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EDITORIAL

Irvin Yalom once said: "If we climb high enough, we will reach a height from which tragedy ceases to look tragic." Some of you will understand this in more poetical sense, describing an individual who did rise above nihilism or lived through the tragedy in his life. However, from the more skeptical perspective of traditional Slovak voter, this statement perfectly describes what happens when you climb high enough on the political ladder in Slovak politics- suddenly, all the tragedies, strikes, poor condition of Slovak health care system- cease to look tragic. Just a cynical mockery? I would not say so. However, there is still some hope, if we mobilize ourselves and we wont ignore our civic right to go and manifest our belief in civil society of 21st century, even though it might look like an endless struggle. Maybe. Nonetheless, Il Ponte supports all the teachers and professors in their fight for appropriate working conditions and encourages everyone to manifest their opinion and participate on the elections 2016, since we should always fight for our ideals...

Barbara

TEACHERS STRIKE

MÁRIO LAPOŠ

In every year teachers had protested against the government Slovakia won a medal at World Hockey Championships - 2003 and 2012. Four years later question arises, will the successful history repeat itself? The employees of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport march the streets and demand immense changes in school financing, wages and equal access for all children. Their hope is to achieve higher quality of the whole system. Just what the hockey players have no so long ago achieved.

The leader of teachers' initiative Mr. Vladimír Cmroman confirmed more than 11,000 pedagogues joining, with transparent support from nationwide media Denník N and .týždeň and right-wing parties (current opposition to leftist parliament majority and government controlled by Fico Smer-SD; social democratic party). Fico, being in dispute with the former listed medium and in the midst of imperative parliamentary election campaign, took advantage of this fact and accused both opponents and the teachers of politically oriented plot. Nevertheless, the prime minister did make a promise to work out teachers' demands given Smer-SD is part of the government after the election day on March 5th. On the opposite, he thinks it wouldn't be right to approve major changes beforehand, thus hurdle the next executive body. Meanwhile, 2-billion euros have been approved to pay for Bratislava bypass.

Teachers and public could no longer tolerate Fico's government hypocrisy and decided to raise the pressure. As of February, vocal support choes toward pedagogues even from Universities. The biggest and oldest Slovak university Komenského joined the strike. On February 15th BISLA - Bratislava International Schoool of Liberal Arts issued formal statement of support and encouragement as well.

Il Ponte would also like to show its support, because, as the press release points out, it is first time since the Velvet Revolution in 1989 (fall of socialism) that universities are active in political and social movement. We want to be a part of it since we believe this change will serve for the betterment of Slovakia's future.

THE RIGHT KIND OF WRONG POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

MÁRIO LAPOŠ

"Forgive me if I tend to romanticize the past. I mean, it wasn't always as stormy and rain-swept as this. But I remember it that way… because that was it at its most beautiful" muses Woody Allen in 'Radio Days' over his childhood neighbourhood Rockaway, New York. I have to apologize too, for this column might get that way. It is all the clichés you can think of (here we go with the romanticizing already): the uglier sister of Wien and Budapest, the outsider, the underclass hero. Ladies and Gentlemen, I give you Bratislava.

Donald Trump is running for republican presidential nomination with slogan "Make America Great Again!". In 1918 Bratislava, then Pressburg, Nowadays, Bratislava is not the city with functioning public transportation, or vast bike lanes network. Cobblestones in the Old Town part resemble Slovakia's World Hockey championship medals - so few and so far away from each other. Parking is a joke (and expensive one) and the number of constructions sites is too damn high. Hell, it is not even as clean as Belarus. But, at least hipsters are doing ok.
Bratislava, you have to get to know. I can only tell you it rewards the patient ones in way, that suits everyone's personal interests. For some, it's diverse coffee shops, for others, concerts both commercial and underground, thriving gastronomy, universities, students life, hockey. See? Stop whining!

STAMPS OF GENERAL VLASOV'S ARMY

SIMON HORECKÝ

When I was browsing through some older literature, I came across a very interesting but relatively short article about postage stamps of Vlasov's Army. The article was written by J. Afanghulsky in the "Yamshchik" magazine of the Canadian Society of Russian Philately. This article really captured my attention, giving me a thirst to find out more about the story behind these mysterious stamps.

HISTORY

Before the outbreak of the war on the Eastern Front, General Andrey Andreyevich Vlasov was one of the top
military commanders in the Soviet Union. In 1938, he was sent to China as a military adviser to assist General Chiang Kai-shek in leading the war against Japan. He was awarded the highest Chinese distinction: the Order of the Golden Dragon. Immediately afterwards he also received the Soviet awards - the Order of the Red Banner and the Order of Lenin. In the evening before the conflict broke out on the Eastern Front, as a Major-General, Vlasov was in command of the 4th Mechanised Corps of the troops around Kiev. He excelled also in the Battle of Lwów and was appointed officer in command of the 37th Army defending Kiev. After heavy fighting, the wounded Vlasov and what was left of his units managed to fight their way out to eastwards, to safety. Once his wounds had healed, Stalin entrusted him with forming the 20th Army for the defence of Moscow in November 1941. He was successful once again and was promoted to Lieutenant General. In March 1942, he was appointed Deputy Commander of the Volkhov Front, in an effort to lift the Siege of Leningrad. Instead of going on the attack, however, his 2nd Shock Army had
a heavy defensive battle on their hands, and faced the threat of being surrounded.

Heavy fighting had erupted on the Volkhov Front at the time, but the Germans gained the advantage, surrounding the 2nd Shock Army in a valley basin. Ten thousand soldiers died in the Volkhov swamps and forests. Soldiers drowned in the swamps, died of starvation or from injuries. Only around 30,000 soldiers were taken captive, meaning less than 30%. Vlasov went on the run together with his troops. The general was eventually caught by the Germans in a curious way, after being taken captive by
a local village mayor as
a partisan and being locked up in a barn. When the mayor brought a German captain with a detachment to the barn, they faced a tall dirty man in
a long officer's coat. It was General Vlasov.

PRISONER AND COLLABORATOR

After the invasion of the Soviet Union by Nazi Germany, hundreds of thousands of Soviet soldiers of various nationalities were taken prisoner. Their national and political affiliations differed, with some disagreeing with the Stalin regime, and many of them were afraid of returning because Soviet soldiers who were taken prisoner were regarded as traitors under Stalin Order No. 270. In time, those prisoners who were willing to cooperate with the Germans started forming various voluntary and help units. The Germans would refer to this kind of labour as Hiwi, short for Hilfswilliger, which translates as 'willing to help'. Eventually, small Russian fighting units even begun to be set up, such as the 1st Russian National Army, 599th Russian Brigade, or the XV Cossack Cavalry Corps. They were just small units though, which the Germans never trusted and used only for dirty work that the Germans themselves refused to do.

After he was caught, General Vlasov was interrogated and taken to a prisoner of war camp in Vinnytsia (Ukraine). Vlasov was visited at the camp by a certain Captain Wilfried Strik-Strikfeldt, a Baltic German and former officer in the Russian Imperial Army, who proposed co-operation with him. General Vlasov agreed, after which his fate was integrally linked to the fate of Nazi Germany. The general was set free and could move around freely without supervision. He started to co- operate with the Propaganda Department in Berlin.
Throughout 1943, he and Strik -Strikfeldt went around POW camps with the aim of getting as many future collaborators as possible to the newly established Committee for the Liberation of Russia. By its ideology, the committee was in line with the white Russian émigrés abroad, with whom it maintained active contacts. The Committee therefore regarded the USSR as the enemy, especially the Bolshevik regime.

The general continued to actively co-operate with the Ministry of Propaganda and was involved in the creation of many propaganda leaflets that were scattered over positions of the Red Army. The Committee set up its main camp in the German town of Dabbendorf. It was from here that the general endeavoured to form the Russian Liberation Army.

These efforts, however, did not meet with the approval of the German high command. When Hitler found out about what was going on, he went into a rage and declared again that the Russian Liberation Army could be used for propaganda, but that it could never actually be formed. Following defeats in 1943 and 1944, however, the Germans were forced to reassess their decision (Fig. 1).

On 14 November 1944, the Committee for the Liberation of the Peoples of Russia (KONR) was officially formed in Prague, together with the official establishment of the Russian Liberation Army (ROA). This act was accompanied by indifference from the official German high command, but also from the Czech public, who saw in the Committee and the ROA mere collaborators. The KONR issued a manifesto without the knowledge of the German authorities, in which it celebrated the Russian nation in the battle against Stalin, but which also assumed the concluding of peace with Germany and the creation of new free Russia without Bolsheviks.

The first military units started to be set up shortly afterwards. On 19 November 1944, the 1st Infantry Division of the ROA was formed, made up chiefly of various Russian voluntary units that had been withdrawn from the front. At the beginning of 1945, the 2nd Infantry Division of the ROA appeared, comprising mostly former prisoners of war from the POW camps. The flight unit was an independent part of the ROA. There was a broad spectrum of opinions in all the units. A large portion of the soldiers wanted to fight against Stalin, while on the other side they did not agree with the Nazi regime in Germany. Others would join the ROA due to the cruel conditions in the German POW camps.

The first military combat of the ROA didn't happen until 14 March 1945 at the confluence of the Oder and Nisa rivers near Erlenhof, where they unsuccessfully tried to destroy a Soviet bridge-head. After that, the division was withdrawn from the battle and dispatched to the south. The units gradually penetrated into the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.

Even at that time, it was clear to General Vlasov that Germany would not hold out long and so he secretly started establishing contacts with the Czech resistance and also with western intelligence services. His wish was to see the ROA preserved in the event of a 3rd World War against the Bolshevik USSR.

From 30 April, representatives of the ROA started establishing official contact with the Czech resistance, which was considering letting them take part in the prepared Prague uprising, with their help eventually being agreed upon. Early in the morning on 6 May, the ROA troops arrived in Prague. The so-called Vlasovs, as they were referred to by Prague residents, occupied key vantage points and junctions and controlled a large part of Prague and its environs.

In addition to battles with the German army, at the same time they had to negotiate with representatives of the Czech National Council and the Czech resistance, as well as with the American military command. It was still not clear whether Prague would be liberated by the American troops or by the Red Army or just how the Western allies would deal with Vlasov and his men. As events unfolded, it soon became clear that the Red Army would liberate Prague and so the Czech authorities started distancing themselves from the ROA.

On 7 May, the Czech National Council decided to refuse additional assistance from the ROA. This led to the departure of Vlasovs from Prague early in the next morning. One of the groups that didn't manage to flee in time from the Red Army was executed at Jinonice in Prague. After leaving Prague, the ROA units moved to the west of the country to the American occupation zone. Vlasov tried to negotiate with the Americans while there, writing an open letter to the governments of the USA and the United Kingdom on 11 July explaining the stance of the ROA, and the fear about the fate of his soldiers.

Nevertheless, the American military authorities decided to hand the ROA troops over to the Red Army. The Americans gave the general himself the chance to flee to Switzerland, but he refused. The execution of the ROA troops took place soon after they were handed over, on Czech territory. There is a mass grave at Olšansky cemetery containing some 187 ROA soldiers who died in Prague and Příbram. After the revolution in 1989, a monument was erected over the mass grave for the fallen soldiers of the ROA. Other members of the ROA were executed back in the Soviet Union, or were destined for the terrible prisons of the Gulags. After being handed over to the Red Army, the general was taken to Moscow, where he was tried and sentenced together with his closest associates for treason, then executed by hanging on 2 August 1946.

PHILATELY

After all that history, let's turn now to philately, but it was important to clarify first of all the historical events related to General Vlasov and the Russian Liberation Army (ROA).

There are five postage stamps with peasant motifs attributed to the Vlasov movement, bearing the inscription ПОЧТА (POČTA). The stamps are printed on greyish-cream paper, of a quality reminiscent of newspaper with perforation of 11.5 and without watermark.

Stamps are known both with and without gum. These stamps were printed using a very simple technique, probably 50 per sheet.

Reportedly, around 16,000 such stamps were printed, with the series consisting of five stamps, namely:

50 k. green - Construction of a farmer's house

1 R. brown - carmine – Ploughman

2 R. blue – Rural scene

4 R. violet – Kremlin and Cathedral in Pskov/Pleskau

10 R. dark brown – Street scene

Stamps are known with postmarks with the inscription:

ST.O.K. / 30 SEP. 43 / SLOBODA
STANDTORTS - KOMMANDATUR / 26 IX.43 / SLOBODA

I could not find any photos or scans of these stamps anywhere. However, instead I managed to find in my collection two stamps with nice ST.O.K. postmarks, but with different dates:

ST.O.K. / 21 SEP. 43 / SLOBODA
ST.O.K. / 25 SEP. 43 / SLOBODA

According to available literature, the postmarked stamps of the Vlasov Army are fakes produced right after the end of World War II. As is known, the ROA or Vlasov's army was indeed formed at the end of 1944, and so logically the stamps could not be found postally used in September or November 1943. On the internet I came across the website of an American philatelist from Los Angeles who claims that these stamps are incorrectly attributed to the Vlasov movement. Reportedly, these stamps were printed for some semi- autonomous government in Eastern Ukraine.

I assume that the author based his conclusion on the allegedly falsified postmarks bearing the inscription SLOBODA. The inscription SLOBODA should be linked to the historical territory of the SLOBODA Governorate of Ukraine located in the north-east of today's Ukraine (Kharkiv region, parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions) and the Russian Federation (parts of Voronezh, Kursk, Belgorod regions). However, I did not find that an autonomous government existed in the north-east of Ukraine. The monetary unit printed on the stamps could also serve as another clue. The symbols K and P (=R) beyond any doubt represent kopecks and rubles. However, within the Reich Commissariat of Ukraine karbovanets were the valid currency. Furthermore, I doubt that any Ukrainian semi -autonomous government would print on stamps the Kremlin in Russia's Pskov. I believe this theory can be definitely excluded. However, right across the border from the Reich Commissariat of Ukraine there was formed on the Russian occupied territory the Lokot Autonomic Area.

The Lokot Autonomy was a small area that was intended to serve the German military administration as a pilot project to test the Russian collaborative self-government for the future. The well-known collaborator Konstantin Voskobojnik was the mayor in charge of the whole area. After his death, he was succeeded by the better-known Bronislav Kaminski, who was behind the creation of the SS Sturmbrigade R.O.N.A - Russkaya Osvoboditelnaya Narodnaya Armiya in 1943. This SS brigade can be considered the forerunner of the RLA.

The brigade was deployed in the fight against partisans in Belarus and during the Warsaw Uprising. Kaminski himself was executed by the Germans for the killings which were even beyond the German standard. The brigade was also deployed during the Slovak National Uprising. In November 1944, however, the brigade was dissolved and most of the men were added to the newly forming Vlasov's army. According to data from the catalogue (Michel Handbuch – Katalog Deutsche Feldpost 1937-1945), these stamps were printed for the Vlasov army as early as July 1943, but only for propaganda purposes and they were never used in the postal system. The catalogue also states that the postmarks on the stamps are all fakes. The word among collectors is that these stamps were found scattered in the streets of Berlin after its fall in April 1945.

The stamps are also mentioned in the Lyapin specialised catalogue of 2009. It is stated that they were probably issued in 1943 or 1944, either for propaganda purposes or for future use. Unlike Michel's claims, according to Lyapin these stamps were found in post-war Czechoslovakia. The catalogue also mentions that these stamps had probably never been postally used. Lyapin himself drew mainly from German catalogues and literature. However none of the catalogues mentioned gives valuations of these stamps.

The cost of the stamps attributed to Vlasov's army is around €15-20 per stamp, based on my own observations. The entire series thus costs approximately €80 to €100. But I have also seen corner blocks of four which are sold for more than €130. The most valuable stamp of the series is the 4 ruble purple stamp, which is missing from many sets. Several years ago, a whole sheet (10x5) of 50 stamps was offered in a Czech auction of the Burda company for around 5,000 Czech crowns. The item was not sold either at the auction or after the sale.

Are these stamps correctly attributed to the Vlasov movement? Or were they printed for the Lokot Autonomy, possibly for the Kaminski Brigade? Were they ever postally used? These are just a few of the questions that remain unanswered. It is known that after the war all citizens of the Soviet Union who collaborated with the Germans were referred to as Vlasovs, even if they had nothing to do with General Vlasov and his movement. These stamps therefore remain shrouded in secrecy, but they are undoubtedly very nice historical records of the time documenting the various fates of Russian citizens in World War II.

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INŠPIRÁCIE Z TOP SVETOVEJ UNIVERZITY

DOMINIK HARMAN

Nie každý piatok máte možnosť vycestovať za Veľkú mláku. Mne sa to podarilo na prvý krát zapriahnuť na pár týždňov rovno na Princeton a chcem sa s vami podeliť o zážitky.
Najskôr: Ako si sa tam dostal?!
Odpoveď je jednoduchá. Prihlásil som sa a vybrali ma :) Letné semináre sú čoraz populárnejšie aj u nás a pochádzajú, hádate správne, práve z Ameriky. Tento mal výhodu, že stojí v porovnaní s ostatnými **smiešnych 500 dolárov.** (V cene bola aj strava a ubytovanie!)
Nuž a čo si z tohto mesiaca odnášam? Inšpiroval som sa v troch veciach:
1. **Nároky, ktoré na seba kladieme na Slovensku, sú úplne smiešne.** BISLA v tomto robí ešte celkom dobrú prácu, no prečítať na letný 10-dňový seminár vyše 2000 (slovom: dve tisíc) strán ťažkých filozofických textov, to som zažil až v Amerike.
2. **Vzťah učiteľ - žiak máme absolútne pomýlený.** Najviac som sa od profesora naučil, keď ma po večeri zobral do miestnej vychýrenej zmrzlinárne a po ceste sme problémy so seminárov rozoberali v rovinách, ktoré by nám počas hodiny nikdy nenapadli. Učiteľ je tu na to, aby nás sprevádzal na ceste za hľadaním Pravdy. A ja ako žiak, študent, som tu na to, *aby som mu jeho sprevádzanie oplatil poctivým študovaním a kladením nepríjemných otázok.* **Tak sa obaja naučíme najviac.**
3. Vybral som si dobrú školu. Podľa toho, čo počúvam od svojich rovesníkov a čo som zažil na inej univerzite predtým, než som prišiel na BISLA, robí naša škola v rámci možností veľmi dobrú prácu. Iste, vidím tisíc príležitostí na zlepšenie - no kto je bez viny, nech prvý hodí kameňom. Myslím si, že peniaze mňa a mojich rodičov sú štúdiom na BISLA investované dobre.

EVERYTHING YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT HEGEL AND HIS PHILOSOPHY OF RIGHT

EMMA JASMIN VISKUPIČ

“WHAT IS RATIONAL IS REAL; AND WHAT IS REAL IS RATIONAL.”

I claim myself being a Hegelian and I am aware of the fact that only a few people imagine something that could actually be considered Hegelian. Let me therefore introduce this German post-Kantian philosopher and his approach towards...everything. I know my last Il Ponte entry was on la Pizza Napoletana, so let’s be a little bit more abstract this month, or maybe we could look at the issue of Italian food through the eyes of Hegel. “Hold back the edges of your gown Ladies, we are going trough Hell!” William Carlos Williams you and your quote never lets me down!

First of all, Hegel saw the world through its problems, the unsolvable problems of the society, the ultimate dichotomies of reality, the crucial oppositions and contradictions of human existence. His melodramatic vision thought, carried a little bit of light within itself – any separation is presupposed by its prior unity! Things are first united, and then they become separated. Easy, right? So this hipster-like cry over the wrongness of our lives, of the unhappy reality carried a sparkle of positive energy, that there is a solution to this problem.

Let’s look at an example of a dichotomy: necessity vs freedom. Necessity is something given and inevitable, it is determined (like Newtonian physics!) whereas freedom is not even empirical – we don’t know freedom! Freedom is just an idea, an ideal we chase in our minds! Freedom even makes us a little schizophrenic, we live in reality and then we also live in our ideal of freedom and these two can never become united! I mean can your superhero movie and your everyday life full of struggle become united? No! But you still watch and dream of that, right?

So, since we can only live in reality, no superhero world, we can peruse a certain level of freedom that is compatible with the tangible reality. Hegel therefore tells us, to look for freedom reconciled with nature. See what he did there? Presupposed unity, tangible dichotomy in real world, suggested unity again. This is a Hegelian basic model of understanding politics, ethics and morality in terms of everyday life. All these dichotomies are deformations of what should be seen as a unity, therefore the modern understanding of ethics and politics is a deformed one! Now Hegel recognizes these dichotomies in every aspect of civil society – family, religion, empirical and realist theories,

"2. The science of right is a part of philosophy. Hence it must develop the idea, which is the reason of an object, out of the conception. It is the same thing to say that it must regard the peculiar internal development of the thing itself. Since it is a part it has a definite beginning, which is the result and truth of what goes before, and this, that goes before, constitutes its so- called proof. Hence the origin of the conception of right falls outside of the science of right. The deduction of the conception is presupposed in this treatise, and is to be considered as already given.

All right, so the passage above is an introductory passage on the Philosophy of Right. I believe you can all see the reasoning I tried to explain myself above. Hegel is all about the lost unity in every aspect of human life, and world itself, and the predispositions we have to become united. He has many followers, not only me and James Griffith, who believe that when society gets united within economical and political aspects, the historical end of history of a man happens (Kojév & Fukuyama). But, BUT, those two and mainly Fukuyama thought that capitalism was the ultimate goal of a society that would end the historical of a man, but we still see the history in its making NOW. Therefore, I am not concluding anything; I am waiting for my personal unity to happen, all due time.
(Hegel kindly provided more on the quote above. You are welcome.)

Addition.—Philosophy forms a circle. It has, since it must somehow make a beginning, a primary, directly given matter, which is not proved and is not a result. But this starting-point is simply relative, since from another point of view it appears as a result. Philosophy is a consequence, which does not hang in the air or form a directly new beginning, but is self-enclosed.

According to the formal unphilosophic method of the sciences, definition is the first desideratum, as regards, at least, the external scientific form. The positive science of right, however, is little concerned with definition, since its special aim is to give what it is that is right, and also the particular phases of the laws. For this reason it has been said as a warning, Omnis definitio in jure civili periculosa; and in fact the more disconnected and contradictory the phases of a right are, the less possible is a definition of it. A definition should contain only universal features; but these forthwith bring to light contradictions, which in the case of law are injustice, in all their nakedness. Thus in Roman law, for instance, no definition of man was possible, because it excluded the slave. The conception of man was destroyed by the fact of slavery. In the same way to have defined property and owner would have appeared to be perilous to many relations.—But definitions may perhaps be derived from etymology, for the reason, principally, that in this way special cases are avoided, and a basis is found in the feeling and imaginative thought of men. The correctness of a definition would thus consist in its agreement with existing ideas. By such a method everything essentially scientific is cast aside. As regards the content there is cast aside the necessity of the self-contained and self-developed object, and as regards the form there is discarded the nature of the conception. In philosophic knowledge the necessity of a conception is the main thing, and the process, by which it, as a result, has come into being, is the proof and deduction. After the content is seen to be necessary independently, the second point is to look about for that which corresponds to it in existing ideas and modes of speech. But the way in which a conception exists in its truth, and the way it presents itself in random ideas not only are but must be different both in form and structure. If a notion is not in its content false, the conception can be shown to be contained in it and to be already there in its essential traits. A notion may thus be raised to the form of a conception. But so little is any notion the measure and criterion of an independently necessary and true conception, that it must accept truth from the conception, be justified by it, and know itself through it. —If the method of knowing, which proceeds by formal definition, inference and proof, has more or less disappeared, a worse one has come to take its place. This new method maintains that ideas, as, e.g., the idea of right in all its aspects, are to be directly apprehended as mere facts of consciousness, and that natural feeling, or that heightened form of it which is known as the inspiration of one's own breast, is the source of right. This method may be the most convenient of all, but it is also the most unphilosophic. Other features of this view, referring not merely to knowledge but directly to action, need not detain us here.

While the first or formal method went so far as to require in definition the form of the conception, and in proof the form of a necessity of knowledge, the method of the intuitive consciousness and feeling takes for its principle the arbitrary contingent consciousness of the subject.—In this treatise we take for granted the scientific procedure of philosophy, which has been set forth in the philosophic logic."

INTERVIEW WITH
Mgr. Aliaksei Kazharski

Q: For the beginning can you give us some brief description about your academic career or whatever you would like to share with us about you.

See below

Q: How did you choose which area of study you want to persue in life? What do you like about IR and what does it make it special for you?

This is going to sound trivial, but in a way it tried to choose me from early on. I was growing up in a very internationalized environment, on a military base that was the very heart of NATO. So "IR" was part of my "Lebenswelt". :) I attended a proper American high school, but around 30% of the students were from all over the world. In the 90's the place was also at the center of current events, so to say, as Europe and the world were both changing fast in the post-Communist era... But by the age of eighteen I had developed a taste for something different and went on to study philosophy. During the following six years I was often involved in rather apolitical stuff like phenomenology and philosophy of language. But then I ended up doing a second MA in European studies and finally a PhD in IR. "The roads that choose us", heh? :)

Q: Can you think of any piece of art (book, movie, play) that really made an impact on your life and the way you understand the world?

Naming one single work would be tricky. But my Honors English teacher had a formative impact on me. We read books like The Lord of the Flies and Animal Farm in class and the effect was profound. Thanks to her I was also a teenage fan of Herman Hesse, though at the age of 15 I probably didn't understand even half of what he was trying to tell me. :p Nevertheless, after all that, I guess, getting involved with social science and humanities was only a matter of time.

Q: If you were to say 2pros and 2cons of living in Slovakia what would they be?

Pros. Not sure how much the people here think about this, but isn't it it super cool to be living on an open border? Austria is within 20 minutes walking distance from my apartment and I can be in Vienna in 59 minutes if I want to... Even in Belarus you normally have to travel a while to get somewhere else, not to mention countries like the US or Russia. This creates a sense of coziness. And the place is also full of fascinating history. I love touching the Austro-Hungarian past with so many cultures and identities that it harbors. It's fun intellectually. You observe contrasts, but also regional similarities that stand out clearly to an outsider, and you smile to yourself quietly as people fight over their "small differences" sometimes.

And, of course, the Slovak project itself was highly interesting. So much in fact that I wrote a master thesis about it.

I know that many young people dream of getting away as far away from Bratislava as possible, but to me it is a cozy and interesting place that I love and where I actually don't mind spending my life.

Cons. My friends keep confusing it with Slovenia…

Q: What do you appreciate the most about an academic life?

Flexible working time, and, above all, the fact that you work is not separated from your Self, i.e. your intellectual interests and desires. But this is a double edged sword, of course, a blessing and a curse in the same vial. Because you are existentially attached to it you often find yourself incapable of putting your work aside and simply enjoying free time as all "normal" people do.

Q: Is there anything you would like to say to our students?

Please, do not cheat. It is immediately obvious to us and it offends us.

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If you are interested in contributing to or joining ***il Ponte***, or want to learn more about us or any of the other groups, activities, or topics mentioned email at: barbarakelemenova@gmail.com.