

Opponent review of thesis:

**Dutch EU Policy**  
by **Christopher J. Svorcik**

In the introduction, author states a clear objective of his thesis: „to analyze the foreign policy of the Netherlands towards the EU“, concentrating on the „Dutch position towards the EU enlargement (widening) and integration (deepening)“.

In order to achieve this objective, the author chose to proceed in following steps: historical analysis of the Dutch foreign and EU policy, the influence of the European Union on the Dutch foreign policy, the role of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in foreign policy formulation and the reasons of the Dutch ‚no‘ vote in the EU Constitution referendum. In the historical part, the author provides an overview of the fundamental change in Dutch foreign policy – one from isolationism to a deep internationalism. The way this overview is conceived reflects the overall nature of the first part of the thesis: Dutch policy is grasped as nothing more but a reaction to a broader international development. The author thus, albeit implicitly, adopts an „outside-in“ approach. I will touch upon this issue later.

Already this part suggests an underlying question, around which is the entire text partly structured: Why is it that formerly European integration enthusiastic Netherland gradually assumed a negative stance towards the EU? After dealing with the above outlined issues, Conclusion part offers some recommendation in regard of the Dutch EU policy.

The thesis can be read as a comprehensive and skillful description of various aspects of the Dutch – EU relationship, proving that the author managed to acquire a deep expertise of this agenda. However, reader expecting more than a description is bound to be disappointed.

The text suffers from two main flaws:

- Lack of a clear analytical framework which would, in turn, inform the structure of the text. The thesis is therefore heavily fragmented, following available data sources instead of a research focus. This assertion can be illustrated by the fact that most of the arguments in the thesis are taken from a single respective source (several *Internationale Spectator* contributions for the first part) without any critical evaluation. This flaw is responsible for following shortcomings of the text: 1) it is unclear why the author chose to provide a historical overview, regarding the fact that its inclusion is not analytically capitalized in any way; 2) the first part (overview of the process of foreign policy making) is in no way related to the second part (overview of the stances towards various aspects of the EU). This is necessarily so given the fact that the former part deals with completely different set of actors than the latter.
- Author implicitly claims to follow foreign policy analysis framework, which is rather inductive. However, the very text clearly assumes a particular theoretical stance: one of Europeanization. This does not necessarily have to pose any problem, but the author does not define his concept of Europeanization, not even speaking about any attempt to operationalize it. Such an omission does not allow any clear analytical approach to the object under study. As a consequence, the question of Europeanization is dealt with only in a shallow way, the author does not address the most important questions, for example – what resistances to the EU influence were to be met, how exactly were the EU inputs translated to the policy changes, etc. There is another observation linked to the last remark – the author claims to analyze the Dutch policy towards EU, while a good part of the thesis deals with the question how the EU has affected the Dutch decision making process. Again, this is not a flaw *a priori* if the author managed to capitalize the gathered data. For example, an interesting question would be – how the ongoing Europeanization of the Dutch political system affects formulation of the EU

policy. However, this is not the question addressed anywhere in the thesis. Last but not least, „Dutch EU policy“ is in this part limited to assessing performance of the MFA in the area of policy coordination.

On the other hand, the author managed to provide a good empirical ground for comparison of the Dutch positions towards „EU widening“ and EU deepening“, since both follow the same structure – overview of the positions of the relevant parties and that of public. However, again, only little analytical benefit is made from this experienced choice.

In sum, the thesis is certainly valuable for its empirical expertise (with the reservation that the list of sources, especially for the first part, is very limited /essentially only a Yearbook Internationale Spectator/) and as a proof that the author acquired essential skills of research work. On the other hand, the work lacks any analytical or methodological clarity and structure, with the inevitable consequence of strongly fragmented text. This fragmentation is responsible for very low linkage between the individual chapters and for a very limited analytical value.

Despite the above mentioned reservation, the thesis is in principle defensible and I suggest **grade B – C**.

**Michal Kořan**

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