
Report on the 2015 ASN (Association for the Study of Nationalities) Convention at the Columbia University in New York

The Association for the Study of Nationalities held this year its 20th annual world convention. For three days, from 23rd to 25th of April 2015, hundreds of researchers from all over the world came to study, discuss and analyse the latest researches concerning Eastern Europe.

This year's convention was held on the 100th Anniversary of the Ottoman Government's decision to deport Armenian leaders from Istanbul on 24th of April 1915, the day of the so-called Medz Yeghern ("Great Crime") for the Armenian nation. In order to observe the centennial, Roy Suny's *"They Can Live in the Desert But Nowhere Else": A History of the Armenian Genocide* and Tom de Waal's *Great Catastrophe: Armenians and Turks in the Shadow of Genocide* were presented and discussed at the conference.

As usual, the convention, co-sponsored by the Harriman Institute at Columbia University, took place at the Institute's venues in New York. There were 159 panels, 17 book panels, 15 new films and 5 special events.

In every panel, the researchers had the possibility to present their works, discuss them, and learn from other scholars' criticisms. This conference is an opportunity and a showcase for its participants. In fact, after the convention, several panellists have been contacted by scientific journals in order to publish their work.

In addition, considering the urgency of the Ukrainian crisis, John Crosby and Ursula Froese, of the OSCE Vienna Office, spoke about the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, while Jose Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission from 2004 to 2014, delivered a keynote address on "The European Union and the Challenge of the Russia-Ukraine conflict".

Similarly, there was a special roundtable of scholars on Greece and the European Crisis.

There were panels on: Eurasia, the Balkans, Russia, Central Europe, Caucasus, Migration, Nationalism and various thematic panels.

Awards for the best doctoral student papers were given to: Aleksandra Zdeb and Jelena Dureinovic for the Balkans; Kyle Marquardt for Central Europe; Scott Weiner for Nationalism; Maria

Tangangaeva for Russia. Conversely, the winner of the sixth annual Harriman ASN book prize was Madeleine Reeves, for her *Border Work. Spatial Lives of the State in Rural Central Asia*.

The convention has been so successful throughout the years that from 2016 a European version of the ASN will be held in Kaunas, Lithuania. The topic chosen for the conference is *Europe, Nations and Insecurity: Challenges to Identities*.

As in previous years, some MA students of MIREES (the Master of Arts of Interdisciplinary Study and Research on Eastern Europe) of the Universities of Bologna, Vytautas Magnus in Kaunas, Corvinus of Budapest and St. Petersburg State University had a valuable possibility to participate.

The panel on *the Holocaust: History and Memory* was focused on the Second World War experience of the Jews of different parts of Europe: from Poland and Ukraine to Macedonia and Italy. As Aliza Luft, the discussant of the panel pointed out, the common idea of the papers was to understand how the memory of the Holocaust should be approached in order to guarantee a correct historical reconstruction. Gian Marco Moisé's, MIREES student present at the panel, discussed a case of Holocaust denial in the city of Parma, in Italy. The research was able to reconstruct the history of the Jewish community of the city and demonstrate through a concrete case study that Holocaust denial, when properly analysed, was historically inaccurate. Viktoria Khiterer, researcher at the Millersville University, analysed the case of Babi Yar, today Kiev, immediately after the war. The paper showed how the communist regime, set up at the end of the war, suppressed the memorialisation of the Holocaust, hindering the construction of monuments to the Jewish victims in the city.

The work of Ulf Zander, professor of the Lund University, in Sweden, was focused on Poland and the figure of Jan Karsky. Jan Karsky was recognized by the Yad Vashem as a righteous among the nations, because during the Second World War he contributed to save hundreds of Jews from the gas chambers. The figure of this man was neglected for decades by the Polish government, until 2013, when the Polish Parliament declared the following year - 2014, the Jan Karsky year. Nadège Ragaru, of Sciences Po, in Paris, France, wrote a complex research on the case of the Jews of Macedonia during the Holocaust. The paper presented at the conference was just a part of a more complex book yet to be published. Finally, Liviu Carare, of the George Baritiu Institute of History, in Romania, dealt with the case of the Czernowitz Ghetto between 1941 and 1942. The discussion revealed to be very profitable for both the researchers and the audience that actively participated in the attempt to understand the relationship that occurs between the concepts of history and memory in such delicate cases.

Panel BK 19 proved extremely useful in discussing several current issues related to the Second World War in the former Yugoslav republics. Mila Dragojevic (University of the South, Sewanee, US) presented a very accomplished paper on the memories and interpretations of World War II violence in the 1990s and 2000s in Croatia, effectively showing how WWII memory was not as influential as believed previously. Even if it is undeniable that political elites tried to ‘historicise’ the 1990s wars providing more-or-less direct connections with the WWII national struggles (and sufferings), average citizens reacted to this historical links only partially – that is, only in regions where direct warfare did happen [i.e. Eastern Slavonia, the Krajina and Lika]. Croats and Serbs alike were more prone to re-enact the Homeland War as a continuation of World War II.

Jelena Dureinovic (Justus Liebig U, Germany) gave a well-structured and detailed presentation on the jurisprudential issues arising from the (legal) process of rehabilitation of *četniks* in Serbia, particularly focusing on Dragoljub Mihailović – needless to say, the most controversial case by far, and on Bogdan Lončar and Milenko Braković (two policemen killed in the first act of insurrection led by Communist partisans). Dureinovic masterly explained the significant legal troubles this rehabilitation process has caused to jurisprudence in Serbia. Moreover, she pointed out the artificial (yet equally controversial) nature of these rehabilitations i.e. they are intended to assert the illegitimacy of partisan trials in the aftermath of the conflict rather than absolve *četnik* crimes, and the many bureaucratic headaches this rehabilitative process has brought to different Serbian governments, whether vis-à-vis neighbouring nations (particularly Croatia and Bosnia & Herzegovina) or from a financial point of view: if properly rehabilitated, *četniks* and their relatives could be entitled to war pensions similar to those given to partisan fighters.

The MIREES student Haris Avdic Pejicic presented the process of entrenchment of Croatdom and Catholicism starting in the late 19th century and effectively imploding – sadly – in 1941, trying to empirically prove the different degrees of collaboration existing between the ustaša regime, the Roman Catholic Church and the Vatican. The presentations were followed by a rich discussion, where the public asked interesting questions and gave useful remarks on how ‘open’ World War II still was in the Western Balkans and the different obstacles that scholars have to work through when analysing this particular historical period.

The panel BK16 «Transitional Justice and the Legacy of the ICTY in the Post-Yugoslav States» was led by discussant Chip Gagnon, professor from Ithaca College (USA), and the chair Iva Pauker

from the University of Melbourne (Australia). Simultaneously with the keynote address «The European Union and the Challenge of the Russia - Ukraine Conflict» of the panel SE5, the speech was presented by Jose Manuel Barroso, a former President of the European Commission. Despite of the overlapping with a famous politician, the panel BK16 got its audience: those who were interested in the subject and professionals of transitional justice. The presentation of MIREES student Kriachko Anastasia “Bringing Back Images to the Politics of Reconciliation: The Discursive Representation and Practice of Audio-visual Documents in the ICTY” opened the panel and was devoted to the theoretical and methodological aspects of the functioning of the Outreach Program of ICTY. It is nonetheless necessary to precise that it was an analysis of the images in transitional justice. Jovana Mihajlovic Trbovc (Peace Institute, Slovenia) presented her paper «The (Lack Of) Impact of the ICTY on the Public Memory of the 1992-95 War in Bosnia». The research was conducted on the basis of the statements of politicians and historical textbooks as the sources and direct representation of the public memories. The presentation of Ivor Sokolic from University College, London “How the War Started in my Village: How the Croatian public frames its understanding of the Homeland War and how to research it?” investigated the problems a researcher can face in post-conflict society and the diversity of the results that can be obtained in such research. Vladimir Petrovic, from the Institute for Contemporary History (Serbia) in his summarising paper “Hubris of Themis: ICTY and the Balkans two decades after” shows the expectations and real results of the ICTY activities in Balkans. Taking into account that ICTY is completing its activities, the main issues concerned the impact (or its lack) of ICTY on transitional justice and the process of reconciliation in the region.

At the ASN World Convention, 15 new documentaries were presented. The choice of the movies and their quality was on a very high level. Among those, watched, we would mark “Dangerous acts”¹ (about censorship and totalitarian regime in Belarus), “Serbian lawyer”² (about lawyer who works in ICTY in the defense team for Karadzic), “Uyghurs, Prisoners of the Absurd”³ (about some representatives of Uyghur minority, who were sold to Guantanamo as terrorists) and “Chechnya, War Without Trace”⁴ (about Chechnya as a police state). But the other documentaries are significant as well and devoted to genocide in Indonesia (“The Look of Silence”)⁵, to a disputed

¹“Dangerous acts”, US/UK/Belarus, 2013 (76 min.)

²“Serbian lawyer”, Germany/UK/Serbia, 2014 (82 min.).

³“Uyghurs, Prisoners of the Absurd”, Canada, 2014 (99 min).

⁴“Chechnya, War Without Trace”, France, 2015 (86 min).

⁵“The Look of Silence”, Denmark, 2014 (103 min).

territory of Abkhazia (“The Domino effect”)⁶ and Transnistrian Moldovan Republic (“PMR - in a state of limbo”⁷), the war conflict in Ukraine (“The Donetsk people’s republic, or the curious tale of the handmade country”⁸, “Maidan”⁹), about a businessman who sells weapons to violent regimes (“The notorious Mr. Bout”)¹⁰, genocide of European Jews (“The forges of history”)¹¹, feminist protest group (“I am Femen”)¹², facing the past in Balkans (“The land is hard, the sky is high”¹³, “War & Peace in the Balkans”¹⁴) and immigrants, crossing the border Mexico-US (“Who is Dayani Crystal?”¹⁵).

ASN 2015 was successfully closed with the ceremony of announcements of the Book prize, Best Doctoral Student Paper Wards and the Award for Best Documentary. During three days extraordinarily interesting events took place in the Harriman Institute at Columbia University. Starting from round tables on 'hot topics' of these days, as the Russia-Ukraine Conflict and the Greece-EU Crisis and following with the no less significant topics of migration, nationalism, human rights, public memory, international justice, gender, migration, transitional justice and others. The ASN Convention as a well organised meeting of professionals became a great opportunity for master students of MIREES to participate in the Conference of such a significance, to share their knowledge with the panellists and to get feedback for their research.

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⁶“The Domino effect”, Germany/Poland, 2014 (76 min).

⁷“PMR - in a state of limbo”, Estonia, 2014 (83 min).

⁸“The Donetsk people’s republic, or the curious tale of the handmade country”, UK, 2015 (72 min).

⁹“Maidan”, Ukraine/ Netherlands, 2014 (130 min).

¹⁰“The notorious Mr. Bout”, Russia/US, 2014 (90 min).

¹¹“The forges of history”, France, 2015 (62 min).

¹²“I am Femen”, Switzerland, 2014 (95min).

¹³ “The land is hard, the sky is high”, BiH, 2014 (64 min).

¹⁴ “War & Peace in the Balkans”, Greece, 2014 (60 min).

¹⁵“Who is Dayani Crystal?”, UK/Mexico, 2013 (98 min).