

Final Report “Engaging Eastern Europe” [EEE]

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Introduction

The project “Engaging Eastern Europe” (henceforth abbreviated as EEE) started, as planned, on 1 November 2006, and was executed largely according to plan. The initially planned end date, 31 October 2008, has not been met, due to the delays in the organization of the international workshops other than those in Nijmegen. Therefore, it was agreed between partners, NWO and the Institute of Eastern Christian Studies (henceforth IECS), to extend the end date to 31 February 2009. Even this end date has not been fully met, due to the same reason: two of the international activities (one international workshop and one researcher exchange) must be delayed beyond that date. Both will take place in March 2009. Except for this regrettable setback, however, the project has been executed according to plan and its objectives have been largely met (see below: “Objectives”, and “Results”).

The project has also proved its relevance, in two respects: one is the lively and enthusiastic international cooperation that has resulted from it, a clear indication that the project indeed hit a point; the other is that it has become clear, during the various workshops, that the tending relation between European integration processes and the Eastern Orthodox Christian tradition is far from clear, let alone resolved.

Objectives

The objectives of EEE, as stated in the application [Appendix A] were the following four:

- A. Five international workshops, to be held in Nijmegen, Moscow, Montpellier, Budapest, and Nijmegen, with participants from all research groups.
- B. The preparation of an FP7 application, including the research and consultations necessary to that end (coinciding in time with the workshops, thus limiting expenses).
- C. A joint publication, to appear in the series ‘Eastern Christian Studies’, published by the IECS.
- D. Exchange of researchers between the participating groups: a total of 6, viz. 3 times going out from and 3 times coming in to IECS.

Problems

The major problem that EEE has encountered was the coordination of the activities of the partners in Russia, Hungary, and France. It should be noted, first of all, that this is *not* a matter of lack of interest or commitment, but rather of the difficulty to coordinate, from a distance, activities that for part of the integral management and planning of diverse partners. Two of the three partners, RGGU represented by Prof. A. Agadjanian, and CEU represented by Dr. N. al-Bagdadi, have been able to work according to plan, albeit with serious delay in the case of CEU: although this delay does not in any way affect the outcome of the project, it is of course less than ideal that the project time span had to be extended. The third partner, a consortium of three universities (MGU – CEU – Montpellier-III) represented by Prof. M. Dmitriev, has gone at great lengths to fulfill its part of the project, but it has proved to be very difficult to work with a “sub-consortium”. The “French connection” in particular, has been absent, due to language problems, to the impossibility for the other partners to participate in workshops at Montpellier-III and in Paris because of dates (coincidence with other activities) and, last but not least, because of differences in research agenda. However, thanks to the efforts of prof. Dmitriev, this has been compensated successfully through a workshop, in September 2008, in Moscow with an adjacent workshop on a related topic in St.Peterburg, in which members of the research group as a whole have participated. Still, it is regrettable that this “French connection” has not come off the ground, with the result that the international research network has not been expanded, as far as France is concerned, beyond already existing cooperation with EHESS in Paris (prof. Scherrer).

Results

A. The first of the objectives has been realized largely according to plan. Four international workshops have been held, the fifth [nr.4] will be held 27-28 March 2009 at the CEU in Budapest. In some cases, topics and titles have slightly changed, but the overall idea has remained intact. One workshop (nr.3) was not held, as had been planned, in Montpellier, but in Moscow.

1. ‘Eastern Orthodox Christianity and European Integration: Questions and Hypotheses’, 18-20 January 2007, Soeterbeeck / Nijmegen, IECS (working language: English) [see Appendix B]
2. ‘Eastern Orthodoxy and European Integration: Russian Perspectives’, 22-23 May 2007, Moscow, RGGU (working languages: English and Russian) [see Appendix C]

3. 'Christianity and Images of National Identity in Russia, France, Europe, 17th -20th century', Moscow, MGU, 4-6 September 2008 (working languages: English and French) [see Appendix D]
4. 'Eastern Orthodox Christianity and Human Rights', 9-11 February 2009, Soeterbeeck / Nijmegen, IECS [Appendix E]
5. 'Eastern Christianity in Post-Imperial Societies', 27-28 March 2009, Budapest, CEU (working language: English) [Appendix F]

B. The second objective has been met in a different way than planned, but, we believe, in a better way. The aim of realizing an FP7 application has been replaced by the more modest, but also more realistic aim of applying for smaller research project grants. Apart from the intended size of FP7 projects, and the fact that IECS does not have the staff necessary for the administration and management of projects of that size, there also have not been issued calls for proposals, within FP7, that really suited the basic intuitions and profile of EEE. Alternatively, therefore, we have worked on two research project applications.

The first of these, officially applied for by prof. Thomas Bremer (Wilhelmsuniversität Münster)¹, is entitled "Alte Grenzen - Neue Fronten" (Old Borders - New Frontiers). It was applied for at the Volkswagenstiftung, which has accepted it. The project, coordinated by Dr. Alfons Brüning of IECS will last of 3 years and be executed by 8 junior and senior scholars from Cluj (Romania), Muenster (Germany), Moscow (Russia) and Nijmegen (the Netherlands). The expected outcome will be three doctoral dissertations, two monographs and several meetings. The senior researchers include, apart from the persons mentioned, dr. Alin Tat (Cluj), dr. Ciprian Ghisa (Cluj), prof. Alex Agadjanian (Russia/USA), prof. Wil van den Bercken and dr. Evert van der Zweerde (IECS). are engaged in this project.

A second project, entitled "Laboratory Ukraine; Religions and Politics in European Border Region," was applied for at the Thyssen Stiftung. It would have consisted of two post-doc research projects, one by a theologian, one by a historian, and led by dr. Alfons Brüning and dr. Evert van der Zweerde. This project was not accepted. However, profiting from the feedback that we have received, other ways will be sought to reapply. Also, the possibilities of other project applications, jointly with partners in our network, will be explored.

C. The third of the objectives is met in the intended publication of a volume in the Eastern Christian Studies serie. The title of this volume is *Orthodox Christianity and Human Rights*, and it will consist of selected papers from the February 2009 expert meeting at Soeterbeeck. Draft versions of the chapters

¹ Volkswagenstiftung accepts only proposals that have a German institution as main applicant.

have been presented at the expert meeting, the deadline for final submissions has been set at 31 July, 2009. The volume will be edited by prof. Wil van den Bercken, dr. Alfons Brüning, and dr. Evert van der Zweerde, and is planned to appear in 2010.

D. As for the fourth objective, finally, 4 of the 6 planned researcher exchanges have been realized, and a 5th will be realized in March, 2009:

- i. dr. Boris Falikov (RGGU, Moscow) has stayed as a visiting scholar at the IECS for an 8-day research stay 18-25 January 2007.
- ii. prof. Wil van den Bercken (IECS, Nijmegen) has stayed as a visiting scholar at RGGU for a 7-day research stay 18-24 May 2007
- iii. dr. Alfons Brüning (IECS, Nijmegen) has stayed as a visiting scholar at MGU for an 8-day research stay 3-13 September 2008 [NB: CHECK!!!].
- iv. dr. Evert van der Zweerde (IECS, Nijmegen) has stayed as a visiting scholar at CEU for a 7-day research stay 5-11 October 2008.
- v. dr. Konstantin Erusalimskiy (MGU and Boston University) has stayed as a visiting scholar at IECS 18-27 March 2009 [NB: CHECK!!!].

Additional Results

In addition to the planned results, the project has led to a substantial improvement of the international visibility of IECS as a Dutch research institution, and to an expanded network in the field. This result is of great importance for a relatively small institute like ours. Moreover, it gives confidence that, with our research activities, we are on a track that resounds within a larger academic context, moreover, and most importantly, both in the Western academic world and in the countries concerned.

Conclusions

Despite a few minor problems and setbacks, the project as a whole has been executed to our satisfaction. Both in terms of the IECS' international network, and in terms of our expertise in the topic of the project, we have achieved what we expected.

The situation in Europe has changed with the admission of a number of predominantly Orthodox Christian countries (Romania and Bulgaria in particular) to the EU, the establishment of Russia, with its specific constellation of state and Russian Orthodox Church, as the EU's largest neighbor, and the position of Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus' inbetween. Assuming that this

constellation will be in place for some years to come, it is important that the differences between these three groups of countries have become clear in the course of this project. In the Orthodox countries inside the EU, churches and other religious organizations are in the process of finding their new position, without the peculiar combination of suppression and protection that they experienced in “Soviet block times”. Within the framework of secular constitutions, and in interaction with such institutions as the European Court for Human Rights, the traditional Orthodox churches in particular face new challenges and new questions with respect to their tradition. Typical examples are territorial and property disputes.

Outside the EU, the situation is very different, if we take into account that the Russian Orthodox Church is more and more acquiring the status of national Church, even if the position of established church is not sought for. The social doctrine and human rights doctrine that the ROC propagates is influential not only in Russia, but also outside it. It seems, however, that Orthodox Churches other than that of Russia are less inclined to follow their “big sister” than some expected. The situation in the countries “in between”, Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus’, is marked most of all by a situation of religious plurality and, partly, competition between different patriarchates, both in Moldova and in Ukraine.

Further research needs to be done with respect to the relations between church & state and religion & politics, but it has become clear that the perception of human rights, of society and of politics of those individuals, groups, and institutions that have their roots in the Orthodox tradition, is different from Western (post-)Christian perceptions, whether Protestant or Catholic. This shared heritage works out differently each side of the EU’s Eastern border, as a result of different local conditions and, also, political histories, but in both cases it has its effects.

Appendices:

- A. Text of the initial application
- B. Report of the 1st expert meeting at Soeterbeeck
- C. Report of the expert meeting at RGGU, Moscow
- D. Report of the expert meeting at MGU, Moscow
- E. Report of the 2nd expert meeting at Soeterbeeck
- F. Report of the expert meeting at CEU, Budapest
- G. Financial report