

# The Future Is What Matters

**Greetings at the 9th World Congress of the International Council for Central and East European Studies in Makuhari, August 3, 2015**

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Today, on this sweltering summer's day in Makuhari, we have gathered to discuss various aspects of Slavic and Eurasian studies. This is not an attempt to create a simple meeting place, but rather an agora where many Easts and Wests reverberate with each other. We will not try to come to conclusions about what form our discipline should take. We'd rather seek a conglomeration of diverse voices that will linger in our mind, hinting at the vague shape of something that looms in the distance.

We are well aware that the divergent opinions, tastes, and positions will not easily dissolve into unanimous agreement. Yet we do hope that by conducting dialogues face-to-face and listening to each other, we can convince ourselves that, in spite of different languages and even different ideologies, we are united by the common enthusiasm of inquiry into our arts and sciences. Let us enjoy the enormous "heteroglossia" of diverse voices and the simple universality of earnest scholarship that freely crosses political borders.

Looking, however, at what is going on in our world, I cannot help but repeat the same question that the devil Woland asked in Bulgakov's *Master i Margarita*: “Изменились ли эти горожане внутренне?”

(Do you think these people have changed inwardly?) The answer would be “no,” because we still live in a world where conflicts do not seem to disappear; on the contrary, hatred is being fueled by tenacious nationalism and its face is, to borrow the poetic expression by Szymborska, “twisted by the grimace of love’s ecstasy” (Twarz jej wykrzywia grymas ekstazy miłosnej). In such a world, war may be waged in the name of love and peace at any moment.

I believe, however, that it is precisely in such times of trouble that scholars have the responsibility to engage in transnational dialogues. Only through such exchanges can we make a step forward to a better world. After all, I am one of those old-fashioned humanists who still believe that bad politics divides people while true art and scholarship unite them. As the poet Joseph Brodsky declared in his Nobel lecture, «Философия государства -- всегда "вчера"; язык, литература -- всегда "сегодня" и часто даже и "завтра"» (the philosophy of the state is always “yesterday,” while language and literature are always “today” and often even “tomorrow.”) Yes, the future is what matters. And that is what our congress is all about.