

Name of the student:	Giorgi Mikava
Title of the thesis:	Understanding Party Positions on European Integration amidst Crises: The impact of national and regional crises on political party behavior in Spain and Ireland
Reviewer:	Prof. Javier Arregui

1. KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTION TO THE FIELD

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

Giorgi's thesis attempts to evaluate the extent to which crises affect national parties' policy positioning on European integration. In principle, this is a nice research question insofar as it takes a plausible explanation for Euroscepticism. The selected crises are Brexit and the 2017 Spanish Constitutional crisis. While the selected crises are fine, I am unsure to what extent these are comparable. This is due to fact that although we could find some similarities between both crises, we could also find strong and substantive differences. The similarities and differences, as well as their impact are not sufficiently addressed. In any case, the RQ is good and the formulation is well done.

Giorgi shows a relatively good command of the literature. He elaborates a typology of parties related to being more or less Eurosceptic, while playing particular emphasis to the roles and strategies different types of parties might perform. He uses both types of literatures to develop one hypothesis. In general terms, the literature and the theoretical background are correct. However, a critical analysis is missing in the literature review.

Finally, the added value of the research, although specified ("understanding the supply-side of political competition"), is poorly developed and/or explained.

2. ANALYSIS

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

Giorgi's thesis is ambitious in relation to the research question it poses. While the research question is quite ambitious, I am not sure that the research design, data analysis and research strategy are equally ambitious.

The RQ posits the parties' policy change on European integration as the dependent variable, and the crises previously cited as the independent variables. This is fine and the case selection where the RQ is tested (Ireland and Spain) is also fine. They are consistently explained and justified. The literature review is also reasonably well developed. When introducing the theoretical framework, however, Giorgi relies mainly on rational choice theory. When analyzing attitudes related to Euroscepticism, there are clearly two relevant theories: the utilitarian (and/or rational choice) approach and the affective approach to the integration process. This second approach is absent in the paper. This approach has demonstrated that for an important part of the European population, their attachment to the EU project is not directly related to the utility the EU provides either at individual and/or national level. By including this approach and formulating hypotheses accordingly, the paper would have given a more complete picture analyzing the impact of crisis on parties' policy positioning on EU integration. Furthermore, the only formulated hypotheses (related to the rational choice of parties) (page 17) is nicely formulated, but the mechanisms that operate particularly in the second part of the hypothesis are not clear.

In relation to the research design, the two selected cases are fine to test the hypothesis and to answer the RQ. However, the information provided particularly about the Catalan case is quite poor when attempting to present the information in a rigorous way. I understand why the author does that, in order to show the intensity of the crisis, but clearly this is not the way to proceed in an academic paper, as we need to be rigorous with the information provided. Another important error is made on page 27 when the author suggests that Spain voted NO to the European Constitution, this is clearly wrong, Spain voted yes in 2005 to the European Constitution with 77% votes in favour. Beyond that, the analysis was carried out through the examination of party manifestos. I am not sure that the time

selection of party manifestos is correct and/or justified. When looking at party change, it is necessary to view a point of change, namely before and after (in this case before and after the crisis under scrutiny). It is not necessary to look too far back in time.

In terms of the analysis, the findings are rather descriptive, and no systematic collection of information was pursued. This means that the analysis is nurtured with some general statements about the relationship between both dependent and independent variables. This is fine, however, no causal claims can be made. In fact, there is no real data on public opinion (for example public opinion polls, on Ireland and Spain in Eurobarometer) but the research relies more on secondary textual data sources. The main problem of using only secondary textual data is that you see to what extent parties have changed (or not) their view and/or preferences about the EU. However, you cannot identify the causes that do so. This means you cannot relate both phenomenon directly since many other factors and/or variables could be acting in that direction. This makes the implemented analysis insufficient.

3. CONCLUSIONS

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

As argued previously, the thesis has a nice and ambitious point of departure starting with the research question. The paper is also reasonably structured while there are clear shortcomings both in the research design and performed analysis. The concluding section shows that the mainstream parties maintain their pro-EU or pro-integration views, something that it is widely recognized in the literature. That it is fine, but I truly believe that this research with another research design and/or data strategy would have been able to provide more important insights.

4. FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE

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

The language and style are correctly developed throughout the whole thesis. The structure of the paper is good. The citation style is consistent and is developed according to academic standards. All formal requirements are met.

5. SUMMARY ASSESSMENT

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

The stronger point of the thesis is the ambition and novelty to analyze the relationship between crisis in MS and parties' policy change. There are not many studies on this subject. The paper also introduces the utilitarian perspective that could be very beneficial to understand what happens in these complex process. The weakest part is clearly related to the research design and the sort of analysis implemented. This is due to the fact that it is virtually impossible to disentangle which factors influence the DV, since many variables could be acting within these processes. As a consequence, the thesis only makes some vague statements that were already clearly stated in the literature.

Grade (A-F):	D (6.5)
Date:	Signature:
22.06.2021	

classification scheme

Percentile	Prague		Krakow		Leiden		Barcelona	
	91-100 %	8,5%	5	6,7%	8,5-10	5,3%	9-10	5,5 %
B (81-90)	81-90 %	16,3%	4,5	11,7%	7,5-8,4	16,4%	8-8,9	11,0 %
C (71-80)	71-80 %	16,3%	4	20%	6,5-7,4	36,2%	7-7,9	18,4 %
D (61-70)	61-70 %	24%	3,5	28,3%			6-6,9	35,2 %
E (51-60)	51-60 %	34,9%	3	33,4 %	6-6,4	42,1 %	5-5,9	30,1 %

Assessment criteria:

Excellent (A): 'Outstanding performance with only minor errors';

Very good (B): 'Above the average standard but with some errors';

Good (C): 'Generally sound work but with a number of notable errors';

Satisfactory (D): 'Fair but with significant shortcomings';

Sufficient (E): 'Performance meets the minimum criteria';

Fail: 'Some/considerable more work required before the credit can be awarded'.