
15-TH ANNUAL ALEKSANTERI CONFERENCE **“CULTURE AND RUSSIAN SOCIETY”,** **Helsinki, 21–23 October 2015**

The Aleksanteri Conference is an annual, multidisciplinary, international conference organised by the Aleksanteri Institute, the Finnish Centre for Russian and Eastern European Studies, affiliated with the University of Helsinki.

The Aleksanteri Institute functions as a national centre of research, study and expertise relating to Russia and Eastern Europe, particularly in the social sciences and humanities. The Institute promotes cooperation and interaction between the academic world, public administration, business life and civil society, both in Finland and abroad. It coordinates *the Finnish Centre of Excellence in Russian Studies — Choices of Russian Modernisation* which was funded by the Academy of Finland for the years 2012—2017. In the *Centre of Excellence*, modernisation in Russia is understood as a set of choices made under certain structural conditions. As the traditional frameworks and theories of individual disciplines are clearly inadequate for analysing the contradictory developments in Russia, the Centre of Excellence strives to redefine the agenda of Russian modernisation. The multidisciplinary research conducted in the Centre of Excellence will produce a new paradigm for Russian studies. At the same time, it will also provide a new platform for policy implications at the most basic level of EU-Russia relations. As well as researchers from the Aleksanteri Institute, it consists of researchers from the Department of Modern Languages (Russian language and literature) at the University of Helsinki and the School of Management (Politics) at the University of Tampere. In addition, several distinguished scholars from both Finland and abroad are involved as associated partners, including those from CEMAT (Aalto University) and the European University at Saint Petersburg, Russia.

Aleksanteri Conferences have attracted widespread interest among researchers and policy-makers in a wide variety of disciplines, both in Finland and abroad, interested in the development of post-socialist countries.

In keeping with the Aleksanteri Institute’s multidisciplinary research agenda and the Academy of Finland Centre of Excellence’s “Choices of Russian Modernisation”, the 15th Aleksanteri Conference invited proposals focusing on the cultural challenges and intellectual choices Russia and its diverse population face today. The conference welcomed scholars from all fields of humanities and social and political sciences to contribute to the investigation of the role of cultural analysis in enriching our understanding of recent developments in Russia.

The 15th Aleksanteri Conference was held on the theme “*Culture and Russian Society*” and included more than 400 participants from all over the world. To be precise, there were 406 individuals who registered for participation, and many more attended without registration. All the major Finnish universities were well represented at the conference. Besides the University of Helsinki, there were representatives from the Univer-

sity of Tampere, the University of Eastern Finland, the Finnish Institute of International Affairs and others. Great interest in the conference was shown by scholars from many Russian universities, such as Moscow State University, the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, Moscow Pedagogical State University, Moscow State Linguistic University, the Russian State University for the Humanities, Saint Petersburg State University, Saint Petersburg State University of Economics, the Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia, the Nizhny Novgorod State Pedagogical University, the Northern (Arctic) Federal University, Omsk State University and many others. Alongside the Finnish and Russian scholars, many appeared from the Post-Soviet states (e.g. Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan) as well as from all the mainline states of Europe (France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, the UK). In addition, many arrived from farther afield, coming from countries like Canada, India and the USA.

There was a pre-conference round table, chaired by Professor **Tomi Huttunen** from the Department of Modern Languages, the University of Helsinki, and **Maria Petersson**, journalist at Helsingin Sanomat with the participation of Irina Prokhorova, publisher (New Literary Review publishing house, Moscow), Roman Senchin, writer (Moscow), journalist and writer Kalle Kniivilä (Malmö) and journalist Artemy Troitsky (Tallinn).

The conference was opened by **Dr. Sanna Turoma**, Chair of the Organising Committee, Aleksanteri Institute, University of Helsinki, and State Secretary to the Prime Minister of Finland **Paula Lehtomäki**,

The conference had five keynote speakers. **Catriona Kelly**, Professor of Russian at the University of Oxford, UK, and one of the foremost cultural historians of modern Russia, who has published widely on Russian culture, entitled her talk "*Russia and Europe, 1991—2014 La grande disillusion*". **Vera Tolz**, Sir William Mather Professor of Russian Studies at the University of Manchester, UK, presented the paper "*Projecting the Nation: Media Events and Changing Narratives of Nationhood in Putin's Russia*". Her current, AHRC-funded project, 'Mediating post-Soviet difference: an analysis of Russian television representation of inter-ethnic cohesion issues', addresses the Russian state television's approach to ethnic tensions. Tolz's interests include nationalism and ethnic politics in modern and contemporary Russia; oriental studies and national identity in imperial and early Soviet Russia; and comparative imperial history. **Evert van der Zweerde**, Professor in Political Philosophy at Radboud University Nijmegen, the Netherlands, devoted his talk to the analysis of democracy in Russia — its perspectives, expectations, and concepts, pointing out both negative and positive aspects of this complicated process. **Elena Vartanova**, Professor and Dean of the Faculty of Journalism of Moscow State University, Russia, discussed the role of mass media in contemporary Russian culture in her substantial talk "*High or Low? Mass Media as a Driving Force of Contemporary (Russian) Culture*". **Vlad Strukov**, Associate Professor in Digital Culture at the University of Leeds, UK, presented the paper "*The Conservative Turn: Culture as Politics in Putin's Russia*".

64 panels concerning different topics were held during the three days. Among them there were "Media and Conflict"; "Communicative Aggression — the Cultural Platform

and Political Choice”; “Narratives and Origins of Contemporary Russian Patriotism”; “Russian Orthodox Christians as Cultural Entrepreneurs”; “Managing Creativity in Contemporary Russia”, “Discourse of Power in Contemporary Russia” and many others.

A few panels were dedicated to the Russian language. **Oxana Issers** from Omsk State University presented the results of her research aimed at the analysis of ‘the word of the year 2014’. **Tatiana Krihtova** from the University of Eastern Finland described the language situation in Christian churches of Joensuu in a context of a migrant’s choice. **Elena Shmeleva** (Vinogradov Russian Language Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences) presented the paper “*Language of Russian Orthodox Church at Present: a Mixture of Stylistic*”. **Irina Levontina** from the same Institute talked on the evolution of key words of Russian power discourse. **Levon Saakyan** from the Pushkin State Russian Language Institute presented a paper entitled “*Texts and Subtexts in Modern Russian Informational Broadcasting: Euphemization, Dysphemization and Other Ways of Semantic Dominance Forming*”.

One of the panels organised by scholars from Saint Petersburg State University was dedicated to the language of Mass Media, viewed as a means of culture transmission. **Liliya Duskaeva** discussed conceptualization of the values of national culture in the semantic and stylistic category of evaluative language. **Yulia Konyaeva** analysed speech genre in her “Portrait of a Creative Personality” in Russian journalism. **Alexey Goryachev** presented a paper entitled “*Promotion of Cultural Projects in New Media: Communicative Scenarios and Speech Acts*”.

Cultural Factors in the Modernization Process of Russia were discussed at the panel chaired by **Arto Mustajoki**, Dean of the Faculty of Arts of the University of Helsinki and Vice-President of the International Association of Teachers of Russian Language and Literature (MAPRYAL). Among the participants there were **Nadezhda Lebedeva** from the Higher School of Economics (Russia) with the paper “*Cultural Barriers of Russian Modernization*“, **Tatiana Larina** from the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, whose topic was “*Cultural Values as Accelerators and Decelerators of Modernization in Russia*” and **Ekaterina Protassova** from the Department of Modern Languages of University of Helsinki, who talked on the interculturality of Russianness.

The panel “Russian Culture in Central Asia: the Own or the Alien?” included the presentations “*Russian Language in the Material Culture of Tadjikistan*” by **Noora Khudoikulova** (University of Helsinki, Finland), “*Russian-Language Cultural Behaviour in the Urban Context of Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan*” by **Natalya Kosmarskaya** (Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences), “*Russian Language in the Mirror of the Kazakh Language Culture*” by **Almagul Maimakova** (Kazakh National Abai Pedagogical University), “*Russian Language and Culture as Mediators in Indirect Translation from English into Kazakh*” by **Leila Mirzoyeva** and **Aigul Zhumabekova** (Demirel University, Kazakhstan). The discussant **Damina Shaibakova** from the Kazakh National Abai Pedagogical University talked over the concept of pluricentrism in language use.

Professor **Nikolai Vakhtin** from the European University of St Petersburg problematized public debates in Russia as “Public Muteness Syndrome”. **Kapitolina Fedorova** from the same institution entitled her talk “*Distances of Vast Dimensions. Official*

versus Public Language” which was based on material from meetings of the organizing committees of mass events, January–February 2012. **Aleksandra Kasatkina** (Kunstka-mera) elaborated on the topic “*In Search of a New Meaning: Current Public Discourse in Russian Allotment Associations*”.

All the presentations were followed by interesting discussion, which continued during coffee breaks.

The conference was closed by Professor **Markku Kivinen**, Director of the Aleksanteri Institute. In his inspiring speech, he emphasised the importance of contacts and discussion on all levels including academia, in order to build understanding and overcome disputes and contradictions in Europe and all over the world.

On behalf of the conference participants, we would like to thank the Aleksanteri Institute, the organising committee and particularly Sanna Turoma for the perfect organisation of the conference, for their hospitality and the warm atmosphere which made it a fruitful and interesting academic event.

Tatiana Larina, Miikka Piironen