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# Liebe Leser:innen, liebe MES'ler:innen,

wir freuen uns, euch den Newsletter des Sommersemesters 2021 als Sommerlektüre für die vorlesungsfreie Zeit zu präsentieren. Wir hoffen, dass ihr bisher gut durch dieses dritte Corona-Semester gekommen seid!

In der aktuellen Sommer-Ausgabe des MES'letters könnt ihr zwei derzeitige MES-Gastdozenten aus Polen und Belarus besser kennenlernen.

## INHALT:

1. Den Newsletter eröffnet ein kurzer **Rückblick auf das MES-Grillfest**.
2. Im Anschluss könnt ihr ein **Interview mit Dr. Łukasz Mikołajewski** lesen. Der derzeitige Gastdozent der Meyer-Sruckmann-Stiftung aus Polen ist Mitbegründer des Forschungszentrums für LGBT+ Geschichte und Identitäten an der Universität Warschau und spricht u.a. über seine Lehrtätigkeit und das LGBT+ Zentrum angesichts der aktuellen politischen Lage in Polen.
3. Anschließend gibt es **neun Fragen an Dr. Aliaksei Bratachkin**. Der belarussische Gastdozent berichtet über

Der Forschungsbericht "Was macht die Corona-Pandemie mit Studierenden" ist im Rahmen des Kurses "In-depth interview and Focus Group Discussions: Methodology, Methods & Practice" von Dr. Oksana Mikheieva entstanden. Die spannenden Ergebnisse der explorativen Studie werden hier vorgestellt.

Viel Freude beim Lesen!

seine Zeit in Frankfurt, sowie die Situation in seinem Heimatland seit den Protesten, die Ende des Jahres 2020 begannen.

4. Abschließend ist der **Forschungsbericht** zu lesen, der sich mit den Auswirkungen der Pandemie auf Studierende beschäftigt.

**Wir wünschen euch schöne Sommertage in der vorlesungsfreien Zeit!**

### **EUER MES-TEAM**

***P.S.** Im studentischen Newsletter können alle Studierende mitwirken. Wenn Ihr selbst einen Artikel zu einem bestimmten Thema schreiben möchtet, Themenvorschläge, Kritik und Anregungen habt, zögert nicht und schickt Eure Ideen einfach an [mes\\_students@europa-uni.de](mailto:mes_students@europa-uni.de).*

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Am 07.07.2021 lud der MES zu einem Grillfest ein. Studiengangsleiter Prof. Timm Beichelt meinte scherzhaft in seiner Begrüßungsansprache, dass das Grillfest wahrscheinlich "die größte Veranstaltung der Viadrina seit Corona" sei. Und so ist es sicherlich auch gewesen. Rund 40 Studierende, Mitarbeiter:innen und Freunde des MES aus dem Logenhaus kamen zusammen für gemeinsames Grillen und persönlichen Austausch. Für viele neue MES'ler:innen war es die erste

offizielle Gelegenheit, sich in Präsenz kennenzulernen. Danke an Alle, die da waren.



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**HERR  
MIKOŁAJEWSKI,**

**WAS WAR IHRE MOTIVATION DAS LGBTQ+  
ZENTRUM AN DER UNI WARSCHAU  
MITZUGRUNDEN?**

**6 Fragen an Łukasz Mikołajewski**

### **Mr. Mikołajewski, how have you experienced your first few days in Frankfurt?**

When I arrived here by the beginning of June I was very happy to finally find myself at a different place than my flat in Warsaw – and to meet my colleagues from Viadrina in person, not on Zoom. I had known Frankfurt and Słubice only a little bit before coming here so it was very interesting to me to explore the streets of this town, think about the many layers of European history so visible in this place and to talk with people who live here on both sides of the river.

### **What are your main areas of research? What are you most passionate about in your research?**

I guess it's a little bit like with walking in Frankfurt and Słubice – what I'm most passionate about is to see how things are connected, especially if for some reason we keep them in our heads in separate compartments. I started my work in the academia focusing on intellectual history, studying the works of various Polish writers who lived in exile after World War II, especially Jerzy Stempowski, Andrzej Bobkowski, Czesław Miłosz and Józef Czapski. I was interested in how their thinking about Europe changed over the years. Intellectual history remains an important area of study for me. However, the longer I studied these texts and the history of postwar decades in Europe and the USA the more I realized that what was interesting was not just what people were saying about the world but also what they were silent about. This has led me to studying history and anthropology of antisemitism as one of the most important dangerous currents in the European and Polish political tradition. The link between narratives about the past, history, and current political discourses is also something that drove me, together with my colleagues from the Institute of Applied Social Sciences, to study history of nonheteronormative people in Poland and to think of ways of documenting life of queer people in Poland nowadays.

### **Are there differences in (online) teaching and (digital) university life between Warsaw and Frankfurt?**

As of the end of June in Frankfurt I was lucky to be able to starting teaching some seminars also onsite! The rector of the University of Warsaw already by the beginning of this year decided that we will not return to classes sooner than October 2021. That is the big difference – somehow it seems to that you can find bigger differences with how were dealing with the situation at various moments rather than various universities.

In general, I had the impression that the first semester of online

teaching (in spring 2020) was an especially interesting one: despite all the difficulties and fears everybody was forced to improvise and risk interesting didactic inventions – being forced out of one’s routine could be very fruitful if we accepted that the situation and the goals we set ourselves had to change. However, the Fall semester in 2020 was more difficult, both for me and most of the students, because institutions of higher learning started to behave as if online teaching was an ordinary way of work, while – together with the pandemic – it was still an extraordinary situation, straining people psychologically.

Teaching here at Viadrina during the third semester of the pandemic, with my delayed arrival in Frankfurt, forced me to accept that you need to adjust your plans constantly and take some liberty with it – it pushed me into experimenting again. I hope the students found it interesting and inspiring<sup>6</sup>

Łukasz Mikołajewski ist Assistenzprofessor am Institut für angewandte Sozialwissenschaften der **Universität Warschau**, Soziologe und Historiker. Er ist spezialisiert auf Ideengeschichte und Anthropologie der Politik.

Er ist Mitbegründer des **Forschungszentrums für LGBT+ Geschichte und Identitäten an der Universität Warschau**. 2012 verteidigte er seine Doktorarbeit am European University Institute in Florenz. 2015 war er Visiting Fellow und am Remarque Institute, New York University.



**DR. ŁUKASZ**  
**MIKOŁAJEWSKI**

**You are a co-founder of the Research Center for LGBT+ History and Identities at the Institute of Applied Social Sciences, University of Warsaw. What was your motivation and interest in launching this new institution? Can you tell us something about the objectives and research of this institution?**

With my colleagues, we wanted to create a space at the University of

Warsaw where academics and students could talk about the history of queer people, think about new ways of studying the past that would end the previous marginalization of LGBTQIA+ people's lives. Two of my colleagues from the Center, Piotr Laskowski and Sebastian Matuszewski, worked for some years as editors of the archival documents prepared and collected by Emanuel Ringelblum and the group of Jewish historians in the Warsaw Ghetto. Inspired by their approach, Piotr and Sebastian convinced us to start collecting and archiving materials about queer life in Poland. That is the objective we are setting for ourselves now. Last year together with Henrich Böll Foundation in Warsaw we organized an LGBT+ memoir competition that coincided with a very difficult and at the same time important moment in the history of queer people in Poland: the homophobic and transphobic campaign of Andrzej Duda and the arrest of 48 people during a demonstration defending the activist Margot in August 2020. We are currently preparing a collection of autobiographies that were sent to us for this competition during that period – they are an amazing source to explore the new language with which queer people speak about their lives in Poland.

**Poland is criticised throughout Europe for its lgbtq+ policy. The introduction of "lbtq+ ideology-free zones" was also an issue in the Frankfurt student community, for example. Against this background, what were the reactions in Poland? How was the centre received by students, fellow academics, the public?**

Such attacks as the infamous LGBT ideology-free zones are a response to a broader cultural change that is happening in the Polish society and elsewhere – never had it been such an important mainstream topic as it is now, and I would say that never had the support for queer people been in Poland as big as it is now. The more queer people are attacked, the more we organize ourselves and oppose it, the more it is also plain for many others to see what kind of threat homophobia and transphobia poses for democratic life. So I would say that so far most of the reactions to the activity of our Research Center were enthusiastic and supportive. The same goes for students at the University of Warsaw – they are very well aware how immensely important this topic is now, in the present political circumstances. We are also very grateful to the people who trusted us telling us their stories, through their memoirs or biographical interviews we have been collecting.

**What are you most looking forward to after the pandemic?**

I miss the possibility of meeting some of my friends – and I miss the possibility of turning my computer off for a longer period of time. Since the end of June, I could meet students in a seminar room again here at Viadrina. And that's one of the things I like the most: to sit by a table with other people and think together about what we've read and the world around us. So I'm very much looking forward to the moment

when this returns for good!

**Thankyou for answering our questions and these interesting insights.**

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**HERR BRATACHKIN,**

**WAS BEDEUTET ES, EIN KRITISCHER  
WISSENSCHAFTLER IN BERLARUS ZU SEIN?**

## **9 Fragen an Aliaksei Bratachkin**

**Mr. Bratachkin, you have only been here for a short time, how did you experience your first time in Germany and especially Frankfurt?**

This is not my first time in Germany, I have been here many times since 2009. It's also my second time in Frankfurt/Oder. I'm always interested in visiting the eastern part of Germany because I'm interested in the fate of the communist legacy and how it is or isn't being preserved. Another story is the Polish-German border here, it's a special phenomenon. I had a very unusual experience here in April and May - the lockdown and quarantine. There was no lockdown in Belarus. Our government has been in denial about the epidemic for some time. That raised a lot of questions for the government. Here in Frankfurt, for some time it seemed to me that there were almost no inhabitants in the city. In the evenings there is no one on the street, but all the city's infrastructure and transport works. Fortunately, this image of a «ghost town» disappeared after the onset of warmth and the reduction of quarantine measures.

**What do you particularly like here, what do you perhaps miss?**

I really like the international environment at the university and the opportunity to discuss problems from different perspectives,

considering the experiences of different countries. Many students followed everything that was happening in Belarus in the summer of 2020, and we can also discuss these events. Several students wanted to meet me and show me the city, it was very nice! I like the level of the students, and how quickly they reacted to some new topics. The university's Welcom Centre staff helped me to adapt quite quickly and solve bureaucratic problems. Of course, I miss home. At the same time, I still feel that I am at a distance from the situation that traumatises many in my country. I thought the problem would be a lack of communication, but now I think I talk more than I expected. I travel to Berlin from time to time, because people whom i know live there. Some have already come to visit me. If Berlin is such a «global city», with the obvious rhythm and dynamics of a big city, Frankfurt offers a relaxed atmosphere, great air, and the chance to concentrate on something I might not have paid attention to before.

### **Can you see any differences between teaching and university life in Germany and Belarus?**

Belarus has a state education system and there are also institutions that operate outside this system. The state education system is very centralized, teaching programs are the same everywhere, you cannot choose subjects if you are a student. I worked for more than seven years in a non-state institution which we set up with my colleagues. We have a liberal arts system, students choose the subjects, teachers create the courses themselves and the atmosphere is very relaxed. During the epidemic we started to use online tools. When I came here I was of course worried, but the transition to teaching in Germany was not abrupt, because I already knew a lot of things. If I hadn't had experience in the liberal arts system, it would have been more difficult for me to work here.

### **What are your main areas of research? What are you most passionate about in your research?**

My main interest is the politics of memory. Already in the 1990s, historians began to ask not only 'how it was' but also 'how we remember it'. I'm very fond of Lowenthal's book 'The Past is a Foreign Country', one of the thoughts of which is that we can only approach the past, but we cannot fully reconstruct it in our research. These ideas help to see how historians are often engaged and included in a political context. Memory research reinforces this feeling. It is very important to understand how you are engaged. In Belarus, historians started talking about memory politics and memory research later, closer to 2010. This optic helps to understand, for example, why the topic of World War II history dominates the public discourse, or why we do not talk about other events.



The topic I'm interested in today is how we consume history through films, pop culture, clothing brands, etc. The context of everyday life often says more about historical culture than interviews with historians.

Der Minsker Historiker Aliaksei Bratachkin ist einer der belarussischen Forschenden, die derzeit an der Viadrina Zuflucht finden. Die Europa-Universität hat sich mit ihrer Initiative **belarus@viadrina** zum Ziel gesetzt, belarussischen Studierenden, Lehrenden und Forschenden eine Perspektive zu geben und sie in ihren wissenschaftlichen Vorhaben zu unterstützen. Einer von ihnen ist der Gastdozent Aliaksei Bratachkin. Der Minsker Historiker ist von April bis September 2021 als Stipendiat der Meyer-Struckmann-Stiftung und als Gast der Professur für Europa-Studien an die Viadrina gekommen.



**DR. ALIAKSEI  
BRATACHKIN**

**In your books "After soviet marxism: history, philosophy, sociology and psychoanalysis in national contexts (Ukraine, Belarus)" & "The Ways of Europeanization of Belarus: between Politics and Identity Construction" you deal with Belarus. How do you perceive the current political development? Is Belarusian society undergoing modernisation?**

Belarusian society is a modern society. However, the political system is anachronistic. There is no paradox in this; many institutions are becoming obsolete and they need to change. The 2020 protests were about the fact that we need other political institutions. We need to bring back public politics, restore the integrity of an institution like elections, bring back the independence of the judiciary. I believe in human capital in the country, in the ability of people to put minds, forces, emotions into development, if it is free. We should remember that there is no single model of modernisation, there are different models. I hope that the most important thing will happen to us - we

will continue to change as a society.

**What does it mean to be a critical historian and researcher in Belarus?  
How does this perhaps affect your personal life?**

Everyone has their own experience of adapting to the system. There has always been a dynamic within Belarus, and there have been different periods of greater freedom or unfreedom. There is often a situation where researchers try to work in state institutions, but also try to participate in international projects in order to maintain their qualifications. The most difficult thing in Belarus is to be an independent researcher. You have no institutional affiliation, it is very difficult to exist like that (for example, you cannot participate in some projects, conferences, etc.). I was lucky, me and my colleagues were able to build up a small community and an institution, but this is not always the case. Many people leave the country.

The most unpleasant thing happened recently - Belarus adopted two laws and amendments to them - "on extremist activities" and "combating the rehabilitation of Nazism", under which any historian, for example, who tries to challenge the official memory policy, can be imprisoned.

**What do you think is the best way for the (international) public/European Union to support Belarus?**

This is a very complex issue. There is a range of perceptions within Belarus about the role of the European Union. Many are completely disappointed with what EU politicians have been doing for a long time in relation to the Lukashenko regime. Many hope that finally we will see a value-based approach and solidarity on the part of the EU against the dictatorship in action. Now everyone is discussing sanctions - will they have an effect? I want to believe that EU governments will show political will and be consistent in their policies, will not believe in manipulation by regime representatives. And I hope that we will get help (unfortunately, this is starting to look like a humanitarian disaster)

**What are you most looking forward to after the pandemic?**

After the pandemic, my greatest expectation is open borders and freedom of movement. Perhaps some people also like closure, but it's certainly not me. I look forward to the emergence of studies that talk about how communication practices changed during the epidemic. I wonder if academic life will recover in the offline format of seminars, conferences, workshops? On the one hand, the pandemic has shown that some events can sometimes take place online, but the second part of academic communication (networking, conversations, personal communication) is completely cut off.

The pandemic has made us look differently at many things - what role the state plays, how capable we are of creating a fair social system (including the health care system). I am also very hopeful that the pandemic-related turn towards closed national borders, towards a new "covid" nationalism, will not kill the project of a united Europe. I believe that the idea of a united Europe is the best thing that politicians and intellectuals have realised since the Second World War. I believe in a European utopia.

**Is there anything else you would like to share with readers or give them on the way?**

It's probably difficult to say anything to people I don't know at all. I can thank those who read the interview and I would also like to wish us all to live in a safe and free environment.

**Thankyou!**



## **Forschungsbericht: Education in time of pandemic - from the student's perspective**

**Oksana Mikheieva, DAAD-visiting professor at the European University Viadrina Frankfurt (Oder)**

Usually we notice the presence of norms regulating our lives primarily

in moments of failure, violations of the normative order. The pandemic, the quarantine measures were a significant disruption to the usual order. Much of what becomes visible during such periods gives us insight into the normative order behind our daily behavior. At the same time the duration of the pandemic forms new and stable norms of behavior, the spread of which creates a new normative order. These changes are not the result of people's gradual and rationally informed choices, but occur over a short period of time and under the pressure of circumstances.

If a person makes a choice under pressure, he/she quickly reverts to familiar patterns of behavior when the pressure is relieved. Our current situation is characterized by the fact that the future remains uncertain. However, the successes of vaccination create some optimism and hope for a return to former «normal» life. All of this leads us to ask ourselves what new benefits we have discovered during the pandemic that we are not ready to part with, as well as what we have lost in these new circumstances.

The focus of our research team was on the student experience at the university during the pandemic. This study was conducted by attendees of the course «In-depth interview and Focus Groups: Methodology, Methods & Practice» at European University Viadrina Frankfurt (Oder), Winter term 2020/21 - Burcu Genç, Domitrovic Laura, Inshakov Idil, Martinsson Holzwardt Oscar, Müller Charlotte, Simon Robert, Storm Lotta, Tetiana Semeiko, Ünal Sude, Verdzadze Natia, Wittrich Gesine.

This study had the status of an **exploratory study**. The participants were only students of the European University Viadrina. Three focus groups were conducted - with local students, international students, and a mixed one in which the two categories were represented together (18 participants). The participants' responses provide a general outline of the range of problems they encountered in learning during quarantine. However, it also allows us to see the new advantages and opportunities that have opened up for participants in the new conditions.

One of the most serious **problems** the participants consider the lack of direct contact with the teacher and other students. And it's not just about the problem of loneliness. In this case, we are talking about the atomization of each individual, about a tangible loss in the social capital, the accumulation of which depends largely on direct communication that is not mediated by gadgets. This is a very important point that will have consequences in the future. In this respect, during a pandemic, the universities does not adequately fulfill its function of creating a positive environment for new acquaintances,

communication, and the development of sustainable relationships, interactions, and partnerships. This problem is especially noticeable in international audiences because people have come a long way to the other country for integration, which never happened.

The next is the transition from a planned life to complete uncertainty and the collapse of planning. The new conditions demanded radically new skills in time management. Situation of pandemic and quarantine also demanded more attention to mental health. According to participants, such problems are related both to the fear of a pandemic and the constant pressure of the situation in the news, as well as to the abrupt transition to a new organization of daily life. Learning under pandemic conditions demanded more responsibility, more concentration, more time management, and the ability to cope with the problem of limited attention and fatigue. A number of participants indicated a loss of a sight of reality due to systematic communication through the screen.

Dependence on technology and services (a good computer, Internet, etc.) and the pedagogical skill of the lecturers are also important aspects. The lack of a good Internet connection reduces the intensity of the student's work, forming an effect of presence rather than active involvement in the process. However, on the other hand, this situation creates conditions for the "soft integration" of international students. While direct contact in the audience is almost impossible to avoid, online communication creates many opportunities to avoid answering or participating.

Also, housing issues are an important factor that affects the quality of education. Only a few focus groups participants have a separate room for online classes. Most share their apartment with other people with whom they are not family-related. This situation is an additional irritant that prevents students from concentrating on the content of the class.

However, we also found many **positive things** that the study participants discovered during the period of quarantine restrictions. The new time allocation was a significant advantage. Time previously spent commuting to class has been freed up. Forced physical activity, related to the road to the place of study, which caused unpleasant fatigue, was reduced and replaced by voluntary and enjoyable physical activity (yoga, sports, long walks or cycling, etc.) This new physical activity for which there is enough time is perceived as self-development and an investment in one's own health.

The free time that has appeared is generally seen as an opportunity for self-development, to find oneself in new hobbies and interests. Also

the time of quarantine with a significant restriction of contacts, led to a switch from active communication with others to his / her own inner world. For many, this was a time of rethinking themselves, career plans, and life strategies. Also, the decrease in the number of contacts has made communication with the small number of people with whom direct contact has been maintained more profound. It was a time of philosophical reflection.

An important positive point was the financial component. Almost all focus group participants noted that they were able to significantly reduce their costs during the pandemic. In this sense, the pandemic period prompted a revision of consumer behavior patterns. In this sense, the pandemic period has prompted a reconsideration of consumer behavior and exposed the artificiality and imposition of many of the needs associated with the consumption of goods and services.

Evaluation of the format of online learning itself is characterized by ambiguity. On the one hand, this model allows more self-control of the learning process, choosing the appropriate pace, re-listening to recorded lectures, etc. On the other hand causes a sense of confusion, lack of understanding of the entire logistics of the learning process, and communication failures.

Such learning simultaneously forms a sense of grounding, of being attached to a place/computer, to the same room. On the other hand, participants note that this format of learning creates a new mobility - when moving in space (between countries, cities, districts of the city) does not lead to missing a class. The important thing in this case is not your location in space, but the ability to access the Internet.

**In general,** we received ambiguous assessments of the learning process during the pandemic due to the state of uncertainty. However, students' awareness of the range of benefits of new mobility, increased free time budgets, and opportunities to study and work remotely are the values that will influence the choice of learning models in the future. Even if the pandemic situation develops in a positive way, it seems impossible to get all the students back into the classrooms.

***The success of universities in the new context will depend on their ability to offer online and offline learning strategies as independent and equal.***

**Wir hoffen ihr hattet viel Spaß beim Lesen! Habt ihr noch Fragen, Anregungen, Kritik? Wollt ihr selber einen Beitrag schreiben? Dann meldet euch unter [mes\\_students@europa-uni.de](mailto:mes_students@europa-uni.de)! Schöne Ferien :)**

**Wenn ihr jemanden kennt oder von jemanden gehört habt, der den MES-LETTER nicht bekommen hat, schreibt uns gerne eine E-Mail.**