

Editorial

After 25 years of silence the Journal of Belarusian Studies is back. The renewed Journal will serve as an international platform where Belarusian and Western scholars of Belarus can publicise their research.

The Journal will appear both in English and in Belarusian. On the one hand, it will help Belarusians share their vision of the country and its development in English in accordance with standards accepted in Western peer-reviewed publications. The Journal will help them become more visible in Western academia.

On the other hand, the Belarusian version of the Journal will allow Western scholars of Belarus to enter the mainstream of Belarusian scholarly life and reach a wider readership in the country.

Building on the long history of the Journal, which started in 1965, the new version will include articles on a variety of disciplines by both Western scholars and Belarusian scholars, who work in Belarus and abroad.

In this issue Andrej Kotljarchuk, a Belarusian scholar from Sweden, examines contemporary memory politics in Belarus as exhibited by new monuments to Holocaust victims, the genocide of the Roma people, and the mass killings of representatives of the Polish minority during World War II.

The article analyses various instances of the exploitation of the mythology of World War II for daily political purposes. Dr Kotljarchuk draws interesting parallels with memory politics in Ukraine, and its conciliation with Poland and Russia with which Belarus shares similar problems, namely the very limited commemoration of the genocide of the Roma and the swift rate of memorialisation of the Holocaust.

In the next paper David Marples from Canada investigates the geopolitical balancing act of the Belarusian authorities. He notes that whether or not the EU and Russia have conflicting interests, Belarus portrays them as two separate and antithetical power blocs that are competing for the allegiance of Belarus. The two neighbours reciprocate this perception: the EU imposes sanctions after Belarusian elections; Russia recognises these elections as free and fair.

Dr Marples argues that if Russia imposes too much pressure, the Belarusian authorities can always release high-level political prisoners to gain leverage with the Europeans. Essentially this is a political card game, but the rules have been established less in Brussels and Moscow than in Minsk. The article also tackles a number of other difficult questions such as whether the EU is correct in imposing its geopolitical and moral views on a former Soviet regime, if much of the

population is content with its government and standard of living.

London-based Professor Arnold McMillin has extensively contributed to the Journal in the past. This time his piece deals with the poetry of Belarusians who were imprisoned for the ‘crime’ of resisting hostile political systems or defending minority national and religious allegiances. He gives remarkable accounts of Belarusian poets in Polish, Soviet and contemporary Belarusian prisons. Professor McMillin illustrates his articles with fascinating examples such as that of Siarhiej Novik-Piajun (1906-1994) who was first imprisoned by the Poles, then by the German invaders, and finally sent to Soviet camps by Stalin.

Finally, a scholar from Hrodna, Natallia Sliž, looks at the laws and traditions related to noblewomen’s dowries in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania of the sixteenth – seventeenth centuries. Dr Sliž touches upon such aspects as the order of apportionment of a dowry, content of a dowry, receipt of a dowry, and disposal of a dowry. She describes a number of interesting cases related to noblewomen’s dowries, which paint a vivid picture of life in the territory of now known as Belarus.

This issue also includes book reviews by Fr Aleksandr Nadson, Professor Arnold McMillin and Paula Borowska. Jim Dingley contributes a summary of the most recent activities of the Anglo-Belarusian Society. The issue concludes with an overview of Internet sites of Belarusian analytical centres which may help foreign researchers better understand Belarus.

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