The 3rd of ESREA Network On Migration, Ethnicity, Racism and Xenophobia
“Multiculturalism” today: aspirations, realities and crisis debates
13th – 15th May, 2014

Alicja Fajfer
University of Eastern Finland

Title: Negotiating linguistic identities. Ukrainian and Belarusian students in Poland

Abstract

The subject of my PhD research is the influence of linguistic proximity on the integration of eastern Slavonic immigrants in Poland. The group is represented by such ethnicities as Ukrainians and Belarusians. So far, only Ukrainians have received some academic attention; mostly because they are the most populous group. Nevertheless, even in case of Ukrainians the issues of language and identity have been treated with neglect. My study investigates whether linguistic and cultural proximity can help overcome integration barrier. Similar cultures share certain norms and values, just like related languages share certain words and other elements. Therefore, it might be easier for eastern Slavs to find themselves in Poland. The questions which I am looking to answer are regarding shifts in the identities of Slavic migrants. Particularly, I am interested in the role of language in their lives. Does speaking Polish mean more to them than just a way of exchanging information? Sometimes multilingual speakers feel that, compared to their own, a foreign language conveys more (or less) accurate or powerful meanings. This paper investigates whether Polish has any symbolic values for Slavic immigrants.