

UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE

Faculty of Political Science

Belgrade, November 2024

At the meeting of the Department of International Studies, held on September 19, 2024, the Master Thesis Defense Commission (hereby the Commission) for the candidate Elvin Alizada was formed with the following members: assist. prof. dr Goran Tepšić, assist. prof. dr Marko Kovačević and prof. dr Nemanja Džuverović. The Council for the Second and Third Cycle of Studies has accepted the proposal made by the Department.

After reading the master thesis, the Commission is submitting the following report.

R E P O R T

The master thesis of Elvin Alizada entitled "Beyond the Frontlines: Examining the Failure of the Peace Efforts between Armenia and Azerbaijan" is 71 pages long and comprised of five chapters, along with the Introduction, the Conclusion and accompanying list of references.

The thesis examines the persistent conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, focusing on the post-Soviet period, with an emphasis on the failed peacebuilding efforts by international actors, including the United States and the European Union. The study highlights the protracted nature of the Karabakh conflict, rooted in historical grievances and shaped by socio-political identities, which continue to hinder the establishment of a lasting peace treaty and the normalization of relations between the two countries.

This research is oriented around the following research question: What are the main obstacles to establishing a peace treaty and normalization of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan despite international mediation efforts? The following sub-questions have been explored in order to acquire a clear understanding of the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process and the challenges that undermine the normalization efforts. It explores the challenges posed to the peace process by the local factors on the ground. In the second sub-question, the thesis explores the reasons behind the fact that the mediating efforts of the international actors delivered minimal results.

Through an analysis based on the classical realist perspectives, this research aims to uncover the underlying reasons for the minimal success of international mediation efforts and the ongoing hostility between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Classical realism posits that the international system is inherently anarchic, with no overarching authority to enforce rules or norms. In such a system, states are the primary actors, driven by their desire for power and survival. The theory argues that states act rationally, pursuing policies that maximize their power and security in an uncertain and competitive environment. In the context of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, classical realism provides a lens through which to examine the motivations behind each state's actions, particularly in terms of territorial disputes, military engagements, and alliance formations.

The study affirms that the historical context of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict is crucial for understanding its current state. The study briefly analyzed the origins of the conflict. It concluded that the collapse of the Soviet Union marked the beginning of an anarchic environment in the South Caucasus, where the absence of a central authority coupled with expansionist ambitions of Armenia led to territorial disputes and violent confrontations between this country and Azerbaijan. The study underscores how historical grievances continue to fuel national identities and narratives, which complicate the prospects for peace.

The study has highlighted the multifaceted role of external actors in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, revealing how their interests often complicate the peace process. Global powers like Russia, the United States, and the European Union have sought to influence the conflict to advance their geopolitical agendas, creating a complex landscape that is often at odds with regional stability. The military support provided to Armenia by France and the growing ties between India and Armenia exemplify how external interests can distort the internal balance of power.

As expected by classical realism, the findings indicate that both Armenia and Azerbaijan have engaged in strategic calculations that reflect their respective security concerns and national interests. The analysis illustrates how classical realism provides valuable insights into the motivations behind state behavior, particularly in contexts marked by historical grievances and territorial disputes. The reliance on military solutions, driven by the imperatives of power acquisition and self-preservation, has characterized the actions of both countries. The realist analysis about the great power rivalries and their impact on the international security provided a useful toolkit to understand the role of external interventions in the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process. These interventions are observed in almost every aspect of the peace process, but in particular, in the issues that have larger geopolitical

implications. Hence, the fact that the Zangezur corridor is of geostrategic significance draws the attention of major powers which complicate the process and undermine the efforts of Armenia and Azerbaijan to unblock the regional transportation links.

Hence, the outcomes of this study point toward several potential pathways for achieving a sustainable resolution to the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. The recognition of each other's territorial integrity presents an opportunity for constructive engagement, signaling a willingness to move beyond entrenched positions. Additionally, the reopening of transport routes would offer a framework for cooperation that can benefit both countries economically and politically. To facilitate progress, it is essential to create inclusive dialogue platforms that engage various stakeholders, including civil society, political leaders, and community representatives. These platforms can help bridge divides and foster understanding, allowing for the development of common narratives that prioritize peace over conflict.

Based on this report, the Commission concludes that the master thesis "Beyond the Frontlines: Examining the Failure of the Peace Efforts between Armenia and Azerbaijan" by Elvin Alizada fulfils all the formal criteria for the public defence.

The Commission:

prof. dr Goran Tepšić

prof. dr Marko Kovačević

prof. dr Nemanja Džuverović