



Universiteit  
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# Thesis evaluation Matteo Venturi Visconti

## Student details:

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## Programme details

**Programme:** European Politics and Society

**Specialisation:**

**EC:** 30

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## Thesis details:

**Title:** Assessing the impact of the introduction of the EEAS on Trade Agreements with Ukraine and Moldova

Is the thesis in your assessment free of plagiarism?

Yes to my knowledge the thesis is free of plagiarism

The style and the grammar produce an impression of the original text.

Can the thesis be made publicly available in the Leiden University Repository?

by V. Korablyova: it can be made public through the repository.

# Summary assessment/comments

The research touches upon important novelties in the EU institutional design refined for the Eastern Partnership policies. It reckons them through the power distribution between the EU institutions and individual member states. While arguing that new institutions brought more complexity than unanimity, the author discusses institutional isomorphism. All the above mentioned is a valid and potentially fruitful object of enquiry. The notion of punctuated equilibrium has a good heuristic potential in the context.

At the same time, the overfocus on the internal developments in the EU fails to properly account for the external developments often guiding the EU foreign policies, more reactive than the author is willing to acknowledge. The status of the EEAS itself as allegedly an “organisation”, a “service” but not a proper “institution” (p. 39) was not fully explained in the vein of the research theoretical framework.

The strong point of the thesis is its innovative research focus and suggested theoretical framework. At the same time, it failed to present a promised comprehensive analysis, partly due to the superficial and sketchy account of the developments in Ukraine and Moldova, as well as the lack of a critical assessment of the shift from economy-driven to politically driven strategies of the EU in its Eastern Neighbourhood. Some stylistic inaccuracies and messy referencing weaken the overall impression, too.

## Criteria

### Knowledge and insight

The research puts forward an innovative and important question of how the introduction of the European External Action Service, following the Lisbon Treaty, affected the Association Agreement negotiations with the East European countries, Ukraine and Moldova. The author interprets those developments as a critical juncture that brought more than mere institutional refinements within the EU structure: the core claim is that it “democratised” the EU architectonics by providing more power/agency to individual member states.

Whereas the topic and the research hypothesis are quite ambitious, the limitations of the MA thesis precluded a fair critical assessment of all the crucial factors in the studied developments and a comprehensive literature review. The choice of sources is improperly selective, and the resulting text produces a sketchy impression.

All in all, the author seems to be more knowledgeable in the field of EU studies, while his coverage of the developments in Eastern Europe is superficial and lopsided. The theoretical section, presented in chapter 1, is arguably the most interesting part of the work that deserves more thorough and consistent application to specific cases.

**Assessment:** good

**Weighing:** 0.01

### Application of knowledge and insight

The methodological focus of the research is the explication of institutional changes within the EU. The author connects it to the matters of legitimacy and power/agency, while discussing institutional isomorphism allegedly led by dominating units. This part in and of itself looks quite convincing yet insufficient and loosely connected to the practical part of the thesis. The author rightly points to the tensions between the

calculus- and norm-driven logic in the EU institutional development (p. 17). This analysis must be complemented by the tensions between the economic and political logic overriding the negotiation process.

Two underlying biases hinder the presented analysis. First, the author tends to interpret the AA as trade agreements downplaying the political dimension. Secondly, the questions of the EU's overall legitimacy, or soft power in Eastern Europe, questioned within the AA negotiations are not critically addressed. The overfocus on the Lisbon Treaty as a critical juncture fails to account for external developments that affected the AA negotiations: the Maidan uprising in Ukraine driven by the claim for EU integration and the subsequent Russian invasion, largely triggered by it, present another historical juncture that enforced the political dimension of the EU foreign policy in the eastern neighbourhood. Some sources covering those mutual effects (e.g. Popescu & Wilson 2009; van Middelaar 2016) are missing in the research. The text fails to address the reactive character of the EU Eastern policies. The explanation of EU EaP policies as "the ethical responsibility to refrain from concurrently extending the European Agreements" (p. 55) does not include a proper reflection of the Russia-centred approach in Brussels at that point.

**Assessment:** (more than) satisfactory

**Weighing:** n/a

## Reaching conclusions

The conclusion is quite convincing but it does not derive from the analysis presented in the chapters. The theoretical part and the practical analysis presented in chapters 3 and 4 are not withered together. As a result, the research objectives are only partly achieved.

**Assessment:** (more than) satisfactory

**Weighing:** n/a

## Communication

The style of the work is quite patchwork. It fluctuates between impartial academic analysis and emotionally charged unjustified claims, e.g. "nothing in the 20th century got the European continent so unequipped as the collapse of the Soviet Union and the creation of newly independent states in the East" (p. 4); "the Community had an ethical responsibility to refrain from concurrently extending the European Agreements" (p. 55); "the geopolitical importance of Moldova within the European foreign affairs agenda and the Eastern Partnership" (p. 79), the Commission "decided to follow the majority's belief rather than face future setbacks and undermine its long-built prominence" (p. 80). The invocation of "the Leninist notion of revolution" (p. 14) looks quite surprising, too. The opening part is very generic and not directly related to the research focus.

Certain negligence towards names and facts cannot be omitted. The inconsistency in naming the research objects as "eastern-EU countries", "east-European countries" (p. 4), "east Soviet countries", "new formed Soviet countries" (p. 51) raises doubts, as do minor inaccuracies (the URSS instead of the USSR, "the Moldovan communist Dondon" (p. 64) instead of Igor Dodon, the MP, Minister of Economy and Trade, later the president of Moldova, etc). Historical inconsistency of invoking later sources and the so-called "conflict in Ukraine" while covering the development in Moldova preceding the Vilnius summit in 2013 adds to the inconsistency impression. The reference to the back matter of the Harvard volume (position 1 in the bibliography) is confusing, too.

**Assessment:** unsatisfactory

**Weighing:** n/a

## Formal requirements

It fits the formal requirements apart from a mixed referencing system.

## Final assessment

This thesis is graded with a 6.6

## Signatures

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'V. Korablyova', written in a cursive style.

V. Korablyova