

BACHELOR'S THESIS EXAMINER REPORT
PPE – Bachelor's in Politics, Philosophy and Economics
Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

Thesis title:	The Path to Georgia's European Dream: A Media Analysis of Rhetoric, Reality, and Russian Influence
Student's name:	Anna Zamtaradze
Referee's name:	Daniela Lences Chalaniova, PhD

Criteria	Definition	Maximum	Points
Major Criteria			
	Contribution and argument (quality of research and analysis, originality)	50	30
	Research question (definition of objectives, plausibility of hypotheses)	15	12
	Theoretical framework (methods relevant to the research question)	15	5
Total		80	47
Minor Criteria			
	Sources, literature	10	7
	Presentation (language, style, cohesion)	5	3
	Manuscript form (structure, logical coherence, layout, tables, figures)	5	5
Total		20	15
TOTAL		100	62

Reviewer's commentary according to the above criteria:

Ms. Zamtaradze's thesis explores the problem of Russian influence over Georgian politics and the complications it brings to Georgia's EU candidacy process. More specifically, she is looking at the hypocrisy of Georgian Dream party (and its breakaway populist members) pretending to want to integrate with the EU, whilst passing laws that contravene this direction. In her own words:

How does the dichotomy between official documents and public statements regarding EU ascension by Georgian politicians reflect the country's actual progress in fulfilling the nine steps required for EU integration, and to what extent is Georgia moving closer to or further from Russia, particularly in the context of soft power influence? (p.5)

To do that, she is using Joseph Nye's theory of *soft power*, and a *media analysis / discourse analysis* (the terminology on method is not consistent throughout the thesis), and applies on two cases of legislation: the "foreign agent" law and the "anti-LGBTQ" law.

The thesis concludes:

The thesis argues that the analysis of GD's discourse in comparison to the official documents is capable of directly showcasing Russian influence in Georgian politics and as a result Georgian legislation. The exploration of two recent draft proposals in comparison with the already existing laws of a similar format in Russia revealed correlations because of the systemic exertion of soft/hard power. (p. 43)

While its clear Ms. Zamtaradze feels strongly about her subject, it is a bit to the detriment of her writing. Don't get me wrong, one can write a *critical* thesis – but it too has to have consistent research design in line with critical theory practice; Ms. Zamtaradze's thesis is struggling with exactly that. If anything, it was a good idea, relevant that however wasn't properly worked into a consistent argument.

There are several issues with the thesis:

- The first has to do with the *soft power* theoretical framework itself. Referring to Nye, who categorises soft power as "an ability to affect others through attraction rather than coercion" using culture, political values and foreign policy as resources to do so (p.10), Ms. Zamtaradze applies it to Russia ...which is a bit "long shot" if you ask me, especially when the author herself talks about Russian "informational warfare" or, quoting Meister, writes that for "Russian leaders, soft power is *not about attraction*; it instead refers to nonmilitary instruments for manipulating, undermining, and weakening opponents, a supplement to Moscow's military power" (p.12; my emphasis). Yes, of course there is the Russian Orthodox church, geopolitical ideas of Eurasia (Dugin), conservatism and foreign policies aiming to maintain influence over Russian neighbourhood, but invasion of South Ossetia in 2008 or intentional disinformation campaign can hardly be considered "power of attraction." The author herself acknowledges as much, referring to Khubulashvili: "Ultimately, observation of previous practice as well as literature showcases the interconnectedness of hard power within the Soft Power framework created by the Kremlin" (p. 14).

The question is: *why then stick with soft power framework? Why not look into "hybrid warfare" instead?*

- The second issue deals with research design itself: soft power is “an ability to *affect* others” – yes, the question points to Russian *influence* behind the new Georgian drafted laws – but the thing is, the methods of media (or discourse) analysis are not suitable for analysis of causes/effects. Yes, by comparison of Russian values (laws) and Georgian draft laws, we can find similarities, but that is not the same as confirming causal effects/Russian influence is behind Georgian draft laws (there are other methods to do that). Also, I am not sure I could repeat Ms. Zamtaradze’s research based on her “instructions” in the methodology section/
- The analytical part has its own problems too. While it *is* very interesting to read about the political hypocrisy in Georgia, about Georgian Dream playing it “both ways” working towards EU integration but paying lip service to Russia (and changing laws along Russian ones), *naming* a chapter “Analysis” is not the same as it actually *being* analysis. As is clear from reading Chapter 4, but it is also visible in the Table of Contents, there is a lot of *description* (“What is ...?” subchapters), and the actual analysis is ...5 pages? Case study 2 has about 1 page of analysis (p.41).
- Finally, I’m not entirely convinced by Ms. Zamtaradze’s work with resources. I am in *no way* implying plagiarism. No way. However, her citations are incomplete and/or inconsistent: Nye’s definitions of soft power, *directly* cited and clearly from journal articles (1990 and 2008, see bibliography), are missing pages. Actually, many *direct citations* are missing page numbers (and I am aware that some of them come from websites, thus a page number is nonsense), however, some of those citations do come from official reports or .pdf documents/reports, some are unclear where they belong (see p. 31).

At times, the *Ibidems* are confused, see p. 19 (where the text refers to EU Report on Georgia, but the *ibids.* point towards a personal interview with Young Greens) or p. 21.

The list of sources – bibliography – is done in “no citation style,” and many times misses even the links to referred to documents, and it is a challenge to find them given acronyms (this is the complete bibliographic information).

41. ICNL, & ECNL. (2023). *Draft Law of Georgia on Transparency of Foreign Influence*.

44. IDFI, & SVERIGE. (2023). *Law on Agents of Foreign Influence*.

or the entry 94 seems to be added from an another used source:

94. U.S Department of Justice. (n.d.). *Report of the Attorney General to the Congress of the United States on the Administration of the Foreign Agents Registration Act of 1938, as amended, for the six months ending June 30, 2006.*

Which is incredibly similar to footnote 5 of another source – [Laufer 2017](#)

⁵ U.S. DEP'T OF JUSTICE, REPORT OF THE ATTY GEN. TO THE CONGRESS OF THE U.S. ON THE ADMIN. OF THE FOREIGN AGENTS REGISTRATION ACT OF 1938, AS AMENDED, FOR THE SIX MONTHS ENDING JUNE 30, 2006 I - 2 (2007), <https://www.fara.gov/reports/June30-2006.pdf>.

All in all, Ms. Zamtaradze's thesis has its informational merit. Ms. Zamtaradze has clearly done a lot of work gathering and reading sources. And I do agree with the usefulness of analysing current situation in Georgia with respect to it being in a tug of war between the EU and Russia.

However, the thesis is more hot-headed than analytical; it seems to have been written in haste and could use thorough editing to cut out repetitions (especially in the first 10 or so pages), to take care of inconsistencies/loose ends (like the fact that the research question doesn't mention anything on EU soft power/influence, yet the thesis contains a section on precisely on that 3.3.). I appreciate the lengths Ms. Zamtaradze went to – to obtain interviews for her thesis – unfortunately we do not learn who these interviewed people were and how they fit into the thesis methodology...

Proposed grade (A-B-C-D-E-F):

D

Suggested questions for the defence are:

Could you tell us more about how the most recent parliamentary overturning of the presidential veto on the "foreign agents" law? What are the reactions from EU? What are the reactions from Russia?

What is the *public* opinion with regards to the "foreign agents" law and the "anti-LGBTQ" draft law? Are they in support? What about the protests? Do you think these 2 (draft) laws will play a role in the October 2024 elections?

Grading Scale:

- A = 91-100 % – excellent
- B = 81-90 % – very good
- C = 71-80 % – good
- D = 61-70 % – satisfactory
- E = 51-60 % – minimal pass
- F = 0-50 % – fail