



## Diploma Thesis Evaluation Form

Author: Alexandra Matjasch

Title: How do regional powers shape the security environment within their regional subcomplex? A case study of the second Nagorno-Karabakh War 2020

Programme/year: MAIN/2021

Author of Evaluation (~~supervisor~~/external assessor): Ondřej Rosendorf

Criteria	Definition	Maximum	Points
<b>Major Criteria</b>			
	Research question, definition of objectives	<b>10</b>	6
	Theoretical/conceptual framework	<b>30</b>	27
	Methodology, analysis, argument	<b>40</b>	36
<i>Total</i>		<b>80</b>	69
<b>Minor Criteria</b>			
	Sources	<b>10</b>	10
	Style	<b>5</b>	5
	Formal requirements	<b>5</b>	5
<i>Total</i>		<b>20</b>	20
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>100</b>	89



## Evaluation

Major criteria:

The thesis addresses the issue of regional powers' influence on security dynamics within regional subcomplexes, specifically the influence of Russia, Turkey, and Iran on the Armeni-Azerbaijani conflict in the Southern Caucasus. The author poses three research questions, including: "Which roles do regional powers play in regional contexts? [...] How strong is their influence? [And] how does this affect [...] the regional security architecture?" (pp. 2-3).

Some of the strong points include: (1) the author demonstrates superb academic writing skills – both stylistically and content-wise; (2) they present an exhaustive overview of the existing theoretical, methodological, and empirical literature; and (3) provide original and timely research results. Some of the weaker points include: (1) the choice of difficult-to-answer research questions and a tautological hypothesis; (2) an imbalance between the theoretical-descriptive part and the analysis; and (3) a relative underutilization of the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) in the analysis.

In the remainder of this report, I will elaborate on some of the problematic aspects. It should be noted, however, that the overall quality of the thesis is impressive.

My first concern relates to the formulation of research questions. The questions are arguably too broad to generate satisfying answers. The author admits as much in the conclusion (p. 81). Moreover, it is evident that much of the focus lies in answering the first question – i.e., "Which roles do regional powers play in regional context?" – and less so in answering the other two. The question related to regional security architecture, specifically, would have deserved a more elaborate answer. This would also require a greater deal of theorization of the concept of "security architecture", which is often thrown around without much regard about its substance. The author could address this point during their defense.

I also have an issue with the formulation of the hypothesis, which states that "[...] regional powers exert influence over security dynamics [in the regional subcomplex of Southern Caucasus]" (p. 27). Considering that the RSCT constitutes the main theoretical foundation of the thesis, this formulation is, of course, banal if not tautological. Under what conditions would the author come to a different conclusion than – yes – regional powers do play a role?



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A greater deal of attention could have been paid to what the author terms “regional subcomplex” in reference to the Southern Caucasus. This may be due to my relative unfamiliarity with the RSCT, but my immediate concern would be, to what extent does the Armeni-Azerbaijani conflict in the “regional subcomplex” of Southern Caucasus reflects patterns commonly ascribed to a regional security complex as opposed to, for example, a “rivalry” or a “frozen conflict”?

Another weaker point relates to the general imbalance between the theoretical-descriptive part and the analysis (pp. 65–78). While I do find the analysis to be sufficient, the overall imbalance creates an impression that the latter part of the thesis was written in a relatively short timeframe before the submission. On the other hand, this may be simply an effect of the choice of descriptively oriented research questions.

A related point concerns the utilization of the theoretical framework in the actual analysis. I would have liked to see more references to the RSCT in the analysis – especially related to how well the RSCT fits the chosen case and how it helps improving our understanding of the situation in the Southern Caucasus.

Minor criteria:

The length, formatting, and sources of the thesis are adequate.

Overall evaluation:

The overall quality of the thesis is well above the average. Some of the strong points are: (1) superb academic writing – both stylistically and content-wise; (2) exhaustive literature review; and (3) original and timely research results. The weaker points include: (1) the choice of research questions and hypotheses; (2) description over analysis; and (3) a relative underutilization of the RSCT.

Suggested grade:

I suggest the grade “B” with the option to raise the grade to “A” if the author defends the thesis convincingly and addresses the issues outlined above.

A–B

Signature: