



Diploma Thesis Evaluation Form

Author: **David Masselter**

Title: **Bargaining Power of the Benelux Region within the EU Council**

Programme/year: MAIN/2024

Author of Evaluation (supervisor/external assessor): **Martin Jeřábek**

Criteria	Definition	Maximum	Points
Major Criteria			
	Research question, definition of objectives	10	9
	Theoretical/conceptual framework	30	26
	Methodology, analysis, argument	40	38
Total		80	73
Minor Criteria			
	Sources	10	8
	Style	5	5
	Formal requirements	5	4
Total		20	17
TOTAL		100	90

Evaluation

Major criteria:

The aim of the thesis, as stated by the author on page 3, is to determine whether the Benelux region exercises any significant bargaining power in the EU Council. The author explores this by focusing on the following assumptions (outlined on page 18): 1. *“Benelux has a higher degree of voting cohesion between its member states compared to other states; 2. Benelux has a higher influence on Council voting outcomes than comparable states and regions; 3. The Benelux region is in pivotal positions more often than comparable EU coalitions.*



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The author conducts a quantitative analysis to evaluate the voting power of the Benelux countries in the EU Council, utilizing the VoteWatch dataset for the period 2009-2022. This period covers the application of the Treaty of Nice and the Lisbon Treaty rules on the Qualified Majority Voting (QMV) system. The analysis also includes a comparison of the Benelux group's voting power with other EU member state groups, such as the Visegrad, Nordic, and Baltic groups.

For further concluded details of the author, see page 56, where it is concluded that "Benelux holds a high degree of voting power compared to most other regions" (p. 59).

The theoretical framework for the topic is introduced by David Masselter in Chapter 3 (p. 15). The analytical techniques, specifically the Shapley-Shubik Index (SSI) and the Banzhaf Power Index (BPI), are described in Chapter 4. The main body of the thesis is comprised of two chapters that present the quantitative analysis, focusing on power indexes and voting records.

Chapter 5 - Bargaining Power of Benelux as Expressed by Power Indexes:
In this chapter, the author examines the voting power of the Benelux countries using two selected power indexes: the Shapley-Shubik Index and the Banzhaf Power Index. The chapter details the computational foundations of these indexes and their calculated values for the Benelux region. Additionally, it traces the evolution of these indexes over time, considering various institutional changes, and compares the Benelux region to other similar voting coalitions within the EU, such as the Baltic and Visegrad groups.

Chapter 6 - Voting Power as Expressed by Council Voting Records:
This chapter shifts focus to the practical reality of voting in the Council by analyzing the voting cohesion of the Benelux countries in comparison to other regional groupings. The author also explores the concept of "pivotability," which refers to the ability of a coalition to alter the overall voting outcome. The findings indicate that the Benelux group votes with relatively high cohesion compared to a randomly selected control group and other regional groupings. Furthermore, although the Benelux initially exhibits a low share of pivotable votes, this share increases when only non-unanimous votes are considered.

The primary shortcoming of the thesis lies in the lack of direct connections between the theoretical approaches and the analytical sections of the study. The author references relevant theories of European integration, such as Rational Choice Institutionalism, Multi-Level Governance (MLG), and Liberal Intergovernmentalism (see p. 16). However, the explicit application of these theories in the main analytical chapters (particularly Chapters 5 and 6) is lacking, and their inclusion, especially in the conclusion, would have been beneficial.



Minor Criteria:

The analytical portion of the thesis is well-written and thorough. The grammar and logical structure are satisfactory, making the author's ideas easy to follow. The thesis includes a comprehensive list of sources, drawing on relevant literature related to coalition-building and bargaining power (e.g., F. Häge) and theoretical frameworks (e.g., B. Kohler-Koch, M. Jachtenfuchs, M. Pollack). The necessary figures and tables are well-executed and integrated into the main text. The use of quotations generally adheres to formal requirements, although there is inconsistency in the citation format, with some references appearing in brackets within the text and others in footnotes on the same page.

Overall Evaluation:

The thesis is of a high standard, significantly above average. It demonstrates the author's strong understanding of the Benelux's influence in the EU Council of Ministers, the bargaining dynamics among EU member states, and the issue of blocking minorities. The original research results are primarily presented in Chapters 5 and 6, where the author conducts well-executed quantitative analyses, including power index calculations and voting record evaluations. The author is knowledgeable about the relevant theories, such as historical institutionalism, and references them throughout the thesis. However, the main limitation is the lack of theoretical application in the core research chapters. Despite this, the thesis is concise, useful, and written in an accessible style.

Question for the MA thesis defense:

1. Influential article by Gelman, Katz and Bafumi claims that Power Indexes do not work. How do you stand up to this critique?

(Gelman, Katz and Bafumi: Standard Voting Power Indexes Do Not Work: An Empirical Analysis (British Journal of Pol. Sci., 2004)

2. Gábor (2020) analyzes changes in voting power after Brexit. Are your results consistent with his?

(Gábor: Impact of Brexit on voting power in Council of the European Union (Open Political Science, 2020)

Suggested grade: **A-B**

Signature:

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