

---

## REGIONAL COOPERATION OF UKRAINE, BELARUS, POLAND AND LITHUANIA: NEW DIMENSIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Anatoliy Kruglashov\*

The analytical overview considers and summarizes the main scientific results of the International Scientific Conference *Ukraine, Belarus, Poland and Lithuania: Through Collisions of the Past Towards Common European Values and Cooperation Perspectives*, which was held on 17-18 April 2008 at Jury Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University.

The article considers the goals and objectives of the conference, its priorities, course of the work and main content of the discussion. It also covers the contribution of the participants to the disclosure of the discussed issues and presents the main proposals made at the conference.

The article provides general conclusions on the event and demonstrates perspectives for publishing the conference material and implementation of the results of the conference into a scientific and educational activity. Particularly, there is reason to believe that this type of scientific communication will work permanently and Vilnius will become the venue of the next conference.

### Introduction

Historically, the national, cultural and political development of modern Lithuania, Ukraine, Belarus and Poland was very deeply intertwined and interconnected. Beginning from the times of Kievan Russia and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, proceeding with common history with Rzeczpospolita and ending with the period of entering the Russian Empire and Soviet Union, the population and territories of these countries were primarily in similar and very close social, cultural, spiritual and political conditions. This situation started changing fundamentally after the disintegration of the socialist camp and breakup of the USSR. After Lithuania and Poland chose to orient their development in the European and Euro-Atlantic direction in the early 1990s, they soon became full

---

\*Anatoliy Kruglashov – an academic coordinator of the conference, doctor of political science, professor, head of the Department of Political Science and Public Administration at Jury Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University, Ukraine; tutor of the Master Program “European Studies” at the European Humanities University in Vilnius, Lithuania; e-mail: akruglas@gmail.com

members of NATO and the EU. Ukraine proclaimed European and Euro-Atlantic integration as a strategic goal in the early 1990s, but has not yet achieved decisive success in this direction. Belarus, with its neo-Soviet development model, cultivated by the present Minsk appeared to stand entirely apart from these processes. Regardless of the officially proclaimed multivectorial foreign policy, the country has been demonstrating political and economic orientation towards Russia for a long time.

All these recently acquired, more fundamental and historically justified differences do not prevent the four countries from maintaining a special interest in each other. The intellectual, business and political elites of these countries are quite well aware of the benefits of cooperation and express certain interest in realisation of the potential of regional cooperation. The issues that they are facing at the moment are also very similar. In order to understand the perspectives of their cooperation, besides the above-mentioned factors it is very important to bear in mind the fact that the historical heritage of these countries and communities, similar in many respects or even common to a considerable extent, still has an impact on the contemporary state of the countries and vision of their future, including predetermining forms of communication between the neighbours.

In order to clarify, inter alia, these crucial issues and bring the existing level and quality of cooperation to a higher level, the Political Science Centre of Bukovyna at the Department of Political Sciences and Public Administration of the Faculty of History, Political Sciences and International Relations of Jury Fedkovich Chernivtsi National University (Ukraine) in cooperation with the European Humanities University (Vilnius, Lithuania) and under support of the Regional Representative Office of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Ukraine and Belarus held an international scientific conference *Ukraine, Belarus, Poland and Lithuania: Through Collisions of the Past Towards Common European Values and Cooperation Perspectives*. Certain support and assistance in conducting this conference on 17-18 April 2008 was also provided by Chernivtsi Regional State Administration, Chernivtsi Regional Council, Jagiellonian University (Krakow, Poland) and High Business School (Novy Sazc, Poland).

As was demonstrated by the active scientific communication during the conference, the relationships between people of Ukraine, Belarus, Poland and

Lithuania have a long and rich history full of various examples of fruitful cooperation, close cultural connections, common political experience and national traditions. Despite many, sometimes dramatic, events of the past that drew the attention of both researchers and the society, modern dialogue of the neighbouring nations requires a systematic approach and a new semantic structuring. Among the priority tasks of the conference, the following were defined by the organizers:

1. Development and deepening of scientific contacts among researchers in the humanities and social sciences of Ukraine, Belarus, Poland and Lithuania.
2. Identifying crucial problematic issues regarding the relationships between these countries, and search for and development of approaches to solve these issues based on constructivism and objectivity.
3. Investigating opportunities provided to these countries by the European integration processes and political and energy safety challenges arising in the region.
4. Making practical proposals regarding future joint events, development and implementation of perspective models of cooperation between scientists, in particular, historians, political scientists, cultural scientists, and representatives of public organisations of Ukraine, Belarus, Poland and Lithuania.

### **Issues of scientific dialogue during the main conference sessions**

The conference was conducted in consecutive sessions. The first session was devoted to historiosophical and historiographical, rather than only historical, analysis of the experience of the past in the consciousness of the elites and society, and its impact on the relationships of the neighbouring countries Ukraine, Belarus, Poland and Lithuania. During this session, essential attempts to conceptualise studying the historical past were made in respect of people of the neighbouring countries and their political, sociocultural and spiritual contacts. The contemporary state of the mutual knowledge and historical self-conscious-

ness of Ukrainian, Belarusian, Polish and Lithuanian people, as well as their interference and conditionality were also analysed. Critical consideration was given to the stereotypes of mutual perception formed throughout the long period of the past and an interpretation was made with regard to the role of historical science and methodological readiness of its representatives to form civilized principles of dialogue between the neighbouring nations.

Among the many presentations and reports given at the conference, the issues touched by certain colleagues, who aroused the highest interest of the participants, are worth mentioning. Thus, docent Audronė Janužytė (Vilnius) touched insufficiently explored aspects of the formation of an idea of the state society in Lithuania at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by giving an author's evaluation of various alternative political projects and theoretical concepts, among which, in particular, proposals to create a common state with Russia, Poland and Belarus were made. Professor Grigoriy Minenkov (Vilnius) summarized and gave a critical consideration to the practice of construction of historical narratives in post-communist societies by focusing primarily on the experience of post-Soviet Belarus compared to the practice of the neighbouring countries. He showed a dependency of these structures on ideological considerations, values and political goals of the authorities and opposition, and on the correlation of the impact of various political forces, public inertia and other factors. Professor Alyaksandr Smalyanchuk (Grodno, Belarus) proceeded on and clarified this subject from a particular historiographical point of view. He made an interesting and comprehensive attempt to compare the state of the Soviet and contemporary Belarusian historical science by pointing out the predominance therein of the Soviet methodological and scientific organisational heritage that has not been mastered until now. The scientist noted that the formation of the proper national discourse of the Belarusian history in the country appeared to be a marginalized semi-official version of the Soviet historiography. Moreover, this branch of science turned out to be in a very peculiar position when quite a number of its representatives lost even those values which were specific for certain periods of development of the historical science in Soviet times. They did not, however, acquire either Western pluralistic or academic openness, and remained weakly integrated in the European and global academic space.

Active interest was aroused by a presentation passionate in its tone and content which was given by docent Alexander Massan (Chernivtsi, Ukraine) who enthusiastically and originally interpreted the relationships of late medieval Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine as relationships which evolved from an armed confrontation and lack of understanding to mutual rapprochement and cooperation. The author polemized with the contemporary Lithuanian researchers, who cast doubt on the certainty of the Union of Krewo, and proved the authenticity and meaning of the documents by which this Act was recorded. The speaker insisted on giving special importance to that event in the formation of dialogue between the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Poland and in the development of their common state society.

The next session joined together the efforts of the researchers engaged in European integration issues. They were mainly considered from the point of view of threats to the regional safety of the countries. A presentation which was jointly prepared by Professor Irmina Matonytė and investigator Justė Tolvašaitė had a programmatic meaning. By considering the threats to Europe's safety as perceived by the elites of Germany, Lithuania and Poland, the authors of the presentation could clearly bring out something more than only the things which were common and specific to those elites and their approaches to safety and European solidarity challenges. The authors insisted on the advisability of applying a socio-constructivistic approach as a more effective approach compared to the school of rational conflict rationalism. They proved that perceiving "others" from the outside as a threat forms a certain identity. This, in turn, leads to the fact that the development of a European identity implies, with necessity, the presence of some common threats. In other words, when talking about a common European identity, European elites must perceive external threats in a similar way. The analysis of the countries selected by the authors of the presentation allowed us to draw the conclusion that it is economic development that is a key factor that disunites the common European identity. Countries with a lower level of income pose greater danger to the unity of the EU than all the other external threats. On the other hand, ideological self-identification of the national elites is one more disuniting factor. For example, rightists are more concerned about the threats caused by EU enlargement and the possible entry of Turkey into the EU, and they are also worried about Russian interference.

At the same time, leftists, much more than rightists, are concerned about the fact that the relations between individual countries of the EU and the USA become closer than the relations between these countries and other EU member states. Finally, the East/West dichotomy at the level of individual states is a very important challenge to the common European identity. Eastern EU members are mostly concerned about Russian influence in Europe, while Western EU member states are concerned about possible further enlargement of the EU.

Anatoliy Lysyuk, a scientist from Brest, broadened the proposed topos of discussion and attempted to summarise the contemporary state of safety culture in its regional East European context by referring to political-philosophical and social approaches. Wide analytics was given in a presentation of professor Arvydas Matulionis. Using the example of Lithuania, he presented statistical, demographical and sociological data demonstrating relevancy and insufficient understanding of the main social challenges to national safety. Particularly interesting were reasoned considerations of the author of the presentation on the correlation of global and national trends in the social sphere, and opportunities and drawbacks of the social policy which were imposed on the Lithuanian community and state after Lithuania entered the EU.

Professor Sergiy Fedunyak (Chernivtsi, Ukraine) proceeded on the discussion of the safety issues by choosing a safety discourse in the rhetoric of Ukrainian and Polish political elites as a subject for consideration. He proposed his view of the degree of security that citizens of the neighbouring countries feel. He analysed the key threats to national security articulated by the leaders of those countries. Based on the degree of public understanding of the threats by elites and on the reaction of the society to these proposals and their correlation with political practice, the speaker proposed to evaluate the adequacy of political management in both countries and its conformity with the contemporary level of requirements to the mature political leadership.

Interesting data (based on Bertelsmann Foundation studies) related to the present state of democracy in Central and Eastern European countries and Lithuania, in particular, after entering the European Union, were brought to the attention of the conference participants by Lithuanian colleague docent Romualdas Kacevičius. Referring to the materials of the presentation, despite the indubitable beneficial influence of preparing and entering the EU on the

Lithuanian society, the democratic process in this country after entering the EU acquired certain features of stagnation with respect to democratic procedures and active participation of the citizens.

Regional resources of bi- and multilateral cooperation were considered by docent Vladislav Struginskiy (Chernivtsi) by giving specific examples of a Ukrainian-Polish dialogue. He presented a systematic overview of the participation of the Chernivtsi region of Ukraine in different partner programmes with Polish colleagues at the level of voivodeships, cities, and individual administrative-territorial units of the two countries. He highlighted the importance and fruitfulness of active participation in such programmes of the civil society institute, including national cultural organisations of various ethnic groups in both countries. The given examples were especially convincing also for the reason that the speaker had been the head of the regional Adam Mickevicz Polish Culture Society in Chernivtsi. Close to the attention focus, but oriented towards studying new initiatives on the use of regional resources of cross-border cooperation, was a presentation made by investigator and civil activist of authority Yaroslav Kirpushko (Chernivtsi).

Professor Anatoliy Kruglashov (Chernivtsi) presented a report prepared together with Belarusian investigator Yuliya Kotskaya on problematic issues of cross-border cooperation between the neighbouring countries. By concentrating attention on the comparison of the models and tools of the regional policy of Ukraine and Belarus, the authors ranged the main difficulties related to the development of this kind of cooperation. Among those are essential differences in the foreign policy priorities of both countries, greater or lesser extent of centralization of regional administration that leaves very little room for their own initiatives, peripheral position of boundary regions with respect to national financial flows, limited material and financial as well as institutional organisational resources which do not allow successful implementation of interregional and cross-border cooperation.

The third session *The Politico-Legal and Public Relations Between Ukraine, Belarus, Poland and Lithuania in the Context of European Integration* was to consider processes of post-communist transformation in these countries. It provided to the participants of the scientific meeting an opportunity to trace the evolution of the political systems and regimes of these countries and assess

the development of democratic processes, formation and problems of further development of the civil society, and the impact of internal political factors on multilateral relations of Ukraine, Belarus, Poland and Lithuania.

Certain tonality to the session was given by a presentation of Professor Y. Makar from Ukraine. The speaker, having wide personal and theoretical experience in the considered field of his study, gave an attentive and many-sided presentation on the problems of stereotypes in Ukrainian-Polish interpersonal relationships. After him, a Polish expert Dr. Przemyslaw Zurawski vel Grajewski proposed his own understanding of the role of the EU as a new resource of the Polish policy with respect to Ukraine and Belarus which showed an original combination of neorealistic and national romantic approaches to the analysis of this topic.

Considerable interest was aroused by theses reflected in a presentation of Prof. Sergey Troyan (Rovno, Ukraine) who proposed his understanding in Ukraine's measuring post-Soviet integration space. Naturally, Kiev's ambition to become an alternative centre with respect to Russia's attraction of countries for the post-Soviet space is, as compared to the Kremlin's policy, supported by lower resource potential and performance opportunities. Nevertheless, Ukraine makes efforts as an initiative regional player which deserves our attention and respect.

The next session of the conference discussed politico-legal and public relations between Ukraine, Belarus, Poland and Lithuania in the context of European integration. The participants of the discussion were expected to provide a certain synthesis of practical experience and theoretical knowledge on the mutual relations of Ukraine, Belarus, Poland and Lithuania at the level of cross-border, interregional and Euroregional cooperation, and analysis of transnational cooperation of the neighbouring countries. Scientists who study and take part in the development of relations between the countries in the context of post-Soviet integration and make forecasts on their perspectives in the European and Euro-Atlantic space had the floor during this session.

Dr. Artur Wolek (Novy Sazc) gave a comprehensive presentation in which he considered and classified informal rules and institutions which form mechanisms of corruption, and proposed evaluations of quality of democracy in Poland and Ukraine based on these considerations. Professor Antanas Kulakauskas

from Lithuania systematised the experience of the post-communist transformation in Lithuania and frankly pointed out difficulties that arose on the way to democratic consolidation of the Lithuanian society. The speaker's Ukrainian colleague Prof. Vladimir Fisanov proposed to discuss controversial issues on the degree of maturity of the democratic systems in the post-communist countries by taking an issue of openness of the political class in all four countries as a basis of his reflections and interpreting it from the point of view of the clientele model of development of the social environment in these countries. A focus analysis of Prof. Nikolay Primush (Donetsk) was addressed at the stages of the formation and development of the party system in Poland in light of entering the EU, and proposed to be used as a reference in making certain conclusions for the Ukrainian political class and expert environment.

The conference ended with a session on cultural, scientific and educational contacts in relations between Ukraine, Belarus, Poland and Lithuania in light of enlargement of the EU. It aimed to consider the present state of scientific and educational contacts between state institutions and non-government organizations, produce particular proposals on the establishment of bi- and multilateral relations, and determine possible common projects in the field of historical, economic, political, sociological and other relevant studies.

This focus was given in the presentation of Belarusian colleagues Vladimir and Valentina Lyukevich, who proposed a study rich in specific data on dynamics and the meaning of tourism in the system of Euroregional cooperation. The data showed how dysfunctional development of relations of regional authorities-partners hinders intensification of personal contacts, attraction of investment and modernization of the social infrastructure of the boundary areas.

Interest was aroused by the presentation of historian Natali Yusova (Kiev, Ukraine), who demonstrated how the Belarusian component was used in the formation of the Soviet paradigm of the "Old Russian nationality" and its remaining level of meaning for the contemporary humanistic science in this country. The discussion touched upon the political innovations of Polish leadership that generated a mixed response in the neighbouring countries. This was mentioned in the presentation of Nataliya Nechayeva-Yuriychuk (Chernivtsi, Ukraine), who made an attempt to predict the impact of introduction of the Pole Card on demographical changes in Ukraine and Poland.

## **Conclusions**

At the end of the discussions, the results of the conference were summed up. The participants of the discussion evaluated the high level of the presentations and reports, and versatility of scientific approaches and opinions heard in the course of the discussions. The main results of the conference must be presented in a special collection of scientific articles published in cooperation with the Chernivtsi National University and European Humanities University. Furthermore, certain articles, which are mostly significant from the point of view of the considered issues, will also be published in Lithuanian and Polish editions. All this will provide wider opportunities for the interested audience to become familiar with the results of the works of the scientists and experts who gathered at this conference in Chernivtsi.

The participants of the conference supported a Prof. Kruglashov's idea to make this form of scientific communication work on a permanent basis and to suggest the Lithuanian institutions hold the next conference in Vilnius after having determined what organisations would take over the task of preparation for the next conference.

The participants stated that there were no insuperable contradictions between the intellectual elite from the conference member states and that it would open new opportunities for further dialogue and partnership between them. In addition, this form of communication offered to all participants new opportunities and chances for professional cooperation and diverse, including institutional, partnership. It's important to note that the creation of a dynamic forum such as a conference devoted to urgent issues of mutual relations between Lithuania, Poland, Ukraine and Belarus could create a new communication platform between researchers and lecturers in these countries, bring a new impulse to the relationships of the neighbouring countries, and intensify integration and cooperation contacts and processes in the so-called Border Zone. The theoretical and conceptual potential worked out by the researchers could turn out to be quite useful not only in educational and research activity, but also in political practical activity of the member states of the four-lateral dialogue.

**Publishing House**

PLC Kronta

Šiaulių g. 3, 01133 Vilnius, Lithuania

Phone: +370 5 212 18 71

Fax: +370 5 262 45 93

E-mail: [leidykla@kronta.lt](mailto:leidykla@kronta.lt)

[www.kronta.lt](http://www.kronta.lt)