

*Olga Leshkova*

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE  
IDENTITY IN THE EASTERN AND SOUTH-EASTERN  
EUROPE BETWEEN REGIONAL AND (SUPRA-)  
NATIONAL MODEL

The international conference *Identity in the Eastern and South-Eastern Europe between Regional and (Supra-) National Model* took place in Prague, The Czech Republic, from 10th to 11th December 2015. The event, which was organized jointly by the Department, East European Studies and the Department of South Slavonic and Balkan Studies, Faculty of Arts (Charles University in Prague), brought together about 20 professional historians and literary historians from the Czech Republic, Germany, Ukraine, Poland and Russia. The main two-day-program of the conference featured 16 papers including the large keynote lecture by a Russian historian Andrey Zubov, an ex-professor at Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) who became world-renowned for his active and consistent critics of modern Russian international politics after the Crimea conflict in March 2014. Beside the official agenda, the conference had an important side event the presentation of *Oriens Aliter* – the project of a new scientific periodical on cultural and historical heritage of the Central and Eastern Europe issued jointly by the Department of Central European Studies and the Department of East European Studies in co-operation with the Precarpathian National University of Vasyl Stefanyk in Ivano-Frankivsk (<http://oa.ff.cuni.cz/en/frontpage>).

The conference was held in two working languages, English and Russian. The first day opened with welcoming words from Dr. Jan Bičovský, the vice-dean for admission procedure and external relations at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague, Dr. Marek Příhoda, the head of the Department of East European Studies, and Dr. Stanislav Tumis, lecturer at the Department of East European Studies. The program of the first day was divided into two sections according to language and thematic criteria. The first one, *Identities in the Eastern Europe in Culture and Literature*, included four papers in Russian covering some controversial aspects of

Russian national identity, its duality and ambivalence, reflection in literature and philosophy.

**Vladimír Svatoň** (the Czech Republic) presented his view on double identity in Europe and Russia. The author proceeds from the assumption that the roots of European identical duality lie into the Modern period when the ideas of cultural differences and cultural opposition were philosophically shaped. Thus, German classical idealism based its historical and philosophical conception on contrasting the ancient and modern history. According to the author, the ideas of cultural oppositions, which were often critical towards modernism, played a major role in historical, political and cultural processes in Europe in the 19th century, including the so-called national revivals. The trends in Germany and Russia can be interpreted within the same context. The author puts an emphasis on the critical attitude towards western rationalism and individualism among Russian Slavophiles, namely Ivan Kireyevsky and Alexey Khomyakov, as well as among Russian symbolists (Vyacheslav Ivanov), and briefly dwelt on Russian conception of Eurasianism.

**Marek Příhoda** (the Czech Republic) focused his attention on fundamental concepts of Russian thinking and view of the world during two major periods of Russian history – before and after Peter the Great. The author analyses three key problems: (1) the forming of Russian identity at the level of historical consciousness and political thinking, (2) differences and connections between Muscovite and imperial periods in Russian history, (3) the roots and reasons for contradictory perception of the Old Russia during the Modern period. Talking about the spiritual world in Muscovite Russia, the author underlines its religious orientation when Orthodoxy as such or certain religiously motivated ideas dominated merely all spheres of people's life including state politics. The situation dramatically changed during Peter's rule when the persuasion of special religious mission was substituted by the secular idea of a Great Russian Empire.

**Helena Ulbrechtová** (the Czech Republic) analyzed the literary semantisation of space in Russian literature with regard to Russian national identity. According to the author, the concept of space in Russian literature is much more important than the concept of time which can be partly explained as a result of certain territorial ambitions. The literary correlation between the concepts of water and ground in Russian literature represents a particular interest as well. Surprisingly, Russian literature did not develop much the poetics of the sea, water as a concept does not play the role of a bridge between the opposite shores; on the contrary it is considered to be a hostile element. The author also analyzes the semantisation of the Caucasus and Crimea and provides numerous examples from Russian literature to prove the particular importance of these concepts for Russian mentality.

**Hanuš Nykl** (the Czech Republic) devoted his paper to the large-scale projects of comprehensive world transformation which were produced by Russian philosophers in the 19th – early 20th centuries. Despite the fact that social and political matters, which were broadly discussed in Russian political thinking, did not evaluate into a coherent political theory, Russian political thinking gave birth to several ambitious projects, though mostly unrealistic or even utopian. The author reviews, in chronological order, the most important of these projects, such as (1) the debate between Westernizers and Slavophiles in the 1840s; (2) the pan-Slavic ideas of Nikolay Danilevskiy who developed the theory of cultural-historical types; (3) the project by Konstantin Leontyev who offered the idea of an Eastern Union which was supposed to be a unity of Orthodox peoples; (4) and finally, the global world-transforming conception by Vladimir Solovyov who elaborated the idea of the union of Churches which would lead to the reunion of the world, and eventually, to the reunion of the World and God.

The second section, *National and Supranational Identities in the Eastern and South-Eastern Europe: Origins and Transformations*, was conducted fully in English. The five papers presented, focused on identity and minority policies, different patterns of national and supranational building in the Balkans and Eastern Europe.

**Miroslav Hroch** (the Czech Republic) brought up a question of nation formation processes under conditions of the Ottoman Empire. The author argues that all national formation processes in the Balkans, under conditions of the Ottoman Empire, should be interpreted in the frame of correlation between their specific and common features, not as a series of isolated events. Using the comparative approach, the author defines the object of comparison – large units in multinational empires and conditions for their development from ethnic communities towards modern nations. He compares the situations in three major European Empires (Ottoman, Russian and Habsburg) on the basis of clearly formulated criteria, such as: the origins of these empires; the role of Church and religion in national movements; educational system and its impact on national formation processes; social structure of ethnic communities; framework of national organization; definition of national enemy; historical arguments, role of myths and oral tradition; external influence and so on. In conclusion, the author asserts that there is a specific type of South-Eastern nation formation even though every single national movement, undoubtedly, has its own specificity.

**Petr Stehlík** (the Czech Republic) analyzed the nature and the role of the ideology of Yugoslavism in the formation of national identities in South Europe from the 19th century up to the year 1914, including its cultural, social and political impact. The author starts with the definition of the very term of Yugoslavism, and

then provides a rather detailed comment on its historical forms and their evolution to start with the Illyrian movement. Having analyzed the role of particular South Slavic peoples in the national forming processes, the author comes to conclusion that, due to certain historical and political reasons, Croats had contributed to the elaboration of Yugoslavism considerably more than other Balkan ethnic groups.

The concept of Yugoslavian nationality during 1945–1991 was in the focus of the presentation by **Jaroslav Otčenášek** (the Czech Republic). The author considers the concept of Yugoslavian nationality representing an unsuccessful example of supraethnicity. He deals with the terms of ethnicity and supraethnicity, emphasizing the difference between them in contemporary understanding. According to the author, Yugoslavian supraethnicity represented a typical example of supraethnicity which had been created “from above”, by governing authorities. The author describes its fundamental features and confirms his assertions with statistics reflecting the dynamics in people’s perception of themselves as Yugoslavians, as members of the united Yugoslavian nation. In the end, the author concludes that nowadays, the phenomenon of Yugoslavian supraethnicity has no future, as the state, from which it originated, does not exist any longer.

**Thomas Wünsch** (Germany) dealt with different modes of identity politics and their impact on the making of collective mentality. Identity politics represent an essential component of the composition of the human community and effect directly both historical and present times. The constructs, which are usually defined as the national consciousness, are rooting to great extent back to the intervention from the outside. In other words, collective identity does not simply grow by itself, but it is connected with some influence of different groups or forces. Identities are not monolithic; they represent a dynamic complex phenomenon which is composed of various elements and change in time. The author describes four modes of identity politics illustrating them with particular historical examples: (1) pervasive indoctrination as the most dominant form, including all kinds of obstruction of ruling government towards the autochthone population (ex. politics of Turkey towards Kurds); (2) recreation and protection of exclusive political rights in the situation of permanent battle of cultures when certain historical events or cultural phenomena are emphasized to create national identity (e.g. a Czech-German conflict initiated by national emancipation in the 19th century, situation in the Ukraine after 1991); (3) central position dealing with changes within the living environment including mentality (e.g. politics of Krakow bishop Zbigniew Oleśnicki, the 15th century, or politics of Frederik II of Prussia, the 18th century, in Silesia); (4) the weakest mode, superficial social harmonization which aims to find equilibrium between new and old structures (ex. Habsburg identity politics after 1780s).

**Stanislav Tumis** (the Czech Republic) conducted an analysis of two mainstream approaches to the interpretation of the Ukrainian history: the Ukrainian national scheme and the Soviet approach. He argues that relevant comprehension of such a complicated phenomenon as the Ukrainian history is possible only under condition of unbiased analysis of both schemes, although these approaches exclude each other and it is almost impossible to reconcile them. The Ukrainian national scheme tends to interpret the Ukrainian history mostly within colonial and post-colonial constructs, as a victim of the Soviet empire, or, earlier, of the Russian Empire. The fundamental premise for the range of these theories is the distinction between “self” and “other”. According to the author, the Ukrainian national discourses actively use the populist historiography which was formed by mid-nineteenth century and emphasis the distinctiveness of Ukrainians among other Slavs. The Soviet scheme represents the opposite pole, considering the Ukrainian history in the context of long-term Ukrainian striving to reunite with its “old-sister” Russia and marginalizing all attempts to establish an independent state. By the example of key narratives in Ukrainian history, the author draws attention to the importance of collective memory and historical myths with regard to political and social manipulations with public consciousness and forming of national identity.

The final event of the day was a public lecture by Professor **Andrey Zubov**. His lecture, the *History of Russian Imperial Consciousness and Its Prospects*, which was dedicated to the formation of imperial idea in Russia and its role in Russian and world history, took place in a big lecture-hall in the main building of the Faculty of Arts and attracted a considerable number of listeners.

The author highlighted the problem of imperial idea as a historical phenomenon in general, and in Russia in particular. He drew attention to the genesis of the imperial idea in Russia, its special features and role in the formation of political and historical consciousness of Russian people, arguing that imperial ideas as such were not created by politicians, but had their roots in social consciousness. According to the author, imperial ambitions can be interpreted with regards to basic human need for possession, though realized at a higher political and state level. This is the reason, why empires tend to expand their borders. The imperial idea is not an exclusively Russian phenomenon which can be easily proved by other examples from world history, for instance German Third Reich or the Ottoman Empire. According to Andrey Zubov, the imperial idea usually fulfills a certain compulsory function as it recompenses people’s misery and lack of freedom with a delusive feeling of being part of a great powerful state. The authorities give people a useless phantom of abstract imperial dream. At the same time, people who are deprived of opportunity to act independently both in economics and law, remain infantile and immature,

and as a result, they are susceptible to such dreams. As the empire keeps its parts together mostly by force or by means of various incentives, including different forms of economic motivation, it is not beneficial for its own titular nation or for people living on its central territories. Expenses of the Russian Empire on its outer regions largely exceeded the expenses on its central part; the same is true for the USSR. The roots of Russian imperial idea lie deep in the history. The first more or less coherent Russian conception which affirmed the idea of Russian distinctiveness towards other peoples was the conception of the Third Rome which considered the Russian ruler and people as the ultimate fighters for the true faith – the Orthodox Christianity – while other countries were supposed to be following the wrong impious traditions. Despite the fact that after the Great Moscow Synod in 1666 the above-mentioned idea was buried, it provided the necessary ground for developing of the imperial idea when the feeling of national greatness substituted religious aspect. Nevertheless, nearly 90 % of Russian population remained slaves up to 1861, when Russian tsar Alexander II attempted to carry out liberal reforms which unfortunately failed. The October Revolution in 1917 gave birth to a new empire, the Soviet Union, built on the ruin of the collapsed tsarist Russia. Soviet power ambitions extended to the world ideological dominance, but it proved to be completely unrealistic. Another failed attempt to build a liberal market economy in 1990s turned into a deep frustration in Russian people, as instead of fair liberal economy and democratic society, they got oligarchic capitalism and corrupted structures. Russian president Putin adverted for the first time to the idea of imperial greatness after the terrorist attack on Beslan in 2005. Then it has been gradually developing and strengthening up to the Crimea annexing in March 2014. So, it is rather reasonable to conclude that nowadays we deal with the 4th Russian Empire – Putin's one. The author raises the question whether it is possible to stop the Empire. He is convinced that external forces are not able to prevent an Empire from further expansion. The most efficient way to stop it is to transform the Empire into a Commonwealth where all subjects would benefit from being a part of a bigger construct but keep their identity and independence at the same time. To fulfill this goal it is necessary to resolve two major issues: (1) economic factor (to eliminate the problem of people's poverty by means of property redistribution – the author inclines to the restitution as it was carried out in Europe); (2) creation of a mature civil democratic society.

The second conference day logically continued the scientific debate and exchange of opinions. Despite being shorter (the agenda included six papers), the program was not less interesting than the day before, focusing on the identity conflicts and ethnic contradictions with regards to their history, origins and contemporary state.

**Jan Rychlík** (the Czech Republic) brought up a question of dissolution of multinational states in the Central and Eastern Europe in the 1990s. The author assumes that, at a certain phase, every ethnic entity attempts to create its own national state. Taking into account the actual number of nations and other ethnic groups, it would be reasonable to assume that conflicts on national or ethnical basis cannot be avoided. According to the author, the only solution is to observe them and to try to reduce their negative consequences. In his paper, the author analyzed most significant examples of collapsed multinational empires (Ottoman, Russian and Habsburg) emphasizing the fundamental aspects of their national and ethnical policy. He compared the attitude to minorities and their rights in the above-mentioned states and revealed their strengths and weaknesses. The author considers that mistaken minority policies represent one of the most important factors which eventually led to the dissolution of all these states. The 20th century gives us numerous examples of inefficient national and ethnical policies neglecting minority rights as well. Neither economic factor, nor linguistic and cultural proximity provide a substantial ground to unify the consciousness, and consequently no universal solution can be offered.

**Michaylo Nahornyak** (Ukraine) talked about the nature of ethical contradictions and conflicts in modern Ukraine, trying to define special features of the Ukraine and Ukrainians, with regard to their political and social activity. He argues that, contrary to a rather widespread opinion, anarchism is not an innate Ukrainian national mentality feature, which makes people more inclined to revolutionary actions and disobedience. The author insists that the modern ethnical contradictions should be explained in terms of Ukrainian double identity that resulted from dramatically different historical development of two parts of the modern Ukraine, i.e. its Europe-oriented Western part with the idea of an independent national state and the Eastern one (and more or less Central and South), earlier called Little Russia, which used to be an integral part of the Russian Empire and suffered, and is still suffering, a large influence of Russian imperial idea. The author interprets the “Little Russia complex” in the Ukraine in terms of postcolonial syndromes. Nevertheless, the nature of the ethnic conflict in the Ukraine is much more complicated and can be interesting for the rest of Europe.

The paper by **Ihor Hurak** (Ukraine) was dedicated to the analysis of the conception of Russian world as an instrument of Russian foreign policy, its history and real application. The idea of Russian world dates back to the 1990s when it emerged within social and cultural discourse and was referred to as a certain cultural community which united Russian speakers and people interested in Russia all over the world. Despite the fact that the theoretical background of the concept is rather vague and disputable, it has been put into political and state practice since the

beginning of the 21st century. The real implementation of the conception emphasizes the idea of the protection of Russian compatriots living abroad. To illustrate the above-mentioned assumption, the author uses the Crimea conflict in March 2014. However, the author is sceptic about possible success of this conception.

**Alenka Jensterle-Doležalová** (the Czech Republic) talked about the situation within Slovene intellectual and literary milieu before World War I with regards to the ideas for a union of the Southern Slavs – New Illyrism and Yugoslavism. According to the author, New Illyrism as the project of fusion between Slovene and Croat cultures and languages was a kind of common conviction among Slovene intellectuals of that time and was generally accepted by Slovene writers. On the contrary, Ivan Cankar, the key figure of Slovene modernism, consistently rejected the New Illyrism. In his public lectures and interviews, he proclaimed that the practical realization of this idea would mean the end of Slovene language and culture. Ivan Cankar remained very critical of Slovene intellectuals who were ready to sacrifice their national identity in the name of uncertain political goals. His public activities were crucial for the Slovene society as eventually he managed to persuade Slovene public opinion and political stage of necessity to preserve Slovene national culture and language.

In her paper *Identity and Statehood. Bosnia and Herzegovina Twenty Years of Independence*, **Malgorzata Podolak** (Poland) emphasized peculiar identity problems in Bosnia and Herzegovina and revealed the special features of national identity in this post-Yugoslav country in comparison to similar aspects in other Balkan states. The problem of national identity is considered to be a key issue in Bosnia and Herzegovina as it is linked to a concept of nation. Due to historical, cultural and ethnic factors, people in Bosnia and Herzegovina have trouble with identifying themselves as a single nation and prefer keeping strong connection to a certain ethnic group, such as Croats, Serbs, Bosniaks, which could be rather alarming as the ethnisation of almost all sectors of society contributes to ethnical division of the country.

**Marek Junek** (the Czech Republic) talked about the Czechoslovak relationship before World War I based upon Anton Štefánek's ideas. Štefánek belonged to major Slovak personalities who promoted Czechoslovak unity in the field of culture, education, language, politics and economy. After 1918 he became one of the most important ideologists of Czechoslovakism. The author describes in his paper Štefánek's vision of Czechoslovakism both on theoretical and practical levels including Štefánek's interpretation of Czechoslovak linguistic problems which were connected to determining of the Slovak language status and its correlation with the Czech language; the issue of common origin of Czechs and Slovaks, their

common culture and history; the question of education and support of Slovak students at Czech schools and universities carried out by Czechoslovak unity (Československá jednota); political and economic cooperation and so on. The author eventually argues that all theoretical ideas of cooperation between Czechs and Slovaks became reality during the World War I.

It is also necessary to address special thanks to the organizing team for their effort and an extraordinary job contributing to the success of the conference, which provided a great platform for professional meetings, research presentations and exchange of opinions.