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Programme: European Politics and Society

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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

I have found no evidence of plagiarism in this thesis.

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

by D.D. Schade: it can be made public through the repository.

Summary assessment/comments

This is a thesis on a very interesting topic which suffers from serious defects across quite a few domains, leading to the final assessment.

Criteria

Knowledge and insight

- The thesis outlines a research question on p. 4 which is focused on how the set-up of the EEAS affected Association Agreement negotiations with Eastern European countries, highlighting the case studies of Ukraine and Moldova.
- While the introduction also claims to include a literature analysis, this remains very limited in practice. It would have been desirable for a thesis focused on the process of negotiating EU Association/Trade agreements and underlying institutional changes to consider the wide variety of literature that tackles such issues from various perspectives, be it theoretical, or empirical with specific negotiations in mind.
- The introduction begins in a very unspecific manner, talking about various kinds of world events to then suddenly arrive at a discussion of economic agreements with Moldova and Ukraine. It remains somewhat unclear how this is meant to develop a contextualisation of the actual thesis topic. The works used to back up this approach are also mixed in odd ways, ranging from specific literature on EU coherence to a general-audience facing brochure on the Lisbon Treaty by the EPP, to a foundational work in foreign policy analysis without offering further explanation or contextualising these works.

Assessment: (more than) satisfactory

Weighing: n/a

Application of knowledge and insight

- The methodology section considers both historical and sociological institutionalism. However, it doesn't fully explain what the core tenets of these approaches actually are. The section also does not discuss certain elements such as source selection and approach to sources, with the consideration of this aspect largely being limited to a claim on p. 5 about "This comprehensive analysis, based on a wide range of sources and perspectives, will provide a robust understanding of the transformation of European foreign policy and the negotiation of trade agreements."
- Although chapter 1 discusses institutionalism in great detail, it does not fully outline or discuss how this links to the analysis conducted for this thesis until p. 29. There is also some overlap with some of the discussion in the introduction. What's more, where various strands of institutionalism are discussed, there does not seem to be an emphasis on highlighting specific aspects of these theories, but rather a very detailed retelling of what other authors have written about such varieties of institutionalism. It is thus somewhat unclear what purpose this discussion serves in the wider context of this thesis.
- The discussion of the Lisbon Treaty and its contents (a core element for structuring the analysis underlying this thesis) seems somewhat devoid of context such as the politics or underlying reasons for its adoption. This is odd as part of the discussions which led to the treaty in its present form continued to be played out in inter-institutional bargaining in its aftermath as is (should be) considered in the empirical chapters of this thesis. While the discussion of institutional roles is detailed, once more it could have benefitted from more focus on highlighting how these roles are likely going to matter in AA/trade negotiations and how this might have been affected by Lisbon in a before/after dimension.
- The empirical/analytical chapters on Ukraine and Moldova only contain very little actual analysis of the author's own making, instead mostly relying on (few) relevant academic sources. The bibliography for the Ukraine chapter is an illustration of this, as it cites 14 sources in total with

all but one being from before the year 2000. None of the sources are from the crucial time period of Ukraine's Maidan revolution or beyond, and only one from the immediate aftermath of the passing of the Lisbon Treaty. It is unclear how any insights in this chapter can thus compare and contrast the pre and post Lisbon setting (although significant political dynamics between EU institutional actors occurred for this agreement both before and after the Lisbon transition).

- While the chapter on Moldova is a little more detailed, referencing a few newer sources, including some relevant primary documents, its analysis remains shallow, especially in the crucial institutional analysis dimensions.

Assessment: (more than) satisfactory

Weighing: n/a

Reaching conclusions

- While most of the conclusions outlined are meaningful overall in light of the topic, it is somewhat unclear how the author ultimately reaches some of these at the end of the thesis considering what was discussed within it beforehand. Some of the insights raised in the conclusion appear either completely novel or do not fully match what is being discussed in the empirical chapters.

Assessment: (more than) satisfactory

Weighing: n/a

Communication

- There appears to be some semantic confusion in certain parts of the thesis related to key developments in European integration, such as when it is highlighted that the EEAS is not an institution or an organisation (without exploring what that means or why it would matter).

- The thesis introduces many concepts and terms such as Association Agreements, or makes reference to specific instances of such agreements without offering an explanation or an underlying definition. For instance, is this thesis interested in trade or the political dimension of EU external agreements, or both?

- There are some serious language issues present in this thesis which at times make it difficult to understand the point that is being made. While some degree of imprecision is to be expected given that the author is not a native speaker of English, in the present case some of the language appears deliberately convoluted and complex. A good example of this can be found in the initial paragraph of the methodology section on p. 5.

- The thesis mixes in-text citations with footnotes in a rather confusing manner. Additionally it uses both chapter bibliographies and an overall bibliography for the thesis, which is also very unusual.

- The style of the footnotes used is inconsistent with established reference styles.

- There are unreferenced direct quotes in this thesis. An initial example of this can already be found on p. 1 of the thesis.

- The thesis makes frequent use of some direct quotes of works directly quoted in other academic output where the original source could easily have been consulted.

- References in the chapter bibliographies and final bibliography are inconsistent in style. For instance, just looking at journal articles one can find volume and issue number referred to in the X(Y) format, while also using the vol. num. format.

Assessment: unsatisfactory

Weighing: n/a

Learning skills

- The student has not taken on board some feedback such as on referencing and citation styles given to him on multiple occasions.

Assessment: unsatisfactory

Weighing: n/a

Formal requirements

The formal requirements such as on length have been fulfilled.

Final assessment

On 15-08-2024 this thesis is graded with a 6

Signatures



D.D. Schade