

Review of Nigar Farajullayeva's M.A. thesis

The thesis deals with an interesting topic of what the author considers Western orientation in the foreign policies of Azerbaijan, a post-Soviet country in the South Caucasus. The thesis touches on a range of issues that largely remain under researchers, however, notwithstanding the promising start, turned into stating a range of obvious or doubtful statements, an outcome given primarily by the lack of knowledge when it comes to basic scholarly methods.

Strengths:

- a) Relatively good stylistics and dynamic language – the author delves into the narrative journey and takes the reader along with herself; the author reveals talent for writing which is extraordinary given the fact that English is not her native tongue.
- b) Additionally, the author shows her ability of analytical thinking – she doesn't hesitate to formulate her own findings in a comprehensive way, interpreting the fact in a manner that renders her work outstanding clarity.
- c) Even though rather insufficiently (see below), the author starts her thesis outlining basic theoretical underpinning. More should have been elaborated on this, though.
- d) The thesis has a quite solid list of bibliography indicating her knowledge of major works related to the topic. However, even in this regard some serious scholarship is missing in the bibliography.
- e) The author provides with a truly insider's look into the topic – knowledge of empirical detail is obvious which is given by the lasting interest of hers in the topic, as well as her engagement with it.

Weaknesses:

- a) Only less than 15 pages (!) of the entire M.A. thesis deal directly with the topic in question; as a result, the findings of the thesis are widely superficial leaving the reader with nothing else than stating the obvious. The scholarly value of the thesis is minimal.
- b) The chapters of the thesis that are supposed to make up the background of the study are superficial, as well; sometimes it is not entirely evident why the author has decided to emphasize certain points (for instance, the Tsarist period in the history of the Azerbaijani people) while leaving out others (at least a chapter or a subchapter on Azerbaijan's relationship with Iran, Turkey, and Russia – just to portray the political landscape of a country and explain what the author considers its pro-Western orientation).
- c) No methodology is to be found in the thesis, which is one of the major shortcomings of the thesis – a lack of a serious methodological fundament along with insufficient anchoring in the realm of theories (and a rather controversial structure of the thesis) downgrades the thesis sufficiently.
- d) As mentioned, no solid theoretical underpinning is made by the author. In fact, this is not just a typical “tribute to the genre” required by social scientists – for instance, the very term “Western orientation” deserved much more focus than it actually received in the study. What is Western – and what the author bears in mind while talking about a Western orientation? Is it a willingness to embrace Western values, to enter the NATO and EU, or just to counterbalance the dominant standing of Russia, Armenia's key ally in the region? Is there any interrelationship between the country's commitment (if such exists) to carry out pro-Western (or rather pro-American?) policies and some sort

of Westernization of its internal policies? After all (and this is what I tend to think) Azerbaijan's foreign policies isn't about being pro-Western (in a sense, for instance, Georgia's is), but rather about providing a serious counterbalance to Russia's (and Iran's) domination in the region. I might be mistaken, yet it was up to the author to provide substantive argument to support her points – unfortunately, this is not the case on less than 15 pages that are specifically dealing with the issue in question.

Given the aforementioned, I suggest that B or C is given to the thesis provided her record on her thesis defense.

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