

KU professor shares insight on Ukraine

Jennifer Walleman | Staff Writer

Dr. Vitaly Chernetsky, associate professor of Slavic languages and literatures and associate director of the Center for Russian, Eastern European and Eurasian studies at the University of Kansas, was the first lecturer in a series that will be held every couple of months at the Lewis and Clark Center as an extension of the partnership between the Language Training Center within the Command and General Staff College and Fort Leavenworth and sponsored by the Combined Arms Center Language, Regional Expertise and Culture Management Office.

The lecture at Arnold Conference Room Jan. 26 was open to all military personnel, faculty and staff, and focused on the history that shaped the current situation in Ukraine and the implications for regional and global geopolitics.

“I personally and professionally thought and everybody agreed with me that this was one of the most vital topics in terms of regional and global geopolitics because this topic, the situation in Ukraine, is already affecting their relationship between the major

global powers,” said Dr. Mahir Ibrahimov, program manager of the LRECMO. “It worsened the relationship between Russia and the U.S. to the lowest level that has not been seen since the Cold War era. I believe there was no doubt to begin with this topic.”

A native of Ukraine, Chernetsky said that one major problem of Ukraine was that the its borders largely are formed by natural division making it easy for nomads to pass through Ukrainian territory. He called Ukraine the breadbasket of Europe because of its rich soil, grain production and highly-educated populace. To understand what Ukraine is and what it means to be Ukrainian, Chernetsky contextualized what is Ukrainian national identity.

“It’s not just a case of a preexisting Ukrainian nationality acquiring the state structures to which it is has long been entitled,” Cher-

netsky said. “The modern Ukrainian national identity itself was being shaped over centuries by state structures, political events and social processes unfolding across Eastern Europe for the last three centuries. Ukraine did not come of age on its own but was built through the

interaction, through the mutual pressure between activists, politicians, writers, civic activists and bureaucrats.”

Some of the events he mentioned included the Russian revolution, Ukraine’s first declaration of independence, the invasion by Poland, a man-made famine killing 7 million peasants during Stalin’s collectivization campaign, mass executions and deportations during World War II, the Chernobyl nuclear power station explosion, Ukrainian independence from the Soviet Union, surrendering nuclear status and the civil disobedience after the election of the prime minister.

With regard to Russia, Chernetsky said that the country has not had a proper “grieving process” after losing its control over Ukraine.

The most recent conflict between the two nations involves pro-Russian rebels, who fought with Ukrainian government troops in eastern Ukraine and the rightful possession of Crimea,

which Russian authorities have claimed as Russian territory.

During the question-and-answer session, someone asked if this could be in part because Russia feared NATO’s expansion.

“What is happening now is a throw back to political doctrine before World War I,” Chernetsky said. “The discourse happened recently. The same economic disabilities in the early 1990s befell all parts of the former Soviet Union. Local economists in Russia advocated reforms. Why did it succeed in Poland and not Russia? Not because of ill-intentioned advice from West. We have the question of identity, discourse and perception.”

Another person asked what Ukraine and the European community could do for Ukraine to help it prosper and to create a long-term security economic integration.

“Ukraine over past year has seen a surge of volunteerism unlike the kind seen anywhere else in the former Soviet Union,” Chernetsky

said. “People donating time and effort to change the country from the ground up. The problem is a distrust of some institutions that are still run under the old Soviet patterns of thinking. What’s important is to harness and productively use volunteerism both domestically from the Ukrainians but also from the rest of the world community.”

After the presentation, Chernetsky said he hoped what he presented could be used when making future military decisions.

“I think it is very important for us civilian academics to share our expertise with the Army, and as somebody who works in Ukrainian studies right now when Ukraine is in such a difficult situation I hoped that some of my knowledge and some of my insight could help some current and future decision makers in the United States Army in formulating a policy that helps with the strengthening cooperation and mutual understanding,” Chernetsky said.



Prudence Siebert

Dr. Vitaly Chernetsky, native of Ukraine and associate professor and director of graduate studies in the Slavic Department at the University of Kansas, shares Ukraine’s history with a packed room during his “The Situation in Ukraine: Implications for Regional and Global Geopolitics” lecture Jan. 26 in Arnold Conference Room at the Lewis and Clark Center.

Badge presentation



Army photo by Lt. Col. James F. Lowe, *Military Review*

Lt. Gen. David Hogg, U.S. military representative to the NATO Military Committee, poses with his son, Michael Hogg, after presenting him with a Combat Action Badge for actions in Iraq in 2003 for which he also received the Purple Heart. The Combat Action Badge became an award in 2006 for non-infantry soldiers who actively engaged with the enemy. Michael Hogg works at *Military Review* at Fort Leavenworth, where he received the badge Jan. 27.