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- im Hause -

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Gutachten

zur **Inauguraldissertation** von

Vanessa Boas, M.A.

Thema:

**Who needs goodwill?
An analysis of EU norm promotion
in the Central Asian context**

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I. On the topic and research area

The analysis of 'norms promotion' in the EC/EU's external action belongs to the now already traditional and current core area of the integration oriented studies of political science. The debate on the role of the EU as 'normative power' (see Manners, Tocci et al) is quite intensive and differentiated. A special and so far under-researched case is the EU's strategy vis-à-vis Central Asia. A systematic study of the factors influencing adoption rates of different Central Asian countries is an academic but also practical desideratum. To use the linkage and leverage approach promises highly useful insights.

The author has chosen a topic with considerable challenges: she has to take into account the large and differentiated *acquis académique* on the 'normative power' and 'Europeanisation' literature. She has to discover empirical evidence in a difficult political environment and context for researchers from outside. Finally, she has to assess her findings in view of the theoretical approaches chosen.

The candidate has pursued her tasks with considerable energy and ambition - especially in view of finding sources of evidence on the spot. She has produced a highly useful dissertation which contributes to our knowledge on the EU's capabilities.

II. Detailed report and detailed assessment

In Part One (Introduction and background) the author sketches the relevance of the topic in terms of geo-politics referring to provocative Mackinder theory (p. 4) and the state of scholarship. On page 7 she describes the 'thrust of research' (see also the research questions on p. 25) and then the conceptual background.

For the evaluator the research area is well identified and the focus on the norm adoption is well explained. She also refers to stimulating parts of the theoretical debate - such as Zielonka and Laidi. But the evaluator misses some more earlier elaborations (within the introduction) on the specific approach (the Levitzky and Way theory) she plans to pursue.

Part Two (Analytical framework) documents the capability of the author to identify and use relevant conceptual and theoretical frameworks. She explains convincingly her choice of using categories by Levitzky and Way with a

rational institutionalist approach (see e.g. p 33). She exploits the respective state of the art in a productive way.

She elaborates four hypotheses with one null hypothesis (pp. 37/38) and operationalises the concepts in a promising and productive way (see e.g. p. 41, 47, 50). One significant part deals with the 'methodological tools' - including the selection of the cases in terms of countries and norm promotion.

The evaluator finds this design highly useful and stimulating. He especially likes the less conventional use of the 'linkage and leverage' approach. One suggestion might be to look more at the geo-political dimension of the relationship and to link it to traditional and conventional theories on the EU's role in the international system.

The chapter on methodology is well reflected; the selection of the cases as well as the period makes sense.

Part Three (Empirical Results) offers the findings of the study. The author describes in detail and based on extended research the norm adoption outcome (see p. 127) as the dependent variable (chapter 8) and then linkage, leverage and organisational powers, as well as regime types as independent or intervening variable (chapter 9).

For the evaluator she presents her findings in a strictly systematic way using the categories and methods developed in Part two. She is able to collect empirical evidence in several ways. The evaluator profited especially from the analysis of the 'great game' (p. 149ff.), the evaluation of the Organisational Capacity (p. 175ff) and of the Regime types (p. 183ff) in which she contributes to our understanding of the EU's limited impact.

In Part Four (Conclusion) she summarizes her findings and presents her research results (see especially the respective tables). She discusses in how far the results match the hypotheses and offers lessons learnt and future research ideas.

The evaluator highly esteems the reflected discussions of the results – especially in terms of causal relationships between the variables. Of interest are the findings on the impact of the organisational power and the regime type. The chapter on 'policy implications' remains superficial as do the pages on the 'future outlook'.

More links to other theories and conceptional approaches are desirable, as they increase the value of the study also for other research areas on the EU's external action.

III. Criteria for a general evaluation

The author formulates stimulating *research questions* with which she addresses a relevant desideratum of academic work.

She productively uses the existing *theoretical state of the art* and applies - less often used - categories and approaches.

The author presents a useful and systematic *research design*.

The methodology is well presented and used.

The *overall division* between the theoretical and empirical parts is well balanced. Both parts are well connected.

All *formal criteria* are respected.

The *plagiarism test* did not show any problems.


The *presentation* is well done. Throughout her work she develops stimulating and informative tables.

One of the strongest points is the *empirical evidence* collected: the author discovers highly relevant pieces of information from several and different sources in a difficult context.

Overall, the dissertation offers a highly useful contribution to the analyses and assessments of the evolution of the EU's strategy for Central Asia.

As grade I propose

Magna cum laude (1,3)


(Prof. Dr. W. Wessels)

