



Opponent's Report

Ph.D. thesis **New understanding of EU legitimacy and anti-corruption** *The role of the representative democracies*

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The dissertation thesis **New understanding of EU legitimacy and anti-corruption** *The role of the representative democracies* deals with an important topic not only for European studies, public policy studies or political science in general. The subject dealt with is also of great social and political importance. The question of the (democratic) legitimacy of the EU is central. Still, the research mainly focuses on new opportunities for corruptive practices, which traps societies into a loop of corrupt systems, in which the constraints imposed to representative democracies are triggering facades of legitimation and hidden opportunities for the executive elites to reach for abuses of power, through the weakened capacities of party democracies. The result is a very interesting and compact study of one of the most actual problems faced by the EU and democracies in general, leading to democratic backsliding. Nevertheless, in this review, I will focus on some flaws or limits of this research.

The research lays on the operationalization of two concepts: the „legislative corruption“ and the lack of social trust when political systems fail to solve collective problems. Considering the first one, we can assume that the author presented in general, a good level of knowledge of the literature. The question of the trust is much more problematic (trust as a basis for legitimacy), and the basic literature should have been broadened and presented (at least Luhmann, Seligman, Sztompka for instance or M. Sedláčková in the Czech context), even if it is not the center of the research per se. The question of corruption is also well presented, but it should have been more deeply analyzed; at least the question of lobbying should have been systematically treated (esp. J. Vargovčíková).

The main question we should have concerns the choice of the three national cases (Slovenia, Croatia and North Macedonia). It is not about their relations with the EU, but all these states were much more members of the former Yugoslavia than parts of Central and Eastern Europe. We do not consider these three cases as illegitimate or not logical per se, but the findings should be different in other CEE countries (with another historical context, especially if we consider at least the situation after 1989-1990). By doing as we have in this thesis, we just replicate the



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idea of the homogeneity of the former Easter bloc (without considering the then specific situation of Yugoslavia, much more in-between the two blocs, and the much longer historical context, ie. These countries and societies before the communist regimes). From our point of view, it is much more the problem of the “official” title and general presentation than a problem of the research in itself. If this research has to be presented as an analysis of the CEE, it has to be clearly supported by a comparative chapter or robust introduction.

This point is especially important if we follow the principle that the historical preconditions of communist regimes, the historical context (EU enlargements; post-1989 Cold war period; EU crises) and especially, the specifics of the process of Europeanization are important features for understanding a) *the conditions under which corruptive practices are taking place;* b) *the EU approach in addressing corruption* and c) *the outcomes in form of democratic backsliding.*

The text is very dense and, in some respects, quite difficult to read. We can find in the text a lot of assertions without any clear reference, for instance we can certainly agree that “The ramifications due to the marginalization of the national parliaments during the process of Europeanization and democratization, however, has much more serious consequences on representative democracies and the loop of corruptive practices, particularly on the creation of social traps, when the citizens are mistrusting both the institutions and each other, ending with resistance for changing the corruptive systems.” But such definitive comment has to be referenced (author/s, eventually any other reference). All in all, the problem is recurrent especially if we consider the very diffuse (maybe confuse) presentation of the EU, and especially its aims or conception. The situation has greatly changed since the beginning of the 1990’s and this evolution is insufficiently taken into account by the author. Due to the lack of sufficient contextualization, in a sense, the reader may have the impression that the EU and the states or national parliaments are individual unchanging actors.

One of the actors which are practically missing are the political parties (mentioned is the title of the Chapter V, p. 107-116). If they are referred to, there is another lack in the presentation of these type of actors (quite different indeed from an analysis of the party systems, or general comments to these systems, and also different from the deputies). All in all this does not impact negatively the author’s analysis, but if the author claims she did such work, in fact this part is missing.

This simplification leads to an all-embracing conception of the situation after 1989 “After the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, the CEE countries decided to join the European Union with the aim of sharing democratic values and principles, as well as the benefits of the liberal markets of free capital and movement, in the hope for political change regimes from communist to liberal democracies.” (p. 55) The role of the then important leaders (Kohl, Mitterrand) is diminished and the „road back to Europe“ is concentrated only on the actual acceptance of the Europeanisation.



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From a formal point of view the text is quite difficult due to the absence of visible structure, ending in too long chapters without internal division. In some cases such subdivision might appear but it was not systematically used: for instance we have a beginning such structure at the page 88 (*a) Political party transformations*) but there is no b)...

We can find an ending quotes in the page 93, but the beginning of the citation is unclear. Some names are misspelled (Gensher/Genscher, p 87). Finally the bibliography has some flaws (Maatsch, Pierson, Vachudová and so on) and also should have been better structured.

The thesis brings a lot of insights and a very rich analysis. The flaws or limits we mentioned above do not altered the quality of the research but open some spaces for further research, and maybe a general guideline in case of the publication of this work as a monography.

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