

The 7th International Balkan Studies Conference

Prague, Czechia
10→11 November 2023

BALKAN EXPRESS Balkan Women Express

Between Orientalism and Occidentalism

Date: November 10–11, 2023

Conference venue: Faculty of Humanities,
Charles University, Pátkova 2137/5, 182 00, Prague 8

The conference is dedicated to the memory of **PhDr. Mirjam Moravcová, DrSc. (1931–2023)**, ethnologist and Balkan scholar from the Faculty of Humanities, Charles University, co-founder (2013), and member of our organizing committee.

Key note speaker:

Hariz Halilovich

RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia

Book presentation:

Peter Handkes Jugoslawienkomplex

Clemens Ruthner

Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland

**Organizing committee
& participating institutions**

PhDr. Dana Bittnerová, CSc.

Faculty of Humanities, Charles University

Mgr. Markéta Slavková, Ph.D.

Prague Security Studies Institute

Mgr. Ivana Skenderija

Institute of Czech and Deaf Studies,

Faculty of Arts, Charles University

František Šístek, M.A., Ph.D.

Institute of History, Czech Academy of Sciences

The conference is organized by the Faculty of Humanities, Charles University and the Institute of History, Czech Academy of Sciences in cooperation with the Institute of Philosophy, Czech Academy of Sciences (Zora Hesová, M.A., Ph.D.), the Czech National Committee of Balkan Scholars — Czech Association for Slavonic, Balkan and Byzantine Studies (ČSSBBS). The conference has been supported by Strategy AV21 — Top Research in the Public Interest, a research program of the Czech Academy of Sciences and also the Czech Association for Social Anthropology (CASA).

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BALKAN EXPRESS



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BALKAN EXPRESS БАЛКАНИ ЕКСПРЕС

Between Orientalism and Occidentalism

About the conference

In 2023, the **7th International Balkan Studies Conference “Balkan Express”** aims to rethink the Balkans through concepts of Orientalism and Occidentalism from the 19. century to the present day. In a broader sense, at the center of attention are the mechanisms of integration and disintegration, the social construction of local, national, and European identities in Southeast Europe, and the discourses that further shaped these processes.

Orientalism is a term coined by Edward Said, and it refers to the asymmetrical Western perception of the East (i.e., the Orient). Maria Todorova proposed an alternative term, Balkanism (Balkanization), which critically examines similar attitudes in Southeast Europe. In these biased orientalizing perspectives, the East has been typically constructed at large as “non-European” and as radically different from other parts of the old continent. It is believed that this region had been deeply influenced by the Ottoman heritage and also by oriental religious and cultural norms.

This is not merely the case of the Western discourse and Western representation of this region. The orientalizing prejudices and stereotypes were, since the 19th century, shared to a large extent also by the elites of the emerging Balkan nations, namely, in relation to the modernization process. The attempts of diminishing or even getting rid of the oriental heritage have had different forms: starting with the Europeanization of local cities, continuing with suppressing of the oriental elements in fashion, purification of the regional languages (generally from the expression coming from Turkish) and finishing with the ethnic cleansing of various social groups, most prominently the Muslim origin inhabitants (e.g., Turks in Bulgaria in the 80s of the 20th century, the Bosnian War including the Srebrenica genocide in 1995).

Occidentalism, or in other words, the stereotypical and distorted image of the West (Occident), is also present in the Balkans from the 19th century to the present day. In this region, occidentalism represents, to a large extent, unsuccessful modernization attempts and also a latent effort to “catch

up” with a more developed Western Europe. Nowadays, occidentalism manifests as the refusal of European integration processes and, at the same time, an attempt to construct a seemingly independent orthodox Christian civilization inclined towards Russia (prominently in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Greece and Montenegro). Uniting motive is the opposition against the allegedly “rotten and decadent” West and its values, and another motive might be “defense” against the spread of radical Islam in the areas with a higher percentage of Muslim inhabitants.

The 7th “Balkan Express” conference would like to revisit the notions, practices, and discourses of orientalism and occidentalism from the interdisciplinary perspective (historical, anthropological, political, and economic perspectives). The goal of the interdisciplinary approach is to improve the communication between the individual disciplines and, thus, enable different fields of knowledge production. Last but not least, the conference aims to provide an innovative perspective on the region, which at present (as well as in the past) becomes an unstable and potentially explosive space where Europe (West), Russia, and the Islamic world compete for political, economic and cultural influences.

Topics of interest include but are not limited to:

- ▶ Discourses and concepts of Orientalism and Balkanism (asymmetrical Western perception of the East/Orient)
- ▶ The Europeanization of the Balkans and processes of Westernization
- ▶ The process of formation and purification of the regional languages
- ▶ Ethnic cleansing and discrimination of social groups
- ▶ Discourses and concepts of Occidentalism (stereotypical and distorted images of the West/Occident)
- ▶ Refusal of European identity, the EU integration, and anti-Western and anti-EU discourses, groups, and practices
- ▶ Constructing “Orthodox Christian Civilization” in the Balkans, Russian influence, pro-Russian groups, and discourses
- ▶ Orientalism and Occidentalism in everyday practices – discourses and field research
- ▶ The Balkans at the defense of the West from the real or imagined threat of radical Islam