



Universiteit  
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# Thesis evaluation Joël Audenaerde

## Student details:

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## Programme details

**Programme:** European Politics and Society

**Specialisation:**

**EC:** 30

## Evaluators:

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## Thesis details:

**Title:** The long and winding road to a domestic consensus on enlargement? Parliamentary positions and framing on EU enlargement in the Netherlands between 2004 and 2020

Is the thesis in your assessment free of plagiarism?

Yes to my knowledge the thesis is free of plagiarism

Checked by supervisor

Can the thesis be made publicly available in the Leiden University Repository?

by M. Broad: it can be made public through the repository.

## Summary assessment/comments

This was a good thesis on a topical subject. Case selection needed more thought, and the relevance of what was being discussed could have shone through far more clearly. I ultimately felt also that the thesis didn't always do justice to the very impressive amount of research. But it was a decent attempt written by an enquiring mind.

## Criteria

### Knowledge and insight

This thesis, which I enjoyed reading, dealt with a neat issue of contemporary relevance, namely, EU enlargement. More specifically, it sought to examine the evolution of Dutch debates surrounding enlargement and 'enlargement fatigue' over the course of the last fifteen years. It started with the assumption – rightly, in my opinion – that enlargement policy has become 'nationalised', with ever greater number of domestic actors having ever greater say in how a national government responds to the EU's expanding borders. The expectation in turn was that enlargement has become heavily contested and thus politicised; the aim of the thesis was consequently to flesh out this contestation by revealing how, and potentially why, different parties have framed enlargement in the way they have. This was an intriguing approach to the topic for sure. But there was a slight feeling still of the student bringing in lots of related, but not strictly necessary, commentators and research topics when in fact the thesis was chiefly concerned with changes and continuity in, and differences and similarities between, Dutch party-political views of EU enlargement. All this was perhaps exacerbated by a slightly more complicated research question than I had been expecting. As a result, the entry point to the topic probably could have been streamlined, even if the introduction was throughout premised on a really decent amount of reading.

The breadth of that reading continued into the literature review, which was sensibly divided and did well to elucidate on some of the assumptions behind the introduction's opening gambit. I'm not sure literature on the Dutch position towards enlargement needed to be included here, but it did need to feature more prominently than that contained on pp. 24–25. And it ought to have been linked more resolutely to case selection (see below).

**Assessment:** good

**Weighing:** n/a

### Application knowledge and insight

Chapters 3–4 covered the theoretical framework and research design. It is obvious that the student poured a huge amount of effort building his case and articulating his ideas. And the degree of reading included here was again impressive. That said, I'm still not convinced there was much need to include the hypotheses. At the very least it remained unclear to me whether there was always an obvious connection between some the hypotheses as presented and the research question or gap identified in the literature review. As mentioned before, the thesis also needed to do a better job in explaining the scope conditions of the case – what type of case in The Netherlands? What did the student expect when examining the Dutch parliament, and was this similar or different to other parliaments? Is the Dutch case unique or representative when it comes to testing the hypotheses? I can't quite shake feeling that this was an author who in researching Dutch parliamentary debates on enlargement – an eminently sensible topic – so feared writing what they perceived would be a descriptive thesis that they ended up overgilding the lily. In fact, time was probably better spent thinking about what we gain by looking at the Dutch second chamber and why we ought to care.

**Assessment:** (more than) satisfactory

**Weighing:** n/a

## Reaching conclusions

The analysis in Chapter 5 was thought-provoking and managed to demonstrate the level of primary work undertaken for the thesis – which in some ways was remarkable given the circumstances. It was muddled by the hypotheses, and it wasn't always clear what we were meant to do with some of the findings presented. But the student clearly knew his stuff when it came to the intricacies of Dutch parliamentary discussions on EU enlargement. The eventually findings – that enlargement discourse 'points towards the overall importance of partisan dynamics' – might not have been overly surprising. And it would have been intriguing to see quotes of the actual statements reviewed – a shame indeed that more glimpses of even some of the 1700+ statements were provided. But the student was nonetheless able to establish what parties say and how they go about saying it. It was all the more shame then that the conclusion itself again seemed a bit disconnected from the framing earlier in the thesis – although, as mentioned above, with so many potential approaches and framings being shoe-horned in this was not altogether a surprise.

**Assessment:** good

**Weighing:** n/a

## Communication

The thesis read fluently and was mostly well put together. Admittedly there were a few grammar issues – the possessive apostrophe was for instance often noticeable by its absence – but expression was varied enough to keep the reader engaged. Scholarly apparatus were all very neat too

**Assessment:** very good

**Weighing:** n/a

## Learning skills

Met

**Assessment:** (more than) satisfactory

**Weighing:** n/a

## Formal requirements

Met

## Final assessment

On 19-07-2021 this thesis is graded with a 7.5

# Signatures



M. Broad