EPS { European Politics and Society

Joint Dissertation Review

Name of the student:	Martina Ellis
Title of the thesis:	Negotiations between the EU and Mercosur: Motivations behind the relaunch in 2010
Reviewer:	Dr. Javier Arregui

1. KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTION TO THE FIELD
(relevance of the research question, research objective, literature review):

The thesis examines the relaunch of international negotiations for trade and partnership agreements between the European Union and Mecosur. The aim here is to explain new trends of interregionalism after the failure of the Doha Round. The approach of the thesis is rather descriptive and it tries to identify arguments that are able to explain the new scenario of international agreements in the last decade.
The literature review is all right but there are relevant missing authors for the object of study such as Walter Mattli or Jaime de Melo. Thus, the author is not fully aware of the relevant works on the subject. Further, the review is not sufficiently critical. The review consists mainly on the description and/or presentation of a number of works, but the author does not really engage in the relationship of the existing arguments in the literature with the piece of work proposed. If this would have been made the theory of the paper (and the arguments beyond that) would have been actually much more appealing.
The relevance of the research question is not very robust. This is due to the fact that it is presented like a descriptive rather than an explanatory research question. The thesis does not explain either which is the added value of the research in relation to the state of the art in the literature.

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

The approach of the thesis is, as pointed out, a rather descriptive approach. In principle there is no problem with this. My concerns are more related to the fact that no consistent theoretical approach is used to link the dependent and independent variables. The author is mainly looking for existing arguments in the literature that actually may explain such a relationship. Of course these arguments do exist, but there is no explanation about the mechanisms behind that relationship. This is clearly a shortcoming of the research.
The discussion about the methodology is based mainly on the selection of a case study, which is the relationship between the EU and Mercosur. In principle, to make a case study or a number of cases studies is fine, because as the author argues a good case study may help us to test causal relationships between the analysed variables, to test the quality and consistency of the analytical tools used in the research or to implement a whole range of techniques to obtain information. However, in the research this has not been always implemented as indicated in the methodology section. For example, in the paper there is no information about causal relationships between variables. This is related to the level of analysis that has been implemented in the research.
An additional concern is why the author has selected the case of the relationship of the EU and Mercosur and not the EU and China, Japan, USA or Korea. This means that there are some relevant questions that have not been answered in the case selection: To what extent and why the relationship EU-Mercosur is a better case to explain the dependent variable than the relationship EU-Korea or EU-India or EU-EEUU? The answer to this question would have helped to extrapolate the extent to which the case selected has more or less explanatory leverage than other cases.
The main corpus of the paper also consumed a rather extensive space when explaining the historical evolution of world trade. Authors also describe some of the most relevant issues about the negotiations between the EU and Mercosur but they do not go one step further in order to analyse the utility reported by each of those issues to both trading blocks … This would have been relevant insofar it would have shown the main rationale of each trading block in order to establish a joint

trading partnership.

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

The thesis achieves the aim to explore the relaunch of the international negotiation and the new trends towards inter-regionalism. Yet the conclusions and implications of the arguments developed are rather limited. Probably this is the case because some of the points I mentioned earlier such as a poor theoretical setting, the unclear use of case selection with unclear variability or the uncertain implications of the arguments used that never were fully explored. There are too many descriptive arguments and too little empirical testing in order to be able to contrast in a rather consistent way the hypotheses and to grow theoretically beyond that.
The conclusions are actually too short, particularly considering how lengthy are others sections of the thesis. They do not fully explain the implications of the arguments used and/or the ´findings` developed along the thesis.

4. FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE
(appropriate language, adherence to academic standards, citation style, layout):

The style and the language is overall clear and the thesis is well written. On the other hand, formalities related to citation standards, presentation of quotations, abbreviations, etc .. are entirely fine. The author´s formal skills are solid and professional and meets all academic standards.
The only aspect to be mentioned here is perhaps the structure of the paper, in formal terms it is fine, but clearly there is certain unbalanced between the different parts of the structure.

5. SUMMARY ASSESSMENT
(strong and weak point of the dissertation, other issues)

The stronger points are:

- a relevant topic and discussion of the background of the topic under study
- a partially well-developed analysis of some sources

The weakest points are:

- lack of a strong theoretical focus that actually is able to establish explanations in the relations between the variables analysed as well as to be able to look at the implications of the arguments used in the thesis
- not engagement in the literature from a critical perspective
- the case selected not enough explained and/or discussed
- the conclusions and the contributions fall short mainly due to previous points.

Grade (A-F): 6.5	
Date:	Signature:
7/07/2019	