

MESletter

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Portraitreihe der MES-Gastdozenten/innen

Interview mit Mykhailo Minakov

Von Katja Sinko



Mykhailo Minakov

*born 1971
Leninsk, Volgograd
oblast, USSR*

*political
philosopher living
in Kyiv and Milano*

His major philosophical investigations focus on human experience, social knowledge, political system, historical consciousness, and multiple modernities. Since April 2017 he is a DAAD- visiting Professor at Viadrina.

Why did you choose to visit the Viadrina? What is special about the Viadrina and the MES?

I had my previous experience in cooperating with the colleagues from the Viadrina. Recently, together with Timm Beichelt and Susann Worschech from Viadrina Institute for European Studies, we published a book on “Transitional Ukraine.” I find the Viadrina scholars open for cooperation and interested in the same area of research: post-Socialist societies and political cultures and systems of Eastern Europe.

I also like Frankfurt/Oder and its surroundings. I bike around Marke with pleasure (some photoalbums can be seen [here](#) and [here](#)). This city provides me with good balance of calm life and access to Berlin fun-chaos.

What are your research interests? How can you relate them to European Studies?

Today’s Europe lives in times of re-establishing its unity, when East and West start sharing new common era. Now, the old differences remain, but new ones arrive and make Europe a new creative cultural space. Europe now faces one common fate both with Brexit and Donbas war, Catalonia secessionism and German reunification.

Eastern Europe is a laboratory of ideologies today. Unimaginable populism, postmodern conservatism, demodernizing fascism and many more political religions grow here and produce new forms of subjection. Western Europe immerses into unexpected socio-political reactions to welfare state and rule of law. Together they constitute new cultural and political landscape. This is what interests me, and this is an emerging subject for European Studies.

What are you currently working on? Do you feel an influence of the EU policy towards Ukraine within your field of research? How do you think about it?

Due to my stay in Frankfurt and work in the Viadrina, I managed to finish my book “Development and Dystopia. Studies in post-Soviet Ukraine and Eastern Europe.” Here I review the socio-political development of post-Soviet societies as viewed from Kiev. What interests me, is how late Soviet Human invents capitalism, democracy and nationalism.

In this context, EUs and bigger West's role was hugely important. European integration was an ideology that was driving progressive parts of post-Soviet societies towards rule of law and political pluralism. However, these societies were also using this ideology to cover new injustices of socio-economic, linguocultural and legal-political inequalities. Altogether, the post-Soviet Europe became a source of vital threats for all European countries.

What concerns the current situation in Ukraine, EU remains one major player that keeps all warring sides under pressure of the peace agenda. Peace is the common interest of EU, EU member-states and pro-peace groups in Ukraine. In a way, the peace process is the new Europeanization strategy of Ukrainian society. As UNDP Ambassador of Peace in Ukraine, I find EU's role critical for the peaceful future of my country.

Last summer semester you led four workshops at the Viadrina. In your opinion, what are the differences in teaching in Ukraine and in Germany?

Even though four workshops constitute a big workload for one professor, the number of hours is 3-4 times lesser than a Ukrainian professor has to teach per semester. So, in a way, I enjoyed more freedom for research and writing. I am grateful to DAAD and Europa University Viadrina for giving me an opportunity to write one scholarly book (which I mentioned before), one art-philosophy book (Photosophy, to be published in December 2017 in Kiev), and edit one collection of papers dedicated to the global demodernization (to be published in Germany in April next year).

I also have time for more communication with colleagues at IFES due to our on-going methodological seminar. The debates in this seminar provide me with many ideas, and inspire for more fruitful research. My university lacks this kind of debate.

Here and in Kiev, the students are the same: critical, inquiring, and creative. However, I enjoy bigger cultural diversity at the Viadrina. Due to this diversity, the workshop in Soviet Philosophy, for example, turned out to be a global study of Marxism. Or the workshop on the study of post-Soviet non-recognized states turned into polilogue of students from societies that would never meet in their homelands (Georgia and Abkhazia, Moldova and Transnistria). At the Viadrina international context these workshops were not only about education and science, but also about understanding each other and cultural therapy.

What is the attitude of your Ukrainian students towards the EU? Is there something you have learned from your German students?

My students in Kiev are divided into two camps: left liberals and radically conservative. However, the both groups use pro-European rhetoric. For the first, Ukraine's future is with the united Europe with EU as a source of political and social development. For the second group, EU (as part of West) provides Ukraine with the means to fight back Russia and Russia-backed separatism. So, the general attitude is positive towards EU, however on different grounds.

With the German students, it is much more diverse. I cannot find these striking group differences. And I see much more individual perspectives, more desire to understand subject before making conclusions.

I was also happy to learn from my students. Last month, Prof. Dr. Beichelt, 15 Viadrina students and I organized a study tour to Ukraine. The topic of this voyage was “Emotional aspects of Russian-Ukrainian conflict.” For a week we were traveling in Kiev, Kharkiv and Donbas, talking to local intellectuals, politicians, artists and priests. Although I travelled often to these lands, this time I did look at my country through the eyes of my students. And I saw so many new, unexpected things which were hidden from me as an insider. One of the most striking things for me was our huge tolerance to inequalities, which our Ukrainian social perspectives and language does not let to see and articulate. I really recommend to look at the [blog](#) that our students made during this study tour.

How do you estimate the current relations between Ukraine and the EU? Do you expect the Ukraine to be a member of the EU in 2040?

I belong to intellectuals that support European integration. However, I see that Ukraine’s political and business class is too far from values and practices that can make Ukraine an EU member state. The same opinion shared the heads of EU member states who, in a way, denied EU membership future to Ukraine [last December 2016](#).

Ukrainian society should stop inventing more and more inequalities, discriminate large and small minorities, and establish effective democratic institutions. If this is achieved, I would change my pessimistic standpoint.

How do you argue that the spread of the feeling of insecurity changes the value of freedom and meaning of war in post-Soviet societies?

As I said above, Eastern Europe is the source of conflicts for entire Europe. Our region is getting immensely militarized. Both West and East invest into future big war, while trying to contain the small Donbas war. For over two decades our societies – in Ukraine, Russia, Georgia, as well as in non-recognized states – educated youth with hate and suspicion to neighbors. And we now see the fruits in growing ethnonationalism, spread of racial and confessional intolerance, popularity of non-democratic political practices and secessionism in old and new EU member states and in non-EU Europe.

Altogether this produces the feeling of insecurity. And it is not only feeling; it is a rational, well-grounded conclusion. Our regions is insecure, and becomes more and more so.

This is the reason why the militarization of our region – and our future – must be stopped. New security and conflict-prevention mechanisms must be created. Any attempt of borders’ change, as well as any type of minority discrimination must be collectively made impossible in entire Europe, whether EU or not.

On 24 October 2017 you are organizing a photo exhibition “Center, Periphery and the Distance: Aesthetic Discrepancies of Socio-cultural Inequality” at Viadrina. What will be seen and how did this idea come about?

In the era of visual dominance, photography can be a legitimate language of ‘philosophieren.’ This is why I try to do the philosophical work of social critique also by the means of photography. This

what I do, for example, in my book on 'Photosophy' that I finished this year in Frankfurt.

The up-coming exhibition is dedicated to post-socialist societies' invention of inequality. The real socialist societies, in USSR, Eastern Block, and Eastern Asia, were/are enormously unequal.

However, the social and cultural distances were hidden, invisible.

In societies that survived the fall of socialism, 1990-ies and early 21st century was dedicated to re-inventing inequalities and distances. Inequality

is fetishized and symbolically present, especially in post-Soviet societies. This experience I try to show in the photos that are to be shown in this exhibition.

Thank you very much for the interview!

