

# Shevchenko Scientific Society of Canada holds annual conference

by **Ulana Plawuszczak Pidzamecky**

TORONTO – The Shevchenko Scientific Society (NTSh) of Canada held its annual academic conference virtually on December 10, 2022. Participants presented new research and discussed recent academic publications, new directions for academic research and offered new, creative ideas for the organization's future.

Board member and director of conferences Ulana Pasiczuk was the chairperson of the 2022 "Member Scholars of the Shevchenko Scientific Society of Canada" annual conference.

The conference was opened by Dr. Marta Dyczok, president of the Shevchenko Scientific Society of Canada, who also expressed thanks on behalf of the organization to all participants and the audience.

Dr. Oleksandr Averbuch, a native of Novoaidar in Luhansk Oblast, Ukraine, discussed his work as a literary historian, poet and translator.

The author of three books of poetry and an array of literary translations between Hebrew, Ukrainian, English and Russian, his poetry deals with the issues of ethnic fragmentation and in-betweenness, multiple identities, queerness, cross- and multilingualism, documentalist writing and memory. Since 2022, Dr. Averbuch has been an Izaak Walton Killam Memorial Postdoctoral Fellow and lecturer at the University of Alberta.

Using a specially designed questionnaire, Dr. Averbuch conducted and continues to conduct research with poets, writers and translators about their use of the Ukrainian language before and after the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022.

Daria Glazkova, another conference presenter who earned a master's degree in European and Russian affairs and Slavic studies from the University of Toronto, said that her research is focused on changes in the urban landscape of Odesa in the years after the Revolution of Dignity.

She discussed decommunization initiatives in Ukraine, in particular after the current Russian invasion of Ukraine. She talked about how a new cosmopolitan narrative of Odesa might be implemented through attempts to distance the city from its Russian past and develop its distinctive national identity. The presentation considered the controversial issue of toponymic changes, their historical and political roots and the key role of public involvement in the issue.



Courtesy of Ulana Plawuszczak Pidzamecky

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Katharina Davoudian, who completed her bachelor's degree in chemistry at the University of Toronto, provided examples of computational modeling and visualization that she and her team have been developing to investigate the defining biomarkers of ovarian cancer and their interactions with specific protein complexes. She described her findings so far and how the observed changes in the behaviour of biomarkers in relation to protein complexes increase our understanding of this cancer and, more specifically, the hope for early detection of the disease and improved survival rates.

Ms. Davoudian previously had the opportunity to be an Undergraduate Student Research Award student of the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada. During her studies, she became interested in biosensors and chemical sensors and realized that she wanted to do further research in the field. In September 2021, Ms.

Davoudian began work for a doctoral degree in analytical chemistry at the University of Toronto (She is also an established artist and writer who examines the topics of feminism, sustainability, art, writing, science and more).

Kalyna Somchynsky, an independent researcher and art historian living in Edmonton, discussed the foundations of her current research, including "The First Wreath," the first feminist almanac by Nataliya Kobrynska and Olena Pchilka published in 1887 in Lviv, Ukraine. This publication was the first in Galicia and in Ukraine to present the women's question as a problem to be considered from various aspects.

Ms. Somchynsky noted the significance of "The Second Wreath," which took place in Edmonton in 1985 and marked the 100th anniversary of the Ukrainian women's movement.

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## 'A terrible club to be in': Russia, Iran and the bloc of sanctioned nations

by **Michael Scollon**  
RFE/RL

As Russia and Iran have come under increasingly restrictive international economic sanctions, the two countries have turned to each other and similarly sanctioned states in a bid to develop trade that can circumvent the punitive measures.

Largely cut off from international banking systems, export markets and foreign resources and technologies, they have strengthened their own trade relations while building economic ties with pariah states such as North Korea and Belarus, and others such as Venezuela and Burma that have been sanctioned by the United States and the European Union for human rights and other abuses.

But while such states might be willing to deal in a shared effort to counter the West, long-standing rivalries, logistical difficulties and similarity of products greatly limit the effectiveness of any sort of bloc of the sanctioned, experts say.

"They're geographically spread out. They don't have things that they want to buy and sell from each other. And they don't like each other," said Peter Piatetsky, a former U.S. Treasury Department official who is now the CEO of the consultancy firm Castellum.AI. "It's a terrible club to be in."

### Sanctions upon sanctions

Russia and Iran entered the year as the two most sanctioned countries in the world, and attempts to hold them to account for their internationally condemned actions in 2022 only compounded their problems.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February set the table for a raft of new sanctions targeting the country's lucrative energy sector. Many Russian banks were also cut off from the world's dominant financial transaction network, SWIFT, greatly inhibiting Moscow's ability to conduct trade.

Iran, another major energy exporter, had hoped that existing sanctions over its controversial nuclear program would be dropped in negotiations to revive its stalled nuclear deal with global powers. Instead, the United States and the European Union imposed new sanctions on Tehran over its support for Russia's war in Ukraine and its crackdown on antiestablishment protests at home.

Even before the war in Ukraine began, Tehran and Moscow were envisioning the benefits of working out trade deals in an effort to circumvent sanctions.

"Both Iran and Russia are targeted by sanctions, and they can take advantage of this opportunity," Iran's Oil Ministry tweeted in January 2022 as officials met in Moscow to iron out areas of increased economic cooperation, including in the manufacturing and energy sectors.

While hosting a Russian delegation in Tehran in November, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi pledged to upgrade relations with Moscow to a "strategic" level, something he said is "the most decisive response to the policy of sanctions and destabilization of the United States and its allies."

### Others enter the ring

Other countries interested in challenging the West attracted attention from Moscow and Tehran, as well.

Belarus, itself under sanctions for its support of Russia's war effort and its own crackdown on anti-government protests in 2020-2021, saw the potential of inking fresh agreements this year with Moscow and Tehran that boosted trade with both.

Venezuela, which in the wake of its crackdown on protests in 2014 has been under U.S. and E.U. sanctions, struck a 20-year cooperation agreement with Tehran this year.

According to Benjamin Tsai, a former U.S. government intelligence officer who is now a senior associate with the

risk intelligence firm TD International, in addition to Belarus and Venezuela, North Korea, Syria and Burma (also known as Myanmar), "all play a role in trading with Russia or Iran."

China, he said in written comments, "benefits from Russian and Iranian energy imports," but is "playing a delicate balancing game of supporting Russia and Iran diplomatically and ideologically while not violating sanctions." This is because, Mr. Tsai said, China "cannot afford to be cut off from the West."

Ironically, Russia's lowering of prices to boost exports to China was seen as harming Iran's own efforts to sell its oil.

China and Russia did throw a bone to Iran in September when the two countries, which lead the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), formally agreed to make Iran a permanent member, paving the way for increased trade.

### E-trade and de-dollarization

Sanctioned states, hindered by obstacles to international shipping and financial services, employ a number of different methods to conduct trade among themselves.

"They can engage in barter or trade that is not denominated in U.S. dollars," wrote Mr. Tsai. "For example, Western sanctions have increased Russia's use of the Chinese yuan to settle bilateral trade. Russian entities have also attempted to evade sanctions by using cryptocurrencies."

Russia and Iran have long floated the idea of establishing alternative currencies to avoid dollar-denominated trade.

Since it came under sanctions for its seizure of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula and backing of pro-Russia separatists in eastern Ukraine in 2014, Russia has attempted to expand the use of its own banking system to replace SWIFT.

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## To ensnare...

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June 20). According to data from the portal Dev.by, 15.8 percent of the first wave of emigration in 2020-2021 included IT workers, while the proportion of IT specialists for the second wave (after February 24, 2022) reached 22.7 percent (Devby.io, June 20). It is entirely possible that the Belarusian authorities are using this program to lure back not only opposition leaders, but also sought-after professionals who have left the country.

For its part, Russia is also confronting a significant loss of specialists. Despite an abundance of propaganda statements on "getting rid of traitors," even among the pro-government Telegram channels, panicked messages are proliferating that "Russia is left without brains" (Life.ru, November 22). These page administrators admit that, after the beginning of the war, "the shortage of IT specialists [in Russia] rose sharply," and all the most valuable professionals in this field have gone abroad or are sitting in prison. The situa-

tion was further exacerbated following President Vladimir Putin's announcement of the "partial mobilization" (Tgstat.ru, November 21).

Moscow was finally forced to recognize the seriousness of the problem, and the Russian Ministry of Digital Development even announced the development of a special program for the return of departed IT specialists to Russia (RBC, November 11). In parallel, Russian media reports have become more frequent regarding the return of Russians who had fled the partial mobilization announcement (V1.ru, November 12). Separate articles were devoted exclusively to the return of IT specialists (Gazeta.ru, August 8).

However, instead of tempting offers, benefits and guarantees for those returning, the Russian parliamentarians proposed a completely different initiative. In December 2022, Andrei Klislas, head of the Russian Federation Council Committee on Constitutional Legislation, announced a bill that would soon be submitted to the State Duma to limit remote work for Russians abroad. According to media reports, the bill will affect people who left

the country against the backdrop of the "special military operation" and partial mobilization (Gazeta.ru, December 14). Soon after, State Duma Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin announced that the parliament was developing a bill to increase the tax rate for Russians who left the country (Vz.ru, December 25).

Some experts loyal to the Kremlin were critical of the proposed bill. Head of the Political Expert Group Konstantin Kalachev explained that Moscow's goal in this case is "to return those who left whose professional competencies are needed to solve the problems of technological sovereignty." However, Mr. Kalachev stipulated that "people are leaving due to a special military operation," and the authorities have nothing to offer them except nostalgia and intimidation. Petr Bychkov, assistant professor of political psychology at St. Petersburg University, also believes that "tightening the rules will only lead to another massive wave of emigration," which is especially harmful now that some are already starting to return (Tlgrm.ru/@russica2, December 16).

Seemingly, the Russian authorities are considering these possible restrictions in trying to solve two problems simultaneously. On the one hand, they hope for the return of those who are critical for economic development and who agree to compromise with the authorities to avoid losing their earnings. On the other hand, such restrictions could provoke dissidents into a final break with Russia, which might reduce the potential for future protests domestically. In truth, pro-government political scientists do not hide the fact that

the latter task is a priority for Moscow.

For example, as the head of the Center for the Settlement of Social Conflicts, Oleg Ivanov, bluntly writes, those who left were a "fifth column" in Russia, and their departure "only adds stability to the regime, since the remaining opposition has lost its assets." The pro-Kremlin "political scientist" postulates that the actual number of emigrants is not that high and that the "patriots" remaining in Russia will be able to cover the economy's needs (T.me/russica2, December 19). Recall that earlier the same author suggested killing oppositionists abroad according to the precepts of Chekist Pavel Sudoplatov (see Eurasia Daily Monitor, November 14). Furthermore, focus groups conducted by pro-Kremlin sociologists also show that even supporters of Russia's war against Ukraine with negative attitudes toward those who have left the country suggest that people have the right to make such a decision and that the borders should remain open (Tlgrm.ru/@russica2, December 14).

All this shows that the task of forcing dissatisfied Russians into emigration is, apparently, more important in the near future for the Russian authorities than repairing a severely damaged economy. However, it should not be ruled out that attempts to entice émigrés to return or to close the borders may begin if the positions of Russian forces at the front become critical and a new wave of mobilization fails.

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## 'A terrible...'

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This year, Russia found a willing partner in Iran, which has claimed to have completed import deals using an unspecified cryptocurrency. The two states took steps to trade in their respective national currencies and worked to integrate their home-grown electronic banking payment systems – Mir and Shetab, respectively – as part of their de-dollarization push.

When Iran and Russia did not succeed in direct trade with sanctioned states, they turned to exchanges of military goods, technology or know-how.

The United States has accused North Korea of supplying munitions to Russia to replenish stocks that were depleted due to the fighting in Ukraine. Iran, meanwhile, has supplied combat and "kamikaze" drones to be used on the battlefield in Ukraine, while Britain has accused Russia of paying Iran back by supplying it with "advanced military components."

Such workarounds aside, however, Mr. Piatetsky said Iran, Russia and other sanctioned states lack tradable commodities that they do not already export themselves.

"There's essentially this problem where yes, you can do business with each other, but you don't really have anything the other one wants," Mr. Piatetsky said.

Russia, Iran and Belarus are all energy producers, and with Russia's increased sales to India and China, Iran's own exports suffered. Both Russia and Belarus are leading exporters of fertilizers, nixing the market for potash, a key Belarusian export. And while Russia's difficulties with its domestic automobile industry was seen as an opening for Iran's efforts to export vehicles and parts, the woeful safety record and reputation of Iranian vehicles cast doubt on the success of any arrangement.

Likewise, while Tehran reportedly agreed in August to supply Russia with aircraft parts in an effort to thwart sanctions, and Moscow last year reached an understanding with Tehran to export Russian aircraft to Iran, the viability of such dealings is questionable.

"People in Russia don't want to drive Iranian cars, and people in Iran don't want to fly on Russian planes," said Mr. Piatetsky.

### More to come

Nevertheless, officials from both Russia and Iran appear committed to continuing to look for new trading opportunities among states interested in helping them fight what they believe are Western efforts to isolate them economically.

"People in Russia don't want to drive Iranian cars, and people in Iran don't want to fly on Russian planes," said Mr. Piatetsky.

"We will never take the route of self-isolation," Putin vowed. "On the contrary, we are broadening, and will broaden, cooperation with all who have interest."

But ultimately, most of the dealings among sanctioned states are relatively small-scale, and experts see serious limits to what Russia and Iran and their disparate crew of trading partners can do to effectively counter the punitive measures against them.

"These sanctions-circumvention measures ... may ensure regime survival, but will not lead to economic growth," said Mr. Tsai. "It is inconceivable that this 'bloc' of sanctioned nations will rival the West economically in any way."

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## Shevchenko...

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Ms. Somchynsky, who earned a master's degree in the history of art, design and visual culture from the University of Alberta where she studied contemporary feminist art in Ukraine, talked about a complex issue that is as relevant today as it was then: the intersection of ethnic identity, social class and gender identity. She mentioned the influence of prominent Ukrainian Canadian feminists and the identity issues of today's Ukrainian woman due to factors such as divorce, child rearing, single parenthood, domestic violence, birth control and migration status.

In 2021, Ms. Somchynsky was hired by the Ukrainian Resource and Development Center (URDC) at MacEwan University in Edmonton to lead the oral history research project entitled "Local Narratives: The Lives, Legacies, and Locales of Edmonton's Ukrainian Canadian Community."

In this position, she also served as project coordinator of the short documentaries "Visionary Collaborations: The Life and Work of Dr. Roman Petryshyn" and "Mentoring Eternal Optimism: Dr. Ehor William Gauk." Currently, together with Dr. John-Paul Himka, she is editing a volume of the Western Canadian Collection of the Shevchenko Scientific Society of Canada on Ukrainian-Canadian art and is working on an independent research project called "Our Feminist Aunties: Feminist Activism in the Ukrainian Canadian Community and the Second Wreath Conference."

Myroslaw Iwanek, who graduated from

the University of Warsaw and who worked there as a didactics lecturer in the Faculty of Slavic Studies and Applied Linguistics, spoke about his research in the archive of Yevhen Pasternak, a Ukrainian public and cooperative activist, engineer and amateur historian. That archive includes 33 volumes, which he unexpectedly came across and which he was able to save from potential oblivion.

Mr. Iwanek explained that this archive is a rich source of information not only about the life and activities of Mr. Pasternak (the husband of the late Yevheniya Pasternak, the founder of Ivan Franko Homes in Canada), but he also discussed the Ukrainian communities in which he lived, worked and was a leading activist and journalist – in Poland, Germany and Canada.

Mr. Iwanek also focused attention on the state of Ukrainian archival science and spoke about those locations where (in Canada, for example) archives are well preserved. He expressed the hope that Mr. Pasternak's complete archive will eventually be transferred to the State Archival Service of Ukraine in Kyiv so that it will become more accessible to a larger number of researchers and, at some point, digitized.

NTSh Canada expressed thanks to the conference organizing committee chair and to all committee members – Dr. Daria Darewych, Chrystia Kolos, Dr. Dagmara Turczyn-Duvirak and Nadia Gereliouk – for the successful organization of the event.

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### Оголошення

Dear readers, the Soluk family is asking for help in finding copies of several Ukrainian films «Black Sea People (16mm) and «Ukrainian Christmas» (16mm). At one time, Bohdan Soluk loaned these film projects for viewing, but unfortunately they were not returned after his death in 1994. If you have any information about these films, please let us know. email at: [GeorgeS@SolukMediaArchive.com](mailto:GeorgeS@SolukMediaArchive.com)

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