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Review of the PhD dissertation by Lasha Markozashvili, MA, entitled *System Approach to the European Union Studies*, Faculty of Political Science and Journalism, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań 2016, pp. 248, prepared under the supervision of prof. dr hab. Marek Żyromski (secondary supervisor – dr Remigiusz Rosicki)

1. General Comments

The systems approach has gradually become popular, together with the dissemination and increasing significance of systems analysis as a research method employed in order to analyze the behavior of states and other actors in international relations. Its classic form was established in political science at the turn of the 1950s when such US scholars as David Easton, Karl W. Deutsch and Morton Kaplan designed a conceptual ‘toolbox’ applied to examine varied elements connected by different dependencies and forming a certain structure (system) together.

The task of taking a systemic look at the European Union is undertaken by Lasha Markozashvili, MA in a doctoral dissertation entitled *System Approach to the European Union Studies*. This endeavor deserves to be praised. Tackling a difficult topic which demands extensive source studies, presentation of at least the key theoretical concepts and their interpretation, designing a theoretical model of applicable value and the skilful combination of the theory and practice of functioning of the European Union, which until recently was an ‘unidentified political object’ and became an international organization following the Lisbon Treaty, are all deemed to be accurate. The task undertaken by Mr Markozashvili is challenging

for a number of reasons. Firstly, during the ‘unfolding crisis’ engulfing the EU, questions arise as to whether the EU system is still capable of regeneration, and whether its primary political, legal and economic subsystems are appropriately connected with one another by communication procedures after the Lisbon Treaty. Is it justified to talk about European society as a construction element of the EU’s political system? Is the EU adequately responding to the stimuli it is receiving from its surroundings? What are the relations between EU institutions which can collectively be treated as a certain subsystem of the EU (institutional system)? What principles of conduct determine their mutual relations and how are they practically implemented? To what extent is the decision-making process influenced by the governments and EU institutions, and to what extent – by sub-national actors such as corporations, labor unions, NGOs, industrial associations and other groups of interest? How important is the process of Europeanization for the shape of the political system of the EU? Finding answers to these sample questions and many other questions about the EU, which is understood as an organized set of interrelated elements maintaining mutual interactions, is clearly facilitated by the application of systems analysis and making an extensive use of the findings of the systems theory. While doing so, it is necessary to supplement systems analysis by other research methods that make it possible, for instance, to clearly separate the system from its surroundings, to operationalize the concept of balance and to take into account the human factor, motivations, goals, charisma (or its lack), the personal attitude of the Euro-elite to the integration project and the influence actors at the sub-state level (entrepreneurial associations, bankers, labor unions, NGOs) have on different states and their relations with supranational European institutions.

2. Methodology of the Dissertation

Even the title of Mr Lasha Markozashvili’s dissertation indicates the systems approach to European Union studies. The reviewer considers the title to be justified. In the introduction, the author stresses the object of his research, the goals, research hypothesis, the main directions of consideration as well as the fundamental methodological issues, where the topic of the different types of knowledge ‘produced’ by theoretical trends comes to the fore. He indicates the ontological and epistemological foundations of the dissertation and synthetically describes its further parts.

The main goal of the dissertation declared by the author is “to give a systemic description of the European Union studies” (p. 1). The reviewer finds this presentation of the

goal incomplete. The goal of the dissertation should be to carry out an in-depth analysis of the issue rather than its mere presentation (description). The author of the dissertation does not so much concentrate on EU system as such, but rather divides his attention between examining the EU as a certain system/organization and grasping its dynamics by approaching the process of European integration as an ongoing activity that occurs within this system. He finds his considerations on the sociological-constructivist approach of Talcott Parsons and Niklas Luhmann, rather than on the institutional models of Simon Hix and Jonas Tallberg. Mr Markozashvili makes a highly interesting attempt at designing a research system that will make it possible to solve the problem of the ‘dialogue of the deaf,’ namely taking different and often mutually exclusive approaches to a given research topic (in this case the systemic description of the EU as the object of study). The author enquires here about the systemic identity of the EU, focusing on ‘how things become what they are’ rather than on ‘what is going on.’ He identifies the political, legal and economic systems, writing in an illustrative manner that “approaching the complex system like EU without a systemic scope is similar to checking the time on a deconstructed clock” (p. 4). In ontological terms, the dissertation concerned makes an assumption that the importance of the “two hands,” namely political and apolitical relations, is balanced. They determine the time and pace of structural adjustments made within the EU system, which is hierarchical. The social system is at its top, with the above mentioned political, legal and economic subsystems located slightly lower. In the opinion of the author of the dissertation, the social supersystem (named so by the reviewer) both restricts the remaining subsystems and encourages their increased operability. The subsystems operate as autonomous units connected by communication procedures.

In the introduction, the author of the dissertation formulates **a research hypothesis** that the “the European Union is a self-referential system that consists of autonomous subsystems (variables). The environment is a set of elements that are structurally coupled with the EU. The identity of the organization is determined by the purpose that is fulfilled via the recursive communications between the systemic variables” (p. 3). This clear and well formulated research hypothesis is accompanied by a set of **research questions**, namely: (1) how does the EU maintain its systemhood properties?; (2) what kind of system is the EU?; (3) how are the interactions between the system (the EU) and its surroundings formed? It has to be noted that these questions are justified but grossly general and – given the absence of auxiliary, more detailed questions – they somewhat diminish the methodological value of the dissertation.

As concerns the **research methods** applied, the author refers to systemic analysis, which is natural, and supplements it with statistics and retrospective inquiry. He also announces

that the cognitive model of systems mapping will be applied with reference to the EU, which is the case (pp. 222-226). On several occasions he also promises to apply qualitative methods (for the purpose of the analysis of legal acts, among other things). While the introduction is designed in an interesting and likeable manner and promises a lot, the methodological part has some flaws. The author never mentions the analysis of source literature, which is the main tool he applies in synthesizing the theoretical foundations of his dissertation. Methodological shortcomings can also be noted, as Mr Markozashvili makes only marginal use of simulation and the institutional-legal methods which are deemed essential in EU studies.

The source literature base of the dissertation is accurate and sufficient, although the author tends to concentrate on studies by Anglo-Saxon scholars. These, however, lack the studies by such researchers as Helen Wallace, Alasdair R. Young, Jonas Tallberg and Takis Tridimas. The absence of works by Polish experts in European studies raises concerns as well. In the reviewer's opinion, the bibliography could be divided into documents, monographs, academic papers, journalistic articles and Internet sources, in order to convey a clearer message. It is worth stressing, though, that the author was very particular when selecting his sources.

3. The Content of the Dissertation

In chapter 1 the author presents the main concepts that accompanied the development of the systems theory and selects the studies that lay the foundation for his further considerations. The author justifiably indicates the need for an eclectic approach in this respect. Mr Markozashvili refers to studies of numerous commentators of the leading researchers into the systems theory, while making his own standpoint, interpretation and comments relatively infrequently. The majority of theories are presented in a clear and interesting manner with the exception of the subchapter about the theory of autopoietic systems, which raises the reviewer's concerns. It is true that this theory is somewhat 'suspended' between metaphysics and metabiology, but the author devotes too much space to the works of Chilean biologists (Maturana and Varela) when compared to the works by Niklas Luhmann, whose concept provides the foundation for the entire dissertation after all.

In chapter 2 the author reviews the main theories of European integration. He mostly concentrates on neo-functionalism, the intergovernmental approach and constructivism (which he treats as a research approach and a kind of a research tool rather than a grand theory). He devotes considerable attention to governance in this chapter, and takes his considerations in the right direction of multilevel and network governance, discussed by Papadopoulos, Marks,

Hooghe and Blank, among others. In the subchapter on this topic, the author stresses the open method of coordination as a framework for cooperation between EU member states. He is also right in stressing the issue of the legitimacy deficit expressed by the restricted influence national parliaments and the European Parliament have on working out solutions in this mode at the expense of expert groups; this results in growing information asymmetry between those involved in the process of developing solutions and those appointed to assess these solutions. The author applies the perspective of governance to the EU's 'external governance' where the *acquis* is extended to cover the relations with states other than EU members (e.g. neighborhood policy, bilateral agreements, interregional agreements and detailed matters). This chapter, which is elaborate in terms of content and of high merit, places historical institutionalism, rational choice institutionalism and sociological institutionalism within the framework of the institutional approach, making reference primarily to March, Olsen, Pollack, Krasner, Hix, Tsebelis and Garret. The above mentioned constructivism is understood in a specific manner – as constructivist-and-sociological institutionalism. This chapter is accurately written and the reasoning is clear. Focusing on institutionalism, constructivism and the governance perspective, the author offers the theoretical justification of a model identified in chapter 5.

In chapter 3 Mr Markozashvili refers to his considerations in chapter 1. His main objective here is to identify the general nature of systems, which is facilitated by the identification of the fundamental properties of systems described from an observer's point of view, as well as of the values and relations that occur within systems. Starting with Luhmann's model, the author concentrates on the operations that occur inside self-referential systems and rightly stresses the importance of feedback between the system's 'input' and 'output.' The author stresses that it is important to endeavor to achieve a balance within a system as a desirable condition. He fails to take note of a serious problem that disturbs the stable functioning of the EU, though. The crises and shocks that are intensifying in terms of frequency and scale (euro zone crisis, migration crisis, democracy crisis in the EU, identity crisis) are a challenge to EU subsystems which, according to Luhmann's model, should automatically adjust to the evolving conditions and stimulate the system's self-repair by means of the correction loop between the input and output. The progressing dysfunctionality of many elements of the EU system raises the question of the actual adaptive capability of the legal, political and economic subsystems of the EU. Additionally, the author devotes considerable space in chapter 3 to the system's surroundings, providing varied stimuli forcing the system to implement adaptive structural changes and achieve defined goals.

In chapter 4 the author makes reference to chapter 2. Right at the beginning he assumes that the theory of European integration will be applied in the field of systems analysis in order to provide a systemic framework to paint a 'wider' picture of the European Union. Starting with the assumption that a system is defined by its (1) purpose(s) and (2) operations that occur within its boundaries, Mr Markozashvili presents a clear picture of the relation between the purpose of the EU as an organization and internal systemic operations that may lead to the emergence of a new purpose or purposes. Interestingly, the author rejects the dominant dichotomy of systemic relations 'produced' by inter- and supranational elements within the framework of multidimensional space and suggests differentiating between organization and structure. Despite its considerable explanatory value, this chapter abounds in repetitions, which could also be seen in chapter 2. An objection has to be made concerning the analysis of the purpose of the EU (p. 136 et seq.) conducted without making reference to the provisions of the treaties. This is the more surprising as both the detailed and general goals of the Community and the Union evolved over the period 1957-2009. Instead, on the basis of diverse works ranging from Proudhon, to Coudenhove-Kalergi to Spinelli and Rossi, the author gives a descriptive presentation of the dispute about the different visions of Europe held between federalists and integralists. Nevertheless, he arrives at the accurate conclusion that federalist movements in Europe provided an ideological framework that was necessary for the EU to define its political orientation (p. 144). A highly valuable part of this chapter involves the considerations on the deficit of democracy in the EU (pp. 145-154) and the role of public opinion which 'injects' legitimacy to the system or not, offering its support for, or opposing the activities of EU institutions or the decisions of individual politicians (also at the national level). The author analyzes the relations between the efficiency and transparency of the EU on the examples of the Commission and the Council. It is a pity, however, that Mr Markozashvili fails to take note of the changes that took place after the Lisbon Treaty which reinforced the European Parliament and the European Council. He sticks to a traditional view, arguing that "the Council still remains the most powerful institution in the EU" (p. 175).

In chapter 5 the author brings all his previous considerations together. He proposes his own explanation of the EU system, albeit strongly related to Luhmann's sociology. In doing so, he rejects the multilevel governance promoted in works by Hix, Marks and Hooghe and based on the model of political systems developed by Easton and Almond. The author of the dissertation proposes that the EU be approached as a set of several mutually related subsystems whose relations are decisive for the overall picture. Each subsystem is involved in recursive communication and fulfills its functions. Systemic operations are performed via 'planners' or

varied institutions. The relations between varied subsystems (in the conclusion called systems by the author) in turn, are regulated by the mechanism of structural coupling. The discursive meaning of the EU as a whole (a system) stems from political communication (political system). The legal subsystem entails the production and reproduction of legal standards and a certain legal code. The economic subsystem influences the legal and political subsystems via asymmetrical economic transactions that have an impact on the elite and the supranational officers of the Commission who supervise the functioning of the internal market, and so on. First and foremost, however, the economic subsystem has an internal structural power (the author fails to elaborate on this concept) that conditions the achievement of the fundamental goal of the EU, which the dissertation deems to be prosperity. Whether this is so or not, the reviewer agrees with the author's belief that the legitimacy of the political system is to a large extent based on economic efficiency. When the latter is missing, anti-system trends intensify, as evidenced by the 2008+ financial crisis.

The dissertation ends with the conclusions the author draws from his research. He notes that the EU is a hybrid system based on a combination of declared political goals and non-political mechanisms, connected by communication procedures whose development makes it possible to overcome the problem of democratic deficit and accountability for actions.

4. Detailed Remarks

The dissertation is correctly prepared as concerns the language and technique. Although the text has been carefully proofed, some typos can be found, for instance "illustratuin" (p. 20), "the athor" (p. 39), "orgaizations" (p. 69), "Ole weaver" (lack of capitalization of the last name, p. 77), "indroduction" (p. 77), "teconomic" (p. 206). Inserting drawings and graphs, the author fails to indicate his sources. The descriptions of some drawings also raise doubts, for instance "common ground" (Figure 6, p. 97), "general structure" (Figure 13, p. 180). The dissertation raises some concerns about the author's diligence in this respect. The author applies the Oxford referencing style, where reference is made to the source indicated in the bibliography. The references provided are correct, as the author presents a given piece of information, opinion or standpoint and accompanies it with the name of its author, date of publication and page of the source. It should be noted that this referencing method is typical of Anglo-Saxon literature but is spreading also on the continent. The author provides only explanatory footnotes at page bottoms. The reviewer has found a total of 50 such footnotes. A certain flaw of the dissertation is the fact that other scholars are frequently and relatively extensively cited. Such citations

typically facilitate the reception of works, but when their number is excessive the reader may have difficulties grasping the meaning of a given paragraph. It would be advisable for the author to dedicate more space to the interpretation of the works of the theoreticians he is referring to. With reference to the introduction, it is not the most fortunate to identify the main goal of the dissertation as “to give a systemic description of the European Union studies,” the more so as the reviewer believes that the author actually analyzes political processes (or attempts to do so), explains and endeavors to combine the theoretical and practical realm of studies into the shape of the European Union’s system. He seems to be too ambitious in tackling this task, however. He admits this himself, as he notes in the conclusion of the dissertation that he is unable to illustrate the economic subsystem of the EU in a satisfactory manner, as it is highly complex and difficult to grasp. This is true. Despite his promise to take a comprehensive approach to studying the EU as a system, the author tends to focus on the political and, partly, legal systems. This, however, is not a shortcoming of this dissertation, which the reviewer believes is an invitation to creatively use the excellent research tool of systems analysis, accompanied by theoretical concepts. The dissertation of Mr Markozashvili is one of the few devoted to the EU where the author abandons a routine approach to the political system of the EU, applying concepts rooted in the sociological constructivism of Niklas Luhmann.

5. Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, in his dissertation *System Approach to the European Union Studies* Mr Lasha Markozashvili undertakes to analyze a problem of primary importance for the further functioning of the European Union. The multitude of issues he addresses, standpoints and opinions he refers to, and the complicated nature of the topic concerned prevents him from fully implementing his research goals declared in the introduction. Nevertheless, in the reviewer’s opinion, this doctoral dissertation offers an interesting solution to an academic problem and demonstrates the general theoretical knowledge of the candidate for doctorate in the field of political science.

Emphasizing the ingenuity, careful presentation of the research problem, the high culture of language and the undoubted merit of work, **I consider that the dissertation corresponds to the requirements set out in Paragraph 13, Item 1 of the Law of Academic degrees and titles of 14 March 2003 (Journal of Laws (Dz.U.) of 2003, no. 65, item 595 and**

of 2005, item 1852 and of 2015) and move for the admission of Mr. Lasha Markozashvili to the further stages of the doctoral degree procedure.

Lasha Markozashvili