

# Roman Jurkowski

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## Tsarist Russia - Bolshevik Russia - Contemporary Russia : Special Session with the Ceremony of Conferring the Title of Doctor Honoris Causa of the University of Warsaw to Professor Richard Pipes, Warsaw, 25-30 June 2010

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## ACADEMIC CHRONICLE

*Roman Jurkowski*

*TSARIST RUSSIA – BOLSHEVIK RUSSIA*  
– *CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA*. SPECIAL SESSION WITH  
THE CEREMONY OF CONFERRING THE TITLE  
OF DOCTOR HONORIS CAUSA OF THE UNIVERSITY  
OF WARSAW TO PROFESSOR RICHARD PIPES, WARSAW,  
29–30 JUNE 2010

The ceremony of conferring the title of Doctor Honoris Causa of the University of Warsaw to Professor Richard Pipes, an outstanding American academic who specializes in the history of Russia, was preceded by a special conference dedicated to three eras in the history of Russia: Tsarist rule, Bolshevik rule and contemporary Russia. The organizers were able to bring together 18 renowned historians and political science experts, including two from the Ukraine and one from the USA, on very short notice, and much of the credit goes to the Laureate himself as well as Jan Malicki, Director of the Center for East European Studies at the University of Warsaw, the founder of the initiative to award the honorary title to Professor Richard Pipes. The University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn and the Institute of History and International Relations were represented by Assistant Professor Roman Jurkowski. The conference was divided into four parts spanning two days, and it ended one hour before the ceremony of conferring the Doctor Honoris Causa title to Professor Richard Pipes. The four parts of the conference were further subdivided into thematic sessions devoted to each period in Russia's history. The first part was dedicated to Tsarist Russia, the third – to Bolshevik Russia, while the second and the fourth part combined Russia's modern history with political issues.

Set in the magnificent Senate Hall of the University of Warsaw, the conference was opened by Jan Malicki who thanked the participants for attending the event on such short notice. The date of the ceremony and the academic session was set at the very last moment to accommodate Professor

Pipes' busy schedule. Mr. Malicki added that the session was organized on the initiative of Professor Mirosław Filipowicz of the Catholic University of Lublin. He apologized for the short speaking times granted to the lecturers (15 minutes), adding with a smile that this restriction would not apply only to the first speaker – Professor Pipes.

The first session was chaired by Professor Andrzej Nowak who welcomed the Laureate and the participants and gave the floor to Professor Pipes. Richard Pipes delivered his paper, entitled “From the Annals of Polish Sovietology”, in English, and he read the quotes in excellent Polish. The paper summed up the 200-year history of Polish-Russian relations as documented by Polish academics, writers and journalists. The speaker performed a critical evaluation of the work of Zygmunt Krasiński, Jerzy Giedroyc, Franciszek Duchiniński, Wojciech Dzieduszycki, Stanisław Kutrzeba, Józef Piłsudski, Roman Dmowski, Józef Mackiewicz, Bogumił Jasinowski, Feliks Koneczny and Jan Parandowski. In the opening speech, Professor Pipes said that “quotes will be in Polish because there is no point in translating the language of the source into English”. In the paper, which he referred to as “a few reflections on the Poles speaking about Russia”, the Professor admitted that his work had been profoundly influenced by Polish historians, mostly Jan Kucharczyński. Professor Pipes expressed his regret that Jan Kucharczyński's prominent book *Od białego caratu do czerwonego* (From White Tsardom to Red) has been published in Western Europe and the USA in the form of a single, abridged volume that “does not do this extraordinary piece of work any justice”.

The second speaker was Professor Hubert Łaszkiwicz of the Catholic University of Lublin whose paper, entitled “A Journey to the East of the Moscow Empire: 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries”, put forward a thesis that it was not the state nor the monarch who were responsible for the success of Russia's eastward expansion, but its ordinary citizens, mostly the merchants (Stroganovs). The second thesis postulated that Russia's eastward expansion in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (in 1581, Yermak set out on a voyage to conquer western and southern territories) was initially a marginal undertaking that generated massive benefits in modern times.

Dr. Henryk Głębocki of the Jagiellonian University painted a portrait of count Adam Gurowski, a highly fascinating historical figure of dubious moral and ethical conduct (“Russia and the United States as the «Countries of the Future”. Count Adam Gurowski – America's intellectual guide to Russia and Russia's guide to America (1849-1866)”). Gurowski, the initiator of the plot to assassinate Tsar Nicholas I in Warsaw in 1829, the most radical émigré after the November Uprising, suddenly declared his support for the Pan-Slavic movement. He left for Russia where he worked as an office clerk. He wrote petitions to Nicholas I and “argued with Katkov over how to deprive the Poles of their national identity”. Gurowski later left for the US, Russia's ally in the Crimean war, where he became the “Americans' guide to knowledge

about Russia". According to Dr. Głębocki, "Gurowski significantly contributed to Russia's positive image in the eyes of American citizens".

Professor Wiesław Caban of the Jan Kochanowski University of Humanities and Sciences in Kielce, who is renowned for his ability to present succinct reviews of his work, narrowed down the presentation of his paper ("In Service of the Tsar. Polish Soldiers in the Tsar's Army in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Population and Distribution") to eight points focusing on the size of the Polish conscription, the Jewish population in the Tsar's army, the myths and facts about Polish soldiers stationed in garrisons throughout Russia, the reasons for enlisting soldiers in different military formations, the number of Poles in the officer corps, the restrictions imposed on Polish soldiers and the role of Polish commanders in the Russian army.

Assistant Professor Roman Jurkowski of the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn attempted to explain the underlying causes of Russian Prime Minister Pyotr Stolypin's hostility towards the Poles ("I Left Many Friends There. Pyotr Stolypin and the Polish Gentry in the Taken Lands in 1888–1911"). He argued that contrary to popular belief in Polish historical science, Stolypin was not an advocate of Russification, nor was his activity aimed against the Poles during his term in office as the marshal of the Kovno guberniya. According to the speaker, the theory postulating that Stolypin became a Russian nationalist and an enemy of the Polish people during his stay in Kovno was unfounded. The governor's views became more radical after Stolypin had assumed the post of the minister of the interior and, subsequently, the prime minister, and they mirrored the policies that he implemented after 1907.

According to conference chairman Professor Andrzej Nowak, the following speaker, Professor Antoni Mironowicz "summarized the history of the Orthodox Church in Russia in 15 minutes" ("The Orthodox Church in Russia"). The paper traced the evolution of the Orthodox Church in Russia from the reign of Tsar Peter I until 1917 when it became an instrument of state policy.

The second session, moderated by Professor Roman Bäcker, was devoted to East European affairs. Professor Andrzej Nowak ("Does Eastern Europe Still Exist? Questions About the Region's Place in Contemporary Western Historiography") cited several definitions of Eastern Europe, including the "new Eastern Europe", implying the countries that had joined the European Union, the "broader Eastern Europe", signifying this part of the continent without Russia, "Slavic territories" and the "Second World", which encompasses the region together with Russia. In Japan, Eastern Europe denotes the western part of Eurasia – the western region annexed to Russia. According to Professor Bäcker, the state of contemporary Western research investigating Eastern Europe resembles the situation encountered in the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> century – the researchers' attention is drawn to Russia, not the neighboring states. Russia has a sense of national identity without Europe, while Poland's history had always been closely intertwined with the European continent.

Professor Mykola Ryabchuk of the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy in Kiev (“In Russia’s Shadow: The «New Eastern Europe» and East Slavonic «Ummah» – Uneasy Emancipation”) made a reference to Professor Nowak’s paper. According to Ryabchuk, we are currently dealing with four concepts of Eastern Europe: the “Europe in Russia’s shadow”, covering the former Soviet block countries, the “New Eastern Europe” of countries that are not EU members (Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus and three Caucasian states), the “Slavonic Ummah” (by analogy to the Muslim Ummah) which denotes the Pan-Slavic community in Europe, and the fourth category of countries that will be emancipated from the Slavonic Ummah. The speaker claimed that each of the four concepts of Eastern Europe are perceived as a threat in the West.

Professor John Micgiel of the Columbia University, USA (“Reflections on Contemporary Polish-Russian Relations”) based his paper on Alain Besancon’s statement: “The mere fact that Russia has adopted a policy of conciliation does not mean that it wants to become reconciled”. Making a reference to the Russian authorities’ reluctance to address the Katyn massacre, Micgiel said that “It is difficult to escape the impression that the Polish government is naive to think that Russia is willing to make amends for the Katyn issue”.

Professor Jarosław Hrycak of the Lviv University and the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv delivered a gripping paper (“The Return of Nationalism in Russian-Ukrainian Relations”) which presented a number of counterarguments to Mykola Ryabchuk’s theses. In his paper, Hrycak negated the 19<sup>th</sup> century belief that a nation-state could not be established in Orthodox countries. This line of thought underlined most of Borys Yeltsin’s policies addressing the Ukraine, while Vladimir Putin believed that Ukrainian national identity was fully manifested only in the western part of the country, which proved to be Russia’s greatest mistake during the Orange Revolution. According to Hrycek, the difference between Russia and the Ukraine is best portrayed by those countries’ attitudes towards Stalin.

The current political situation in Ukraine was the topic of a 30 minute discussion. A representative of the Polish Radio External Service asked Professor Ryabchuk and Professor Nowak about the European Union’s foreign policy in Eastern Europe. According to Ryabchuk, the EU’s policy has two goals: to push East Europe away from the “old” EU and to engage East European countries in European affairs. Although those goals are mutually exclusive, the EU is hoping to work out a compromise on the assumption that this policy is not the European Union’s priority. Professor Jan Holzer of the Masaryk University in Brno initiated a debate in the realm of terminology and axiology by questioning the true meaning of the term “Western values” in contemporary Europe. Professor Mironowicz argued that political scientists who are experts on Eastern Europe tend to overrate the state-building role of the Orthodox Church.

On day two, the third session was opened by Dr. Adolf Juzwenko, Director of the Ossoliński National Institute in Wrocław, who invited Professor Wiktoria Śliwowska to deliver her paper entitled “Does the Title of Jan Kucharczyński’s book *Od białego caratu do czerwonego* (From White Tsardom to Red) Contribute to Our Understanding of the USSR?”. The author strongly opposed the thesis that there were no differences between Tsarist Russia and Bolshevik Russia. Śliwowska argued that by the same token, Bismarck’s Prussia should be equated with the Third Reich. She noted that Tsarist Russia was a law-abiding state where even false informers were sentenced to penal labor, and Nicholas I, the creator of the social control system, used to say: “доносы люблю но досчиков терпеть не могу”.

In his captivating lecture (“The Concept of Totalitarian Rule and Democracy According to Richard Pipes), Professor Jan Holzer of the Masaryk University in Brno analyzed the politological terms applied by Richard Pipes in his work. According to the lecturer, the notion of democracy serves as a point of reference for Professor Pipes. In his work, Pipes looks to democracy as a model system characterized by specific attributes, and he deploys that model to describe his attitudes towards totalitarian rule.

Professor Leszek Zasztowt, Chairman of the Mianowski Fund and employee of the Center for East European Studies, delivered a paper entitled “Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Science. The Insufferable Problem of the «Academic Outlook»” in which he discussed the influence of Soviet academia on research in the People’s Republic of Poland. In his opinion, the Polish academic community’s dependence on Soviet influences varied throughout the years, reaching its peak in 1948-1953. The exerted influence can be classified into two domains: organizational-structural and philosophical-ideological. According to Professor Zasztowt, as regards the latter, “classical Marxism had never taken root in Poland”.

Professor Mirosław Filipowicz of the Catholic University of Lublin was the second speaker who focused on a selected aspect of Richard Pipes’ work. His paper, entitled “Vera Zasulich in Richard Pipes’ Court” skillfully traced the evolution of Professor Pipes’ thoughts concerning Vera Zasulich’s trial, the court’s attitude toward the defendant and the place of that trial in Russia’s judicial system. According to Filipowicz, Richard Pipes’ investigations into the matter were laborious, and they were crowned with an extensive article, “The Trial of Vera Zasulich”, published in 2010 in *Russian History* (currently published in Leiden), in which the author claimed that “we should investigate the crime, but we should not forget about the punishment”.

Professor Włodzimierz Marciniak of the Polish Academy of Sciences gave an account of Yakov Sverdlov (“The First Gensek. A Stage in the Battle for Power in the Bolshevik Party”). Sverdlov was a terrifying yet a bland figure, but an insight into Sverdlov’s personality cult is vital for an understanding of the cults built by the successive Secretaries General of the Communist

Party. Sverdlov's preference for long, black leather coats, a trend that was picked up by other Bolshevik leaders, gave rise to the expression "black Bolshevik devil".

Professor Mikołaj Iwanow of Opole University, employee of the Center for East European Studies at the University of Warsaw, delivered a paper entitled "Jews – Farmers in the USSR and the Soviet Jewish Policy in 1921–1935". The establishment of experimental national autonomies on the Soviet territory in the 1930s had tragic consequences for the Poles, Germans and Jews, and the latter are still experiencing its effects today. Immigrants from the Jewish Autonomous Oblast in Birobidzhan (near Khabarovsk) account for more than half of the population of 30,000 in the town of Batian near Jerusalem. Professor Iwanow ended his lecture with an anecdote: "Where is pure Yiddish spoken today? – In the Jewish Theater in Warsaw, in New York and in Batiana near Jerusalem".

The fourth session, chaired by Professor Jan Holzer, was the shortest part of the conference due to the upcoming ceremony of conferring the title of Doctor Honoris Causa to Professor Pipes. The first speaker was Wiktor Ross, a former Polish Ambassador to Moldova and Armenia. His paper ("Evolution of the Russian Political System During the Presidency of Putin and Medvedev") traced the general trends in the process of political transformations in the Russian Federation during Putin's reign: progressing oligarchization of power, intensive ideologization that refueled Soviet resentments, and Russia's power status based on vast energy resources.

Professor Roman Bäcker, Vice Chairman of the Polish Political Science Association, delivered a captivating and very well presented paper ("Russia Under the Reign of Recent Presidents") that classified Russia's current assets into three groups: material resources, institutional resources and civic awareness. In his opinion, Russia, the world's largest source of energy reserves (in June 2010, financial reserves generated from the sale of raw materials totaled USD 455 billion), is a classical authoritarian regime where civic awareness is shaped by the state-building myth of the 9<sup>th</sup> of May. Entropic trends are gradually rising to the surface in contemporary Russia, but this does not imply that a top-down, or even less likely, a grassroots revolution could take place.

After Professor Bäcker's speech, Professor Richard Pipes, accompanied by Jan Malicki, Director of the Center for East European Studies, made an appearance in the Ballroom of the Potocki Palace which hosted the second conference day. Professor Pipes said that he was honored to attend the sessions on both days of the conference. He added that Russian studies in Poland contribute to the understanding of Russia on the global arena, unfortunately, the achievements scored in this academic field are still weakly recognized in the world. Poland's relations with Russia span 1000 years, and Polish people, especially members of the academic community, have a good grasp of Russian events, and this knowledge should be popularized around

the globe. The Russians are well aware of that, which is why they are resentful of Polish experts dealing with Russia. Stanisław Ulam, Zbigniew Brzeziński and the speaker himself were accused by the Russians on several occasions that their Polish roots influence their opinions and deteriorate Russia's relations with the West. Professor Pipes' speech received a thunderous applause.

Jan Malicki made a reference to the fact that the achievements of Polish academics specializing in Russian affairs remain unknown in the West by declaring that the materials from this conference would be published in English. He emphasized that Professor Pipes had lectured on many occasions at the Summer School of the Center for East European Studies at the University of Warsaw.

The last speaker was Professor Witold Rodkiewicz of the University of Warsaw ("The Recent Russian Proposal of a European Security Treaty: An Interpretation"). His brief paper discussed the Russian establishment's notions about the role of contemporary Russia in the world. After World War II, Russia was incorrectly deemed a weak state. The international system pushes for American supremacy on the global arena, while Russia aims for a multipolar system. Russia should reinstate its power in every aspect. As regards the latter, Professor Rodkiewicz pointed to an analogy between Russian leaders' political views and the business strategies of Russian oligarchs.

The fourth session was not followed by a discussion due to the upcoming ceremony of conferring the title of Doctor Honoris Causa to Professor Richard Pipes. The ceremony was held in the Senate Hall of the University of Warsaw. The supervisor was Professor Henryk Samsonowicz, while Professor Wojciech Materski, Professor Władysław Serczyk and Professor Wiktoria Śliwowska acted as the reviewers. The Rector of the University of Warsaw Professor Katarzyna Chałasińska-Macukow read the Senate's unanimous resolution of 20 January 2010 to confer the title of Doctor Honoris Causa to Professor Richard Pipes. In the laudation, Professor Samsonowicz emphasized the Laureate's achievements in the field of historical science as well as his political activity as President Reagan's advisor on Soviet and East European affairs that supported Polish interests. In a warm acceptance speech, Professor Pipes recalled his childhood and youth in Cieszyn and Warsaw. In October 1939, Pipes emigrated to America with a forged Portuguese passport. He ended his moving speech with the following words: "In late September 1939, I was standing in Krakowskie Przedmieście, watching two Nazi soldiers guard the gate to the University. A female Polish student burst into tears at this sight. Today, I passed the very same gate on my way here, and I realized that history is not always as terrifying as we might think".