



UNFORGETTABLE TIME IN BERLIN
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I arrived at the Wissenschaftskolleg in the middle of September 2022 and stayed there for six months. All the departments of the Kolleg were truly kind and helpful during my entire stay. To settle in, I was offered a comfortable residence with a separate room for work in the Villa Jaffé, very close to the main building of the Kolleg and its library, which was pretty convenient. Together with more than forty Fellows from all over the world, we lived and worked in a villa district of Berlin I’d never been to before. Grunewald turned out to be such a beautiful, green, and quiet place that it was hard to believe we lived almost in the heart of a huge modern city. And at the same time, one could quickly

reach any other part of Berlin, due to the city's very well developed and convenient public transport network, which was really great. But most of all I loved going for a walk to the lakes, wild parks, and unknown areas of the city.

Wiko provided all I needed to make progress in conducting my research, first of all a lot of books, silent space, and time to read them. It was really amazing how the library service was organized. The library team could bring practically every item you need! As for me, I got all the books and articles that I ordered. I feel obliged to express my deep gratitude to the library team and especially to Stefan Gellner, who conducted for me a special bibliographical study, and to Anja Brockmann for her constant assistance of all kinds.

Thanks to the outstanding opportunities provided by Wiko, I could work for a long time without any disturbance in the silence of my office in the Villa Jaffé, under ideal working conditions. The IT services delivered and set up devices I needed to read photos of manuscripts and were always ready to support me. On working days, we all met for common lunches and Thursday dinners with delicious dishes. The always perfect meals made by Dunia and her team, as well as interesting conversations with Fellows while eating, are pleasant memories of my stay in Berlin.

The most essential form of common intellectual life was our Tuesday Colloquia, which brought the Fellows and the Wiko staff members together. Sometimes the colloquia were held also on Thursday. Though the talks on natural subjects prevailed and, as a representative of the humanities, I could hardly understand everything, the presentations given by the Fellows I attended appeared to be quite educational and enriched my worldview. It was easy to gain some knowledge in a field I have never dealt with before from the talks on various subjects, which were followed by live discussions. The very first one, given by the neuroscientist Giovanni Galizia, who managed to explain in simple words how bees see the world and even dream, impressed me to such extent that I shared its main idea with my colleagues in my country. What I also especially liked about our colloquia was the friendly atmosphere of discussions, which sometimes became very intense. There was nothing unusual in coming up with a question unexpected by the speaker and to leave it open. The Wiko workshops organized by Fellows also should be mentioned. One of the most compelling to me was a workshop, "Scholars at war. The past, present, and future of intellectual communities in Eastern Europe and Eurasia," organized by Arie Dubnov, Ekaterina Pravilova, and Martin Saar in February 2023. Participation in it gave me a chance to tell about the many Belarusian scholars who have to live in exile since 2020.

During my stay in Berlin, I greatly improved my German thanks to the wonderful classes given by Eva von Kügelgen. In our advanced group, we talked about what is really gripping, without boring textbooks and without grammar rule drill. Eva constantly provided us with materials related to German culture and history as well as the most recent events of Berlin's cultural life. Indeed, as a world city of culture, Berlin offered plenty of great theatres, museums, and art galleries to visit. To tell the truth, I remembered that my term would be short, and so I tried to focus on work in order to accomplish as much as possible. However, during my fellowship I made exciting trips to Leipzig and Magdeburg.

Regarding my project, which seeks to determine when a distinct collective identity of the population living on the territory of today's Belarus started to exist, it was essential to identify the most relevant paradigm to conceptualize the empirical part of the research study. In my view, the ethnosymbolic concept of the nation can serve as a promising theoretical perspective. As is well known, while the modernist approach prevailing in Western academia negates any relationship between nations and pre-existing ethnic groups, a theoretical perspective developed by Anthony D. Smith stands in opposition to that attitude. He insisted that the modern nations grew out of the cultural content developed within the ethnic communities existing before the modern era. So, my first task was to thoroughly analyse the ethnosymbolic concept presented by the British scientist on the basis of his texts, available due to the perfect service of the Wiko library. Then I tried to critically apply it to a context of the medieval and early modern history of the Eastern Slavs.

Though I did not write a book, a lot was done for its foundations. In addition, I wrote three articles on topics related to my project and submitted them to scholarly journals and the Mieroszewski Centre in Warsaw. During my stay at Wiko, I took part in two international conferences, entitled "The Grand Duchy of Lithuania – new research" (Vilnius, European Humanities University, November 2022) and "In the Shadow of the Soviet Union: Belarus in the 20th Century" (Berlin, November 2022). In Vilnius, I spoke as a Fellow of the Wissenschaftskolleg at the panel discussion "Statehood and nationality in early modern Eastern Europe from the 21st-century perspective," while in Berlin I gave a talk, "Dissidents in Belarusian historiography during the Khrushchev Thaw."

Regrettably, I had to leave a bit earlier than the fellowship expiration date. After departure, I observed nostalgically the intellectual and cultural life at Wiko from a distance, checking Wiko e-mails. Now I realize better how intense and really fruitful my stay in Berlin was. The six months spent in Grunewald seem to be the best fellowship in my life. Thank you so much for this wonderful and unforgettable time!