

**BACHELOR'S THESIS EXAMINER REPORT**  
*PPE – Bachelor's in Politics, Philosophy and Economics*  
*Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University*

<b>Thesis title:</b>	<b>Free Speech and Nationalism: The Case Study of Vlaams Belang</b>
<b>Student's name:</b>	<b>Barbara van Aert</b>
<b>Referee's name:</b>	<b>Janusz Salamon</b>

Criteria	Definition	Maximum	Points
<b>Major Criteria</b>			
	Contribution and argument (quality of research and analysis, originality)	<b>38</b>	
	Research question (definition of objectives, plausibility of hypotheses)	<b>14</b>	
	Theoretical framework (methods relevant to the research question)	<b>13</b>	
<b>Total</b>		<b>65</b>	
<b>Minor Criteria</b>			
	Sources, literature	<b>9</b>	
	Presentation (language, style, cohesion)	<b>4</b>	
	Manuscript form (structure, logical coherence, layout, tables, figures)	<b>4</b>	
<b>Total</b>		<b>17</b>	
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>82</b>	

**Plagiarism-check (URKUND) match score: 2%**

The thesis does not appear to include instances of plagiarism.

**Reviewer's commentary according to the above criteria:** Barbara chose to explore in her BA thesis an interesting dilemma with moral, legal and political implications that has animated a high-profile public debate in her country, Belgium: whether to restrict by legal means the freedom of speech (including in the social media) of political actors, such as the far-right nationalist party Flemish Movement (Vlaams Belang), in order to protect the rights of the Moroccan and Turkish minority communities which are the target of a sustained campaign of demeaning, denigration, defamation, vilification, etc., by the activists of Vlaams Belang through various forms of provocative speech. Perhaps the most valuable and impressive of Barbara's achievements in her work is the way she manages to inject in her analysis of the political and legal aspects of the ongoing public debate in Belgium, the arguments of the most influential political and legal theorists of our times who has been trying to establish theoretical principles concerning the limits of civic freedom and the limits of liberal state coercion to uphold citizen's dignity and rights in the face of offensive and harmful speech (Ronald Dworkin, Samuel Feinberg, Jeremy Waldron, Thomas Scanlon and Steven Heyman). The inclusion of these arguments into Barbara's discussion of the Vlaams Belang case helps her to reassure the reader that the conclusion of her study, which might otherwise look disappointingly ambiguous (in short: it is impossible to settle the matter because there are very good reasons to restrict and very good reasons not to restrict the freedom of speech of extremist political

actors like Vlaams Belang) is not a failure resulting from Barbara's lack of analytic abilities, but, quite the opposite, a sign of Barbara's ability to recognise the subtleties of the legitimate reasons involved on the both sides of the argument. This is so because Dworkin, Feinberg, Waldron, Scanlon and Heyman themselves provide arguments which lead to an argumentative deadlock. I also appreciate Barbara's final argument that emerges logically from the section of her thesis devoted to the democratic context of the debate about the limits of the freedom of speech, and assigns the democratic citizenry (as opposed to the law-makers and the courts) at least part of the responsibility for defending their vulnerable co-citizens in the face of offensive and harmful speech, by putting *political* (as opposed to legal) pressure on the political actors who engage in such speech. This is an imaginative move because it overcomes in a non-legal way the legal dilemma of the conflict of legitimate rights to the freedom of thought and expression on one hand, and the civic dignity, religious freedoms and minority rights on the other hand.

Having said all the above, the thesis has its own limitations, which makes me recommend grade B, rather than A. Firstly, the originality of the thesis is limited, since Barbara by stating and exploring the dilemma does not go much beyond what has already been discussed in the literature she refers to (and the spectrum of the sources is wide enough for a Bachelor's thesis). Secondly, and more importantly, while being a philosopher and not an empirical researcher myself, I sense that given that Barbara's thesis is in large part devoted a political party on one hand, and religious and ethnic minorities on the other, the use of the appropriate non-philosophical methodology is largely missing here. In a brief comment on her methodology she promises to bring some data into consideration which she calls quantitative, but then clarifies that by this she means a (small) sample of the comments published by some activists of Vlaams Belang on Facebook and Twitter. The negative impact of the offensive speech on the minority communities seems also presented in an anecdotal manner. The methodological approach is appropriate in the philosophical sections where the arguments of the political theorists are considered.

**Proposed grade (A-B-C-D-E-F): B**

**I do recommend the thesis for final defence.**

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***Referee Signature***

Overall grading scheme at FSV UK:

TOTAL POINTS	GRADE	Quality standard
91 – 100	<b>A</b>	= outstanding (high honor)
81 – 90	<b>B</b>	= superior (honor)
71 – 80	<b>C</b>	= good
61 – 70	<b>D</b>	= satisfactory
51 – 60	<b>E</b>	= low pass at a margin of failure
0 – 50	<b>F</b>	= failing. The thesis is not recommended for defence.