

Ukrainian Contributions to the International Congress of Slavists

August 15-22, 2003, the XIII International Congress of Slavic Studies took place in Ljubljana (Slovenia). Thanks to the efforts of the Slovenian Committee, the Congress was pleasant and, as a whole, well organised. Contributing to the success of the organization was the fact that all the sessions were held in one building and that the place where plenary sessions and other activities were held was close to this main building. Many participants complained about the high prices of hotels and other services (e.g. the final dinner and excursions). This is unfortunately true. Probably, the prices and the late distribution of the definitive programme are responsible for the absence of many (almost the half) of the scholars who were supposed to be in Ljubljana (I know that several colleagues from Italy did not come because they could not afford staying the whole week and did not know when their paper was: by the end of July, when the programme was definitive, it was too late to organise everything. Present economic difficulties in all the Western countries make it often impossible for younger scholars to pay the hotel and all other expenses for a full week). The massive absence of announced speakers should be avoided in the next Congress: the organisers and the national committees should pay special attention to this aspect of the activity of the MKS.

However – it must be stressed that the absolute majority of participants who were in Ljubljana considered the Congress successful, interesting and useful. Among the main contributions to the success of the Congress, the exhibition of new books and the “thematic blocs” are to be mentioned. There were also good opportunities for buying books at the stands. It was a pity that the book exhibition was closed after the 4th day. We understand that this was due to the need to leave the space free for another congress that was beginning at the same time. The organisers of the next Congress should try to keep the book exhibition open during the whole time of the Congress. I consider as excellent the idea to organise special sessions for the presentation of new books. Specialists of various countries described some of the new publications that appeared in the last 5 years; discussion and questions were also interesting during these sessions. This should also be kept in mind by the organisers of the next Congress! Thus, on the whole, I think we should all express our gratitude to the organisers who made an enormous and successful effort to keep the tradition of the International Congresses of Slavists alive: a tradition which encountered many difficulties (on both the economic and organisational, and the scientific level) in the last decade, but which seems to regain vigour now. Obviously, the change of generations is evident, and I really hope that the younger scholars who will be responsible in the next decades will have the capacity and will to maintain the tradition with the needed innovations on all levels of the MKS.

The thematic main points of this Congress showed in many aspects the new trends and methodological approaches to Slavic Studies, which are evident also in every scientific and teaching activity. Besides the traditional subjects, interest towards new branches of literary and linguistic studies were evident: growing attention was paid to social and culturological approaches, to the application of computer sciences to humanities, to philosophy or emigration literature, and others. Now I will focus on a limited aspect of the Congress: the Ukrainian presence in the Congress, both as a “subject” of active participation (i.e. the papers presented by Ukrainians) and as an “object” of investigation (papers and discussions about Ukrainian culture).

The papers of Ukrainian participants which were announced in the program were numerous: 33 in the sections dedicated to Literature, Culture, Folklore and History of Slavic Studies, 17 in the section devoted to Linguistics. The Summaries of the papers have been published by the Organizing Committee of the Congress (13. Meznarodni Slavistični Kongres – Ljubljana 15-21 avgust 2003, “Zbornik povzetkov”, Ljubljana 2003). The full programme of the Congress is available on internet under the address: <http://www.ff.uni-lj.si/mks/>

Twenty eight papers were presented by Ukrainian authors who actually were in Ljubljana. In many cases the discussions after the papers were lively and interesting. I had the opportunity to listen to some of the lectures held by Ukrainian scholars which were of interest for my field of research, but I will not write any kind of evaluation. I will just give general information about the

main subjects of the papers. As it is in the very nature of the International Congresses of Slavists, the contributions are supposed to focus on comparative issues (Compared literature and linguistics) and on the most traditional fields of Slavic Philology (Cyrillo-Methodian tradition, Medieval Slavic Literatures, Edition of texts, Diachronic and synchronic linguistics, Ethnogenesis and protohistory of the Slavs, Comparative folklore). In this Congress a strong accent was put on Culturological studies, on Literature of the 20th century (both within the Slavic countries and in the emigration), on Romanticism and on the philosophical and religious trends in Slavic cultures and literatures. A great number of papers was dedicated to Linguistics, where the amazing variety of methodological approaches makes it difficult not only to give an overview, but sometimes also to keep lines of communication among the different branches of linguistics (as Prof. Topolinska pointed out): I heard several colleagues inviting the specialists – mainly the younger ones – not to forget the comparative approach and the possibility of cooperation between the various branches.

Ukrainian participants followed the main instructions given by the organizers in the guidelines to the general programme. In linguistic studies the following issues were most frequently touched upon by the Ukrainians: 1) dialectological and lexicographic studies which permitted the publication of several new – and really important – geographic linguistic dictionaries and atlases, a fact which gives new possibilities to area studies; 2) the development of the Ukrainian and other Slavic languages in the last decade (attention was directed not only to Western-Slavic and inter-Slavic cross-influences, but also to the issue of functional changes of the status and structure of the languages after the creation of new independent states); 3) syntax structures, mainly simple ones. More traditional subjects as Proto-Slavic and Church Slavonic were not ignored, but the stress was put rather on relationships between modern languages, mainly Ukrainian and Baltic languages, Ukrainian and Serbian, or other inter-Slavic connections.

In the contributions devoted to Literature and Culture there was a great variety of methodological approaches, which seem to reflect the efforts of contemporary Ukrainian scholarship to grow familiar with the main streams of literary theory and criticism of the last 5 decades, both in the Western countries and in Eastern Europe. Several papers were devoted to Modernism and Post-Modernism, to Deconstructivist trends and to the description of the newest literary tendencies. However, several papers focused also on the problems connected with the ideas of “nationalism” and “universalism” in modern literature, and to the dialectics of nation-building and internationalism. As I mentioned before, I attended only a few lectures, hence my remarks are based on the resumés, rather than on the papers in their full versions. If we look at these materials, however, it appears as evident that the most frequent comparative approach focused on the relationship between Polish and Ukrainian literature on the one side, and the Serbian and Ukrainian literatures on the other. In some cases several Slavic and Western European literatures were examined in comparison with Ukrainian literature and culture. The discussions in which I had the opportunity to take part (on Romanticism and on “Moderna”) were very lively and fruitful.

It is to be stressed, that Ukrainian issues were presented also by some of the Italian Slavists. The Ukrainian way towards an “open” and “liberal” society and culture was analysed by O. Pachlovs’ka with reference to the literature of the 17th-19th centuries. Ukrainian literature of Renaissance and Baroque was in the center of the contribution which I read in the Plenary session: I analysed there the specificity of Ukrainian literature and the functional plurality of works and authors belonging to 2 or more national cultures; the issue of the Medieval heritage in Ukrainian and Russian literary consciousness was also touched upon. In the other sessions, several Polish colleagues focused on Polish-Ukrainian literary relationships. I consider it as an important achievement that the most complicated and delicate problems of Ukrainian culture and of its relationships with European culture have been put in the centre of the attention of a plenary session. This shows the importance Ukraine and Ukrainian studies have attained in the last decade.

Ukrainian participants took part also in two of the “Thematic blocs”: one devoted to “The role of Religion in the Formation of National Consciousness and National Culture in Slavic

Countries”, another devoted to “Gender” (specific characters of speech and language structure according to gender).

“Thematic Blocks” are a relatively recent innovation in International Congresses of Slavists: the decision to organise this kind of activity forseen mainly to foster discussion was taken in Bratislava, 1993; “Thematic Blocks” were initiated 5 years ago at the last Congress of Slavists in Cracow, 1998). They have demonstrated to be a very valuable means of information, discussion, up-dating of knowledge and methodology, though some changes and ameliorations are needed. In the Ljubljana Congress of this year they met with remarkable success and (as far as I could attend) were quite interesting, sometimes really innovative.

It is self-evident that there is no possibility of participating in all of the blocks. Sometimes blocks of equal interest are held in the same time, or they coincide with lectures in the other sections. It is also in the nature of International Congresses of Slavists to promote the curiosity of scholars in fields that are generally not in the main focus of their interest, in order to give everyone the opportunity to receive information about what is going on in several branches of Slavic studies. This sometimes limits the time that may be devoted to narrow scientific specialised sectors or “national” themes and traditions.

As far as Ukrainian studies are concerned, I would like to focus on the thematic block named: “Etnokul’turnye vzaimodejstvie vostochnyx slavjan v XVII-XVIII vekax”. It was organised by the “Institut Slavjanovedenija” of the Russian Academy of Sciences of Moscow. The organiser was Leonid Gorizontov, the invited speakers and discussants were Boris Florja, Oksana Ostapchuk and Svetlana Kul’. Unfortunately, only Gorizontov and Ostapchuk were present. As it was easy to be foreseen and as the title itself indicates, the main point of interest of this “block” constituted the relationship among Belarusan, Russian and Ukrainian cultures in the aforementioned period, i.e. in the period of the most evident manifestation of the selfconsciousness and beginning of national identity. The strong influence of Ruthenian culture on Russia has been stressed in the evolution of the life of the Church, of the elitarian literature written by the Church hierarchs and the monastic milieu, but also in the life of the court of the tsars and of some of the leading aristocrats who decided about the life of the state for both war and peace, and for economic and social structures. The dramatic tensions that emerged in Russian-Ruthenian relationships were not neglected in the presentation of the papers written by B. Florja and L. Gorizontov. O. Ostapchuk tried to summarise the main issues concerning the difficult linguistic situation of the Eastern Slavic area in the period, from both a general and a regional point of view. She examined the different levels of linguistic expression in various areas and tried to stress the points which most need to be better investigated.

The discussion which followed was very animated, in some cases even sharp. As it is self evident, the subject of this “Thematic block” is “hot”. L. I. Sanovova stressed the importance of the evolution of printing and printed books, and of the first codification of “prosta mova” in various literary genres of the Ukrainian and Bielorrussian literature already in the 16th century. V. Volkov, on the other side, laid the accent on the strong influence of Orthodox consciousness and culture for the unity of the 3 “brethern peoples”. He also stressed their linguistic unity up to modern times. It is easy to understand that point of view of the latter discussant inevitably called forth different opinions and opposed interpretations of the linguistic and cultural phenomena. I questioned the idea itself of the comparability of the linguistic situation of the Ruthenian lands and Russia, and of the influence of the Ukrainian “model” on the Russian “model”, and stressed the different evolution of the Russian and the Ukrainian languages. I also expressed the opinion that the literature and culture of Ukraine in the 16th-18th c. need to be investigated in their relationship with Russian and Polish literature, but also – and particularly – in their national, area specificity. Two other participants in the discussion expressed doubts about an exceedingly strong accentuation of the unitarian intention of Xmel’nyč’kyj’s act of “soedinenie” with the tsar: if needed, it was said, one may speak of “prisoedinenie” rather than “vossoedinenie”; moreover, the contractual character of the agreement of Perejaslav was underlined, together with the numerous cases of misunderstandings which marked

the complicated history of the Russian and the Ukrainian peoples, two peoples which certainly are too similar to be easily separated in two distinct nations, but also too different to be united.

I indulged in describing the main points of this “Thematic block” not in consideration of a special originality or novelty of the subject. The papers which were presented have been previously published in Russia and are the result of several years of investigations of their authors and of various meetings. The main issues I want to stress are the following.

L. Gorizontov and O. Ostapchuk are two relatively young scholars working in a very active Institute created about a decade ago with the purpose of incrementing Ukrainian and Belarusian studies in Moscow and of reconsidering the problems of the history of Eastern Slavic culture and literature from the methodological point of view, I would say also from the point of view of the basic ‘philosophy’ of Eastern Slavic studies in Russia. L. Gorizontov and O. Ostapchuk are in the full sense of the word scholars and teachers in Ukrainian studies. B. Florja is such a well known specialist that he does not need a presentation. No doubt, the main interest of the “Thematic block” presented by L. Gorizontov and O. Ostapchuk lays in the comparative approach to the languages and literatures and to the culture of the 3 Eastern European peoples, in some way to their relationships – both common characters and peculiar, regional elements and events.

Unfortunately, the people who were present and participated in the discussion were really not numerous. The question rises: Why? Was this intentional or due to external circumstances? By all evidence there were circumstantial reasons: first the contemporary presentation of A.A. Zaliznjak, a specialist with such a world wide fame and spectacular theories and research activity that a great amount of listeners were attracted by his lecture. However, the fact that only 2 (TWO) Ukrainians, no Poles and no Belarusians were present at a round table devoted to the history and culture of the Ruthenian lands is surprising and needs interpretation and clarification.

The questions rises by itself: Was the absence of Ukrainian and Belarusian scholars (resp. 28 and 20 of them were in Ljubljana, it should be remembered) a result of casuality, of unforeseen circumstances such as the participation in other sections or blocks, the coincidence of hours with their own lectures, a.s.o.? or was it the result of a sort of neglect of a block organised by Russians, hence considered as not sufficiently inclined to a “Ukrainian-friendly” interpretation and methodology?

If the second hypothesis should be true, I confess that I would consider this as a very sorrowful and unpleasant way of participating in International Congresses. I hope that the reasons were not bound to any kind of prejudicial way of thinking, and connected rather with casuality and impossibility of being present in different places at the same time. One may think also that the most Ukrainians present in Ljubljana were specialists in modern literature or modern languages and cultures.

There is another possible reason to explain the non-participation of Ukrainian colleagues to the block under discussion. Indeed, the very formula of a “Thematic block” is new in the International Congresses of Slavicists. Several colleagues who sat in the MKS Organizing Presidium in the years 1988-2003 probably remember how difficult it was to have an agreement on the utility of organizing such “panel sections” (they were called “Block” to encounter the linguistic feeling of Slavic members of the Presidium) and on the manner how they should be prepared. They were presented for the first time, as I already wrote, in Cracow 1998. I have remarked several times that colleague coming from the Eastern European countries often do not really know about this kind of activity in the MKS Congresses and have very vague ideas about its functioning and importance. Thus, it might be, that at least a part of the Ukrainians who were present in Ljubljana simply did not know about the block organised by the Russian scholars, they may have forgotten it because it was held in a different building than the Building of the Philosophical Faculty where all the Sections were held, or they may have read the Programme without really figuring out what it was. If this latter possibility has some real ground, I can only regret that it happened. In any case, such occasions to get in contact and to discuss with colleagues coming from another milieu should not be left unexploited by Ukrainians. Moreover, if one easily can imagine that there are indeed

differencies in view, methodology and way of approaching problems with colleagues coming from Russia, this is even a more cogent reason to participate in the discussion, to listen what the others are saying (or not saying!) and to tell one's own reasons. If one does not agree on a certain topic, the best way is to sit together around a table and to discuss, in order to understand at least on what we may agree or not agree, and what seems to be acceptable or not. In any case it is sure that the only way to defend one's own points of view or interest is to be present and to participate in discussion.

The Ukrainian participants in the Congress of Ljubljana were numerous and highly qualified. The lectures I had the chance to listen to were interesting and good. I am convinced that in not going to this "Block" they have lost a good opportunity to make new Ukrainian Slavic studies known on an international level, to let the forum of Slavicists coming from all over the world know how well and quickly Ukrainian culture and scholarship has integrated the newest trends and methodologies of international scholarship, how the younger generations have assimilated various methodologies and how Ukrainian scholarship is able to give the best of itself continuing the century long tradition of their fathers and receiving new impulses coming from the modern world. I am sure this will be shown in many occasions in the congresses and meetings which will be held in the next years, and I am convinced that on the next International Congress of Slavicists Ukrainians will give their active and precious cooperations in all the sections, blocks and round-tables.

I will conclude with an observation concerning the evolution of Ukrainian studies in Russia. Their main focus remains on the historical and cultural relationships between the 3 Eastern Slavic peoples, on their reciprocal influences, on the elements which united their histories and on the points of discussion or opposition. This is the traditional approach of Russian specialists, and it would be foolish to conceal that this approach often brought a biased interpretation of the Eastern Slavic interrelations, mainly when official political pressure contributed to pushing historians and philologists to ideologically pre-determined conclusions. The errors and deviations of certain trends and periods notwithstanding, one should not forget the great merits of tens of scholars who have investigated the Ukrainian past culture and have published thousands of works and documents concerning Ukraine and Russia. I consider it impossible to change the tradition of Slavic studies in a certain country and to impose to others a model of investigation which is not in accordance with its own patrimony and tradition. Every country has its favoured subjects and approaches, and investigation of one's own relationships with neighbouring countries is the most natural in comparative Slavic studies. To impose to the Russian scholars a "national Ukrainian" point of view would be unfair and useless. In the same way it would be unfair and useless to interrupt in Italy the tradition of Slavic studies which is strongly rooted in the examination of Italian-Slavic interrelation and on the influence and elaboration of Italian Renaissance and Baroque tradition on Slavic languages, cultures and literatures. Thus, it is natural that the Russians continue their philological and historical tradition investigating inter-Eastern-Slavic relationships. It will be the duty of scholars coming from the Russian milieu to re-examine some problems, the duty of Ukrainians to re-discuss their relationships with Russia, and the duty of other traditions to participate in the discussion and to show different interpretations or old and new documents and facts. This is the only correct and sound way to make scholarship grow and develop. In my opinion, it lays in the interest of everybody to organise and facilitate dialogue and discussion (even heated discussion) between two peoples who have a great cultural patrimony and who still have many difficulties to come to a real understanding of one another.