

# Editorial

The 2016 issue of the Journal largely resulted from a conference organised by the Ostrogorski Centre and the UCL School of Slavonic and Eastern European Studies in London in March 2016. The conference gathered around 20 scholars of Belarus from the United Kingdom, Germany, United States, Canada, Poland, and France. Three papers were selected for publication alongside the annual lecture on Belarusian Studies delivered by Professor Andrew Wilson.

In the issue's first article, Aleksandra Pomiecko of the University of Toronto writes about the bandit-partisans of West Belarus in the 1920s. She notes that the history of the Second World War has often overshadowed less well-known parts of Belarusian history, such as the anti-Bolshevik movements on the territory of Belarus. The article analyses portrayals of bandits in newspapers to understand local perceptions in Belarus. The bandit Ataman Mukha exemplifies the 'heroic' and 'cult-like' effect of bandit organisations, and his portrayal illuminates local sentiments and perceptions. Collectively, the article seeks to describe local sentiments towards this phenomenon in the borderland region, which has traditionally been viewed in historiography from the perspective of occupational forces.

Veronica Laputska of the Polish Academy of Sciences analyses Nazi war criminals in Belarusian internet media discourse, discussing the cases of Andrei (Anthony) Sawoniuk and Vladimir Katriuk. The author distinguished between state-owned, 'neutral', and oppositional media coverage of the two war criminals. The author concludes that Russian propaganda wields profound influence on the Belarusian mass-media. She notes that rather than coming up with their own explanations, Belarusian state mass-media often merely echo the Russian media. This differs from the approach of 'neutral' and opposition newspapers, which in the majority of cases try to remain objective or oppose the messages of the Russian mass-media.

Ina Shakhrai of Humboldt University in Berlin examines the reactions to Alexievich's 2015 Nobel Prize win in Belarus and Russia. She focuses on the interconnections between the common Soviet past of the countries and the spread of nationalist sentiments in the post-Soviet space following the Ukrainian crisis. She argues that Alexievich's dismissal of autocratic regimes, alongside her identity – encompassing Soviet, Russian, Belarusian and Ukrainian elements – prevents her from becoming a unifying figure in Belarus and Russia.

Professor Andrew Wilson of University College London looks at how Belarus has transitioned from a social contract to a security contract after the start of the

crisis in Ukraine. He observes a triple shift since 2014 as Russia became more aggressive towards its neighbours and Lukashenka shifted in a more statist direction, followed by part of the old opposition. Belarus has not been invaded, but a sense of threat, and a desire to avoid conflict, has led to a certain closing of ranks. Professor Wilson notes that it would be much easier for Russia to impose their own man at the top rather than break the bonds between the leader and the elite, or between the leader and society.

Dźmitry Papko of Warsaw University reviews a new collection of texts by Valancin Akudovič, one of the most renowned Belarusian philosophers. According to the review, Akudovič proves that Belarusian language, history, and culture are less important to the process of constructing the nation's collective identity than the mere existence of the Belarusian state.

Peter Braga of the School of Slavonic and Eastern European Studies analyses three articles on Belarus-China relations and the commitment of the Belarusian authorities to a high-risk strategy to bring in Chinese investment. The Secretary of the Anglo-Belarusian Society Brian Bennett also gives an annual account of the most important activities of the Anglo-Belarusian Society.

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