EUROPEAN UNION – RUSSIA STUDIES GUIDE

The following guide contains requirements and suggestions for the University of Tartu European Union – Russia studies and the planning of the writing process.

The MA thesis writing process reflects the Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies (hereinafter the Institute) principles, approach to studying and teaching (problem-based and project-based learning). Problem-based learning and project-based learning are future competence development-oriented.

The aim of this guide is to give MA students an overview of the requirements set by the Institute and the process of writing the MA thesis. Substantive, structuring and formatting requirements can be found in the Institute’s guideline for formatting papers.

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European Union – Russia studies guide
1. LEARNING PROCESS

European Union – Russia studies curriculum (hereinafter EURUS) uses active learning as its form of study. Active learning is a learning process in which knowledge is obtained through active participation and experience. Such an approach helps students form independent perspectives, finding common ground between courses and the real world and developing transferable skills. Problem-based and project-based learning are subcategories of active learning and they can be successfully used for conducting interdisciplinary studies. Both of these use previous knowledge and knowledge and skills obtained throughout the course in order to solve a problem or create a project.

Learning methods may include the following:

1. Different methods of active learning, incl. simulations, role-playing games, debates, discussions, study visits, case analysis, etc.
2. Lectures, seminars, practicums.
4. Independent work: independent work in lectures, homework, writing reports and essays, independent work with literature and writing research papers.

EURUS curriculum uses differentiated (A-F) and non-differentiated (pass/fail) grading.

Students are allowed to take the exam if they have registered for the course and fulfilled necessary criteria to take the exam. The examiner (responsible lecturer or individual appointed by said person) is responsible for overviewing the fulfillment of aforementioned criteria.

1.1. Logic of Programmes

The full time English taught Master Programme in European Union – Russia Studies combines political science, economics, law and historical studies as well as cultural studies.

1.2. Logic of Modules

EURUS curriculum consist of modules: obligatory Introductory module, Directing module, Optional module and the MMA thesis module.

The volume of curricula of European Union – Russia Studies is 120 credit points that are calculated in units of study, i.e. credit points of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (or ECTS). The curricula consist of three modules consisting of courses with identification code P2EC:

1. Introductory module (36 ECTS)
2. Directing module (48 ECTS)
3. MA thesis module (30 ECTS)

The obligatory Introductory module provides students with topical knowledge of the formation and operations of the European Union and Russia. The student must pass courses that concern the history of European Union’s and Russia, their legal space,
relations between them and in global arena, administration and different challenges on a global scale.

The Directing module provides students with the opportunity to specialise in different areas and different disciplines (from sociology to political science). The student can choose between courses that focus on policy formation, international relations or subject specific developments.

The MA thesis module consists of a three-semester long development seminar during which students are prepared for writing and defending the MA thesis. The second part of the module is the thesis. The written thesis is worth 15 ECTS and the development seminar is worth 15 ECTS. Students are given the possibility to defend 30 ECST MA thesis, which requires more comprehensive theoretical research.

1.3. Curriculum Completion

Students themselves are responsible for planning their learning process. Students are required to follow the curriculum to which they have been matriculated.

Courses from the Introductory module (36 ECTs) are required to complete the curriculum. Students can choose between courses that suit them in the Directing module, but they must complete 48 ECTS worth. Students can choose any courses UT offers in order to fill their Optional course credits not less than 6 ECTS.

Based on the logic of the curriculum, all extracurricular courses (except the courses with identification code P2EC), incl. language courses, will fall under optional course credits, unless specified differently. P2EC courses are always counted under the Introductory or Directing modules.

If the student wishes to add an extracurricular course (incl. courses from other institutes and/or fields) that are related to specialisation and comply with the curriculum outcomes and fall under the narrow field module (excl. language courses), they are required to present an application to the programme manager. The application must contain the relation between a specific course’s learning outcomes and the MA thesis or the project conducted in the development seminar. The Directing module can contain at most 18 ECTS worth of other than P2EC courses.

Courses taken in foreign universities will be carried over into the curriculum. Students must submit an application, a syllabus and form a learning agreement before beginning studies in a foreign country. The courses in the syllabus must be approved by the programme manager. Courses taken in a foreign country will generally be replaced by courses of the Institute that have similar content and learning outcomes. If the student takes a course that cannot be replaced by a course of the Institute, they must provide an explanation letter that allows the ECTS to be carried over to the core module or Directing module. Students are advised to consult with the student coordinator before going to study abroad.
2. DEVELOPMENT SEMINAR

The aim of the development seminar is to support the student's learning process and provide the student with the necessary knowledge and skills to complete their MA studies and write the MA thesis. There are four learning objectives of the development seminar:

- Team building, developing of personal attitudes and non-disciplinary skills
- Support of the study process
- Realization of student-led group project
- Thesis support

The development seminar is largely built on the principles of project-based learning, based on which the students carry out a large group project that, firstly, requires defining a specific social problem and then providing a solution to it.

The aim of the project is to provide students with the opportunity to obtain knowledge of narrower fields that would help them with their MA thesis research. The project should end with a specific outcome that is presented to relevant affiliated groups. The exact format of the project's outcome is not set, it can be a public event, a multimedia project, a website, a campaign, etc.

The course offers individual as well as group learning methods for achieving these goals. The development seminar contains:

- Regular seminars that focus on the development of different skills and knowledge
- Passing of one MOOC, of the student’s choosing, that is accepted by the development seminar's advisor
- Compulsory 60 academic hours of internship

The development seminar has two mentors that coordinate all activities carried out during the course relating to academic performance and personal development. The mentors set interim goals: a) help the group in agreeing upon a project and realise it in team/s and b) develop personal research interest that will result in a MA thesis.

2.1 Internship

The internship of European Union – Russia Studies consists of three subcategories that must be completed by the end of MA studies:

1. Organisational internship in the UT
2. Analytical internship in the UT
3. Internship in another organisation
The internship in the UT consists of organisational as well as analytical tasks for a total of at least 60 hours. The duration of an internship in another organisation must also be at least 60 hours. The internship does not grant ECTS.¹

The organisational internship helps students obtain knowledge and skills related to everyday institutional workflow and development, incl. event organisation and speaking to a foreign auditorium. The organisational internship takes place under the supervision of other employees, lecturers, project managers, etc., of the Institute or UT. Suitable tasks for passing the internship include: organisation of lectures, conferences, workshops, trips, student activities; giving speeches at conferences, public events; organising and carrying out working group meetings, different business-related tasks, etc.

Through the analytical internship, students can participate in the university's research projects that are carried out by the employees of the UT. The internship allows students to apply different research methods in real research projects as well as experience how project management works, how different data analysis programmes work and have a look at the project documentation. The analytical internship can be related to studies, e.g. composing course materials. Suitable tasks for passing the internship include: collecting and/or analysing of data, collecting background information, writing reports and summaries, conducting interviews, proofreading, composing course materials, etc.

The internship in another organisation introduces students to actual work in the field they are studying. It helps them understand theoretical knowledge through practical work, apply what they have learned in a real working environment, understand the workflow of an institution related to their field of study and observe different workflows and develop their independent work skills and habits.

The organisational, analytical internships and traineeship in another organisation are coordinated and approved by the development seminar's supervisor.

In addition, students can pass an internship that counts as a separate course, 6 ETCS (240 hours), of the Directing module. If they so choose, the internship in a working environment must be a purposeful and long-term activity that takes place under the supervision of the organisation as well as a supervisor from the Institute. The internship must be in accordance with the curriculum's aims and learning outcomes and must be in a related field or, more generally, develop the student's research and analysis skills. The internship course is non-differentiated. The final grade will be given by the university supervisor, based on the organisation's appraisal and the student’s internship report. The internship is completed when the student receives a positive grade from the organisation where the student worked and the university supervisor has confirmed the internship report and the organisation's appraisal.

3. MA THESIS

An MA thesis is an independently written research paper, conforming to Guidelines for writing and formatting papers, that shows the MA students theoretical and practical knowledge, their ability to use literature of the field, substantiate their positions and

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¹ Except internship, for which students can receive up to 6 ECTS (240 hours), incl. Erasmus, etc.
express these in written form. The MA thesis is an analytical research paper with a clear problem statement where scientific methods are applied to a concrete object of research. An MA thesis is not a reference of existing research or an essay on personal observations and evaluations.

The MA thesis in EURUS curriculum can be scientific or applied, must contain a theoretical component and should contain an empirical component. The first part of a scientific as well as an applied MA thesis contains theoretical approach or general regularities of a research problem. In the following parts of the thesis, these approaches/regularities are applied to researching a specific problem. An applied MA thesis focuses on a practical problem in some field.

### 3.1 Choice of topic and thesis supervisor

The student chooses their MA thesis topic in coordination with their thesis supervisor, the development seminar's supervisor is also available for assistance and advice. If a suitable supervisor has been found and supervision has been approved, the student will notify, in written form, the programme manager by 1st June of their first academic year.

Based on the content and aims of the curriculum, the MA thesis of European Union – Russia Studies must be related to themes of the European Union – Russia. Additionally, students should keep in mind the following points when choosing their research topic:

- Topicality and originality of the topic;
- Concreteness and delineation of the topic;
- Availability of literature and empirical information of the field;
- Personal interests and ability.

When choosing the topic, students should make sure that they do not choose a thesis with the same topic as an already defended thesis or a thesis currently being defended. Students are allowed to write several papers on related fields, but it is important that each thesis provides a valuable contribution. Therefore, an MA student should browse MA theses defended in EURUS curriculum (available in DSpace).

### 3.2 Cooperation with supervisor

Students cooperate with their supervisor when writing their thesis. An MA student is obligated to follow the supervisor's instructions, but can ignore the supervisor's recommendations if they provide valid arguments.

Students consult their supervisor on questions of topic choice and during the writing process. Students must inform their supervisor of possible changes in their problem statement or topic wording.

Students turn to their supervisor for consultation or to solve problems and questions that arise during the writing process. Students have the right to receive feedback on their thesis within an agreed amount of time. The supervisor will answer any principal questions that may arise during the writing process, will point out mistakes and weak points in argumentation and structure; assess research methodology and terminology; correctness of referencing; and, style of language of the thesis. The supervisor is not a co-author or editor;
it is not the supervisor's job to write the thesis or correct language or stylistic mistakes. If necessary, the supervisor offers advice on preparation for pre-defence or defence.

Students may also turn to their development seminar supervisor who will help them find motivation, give advice on how the writing process could be more effective and, if necessary, consult with the supervisor(s) of the thesis.

The supervisor of an MA thesis has the right to refuse further supervision to an MA student (must be presented in written form to the programme manager) if the student does not follow deadlines, recommendations or has changed the topic to something the supervisor deems out of the competence of either party.

The supervisor has the right to abandon supervision and the defender has the right to change the supervisor if it has been approved in written form by the programme manager.

3.3 Presenting and assessing the extended MA thesis research plan (prospectus)

Students are required to present and defend a prospectus as part of the development seminar. As the exact delineation of the topic, formulating the aim and research tasks, and a logical structure of work are essential to the quality of the thesis, it is important that the aforementioned points are thoroughly thought through before the writing process starts. Presenting the prospectus allows students to receive feedback on research questions, research methods, suitability of the theoretical background and general structure of the thesis. Additionally, presenting the prospectus links what has been learnt in courses to writing the MA thesis.

The prospectus has a crucial role in defining the topic, setting an aim and logical structuring of the thesis. It should contain the following aspects:

- **The thesis' title**, which should be concise and specific, yet reflect the research topic and provide a clear picture of the nature of the research problem. Note also that this title is preliminary. Students are free to modify the wording of their title before they hand in their final thesis.

- **The thesis' author and supervisor(s).**

- **The research problem**, which must be exactly delineated and defined, should show the problem's nature, topicality and importance. This section of the prospectus should outline the research area or conceptual phenomenon that the thesis will address. The student should demonstrate his/her familiarity with the relevant theoretical parameters of their topic. If the thesis is about, for example, social movements, the prospectus should give a brief outline of the concept drawing from relevant literature and giving a sense of how this framework will feed into the empirical research that will be done.

- **The aim and main research tasks** help to outline the research design of the thesis (i.e. case study, comparative study, large-N) as well as any specific methods that will be used (policy analysis, document analysis, discourse analysis, statistical methods, etc.).

- **The thesis' structure.** The planned table of contents must be presented, preferably
listed as chapters and subchapters. Research tasks help in creating the paper's structure.

- The theoretical background and methodology must show which theoretical approaches were used and will be used in order to solve the research problem, which are the field's main research papers that the student wishes to base their own research on. It should also show the main research method that the student will use in order to solve set tasks. The student should judge their competence before choosing research methods.

- The overview of the data collected, used and analysed should contain a description of what data the student intends to use to solve the research question and where this data comes from. The student should also explain what kinds of problems may arise (e.g. availability of data, sources, other materials) and how they plan on solving them.

- The Bibliography should contain a list of the main source materials – books, scientific articles, etc. – used in the thesis. Theoretical sources and sources of empirical data, statues and other literature supporting the applied part of the paper needs to be introduced separately. The list introduced in the plan is not final and it can be updated during the writing process. The bibliography should be in accordance with the requirements set in the Guidelines for writing and formatting papers.

The prospectus must be presented to the development seminar supervisor by 1st November of the third semester if the student wishes to defend in the following spring semester, or by 1st April if the student wishes to defend in the following fall semester. The prospectus is either accepted or rejected by the development seminar supervisor in coordination with the MA thesis supervisor.

Prospectus, incl. final thesis topic and supervisors, is to be confirmed by 15th November or 15th April. After the prospectus is accepted, the student continues writing their paper. If the prospectus is rejected, the student is required to take the comments of the supervisor into account. A new plan must be drafted and presented if the topic changes. If the plan is rejected a second time, the student is advised to changed their topic and/or supervisor.

3.4 Presenting and defending the MA thesis

In order to defend the MA thesis and obtain an MA degree in social sciences, the thesis must be, respectively, pre-defended and defended. Dates of the pre-defence and defence are set by the Institute at the beginning of the academic year. MA theses defences generally take place during the fall semester (end of December or beginning of January) and in the spring semester (end of May or beginning of June).

3.4.1 Composition of the defence committee

Based on the interdisciplinarity of the MA programme, the committee is comprised of representatives of socialia field and, if necessary, other fields. In addition to MA programme lecturers, the committee can contain practitioners and recognised experts on questions concerning European Union – Russia.
3.4.2 Pre-defence

The goal of the pre-defence is to guarantee that theses presented for defence are in accordance with requirements and only theses that pass pre-defence are allowed to be defended. Theses presented to pre-defence must be at least 75% complete, must contain a table of contents, list of abbreviations (if necessary), main part (separated into chapters), references and appendices. Theses presented for pre-defence are not required to contain a foreign language or an abstract.

Pre-defences take place based on the timetable no later than five weeks before the defence of the MA thesis. The pre-defence has the same format as the real defence and the thesis is either accepted or rejected in the process of it. The supervisor must give their approval before a thesis is presented for pre-defence.

A thesis approved by the supervisor must be presented electronically together with the supervisor's approval at least two weeks before the pre-defence. Pre-defence is not graded. As the result of the pre-defence, the defence committee will make one of the following three choices:

1. Thesis is ready for consideration
2. Thesis ready for considering after correcting mistakes
3. Thesis is not ready for consideration

The student has the right to ask the committee for reasons of acceptance/rejection and/or suggestions for improvement.

3.4.3 Defence

An MA student is allowed to defend their thesis if they have completed the curriculum, passed the pre-defence and presented necessary documents, as well as the MA thesis, due the deadline. If a thesis passes pre-defence, but the author of the thesis has not completed all of the required courses, they must reach an agreement with lecturers/professors so that exams are taken before the defence. All grades must be in the Study Information System no later than two days before the final defence.

The student must pay attention to the self-test list before presenting the MA thesis (cf. appendix 1).

The following documents must be presented to the Specialist in Academic Affairs no later than two weeks before the defence:

- Application to the Head of the Institute (cf. appendix 4.2 of Guidelines for writing and formatting papers)
- One (1) bound (either hardcover or softback) and signed copy of the MA thesis
- Short annotation of MA thesis on paper (½-1 page each) (cf. appendix 4.3 of Guidelines for writing and formatting papers)
- MA thesis in electronic form together with supervisor's approval that the thesis is ready for consideration.

The bound copy of the MA thesis and the MA thesis in electronic form must be identical by content and format.

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The MA thesis defence is held openly in front of the defence committee. The MA thesis defence procedure is, generally, as follows:

- Introduction by the committee chairman;
- Oral presentation by the candidate (up to 10 min.);
- Opinion of opponent (if the opponent is not present, with reasonable excuse, a member of the committee will read the opinion);
- Debate (response to the opponent and, if necessary, additional questions from the opponent);
- Questions and statements from the defence committee and audience;
- Opinion of the supervisor (if the supervisor is not present, with reasonable excuse, a member of the committee will read the opinion);
- MA students closing statement.

An oral presentation should be prepared for the defence. As the presentation's length is only up to 10 minutes, it should not state the obvious or well-known positions. The MA student must briefly explain the thesis' aim, describe the choice of object of research, present results, detailed overview and assessment. The presentation needs to clearly illustrate the student's contribution to the topic of research. It is advisable to illustrate the presentation with visual aids (PowerPoint, etc.).

### 3.4.4 Review

A reviewer submits a written review no later than **two business days** before the defence to the Academic Affairs Specialist, who forwards the review to the MA student. The opponent's task is to provide an objective assessment to the text according to the structural and formatting criteria laid down in the *Guidelines for writing and formatting papers*. Generally, the following aspects are outlined in the review:

- Assessment of the topicality of the research.
- Assessment of the thesis' relation to topic.
- Assessment of established goal(s) (clarity etc.) and research tasks (if completing these can lead to established goal).
- Assessment of thesis structure (coherence, balance, consistency, etc.).
- Assessment of the level of analysis and comprehensiveness of material (clarity, relevance, thoroughness, correctness and logic of analysis, validity of conclusions, material combination skills, adequateness and sufficiency of material etc.).
- Assessment of sufficiency, relevance and level of literature (e.g. relevant and recent articles from recognised international journals or simply some journal articles).
- Assessment of linguistic correctness.
- Assessment of formatting.
- Assessment of set tasks and goal attainment.
- Assessment of the thesis as a whole.
- Opponent's questions concerning the subject matter of the thesis for the student, the answers of which determine the student's knowledge of the topic and skill of argumentation.
3.4.5 Supervisor's opinion

The supervisor's opinion is submitted no later than **two business days** before the defence and it contains the following aspects:

- Assessment of the topicality of the research.
- Assessment of the thesis' relation to topic.
- Assessment of thesis structure (coherence, balance, consistency, etc.).
- Assessment of the level of analysis and comprehensiveness of material (clarity, relevance, thoroughness, correctness and logic of analysis, validity of conclusions, material combination skills, adequateness and sufficiency of material, etc.).
- Assessment of formatting.
- Assessment of set tasks and goal attainment.
- Assessment of thesis development during the writing process.
- Assessment of the student's attitude towards the research and the supervisor's suggestions.
- Assessment of the thesis as a whole.

The committee will take into account the following while assessing the thesis:

- Thesis' accordance to assessment criteria (cf. appendix 4.8 of Guidelines for writing and formatting papers).
- The MA student’s performance during the defence (content and style of presentation, answering of questions, etc.).
- Opinion of supervisor and opponent.

After the MA thesis defence, the committee will have a closed discussion to decide whether to give the MA candidate their MA degree. The committee is not obligated to go by the opinions of the opponent or the supervisor.
APPENDIX 1: Check list for the presented research paper (incl. MA thesis)

The following list should be considered before presenting the research paper. The list is composed, primarily, considering empirical research and it is not exhaustive.

Introduction

☐ Define research questions clearly (question, not topic) and explain exactly what you wish to research.
☐ Discuss how your research relates to existing research.
☐ Compose a summary of your main arguments and findings.

Theory

☐ Discuss how existing literature is applicable, based on your research question (compose a literature overview, not a summary).
☐ Explain assumptions and concepts used in the theoretical component(s) of your thesis.
☐ Formulate one or more hypotheses that are based on theory.

Structure and method/sample of the research

☐ Give the reader enough information to critically assess your research.
☐ Explain the structure of the research.
☐ Explain the choice of sample.
☐ Explain which method(s) you used in your research.
☐ If necessary, use figures and tables.

Data and analysis

☐ Describe collected data to give the reader a good overview of your research's empirical content.
☐ Give the reader enough information to critically assess your research.
☐ Explain how you interpret your findings.
☐ Present whether your hypothesis turned out to be true.
☐ Critically discuss your research result's potential pitfalls (i.e. if something threatens validity, etc.).
☐ If necessary, use figures and tables.

Summary

☐ Answer the research question set at the beginning.
☐ Summarise how the research was conducted – what and how?
☐ Associate your findings with references and discuss legislation (where appropriate).
☐ Discuss the conducted research's delineation and possible further research directions.
APPENDIX 2: What is being assessed in the research paper (incl. MA thesis)?

Identification of the research problem

The student has shown that they can formulate a relevant research problem for a complex research task, including research questions and corresponding strategy or general approach. The student has demonstrated, with their choices, that they are motivated to research a certain field, expressed by a systematic, thought-through aim, main problem and corresponding solution, as well being familiar with the necessary theoretical and/or empirical research.

Literature overview and theoretical/conceptual framework

The student has shown that they are capable of composing a presentable overview of scientific and professional resources (including recent scientific research) that are relevant to the research task and goal.

Also, the student has shown that they are skilled in conducting critical and in-depth analysis of chosen sources and the skill to develop their ideas by integrating and/or comparing different theories, concepts and models to explain research questions and display the feasibility of them.

Approach to the problem

The student has shown that they are capable of independently creating a suitable action plan in order to conduct research. Additionally, the student is capable of independently developing their own conceptual approach to the research problem, which can later be proven by empirical data. The approach needs to be logically connected to the research problem and theory.

Data collection and analysis and/or validation of results

The student has demonstrated that they are capable of independently, in a responsible and valid manner, planning solutions and using tools necessary for collection and analysis of data, the result of which is a data collection and corresponding analysis results. Additionally, the validity of said results has been proven and said provide an answer to the research question(s).

Validation of results (in case of a project)

The student has shown that they are capable of independently and adequately composing a plan to achieve results, using necessary tools or instruments for selection and validation, the result of which is research that is suitable for solving a problem. Also, this research is in accordance with concrete details/requirements and validity.

Findings and recommendations

The student has shown that they are capable of describing the research and results and linking them to the research problem(s), research question(s) and relevant literature. Additionally, the student can critically analyse the weak and strong points of the conducted
research and its contribution to the field of research. While describing research results, the student is capable of linking them to social, societal and/or ethical aspects in a narrower and broader context.

**Written presentation of results**

The student has shown the ability to present data – quantitatively and/or qualitatively – clearly, in accordance with accepted scientific norms, which are linguistically accurate. The student's argumentation is structured, logical, relevant and linguistically accurate. References to literature are presented according to the scientific standards of the field of research.

**Oral presentation of results**

The student is capable of composing and conducting a presentation, in English or Estonian, that is clear, structured and features a sufficient amount of illustrative auxiliary material. The presentation is understandable for listeners of different levels and backgrounds and places emphasis on introducing the structure of the research as well as presenting the most important results. The student presents reasons for important choices they made in their research.

**Independence and professional skills**

The student has shown, during the preparation for, and the process of the task, that they are capable of acting independently and are able to plan and execute (within a certain time limit) the processes necessary for their research. Furthermore, the student has demonstrated that they are capable of effective cooperation and has demonstrated the ability to adequately perform in an organisational context. Additionally, the student is capable of critically reflecting the execution of their own research as well as their ability to learn, incl. the ability to present possibilities for further scientific and/or professional development.