

Gábor Czoch:

Report on the master thesis of Aleksandar Vanchoski:

Region building in the Western Balkan and Visegrad countries – political and media discourse in Macedonia.

(TEMA Erasmus Mundus Master Course; Eötvös Loránd University of Sciences, Budapest, and Charles University, Prague, 2016)

The master thesis of Aleksandar Vanchoski is a work written in English. The analytical part of the work contains 86 pages with altogether 244 footnotes, and it is completed by 3,5 pages for the bibliography. This dimension fulfils the requirement of a master thesis of the TEMA Erasmus Mundus Master Course. The references and the bibliography are precise however they present some formal problems. For instance, on the first pages, the titles in the footnotes are in italic while later the author put them between quotation marks. Or, the author use a lot of online sources, but he forgets many times to specify the date of their access. The language of the thesis is not always on the level of the expectations, some parts of the text are hardly comprehensible. All in all, a formal and linguistic revision of the text would have been necessary.

The main concern of the thesis is situated in the general framework of the European integration and regionalisation processes. Concretely, the thesis examines the Western Balkan countries' regional cooperation which was established in 2004 by the European authorities in order to insure the security and to promote the process of the EU enlargement in the region. The author's central question is to see whether the Western Balkan regional cooperation – which is a result of a political act – can be considered as a region according to the criteria of the model created by the Finish human geographer Anssi Paasi. In this model, Paasi suggests to distinguish the concept of the identity of a region (which corresponds to a series of indices externally defined by different social actors) and that of the regional identity (which corresponds to the regional consciousness of the inhabitants). Moreover, the author's ambition is to compare the Western Balkan and the Visegrad group countries' regional cooperation.

The reviewer has a mixed feeling after reading the thesis, because it presents some real values but it has serious weakness as well. As the positive points of the thesis, one can mention the

really interesting and relevant research question with the good choice of its methodological background; the logical structure of the thesis; the good and extended presentation of the institutionalization of the Western Balkan region with its typical top-down formation, and the demonstration of the particular importance of the security issues in this cooperation. But, apart from the formal problems already mentioned, the main weakness of the thesis is that the author didn't offer a complete answer to his initial research question. In a general way, unfortunately, the thesis has a very descriptive character and lack of in-depth, problem oriented analytical parts. Though, he is restricting his demonstration mainly to the Macedonian case, which would have let him a more detailed investigation, his analyse concentrates mostly on the political discourse of the experts, the officials of the government and on the discussion of the Western Balkan intergovernmental official meetings. Also, the comparison with the Visegrad group remains on a general level, expect some interesting aspects. And finally, the author couldn't really extent his examination on the question of the regional identity, regional consciousness, and also, he missed to discuss the eventual conflicts following the institutionalization of the Western Balkan region.

My overall evaluation is that the thesis of Aleksandar Vanchoski fulfils the basic requirements of the master thesis, and taking into consideration its positive and negative aspects, I recommend him the mark satisfactory (3) according to the Hungarian system.

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