

ABS Report: Reframing Eurasia's Borders in the heart of Texas

On Thursday April 12, 2012, at the international conference of the Association of Borderland Studies (ABS) in Houston, Texas, a fascinating panel took place comparing the nature of Eurasia's borders. The panel was a collaboration between the Slavic Research Center and the Karelian Institute at the University of Eastern Finland. The idea was to approach Eurasia from its Eastern and Western peripheries in order to rethink and share ideas about borders and sovereignty. The panel attempted to examine both processes of "re-bordering" and "de-bordering" occurring on the Finnish-Russian border and around maritime borders in the Far East. This proved to be one of the best attended panels at ABS and successfully brought together researchers situated in Europe and Asia in order to create a dynamic dialogue on how borders are created, understood and interpreted on opposite sides of Eurasia.

Professor James Scott and Professor Ilkka Liikanen, of the University of Eastern Finland, presented on how the EU has played a key role in shaping the post-Cold War political order in Europe. They argued that though the process of enlargement it has exerted considerable influence on political institution-building and socio-cultural processes in the former Soviet Bloc. This paper highlighted how the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is at present the maximum expression of this new geopolitical project in terms of an emerging "Common Foreign and Security Policy." It demonstrated the impact of the European Union on the ways in which borders between former Soviet Republics are perceived and framed politically. A central aspect of this is security and border management objectives promoted as part of its Neighbourhood Policy.

Jussi Laine, a PhD Candidate at the University of Eastern Finland, presented a paper on how local initiatives both complement and undermine Finnish foreign policy towards Russia. In the post-Soviet era, the framework for cooperation between Finland and Russia transformed following Finland's accession to the EU in 1995. Cross Border Cooperation, previously coordinated as a part of bilateral state-level politics, became gradually "streamlined" according to policy principles defined at different levels of EU administration. This paper provided a revealing comparison of actual practical experiences versus policy visions. It showed precisely how significant and rapid this supranational turn has been for cross-border relations at the regional level.

Professor Akihiro Iwashita of the Slavic Research Center and coordinator of the GCOE Program "Reshaping Japan's Border Studies" provided his audience with a discussion of how, on Eurasia's eastern periphery, there has been a conceptual shift in significance from land borders to sea borders. As Professor Iwashita noted most border researchers and policy makers have yet to engage with the local, national and geopolitical consequences of sea power in this region. His presentation focused on the realities and perspectives for Japan's surrounding sea zone and its associated energy, fishery and other maritime resources. It also provided an analysis of the prospects for multi-lateral cooperation and conflict resolution in the region.

Finally, Paul Richardson, a Japan Society for the Promotion of Science Fellow at the Slavic Research Center, addressed the issue of sovereignty and how it operates in various categories, or sovereignty regimes. From a theoretical aspect it emphasised how sovereignty is socially constructed; how it is deployed in territorial and non-territorial forms; and the relative power of states in the global system. His paper went on to an empirical analysis of how competing sovereignty regimes operate in the contested maritime borders of East Asia. By developing a more sophisticated, nuanced and critical conceptualisation of the way in

which borders are constituted and transcended by systems of effective sovereignty, this paper attempted to reveal new insights into bordering practices and the dynamics of a shifting world order.



Thanks to an excellent moderator and discussant, Kimberly Collins of California State University, San Bernadino, these papers were neatly summarised and managed. This stimulated a lively post-presentation debate, led by the energetic Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly (University of Victoria, Canada). The pleasing result of this collaboration was a truly multinational panel that allowed all participants to come away with new perspectives and insights from colleagues working in different geographical, cultural, and academic settings.

Paul Richardson (JSPS Postdoctoral Fellow, Slavic Research Center)