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President's Report

'A people without a memory is a people without a future'

In September this year, I had the pleasure of travelling to South America to launch the Spanish version of my book on the Komsomol (The Communist Youth League and the Transformation of the Soviet Union, 1917-1932, Routledge, 2011). In Chile, I went to Antofagasta, a fascinating medium-size Pacific port at the edge of the Atacama Desert that was once the heart of the world's saltpeter industry, and to the capital, Santiago de Chile. Walking through both cities, browsing in the incredible number of book stores, and visiting several Chilean memorials to the disappeared, the scars of the Cold War and the continuing struggle between the Left and Right were very visible. The 'Viva Allende' graffiti that greeted me on a bench at Antofagasta harbour was counter-posed by 'Viva Pinochet' a few streets away, on a wall close to my hotel.

In Santiago, I began to spot Soviet symbols in the urban landscape, references to a time when the fight for communism was a global affair led by Moscow. At the Allende monument, visitors were greeted by a wreath of cloves forming a hammer & sickle; a few streets away, on a small bridge on the main boulevard in central Santiago, graffiti declared 'We salute 87 years of joyous rebellion', alluding to the founding of the Communist Youth of Chile in 1932. The slogan was sandwiched



between a hammer & sickle and a red star. The political murals and graffiti that decorate the streets of the capital are expressions of a vibrant political discourse. At the humanities faculty of the University of Santiago de Chile, where I gave a book talk, I saw students gathering in the shadow of a poignant memorial to Victor Yara: it looked like a photograph of the Sorbonne in 1968.

Yara, a Chilean musician and communist activist, was one of many rounded up and incarcerated in the National Stadium. Pinochet's soldiers tortured him, broke his fingers and smashed his hand, so he would never be able to play the guitar again. Silencing his instrument, however, was not enough – after torture, Yara was executed with a shot to the head. On the next day, I visited the Estadio Nacional Julio Martínez Prádanos, where a whole terrace has been turned into a counter-monument to commemorate the stadium's use as a concentration camp. **As I walked through the accompanying museum with a group of Chilean school kids**, I started to get a better understanding of the profound >>



New Books in the BASEES/Routledge Series on Russian and East European Studies

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New and Forthcoming Titles in this Series:

>> *Azerbaijan and the European Union*

By Eske van Gils
(November 2019)

>> *Freedom of Expression in Russia's New Mediasphere*

Mariëlle Wijermars, Katja Lehtisaari (eds)
(December 2019)

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>> legacy of the global dimension of the Cold War, the ongoing struggle of Chilean society to come to terms with it, and the immense challenge of constructing a unifying national narrative to enable reconciliation.

Nevertheless, Chile felt like a stable democracy, built on a solid economy, where people enjoy a very reasonable standard of living. The gap between the haves and have nots felt much smaller than in neighbouring Argentina. The day before the recent eruption of unrest, I talked to a relative about my trip to Chile and reiterated how stable and safe it felt. I couldn't have been more wrong. The next day, one of Santiago's skyscrapers went up in flames.

Perhaps I should have known better, given the vibrant political course and activism I had witnessed in my few days in the country. Flyers and posters by the Organización Comunista Revolucionaria had popped up in the metro and streets of the capital during my stay, announcing an immanent uprising - 'La Revolución Comunista Es Emparable' (The Communist Revolution is unstoppable). It remains to be seen where these protests are heading and I am doubtful that the Organización Comunista Revolucionaria will emerge victorious. In my talks with staff and students at the university it became clear that Chile's Left is fragmented, with multiple factions finding a temporary common denominator in the protest against neoliberalism. What happens next remains to be seen.

I left Chile determined to challenge further my own inherently euro-centric view of the Cold War. Despite great advances in recent years, this perspective still dominates our discipline, and this is something BASEES should engage with more pro-actively. Furthermore, as campuses in the UK are swept by student-led initiatives to diversify and decolonise the curriculum, it is time for BASEES to reflect critically on the diversity of our community as well as our research. That's one of the agreed aims for the BASEES 2020 conference. Furthermore, we have teamed up with the Leibniz Science Campus in Leipzig, Germany,

to organise the third **BASEES Regional Conference** with the theme "Eastern Europe - Global Area". This conference aims to connect the study of Eastern Europe with the study of global processes, both historical and contemporary. It brings



together regional expertise with recent trends in the fields of global history and trans-regional studies. At the heart of this conference is the question of how Eastern European societies position themselves in relation to global processes and conflicts. The Call for Papers has been published and I would encourage BASEES members to submit panel proposals. For more information see [here](#).

Finally, I am delighted to announce that BASEES has led a successful bid to host the 2025 World Congress of the International Council for Central and East European Studies (ICEEES) at University College London. I would like to thank Prof. Diane Koenker (Director of UCL SSEES) and Clem Cecil (Executive Director of Pushkin House) for their support of our bid. We look forward to welcoming scholars of Central and Eastern Europe, including the former Soviet countries of Central Asia, from across the world at London's Global University in summer 2025.

I have to close this editorial on a gloomy note: Last month I joined three German learned associations, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Osteuropakunde, der Verband der Osteuropahistorikerinnen und -historiker, and der Deutsche Slavistenverband, to express my concerns over an ordinance issued by the Minister of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation, Mikhail Kotiukov, on

11 February 2019, that made regulations for collaboration with foreign academics significantly more stringent. A joint open letter (reprinted on page 4) was sent to the minister on 1 October 2019 and has received some media attention in Germany and Russia. I am yet to receive a response.

Matthias Neumann



Summer School in Russian and Eurasian Studies, Nazarbayev University, Kazakhstan

SSRES at Nazarbayev University in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan is an intensive academic program that offers students the chance to immerse themselves in the Russian or Kazakh languages and to experience Kazakh and post-Soviet culture in the heart of Eurasia. In 2020, SSRES will offer an 8-week program, with 20 contact hours per week, including intensive courses in Russian or Kazakh and elective modules taught in English. The deadline for applications is March 1, 2020: for further information, please see [here](#). Questions about the program should be addressed to Amanda Murphy (amanda.murphy@nu.edu.kz).



Conference report: Contested Minorities in the 'New Europe': National Identities from the Baltics to the Balkans, 1918-1939

Contested Minorities in the New Europe was a two-day academic conference held at Birkbeck (UoFL) on 1-2/06/2019. Organised by Dr Olena Palko (Birkbeck) and Dr Samuel Foster (University of East Anglia), it focused on the various histories of ethnic minority communities across the independent states of Eastern Europe and western Soviet Union during the interwar era.

Among the many challenges facing the new, or enlarged, nation-states that arose on the territories of the former German, Habsburg, Ottoman and Russian Empires in 1918, few were as vexing or complex as the 'minorities question'. Across this mosaic of geopolitical boundaries, what the Czech statesman Tomáš Masaryk emphatically termed the 'New Europe', thousands of disparate ethnic and religious communities discovered that they now existed as minorities, often in areas adjacent to their designated homelands. Following the centennial commemorations of the Great War and Russian Revolutions from 2014 to 2018, the conference sought to address a significant gap in current Western scholarship that typically oversimplifies this area of historical enquiry by presenting the region's successor as inherently unstable, with minorities as perpetual victims of nationalist antagonism and authoritarian persecution. We were especially keen to reorient discussion away from a 'top-down', unidirectional approach - that tends to emphasise the rise of ideological extremism, deteriorating international relations in the 1930s, or the spectre of Stalin's purges and the approaching Holocaust - by expanding the historical discussion beyond the views and actions of Eastern Europe's political and intellectual elites.

To this end, the conference's central themes emphasised the role and agency of minority communities and the ways through which they strove to develop or preserve their respective sense of national or cultural identity through non-violent means between 1918

and 1939. Areas of particular interest included the study of local and community politics, especially before 1938; minority engagement with state or religious institutions; inter-community relations and forms of cultural and socioeconomic exchange; diaspora formation and cross-border networks; and the role of language, education and the press as a means of preserving or cultivating identities. While not every country in the region could be represented, we were delighted to host presentations discussing differing aspects of minority history in interwar Estonia, Czechoslovakia, 'Greater Romania', Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Ukraine and Yugoslavia. These were divided across seven panels and encompassed an equally broad spectrum of topics and case-studies as well as consideration of the issues in a transnational context. The expansion and social diversification of Romania was a particular point of interest with some notable contributions being Christopher Wendt's (Institute of Political History, Budapest) analysis of German national identity among the Banat Swabians; Anca Filipovici's (Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities, Cluj-Napoca) case-study of the interwar Youth Organisations *Straja Țării* and *Maccabi*; and Giuseppe Motta (Sapienza University, Rome) on reactions to the Treaty of Trianon among Transylvania's Hungarians. Mart Kuldkepp (University College London) provided an intriguing overview of the little-known role Estonia's Swedish minority played in the country's interwar politics while Stephan Stach's (Polin: Museum of the History of Polish Jews, Warsaw) historical evaluation of *The Polish-Ukrainian Bulletin* and Petru Negura's (Free International University, Chisinau) comparative study of primary education among minorities in Romanian Bessarabia and Soviet Transnistria, provided conference participants with a more transnational perspective. The above mentioned presentations have also been selected for publication as a special issue of the interdisciplinary journal *National Identities*.

Both conference days also featured talks by our two invited keynote speakers: Professor Cathie Carmichael (University of East Anglia) who closed the first day with a public lecture on the Austro-Hungarian legacy in Herzegovina after 1918 and Professor Julia Richers (University of Bern)

who opened day two with an in-depth assessment of Jewish communities in Carpatho-Ukraine, a territory that existed at the centre of multiple border changes and regional conflict between the wars. Despite the myriad of subject matter under discussion, and the unexpected warmth of an early British summer, both days generated exhaustive, yet civil, debate regarding each presentation's place in relation to the key research themes. Overall, we were delighted as the extent to which *Contested Minorities* managed to bring together such a broad international mix of attendees from a diverse range of institutions. Given that the majority of presenters were PhD students or early-career scholars coming from outside of the United Kingdom, the event provided ample opportunity for more informal discussion and professional networking during the coffee and lunch breaks. Equally gladdening was the overwhelmingly positive response recorded on our post-conference evaluation forms with most ranking their experience as either 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied'. Much of this was only made possible through the generous support of a BASEES grant that helped fund travel and accommodation for presenters from eastern and south-east Europe. On behalf of all those who attended, we wish to extend our sincere thanks to the Association for helping to make this conference a major success!

Dr Samuel Foster
University of East Anglia

Baltic Orthodoxy

From 1836 to 1940, Orthodoxy in the Baltic (the imperial provinces of Estland, Livland, and Kurland/the interwar republics of Estonia and Latvia) underwent dramatic shifts in fortune. At the beginning of the period, Orthodoxy was the religion of a limited number of bureaucrats, soldiers, and merchants: the most numerous Orthodox group in the region, the Old Believers, rejected the authority of the Russian Orthodox Church. However, in the 1840s approximately 110,000 Latvians and Estonians converted to Orthodoxy in an effort to gain the support of the Russian state in their tempestuous relationship with the German landowning elite. This >>

>> set the stage for simmering confessional tensions with Lutheranism, whose dominance in the region had hitherto been unchallenged, and set in motion a process of Orthodox institutionalisation in the Baltic as the Church (with help from the state) sought to create religious infrastructure from scratch. However, institution building was only one part of the story: particularly in the 1880s and 90s, the Church established new sacred stories for Baltic Orthodoxy by propagating saints' cults, miracle-working icons, and pilgrimage.

The tumultuous period between the first Russian Revolution in 1905 and the collapse of Russian control over the region in 1917-18 saw Baltic Orthodoxy emerge as a laboratory for church reform. Drawing both on a wider discourse of reform and on novel forms of religiosity unique to

the area, Orthodox churchmen (Latvian-, Estonian-, and Russian-speaking) made a distinctive contribution to ecclesiastical renovation while at the same time facing the violence and deprivation unleashed by war and revolution. Following the establishment of the independent republics of Latvia and Estonia, the Orthodox minorities confronted a range of new questions: how should they relate to the new states and their laws regarding religion? What was their relationship with the Moscow patriarchate and other autocephalous Orthodox churches, particularly the patriarchate of Constantinople? And how would they remain united in the face of ethnic diversity?

Funded by the University of Tartu and run by Dr James M. White (Ural Federal University/University of Tartu) and

Professor Irina Paert (University of Tartu), the 'Baltic Orthodoxy' project aims to provide accessible and informative resources to members of the general public, students, and academics about Orthodoxy in the Baltic. The first and most important step in this project is the new website www.balticorthodoxy.com. Ranging from the creation of the Riga diocese in 1836 to the German invasion in 1940, the resources on this website include biographies, photographs, translated primary sources, videos, and links to further reading. Some of these are interactive, such as a comprehensive time line, story maps, and downloadable archival documents. Planned updates over the next year include a YouTube channel, a section on Old Belief, and book/article reviews.

Dr James M. White

Open letter from BASEES to the Russian Ministry of Science and Higher Education

On 11 February 2019, the Minister of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation, Mikhail Kotiukov, issued an ordinance that made the regulations for collaboration with foreign academics significantly more stringent.

It introduces a two-person rule for meetings with foreign academics, i.e. it stipulates that at each meeting there should be at least two Russian representatives in attendance, and that these representatives should file a report on the meeting thereafter. As the Russian newspaper Kommersant reported on 8 October, the Kazan Federal University has already adopted these new rules in its internal guidelines.

Many within the Russian academic community regard the ordinance as extremely counterproductive to research and as an expression of official mistrust towards foreign scholars and their academic partners in the Russian Federation. Foreign scholars, who are currently working with Russian partners, have also voiced their serious concerns and misgivings. The British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies, together with the [Deutsche Gesellschaft für Osteuropakunde](#), the [Verband der Osteurohistorikerinnen und -historiker](#), and the [Deutsche Slavistenverband](#),

expressed these concerns in a joint open letter to the Minister of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation, Mikhail Kotiukov on 1 October 2019.

'As academic organisations, we look back on three decades of successful binational and international collaboration with individuals and institutions from the Russian Federation. This collaboration has opened up new research perspectives and has created a spirit of mutual trust, from which everyone involved has benefited to a high degree.

As societies for eastern European research in Germany and Britain, we have a great interest in further expanding and strengthening cooperation with colleagues from the Russian Federation. The new regulations issued by your ministry threaten to destroy this trustworthy international collaboration in the academic and research fields. This has been a cause of major concern and misgivings in the academic community.

We therefore ask you to clarify the intention behind the above-mentioned ordinance, and to refrain from imposing any restrictions on international academic exchange.'

[Link to full letter >>](#)



Book Review

Derek Offord, Vladislav Rjéoutski and Gesine Argent
The French Language in Russia: A Social, Political, Cultural and Literary History. Amsterdam University Press, 2018. 699 pages. ISBN: 9789462982727. €45.

The field of historical sociolinguistics, combining diachronic and sociolinguistic aspects of language, is relatively new, having only really established itself in the last 30 years. In *The French Language in Russia: A Social, Political, Cultural and Literary History*, Offord, Rjéoutski and Argent provide a study of the linguistic and social influence of French in Russia, which they divide into two threads – language practice, encompassing diplomacy, high society, propaganda and French at Court; and language attitudes, reflecting notions of social and national identity. As the authors point out, others have alluded to the importance of the French language in Russia, particularly in the 19th century. In this work, however, we have a detailed study of its standing. The breadth and depth of scholarship demonstrated across the diverse strands is impressive, providing an important contribution to a developing field.

The thematic organisation of the book allows the reader to make his or her own connections and conclusions regarding the material presented, and the importance of this form of study. The style of writing is clear and engaging, providing a text that is accessible to specialists in various areas without seeming as if it is two distinct topics uncomfortably situated other than subtly aligned, and the text's arguments convincing. For example, the sections on cultural propaganda and political polemics (Chapter 7) and perceptions of bilingualism in the classical Russian novel (Chapter 9) provide perceptive readings of two distinct subjects within the wider scope of the work.

While the text may be historical by design, there is much to be gleaned regarding the relationship between language and identity that may be applied to contemporary Russian – and other – society. Offord, Rjéoutski and Argent have produced an important, original and scholarly work which will be of interest to specialists in political, social and cultural studies, as well as linguists. This work could almost be considered a blueprint for any future studies in historical sociolinguistics.

Alison Long, Keele University



Selected new titles from Glagoslav Publications

I Want a Baby and Other Plays
by Sergei Tretyakov
Glagoslav Publications
August 2019

When Sergei Tretyakov's ground-breaking play, *I Want a Baby*, was banned by Stalin's censor in 1927, it was a signal that the radical and innovative theatre of the early Soviet years was to be brought to an end. A glittering, unblinking exploration of the realities of post-revolutionary Soviet life, *I Want a Baby* marks a high point in modernist experimental drama. Tretyakov's early plays led directly to Eisenstein's highly influential theory of 'the montage of attractions', while later his ideas were crucial in the formation of Bertolt Brecht's theory of epic theatre. Brecht, in fact, called Tretyakov 'my teacher'. The reason why is evident in his plays, now collected and published for the first time.

Mikhail Bulgakov: The Life and Times
by Marietta Chudakova
Glagoslav Publications
August 2019

Marietta Chudakova's biography of Bulgakov was first published in 1988 and remains the most authoritative and comprehensive study of the writer's life ever produced. It has received acclaim for the journalistic style in which it is written: the author draws on unpublished manuscripts and early drafts of Bulgakov's novels to bring the writer to life. She also explores archive documents and memoirs written by some of Bulgakov's contemporaries so as to construct a comprehensive and nuanced portrait of the writer and his life and times. The scholar casts light on Bulgakov's life with an unrivalled eye for detail and a huge amount of affection for the writer and his works. Includes an introduction by Professor Julie Curtis.

The Hemingway Game
by Evgeny Grishkovets
Glagoslav Publications
June 2019

The Hemingway Game is an urban romance which depicts the life of a shirt over the course of one day (worn in the morning and taken off late at night), revealing a lot about the main character, who subsequently moved to Moscow some time ago. He, just like all of us, wakes up in the morning, goes to work, meets his friends and has his daily routine; that is until love changes everything. Written in a similar style to Grishkovets' plays, this short novel depicts the same type of unity of time, place and action, as well as psychological subtlety. *The Hemingway Game* is the first novel from Russian playwright and performer of his own plays, Evgeny Grishkovets.

A Flame Out at Sea
by Dmitry Novikov
Glagoslav Publications
April 2019

The characters in Novikov's work are predominantly people of the Russian North: Pomors, Karelians and Komi. In 2013 Novikov, along with other Karelian writers, proclaimed the Manifesto on a New Northern Prose, the mission of which Novikov described as: "Though these are trying times for Russian literature, there is light, there is hope that it will retain its key underlying principles of honesty, faith, beauty. How great it is that these principles fully fit with and correspond to the old and new, living, and strong direction of Russia's Northern Prose!"