

Russian and East European Studies in Sweden: New Challenges and Possibilities

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Sweden has much in common with many Western countries with regard to trends of development in research on Russia and Eastern Europe. Perhaps more interestingly, there are also significant differences, especially since the breakup of the Soviet Union. When other Western countries experienced a decrease of interest and money to Russian and East European studies after 1991, Sweden experienced a growing interest and institutional growth.

This increasing interest may be explained by Sweden's geographical location close to Russia, which guarantees that there always will be a demand in Sweden for knowledge about Russia. Sweden has a long history of conflict, including war, with Russia in parallel with 1200 years of contacts and exchange with Russian territories. The breakup of the Soviet bloc and the Soviet Union created a demand on knowledge of the new situation in the neighbourhood among a variety of Swedish authorities. Moreover, new prospects for economic exchange and trade created hope for interesting jobs among students, academics and other professionals.

Research and analysis of Russia and Eastern Europe are carried out at i) military-related institutes (among them the Swedish Defence Research Agency, FOI and the Swedish National Defence College - both under the Defence Ministry), and ii) universities and independent research institutes (such as the Swedish Institute of International Affairs).

The institutional growth since 1990 is reflected in a) the expansion of the Institute for East European Studies at Uppsala University; b) the creation of a special research institute of the economies of Russia and Eastern Europe at Stockholm School of Economics; and c) the creation of a graduate school at the new university college of Södertörn, which focussed on the Baltic and East European states.

a) In the late 1960s an interdisciplinary Institute for East European Studies was created at Uppsala University reflecting the increase of interest in Russian and East European studies at the time. At the beginning of the 1990s, two more professorships were added to the previous one resulting in a faculty covering economics, history, and law. The Institute has maintained its position as the centre for education in the field of Russian and East European studies in Sweden.

b) The Institute of East European Economies was created in the early 1990s under the Stockholm School of Economics. In the 1990s, it was renamed the Stockholm Institute of Transition Economies (SITE). SITE is a research institute which also provides assistance in setting up independent centres for economic policy debate and research in Russia, Latvia and Poland, among them

the independent think-tank Moscow Centre for Economic and Financial Research (CEFIR), the New Economic School in Moscow, the Riga-based Baltic International Centre for Economic Policy Studies (BICEPS), and the Warsaw Institute for Socio-Economic Research (WISER).

c) The Baltic and East European Graduate School (BEEGS) was created in 2000 at the new Södertörn University College south of Stockholm. The Graduate School was created in order to bridge a perceived gap of knowledge between the Scandinavian countries on the one hand, and countries and cultures around the Baltic Sea on the other hand. The school serves to re-integrate the experience of these countries and cultures into the corpus of humanities and social sciences. Today BEEGS is one of the world's largest post-graduate schools of Baltic and East European studies outside those countries. It has a number of graduate students from the countries around the Baltic Sea.

In this context should also be mentioned the small interdisciplinary centers, which were set up at different universities during the 1990s reflecting the larger interest in the geographical areas to the east, including the centres for Russian and East European Studies in Göteborg and Lund; for Baltic Studies in Stockholm; and Central Asian Studies in Stockholm and Uppsala (the latter from the early 2000s). The number of graduate students at the departments of political science, history, cultural history, and languages increased.

Thus, the research field of Russian and East European Studies expanded in Sweden and became more diversified during the 1990s when, in most other Western countries, the interest and money in the field of Russian and East European studies decreased. As a further illustration, in 1997 the Swedish Society for the Study of Russia, Central and Eastern Europe, and Central Asia was created. The Society replaced the Swedish branch of the Nordic Forum of Soviet and East European Studies, which silently died in the early 1990s. An association of Slavists existed but consisted only of linguists. The Society thus reflects a new, broader Swedish interest in these countries. It includes people from academia, diplomacy, and journalism, in other words, people who are professionally involved in research and analysis of the named geographical areas. The Society will be prepared to organize the ICCEES World Congress in 2010 in Stockholm.

It should be stressed that the field of Russian and East European Studies in Sweden is facing the same challenges as in most other countries, among them the restrictions following from general budget cuts during the first years of the 21st century. There also are more fundamental challenges to our field of study.

New Challenges to Russian and East European Studies

What are the new challenges to our field of research? I will here concentrate on two questions: (1) How to define the East European studies in the future – what countries will be included? And (2) What will be the relevance of such studies? These questions are important to all scholars in the

field but all the more important to those who now start planning the ICCEES World Conference of 2010.

Russian and East European studies were best described as area studies during most of the Cold War period. These studies were not simply geographically defined. The core of the field consisted of the Slavic countries, yet the field included also non-Slavic countries. This field of research was defined politically as consisting of countries of the Soviet bloc. When there was no longer a Soviet bloc, the field was defined by countries sharing a similar post-Soviet experience.

Today these studies are at a crossroads and so is the ICCEES. They either have to return to purely Slavic studies, or to redefine the geographical focus. To redefine the field would mean regarding Slavic countries as the core as previously, but give more emphasis to countries in the very eastern parts of Europe. What does this mean?

Before I answer this question let me raise another question relevant to our field of research. Why should Russian, Central and East European Studies receive financial support in the future? Looking back at the post-WW II period money was given for political reasons. Consequently, in the USA today - when Russia is no longer regarded as a major adversary but as a state with limited influence on the international scene - there is little money available for Russian studies. Instead, other geographical areas and regions of the world become of more concern to the US administration and thereby also to those providing research money. To most countries in Europe and Asia the situation ought to be understood somewhat differently and studies in the field be more relevant. This brings us to the questions - relevant in what sense, for what, and for whom?

Let me give you two major arguments why our field - and the ICCEES - have to change its emphasis. First, several Central and European countries have now become members of the European Union and NATO. Consequently they will be studied in the context of EU and NATO integration together with other member states. Scholars interested in the language and history of Slavic countries will, of course, continue to belong to our field as previously. The economists and political scientists studying Central and East European countries will thus abandon us since the political and economic context of these countries has changed. Thus, what connects the remaining states of our field is that they are all outside both the EU and NATO.

As I see it, our field of research and our organization, the ICCEES, have to make the choice either to limit itself to the field of pure Slavic studies and consist mainly of linguists and historians, or to give more emphasis to Eastern Slavic countries and non-Slavic countries deeper into Eurasia and attract scholars from several different disciplines. I support this latter alternative, and I argue that the ICCEES should give more emphasis to the study also of the Caucasus and Central Asia. Our field would thus be described as Russia, Eastern Europe and Eurasia studies.

It will remain logical to study these countries in a European context. Since the break-up of the Soviet Union the concepts of 'Europe' and 'Wider

Europe' have changed. Although broader today, these concepts are often used in the context of EU enlargement and thereby monopolized as concepts related to the EU. 'Europe' becomes a synonym for the European Union. This is a temporary and politically conjectural understanding of these words. There are several ways of defining Europe. Europe can be understood either in a narrow geographical and historical-cultural sense as the territories up to the Ural Mountains; or, in a new political sense, which takes Europe much farther to the East. The OSCE includes as member states all states of the former Soviet Union up to the Chinese border. It is important to point out here that Europe is much more than the EU. 'Wider Europe' has to be understood in its new political OSCE sense. This concept includes states, which now constitute the EU's new neighbourhood. As cooperation between these eastern countries and European organizations widens (as with the EU and the PFP) and European governments engage in the Caucasus and Central Asia, the OSCE concept of wider Europe becomes very appropriate.

By 2010 the question of wider Europe will be urgent. Will by then all the promises of the previous decade - of wider cooperation and integration between the EU/NATO and the non-member states of Eastern Europe, including Russia and Ukraine, the Caucasus and Central Asia - have been fulfilled? Will the result of all promises become a more integrated Europe, or will new barriers be created? Have the efforts of European integration paved the way for closer and wider cooperation with Asian and Middle Eastern countries, or will they create tension in the region?

Our field of research should be scientifically motivated and we will remain an interdisciplinary field and organization. If we more clearly define our object of research, we will also stay politically relevant. We have the knowledge of these countries. This raises the question of how we best can contribute our knowledge. In most Western countries today there is a strong trend of political decision makers requesting that research is more directly useful to them. They strongly feel the need for more specific knowledge and analysis. This creates a favourable situation for us. At the same time, there is a serious risk that our contribution is understood mainly in the form of brief policy papers and short-term analysis not much different from the kind of analysis the ministries use to do themselves. To my mind, most beneficial to policymaking is instead the long-term scholarly work and independent analyses. There always has been a need for bridging the gap between scholars and decision-makers. In the contemporary world this seems to have become a more urgent issue, and thus research has to defend its positions.

Back to the year 2010. By then I can imagine that the ICCEES may have developed into an organization of which eastern Slavic countries constitute the core and there also is a new emphasis on the non-Slavic countries of the former Soviet Union. By then a better name of the organization might be International Council for Eastern European and Eurasian studies (ICEEES). Since several organizations already exist for the study of individual subregions, the ICEEES will have to actively search for cooperation with these organizations.

For the upcoming ICCEES World Congress in Berlin in 2005 the theme will be 'Europe - Our Common Home'. The Berlin congress maintains the present understanding of Europe, which relates first of all to the EU and its new member states. For the ICCEES World Congress in 2010 the Swedish Society suggests a theme, which by then will hopefully reflect concerns at that time, 'Wider Europe: Myth or Reality?'