Name of the student:	Marius Heil
Title of the thesis:	European and German Political Foundations: Roles and Influences in the EU Enlargement Process
Reviewer:	Javier Arregui

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

Marius´s thesis seeks to analyse the role and influence of the Konrad-Adenauer Foundation and the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies on the Enlargement towards the Western Balkans. In order to do so, the author poses one (descriptive) research question (the first one) and a second more analytical research question, trying to identify the real impact of those informal actors on the EU enlargement in the Western Balkans. The framing of the thesis in the introduction is good insofar it introduces the potential relevance of the topic, the puzzle that can considered and the general literatures the thesis is related to. Beyond the framing, my view is that the posed research questions are nice since they may help to uncover how relevant are this type of (informal) actors in the EU Enlargement policy analysed. However, the way in which the research design is actually made and implemented offers a rather poor answer to those questions. More specifically, what I miss is a more ambitious approach to answer the research questions, in particular, in terms of theory development, formulation of hypotheses, a more and better integrated research design and also a bigger focus on the case analysed which is the Enlargement of Western Balkans which is talked about throughout the paper but never goes into depth about it. This obviously has negative consequences for the development of the thesis to the extent that it does not provide clear information about the possible role that these informal actors can have in a case like this (compared to other possible cases, which of course are not even raised in the thesis).

The goals of the research are stated in a rather general way on Pag 19. What I miss from this general explanation is getting deeper on why Political Foundations (particularly the two that have been selected for this thesis) are supposed to be important actors on the EU Enlargement for Western Balkans. Related to this idea, the thesis does not justify satisfactorily the selection of the political foundations under scrutiny.

The literature review (Pag 10-23) is mainly focused on political parties, political foundations and the possible role of both (actors) on EU Enlargement. The literature review is comprehensive and well-structured, however, I also miss a broader approach including other informal actors on EU Enlargement policies. Probably, that would have been the best way to determine the best-case selection of informal actors for the present study. Further, although the literature review section devotes some space to explain some possible instruments and mechanisms these political foundations may use to try to influence EU Enlargement it is hard to find a tangible influence of these foundations (at least in the literature review). This makes the research questions posed in the thesis less appealing.

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

The theory that the thesis brings and tests is very poor. The paper barely mentions the elite and pluralist theories. However, only some ideas about these theories are mentioned, which are not subsequently worked on or used to construct and/or formulate hypotheses. It is a pity, since the thesis would have had more interest with the formulation and subsequent testing of some hypothesis (even if these were only tentative). The approach is in this way more exploratory and descriptive rather than explanatory.

The research design relies on data from documents as well as information collected from five interviews in both (KAS and WMCES) foundations. In principle, five interviews do not seem many interviews given the complexity of the issue at stake. In any case, with a good semi-structure interview I believe it is possible to collect a good dataset. The author mentions that experts from different countries were chosen to reduce country-specific biases. However, he does not say anything about other plausible problems of validity and/or reliability of the data and information collected such as the possible bias of the interviewer on the interviewees or the degree of matching of the data and information collected between documents and the policy officials or experts interviewed. This information would have provided more credibility to the data and information analysed.

In relation to the analysis strategy the author mentions three strategies (process-tracing, method of ´attributed influence`, and thematic analysis), however, the analysis relies mainly on the interpretation of the information the author has collected from the interviews and documents. The problem here is that unless it is established previously a theoretical framework for interpretation, anything may happen. In other words, it is very hard to measure influence unless you have a controversial issue (or a number of controversial issues) in which a number of actors have to make a formal decision(s). This is very hard (if not impossible) to measure this with arguments (or interpretations). The easiest way is to transform qualitative arguments into quantitative estimations (as it is made usually in the literature). As this has not been made, I would argue that wherever findings are rather tentative and therefore it should be recognised as this. I appreciate the honesty of the author since to some extent he recognises that on Pages 39-40.

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

The conclusions are nicely written but they do rely pretty much on a rather descriptive analysis. What I mean by that is that, as mentioned before, the thesis has developed very little theory that helps to interpret (the information provided from the interviews) about the real role and/or influence that political foundations have on the Enlargement process. Furthermore, the conclusions state that the thesis has made ´a contribution to the literature on Think Tanks, Europeanization, Party Politics in the EU and EU Foreign and Enlargement Policy` (Pag 55), however the author does not specify what are these contributions about on each of those areas. In other words, it is not explained how this study help us to better understand and/or explain the Europeanization processes or Party Politics in the EU. Finally, I have also missed the development in the conclusions of some implications of the findings. For example, what are the implications for the working of EU policies that the KAS and WMCES act oftentimes as norm entrepreneurs, knowledge brokers and watchdogs? By answering this sort of questions, the thesis would have been able to show in a rather more convincing way its contributions.

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

> In general terms, the thesis is nicely written and uses scholarly language.
> The author does not use footnotes and the citations are made correctly. The style is consistent across the thesis.
> The thesis has a nice Appendix section that includes a list of documents used in the analysis as well as the transcripts of the content of the interviews. This is highly appreciated.

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

> The Thesis has strong points:
> - Interesting research questions (although they could have been developed in a more ambitious way)
> - Well- structured literature review
> - Nice field work with primary sources through interviews
> - Nice formal aspects in the development of the thesis
>
> Weaker points:
>
> - Little theory development (with implications for the amount of insights the thesis is able to bring)
> - Poor research design
> - Too much description in the analysis
> - Weak conclusions

Grade (A-F):	C (7)
Date:	Signature:
03/07/2024	

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'.