



## CALL FOR PAPERS

The European Humanities University, Vilnius  
The Ukrainian Catholic University, Lviv  
and  
Charles University, Prague

Invite all who are interested in participating in an international conference on

# **The Decolonization of Education and Research in Belarus and Ukraine: Theoretical challenges and practical tasks**

September 28-30, 2023 in Vilnius

The full-scale war launched by Russia against Ukraine in 2022 and supported by the Lukashenko regime has, first of all, buried forever and consigned to the archives the once entirely consensually agreed term “post-soviet region,” (post-soviet countries). Secondly, it has focused attention on the urgency of decolonization as a process of overcoming the structural, political, and cultural subjugation by the “empire.”

The first attempt to analyze our societies from the perspective of colonial experience began soon after the disintegration of the USSR. It was stimulated by Western postcolonial theory (primarily by the writings of E. Said, G. Spivak, H. Bhabha). Indeed, after the establishment of independent states in place of former Soviet republics, postcolonial research began to develop in some of them contributing to the rise of new national self-identities that broke with the cultural and political influence of Soviet (Russian) imperialism. Postcolonial discourse spread more widely in Ukraine than in Belarus due to the cultural-historical and social-political specificities of each country. The annexation of Crimea and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014 provided new reasons examining critically Russian imperial claims on Eastern Europe. The example of Belarus shows yet again that cultural colonization is imposed primarily through education, and it is based on the ideological distortion of history and the other humanities and social sciences. This conference aims to develop the theoretical and methodological foundations for decolonization both in today’s conditions and after the end of the war. As W. Mignolo and M. Tlostanova rightly noted (2012), colonialism is reproduced through everyday habits of thought.

Resistance to it is possible through development of purposeful practices of “learning to unlearn.” Accordingly, educational and media spheres comprise the main terrain of decolonization, and the academy can provide meaningful content for an alternative to the “colonial matrix of power,” creating scholarly communities and institutions sharply opposed to existing cultural hierarchies.

This conference will begin with a focus on determining the meaning and relevance of the concept of decolonization today, as related to the system of education and scholarly research in Belarus and Ukraine. Of course, to establish a basis for decolonizing the production of knowledge in the humanities and social sciences, it is necessary first to justify the admissibility of characterizing the Soviet era – and to some extent, perhaps, also the post-Soviet one – as an era of colonization. It is well known that there are divergent opinions on this matter in the international scholarly community. This conference intends to conduct relevant interdisciplinary discussions and theoretical clarifications of the conditions for, and specific sense of, applying the concept of decolonization to Belarusian and Ukrainian societies.

An additional theoretical challenge to the development of topics related to the decolonization of the production of knowledge in our countries is presented by the relatively new discourse of “decoloniality,” which has been fruitfully developed primarily by scholars from non-European countries in line with what has been called “the decolonial turn.” How do decolonization and decoloniality apply in our context? Which aspects of the concept of decoloniality are relevant to our situation and our practical tasks? Is it possible to combine the decolonization effort aimed against subordination to “the Russian empire” with the decoloniality effort aimed against the west European paradigm of the production of knowledge?

This conference’s practical focus is to answer the question: How exactly is decolonization to be achieved in education and in humanistic and social science research? In this regard, Ukrainian society already has a wealth of experience, related to reforms of the educational system and with the work of Ukrainian researchers in the global academy. Belarusian civil society, which testified to its subjectivity and its democratic principles in the 2020, has come to realize the political priority of decolonization. It should become the basis for future reform of the educational system in Belarus. Moreover, decolonization as a practical task unites Belarusians and Ukrainians in our aspirations for national independence, which will require a mutual reconsideration of regional cooperation. Our societies are both equally affected by a special sort of “double colonial loop,” by which Russian imperial ambitions on the so-called “post-Soviet territory” were for a long time strengthened (and to some extent are still being strengthened) by the domination of Russia as a thematic focus in the scholarly activities of Western centers of post-Soviet, Slavic, and/or East European research.

It follows that the task of decolonization, the relevance of which is in the first instance oriented to our national realities, should be analyzed in connection with the global politics of knowledge and our participation in these politics. The question of decolonization should be considered from internal as well as external points of view, that is, through the eyes of Belarusians and Ukrainians themselves and through the eyes of researchers from abroad who study our countries. In this connection, a separate practical objective of the conference is the consideration of a common politics of decolonization and the creation of a network for continued promotion of decolonization in Belarusian and Ukrainian research, considered in national, regional, and global perspectives.

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The following issues are proposed for discussion at the conference:

- Results and lessons from postcolonial research in Belarus and Ukraine
- Ukrainian pre-war experience in the decolonization of education and research

- Decommunization, de-Sovietization, decolonization
- Subaltern experience as the new “meeting point” across old regional divisions, from Central Asia to Central Europe
- The end of “post-Sovietism” and the recentering of East European studies
- Decolonization, nation-building, Europeanization – intersections and paradoxes
- Decolonization in school education: the creation of a national canon and the cosmopolitan perspective
- The university as a platform and engine of decolonization
- The objectives of decolonization and regional cooperation
- The phenomenon of self-colonization in scholarly research: Eastern and Western versions
- Overcoming the “post-Soviet” paradigm and the prospects for Belarusian and Ukrainian research in the global context

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The conference will include discussions, thematic panels, and working groups.

Proposals will be accepted for:

- the organization of thematic panels
- the organization of discussions
- individual paper presentations.

Working languages: Belarusian, English, and Ukrainian

To participate in the conference as a presenter or as an organizer of panels or discussions, it is necessary to fill out this [ONLINE FORM](#).

*Deadline for applications: July 15, 2023*

Conference participants, if they require it, are eligible to receive financial support (a travel grant of 400 Euro) to take part in the conference.

There are plans to prepare a special issue of the journal *Topos* based on conference proceedings.

**All questions related to the conference can be sent to the e-mail address:**

decolonization-conference@ehu.lt