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PANSLAVISM, SLAVIC STUDIES AND NATIONAL CULTURE

During a workshop held in Italy thanks to the support of the European Science Foundation¹, Ya. Isayevych presented a paper on the significance and role of the idea of Slavic unity in different epochs with reference to the development of Ukrainian culture. He stressed the dialectic relationship between the “Slavic idea” and national movements, highlighting, among other things, the difference between Slavic countries that share boundaries with non-Slavic countries (such as the Czech Republic, Serbia and Bulgaria in the past) and countries without such boundaries. We cannot but agree that Ukraine – as always! – is a “special case”: In theory, its geopolitical position between two Slavic countries made Pan-Slavistic ideas unnecessary, since no “external” opponent can be considered a threat for Ukrainian identity (as the Germans or Turks were, for centuries, for the Czechs or Serbs and Bulgarians respectively). In the case of Ukraine, the threat lies in its special ties with Russia and Belarus². Such ties make the idea of Slavic unity seem particularly dangerous for contemporary Ukrainian political and cultural development. It is true that a special blend of Ukraine’s communist heritage, ideological messianism, orthodox religious extremism, anti-American, anti-Western and anti-globalization tendencies threatens to undermine genuine democratic thinking and political life. This is not only a problem for Ukraine, Russia and Belarus²: in fact, though different – being a mixture of extreme xenophobic nationalism and obscurantist Catholicism – fundamentalist ideological trends are not unknown in Western Europe. They are also a threat for progressive civilizations such as Poland, as illustrated by recent events linked to the election of the new Polish Parliament and President in autumn 2005.

But however important, here I shall leave political problems aside and focus on a comment by Isayevych at the end of the above-mentioned paper. In traditional Slavic studies in the West, both in Europe and in North America – he argues – the history and culture of any East-European country, including Ukraine, are frequently included in the overall syllabus of a Slavic department as “Slavic Studies”. Even scientific journals are mainly named according to this same principle. Moreover, we tend to say “Slavists” (or “Slavicists”, depending on local variants!) when referring to specialists who often have a basically “monocultural” and “monolingual” field of academic interests, since they are Russianists, Polishists, Bulgarianists, and so on. To Isayevych’s considerations, I would like to add that,

¹ “The Reintegration of Ukraine in Europe. A historical, historiographical and cultural urgent question”. The papers are due to be published shortly by Dell’Orso (Alessandria, Italy).

² How troubling the question may be is shown by the recent book by A. Wilson, *Virtual Politics. Faking Democracy in the Post-Soviet World*. New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2005. I would also like to mention O. Hnatiuk. *Pożegnanie z imperium. Ukraińskie dyskusje o tożsamości*. Lublin, 2003.

probably, only Ukrainists belonging to the diaspora consider themselves “exclusively” Ukrainists. Specialists in Ukrainian studies from other cultures (Italian, German, French etc.) tend to perceive themselves not only as Ukrainists, but also as Slavists. I may add that a similar pattern is also represented by the International Association of Slavists (MKS). Initially, the latter focused mainly on the “classical” field of Slavic Philology: the Cyrillo-Methodian heritage, Old Church Slavonic texts, the evolution of the Protoslavonic and/or Common Slavonic language, Ethnogenesis, and so on. However, it is no coincidence that the First International Congress of Slavists was held in 1929 in Prague, when Pan-Slavism and Eurasianism were “in vogue”: This does not mean that Slavic studies were always false or ideologically biased at that time (on the contrary: they were often excellent!)³. However, Isayevych is certainly right in pointing out the relationship between such ideas and general Slavic studies as a historical reality.

Later, as it is well known, MKS congresses became broad ‘containers’ with papers on every possible field and period of any Slavic country, ranging from “Славяноведение” to Socialist realism! There is no denying that the MKS itself and its congresses were largely dominated (and manipulated) by Soviet – or more precisely Russian-Soviet – patterns of thought and of ruling cultural politics. Contrasts between representatives of Western Slavists and Soviet block countries became so marked in the 1970s and 80s, that Western Slavists decided to publish a volume dedicated to the history of Slavic studies in non-Slavic countries as a separate (and controversial) set of articles. A new volume appeared a few weeks ago, considering developments in Slavic studies in non-Slavic countries up to the year 2002⁴.

It is worth remembering that, besides the International Association of Slavists, other associations devoted to examining the cultures of various Slavic countries have been established in different periods. Here too, the (chronological and numerical) priority of Russian studies has to be acknowledged. From the point of view of the development of history and culture in Eastern Europe in the 1990s, however, the most significant event was the creation of the International Association of Ukrainianists (MAU) in July 1989. Under the “patronage” of the outstanding Italian Slavist Riccardo Picchio, and with the most active cooperation of the “Fathers” of diaspora Ukrainian studies (both brilliant Slavists) O. Pritsak and I. Shevchenko, historians, literary historians, philologists and linguists from Soviet Ukraine, from USA and Canada and from Western European countries met for the first time and planned future cooperation.

³ Aspects of this question were discussed, among other things, during the conferences held by the Commission of History of Slavic Studies in 1992: cf. *L'idea dell'unità e della reciprocità slava e il suo ruolo nello sviluppo della slavistica – Ideja slavjanskoj vzaimnosti i ee rol' v razvitii istorii slavistiki* / Red. G. Brogi Bercoff i S. Bonazza. Roma: La Fenice Edizioni, 1994; *Veda a ideológia v dejinách slavistiky* / Ed. T. Ivantjynová; Slovenska Akademia Vied. Bratislava, 1998; *Histoire de la slavistique. Le rôle des institutions* / A. Bernard Ed.; Institut d'Etudes Slaves. Paris, 2003. For Ukrainian studies cf. also my paper: G. Brogi Bercoff. Ukrainian Studies at the International Congresses of Slavists (1929–1968) // *Pagine di Ucrainistica europea* / Ed. G. Brogi Bercoff, G. Siedina. Alessandria: Edizioni Dell'Orso, 2001. P. 53-75.

⁴ Cf. Beiträge zur Geschichte der Slawistik in Nichtslavischen Ländern / Hrsg. A. Wytzens, J. Hamm. Wien, 1985; Beiträge zur Geschichte der Slawistik in Nichtslavischen Ländern / Hrsg. G. Brogi Bercoff, P. Gonneau, H. Miklas. Wien, 2005.

This was a pathbreaking event, first for Ukraine itself, since the scholars of Soviet Ukraine had the chance to establish contacts with the best specialists in the West. I am convinced that one of the reasons for the different situation of Belarus' and Ukraine today is the fact that Ukraine could rely upon Western contemporary culture and research through the diaspora Ukrainian universities and foundations (the role of Polish culture and policy was also significant, but it is not directly related to my discourse), while Belarus' remained somehow isolated.

The creation of the International Association of Ukrainian studies was no less pathbreaking for Western scholarship, mainly for middle and new generations. Indeed, it was during the late 1980s and the 1990s that Slavists, historians and specialists in cultural and political studies became fully aware of the existence and importance of a population of almost 50 million who see themselves as different from both the Russian and the Polish national communities. They have a rich cultural and literary tradition, and a highly developed language that has reached full status as a "literary language" following the modern standards of evaluation (polyfunctionality, codification, stylistic differentiation, general acknowledgment as the means of communication of an entire community). Before the 1980s, very few Western intellectuals knew about Ukrainian literature and language, often due more to political considerations than to purely scholarly or cultural interests (as happened in the 1930s in Italy).

There is no doubt that interest in Ukrainian history and culture grew in the 1990s thanks to the fact that Ukraine became an independent state, and one with a strategic geopolitical position. The importance of other concomitant circumstances, however, should not be underestimated. I would like to stress that in the first years following independence, Associations for Ukrainian Studies were set up in many European countries: e.g. in Italy, France, Germany and Austria. It is significant that the most enthusiastic members of these associations were Slavists, more precisely scholars with a broad spectrum of specialisations, people who generally had good knowledge of three or more Slavic languages, who were immediately able to establish the points of reference of cultural ties between Ukraine and other Slavic countries in the past (the Polish Commonwealth at first, but also the Serbian communities, the Slovak and Czech culture, just to give some examples). Russianists who were only interested in Russian culture after the 18th century looked at the new Ukraine with curiosity, but many also with concern and with some suspicion. Specialists in the history, language and culture of Medieval Rus' were challenged by the thorny question of the "Kievan heritage" as Ya. Pelensky described it. The debate is still open and will probably last a while. There is no doubt, however, that in Western countries "pure" Russianists are often less inclined to be involved in Ukrainian interests than broad spectrum Slavists. The situation might change with the younger generations, but for the time being it is rather this way, at least in Italy. As far as I know, in France, besides the obvious activity of the diaspora French-Ukrainians, interest in Ukrainian culture lies mainly with historians and politologists (such as D. Beauvois and A. De Tinguy, just to mention two of the most brilliant). In Germany there was a long tradition bound to such distinguished scholars and intellectuals as O. Horbatsch, Anna-Halja Horbatsch and H. Rothe, not to mention D. Chyzhevs'kyj. There are now several young specialists emerging (many not from Ukrainian families), thanks to the Institute of Slavic Studies at the University of Greifswald and a couple of

other institutions. In any case, it is clear that Ukrainian studies have been linked with broad Slavic interests in Germany too, at least so far.

In no way do I wish to underestimate the risks involved in an approach to Ukrainian culture based on Pan-Slavic patterns. On the contrary, now more than ever it is vital to distinguish between manifold cultural currents and academic approaches: false theories based on ideological biases (be they of Pan-Slavistic or “nativist” inspiration, or of any other radical nature) and “fundamentalist” trends should be described accurately both in Ukraine, in other Slavic countries and in Western countries. Patient work is required at all levels: “pure” academic research, textbooks and “public opinion makers”, journals and mass-media – all means at our disposal should be used to further our understanding of the fluid situation that characterises not only the young Eastern European democracies, but also the new generations of “old” Western Europe. Radical manifestations of Pan-Slavic ideologies and confused blends of ex-communist and orthodox currents (or of xenophobic nationalism) are real risks for the development of civil society. In this sense, many more books about Ukraine should be translated into Western languages⁵ (starting with the most widely known: English) and Ukrainians should have access to many more Western books, both through translations and through a better knowledge of English and other Western languages.

Coming back to a more limited (but no less important) question, such as the development of Ukrainian studies in Western countries, I would like to stress that at the present time, among scholars and young generations engaged in Slavic and Ukrainian studies, there is a tendency to “nationalise” scholarly and teaching habits. I use the term “nationalise” in a positive sense, giving it the meaning of studies concerning the language, literature and culture of one nation or country: Polish language and literature, Czech, Russian, Bulgarian, Ukrainian or any other language and literature, seen in a possible comparative approach including any other national literature. In this sense, inter-Slavic contacts are not supposed to be automatically privileged, while a comparative study of Polish and French or German, Ukrainian and Italian or German, Russian and French or English literatures and so on, should become the current way of studying a literature and culture, in the same manner that German, French, Italian and other literatures are currently compared. This tendency towards “nationalising” Slavic studies is probably also connected with the fact that four Slavic countries are now full members of the EU, or – rather – there has been such a tendency over the last twenty years and it is likely to be consolidated in the years to come thanks to the enlargement of the EU⁶.

Evidence suggests that this is both a new opportunity and an important challenge for Ukraine’s position in Ukrainian (and Slavic) studies at Western European universities or other institutions. From this perspective, the position of Ukraine may be analyzed in different ways. On the one hand, the possibility in Europe of academic research and teaching being based on a national approach, where comparative studies may bring

⁵ I underline the importance of publishing books by authors such as A. Wilson, K. Wolczuk, A. De Tinguy (to mention a few), and how important it would be to translate such works as N. Yakovenko’s or Ya. Hrytsak’s histories, or the recent book by O. Hnatjuk, mentioned above, into English.

⁶ The question has been discussed recently: L. Marinelli. Specializzazione e nuove integrazioni: qualche riflessione sugli studi slavistici (in Italia e a Roma) dopo il 1989 // *Scienze Umanistiche*. 2005. 1. This paper may be a good point of departure for further debates on this issue.

together any national culture or literature – whether Slavic or non-Slavic – is very positive: Ukrainian studies may focus on a fully settled Ukrainian national culture and literature, at the same level as Polish, French, English or German literatures and cultures; or they may focus on comparative aspects taking into consideration any of the above-mentioned literatures. This has the advantage of bringing to the fore clear methodological and disciplinary parameters. It also has an advantage of enormous value for Ukrainian culture, namely the possibility of comparing Ukrainian with German or Italian literature, but also with Russian and Polish culture on a basis of absolute equality. On the other hand, the “nationalization” of Ukrainian studies comes up against the overall difficulties of the present economic and social crisis: it is becoming increasingly difficult to create new positions at universities and other institutions, creating a new generation of scholars takes a long time, the organization of good libraries is also hindered by lack of financial support and of specialized staff. Such difficulties in Western (mainly European) countries may be partially mitigated by sustaining general Slavic studies: a strategy that partially allows to face the lack of positions for individual Slavic literatures. Thus, reliance on a traditional inter-Slavic approach is often dictated by the needs of survival.

I may add that it is also – at least partially – up to Ukraine itself to organize a better “cultural policy” in Europe: both the Ukrainian government and the intelligentsia should try to understand the needs and the “horizons of expectation” of Western specialists and the reading public. Books and articles should be offered to western readers not only in widely known languages, but also in forms of thinking and explaining that may intrigue a western mentality. Indeed, not everything that interests Ukrainians has the same value for other Europeans; and of course, the opposite is equally true!

As far as Ukrainian academic studies are concerned, I would suggest that an inter-Slavic approach corresponds also – at least in some cases – to the very nature of the subject being investigated. I will briefly examine a couple of examples. Indeed, it is not always easy to give a unique and universally valid definition of the limits and significance of the term “national literature”. For the regions where Ukrainian culture developed this is a basic problem: How can the Polish, Lithuanian, Belorussian and Jewish cultures be separated from Ukrainian culture in the 15th and 17th centuries? How could the Church Slavonic tradition, or the Polish, Italian or German tradition be ignored, and even the Armenian, Greek or Tatar ties to Galicia during several centuries?⁷ How can the culture of the Ukrainian elites be separated from Russian culture in St. Petersburg in the 19th century?

I venture to suggest that in many cases Western scholars with knowledge of two or three Slavic literatures, cultures and languages are in a good position to evaluate complex phenomena of the Ukrainian specificity, especially if they have also a certain knowledge of the Ancient and Western heritage. To be sure, being well versed in more than one Slavic culture – i.e. being a traditional Slavist – is becoming increasingly difficult. Still, such scholars continue to exist and to write interesting books, despite the fact that the methodological approaches today are very different from the past. This is why an inter-

⁷ For this and other similar questions cf. G. Brogi Bercoff. Ruś, Ukraina, Ruthenia, Wielkie Księstwo Litewskie. Rzeczpospolita, Moskwa, Rosja, Europa środkowo-wschodnia: o wielowartości i polifunkcjonalizmie kulturowym // *Contributi italiani al XIII Congresso Internazionale degli Slavisti (Ljubljana 15–21 agosto 2003)* / Eds. A. Alberti, M. Garzaniti, S. Garzonio. Pisa, 2003. P. 326-387.

Slavic approach is still fundamental for academic research and for the serious teaching of modern Ukrainian culture. I stress how important contacts with Western Polonists – who often had an inter-European and inter-Slavic approach – were for the development of Polish culture and scholarship in the second half of the 20th century.

There is no space here for further details. I would like to conclude underlining that an approach to Ukrainian culture and literature based on general Slavic studies may have different characters and functions in Ukraine, in Russia or in Western countries, and that there are also differences between North-American and Western European schools of Slavic studies. Basically speaking, this is positive, since the numerous layers of Ukrainian culture call for a plurality of approaches to be examined in its various aspects and phases. Hence, a general Slavic approach is still needed, though I agree that other approaches are equally necessary and useful. Specific aspects of Ukrainian tradition and culture, and approaches comparing Ukrainian culture with other (individual) national cultures, are both necessary and may even be more useful at this very moment.

Of course, the phrase “general Slavic approach” should in no way be confused with Pan-Slavism or with theories inspired by Pan-Slavism. Indeed, I fully agree with Professor Ya. Isayevych that, at this particular stage in history, a general Slavic approach could still favour ambiguous attitudes of “Pan-Slavic unification”, which are neither scholarly nor useful. On the contrary, they may be a threat for Ukraine and for Ukrainian and Slavic studies. Serious research and the dissemination of knowledge on this issue should be undertaken everywhere. I am convinced that an analysis of Ukrainian literature and culture in historical perspective, and with a synchronic approach, should be intensified over the coming years in order to describe the inner framework of a cultural and literary system that is autonomous and self-sufficient. Special attention should be paid to examining and publishing the many literary works that are still gathering dust in the archives⁸. Efforts have been made over the last 15 years to reconstruct the “Ukrainian literary system”, but further publications and a revision of past interpretations lie in future research. Considering Ukrainian culture as an autonomous system does not necessarily mean separating it from other cultures. It is important, however, for boundaries not to be blurred, for artificial unifications based on ideological biases to be banned and for comparisons to be made between “comparable units”, as recently pointed out by H. Rothe. This also means that Ukrainian literature should be studied in comparison with any other literature. The same holds good for Russian literature and culture, as long as Ukrainian culture is not considered part of it. The only honest approach, and the only one that would serve a useful purpose, is one based on equality. And it would not only be useful for Ukraine, but – maybe above all – for Russia itself.

⁸ By way of example, I refer to two of my own papers. The first is devoted to Varlaam Jasyn'skyj (G. Brogi Bercoff, *L'omiletica di Varlaam Jasyn'skyj fra retorica e teologia. Alcuni esempi inediti. // Russica Romana*, VIII. 2001. P. 19-26.); the second (“До питання про гомілетіку Стефана Яворського”) – about an unpublished manuscript containing the homilies of Stefan Javors'kyj – to be published in the Proceedings of the Conference held in Kyiv (12–15 October 2005) for the 390th anniversary of the foundation of the Mohylian Academy.