

Hamburg, May 14, 2022

**REVIEW** of the member of the dissertation council of the dissertation of **Kseniya A. Konovalova** on the topic: "**Paraguay after Stroessner in the international relations system: 1989-2018** ", submitted for the academic degree of a Candidate of Historical Sciences in 5.6.7. History of International Relations and Foreign Policy.

Dear members of the dissertation council,

it was a pleasure for me to read Kseniya A. Konovalova's doctoral thesis, I learned a lot. This is very interesting and timely doctoral thesis which produces many new insights in the evolution of Paraguay's foreign policy in the period 1989 to 2018. The choice of the subject is well justified. I agree with the author (page 15) that "Paraguay remains one of the least frequent and developed topics in Latin American studies." This applies even more to Paraguayan foreign policy. To my knowledge, this is the first comprehensive study of Paraguay's foreign policy, covering the period 1989-2018.

The purpose of the doctoral thesis is to analyze and explain the main characteristics of the Paraguayan foreign policy in the period from 1989 to 2018 in a changing domestic, regional, and global context. This is a very ambitious endeavor.

The English version of the doctoral thesis has 158 pages of text and 28 pages of sources and bibliography, which is quite impressive. It is composed of an introductory chapter, four empirical chapters (and 16 sub-chapters) and a short chapter with final conclusions.

The introductory chapter consists of an introduction into the topic including a literature review, the presentation of the research questions, a depiction of the applied methodology, and a description of the sources used. The author applies a historical approach. The thesis is empirically well-grounded; it is based on broad array of sources. The author gives a good overview on the state of the art of research on Paraguayan foreign policy in Russia, Paraguay (and Latin America), the US, and Europe.

While the first chapter describes the historical dimension or the historical heritage of Paraguayan foreign policy and the general impact of the democratic transition, the following three chapters deal with the various

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layers of international politics in which Paraguayan foreign policy is embedded. The first layer is the regional, Latin American, and especially South American context. The second layer refers to the Inter-American system with the US at its core. And the third layer is the global system with a focus on the EU, Russia, the Asia Pacific region (China, Japan, Taiwan), and the Middle East. The author shows very well how the Paraguayan governments were striving to expand the scope for action in international politics and to find a foreign policy “niche” for Paraguay whenever the opportunity arose. The author also deals in detail with the constraining factors for Paraguayan foreign policy.

The conclusions of the doctoral thesis contain a very good systematization of the different phases of Paraguayan foreign policy in the post-Stroessner era (pages 156-157), which the author characterizes as (1) overcoming post-Stroessner isolation and integration into the liberal world order, (2) inclusion in the trend of the global ascent of Latin America, and (3) multi-vector globalized foreign policy.

The empirical part of the study is rich in information and very well researched and really impressed me. There is a small inaccuracy on page 75 (also on page 79), which is possibly due to a translation error. Paraguay was not expelled from Unasur and Mercosur, but its membership was (temporarily) suspended.

The author describes with great knowledge the historical roots of Paraguayan foreign policy and the changes and continuities in foreign policy during the various presidencies after the end of the Stroessner dictatorship. The focus is on the two big neighbors, Argentina and Brazil, and the strong influence of the US. Kseniya A. Konovalova analyzes the special relationship with Taiwan, and addresses Paraguay's efforts to differentiate its foreign relations, for example with Russia or Asian countries.

The dissertation identifies the end of the Stroessner dictatorship and the subsequent democratization process as a turning point in recent Paraguayan history, which also had implications for its foreign policy. However, as the author points out, there are also continuities. The author shows that history since the 19th century and the historical heritage are important and continue to influence Paraguayan foreign policy to this day. The same applies to the geopolitical location as a landlocked country. In a multilevel analysis, the author convincingly links the level of domestic politics (including the political orientation of the presidents), the regional level of international politics (both Latin American / South American and Inter-American), and the changes at the global level of international politics to explore and explain Paraguayan foreign policy in the post-Stroessner era.



Kseniya A. Konovalova did a great job. For each doctoral thesis, decisions must be made about which topics are not considered due to time constraints, space constraints or other reasons. I am not a historian but a political scientist and IR specialist. From an international relations (IR) perspective (but which would go beyond the scope of a historical doctoral thesis) a stronger engagement with IR theories, approaches, and concepts would have been interesting. The dissertation contains many suitable and appropriate references to IR approaches / theories. This could have been the starting point for a discussion and feedback loop between theoretical approaches and the rich empirical results of the doctoral thesis.

The doctoral thesis refers to Carlos Escudé's book on peripheral realism (*realismo periférico*) (page 122, note 477) and the concept of peripheral realism (page 27) and correctly characterizes Paraguayan foreign policy as predominantly reactive (from a peripheric perspective) and Paraguay as a "rule taker" in international politics. The thesis also mentions the concepts of "soft balancing" and "bandwagoning" (on pages 28 and 158). The basic ideas behind the concepts mentioned are well reflected in the thesis and integrated into the analysis (specially the conclusions). In chapter 4 the author mentions different "roles" in Paraguay's foreign policy. Here the concept of national role conceptions (and role theory) might have been useful.

Kseniya A. Konovalova has written a very exciting, informative, and innovative doctoral thesis. The topic is very up-to-date and of political relevance. When reading the doctoral thesis, I was really impressed by the breadth of knowledge of the author of Paraguay's foreign policy. The thesis reflects the high quality of research on Latin America at St. Petersburg State University.

The author describes the multilayered external relations of Paraguay with extraordinary knowledge. She impressively processes a lot of information to contextualize Paraguayan foreign policy in a changing domestic and international environment. The structure and the argumentation of the thesis are coherent.

In her dissertation Kseniya A. Konovalova breaks new ground in the research on Paraguayan foreign policy in the period 1989 – 2018. She demonstrates not only very good knowledge of Paraguayan foreign policy but also a broad knowledge of key developments in the international system, the Inter-American system, and the Latin American / South American regional order since 1989. Her arguments are developed eloquently. Overall, this is a highly impressive, sophisticated, insightful, and well-designed dissertation, which will no doubt make a significant and original contribution to the knowledge on Paraguayan foreign policy in Russia (and beyond) and fuel the academic debate.

I hope that the English version of the dissertation will be made available to a wider audience, because of its high quality and the rich information it contains, on the one hand, and because it gives researchers, who cannot read Russian texts, an insight into research on Latin America in Russia, on the other hand.

By international standards the submitted doctoral thesis meets the criteria for a doctoral degree. The reasons have been explained.

In my opinion the dissertation of Kseniya A. Konovalova on the topic: "Paraguay after Stroessner in the international relations system: 1989-2018" meets the basic requirements established by Order No.11181/1 dd. 19.11.2021 "On the procedure for awarding academic degrees at St. Petersburg State University".

The applicant Kseniya A. Konovalova deserves to be awarded the academic degree of a Candidate of Historical Sciences in 5.6.7. History of International Relations and Foreign Policy. Paragraphs 9 and 11 of the specified Order have not been violated.



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