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**Universität zu Köln**



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An die  
Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaftliche Fakultät  
der Universität zu Köln  
Dekanat

- im Hause -

**CETEUS**  
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**Gutachten**

zur Inauguraldissertation von

**Bogdana Depo, M.A.**

**'Goliath Versus Goliath:  
EU Democracy Promotion in the Eastern  
Neighbourhood and Russia's Alternative Agenda'**

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## **I. On the topic and research area: political and academic relevance**

The relations of the EU with the countries of the Eastern neighbourhood is an extensively studied area of political science – especially taking stock of the extensive debate about the concepts of the EU as 'normative power' promoting democracy via the effects of Europeanization. As the author rightly mentions in her work the influence of the Russia as 'Goliath' are however under-researched. There are significant research desiderata how the EU and Russia interact in their shared and apparently disputed 'buffer zone' and what the EU's performance in this struggle tells us about the EU as actor in the international system.

In view of this state of the art the author identifies a stimulating perspective in pursuing her ambitious research on explaining the strategies of the two 'Goliaths'. Compared with the conventional state of the art she promises an added value by employing more extensively than others realist approaches with the balance of power: geopolitical considerations are less prominent in studies on EU external action.

Dana's research is thus both timely and stimulating. She has chosen a topic which implies considerable challenges: she has to take into account the large and differentiated *acquis académique* from several sets of theoretical approaches. A major task is to identify and analyse empirical evidence from a complex set of sources- especially Russian- which were and are not easily available. Her way to use Russian sources is a considerable added value. Finally she has to assess her findings in view of the theoretical approaches chosen and to draw more generalised conclusions.

The candidate has pursued her tasks with considerable energy and strong ambitions. She presents a focussed comprehensive work. She could have invested more into the generalisations.

## **II. Detailed report and assessment**

*In the short introduction* the author informs the reader about the research perspective – the 'clash' between academic approaches. Here, she formulates her major theses- especially 'the misconception of the EU's world view'.

For the evaluator her clearly stated argument is stimulating as though provoking. She should have discussed this finding more extensively in the conclusions.

Chapter 1 presents a historical, well documented overview about the evolution of the democracy promotion and more importantly a literature review.

For the evaluator this part is well written and informative. With reference to mainstream works, e.g. on the Europeanisation literature, she explains the 'search of the new research avenue' (p.27).

*In chapter 2* the author contrasts the argument of Fukuyama's 'triumph' of western liberalism with the balance of power thesis and explains her methodological tools

For the evaluator both parts are of high significance for the further work. They document the capability of the author to identify a promising conceptual framework - especially on the way to explain her analytical approach to study the geopolitical competition.

The part on the methodology is rather conventional though useful and necessary. The evaluator esteems the critical reflection on the limits of her research especially in view of limited insight into Russian sources, but for the evaluator already her reflected use of public Russian sources – eg. from the academy of science - is a significant added value for all those interested in the EU's eastern neighbourhood policy and Russian strategies but with no deeper access to the respective sources.

Chapters 3- 8 present the empirical findings over well - defined periods and towards individual states of the EaP.

For the evaluator these chapters document an intensive empirical work. In a disciplined way the author leads the readers deeply into EU's actions and activities like those of Russia. Though the evaluator is familiar with most steps and strategies of the EU's long and invites dealings with the Eastern neighbourhood he has learned a lot from the detailed and highly informative description with also some additional insights - especially about the concrete Russian policy of sanctions against its western neighbours as to the use of Slavic and orthodox identity

In these empirical chapters the author uses her theoretical categories in a solid way.

*In the thesis conclusion* the author systematically summarizes her key findings and discusses general conclusions.

The evaluator can well follow the lines of arguments. They give useful answers to the research questions raised in the beginning. Of specific interest are conclusions 3 and 5. They should have been used more extensively for characterising the limited role of the EU in cases of hard power issues. There are no major attempts to generalise her findings and conclusions.

The author's suggestions for a new avenue of research offer only a limited added value.

More clearly she should have elaborated here like in other parts that she does not pursue the conventional ways of the Europeanization and normative power literature in studying the EU's impact of the democratization efforts on the ground.

### III. Criteria for a general evaluation

The author formulates a stimulating *research topic* with which she addresses a clear desideratum of academic work and political relevance.

She uses a relevant and for EU studies less conventional approach exploiting the *theoretical state of the art*.

*The methods* are satisfactorily explained and applied. The author has produced reliable and valid evidence from both interviews and from document analysis.

The *division* between the theoretical and empirical parts is balanced;

Though the empirical parts are long the reader is not getting bored

All *formal criteria* are respected. The plagiarism test did not indicate any problems.

The *presentation* is satisfactory.

One of the strongest points is the *empirical evidence* collected: the author discovers relevant pieces of information from several and different sources. An added value is the exploitation of Russian sources.

A *major advice*: the author should reflect more about the consequences of her work for the conventional macro-theories on the EU's international role.

Overall, the dissertation offers a useful contribution to studying the EU's role in its external action without however offering an exceptional work

As grade I propose

**Cum laude (1,7)**

(Prof. Dr. W. Wessels)



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