Joint Dissertation Review

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:	Marcin Zubek

1. KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTION TO THE FIELD
(relevance of the research question, research objective, literature review):

The thesis discusses the issue of "stabilitocracy" promotion in the EU enlargement process based in the case studies of Serbia and Montenegro. The exact research question was posed on p.3 as follows: "To which extent do stabilitocratic tendencies influence the EU institutions' monitoring of the progress of candidate states for EU membership?". The question is indeed topical taking into account the intensifying debates in the EU about how to enlarge the Union vis-à-vis new, geopolitical challenges and at the same time be able to uphold EU's democratic principles. The objective of the research reflect this debate and critically engage with the core literature on the EU enlargement in general and the Serbian and Montenegrin case studies in particular.

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

The thesis has a sound theoretical and conceptual backing, however I am missing a more convincing discussion about the "fine line" dividing the "stabilitocracy" from, on the one side, authoritarian regime and democracy on the other. I realize that the concept of "stabilitocracy" is still being developed, but a clearer indication of eg. where it begins, and the democracy ends would be worth reflecting upon. This omission is later visible in the analysis and research design, where the coding is driven rather by the "stability" than "democracy" and this makes it difficult to see whether the "stability element" really prevails.

There is also a question about the EU's ability to influence the EU enlargement target countries, where such theories and concepts as Europeanisation or external (differentiated) governance could come in handy when trying to address the issue of how the EU monitors the progress of both countries. This is however not a big issue.

The methodological approach also seems sound, yet I have reservations regarding one aspect. It has been signaled above already and concerns some sort of bias in the coding scheme towards the "stability". It makes it difficult to see the democratic tone in the analyzed material, against which it is supposed to be assessed. Even in the research question we are promised to see some "extent", some measure, but this measure is not envisaged by the research design.

There is also one more minor thing I do not understand – performing the inter-coder reliability test. I admit it can be useful in collaborative projects, if more people are coding material using the same codebook, but not sure why it would be necessary for a single coder.

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

I generally think that the data and conclusions are relevant and to some extent persuasive. I particularly think that putting more attention to what the European Parliament has to say about the issue makes more sense, as it reveals contestation of EU's (sometimes fundamental) norms and values. Having said that, I also think that the European Commission's assessments were almost completely watered down. I understand why, but it would perhaps make more sense not use them at all, or perhaps use them more to show the context rather than make them the subject of analysis. The analytical chapter looks a bit silly with all the nice data about the EP, and then only a short section about the EC.

Last thing I need to mention here is that there is no answer to the research question. It does not mean that the research objectives are not met, as the results of the analysis inform us about how the "stabilitocratic tendencies" look like and the evidence for their existence is provided, but the "extent" is missing.

4. FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE
(appropriate language, adherence to academic standards, citation style, layout):

No problems here, I even kind of liked a slightly journalistic tone in the introduction. It makes reading smooth and pleasant.

5. SUMMARY ASSESSMENT
(strong and weak point of the dissertation, other issues)

The thesis is the strongest when it comes to a very clear explanation of the objectives and the relevance of the research. The author also very nicely situates himself in the field and very clearly explains what the research gap is. I truly commend Marko here!

The execution presents some problems, especially regarding some aspects of the research design and persuasiveness of conclusions connected to it. I certainly would appreciate rigorous data collection process, case selection and (despite its shortcomings) development of the coding scheme.

Grade (A-F)	8,1=B
Date	Signature
26/06/2024	

Classification scheme

Percentile	Prague		Krakow		Leiden		Barcelona	
A (91-100)	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'.