

REPORT

**By Member of the Dissertation Committee on the Dissertation of
Konstantin I. PAKHORUKOV on the theme:
“External Activity of the Regions (On the Example of Paradiplomacy of
Territorial Entities of the French Republic in the Early XXIst Century)”
Submitted in conformity with the requirements for the Academic Degree of
Candidate in Historical Sciences
Specialisation 5.6.7 – History of International Relations and Foreign Policy**

Having read the doctoral dissertation of Konstantin I. Pakhorukov in the English-language version, I am ready to offer a series of observations and draw conclusions concerning the academic quality of the work. The thesis concerns the analysis of the theoretical and practical approaches and effects of the European policy and practice of decentralisation and tracing the contemporary and historical French policy through numerous presidential administrations towards regionalisation. The topic is at the intersection of several different academic disciplines, which includes among others international relations, EU politics, national politics, regional politics, national and transnational policymaking, political/public opinion and substate diplomacy. This thesis is very highly informative, easy to follow, the text written in an easy to digest and yet engaging format that contains a remarkable level of detail on the subject at hand. A very rich set of data from academic, mass media and other sources in English, French and Russian are used to illustrate the logic of the consistent and diverging elements of French political policy on regionalism and substate diplomacy (paradiplomacy).

The thesis consists of an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion and bibliography. The format and order of these various parts of the thesis is conducted in a clear, consistent and logical order. In the flow of the appearance of topics and subjects, knowledge and information are appearing in a progressive manner that is conducive for the reader in digesting the evaluations, observations and conclusions of the work appear in a gradual style. The articulated academic and practical relevance of the topic are clear as are the purpose and objectives of the thesis and its originality. There is an excellent policy background and political context to the change and consistency in French policy and practice towards the decentralisation/regionalisation process

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through a comprehensive literature overview of academic thinking, statements by politicians, mass media coverage and reports over an extended period of time.

There is an evident, consistent and systematic approach to ordering and presenting the empirical data, which facilitates enables a comparability of the French presidential administration policy change and consistency perspective for the reader, the origins and motivations of the EU are also present and clear. A vast array of literature has been accessed and integrated into the framework of the thesis, which has been carefully selected and applied. Consequently, the thesis work is very well researched, written and argued. Observations, interpretations, evaluations and conclusions are well justified and convincing concerning the political events, trends and processes. The definition of political concepts and practices has been thoughtfully approached, offering the reader a clear account of what is intended and implemented in the study.

Despite the obvious various noted strengths and many merits of this thesis, there are several academic and scientific points that should have been considered for inclusion in the work to further strengthen it in terms of its academic and scientific robustness. The various points to be organised into the following categories: greater elaboration, motivation and justification of the selected methodological basis, together with its integration into the thesis text; a clearly articulated method and theory for the interpretation and analysis of the empirical data; typos and language errors; missing chapter summaries and analyses.

On the first point, the need for a much more clearly articulated scientific framework and the integration of theory and method into the analysis and interpretation of the thesis. At this stage it is not clear what this scientific framework is in terms of the basis for the selected theoretical and methodological tools. This should be very clear given the absolute academic value that a scientific study needs to be able to be replicated. Certainly, there are clear advantages for the author as well, it was possible and even desirable to make greater use of the chosen theory and method to yield even more results and conclusions to those currently reached to more clearly demonstrate the contribution of the thesis to the state-of-the-art knowledge on the subject, and the contribution to theoretical and/or conceptual development.

In the second point, the need for a clearly articulated method and theory for the interpretation and analysis of the empirical data. There are some brief mentions of various methods and theories in the methodological section (pages 16-18). This includes the approaches of scientific objectivity, historicism and specific-historical approach; the methods of critical source analysis, historical-genetic, comparison and comparative use of data; and the concepts of regionalisation

and regionalism (page 16). These are all named, but there is no systematic and meaningful attempt to define these components, to motivate and justify their inclusion, and to explain to the reader how they shall be operationalised in the analysis and interpretation of the data. As an aside, the use of a constructivist approach could have been very fruitful in revealing and exposing the key components of culture and identity operating at the political and social levels of the regions and how these facilitate or obstruct the policy of regionalisation.

Typos, errors and unclear language detract somewhat from the work. For example, on page 100, there are repeated words in a sentence. A typo occurs on page 109 – “one of de Ch. Gaulle” – which is somewhat jumbled. In general, the number of typos and language errors is rather small, and they tend to be minor errors in nature.

On the next point, the missing chapter summaries and analyses. It would have been very beneficial for the thesis and the reader if chapter conclusions and summaries had been presented to help condense the vast amounts of information as well as to indicate and keep track of how each chapter is contributing towards the goals and objectives of the thesis. In particular, any possible theoretical and conceptual implications of the findings. A final point relates to the necessity to expand the conclusion to situate your findings in the wider academic community, which is currently focused upon the empirical and policy related dimensions of the research findings and not the scientific significance of those findings. This should include analysis based on the theoretical interpretations of the key empirical findings and conclusions, which should be used to reveal the larger theoretical picture and your original contribution to developing the current state of the art literature and knowledge on the empirical topic of regional studies, but its wider theoretical meaning and significance to the field of academic science. This should be present in the conclusion of the thesis.

In summary, the thesis covers the field of academic study of French regionalisation in the 21st century and its evolution since the 1980s, with an emphasis on policy consistency and change across French presidential administrations. The strengths of the work far outweigh the few minor weaknesses uncovered in the thesis. This thesis work reveals and enables a deeper empirical understanding of the politics, nature and practice of a paradiplomacy agenda on French (and EU) regional politics with its sets of interpretations and representations, the theoretical concepts, political processes and the resulting foreign policy outcomes to secure France’s own economic and political interests and obstruct other actors from achieving the same.



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The dissertation meets the basic requirements established by Order No. 11181/1 of 19 November 2021, "On the Procedure for Awarding Academic Degrees at Saint Petersburg State University," the candidate Konstantin Pakhorukov deserves the award of the scientific degree of Candidate of Political Sciences in the speciality 5.6.7. – History of International Relations and Foreign Policy. Clause 11 of the aforementioned Order by the author of the thesis is not broken.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "G. Simons".

14.07.2024

Member of the Dissertation Council

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), Independent Researcher, Sweden, Associate Professor Greg Simons