

UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE

Faculty of Political Science

Belgrade, December 2024

At the Department of International Studies meeting, held on 29 August 2024, the Master Thesis Defense Commission (hereby the Commission) for the candidate Ivan Goliazhenkov was formed. The Commission, consisting of the following members: doc. dr Marko Kovačević, assist. MA Tijana Rečević, and doc. dr Goran Tepšić, was accepted by the Council for the Second and Third Cycle of Studies based on the proposal made by the Department. The Commission is responsible for overseeing the defence of the master thesis.

After a review of Ivan Goliazhenkov's master thesis, the Commission is submitting the following comprehensive report.

REPORT

Ivan Goliazhenkov's master thesis, titled "Geopolitical Identity Transformation in Conditions of International Isolation: A Case Study of Russia", examines the transformation of Russia's geopolitical identity over an extended period, focusing on the impact of sanctions and exclusionary policies. Using a constructivist approach, it explores the dynamics of the «Self/Other» relationship in Russian identity, shaped by political discourse and public perception. The study analyses how sanctions and isolation influence Russian attitudes toward national identity and geopolitical self-perception. Notwithstanding the introduction, conclusion and references, this thesis is divided into five chapters: Literature Review, Theoretical Framework, Methodology, Empirical Analysis, and Discussion.

The literature review, grounded in constructivism, includes seminal works on identity alongside studies on Russian identity and the effects of sanctions. The chapter identifies critical gaps in existing research, particularly in understanding the dynamic transformations of identity under external pressures.

The theoretical framework, drawn from this body of literature, emphasises the social construction of identity through interaction, discourse, and norms. It highlights the centrality of the «Self/Other» dichotomy and its evolution in response to external pressures. Key

constructivist concepts and approaches offer a nuanced lens for analysing how identity changes and adapts over time.

To apply the theoretical framework outlined above, this thesis employs a mixed-methods approach that combines authority-driven discourse analysis with quantitative data from public opinion surveys. This methodology captures changes in elite rhetoric and public sentiment across three periods: 1991-2007, 2008-2013, and 2014-2024. These periods represent the pre-sanctions and post-sanctions phases, enabling comparative analysis.

The paper traces the transformation of Russia's geopolitical identity across the three previously noted periods. It demonstrates Russia's journey from post-Soviet aspirations for integration with the West and a self-perception as part of Europe to adopting an anti-Western stance and redefining itself as a distinct civilisation—a Eurasian country and a unique geopolitical actor.

Based on empirical analysis, the discussion reveals that international isolation amplifies nationalist discourses, shaping both elite rhetoric and public sentiment. Sanctions, intended to suppress and enforce policy changes, prove largely ineffective, particularly against «non-democratic» regimes. Additionally, the study uncovers the dual effects of economic and political isolation on the civilian population, which, combined with elite discourse, reflects the transformation of Russia's geopolitical identity. The thesis concludes that international isolation significantly impacts identity formation and transformation. In practice, this is reflected in the fact that Russia's identity and the self-perception of its citizens have been changing over a long period of time, especially in response to such a thing as isolation. In addition, it is noted that it advocates for further research into the interplay between external pressures and internal identity dynamics in other states, offering valuable insights into the broader consequences of sanctions and isolation strategies.

Following a thorough review of the report, the Commission has reached the conclusion that Ivan Goliazhenkov's master thesis, titled “Geopolitical Identity Transformation in Conditions of International Isolation: A Case Study of Russia,” successfully fulfils all the necessary formal requirements for public defence. This assessment indicates that the thesis meets the established academic standards and is prepared for presentation to a broader audience.

The Commission:

doc. dr Marko Kovačević

assist. MA Tijana Rečević

doc. dr Goran Tepšić