

REPORT ON MS DODEVSKA'S DISSERTATION ('Europe and its Others:  
Migrant Integration in Research and Policy')

Professor Jean-Christophe Mayer begins by pointing out that Iva Dodevska's dissertation is exemplary in many ways. First of all, the candidate should be commended not only for her impressive command of the primary and secondary sources related to her subject, but also for MS Dodevska's determination to tackle such a confounded and yet crucial topic as 'European migrant Integration'. For decades, 'Integration' has been a word on almost everyone's lips—from politicians, decision makers, academics, journalists, to the woman or man in the street. Thus, the impression created is that 'integration' is a genuine concept. Yet the whole of this dissertation shows that it can mean very different things for various people and is far from being a stable concept. In fact, by choosing to focus on integration Research and Policy—two fields where the term is much debated—Iva Dodevska produces a complete and compelling deconstruction of this so-called concept, which is more of a vehicle to circulate conservative ideas on race, social issues and nationhood.

From a formal point of view, the Ph.D. is written in clear and overall correct English, which is all the worthier of praise, as English is not MS Dodevska's native language. The core text of the dissertation is 246 pages long and is followed by an 'Annex list of key sources' (247) and a 'List of publishing outlets' (253). The whole amounts to 253 pages (about 97,500 words). One should bear in mind that this thesis was written in just over 3 years and is therefore perfectly in keeping with what contracted early stage researchers are asked to produce. In passing, one may also notice that the current manuscript is roughly the size of an average monograph. Professor Mayer further notes that due to the high level of the work presented by the candidate, he would be eager to see it in print.

There are countless strong points in this dissertation. Among the many thought-provoking ideas is the excellent manner in which MS Dodevska demonstrates that 'integration' is a dangerous notion because of the very fleeting nature of its definition: 'Hence, "integration" is a concept that yields enormous power, not least by structuring mobility and diversity debates of the present, while having no agreed meaning' (22). No less subtle is the idea that 'integration' does not at all serve the needs of the people it purports to assist: 'the discourse on integration does nothing to help immigrants lead a dignified life' (22). The discourse showcases populations and perversely 'exacerbates their exclusion, all the while claiming its goal is to reverse it' (22). Moreover, the use of wording ('migrants'; 'immigrants') in the critical literature

on these topics is equally detrimental (104). Thanks to MS Dodevska's well-argued demonstration, one discovers that integration is largely a figment of the imagination: 'what is shared is the imagination of integration as something desirable' (110). Thus, whatever numbers are quoted to us reveal the absurdity of quantitative approaches in this domain (170).

Furthermore, and as the candidate argues, some academics, specifically social scientists, are complicit in using the term to please policy-makers and so produce research that is biased and overly tailor-made (174).

By the same token, Professor Mayer finds Chapter VII of the dissertation ('Integration In Science-Policy Knowledge Infrastructures') to be an especially very strong piece of writing. Iva Dodevska's in-depth familiarity with data producing institutions, think-tanks, as well as the workings of academia is particularly eloquent. Indeed, we are told that integration policy has become as a point of juncture 'between the EU and member states, on the one hand, and think tanks and civil society, on the other' (179). Yet, paradoxically, the more the notion of 'integration' is highlighted by these institutions, the more it becomes obfuscated (184). This is because, if we follow Ms Dodevska's train of thought, 'empiricist research design' (198) acts as a smoke screen concealing a set of unproven, unprogressive assumptions—one that, worryingly, regularly relies on old and tried colonial methods of ensuring compliance.

Descriptions of the notion of 'integration' are doomed to fail (199), for any precise description of such a politically and socially sensitive term would reveal its controversial and untenable nature. Clarity and political correctness, argues MS Dodevska appropriately, are certainly not strong points as far as the aforementioned institutions are concerned. What the candidate calls, with a touch of irony, 'the subject-to-be-integrated' (201) is prey to an almost infinite number of variations and to the political imperatives of the moment. MS Dodevska is right to cite Brexit as one important recent factor that altered once again ideas on migrants and asylum seekers—the latter being particularly exposed and targeted in the British and European political arenas (205).

As far as the European Union is concerned, the candidate evidences cogently that 'EU discourse on integration is the result of competing concerns' (205). The outcome is that these contending positions can lead to contradictions within the EU. MS Dodevska validates her point by reminding us that Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic refused to relocate refugees despite the mandatory EU-imposed system of quotas (214). The candidate aptly warns us that, as a result of EU states' disagreements, 'integration' has become a critical 'European Problem' (209).

What Iva Dodevska's dissertation brings to the state-of-the-art in the field is far from negligible. The core of her Ph.D. poses questions which have the power to challenge the current scholarly literature on her subject. As the candidate herself points out, her 'study answers to the political urgency to question discourses that (potentially) perpetuate [...] violent boundaries between humans, rooted in colonial legacies' (219). This is not a light statement to make. The value of MS Dodevska's doctorate lies, as well, in her call to be more vigilant on matters of 'integration', particularly because integrationism is, as she warns, more 'normalized' and 'depoliticized' as ever, "even as it remains one of the most controversial issues of present' (222). One of the great qualities of this Ph.D. is that it eschews partisan views and stays lucid and honest. In this way, Iva Dodevska's fourth concluding subpart, entitled 'Limitations of the dissertation' (219) manifests the candidate's real capacity to take a step back from her work—a rare quality for an early career researcher.

Of course, no first long-length undertaking by an early career researcher can escape a measure of comments or suggestions for revisions, despite all MS Dodevska's very valuable efforts to offer some self-criticism. However, let it be absolutely clear that there are no major weak points in this dissertation—only passages that require some rethinking and readjustments.

For instance, the point that the EU has a 'paradoxical role in furthering national (and not supranational or federal, nor global and cosmopolitan) political programs' (26) is incorrect. The European Commission does fund European, as well as international programmes, through the different pillars and actions of the Horizon programme.

Regarding the EU, Ms Dodevska writes that 'it remains an open question which member states and under what rationales took an active role in shaping EU integrationism' (220). Such an inquiry is valid, but could have been answered by merely stating that the EU's relationship to its member states has been complex and convoluted from the start. Historically, Europe was not so much created by ideals as by the national needs and interests of states to join it or, more recently, to withdraw from it. This issue reveals the candidate's slight lack of historical perspective at times in her analyses.

Similarly, Iva Dodevska wishes to 'propose a typology of the various (sometimes opposing) discourses that converge in EU policy, differentiating between neoliberal, egalitarian (welfarist), securitarian and boundary integrationism' (33). A typology is useful, nonetheless, that differences of opinion exist within the EU is not surprising. As in all major organisations, there are internal feuds and opposing views. Nevertheless, that the European Commission was willing to fund the MOVES programme (from which the current candidate directly benefits) is proof enough that the EU can not only face contradiction but also clearly seeks other ways of

operating: Professor Mayer believes this should be acknowledged in some way, despite the EU's many failings and imperfections.

Besides, that research on 'integration' and Muslims dominate the academic field (189) could be explained by the perceived threat of terrorism. In fact, terrorism and the role played by it, seems to be almost left aside in the dissertation: the word is mentioned 12 times over some 220 pages and the issue is developed briefly (pp. 14; 136). Professor Mayer believes that this relative lack of attention to the phenomenon may be the only relatively small shortcoming of the Ph.D.

Concerning nation-states, MS Dodevska explains that 'The ways nation-states respond to social change related to perceived ethnic, cultural, religious and racial difference demonstrate how crucial is the problematization of mobility and diversity for the perpetual (re)invention of nationhood' (213). A little nuance would be welcome here also, as nationhood is a complex concept, which is not only linked to the question of migration. For instance, nationhood involves power politics and, in some regards, nations' military consortia, as well.

Finally, in her declaration of intent, the candidate claims that her research 'carries a normative purpose in response to the political urgency to deconstruct and unmask discourses that perpetuate harmful social differentiations and hierarchies' (33). This is a worthy principle on which to base the main argument of the dissertation. All the same, having read the entire thesis, Professor Mayer wonders, beyond the efficient deconstruction of integrationism carried out in this doctorate, whether MS Dodevska has any solutions to propose to change the current status quo. Perhaps, suggests Jean-Christophe Mayer, this could be the subject of a further study, or of a book.

To conclude, despite a few shortcomings mentioned in the second part of this report, Professor Mayer remains impressed by the wealth, depth and high level of the work achieved in this doctorate. In his view, Ms Iva Dodevska should be congratulated for her research. Therefore, he recommends that the title of Doctor should be awarded to the candidate.