

SYLFF Research Abroad Article – Paweł Markiewicz

The recent transgression of events in Kiev and in Ukraine made me concerned that I would not be able to travel there and conduct my necessary research. Every day I would listen to news reports and read various internet sources to gain a full perspective on whether it would be safe to plan travels there or not. I finally undertook my decision towards the end of September when the situation seemed most calm and quiet in Kiev. While flying from Poland to Kiev, the thought still circled in the back of my mind that I am flying into a country which was in the process of re-stabilizing territory which in essence was at war with the government authorities. My worries were allayed following my landing into Kiev's Borispol International Airport.

Why study about Ukraine? This is a question which many have asked me after hearing about my dissertation topic. I always respond in the same way. When I was a young boy, history had always fascinated me, particularly the history of Poland – a country from which my parents emigrated and a country in which my heritage and roots come from. Hearing and reading stories of knights, nobles and insurgents heroically struggling for independence or against the large invaders of the east or west gripped my life and allowed me to form a critical decision, that I would devote my future self to researching and writing on various historical topics. Throughout my college and university years, I broadened my interest to go outside of Poland to the general Central East European region while deciding to focus on the twentieth century, a timeframe in which happiness and horror, fear and destruction touched so many people. After being accepted to the doctoral program at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, I wanted to devote my research during those studies to the complex topic of Polish-Ukrainian relations. Although ethnically very similar, the overall history of that topic is difficult, particularly if one looks at the twentieth century alone. After extensive consultations with my dissertation advisor, I chose to research the topic of the Ukrainian Central Committee, the only legally recognized Ukrainian representative organization which was allowed to function in occupied Poland by the German authorities. From this work I hope to form a case study – to examine the workings of this organization with regard to the three groups with which they interacted with the most: the German authorities, Ukrainians and Poles.

Traveling from Borispol Airport to my lodgings in Kiev, I noticed many things. For one, Kiev wasn't the city which I had once thought. This was a cosmopolitan city with the lingering effects of long imposed communist rule still evident. However, the desire for closer integration with the west was very evident and clear. Looking at many of the people who bustled about the streets of Kiev during my daily walks to and from various bus stops it was clear to me that this was a people who were tired, perhaps of the situation in which they were currently in and concerned for their future, one which once again seems to be uncertain. One thing which certainly struck me, perhaps even the most during my time in Kiev was the patriotism of the city and its people. Seeing Kiev, one could feel the roots of old Rus in the monasteries and monuments throughout the city. However, one could also feel the Ukrainian

spirit in this history, a history which is shared with Russia. Ukrainian blue and yellow flags were visible throughout the city while telephone posts or highway guard rails were painted in identical colors. Monuments to those who lost their lives during the tumultuous protests at Maidan Square were now shrines to not only remember those who perished but to make sure their sacrifices would not be for nothing. Talking with my colleague who showed me Kiev during what free time I had, he said something to me which struck me. As we walked past the pictures of young Ukrainians killed during the most recent protests and lamp posts with bullet holes the size of my small, pinky finger, he said to me that the one hope he had was that the current government organizes itself, stabilizes itself and makes a clear decision as to the future of Ukraine and its people. The one thing he did not want to see were such protests again in the future. I felt that this was a thought which permeated throughout Ukrainian society in general.

The majority of the necessary research which I conducted while in Kiev was in the Central State Archives of Supreme Bodies of Power and Government of Ukraine. This archive had a collection of documents which directly related to my dissertation topic. The documents of the Ukrainian Central Committee – Kraków, Poland were extensive, composed of over two hundred files. During my first visit, I was able to analyze and photocopy all necessary files. These documents will add to the already extensive amount of material relating to the Ukrainian Central Committee which I brought back from a research trip to the National Archives of Canada in Ottawa (thanks to the generous SYLFF award from the Jagiellonian University). Furthermore, the Central Committee documents in Kiev, apart from adding to the material which I had also form a detailed and deep understanding of the Committee's large and active wartime branch in Lviv – something which the Canadian archives lacked. During my time in Kiev, I also focused on other files located in the Central State Archives as well as in the Central State Archives of Foreign Archival Ucrainica where I analyzed various newspapers, brochures and Ukrainian emigration materials. One of my favorite parts of my time spent in Kiev was meeting with young students and scholars who were proud of their past and hopeful for their future.

Every scholar feels that the research and writing that they are doing is the most important. I am no different. I feel the same way about my dissertation topic particularly since this is a topic which has not been research to such an extent as I am currently researching it. This is a topic which will add to the historiography of Polish-Ukrainian relations of the twentieth century and one which will add a new perspective to that topic in the hope of fully understanding the causes and effects and in essence bringing those two nations closer together. History can divide and for many years the mutual histories and relations of Poland and Ukraine has divided many outlooks and discussions. However, I feel that through a new generation of scholars and through new interpretations, this mutual history will open a new dialogue and bring these two peoples closer together.