

Journal of Belarusian Studies 2015: History of the Belarus- Poland-Lithuania Borderland

The 2015 issue of the Journal of Belarusian Studies [released](#) today is almost entirely about history. It focuses on the Belarusian-Polish-Lithuanian borderland and the period stretching from the uprising of 1863 to the inter-war period of the 20th century when the territory of today's Belarus was split between the Soviet Union and Poland.

Two longer articles are followed by several essays which resulted from a conference held by the Anglo-Belarusian Society and other London-based organisations at University College London in March 2014.

The issue opens with an analysis of humour as a weapon of the political forces in Eastern Poland, what is now West Belarus, in the interwar period. [The article](#), by Anastasija Astapava from the University of Tartu in Estonia, explains the historical context of the 1920s and how various political groups were struggling for the minds of Belarusians by ridiculing political realities of that time. Rare pictures from interwar periodicals richly illustrate the article.

 Felix Ackermann, a DAAD Associate Professor at the European Humanities University in Vilnius, devotes [his article](#) to the Lukiskės prison in Vilnius. The prison was a hotbed of political struggle in the Russian Empire in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

It was a place of detention for scores of Belarusians, Lithuanians, Poles and other activists fighting for their causes in multi-ethnic Vilnius at that time. It was the only prison in the Russian Empire to incorporate Russian Orthodox,

Roman Catholic and Jewish places of worship at the heart of its infrastructure.

Kastus´Kalinouški Conference Proceedings

The subsequent four shorter articles resulted from the Kastus´Kalinouški and the Nation-Building Process in Belarus conference, which brought together over a dozen of scholars from Belarus, the United Kingdom, Lithuania and Poland. Kastus´Kalinouški is a national hero of Belarus who led the 1863–1864 uprising against tsarist Russia.

Aliaksandr Smaliančuk, a Belarusian historian from Hrodna who is currently affiliated with the Polish Academy of Sciences, [analyses the research problems](#) which historians face when they tackle the historical role of Kastus´Kalinouški in Belarusian nation building. He argues that Kalinouški should not be seen as a creator or even a bearer of the Belarusian national idea but instead as a link in the gradual evolution of the Lithuanian idea in the ‘Belarusian direction’.

Dorota Michałuk from the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Poland [analyses the Polish-language clandestine press](#) published under the patronage of Kastus´Kalinouški around the time of the uprising against the tsarist authorities in 1863–1864. One of her findings is that the periodicals did not promote the idea of separatism of in Lithuania and Belarus but instead called for national unity and the restoration of the whole of the old Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

Uladzislau´Ivanou´ from the European Humanities University in Lithuania [looks at the role of Belarusian old Believers](#) in the Kalinouški uprising. Old believers were a Christian Orthodox sect who refused to accept church reforms in Russia in the 17th century and who after being persecuted settled in the

territory of Belarus. The author shows how the old believers tried to reconcile their 'Russianness' with their 'Belarusianness'.

Andrus'Unučak, Head of the Department of Belarusian Statehood at the Institute of History of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus, [focuses on the image of Kalinouški](#) in the official discourse of Soviet Belarus. According to the official line of the Belarusian Communist Party, Kalinouški supported a federation with Russia while the Belarusian intelligentsia tried to use the image of Kalinouški to strengthen Belarusian national consciousness.

Reviews

This issue also includes the transcript of the [first Annual London Lecture on Belarusian Studies](#), which was hosted by the School of Slavonic and Eastern European Studies of University College London in March 2015. Per Anders Rudling from the University of Lund in Sweden tracks the development of the Belarusian national idea from the 18th century to modern day Belarus.

The issue also includes two book reviews – [one by Stephen Hall](#) examining the meaning of Europe for the Belarusian and Ukrainian authorities, and [the other by Siarhej Bohdan](#) looking at relations between various ethnic groups in Eastern Poland in the inter-war period, which is now Western Belarus. Brian Bennett, Chairman of the Anglo-Belarusian Society and a former British Ambassador to Belarus [prepared an overview](#) of activities of the Anglo-Belarusian Society in 2014.



Fr Alexander Nadson

On 15 April 2015 Fr Alexander Nadson, a spiritual leader of the Belarusian diaspora in the West, a member of the Advisory Board of the Journal of Belarusian Studies and a former chairman of the Anglo-Belarusian Society passed away in London. Fr Alexander left a legacy of not only religious texts and translations but also books and articles on various aspects of Belarusian studies.

Fr Alexander authored the first article in the first issue of the Journal of Belarusian Studies on the writings of St. Cyril of Turaŭ in 1965 and since 1973 served on its editorial board. His last article in the Journal was published in 2013. Jim Dingley's [obituary and a bibliography](#) of his works in English concludes this issue of the Journal of Belarusian Studies.

Konstanty Kalinouski: A Contested Hero

At the start of September, the Belarusian journal ARCHE reported that two monuments commemorating Konstanty Kalinouski, a revolutionary contested in the official Belarusian history, disappeared in a town near Hrodna.

Konstanty Kalinouski remains a controversial figure, present in Belarusian, Lithuanian and Polish histories. To some scholars he symbolises patriotism, a set of ideals and courage, while others consider him a Polish noble who struggled against the tsarist Russia.

Very few, however, dispute that Kalinouski became a political

symbol for the anti-Lukashenka opposition. During the post-elections demonstrations in 2006, the protesters symbolically renamed October Square, after the Bolshevik revolution, into Kalinouski square.

Although this year marks the 150th anniversary of the Kalinouski uprising, the state is not organising any official events. The initiative remains mainly in the hands of Belarusian civil society.

Publisher of first journal in the Belarusian language

Vincenty Konstanty Kalinouski was born in 1839 in Mostowlany, in the Hrodna region and today in Podlasie region of Poland. In those times, these lands belonged to the Russian empire.

Kalinouski turned his interest towards revolutionary activity against the tsarist regime during his legal studies in Saint-Petersburg. Back in Hrodna he continued his clandestine work. He supported the Belarusian language and published the first journal in a latin script version of Belarusian, *Muzyckaja Prawda* in 1861 and two other periodicals in Polish. Through the journal, Kalinouski encouraged peasants to struggle for independence from the tsarist empire.

The uprising is known in the Polish historiography as the January Uprising started in Warsaw in the winter of 1863. Kalinouski joined it at a later point and focused on getting peasants involved in the struggle. He led the uprising in the Hrodna region, as a part of the general struggle against the Russian Empire, an effort which Belarusian historians now call the Kalinouski uprising (*paustannie Kalinouskaha* in Belarusian).

Kalinouski at some point had disputes with the Polish leadership. The sensitive issues included the idea of an independent Belarusian-Lithuanian state, that would exist in some form of federation with Poland. Lithuania (*Litva*) in this historical context differs from the territory of modern

Lithuania. *Litva* referred to the territories which covered the lands that make up a large part of the present-day Belarus and partly the region around Vilnius in today's Lithuania.

In the end, his supposed allies betrayed Kalinouski and the Russian authorities hung the 26-year old Kastus in Wilno (now Vilnius in Lithuania) in March 1864.

Kalinouski: a Belarusian activist or a Polish terrorist?

Today for many Belarusian activists Kalinouski stands for an independent Belarusian state, a distinctly Belarusian national identity and the proper position of the Belarusian language.

He has also become somewhat of a prisoner to historical politics and the present government's current pro-Russian orientation. Currently the authorities allow Kalinouski to exist in a public space, while at the same time they continue to be rather reserved when it comes to more serious forms of commemoration of the uprising.

The position of the authorities has its own ideological explanation. Quite simply, the Kalinouski was struggling to overthrow the tsarist regime and make Belarus-Lithuania an independent state and thus the Kalinouski uprising proves that Belarusians did not always support Russian rule in the past. In any event, the commemoration could perhaps undermine the myth of Belarusians that Belarusians and Russians never had any problems in the past.

According to historian Andrei Kisztynou, the rising of 1863 did not have an anti-Russian character. Its slogan "For our and your freedom" referred to all nations which were part of the Tsarist empire, including the Russians themselves. This is why the Soviet authorities promoted Kalinouski as a fighter for the rights of the poor. To this day, thanks to Soviet support, one can still find many Kalinouski streets in Belarusian cities.

Another historian, Viktor Khurcik, argued that at the time a Belarusian identity did not exist, which means that Kalinowski and other participants of the uprising in the Hrodna region held a Polish identity. On the other hand, Ales Smalianchuk has pointed out that Kalinowski used primarily Belarusian language in his writings.

Kalinowski as a political symbol of the Belarusian opposition

These days, the Belarusian opposition view Kalinowski as a political symbol. Many Belarusian activists argue that his support for the Belarusian language and his political standpoint have remained valid, particularly now.

In 2006, Belarusian protesters symbolically renamed the October square, named after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and where they contested the unfair presidential elections, as Kalinowski Square.

In the aftermath of these events in Minsk, the Polish authorities founded the [Kalinowski Scholarship](#). It offers financial support for youth that due to their oppositional activity would not be able to continue their studies at Belarusian universities. It also supports more senior figures such as Andrei Sannikau and Ales Michalevich, former presidential candidates. The program is meant to attract individuals who have a deep respect for Belarusian culture, language and politics. Those people should also have potential to become a member of the future elite of Belarus.

Social awareness and Kalinowski

In March the Independent Research Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Research examined the attitudes of Belarusians towards various political activists both from present and the past. The data showed that positive opinions towards Kalinowski's stood at 11.7% among the surveyed. This puts him in fifth place, just after Margaret Thatcher. Alexander Lukashenka enjoys the highest rating at 20.9%.



IISEPS noted that such a result is rather disappointing. Over the span of a few months Kalinouski often appeared in various publications. Historians presented him as a person with unclear national identification, Polish or Belarusian, which made him less popular, the Institute explained.

In addition, his attitude towards the Orthodox Church also could cause negative opinions. According to IISEPS, it could be perhaps due to his unfriendly stance towards Russian Orthodoxy.

Kastus remains particularly popular among young Belarusians, aged 18-20. Almost three times fewer Belarusians aged 60 approve of calling him a hero. *Nasha Niva* argued that both Poland and Lithuania would commemorate the events from 1863-64 officially and in Belarus, it will occur only through the initiative of civil society.

In August the Belarusian news portal *Naviny.by* reported that the authorities opposed an initiative by Minsk citizens to raise a statute for Kalinouski. The initiators gathered 3,500 signatures to support the application, but they never received any positive feedback on the project idea from the authorities.

Scholars of various disciplines in the humanities will have a chance to discuss the role of Kastus Kalinouski in the creation of the Belarusian nation. The Anglo-Belarusian Society is organising a conference *Kastus Kalinouski and the Process of Nation-Building in Belarus*. The conference will take place in March 2014 in London. The Society has already announced a call for proposals.

Kastus Kalinouski remains a complex character, one that may be seen as a representative of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania made up by parts of territories of three countries: Belarus, Poland and Lithuania, all of which shared an idea of

independence from the Russian empire.