

Name of the student:	Jelena Malidzan
Title of the thesis:	Geopolitical conditions and assumptions for establishing the Western Balkans Regional Economic Area as a premise for accelerated EU membership
Reviewer:	Visnja Vukov

1. KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTION TO THE FIELD

(relevance of the research question, research objective, literature review):

The research question addresses a very relevant and topical question of the origins of the Western Balkans Regional Economic Area (WBREA) as a regional integration project established in the context of protracted EU accession. The student does an excellent job in presenting the puzzle and theoretical relevance of the research. She is also very thorough in her literature review, engaging with various fields of scholarship, from the theories developed by scholars of comparative regionalism to the literature on Europeanization and area specialists of the Western Balkans. The literature review would however benefit from a better structure and a clearer contrasting of the main debates in these various fields. Furthermore, while some of the contributions of the thesis are clearly specified in the introduction, the student could have still made a somewhat stronger link between her research and the debates surveyed in the literature review section.

2. ANALYSIS

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

The execution of the process tracing of the case under examination is very strong. It is based on the analysis of media reports, and official documents as well as interviews with high level policy makers. The research design is well thought through and the methodology is highly appropriate for the research question. The interviews were particularly well executed and the student managed to gain highly relevant information and insight from the interviewees, producing important and novel findings.

3. CONCLUSIONS

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

The student has made a very good link between the data and the conclusions. She has also outlined some of the main contributions of her findings to the existing theoretical debates. This last aspect could have still been stronger, with somewhat better identification of the main theoretical implications of the research and clearer links between specific research objectives and the results obtained.

4. FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE

(appropriate language, adherence to academic standards, citation style, layout):

All the formal academic standards have been met by the student. The structure of the thesis and its individual chapters could still be improved, with better linkages between individual subsections and the overall argument.

5. SUMMARY ASSESSMENT

(strong and weak point of the dissertation, other issues)

The student has produced an excellent thesis, with extremely relevant and interesting findings. The thesis is overall very well written, with strong theoretical background, adequate research design and very important and novel results. With some further improvements, particularly in the structure and the elaboration of the theoretical implications of the results, the thesis could be a basis for journal submission.

Grade (0-10):	9.2 (A)
Date:	Signature:
06 July 2020	