



UNIVERSITY
OF WARSAW

Faculty of Philosophy

EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR PHILOSOPHY OF CULTURE

Rationale, Profile, and Mission:

The current geopolitical situation in Europe poses many questions and problems to which philosophy cannot remain indifferent. The war of Russia against Ukraine and its possible further escalation, all Russian efforts to destabilize the social-political order in many European countries as well as Russia's relentless efforts to divide European unity and to undermine European ideals, the reality of non-democratic political regime in Belarus – all of this create a demand to act in defense of European culture. And there is some significant work to be done by philosophy here. The situation demands not only a thorough re-thinking of our cultural identities and their existential, symbolic and axiological fundamentals. It also demands undertaking all possible efforts to build a cultural wall against the abovementioned dangers. In this sense the task of philosophy is twofold – to reflectively cultivate pluralism and, from within this pluralism, to work for unity. It fits very well into Jacques Derrida's understanding of the European culture, which is (to be) "one but many." It seems that the very special role can and should be played here by philosophers from those European countries – like Poland, Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia – which have been confronted, for centuries, with the paradoxical cultural formation that poses a constant threat to all neighboring states and ethnicities, i.e., imperialistic Russia. At the same time these countries have been bound together, for better or worse, by what can be called (slightly paraphrasing Milan Kundera) "the community of history and experience" and by the common *ethos*. The *ethos* which has been expressed in the relentless power of resistance against tyranny (internal as well as external) and has been driven by the ideals of freedom, equality, cultural diversity and the sovereignty of people. This *ethos has been* actualized in a kind of cultural flexibility, hybridity, polyphony. However, it has never been something given. It has been gradually developing throughout its dramatic history. And this history

was not only a history of these sublime ideals (and their partial actualization) but also of their real and brutal negation, the history of dramatic tensions and open conflicts. That is why this *ethos* is grounded in a constantly renewed activity of self-questioning and self-searching, in a persistently recurrent will of self-determination; and that is why this region of Europe cannot be enclosed in any single narrative; it expresses itself through different and often competing stories.

We provisionally want to call this region, being fully aware of the controversial character of that label, Eastern Europe. However, we do it only because we are convinced that it can be unwrapped from all layers of negative, post-colonial meanings; and by means of such hermeneutic work we can uncover its foundational positive modes of living, experiencing and self-understanding. Thus, we do not understand the category of Eastern Europe as a geographical category, but rather as an *ethical* and *topographical* one. That is, a region populated by the people sharing the common *ethos* informed by European values and ideals; and a *topos* – a space of persisting confrontation of Europeanness with its radical other. But it is also the *topos* filled with different *topoi* – the region consisting of the lands wrapped with many different layers of history (with all its dramatic twists and turns).

It seems that philosophy of culture, not as a narrow philosophical sub-discipline, but rather as a synoptic philosophical reflection on all human efforts of meaning-making (regardless of their character) has a special role here.

European Centre for Philosophy of Culture joins Polish, Ukrainian, Lithuanian, Latvian and Belarusian philosophers to work jointly on:

- 1) Philosophical reconceptualization of Eastern Europe – by deconstructing its post-colonial associations and uncovering its genuine ethos as an actualization of the ideals of European culture.
- 2) Articulation of cultural identities – by analyzing and confronting different (often competing) narratives, myths, self-interpretations, axiological frameworks, which are constitutive, in all their plurality, for the region and its people.
- 3) Fostering intercultural dialogue by providing philosophical means of articulation of collective memories and traumas and finding ways for a reconciliation of historical conflicts.

- 4) Projecting conceptual frameworks for a community of the people from the region.
- 5) Fostering the processes of further development of civil society in the region – by engaging into educational activities as well as popularization of philosophy as an art of critical thinking.
- 6) Cultivating the leading ideals of European culture.
- 7) Creating the effective tools to resist Russia's imperialistic soft power, i.e., propaganda directed against the countries in the region as well as against Europe in general.
- 8) In the conditions of the Russian war against Ukraine, the specified activities will include a public information component aimed at critical clarifying the political and cultural background of the war as well as the efforts of Russia and its satellites to undermine mutual trust and cultural unity of our peoples.

Activities:

The abovementioned aims will be undertaken by means of:

- 1) Joint research activities directly devoted to these topics – in both historical and contemporary contexts. The members will jointly apply for EU and other grants. We also plan to launch a book series in one of the most prestigious academic publishing houses.
- 2) Annual conferences, symposia, and working meetings organized and co-organized by all involved parties.
- 3) Organization of public talks by philosophers, artists and social activists from the involved countries directed to a broader audience.
- 4) Joint educational activities such as summer schools and workshops.
- 5) To establish closer ties between the countries the Centre will also work for establishing a new program of students' and faculty staff's exchange as well as international program of philosophical studies.

Head:

Dr. Przemysław Bursztyka

Secretary:

Jan Molina (M.A.)

Members:

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Dr. Marcin Rychter

Dr. Mikołaj Sławkowski-Rode

Dr. Hab. Rafał Wonicki

Affiliated Members:

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Professor Yevhen Bystrytsky (The National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine)

Professor Jonas Dagys (Vilnius University)

Professor Andrei Gornyx (European Humanities University)

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Professor Tomas Kačerauskas (Vilnius Gediminas Technical University)

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