



UNFORGETTABLE YEAR IN GRUNEWALD ALTAY GOYUSHOV

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Introduction

Let me start with the point that the year spent at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin was one of the intellectually and culturally richest times in my entire life. And this happened although the COVID-19 outbreak caused serious challenges to the whole world. Yet, the organizational skills of the Wissenschaftskolleg’s staff minimized the impact of the outbreak on my work.

The year started with me arriving in Berlin in August to attend intensive language courses provided by the Wissenschaftskolleg. The captivating beauty of Grunewald and my comfortable lodgings at the Villa Walther were the first impressions that boosted my optimism. Most importantly, the staff's perfect arrangement of our settling in, including documentation and bureaucratic procedures, made my arrival surprisingly easy and smooth.

Cultural Life

German courses, which I attended throughout the year with the two teachers Eva von Kügelgen and Ursula Kohler, are among the most important favors done for visiting Fellows by the Kolleg that I benefited immensely from. I enjoyed the classes with both of my German teachers, and I really hope that I will be able to continue to study the German language after returning home. Apart from teaching classes, both Eva and Ursula provided us with invaluable information about German culture and Berlin life. The film evenings provided by Eva were also one of the great experiences here. Baking *Flammkuchen* with Ursula and our German class, as well as our joint trip to the Turkish market in Kreuzberg, were among the hilarious experiences during our stay in Berlin.

In general, inspirational cultural opportunities here in Berlin were very skillfully enriched by the Wissenschaftskolleg's programs. Immediately upon our arrival, some other Fellows and I attended guided tours in three different parts of Berlin organized by the Kolleg. These very well-prepared, fascinating guided tours plunged us into the landscape of Berlin with its rich, uneasy history and architecture. These tours were also the first close encounter that we already-arrived Fellows had with each other, and there is no doubt that they were a very thrilling start of our cultural life in the city. And the Kolleg's boat cruise on the rivers and canals of Berlin was another unforgettable and thrilling experience.

The Dresden museum trip, guided by our Co-Fellow Dror Wahrman, was among the most memorable events of our fellowship year. Unfortunately, the heist in the Green Vault museum, which happened the next day, saddened all of us. I sincerely hope that investigation into this grave crime will be able to recover the invaluable items stolen from the museum.

We were lucky that the museum trips were guided by the best specialists in their fields – the Fellows of the Kolleg. The Laocoon lecture held by Luca Giuliani and the Mesopotamian tour in the Pergamonmuseum led by Nicole Brisch were especially charming for me – I grew up in an archeologist's family and, accompanying my late father, saw many excavations.

The last extraordinary joint cultural trip we made was our trip to Dessau. It was the last, because the coronavirus outbreak and following quarantine forced us to stop these exciting experiences. The Dessau trip was the most fruitful. We visited the Bauhaus and Masters' Houses Museum. Afterward, we went to the concert and then attended the opera performance staged by Wiko Fellow Krystian Lada (whose fellowship ended in October). That was the first time I attended this style of modern opera, an exciting finale to our Dessau trip.

One of the most memorable moments of my stay at the Wissenschaftskolleg was attending the baptism ceremony for the newborn Alexander. This was the first baptism ceremony I have ever attended; thus, it became an unforgettable event of my life.

I have to mention our dinners and parties, which immensely contributed to building confidence and friendships among Fellows; and, along with the delicious foods made by Dunia, Daniela, and Dennis and the high-quality service of the restaurant staff, they were an important and indispensable part of our cultural life. The highly efficient management of daily catering during the weeks of the quarantine deserves special praise; there are no words to describe my deepest gratitude and sympathy. Thank you very much!

Intellectual life

Amazingly, the COVID-19 outbreak, despite the unease it caused, did not interrupt the intellectual life of the Wissenschaftskolleg, particularly the crown of our intellectual activity – our Tuesday Colloquia. Skillful management of the situation provided us with an opportunity to continue holding the colloquia, as well as evening lectures and discussions, in a highly interactive and fruitful manner via Zoom meetings. And special thanks go to the IT technical personal who arranged things in very high quality. I can say without exaggeration that the interdisciplinary environment of the Tuesday Colloquia, high-quality lectures, and Q&A sessions have enormously enriched my knowledge and particularly my worldview, and they will certainly impact my future work. And this is an impression expressed by a scholar who is not a newcomer to academic life.

I delivered my Tuesday talk in January before the quarantine, so it was live. In my talk, I tried to describe the brief history of Azerbaijan from its inception as an idea in the mid-19th century to date. Then the Wissenschaftskolleg planned to hold an evening discussion on April 22, 2020, Lenin's 150th birthday, with the title "(Post-)Socialist Memories: On the Uses of History in Eastern Europe since the 1990s", where I was to be one of

the speakers, along with three other Fellows of our cohort. Unfortunately, the virus outbreak made live discussions impossible. However, again with the skillful organization of the Kolleg's leadership and staff, the event took place online. The discussions were moderated by Professor Martin Schulze Wessel. I think it was a very interesting and successful event. I liked the idea so much that I suggested to colleagues from my home institution that they organize a similar online event with the participation of local Azerbaijani scholars. My suggestion was accepted and I moderated that event and it became one of the most interesting events organized by my home institution during the coronavirus quarantine.

Introduced by the Wissenschaftskolleg, I also had a chance to visit and give a talk at its sister institution, New Europe College in Bucharest, Romania. And I hope that we will be able to launch an Institute for Advanced Study in our region as well, so that academics and literati of our region can benefit from the colossal intellectual opportunities, exchanges, and enrichment provided by a Wissenschaftskolleg-style institution and thereby contribute to worldwide scholarship.

My Personal Work

In terms of my personal work, the year I spent at the Wissenschaftskolleg was quite fruitful as well. My project here was to write the turbulent post-Soviet history of Azerbaijan: the transformation of the Soviet republic into the informal dynastic, absolutist monarchy. To the extent to which my capacities as an academic and a public intellectual allow me to do so, I tried to detach myself from my regular duties in Azerbaijan and concentrate on my project here in the Kolleg. Although I have not finished my work, I have still managed to write a big chunk of the book, thanks to the opportunities provided by the Kolleg, and I feel obliged to thank especially the library staff, who made my work much easier by providing invaluable assistance.

During my stay in Berlin, as part of my work, I attended a couple of conferences in Vilnius and Krakow and gave a lecture to the Azerbaijani students studying here in Germany. There were some other invitations, both in Germany and abroad; unfortunately, the virus outbreak interrupted plans, yet the space was filled with many Zoom conferences and webinars I was invited to attend and speak at.

After arrival in Berlin, I finished a report on the religious situation in Azerbaijan for the 11th volume of the *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe* published by Brill. The volume came out late in 2019, and I am presented in the publication as a Fellow of the Wissenschaftskolleg.

Another article of mine coauthored with my co-worker in Baku came out in November 2019 in a volume published by Springer Nature. Although delayed due to the coronavirus, a new edition of Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index BTI was published on April 2020; in it, I serve as country expert for Azerbaijan and am an author of this publication's report on Azerbaijan.

During my fellowship at the Wissenschaftskolleg, I wrote an article about the Shi'i revival in Azerbaijan in the post-Soviet period (which will be a chapter in my book) at the request of the *Journal of Religion in Europe* published by Brill, and I submitted it a couple of days ago.

In February 2020, Azerbaijan went to early parliamentary elections and I was asked by the Zentrum für Osteuropa- und internationale Studien (ZOiS) in Berlin to contribute a piece about the electoral environment in Azerbaijan and the possible outcomes. The piece was published on the ZOiS website on February 19.

In early March 2020, in cooperation with the Wissenschaftskolleg and its Fellows, ZOiS organized a workshop titled "Religious Activism between Politics and Everyday Life: Mobilizing and Mediating the Religious in Eastern Europe and in the Caucasus", and I attended and contributed a presentation to this conference.

In late 2019, a Slovenian team of filmmakers who were shooting a documentary about Azerbaijan contacted me to interview me for the film; I agreed. They came to Berlin to shoot some footage with me for their documentary in different parts of the city, including in Grunewald. In the film, I am also introduced as a Visiting Fellow of the Wissenschaftskolleg. The team is coming back to shoot my departure from the airport as well.

Conclusion

It seems I used the word coronavirus in this text many times. There is no doubt it was a challenge for both Fellows and particularly for the Kolleg's leadership and staff. And I can say with full certainty that the Kolleg's collective passed this very difficult exam with the highest grades. As a Fellow, I felt no difficulty, and this helped me to be closely acquainted with the best sides of the Kolleg's team. I am sure that despite the challenges it caused to the Wissenschaftskolleg, it will remain one of the most memorable times in its history and in the personal histories of the Fellows. Still, I wish that this will be the last of this type of challenge the lovely collective of the Wissenschaftskolleg faces.

I would like also to thank all four of our Fellow spokespersons, especially Nicole and Felix, for the amazing work they did during the virus outbreak. Let me add that I, a person of Muslim background, and Felix, a Jesuit priest and Islamic Scholar, became very close friends.

I am sure that it is not the end of my affiliation with the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin. This great idea of the Fellows' Club preserves my membership in the Wissenschaftskolleg's team and opens a grand perspective for my future collaboration with its superb intellectual environment.

Thank you so much for this wonderful year!