



Funded by the  
European Union



## Call for Papers

### International Conference

#### ***Conceptualizing Corruption: The “Old Regime” and the New Order in East-Central-South Europe (1750s-1850s)***

New Europe College – Institute for Advanced Study  
Bucharest, 17-18 June 2024

During the age of revolutions, West European politicians, scholars, and popular writers often characterized South-East-Central Europe as a corrupt political space. Notables from the region routinely echoed these claims. Those in and outside of South-East-Central Europe mobilized commentaries on “corruption” for their own political, professional, and personal gains. They used the idea of corruption to assert, for instance, that they knew to run more honest and efficient administrations, military regimes, and commercial operations. Political and economic actors on both sides of the continent linked “corruption” to the supposed cultural backwardness and economic underdevelopment of the region. In doing so, public figures naturalized notions of “corruption,” making it appear both widespread and organic, popularizing tropes that have endured right down to the present.

“Corruption,” however, is a historically specific concept not an ahistorical, moral, universal, or essentialist category. It gained currency in West Europe during the age of revolutions when a particular understanding of “corruption” grew increasingly hegemonic in developing liberal-capitalist discourses. It lent itself to liberal critiques of *anciens régimes*, rival politicians, and societies that they might formally or informally colonize. Public figures agitating for change used accusations of “corruption” to legitimize their political programs and assert (political and/or discursive) power.

This emerging definition of “corruption” drew on novel notions of good government that excluded traditional systems of clientelist relationships — the types of political, economic, and social networks that had heretofore characterized public life in South-East and Central Europe. Leaders in this region gradually adopted and adapted this new view of “corruption.” As such, denouncing “corrupt” acts generated a particular form of political and social capital in an emerging order in South-East and Central Europe.

The conference organizers welcome paper proposals that employ a (de)constructivist and/or semiotic approach to study the concept corruption and its relationship to the rise of (West European) modernity. Submissions should focus on Central-South-East Europe from the 1750s to the 1850s. Applicants working on regional micro-histories that situate changing notions of “corruption” in a transnational context are especially encouraged to apply. To explore both the continuities perpetuated and ruptures produced by discourses of “corruption,” the conference organizers invite interested scholars to submit a proposal connected to one or more of the following themes:



Funded by the  
European Union



(a) *Redefinition of “corruption.”* In West Europe, critiques of *anciens régimes* as “corrupt” gained purchase between 1750 and 1850. Were actors in South-East-Central Europe aware of these discourses that delegitimized the political and social status quo? If not, how do we account for the simultaneity of similar polemics in the region? What did it mean for the old regime to be “corrupt” and did leaders in East Europe understand “corruption” in the same way their West European counterparts? What did good government mean to actors in different geographic locations and how did “corruption” become a mechanism for asserting their own political legitimacy?

(b) *The transitions from the old regime to the new regime.* How did actors contribute to and/or resist empire- and state-building via accusations of “corruption”? Did they confront or collaborate with new imperial (and later national) agents? Did they encourage or attempt to thwart the rise of a new political/social/economic order? Who were the actors that advocated for a new order and what were the changes they pursued? How did they deploy the concept of “corruption” to achieve their goals?

(c) *Reframing the Ottoman past.* Throughout the period, political elites mobilized tropes like “Turk” and “Phanariot”. Even today these terms still denote notions of “corruption,” clientelism, and favoritism in the region. How can we assess their use at the time as well as the longevity of these ideas in political, public, and historiographical discourses?

(d) *Codifying deviation, formalizing “corruption.”* Debates over “corruption” arose in the context of a broader process of modernization marked above all by the formalization of laws (including property rights, the codification of taxes, the elaboration of various regulatory practices), the creation of an increasingly elaborate and centralized bureaucracy, and a tighter distinction between the public and private spheres. Each of these processes shaped behavioral standards. How can tracking the concept of “corruption” help us analyze these changes over time and understand their impact?

The conference organizers welcome proposals of ca. 400 words concerning the above-mentioned themes until the 1<sup>st</sup> March 2024. The proposals, along with a short CV should be sent to [cardeleanu@nec.ro](mailto:cardeleanu@nec.ro) and [ardcons@gmail.com](mailto:ardcons@gmail.com). The final decision on the received proposals will be announced by mid-March 2024.

#### **Organizers and scientific selection committee**

Constantin Ardeleanu (New Europe College / Institute for South-East European Studies, Bucharest)  
Ana Buculei (New Europe College)  
Silvia Marton (New Europe College / University of Bucharest)  
Alex R. Tipei (New Europe College / Université de Montréal)

#### **Travel costs and accommodation**

Invited speakers will have their travel costs reimbursed. Accommodation will be provided.

This international conference is organized within the framework of “Transnational histories of ‘corruption’ in Central-South-East Europe (1750-1850)”, European Research Council Advanced Grant (ERC-2022-AdG no. 101098095). It is hosted by the New Europe College – Institute for Advanced Study in Bucharest (2023-2028) (<https://nec.ro/programs/erc-grants/>)