

UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE

Faculty of Political Science

Belgrade, September 2026

At the meeting of the Department of International Studies on 4 December 2025, the master's thesis Defence Commission (hereinafter, the Commission) for candidate Maša Mihajlović was formed. The Commission, consisting of the following members: prof. dr Ivana Radić Milosavljević, prof. dr Aleksandra Perišić, and prof. dr Goran Tepšić, was approved by the Council for the Second and Third Cycle of Studies on the Department's proposal. The Commission evaluates the master's thesis and supervises its public defence.

After reviewing Maša Mihajlović's master's thesis, the Commission submits the following comprehensive report.

REPORT

Maša Mihajlović's master's thesis, "Postcolonial Critique of the European Union's Normative Power in Peacekeeping Policies," consists of three chapters, not including the introduction and conclusion: "Theoretical Framework," "Postcolonial Deconstruction of Normative Power in European Union Peacekeeping Missions," and "Towards a Decolonised Vision of the European Union." It begins by observing that the European Union has constructed its international subjectivity primarily through normative rather than material means, grounding its external legitimacy in the claim to represent and disseminate values of universal validity. Peacekeeping missions are the principal institutional site where this claim is operationalised, as they convert declaratory commitments to peace, democracy, the rule of law, and human rights into sustained engagement within third states. Against this background, the research problem is defined as interpreting the European Union's normative power through the analytical apparatus of postcolonial critique, with specific reference to its articulation in peacekeeping practice, and the thesis pursues two objectives.

The first is critical, namely, to subject the assumptions underpinning the Normative Power Europe paradigm to systematic scrutiny, particularly its treatment of European norms as self-evidently universal. The second is disciplinary: to argue for integrating postcolonial

scholarship into EU Studies, a field in which such perspectives have remained peripheral. The central research question accordingly concerns whether peacekeeping missions, notwithstanding their emancipatory vocabulary, reproduce hierarchies of authority, expertise and knowledge between the European Union and the societies in which it intervenes. To address it, the study adopts postcolonial critique as its constitutive methodological framework, combining critical discourse analysis with qualitative content analysis of European Union strategic documents, mission mandates and operational materials. The single case study of Mali is selected because it concentrates, within one setting, the two missions through which the Union's normative ambitions are most fully operationalised, EUCAP Sahel Mali and EUTM Mali.

The theoretical framework integrates three components: normative power as conceptualised by Ian Manners, peacekeeping as the operational instrument through which such power is exercised, and postcolonial theory as the critical perspective that renders both historically intelligible. Within this framework, the thesis reconstructs the trajectory from civilian to normative power. While acknowledging the analytical contribution of Manners' formulation, it identifies its central vulnerability in the fact that the capacity to define normality constitutes a modality of power rendered invisible by its own terms. Peacekeeping is analysed as the domain in which this ambition acquires institutional form, embedding European standards within the administrative and coercive apparatuses of partner states, so that missions are read simultaneously on two registers, as substantive contributions to stabilisation and as mechanisms that normalise particular models of statehood and security. Drawing on postcolonial theory, the thesis then establishes that colonialism persists beyond formal decolonisation in the structures through which knowledge, identity and legitimacy are produced. Its central claim concerning the epistemic dimension of power is that the authority to determine what counts as valid knowledge is inseparable from historically constituted relations of domination.

Building on this critique, the thesis identifies two interrelated patterns within EU Studies and applies them analytically to the case. The first is colonial amnesia, understood as a productive silence that renders contemporary intervention appear historically unencumbered. The second is the decolonisation of knowledge, understood as the corrective that this silence necessitates, requiring the interrogation of traditions long constituted as objects rather than sources of knowledge. Applied to the study's analytical core, these patterns reveal that normative power reinstates the distinction between a centre that possesses norms and a periphery positioned

to receive them. The resulting tutelage is legitimised through the vocabulary of partnership and ownership, so that normative power emerges as the institutionally refined successor to coercive power, operating through standards, conditionality and expertise. The case of Mali shows both patterns operating across the three analytical levels. Colonial amnesia is evident institutionally in the concentration of authority over mandates, training content, and evaluation within European structures, and discursively in a legitimating vocabulary of stabilisation and local ownership that obscures the asymmetry it describes. The absence of decolonised knowledge is evident epistemologically, in the privileging of European conceptions of security, peace, statehood and threat. Colonial configurations of authority therefore persist through the routine distribution of expertise and definitional power.

Based on these findings, and grounded in the three requirements of reflexivity, epistemic humility and reciprocity, the thesis advances a reconstruction rather than an abandonment of normative power. For EU Studies, the corresponding conclusion is that postcolonial scholarship must be incorporated not as a paradigm competing with established approaches but as a corrective to them, since it renders visible dimensions of European external action that conventional frameworks cannot structurally apprehend. In doing so, it both strengthens the field's analytical capacity and situates its object of study within the historical formations from which it emerged.

Based on this review, the Commission concludes that Maša Mihajlović's master's thesis, "Postcolonial Critique of the European Union's Normative Power in Peacekeeping Policies," satisfies all the formal criteria for public defence.

The Commission:

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