This April, scholars of Slavonic and East European Studies gathered at Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge for the annual BASEES conference.

The 2017 meeting became one of our biggest yet, with almost 500 delegates from 40 different countries. BASEES marked the centenary of the Russian Revolution with international keynote panels of leading experts debating recent scholarship on the Revolution and the lasting impacts of 1917 for the present day. In her opening address, BASEES President Judith Pallot also touched on current events. Professor Pallot briefed delegates on recent politically-motivated attacks on academic freedom affecting the Central European University, and on ongoing developments with the European University at St Petersburg (the latter’s educational licence was revoked on March 24). BASEES has actively demonstrated its support for both institutions; delegates used the opening keynote to express solidarity with our colleagues in St Petersburg and Hungary. The President’s formal letter of support for the EUSPb may be read here: www.basees.org/news/2017/3/24/basees-statement-on-the-european-university-at-st-petersburg

Over the course of the conference, numerous panels, as well as a further two keynote roundtables – one on ‘Women in the 1917 Revolution’ and one on ‘The Russian Revolution in Historical Perspective’ – debated the wider impacts of this momentous event. BASEES was particularly delighted to welcome Barbara Engels (U of Colorado, Boulder) and Natalia L. Pushkareva (Russian Academy of Sciences) to Cambridge; both are pioneers of the study of women, the family and social change in Russia. In this context, once again the BASEES Women’s Forum organised an exciting keynote roundtable. In front of a packed lecture theatre, Barbara Engels, Dan Healey (Oxford), Claire Shaw (Bristol) and Katy Turton (Queen’s University, Belfast) considered issues of identity politics and positionality in Eurasian research.

One of the conference programme’s highlights was the roundtable with leading players in the ‘other revolution’ that...
finally ended the 1917 experiment with the signing of the Belavezha Accords, which dissolved the Soviet Union, in 1991. Organised with the generous support from the PHENOMEN TRUST, Gennady Burbulis (close associate of Boris Yeltsin and State Secretary of Russia, 1991-2), Leonid Kravchuk (first President of Ukraine, 1991-4) and Stanislau Shushkevich (first head of state of independent Belarus, 1991-4) shared their recollections of the events of 1991 with the audience. Richard Sakwa (Kent) expertly led this panel, endeavouring to keep the trio on topic. Burbulis displayed skills learned in the Soviet political cadre, pitching himself as a global thinker with energetic oratory. Shushkevich, however, emphasised time and again his background as a scientist, offering his own authoritative version of the Belavezha agreement. Finally, Kravchuk maintained a relaxed, stately poise as he offered sparse, but precise, contributions which many Ukrainian delegates welcomed enthusiastically. Special thanks go to our interpreter, Dr Elena Goodwin (Portsmouth) who did an outstanding job. Recordings of this roundtable, as well as all other BASEES keynotes, are available on our website, www.basees.org.

These keynotes did not overshadow the vibrant scholarly discourse instigated by a programme of exceptional breadth (covering seven subject streams). Besides scholarship, there was much socialising and networking in the exhibitor hall. Delegates attended several book launches, including a captivating talk by our guest, Veljko Vujačić, Provost of the European University at St Petersburg. Professor Vujačić introduced his book *Nationalism, Myth, and the State in Russia and Serbia* (Cambridge University Press), newly in paperback. At the end of day two, delegates enjoyed the annual drinks reception, sponsored by our partner Routledge, and our Russian-themed conference dinner that ended with a splendid after-dinner talk by Simon Dixon (UCL). As usual our administrators, Suzy and Charlie Howes and their team, helped to run the conference smoothly, solving any problems in their customary professional and friendly manner. BASEES would like to thank our partners, particularly Routledge and the European University at St Petersburg, for their generous support, which helped to make the conference a success. Next year’s conference will take place from Friday, 13th April, to Sunday, 15th April. The Call for Papers has just been issued (see page 3) and we hope to see you all again in Cambridge in spring 2018. For feedback and suggestions on this year’s conference, please email me at m.neumann@uea.ac.uk.

Matthias Neumann
President’s Report 2017

[Delivered at the AGM at the annual conference in April 2017.]

At last year’s conference, I took over from Peter Waldron as President of the Association; it’s difficult to believe that a whole year has passed since then. During this year I have become even more aware than previously of the debt the Association owes Peter for so skillfully guiding our affairs during his tenure as President. The Association is in good order; our finances are healthy, our membership is rising, and proposals for new study groups are emerging and we have been able to increase support we offer young researchers through our Research and Development programme (see p. 5). Most pleasingly, under Peter’s tenure, we have had a series of successful, well-attended annual conferences. On the behalf of the Association, I should like to take this opportunity formally to record our thanks to Peter. I wish to add my personal thanks for his remaining on hand during this past year to answer my questions and give sage advice.

The position of BASEES President would be untenable were there not others prepared to give their time to keep the show on the road. The BASEES committee consists of volunteers, all in full-time HE posts, who somehow manage to do BASEES business alongside their core commitments giving lectures, writing conference papers, creating REF-able research outputs and impact case studies, counselling students and attending endless meetings, or running a library. The office-holders and the conference organizer have especially heavy burdens to carry. Under normal circumstances, new office-holders are appointed at the Annual General Meeting, but occasionally appointments must be made at a different time, for which we have to thank the AGM for retrospective approval. At the Association’s autumn meeting in 2016, we learned with delight that Kelly Hignett, the Association’s secretary for just over a year, was pregnant. I know the membership will want to wish her all the best for the forthcoming birth of her baby and to thank her for her excellent job she did as Secretary. (N.B. Evelyn Rose Elsie Hodgson was born on 24 April, 2017. – Ed.) As a result of Kelly’s news, Susan Grant, joining the committee to take over as membership secretary from Melanie Illic, agreed instead to step in and learn the Secretary’s job. The transition from Kelly to Susan took place after the New Year, in time for this year’s conference. The committee agreed that in order to maintain some continuity in the main officer posts, it was appropriate to invoke the ‘normally’ clause in our constitution and ask Melanie Illic to continue to serve as membership secretary for the forthcoming year. Both these officer positions will be subject to ratification at the 2017 AGM. Among other committee members with special responsibilities, we have to thank Jeremy Hicks for chairing the Research and Development Committee since 2013. Jeremy stood down on January 1st; Anne White, who replaced me in April 2016 when I became President, has now taken over as chair. We have co-opted Sarah Badcock to the vacancy left on the sub-committee, subject to confirmation at the AGM. Thanks are due to all Book Prize judges. All have taken their responsibilities very seriously, devoting hours to reading the many books and articles submitted. Katarina Wolchuck has come to the end of her term as judge of the George Blazycz prize, so our thanks are particularly due to her. We thank Luke March and Sam Greene who have also come to the end of their terms as judges of the postgraduate prize. Finally, thanks go to Claire Whitehead and Alison Long, stepping down as organizers for the ‘Literature and Culture’ and ‘Linguistics’ subject streams, respectively, in the annual conference.

In the past year, BASEES has grown to over 500 members (including c. 75 from outside the UK). This is up from the low 400s in 2014. More evidence of the Association’s current vitality is reflected by the flourishing BASEES Newsletter, and by the activity of our study groups. The latter are one of the Association’s most successful activities, after the annual conference. Some are ephemeral, vanishing when research agendas change, but others, like the Study Group on the Russian Revolution, have existed for several decades. Two new study groups were approved by the Committee in the last year: the Study Group for the Caucasus and the Study Group on Digital Media and Culture. We anticipate panels from these new study groups at future conferences. The requirement for all study groups to propose panels at the annual conference (in order to present the best
>> from their workshops to a wider audience) has tended to be overlooked in recent years. We are pleased that the SGRR is sponsoring a conference panel following its successful meeting at the University of Northumbria in January, and we look forward to the other study groups following this example. Besides study groups, the Association has continued to support research by providing one-off grants for workshops and for graduates’ field work/archival research and overseas conference attendance. In 2016–7 we increased the subvention to the Research and Development committee to support both study groups and postgraduate research.

The clearest evidence of the Association’s current good health is the success of its annual conference. The BASEES conference has for some years ceased to be the sole international Slavonic and East European Studies conference in Europe and faces competition, such as the Aleksanteri Institute annual conference (now in its seventh year). BASEES 2017 promises a record attendance again, even when the centenary of the Russian Revolution has meant that there are sufficient workshops, conferences and cultural events themed in danger of being relegated to the margins

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problems to those in power.

enhanced the importance of the Association’s

mission to provide broad coverage of topics

in the humanities, arts and social sciences,

relating to different historical periods

and geographical regions. Even in 2017, a

conference participant may attend a panel

in every session (apart from the keynotes)

without hearing about Russia and its

revolutions. This is exactly as it should be.

Events in the wider world in 2016–2017 have

enhanced the importance of the Association’s

engagement with other organizations with

which we are affiliated and which play an

important role in our members’ teaching

and research. There are some clouds on

the horizon. The first is Brexit. There has

been much press coverage of the possible

repercussions for academe if the UK exits

Europe. As President of BASEES, I see my

role as an active participant in discussions

about strategizing the higher educational

sector’s response to Brexit. I have been struck

by the poorly coordinated responses of

universities and learned societies to Brexit;

and, importantly for us, the large disciplinary
groupings have failed to understand the

specific nature of impacts on smaller

subjects. Compared with non-Area-Studies-
based disciplines in the social sciences and

humanities, Slavonic and East European Studies

relies particularly deeply upon well-

functioning Europe-wide links in research

and teaching, and these will need defending

in the event of a ‘hard Brexit’. Brexit’s potential

impacts on our Association exceed the

immediate geographical region of the EU.

Concerns about the mobility of scholars,

access to the field, libraries and archives,

and constraints on freedom of expression

in the non-EU member states of Eurasia are

in danger of being relegated to the margins

by a preoccupation with defending access
to the EU. As I write this, I have read with
regret the decision of a Moscow court to
uphold the Russian Federation Ministry of
Justice’s decision to keep the Levada Centre
on the foreign agents list. This was one of
the issues on which we campaigned in 2016.
I have continued my predecessor’s pursuit
of questions concerning the visa regime for
scholars moving in both directions between
the UK, the Russian Federation and other
post-Soviet states. Together with other
institutions and NGOs, I aim to take these
problems to those in power.

The second issue that has the potential
to impact on the interests of research and
teaching in Slavonic and East European Studies is the REF. The 2020 REF might seem a long way off, but discussions currently taking place around the Stern report indicate the importance of Area Studies retaining a separate and high profile in the upcoming REF. BASEES participates in UKCASCA, the UK Council for Areas Studies Associations, which has been coordinating responses to the Stern report. The protection of posts in Slavonic and East European Studies in British universities, outside the dedicated centres, is a major concern. In 2016, we participated in the partially successful campaign to maintain Slavonic posts under threat in the University of Nottingham. We will continue to defend posts under threat that are brought to our attention and to press for an expansion in the number of Slavonic, East European and Eurasian posts.

I wish to end on a positive note. BASEES is never satisfied with ‘treading water’, but is always looking for new ways to bring our activities to the widest audience possible. Besides our annual conference in Cambridge, bringing together scholars from diverse backgrounds to present their very latest research, in December 2016 we took BASEES to Hungary for a ‘regional conference’ themed on the 60th anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution. Earlier in the autumn we held a small group discussion with the political counsellor at the Russian Embassy under Chatham House rules, and similar meetings with the embassies of other successor states are planned. On behalf of the Association, I have attended various events organised by the Embassies of the Russian Federation, the Georgian Republic and Belarus. Last but not least, I am delighted to be able to announce the addition of Mary Buckley, distinguished scholar and long-term contributor to the activities of BASEES, to our list of honorary life members of the Association.

Judith Pallot
Spotlight on BASEES Research and Development Committee

BASEES members should be aware of the availability of financial support for projects, including fieldwork and conferences, through the BASEES Research and Development Committee, currently chaired by Professor Anne White (UCL).

Academics at every stage, including graduate students, can apply for funding; there are four annual application deadlines (see www.basees.org/baseesgrants for more details).

Who qualifies for an R&D grant, and how much can you apply for?

Anyone who has been a member of BASEES for at least six months before the application deadline can apply for a grant. Postgraduate students seeking fieldwork, archival research or conference support must also secure the consent of their supervisor. Individuals can apply for up to £800.

How many awards does the R&D committee make per year, on average?

Over the last five years, the committee has awarded an annual average of 10 individual postgraduate grants, 5 grants towards conferences, and 3 study group subventions. The vast majority of applications are successful.

Do awards cover a wide range of research activity?

Yes – the committee welcomes applications across the entire range of Slavic studies. Topics supported in 2015-17 included violence in Russian literature and film (a PGR conference); social aspects of climate change in the Post-Soviet space; experiences of work, care and social security interventions in the Czech Republic; and a project on Russian maritime law, in addition to subventions towards BASEES study group activities.

See below for a fieldwork report from Sarah Dorr, a PhD candidate at the University of Leeds whose 2016 BASEES R&D fund grant supported her research in Central Asia.

Fieldwork Report The Reception of the Arab Spring in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan: A Study of Political Change

What impact has the “Arab Spring” had upon Central Asian regimes? Scholars and journalists have raised the possibility of a “Central Asian Spring” – uprisings across the region ousting the incumbent regimes.

However, such accounts have focused narrowly on the possibility of an outright revolution and overlooked other ways in which the Arab Spring has reshaped the region. But how has the Arab Spring been perceived by local actors? For example, what are the implications of the Arab Spring uprisings for authoritarian and semi-consolidated authoritarian regimes both regionally and elsewhere? What mechanism can account for these effects? To address such questions, my research charts the Kazakh and Kyrgyz governments’ discourse and policy from 2005 – 2015, paying particular attention to élite-level demonstration effects. The demonstration effect is often used to explain the spread of popular mobilization, but it is less commonly applied to the élite level. My research investigates whether uprisings elsewhere, including those outside of the region, affect local actors through an élite-level demonstration effect.

As a recipient of a Postgraduate Research and Development Grant from the British Association of Slavonic and East European Studies (BASEES), I was a visiting researcher from September – December 2016 at KIMEP University’s Central Asian Studies Center in Almaty, Kazakhstan. I conducted approximately 20 interviews with local journalists, scholars and activists in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. I was also able to participate in discussions and activities at the local, academic, and diplomatic levels as well as with the media. For example, I took part in a panel by an analytical group, Journal Exclusive, on the United States presidential elections and Kazakhstan. At the invitation of the U.S. Consulate, Almaty, I spoke to local media about the U.S. presidential elections.

During my stay in Central Asia I chose to live with local families. Living and travelling as a local allowed me firsthand insight into local culture, traditions and socio-economic stratification. I listened to people’s understanding of politics and their views on the United States. My ability to >>
communicate effectively in Russian provided me with the opportunity to develop friendships and explore more of the geographical region. In doing so I gained further interest, knowledge and understanding of the various ethnic groups and cultures making up Central Asia. As a recipient of a BASEES grant, I was not only able to collect data for my PhD research; I also had the opportunity to begin understanding Central Asia as a whole.

I thank BASEES and the Central Asian Studies Center at KIMEP University for supporting my research, and also the numerous individuals who enhanced my stay in the region.

Sarah Dorr

Sarah is a third year PhD candidate in the School of Politics and International Studies at the University of Leeds. She holds a MSc in Russian and East European Studies from the University of Birmingham, an MA in European Literary Cultures from the University of Bologna and Aristotle University, Greece; and a BA in English and Classical Studies from the University of St Andrews.

Obituary: Yevgenii Yevtushenko

Yevgenii Aleksandrovich Yevtushenko, Russian poet
(18 July 1933 – 1 April 2017)

One of the oddest documents in my desk is an un-headed, un-stamped A4 sheet, hastily typed and with scraggy handwritten corrections. Dated 14 July 1983, it is addressed to the customs officials at Sheremetevo airport. Dorogie tovarishchi (dear comrades), it begins. Today, it says, my friends from Britain arrive at 17.00. Today in the Olympic complex my 50th-birthday concert begins at 19.00. Please let my friends through vne ocheredi (without queuing), so that they won’t be late. Signed, Yevgenii Yevtushenko. So many aspects of this seem bizarre in retrospect: that anybody might seriously write such a note to customs officials; that customs officials could be expected even to recognize, let alone pay any attention to, a personal note bearing the unverified signature of a poet; that a poet would be performing at an Olympic-sized arena. Most bizarre of all: this actually worked. Only in the late Soviet era. Only Yevtushenko.

Why did all this not seem so odd at the time? Why was the mere name enough to circumvent normal border controls? Why was the huge arena packed? Yevtushenko has had many reputations. In the West he was and is most often treated as a voice of the Thaw, as the poet of Babii Yar and Nasledniki Stalina. Among post-Soviet intellectuals he was often regarded superciliously as the tame Soviet semi-dissident, serving the regime that he purported to criticize. Both attitudes are political, though often voiced by people who affect to despise the political contamination of literary values.

Neither assessment meant a great deal to the throng of his fans at the Olympic complex. They wanted the mesmeric performance, his peculiar style of declamatory lyricism that in other contexts, or from anyone else, might have seemed merely bombastic. Two poems were printed in the leaflet serving as a programme, and for me they represent

Yevtushenko in the 1970s (image © Simon Franklin)
Yevtushenko was global in his curiosity and ambition, Soviet in his sense of the historical moment, Soviet also in the ways in which he tends to be framed; so it is almost shocking to see here the directness of his declaration of an essential Russianness as the core of his identity and aspiration.

In an age when almost nobody from the Soviet Union travelled, Yevtushenko travelled everywhere, knew everybody. He reckoned he had visited over seventy countries. He was translated into over eighty languages. He met Kennedy, Castro, Neruda. He was perhaps unworthily proud of all of that. But he also had the gift of generous attentiveness, no matter who he was with. Talking with people about their recollections of Yevtushenko, I have been struck by how vivid, and how generally warm, are their memories even of the briefest of encounters. Among his memorable qualities was physical energy, his constantly mobile face, his restless mind. His creative output astonished in quantity and diversity. His poetry ranged from intimate lyrics to grand quasi-epic cycles. He was a novelist, film actor, film director, a published photographer. He was also an anthologist on the grand scale, constantly revising and enlarging ever more vast collections of Russian poetry. He probably wrote far too much, or at any rate published far too much; weak Yevtushenko pieces are easy to find. He became easy prey for parodists. Sneering remained easy; but he was an extraordinary talent nonetheless.

After a brief infatuation with elective politics in the Gorbatchev Spring, Yevtushenko soon discovered the hard lesson that so often brings disillusionment for (and in) intellectuals: to speak to power is one thing; to have it – quite another. He spent most of his last 25 years quietly, by his standards, intellectual: to speak to power is one thing; to have it – quite another. He spent most of his last 25 years quietly, by his standards, of his last 25 years quietly, by his standards, with readings, books, interviews, tours. He was the only one left, the only link to that with readings, books, interviews, tours. He was the only one left, the only link to that with readings, books, interviews, tours. He was the only one left, the only link to that with readings, books, interviews, tours. He was the only one left, the only link to that with readings, books, interviews, tours. He was the only one left, the only link to that

But hope is mine:
I cannot be immortal
I cannot be immortal
I cannot be immortal
I cannot be immortal

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After a brief infatuation with elective politics in the Gorbatchev Spring, Yevtushenko soon discovered the hard lesson that so often brings disillusionment for (and in) intellectuals: to speak to power is one thing; to have it – quite another. He spent most of his last 25 years quietly, by his standards, based in Tulsa, where, by all accounts, he was a popular and conscientious lecturer, and where, on 1 April, he died. In his final few years he enjoyed fresh popularity in Russia, with readings, books, interviews, tours. He was the only one left, the only link to that of age what now looks like naïve optimism; a curiosity; a dinosaur; a national treasure. One of Yevtushenko’s best known aphoristic lines was ‘A poet in Russia is more than a poet’ (Поэт в России – больше, чем поэт). Not any more. For better, for worse, he was the last.