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| Name of the student: | MARKO MILIKIĆ |
| Title of the thesis: | Between democratization and stability: Assessing the European Union's (stabilitocratic) responses to membership candidate states' progress in accession negotiations |
| Reviewer: | Abel Escribà Folch |

1. KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTION TO THE FIELD

(relevance of the research question, research objective, literature review):

Marko's thesis seeks to answer a well defined and relevant research question, namely, to which extent do stabilitocratic tendencies influence the EU institutions' monitoring of the progress of candidate states for EU membership? It thus aims at understanding the change in EU's strategic priorities in the process of enlargement examining the emerging trade-off between stability and democracy in the candidate countries. The framing of the whole thesis in the introduction section is excellent as it clearly fleshes out the importance of the topic at stake, the puzzle under consideration, its implications, and the literatures the thesis speaks to.

The goals of the research are also well explained and justified, all done with a careful understanding of the existing literature and the cases under study in the Western Balkans region.

The literature review is comprehensive and well-structured. The concepts are properly discussed and problematized when necessary; especially, the concept of "stabilitocracy" that is central to the theoretical framework adopted. The large literature on EU's enlargement is well explained, at least the works that seem more relevant to the thesis.

2. ANALYSIS

(methodology, argument, theoretical backing, appropriate work with sources):

The thesis presents an clear well-informed argument about how the EU is prioritizing stability over democracy in its accession negotiations in the Western Balkans. The thesis theorizes the concept of stabilitocracy carefully and critically, assessing the different implications it has for EU enlargement policy. From this discussion, the author derives a clear expectation, namely, “that the EU’s monitoring tools, the progress reports for candidate states, are heavily influenced by tendencies of stabilitocracy.” The theory section also includes a discussion of the cases and the context.

My only comment (or concern) here is that the theory needs a bit more discussion on the potential trade-off between democracy and stability, to make the expectations more concrete about the framing and justification of the EU ‘s position concerning the different dimensions of these concepts, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive. A bit more dicussion of the political and institutional, as well as contextual, drivers of the changing position and apporach of the EU in the enlargement process is necessary, and how they may be reflected in the data and negotiations.

As for the methodology, the author compares two cases, Serbia and Montenegro, and uses European Commission Country Reports (country monitoring), European Parliament Reports on the Commission Reports, Plenary Debates on the European Parliament Reports as the sources of data for the analyses. The choice of these sources of data is well and thoroughly discussed as well as its limitations.

The method to analyze the data consists of qualitative content analysis, utilized through both inductive and deductive coding, and assisted by the MAXQDA software and its content analysis features. The coding is rigorous and systematic and so is the discussion of the results and findings. For transparency, the coding scheme and additional tests are reported in the Appendix.

The findings are carefully presented and discussed. I want to commend the author for the richness and efforts in approaching the data and presenting the findings. The author has showed autonomy,

3. CONCLUSIONS

(persuasiveness, link between data and conclusions, achievement of research objectives):

The conclusions are nicely written. And, importantly, they discuss the policy and social implications of the findings. It also acknowledges the limitations of the paper and offers ways for further research to address them.

4. FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE

(appropriate language, adherence to academic standards, citation style, layout):


All is correct and according to academic standards.

5. SUMMARY ASSESSMENT

(strong and weak point of the dissertation, other issues)

The thesis has numerous strong points including the careful theoretical and conceptual discussion, the framing of the research question and the methodological rigor.

The only weakness I see is the theory section, or parts of it, that are in need of further development in terms of its implications.

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| Grade (A-F) | A – 9.5 |
| Date | Signature |
| 14/06/2024 |  |

Classification scheme

| Percentile | Prague | | Krakow | | Leiden | | Barcelona | |
|------------|----------|-------|--------|--------|---------|--------|-----------|--------|
| | 91-100 % | 8,5% | 5 | 6,7% | 8,5-10 | 5,3% | 9-10 | 5,5 % |
| B (81-90) | 81-90 % | 16,3% | 4,5 | 11,7% | 7,5-8,4 | 16,4% | 8-8,9 | 11,0 % |
| C (71-80) | 71-80 % | 16,3% | 4 | 20% | 6,5-7,4 | 36,2% | 7-7,9 | 18,4 % |
| D (61-70) | 61-70 % | 24% | 3,5 | 28,3% | | | 6-6,9 | 35,2 % |
| E (51-60) | 51-60 % | 34,9% | 3 | 33,4 % | 6-6,4 | 42,1 % | 5-5,9 | 30,1 % |

Assessment criteria:

Excellent (A): 'Outstanding performance with only minor errors';

Very good (B): 'Above the average standard but with some errors';

Good (C): 'Generally sound work but with a number of notable errors';

Satisfactory (D): 'Fair but with significant shortcomings';

Sufficient (E): 'Performance meets the minimum criteria';

Fail: 'Some/considerable more work required before the credit can be awarded'.