Joint Dissertation Review

Name of the student:	Maria Paschalina Dimopoulou
Title of the thesis:	Attitudes towards European Integration in the Western Balkans: Euroscepticism and Europhilia in North Macedonia
Reviewer:	Dr Natasza Styczyńska

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

This MA thesis covers a very interesting and up to date issue that is not getting yet enough scholarly attention. Although it's a valuable piece of work, some problematic parts can be detected.

First, categorisation of the stances on EU Integration – Author uses terms Eurorealist, Europhile, soft Euroscepticism which is a blurry mix of definitions of attitudes to the EU and European Integration proposed by Taggart and Szczerbiak and Kopecky and Mudde (who BTW were focusing on parties, not on public opinion) and de Vries and Neumayer. It's unclear why the author has picked these categories instead of following the existing typology (if she preferred to propose her own, this should be justified and explained).

Second, state of the art is rather a summary of selected reading than a discussion, the author doesn't problematise the topic and doesn't engage in discussion. Several newly published articles and books are missing (Routledge Handbook of Euroscepticism, Deimel and Weicher, Huszka, Naunov, Ecodomides, literature on EU conditionality in the Balkans).

There are small, but very relevant mistakes or inconsistencies - The author writes about "the refusal of the European Commission to set an accession date for North Macedonia and Albania" or "veto in accession". NM and AL didn't open the negotiations yet (the opening of negotiations was vetoed), so obviously there is no accession date. The author is mixing up the facts and there is no clear distinction between the status of the candidate (that NM has) and the country that opened negotiations (that NM didn't).

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

The author announces that the expected outcome of this thesis is "to recognize the role of media in shaping the public attitude towards the EU", "explore the links between media, the political elites and public sentiment towards the EU in North Macedonia", but also points out that "purpose of this thesis is to describe the process of attitude formation in EU candidate states through the media and the impact of political parties on the latter". Looking at these statements it is unclear what is the real aim of the thesis – to research a link or process or perception? it's also not clear how influence is measured?

I am not convinced that based on collected data (articles in online media) one can assess how political parties are influencing media. The author uses qualitative content analysis but doesn't explain why this method would be the best to show the role of media in shaping attitudes to EU integration.

Another issue is the fact that only English translations are used, which can be problematic (the English translation may not exactly reflect the context and real meaning). What is the relation between reports and media articles? Why did Author decide to include both in the sample?

There are also inconsistencies and simplifications in the text, for example, the author writes about "discourse pro or against Europe", is it about Europe or European Union? For no reason, author uses Europe and EU interchangeably.

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

The research puzzle is ambitious, but in my opinion, research questions are not fully answered. Data could be presented in a more clear manner to make the link between the gathered data and conclusions better visible. Unfortunately, the concluding part of the thesis is relatively short, do not use the data extensively and lack independent thought and critical assessment of the data.

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

Language and style are correct, the structure is clear and easy to follow, although some parts are very descriptive and short or appear very late in the text (for example we learn about the analysed material only on pages 26-27). The bibliography of the internet sources (which is called by the Author "List of Appendices"?!) is weak – includes only links with no names, dates etc. A table with a list of analysed media and the number of analysed articles in each of them, would be appreciated. There are minor aberrations in style and punctuation as well as in bibliography (some names put in capital letters), that do not influence the overall impression that the work is well done and according to the academic standards.

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

This is a very interesting topic that attracts more and more scholarly attention. The author put much effort into analysing data and familiarising herself with literature.

What is problematic is the research aim itself – while it's very interesting and important, I don't think that (by accessible means) the Author was able to show the relation as well as was not entirely able to discuss the findings. A more analytical approach would be appreciated rather than the existing descriptive image, which doesn't help the reader to understand the complex situation of Northern Macedonia. The theoretical and methodological parts are also in a need of more careful explanation, as some choices (typology of stances towards the EU) are unclear.

Grade (A-F):	D (3,5 in JU scale)
Date:	Signature:
10.09.2021	

classification scheme

Percentile	Prague		Krakow		Leiden		Barcelona	
A (91-100)	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'.