

IMESS dissertation						
Name/code:	Maria Chernyaeva					
Dissertation title:	Ethnicity, Territoriality, and Conflict in the South Caucasus – A Qualitative Comparative Analysis					
Scale: 5 - excellent, 4 - good, 3 - satisfactory, 2 - poor, 1 – very poor						
	5	4	3	2	1	
ARGUMENT:						
Clearly defined research question	x					No clearly defined research question
Answers research question	x					Does not answer research question
Well structured	x					Badly structured
Shows theoretical awareness	x					Shows no theoretical awareness
Conceptual clarity	x					Conceptual confusion
Empirically appropriate & robust				x		Full of empirical errors
Logical and coherent		x				Illogical and incoherent
Analytical	x					Descriptive
Critical			x			Uncritical
Shows independent thought		x				Does not show independent thought
SOURCES & USAGE:						
Evidence of reading/research		x				No evidence of reading/research
Effective use of sources/data		x				Ineffective use of sources/data
WRITING STYLE:						
Clear	x					Obscure
Good punctuation	x					Poor punctuation
Grammatically correct	x					Grammatically incorrect
PRESENTATION:						
Appropriate length	x					Too long/short
Good referencing	x					Poor/inconsistent referencing
Good spelling	x					Poor spelling
Good bibliography			x			Poor bibliography
Deducted for late submission:		Deducted for faulty referencing:			Mark*: A	
Charles U marker:	Jan Šír		Signed:			Date: June 19 2012

* Mark: A = 70+; B = 65-69; C = 60-64; D = 55-59; E = 50-54; F = fail, less than 50

Scheme of award (assessment criteria):

	Charles University**	IMESS
Excellent	Výborně [1]	A
Very Good	Velmi dobře [2]	B
Good	Velmi dobře [2.5]	C
Satisfactory	Dobře [3]	D
Sufficient	Dobře [3.5]	E
Fail	Neprospěl [4]	F

CONTINUES OVERLEAF

NOTE: Please provide substantive and detailed feedback

Comments (at least 300 words)

Ms Chernyaeva's MA thesis is a multicase study of ethno-territorial conflicts in the South Caucasus. The study seeks to explain the causes of ethno-territorial conflicts as well as what sets of conditions are conducive to the outbreak of these conflicts. It uses qualitative and comparative methods as its analytical framework.

Generally speaking, it is a solid piece of scholarly work that is based on sound methodology and shows a good theoretical background and, moreover, is really well written. What follows are few comments on individual aspects of the thesis that I believe tend to undermine the undisputable strengths of the thesis as such. I hope my comments might help the author to strengthen her key argument.

As far as author's approach to the topic is concerned, I believe a more plausible and convincing delineation of the research problem, particularly in terms of chronological coverage, would be desirable. For each of the seven (non-)cases under scrutiny, Ms Chernyaeva focused on the period of the first two years after independence from the Soviet Union, e.g. 1991-1993. Despite all similarities, this could be a problem as the respective ethno-territorial conflicts were in fact not synchronous, some started already well before the Soviet collapse, and each had its own dynamics. This delineation, as a result, had an impact on the selection of cases for this comparative study and as such might have distorted author's drawn conclusions including the final concepts (stemming, for instance, from the non-inclusion of Armenian minority in Baku as it had forcefully fled before 1990, while virtual non-issues like the case of the Talysh minority in Azerbaijan were included in the study).

In terms of empirical data, the number of factual errors found is relatively negligible; though, it must be noted there are errors. Still, the empirical part is extremely short, containing very little hard data to be operationalized for the purpose of this type of study; moreover, some assumptions, often presented simply as given facts, would deserve further explanation so as to fully utilize these data. For instance, on p. 62 the author speaks about new legislation adopted shortly before the collapse of the Soviet Union that supposedly allowed Autonomous Republics and oblasts to hold a vote on secession from the Soviet Union. Leaving the incorrect legal terminology aside, would the author be able to elaborate more on this piece of legislation? Having studied Soviet collapse for a decade, I have to admit I might be unaware of this key piece of legislation she alludes to. Further, on p. 63, among presumed goals of Tehran's policy towards the New Independent States in the Caucasus, the author lists the objective "to weaken and isolate Azerbaijan by providing covert support to the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenian and rumoured support to the Talysh." Would she be able to elaborate more on how this implicit strategy pursued by Iran translated into practical foreign policy? Having spent some time on field trips both in northern Iran and Talysh-inhabited regions of Azerbaijan, I admit I am not aware of this purported connection and would be eager to learn more about it. Likewise, there is generally very little said about the case of Lezgin and Talysh living in Azerbaijan, for instance; but this was obviously no obstacle for the author to successfully include these two (non-)cases in her study. In all frankness, I, for one, am not saying the author's conclusions are necessarily erroneous. Still, I believe all these operationalizations and conceptualizations should be done explicitly, based on sound, clear and verifiable data, which seems to be not always the case. That said, lack of primary sources is a problem and leaves the author rely solely on what is to be found in literature, which again can lead to additional distortions and bias with the sample data.

Last remark, I see no justification for the inclusion of a sizable section providing an introduction to the basics of Boolean algebra (such as the meaning of the "AND" operator, all in graphics indeed) in a study striving to deal with ethnicity, territoriality and conflict in the South Caucasus.

Specific questions for oral defence (at least 100 words)

Please comment on the remarks above.

Please elaborate on the role of Russia in each of the seven (non-)cases of ethno-territorial conflicts in the South Caucasus under scrutiny.