

**Network: CIII-AT-0037-11-1516**

**Program description:**

Almost 20 years ago the network “Slavic Philology and Its Cultural Contexts” (A-37) was established in Zagreb - later on in Graz - and has been increasing ever since. Today, 19 institutions from 14 different countries from Western resp. Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe are participating, which means that almost every CEEPUS member state is represented. According to the title, the emphasis of this network is placed on Slavic philology, meaning that the improvement of language skills on an academic level and the exchange of theoretical and methodological approaches to philology are of greatest importance. The network’s main objective is to facilitate cooperation between the participating Central, Eastern and Southeastern European countries by intensifying language education and thereby stimulating communication and exchange. Besides the emphasis on the improvement of language skills and the enrichment of philological methodology, another decisive factor in this network is the transfer of cultural knowledge. Especially the newly established joint lecture series contributes to this transfer, because it enables close cooperation on different levels. Considering the fact that most of the network partners have already joined the European Union and some of them have reached the status of candidate countries, a better understanding of Slavic cultures and a profound knowledge of Slavic languages can also be seen in a wider context, especially in the light of cultural and economic relations. A lot of Western European companies have been expanding to Eastern and Southeastern Europe and therefore need young professionals who are well versed in Slavic languages and cultures. The increasing demand is also reflected in the rising number of students of Slavic languages in Central and Western Europe. The fact that not only Slavic countries are involved in this network also puts them into the wider geographical and historical context of the former Eastern Bloc resp. of Southeastern Europe and enables a broader understanding of cultural and historical bonds. Albania, Hungary and Romania, countries in which Slavic languages are at least spoken by national minorities, share the history of Ottoman and/or Austrian reign and the period of communism in the 20th century with their Southern Slavic neighbours. A similar situation can be stated for the Western Slavic countries, whose societies and economies integrated into the European Union faster than their Southern counterparts. Austria seems to be the connective element in this arrangement, especially since it holds Slavic minorities as well as different Slavic migrant groups, who fled to Austria due to the 1990ies’ Yugoslavian War or had come as migrant workers before. From this perspective, focusing on language is important, since the dissemination of particular minority languages or – generally speaking – of lesser used languages, having little speakers, helps preserving them. Another reason why dealing with Slavic languages on an academic level is important is the fact that up to now the cultural transfer has only gone in one direction, namely from the West, containing Central Europe, to the East and Southeast. The great Western European languages have been taught in Eastern European schools and universities for centuries, while the interest in the languages of the Eastern neighbours can be seen as a contemporary phenomenon. Therefore, it is of great significance to use this trend to deepen the bonds between academic institutions of the countries taking part in this exchange program, in order to lead to mutual transfer of cultural and educational knowledge. A program like CEEPUS is able to offer this important possibility of exchange and can therefore help leaving unidirectional influence behind. Austria in its historic role as connector between East and West, and especially Graz in this case, play a decisive role in the organisation of this cooperation. Besides the importance for the European integration and cooperation between EU- and non-EU-countries resp. between former socialist countries and the countries of the European West, this program also allows to

bring the countries, which were involved in the Yugoslavian Wars in the 1990ies, and their academic institutions together. Considering the complex situation concerning the Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin and Serbian language, a first step of harmonisation can be seen in the contribution of the respective institutions to this network and their participation in the proposed project. A similar attempt to an approach was made by the former project on the combined teaching of “Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian as a Foreign Language”. Due to the political aftermath of the war and the still sensitive situation concerning the codification of national languages, this project unfortunately failed. Nevertheless, the bonds between the respective academic institutions and their willingness to work together were used to establish the new project which allows for more flexibility and a wider scope, since the addressed topic offers a wide range of associations and approaches. Furthermore, last year’s accession of Bosnia and Herzegovina to this network demonstrates that there are still interesting perspectives concerning the development of the cooperation. In this regard, particularly young people should get the opportunity to learn about their neighbouring countries as well as get a different perspective on the biased presentation of history. This might also enrich the knowledge they have of their home countries. Foreign students and teachers going to these regions get the opportunity to learn about the similarities and differences between the mentioned Southern Slavic languages and their cultural and historic backgrounds. Generally speaking, living in the respective country, getting to know its culture on an everyday-basis and gaining authentic experience can confirm the already theoretically acquired knowledge and vice versa, since these different approaches work in a synergetic way. The established project – a joint lecture series on “Inter- and Transculturality in Slavic Literatures, Cultures and Languages” – can be mentioned at this point, because one of its main aims is to connect single national institutions and bring them together on an academic level by providing a platform which deals with inter- and transnational conceptions of literature, culture and language. The fundamental aspects leading to the appearance of inter- and transculturality are international relations as well as migration. Especially economic, technological and cultural cooperation between different states leads to migration and vice versa, causing no clearly defined classifications of national, cultural or linguistic identity. This rather wide topic is chosen on purpose in order for every participating unit to find a suitable contribution, since every society is affected by inter- and transcultural processes, not at least caused by globalization and economic and political integration. It can also be pointed out that this certain project, arising out of the cooperation within a mobility network, features lectures on the phenomenon of migration and its consequences, e.g. This means that it is in fact dealing with the circumstances and results of mobility itself and therefore covers this topic in different manners. The hosting institutions, situated in Graz, Ljubljana, Olomouc, Warsaw and Zadar are providing different lectures on the wide transculturality-topic. Experts from the home country or abroad on the one hand, and students as participants on the other hand, will contribute to these classes and the following interactive workshops. In the first instance, this “multicultural and multilayered” composition supports and underlines the strengthening of the network. In other respects, the planned biannual change of the topic also causes active personal exchange and a certain kind of intensive knowledge transfer. Various professionals can offer their research results to different recipients, which guarantees lively interaction between the partner institutions. Due to the fact that this network has constantly growing numbers of participating units and countries, it can be considered an efficient platform for further cooperation, which is, for instance, reflected in the project on “Inter- and Transculturality”. The gradual enlargement of the project might also lead to the establishment of a joint degree program in the future.