

Introduction

The centuries-long Polish-Ukrainian relations are characterized by the complexity of processes and events. The two nations share a legacy of mutual relations, being a part of the same states, fighting for independence against a common enemy, losing and regaining their own independent statehoods. Their history abounds in dramatic or even tragic events, too, which left traumatic impressions on their collective memories.

The city and the voivodeship of Łódź has cooperated with cities and regions of Ukraine (such as Khmelnytsky, Ivano-Frankivsk, Odessa, Vinnitsa) for a long time now. Significantly, close ties with Chernivtsi has resulted in successful cooperation between the University of Łódź (UŁ) and Jurij Fedkowycz State University of Chernivtsi (SUC), with conference participation, joint publications, and student and staff exchange.

Amid these initiatives, an idea emerged a few years ago of organizing a joint academic conference devoted to the experiences and perspective of Polish-Ukrainian cooperation on the regional level.

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On the 21–21 of October 2014, the University of Łódź Conference Centre hosted an international scientific conference on *Eastern Europe in the 21st Century. Poland – Ukraine: the Partnership of Regions*. The conference was organized by the International Centre for East European Research (ICEER) of the University of Łódź, the Department of Political Systems (DPS) of the Faculty of International and Political Studies (FIPS) of the UŁ, the Commission for the Study of European Integration of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Łódź division (PAS Łódź).

The co-organizers of the conference were: SUC, the Institute of Political Science and Journalism of the Silesian University in Katowice, the Faculty of Political Science of the Marie Curie-Skłodowska University of Lublin (UMCS), and the Julian Tuwim Youth Palace in Łódź. The conference was held under the patronage of the Polish Political Science Association Executive Committee (the committee held its meeting during the conference) and the Marshal of

the Łódź Voivodeship. The financial support of the conference came from both the Marshal's and the City Offices of Łódź. The conference initiated a new series of events organized by the ICEER devoted to the challenges and perspectives of the development of political, socio-economic and international situation in the region of Eastern Europe in the 21st century – a continuation of previous scientific activity of the FIPS UŁ.

The conference was inaugurated by Prof. Zofia Wysokińska, Prorector for International Cooperation of the UŁ, Prof. Tomasz Domański, Dean of the FIPS UŁ, Prof. Alicja Stępień-Kuczyńska, Chair of DPS FIPS UŁ, Prof. Władysław Strutyński who presented the address by Prof. Stepan Melnyczuk, Rector of the SUC, and Prof. Grzegorz Janusz of the Faculty of Political Science of the UMCS. Mr. Jacek Jurczakowski, on behalf of the President of PAS Łódź, congratulated the organizers, as did Hanna Zdanowska, the President of Łódź, in a letter read at the opening ceremony. Keynote lecture: *The need for reform of regional policy in Ukraine: European orientation* was given by Prof. Anatolij Krugłaszow of the SUC.

Lectures in the plenary session were read by Prof. Andrzej Chodubski (University of Gdańsk): *Ukraine and the transformation processes in Europe: past and present*; Prof. Grzegorz Janusz (UMCS): *Contemporary mechanisms for protection of national minorities*; and Prof. Teresa Sasińska-Klas (Jagiellonian University): *Ukraine and her problems in public opinion surveys in Poland*. The conference then proceeded for two days in four thematic strands: political science, economy, law and local government, history and culture.

Political science sessions, entitled *European challenges for Ukraine*, focused on Ukrainian systemic transformation, enhanced by the “orange revolution” and “Euromajdan” and on the place and role of Ukraine in contemporary international relations, especially her conflict with Russia which determines the development of Ukrainian domestic and foreign politics. The sessions were chaired by Prof. Janusz on the first day and Prof. Jarosław Gryz (National Defence Academy) on the second day.

The history and culture sessions (*Dialogue of cultures and ideas: Poles in Ukraine, Ukrainians in Poland*) – chaired by Prof. Chodubski and Prof. Jerzy Kmiecński (University of Łódź) – looked at the role of culture in the modernization of Ukrainian statehood, as well as the challenges faced by its promoters. The other important issues turned out to be Polish-Ukrainian social relations and historical politics. The law and local government sessions (*Regions in law and practice* chaired by Prof. Krzysztof Skotnicki of the UŁ and *Poland – Ukraine: the experience of local government* chaired by Prof. Marek Barański of Silesian University) were dominated by theoretical and practical problems of the functioning of local governments in Poland and Ukraine.

The economic strand of the conference was divided into two sessions: *Central-Eastern Europe and the challenge of socio-economic modernization*, chaired

by Prof. Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski (UŁ), and *The chances and threats for the economic development in Central-Eastern Europe in the context of the Europe 2020 strategy*, chaired by Prof. Wysokińska. They were mainly devoted to the challenges of socio-economic modernization in Central-Eastern Europe, specifically Ukraine, also in the context of the *Europe 2020* strategy.

The conference was attended by over 55 researchers from Poland and 16 from Ukraine, representing FIPS and the faculties of Economy and Sociology, Law and Administration and Philosophy and History of the UŁ; National Defence Academy; Warsaw Technical University; University of Gdańsk; Jagiellonian University; UMCS; Silesian University in Katowice; University of Warsaw; Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Warmia and Mazury University in Olsztyn. Ukrainian participants came from CSU; Slavic Studies Institute of the Justus Liebig University; Lwów Art Academy; Khmelnytsky Pedagogy University in Melitopol; Khmelnytsky State University. Non-academic institutions engaged in cooperation with regions of Ukraine, such as the Marshal's Offices and City Offices of Łódź and Lublin, as well as Polish-Ukrainian Chamber of Commerce, were represented, too.

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The third issue of "Eastern Review", published by ICEER UŁ, is entirely devoted to Polish-Ukrainian regional cooperation and the experiences in state-building process, with the emphasis on European models. Some of the articles place contemporary Ukrainian issues in broader historical and cultural, as well as political and international contexts. A. Chodubski explains the peculiar place and role of Ukraine in the transformations of European civilization, shedding light on the sources of the nation's being torn between the East and the West. Two authors from the Khmelnytsky National University view Ukraine from the perspective of sociology of politics: N. Petruk analyses constitutive elements of the new Ukrainian reality which, in her view, constitute foundations for the civil society, while O. Zasławska provides a theoretical framework for the study of political traditions and their significance for the formation of political culture in the Ukrainian society.

A no less important part of the volume are three articles dealing with the influence of European and especially Polish patterns on the political and socio-cultural transformation in Ukraine. A. Kolesnikow considers the possibility of adapting Polish electoral system for the election of Ukrainian High Council, while A. Krugłaszow argues for the pressing need for modernization of Ukrainian regional policy with the use of the experiences of Polish administrative reform and other European models. According to N. Losewa and D. Termenży, Ukrainian higher education system would benefit from integration with European Higher

Education Area. They compare some aspects of Polish and Ukrainian education systems, stressing, among other things, the support for National University of Donetsk by the University of Łódź.

Changing the emphasis from national to regional level in Polish-Ukrainian relations – the focus of the volume’s articles – proved to be an important decision, facilitating closer cooperation between the two nations. Meeting the expectations and securing the interests of both Poles and Ukrainians is a prerequisite for satisfactory mutual relations and, to a large extent, for the security and development of the whole region of Eastern Europe.