

Neue Schwierigkeiten seien oft ein Resultat der Verbesserung ihrer Situation: Es ergäben sich neue Zuständigkeiten für den deutschen Staat, und die muslimischen Gemeinschaften seien vermehrt auf ihn angewiesen. In der Praxis sei es ein Problem, dass es keine organisierte muslimische Position im öffentlichen Diskurs gäbe, sondern viele unterschiedliche Ausrichtungen.

Hans Hofmann, Leiter der Abteilung Staats-, Verfassungs- und Verwaltungsrecht im Bundesministerium des Inneren und Professor für Öffentliches Recht an der Humboldt-Universität Berlin, bot einen Einblick in die Perspektiven und Probleme der Kooperationsmodelle zwischen Staat und Muslim*innen in Deutschland. Die Islamkonferenz des BMI 2006 sei eine wichtige Dialogmöglichkeit gewesen. Die Anerkennung muslimischer Gemeinschaften als Religionsgemeinschaften sowie Formen der

Rechtlichkeit zu finden, sei ein wichtiges Anliegen.

Engin Karahan von der Alhambra Gesellschaft e.V. in Köln griff den Punkt der praktischen Umsetzung von Anträgen erneut auf. Es gäbe keine offizielle Stelle, die für die Anerkennung als Religionsgemeinschaft überhaupt zuständig sei. Daraus ergäben sich Entscheidungen mit sehr unterschiedlichen Anforderungen. Karahan sah allerdings auch Verantwortlichkeit auf muslimischer Seite: Es hätte Möglichkeiten gegeben, die nicht genutzt worden seien.

Leider musste die Abschlussdiskussion aus Zeitgründen abgebrochen werden. Da sie aber zeitnah online weitergeführt werden wird, steht einer Teilnahme von weiteren interessierten Zuhörer*innen nichts im Wege. Der Termin wird rechtzeitig von der Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft bekannt gegeben.

Panel Discussion

Soft Power Literature? The Image of Russia in the Balkans

**Organizer: Southeast Europe Association (Berlin Branch), Humboldt University Berlin and Martin Camaj Association
Berlin and online per ZOOM, 12 Mai 2022**

Report by Danica Trifunjagić, Berlin

The war in Ukraine has understandably become a central issue in many areas and on a global level. While most EU countries openly supported Ukraine, condemning Russia's military actions on Ukrainian territory and imposing sanctions, some Balkan countries appeared as exceptions to this global tendency. The main reasons for this reservation were the subject of the panel discussion "Soft Power Literature? The Image of Russia in the Balkans". The discussion panel, hosted by the Department of Slavic and Hungarian Studies at the Humboldt University of Berlin, had a hybrid character, taking place in presence and online. Prof. Dr. *Christian Voß* moderated the event and introduced the discussion, PD Dr. *Tatjana Petzer*, Prof. Dr. *Svetlana Kazakova*, and Prof. Dr. *Alexandra Ioannidou* gave pres-

entations on the "soft power" of literature in Serbia, Bulgaria, and Greece.

In the beginning, Prof. Dr. *Christian Voß* touched upon the current situation between Russia and Ukraine, pointing out that the main topic of the panel discussion was an attempt to explain and understand what images of Russia have been produced by Serbs, Bulgarians, and Greeks as christian post-Ottoman successor states since the 19th century. He added that the history of relations between the countries shows that they go beyond purely geopolitical aspects and reach into the realm of shared religion, culture, art, and myth. Southeast Europe could be considered a laboratory for cultural crises triggered by ideological conflicts, especially when it comes to Yugoslavia and Albania. A potential

positive image of Russia on the one hand might be interpreted as anti-Western resentment which has strong potential in Serbia (after the NATO bombing in 1999) and in Greece (since EU's austerity policy of the 2010s), in addition to the sustainability of the traditional panslavic discourse since the 19th century.

PD Dr. *Tatjana Petzer* from Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg gave a compelling lecture on the situation in Serbia (with a brief reference to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro) regarding historical cultural and geopolitical relations with Russia. Commenting on the beginnings of the Russian influence among Serbs, Petzer referred to the cultural exchange in the epoch of Enlightenment and the great migration of Serbs to Russia, followed by even closer relations that continued throughout the Romanticism era and later, in the avant-garde movements. One exception to this continuity seemed to have been caused by the tensions between Tito and Stalin, which led to censorship and a negative image of Russia in Tito's Yugoslavia. Subsequently restored, this continuity spans to the present moment.

A comparison between the historical circumstances and the current situation in the Serbian media and government provided a clear insight into the power of discourse, with the portrayal of Russia and its President Vladimir Putin in the pro-government Serbian media being an excellent example of discourse control for propaganda purposes. The image of Russia is associated with brotherhood and shared Orthodox religion, and Putin is portrayed as the great saviour of Russians and Serbs. The economic and humanitarian role of Russia in Serbia is emphasized, despite the marginal role of Russia in these areas in comparison to that of the EU. In conclusion, *Petzer* stressed the somewhat underestimated function of soft power in political processes.

An overview of the Bulgarian situation was given by Prof. Dr. *Svetlana Kazakova* from the Institute of Slavic Philology at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich, who included in her analysis the imagological methodology and accentuated the importance of images of oneself and others as well as stereotypes in creating a

cultural pattern of a nation. *Kazakova* painted a broader picture of Balkan cultures, often portrayed as backward and "oriental" from a Western perspective, based on several centuries of Ottoman rule in these areas. This approach served as an introduction to an overview of the close cultural relations between Bulgarians and Russians, due in part to the hostility of the West and in part to attempts to avoid Turkish cultural and religious influence. Cultural relations between Russia and Bulgaria can be traced back to the Middle Ages, when Bulgarian clergy were sent to support Russian Orthodox Christianity, and later, during the 18th and 19th centuries, when Bulgarian intellectuals brought Russian influence back to the newly formed Bulgarian state. Similar to the situation in Serbia, Russian influence continued in the avant-garde, especially in Futurism and Expressionism. *Kazakova* concluded by reflecting on the passive power of literature and its continuity.

In the concluding lecture, Prof. Dr. *Alexandra Ioannidou* of the University of Macedonia (Thessaloniki) first reminded the audience that Greece, unlike Serbia and Bulgaria, is not a Slavic country, but shares the roots of the Orthodox religion with Russia. *Ioannidou* focused on the literature of the late 19th, 20th and early 21st centuries in Greece. She selected literary works that had Russia or Russians as their main theme. Her approach allowed for a clear overview of the presence of Russian themes in Greek literature as well as the literary means by which they were realized. The experiences of writers in different literary periods showed a change of emphasis and perceptions, and are often related to the geopolitical ideas of the time.

The three presentations were followed by an open discussion in which participants attempted to answer the initial question: "Can literature act as soft power?", with the speakers' insights clearly outlining a positive answer. Participants agreed that, while the presentations had the same starting point, they had different developments and emphases within their respective literatures. During the subsequent discussion of the contemporary geopolitical relations, several questions raised that still remain to be answered.