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(coordinator)

Research in View

2024/2025 Fellows' Essays

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Research in View

2024/2025 Fellows' Essays



Maria Adamopoulou holds a Doctorate in History from the European University Institute in Florence. Her research focuses on the transnational bonds of Greek migrant workers with their homeland and her monograph *The Greek Gastarbeiter in the Federal Republic of Germany (1960-1974)* appeared in April 2024, published by De Gruyter. From October 2024 to July 2025, she has been a Postdoctoral Fellow at the New Europe College in Bucharest, Romania, working on a project touching upon radio and migration during the Cold War. She has held various research fellowships including at the Center for Southeast European Studies in Graz, at Mirekoc in Istanbul, at the Democracy Institute of the Central European University in Budapest, at the *nccr – on the move* in Neuchâtel and she has also been a Guest Lecturer at the Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) in Budapest. From September 2025 she will be a postdoctoral researcher at the IEG in Mainz and a visiting fellow at the Zukunftskolleg in Konstanz. Her main research interests are social history, migration studies, oral history and memory.

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ET IN NEC EGO, Or How to Thrive in an Academic Safe Haven

Maria Adamopoulou

When you first enter the turn of the twentieth century white villa at Strada Plantelor 21, you can't miss one thing: its quiet elegance. Carefully placed flowers according to the season, contemporary art on the walls, the smell of morning coffee, the buzz of conversations in the hall. Being an academic often involves stepping into new environments that you will call home for a year, meeting new people that will quickly turn from strangers into colleagues and friends. It is not always an easy process, but some places seem to wink at you saying "you'll be safe here and you will grow." The New Europe College is such a space, made of walls like every building, yet breaking down walls as real academia must. Inspired by the metaphor of walls, the parts that follow will be divided into *intra-muros* and *extra-muros*.

Intra-muros

A long black table with blue folders with your name written in white calligraphy, elegantly dressed people, a camera, coffee and cookies. It is the debut of our NEC fellowship. A NEC alumnus I met at a conference a few days before—now a professor—told me that I'm going to the "Princeton of Romania." The first day, I meet new colleagues from different backgrounds and career stages, the rector Valentina Sandu-Dediu welcomes us in such a warm manner, and in the room are also Lelia Ciobotariu, Anca Oroveanu and Constantin Ardeleanu to welcome us. I climb the stairs to the library where knowledgeable Mihaela Danga explains to me how everything works with the book collections and I solve practicalities with the ultra-helpful administrative ladies Ana Buculei, Ioana Wasiucioneck, and Ana-Maria Sirghi. In a few days the NEC driver,

the adorable Mr. Nelu, drives us straight to the immigration office booth to get our residence certificate.

Every Wednesday there is a fellow presenting their project and my turn is on October 30th. I'm not stressed as I enjoy presenting and sharing my research. Indeed, people seem to tune with my talk on radio, migration and the Cold War and I make my usual joke that it might "all sound Greek to them." Two of my new friends and colleagues would not be intimidated though, because they knew Greek! That was the case of Roman Kyselov, with whom I started a very promising Greek-Ukrainian language tandem. I learned so many interesting things about Ukrainian culture and I admired Roman's fluency in Greek: not only can he read manuscripts, but he also translates Odysseas Elytis' poetry—this is indeed a level up! My other Ukrainian friend, Olena Uvarova, from Odessa, would also greet me with a spontaneous "Maria, ti kaneis?" accompanied by her heartfelt laughter; we would share many stories in our Bucharest days.

Being an Institute of Advanced Studies with an international standing meant that NEC was open to the current *modus operandi* in academia—that's how they offered us the chance for the first time to publish our research outcomes in a journal of our choice and to write this more experiential piece for the NEC Yearbook. My colleague and new friend, Györgyi Horváth, sent me a call for papers for a special issue in *History and Migration* at the *TMG Journal for Media History* and, indeed, that's where I will publish my research paper under the title "Exiled Airwaves: the Greek Communist Radio in Bucharest Addressing the Gastarbeiter in West Germany (1960-1974)." Promoting visibility is also the main intention of the NEC Close-up Series, filmed and edited by the film director Alexandru Maftai, who is also a NEC alumnus. It took me five takes to shoot a more spontaneous "peach" but I got a percentage of Andy Warhol's 15 minutes of fame—I still have some minutes left!

I generally have good timing in my life, being in the right places at the most opportune moments. Two events made the academic year 2024–2025 special and these were NEC's thirty-year anniver-

sary and the Romanian elections. For the anniversary, a kind of gala was organized and we had the chance to hear impressions from alumni and the Administrative Board, chatting over a mouth-watering buffet. The Romanian presidential elections were, on the other hand, a bumpy process and I personally learned a lot from my Romanian colleagues about democracy in Romania and the country's alliances, spiced up with some personal anecdotes. In early December, when the political climate was quite gloomy, I suggested an idea to lighten up the spirits and something tells me it worked: NEC Secret Santa premiered and had an ultimate success with almost everybody rushing to be part of the list, buying and receiving a festive gift. We also had a choir and orchestra chanting carols for us and a special lunch with delicious *sarmale*. We were really immersed in Romanian customs by spring, and so kindly Daniel brought us a *mărțișor* in March, this red-and-white thread bow in a pin, as a springy reminder to be worn on your jacket.

Daniel Filip-Afloarei and myself also had the smoothest collaboration in organizing a workshop entitled *Romania as a Global Cold War Actor in Politics and Culture* set for the 9th of July. Our idea consisted in shedding new light on Romania's role as an important stakeholder in the global Cold War arena by using comparative case studies and bringing together scholars whose research resonates with the "global turn." We met only a couple of times to plan everything, including at the beautiful Camera din Față café. Our invited speakers included mostly NEC Alumni who are now shining in their fields abroad and in Romanian academia, like Bogdan Iacob, Adrian Matus, Corina Doboș, and Alexandra Bardan. Naturally, we also invited external speakers of high profile, experts in Cold War Studies like Paschalis Pechlivanis from Utrecht, Agnieszka Kisztełińska-Węgrzyńska from Łódź, Anna Graf-Steiner from Graz, and Wanda Jarzabek from Warsaw.

Extra-muros

Memorable will remain all the spectacles, gatherings and day trips with the NEC team. Wiktor Marzec was the first to activate the team and we got our first get-together at the legendary tavern Nenea

Iancu, which was to become our easy option given its proximity to our flats in Strada Matei Basarab. A couple of times we also gathered at my place and it happened that we had an academic rejections group therapy around some wine. The author-translator tandem was also active in cultural events, as for example the poems' reading by the Ukrainian poet and translator Serhiy Lazo at the London Pub and Liliana Corobca's book presentation at the Cărturești & friends bookstore. We learned a lot about exile in Kazakhstan through her book *Too Great A Sky* and we continued our talks eating at the traditional restaurant Vatra near Cișmigiu Park. Dana Katz and Sabine Walther often suggested spectacles we shouldn't miss out on and indeed we watched *Maria Callas* starring Angelina Jolie together. Our NEC bonds extended transnationally and we kept meeting even when on research missions and conferences: for example, I met Claudia Eggart in Switzerland and Christian Costamagna in Kosovo.

However, our gratitude goes mainly toward Raluca Trifa, whose passion as an architect and urbanist contaminated us, as she tirelessly explained bits and pieces of Romanian history, Bucharest's urban planning, imperial industrial heritage, and Transylvanian customs. Through her initiative we went to the Opera, the Sala Radio and the Athenaeum in Bucharest and we also had some drinks at cool bars like Energiea, a former printing house, and the well-known bar Control. More than that, she was our guide together with Gabriela Badea on our day trip to Mogoșoaia, where we explored the palace and its gardens and we ate traditional food at the nearby restaurant. Moreover, she was the mastermind of a very successful day trip to Brașov, where, thanks to her brilliant planning, we included a visit to the fortified church of Hărman and to a restaurant with authentic Transylvanian recipes in the old city of Brașov, coupled with some stair climbing later for digestion and panoramic views of the city. *Mulțumim, Raluca!* (Thank you, Raluca!)

Through our NEC research mission, I had the chance to spend the month of February in Athens at the ASKI archives. The Contemporary Social History Archives (ASKI) is the leading Greek

archival institution for the history of political and social movements, with a particular emphasis on the history of the Greek Left. ASKI holds the most comprehensive collection of archives relating to Greek social and public history projects and activities (publications, workshops and conferences, radio programs, historical walking tours) that enrich historical awareness and the collective memory of social, political and ethnic groups. For my postdoctoral project "Tangled Antennas: A Cold War History of Radio for Greek Migrants," I went through the following collection: Radio Station "Free Greece"—"Voice of Truth" archive of the period 1947–1968 (File size 409 boxes - free access identification code GR-ASKI-0002).

To give the reader a brief idea about my research project, the illegal radio station "Free Greece" began broadcasting in July 1947 as a station of the Democratic Army of Greece, at first from Belgrade and, later, in March 1948, from Bucharest. It was interrupted after the 6th Plenary Session of the Greek Communist Party in 1956, only to resume from Bucharest on March 1, 1958, under the name "Voice of Truth." From one half-hour broadcast a day in 1948, it went up to five daily broadcasts in 1962. After the split of the Greek Communist Party and the temporary suspension of its operation (1968), the station moved to East Germany, where it continued to operate until 1974. It is a unique set of documents as it allows access to the complete archive of broadcasts up to 1968 and the exploration of day by day events during a crucial period, the various aspects of the Greek Communist Party, and its perceptions of the issues of concern to Greek society. My gratitude goes to the exceptionally kind and helpful archivist Mrs. Anta Kopola for all her willingness to trace all folders that I needed to consult, going out of her way to help me thanks to her long experience in building the ASKI catalogue.

My main interpretation of the sources I consulted are summarized in the abstract of my above-mentioned article "Exiled Airwaves": it is a double story of migration, an exiled radio in the Eastern Bloc broadcasting for migrant workers in the West. The Greek Communist Party's exiled radio in Bucharest, the Voice of Truth, made an admirable effort to adapt its shows to the changing

times, surpassing the different obstacles posed to it due to its clandestine operation. With time, it picked up on important issues that touched the migrants in West Germany and raised awareness on the political activities of the leftist groups and unions among the migrants. This became increasingly important during the period of the dictatorship in Greece, acting as a platform of free speech and mobilization. Through diversification of sources and openness it created a two-way communication that was a democratic act per se, partly sacrificing orthodoxy for a more inclusive outreach to a progressive audience.

Just before starting my fellowship at NEC, I had the chance to receive a travel grant and I presented my migrant radio project at the 48th Annual Conference of the German Studies Association (September 26-29, 2024, Atlanta, Georgia, USA) with the title “Safe and Sound: Migrant Emotional Communities Through Radio Programs for the Gastarbeiter in West Germany (1960–1980).” As part of my interest in sound, my blog post “Reworking Gastarbeiter Sounds: Echoes of a Musical Journey Between Homeland and Host Country” was also published through the blog of the Summer Academy in Tutzing. As for my research outputs during my fellowship at NEC, well, they multiplied—maybe thanks to Romanian hospitality! As predicted, they are all under review or forthcoming at the moment I am writing these lines, but, for future reference, the key ones with regard to my NEC research project are the entry “Media and Migration” at the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Migration Studies* and the chapter “Southerners or Europeans? Ideas of Europeanness in Gastarbeiter’s Media Representation in West Germany (1960-1970s)” in the edited volume *Limits of Europeanness*.

This year, I also had the chance to be interviewed three times about my book *The Greek Gastarbeiter in the Federal Republic of Germany (1960-1974)*, published by De Gruyter in April, 2024. The first was with the brilliant Ari Barbalat for the *New Books Network* podcast. The second was in Greek, with my friends and colleagues, Eleutheria Alexandri and Nikoleta Tsigkra, PhD candidates at the University of Aegean in Lesbos, as a premiere of Eleutheria’s Youtube *Purple Podcast*. Last but certainly not least, my friend and

colleague, Sara de Athouguia Filipe, postdoctoral researcher at the University of Neuchâtel, interviewed me as part of my *nccr – on the move* visiting fellowship on topics like crisis, depopulation and (under-)development in Southern Europe, and the politicization of migration.

As this journey comes slowly to an end, I can look with confidence and optimism toward the future: for the next year I will be continuing my research on radio and migration hosted as a postdoctoral researcher by the IEG in Mainz, Germany. Thanks to my research at NEC, I'm now better equipped to enlarge the scope of my research toward a more inclusive history of migrant media under the title "Migrant Radio Stories: Digitizing the History of Radio Programs for the Gastarbeiter in West Germany (1960-1980)." Thanks to the networking opportunities offered by NEC, I had a successful application for the three-month Network Research Visit at the Zukunftskolleg in Konstanz, Germany. There, I will develop a new research project entitled "Thessaloniki as a New Milan: Shaping Postwar Urban Imaginaries Through Migration (1960-1980s)," in collaboration with my host, Dr. Gruia Bădescu. As the name of the college puts it, let us look forward to a promising future!

I can only leave this piece open-ended, because I deeply believe that I will not stop meeting my NEC friends, we will keep remembering our times together, and we will always have a home in Bucharest! We can only wish, with all our hearts, many fruitful years to come for NEC and for all its amazing academic and administrative staff, whom we know by their first names and by their smiles!

Born and based in Kyiv, **Vadym Aristov** earned a Master's degree in History from the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy in 2010 and completed his PhD at the Institute of History of Ukraine of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine in 2014. His research focuses on the medieval history of Eastern Europe, particularly Kyivan Rus. He serves as editor of *Ruthenica*, a journal dedicated to medieval history and archaeology in Eastern Europe, and holds positions as a senior research fellow at the Center for Kyivan Rus Studies of the Institute of History of Ukraine and as a senior teacher in the Department of History at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy.

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The Making of the Rurikids: Historical Writing and Dynastic Traditions in Early Medieval Eastern Europe

Vadym Aristov

My research project during the NEC fellowship 2024–2025 addressed the problem of how collective identity and self-perception were formed among the ruling elite of Kyivan Rus—the Rurikids. Its specific aim was to examine the concept of an overarching princely community defined by genealogical ties and the terminology used to express them. Central to my analysis was the Old Church Slavonic and Old Ruthenian term *rod* (kin), which most closely corresponds to our modern notion of a dynasty. This inquiry was motivated by the observation that, despite the centrality of kinship and lineage in the political life of Kyivan Rus, the term *rod* and its associated concepts have not been thoroughly examined in scholarly literature. Historians' views on how the Old Ruthenian royalty perceived their blood-relatedness fluctuate between two extremes: on the one hand, the assertion of the Rurikids' dynastic identity as total and primordial; on the other, the claim that Ruthenian princes had no sense of common kinship at all, and even the radical denial that the notion of a dynasty can be applied to them. What is at stake is the broader understanding of the organizational structure of the Kyivan Rus's ruling elite—whether it was a single dynasty or a set of aristocratic groups—and the principles by which we speak about developments in this political space and its main actors. In addressing this debate, my ultimate goal was to determine whether Kyivan Rus's political culture had a concept equivalent to our modern idea of a "Rurikid dynasty." If not, what genuine ideas were available to comprehend the sphere of political relations within the ruling elite, and what terms or expressions were used to articulate them? In this project, I was also interested in the social and cultural aspects of the political history of medieval Eastern Europe. I believe that this fruitful convergence enables

us to grasp more effectively those phenomena which, for various reasons, have been analytically divided in scholarship into “culture,” “social history,” and “politics.” While focused on Kyivan Rus, my study also speaks to the broader context of medieval history. The Rurikids were not a unique ruling family, but part of a wider spectrum of elite groups in medieval Europe who shared a broadly similar “package” of power practices and operated under comparable conditions—namely, in newly Christianized and emerging political societies. A deep study of one such case can thus offer valuable insights for understanding others.

On a general level, the research employed an interdisciplinary approach, combining textual analysis, historical contextualization, and comparative studies. On a more practical level, the methodology was shaped by the nature of the sources, most of which were historical (chronicle) narratives. Of primary importance to my research were two chronicles written in Kyiv: the *Primary Chronicle* (compiled in 1116), which covers events up to 1115–1117, and the *Kyivan Chronicle*, which continues the narrative through the rest of the twelfth century. Accordingly, my goal was to analyse key terms and narrative conventions in order to reconstruct, as far as possible, the conceptual system employed by the Old Ruthenian political elite, as mediated by the language and conceptual framework of the literati who authored these texts.

To achieve this goal I employed an innovative approach—micro-contextual analysis—aimed at establishing the meanings and functions of relevant terms within specific passages. This required philological analysis and the use of dictionaries and databases, as well as the examination of a much broader body of texts in which the terms I was interested in—particularly *rod*—appear in other contexts unrelated to the Ruthenian princes. Where possible, I traced the sources of these passages to better understand their origins. Particularly illuminating were instances in which the chronicler rephrased Biblical (Old Testament) texts using the word *rod*, as these cases revealed his interpretation of the concept of kinship.

Another original aspect of the methodology involved examining the absence of the term *rod* in contexts where it might be

expected and exploring how related ideas were conveyed through alternative terms or phrases. In such cases, kinship was often expressed indirectly—through references to dynastic saints and the land’s name (“the Ruthenian Land”), or periphrastic constructions, emphasizing shared ancestry without explicit terminology. This approach helped reveal the nuances of how the concept of dynastic unity was understood, implied, or left unstated in different textual and historical situations.

The synthesis of these findings required their reconsideration within a broader inquiry into how the common genealogical origin of the Kyivan Rus’ ruling elite was perceived, conceptualized, and instrumentalized—especially in comparison to the elites of other medieval “early states.”

The key finding was the discovery of the functioning of the term and concept *rod* in Old Ruthenian sources concerning the Rurikids. This was achieved for the first time in historiography. I found out that, in the chronicles, the scope of the term *rod* in “dynastic” contexts varied depending on the situation and perspective, referring in some cases to individual clans or families, and in others to the notion of the whole dynasty. However, in this broad sense, the term appears only in the *Primary Chronicle*. This makes it possible to associate the conceptualization of *rod* as referring to the community of all (or potentially all) Ruthenian princes descended from Volodymyr the Great with Sylvester, the author of the *Primary Chronicle*. He was one of the most prominent “intellectuals” of Kyivan Rus’, who constructed its foundational historical narrative, including the dynastic legend and the famous story about the “Calling of the Varangians.” In the *Kyivan Chronicle*, when *rod* denoted mostly individual clans, the term still appears in highly symbolically charged fragments, which were the product of the chroniclers’ literary work. Thus, it became evident to me that the term *rod* was a rare and “erudite” way to express the concept of kin (whether broader or narrower), which was more often conveyed indirectly—through extensive and descriptive phrases—or simply implied. This latter conclusion was another breakthrough of my project, which I achieved by exploring the absence of the term *rod*.

At the same time, judging from the entire body of evidence, I came to the understanding that the Ruthenian ruling elite had a shared awareness of belonging to a single genealogical continuum of royals, at least—or exclusively—because their status could only be inherited by blood. This led me to a general conclusion about a defining tension throughout much of the Kyivan Rus' period between the Rurikids' awareness of their genealogical connectedness and its insufficient conceptualization.

One of the primary challenges was the semantic ambiguity of *rod* and its derivatives. The term's meaning often shifted depending on context, making it difficult to ascertain its precise implications in certain texts. To address this, I conducted a thorough contextual analysis of each occurrence, considering the surrounding narrative, the author's intent, and the broader socio-political environment. In the course of this analysis, I faced the need to locate each relevant fragment within the entire text to which it belonged, which was complicated by the existence of multiple manuscript copies and the absence of original autographs—standard circumstances in the study of Old Ruthenian literature. Accordingly, I applied the instruments of textual criticism to cope with (mostly minor) differences between the copies and to establish the affinities of the fragments mentioning the terms in question with other parts of the texts and their sources.

Another challenge I faced was defining the scope of my analysis. I could have limited myself to the word *rod*, which appears relatively rarely in relation to the Rurikids, and thus would have arrived at non-representative conclusions. However, I decided to take into account its contextual synonyms—words and stable expressions that conveyed the same or a similar meaning. In other words, I made a clear distinction between the word *rod* and the concept it denotes. This allowed me to include a broader range of source material and to uncover a fundamental difference between the use of the concept and the use of this specific term.

Some difficulties were related to the interpretation of observations drawn from the source material. I wanted to avoid a formalistic approach and to take historical dynamics into account.

It was important to carefully consider the chronology, the region in which the texts were produced, and the social background of their authors in cases where the term *rod* or its contextual synonyms appeared. It was also necessary to account for the evolution of the princely collective over the course of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, especially its numerical growth and fragmentation into distinct territorial clans. As a result, I was able to outline, in my general conclusion, the milieu in which the conceptualization of the princely elite as a single *rod* could have emerged, as well as the socio-cultural conditions under which such a concept had the greatest chances of developing.

Summarizing and reflecting on my experience at NEC, I can say that the research conducted during the fellowship made a significant contribution to my long-term project on the dynastic history of the Rurikids from the eleventh to the thirteenth century. I gained new insights into the conceptual dimension of that history and demonstrated the need to focus more closely on the “political vocabulary” of Old Ruthenian sources relating to the royalty of Kyivan Rus. The studies I carried out during—and thanks to—the fellowship inspired me to open new directions in my research, particularly by reexamining the kinship terminology used in Old East Slavic sources to describe the political elite in a more comprehensive way.

The NEC fellowship gave a significant moral impetus to my study. It was not only the time of my individual intensive work but also a fascinating opportunity to discover the research of my fellows. The weekly seminars not only introduced me (as well as the other fellows) to the intriguing work of my colleagues, but also provided a powerful intellectual and emotional stimulus for my own project. Especially fruitful was the preparation for my own presentation and the discussion that followed. Explaining my findings to colleagues—most of whom are not medievalists—helped me to clarify many points for myself, including those that had previously seemed “self-evident” but proved vague when subjected to the demands of public presentation. The questions and suggestions I received offered valuable feedback that helped me refine my texts.

Last but not least, I established contact with several fellows who share my broader interest in premodern European history.

A distinctive feature of my fellowship experience was that I participated remotely. This was due to travel restrictions imposed on certain categories of Ukrainian citizens under martial law, as my country must defend itself against the Russian genocidal invasion. Under conditions of daily life-threatening danger, conducting research is especially difficult—both because of increased (and often unexpected) expenses and due to the general psychological strain. The NEC fellowship was critically helpful in both respects. It is also important that the fellowship was extended to those who remain in Ukraine. Under current circumstances, supporting Ukrainian scholarship requires assistance not only for those forced to leave the country, but also for those who stayed and continue to develop academic work at home despite everything.



Gabriela Badea holds a PhD in Medieval Literature from Columbia University. Her doctoral research examined private devotional exercises and explored how devotional modes of reading shaped the late medieval reception of lay texts. Her current academic interests include medieval self-fashioning, intertextuality, gloss, and reader reception in the later Middle Ages. Beyond academia, she works in the NGO sector, where she develops and manages projects focused on Roma issues, social justice, social policy, citizen empowerment, and participative democracy. She is passionate about bridging scholarly inquiry with civic engagement and socially responsive practice.

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Photo: Gabriela Badea.

Poetry in Motion: Dialogic Subjectivity in the Manuscript of Charles d'Orléans

Gabriela Badea

I am a would-be minor poet. It is true that I write no more than a poem a year, often in moments of great distress, when language becomes not a form of expression but a form of survival. For me, philosophy is not a way of life—poetry is. When I write, my own voice is barely audible amid the debris of medieval images and echoes of Emily Dickinson that float to the surface. I have never aspired to more than being a cultured reader, occasionally dabbling in unconscious emulation. My research project is personal in that it explores intentional literary emulation in the Middle Ages. It was a privilege to immerse myself in the personal manuscript of one of my favorite poets, Charles d'Orléans. His manuscript offered shelter from the sound and fury of the outside world this year, and it anchored me. If my study has no other merit, let it stand as a love letter to Charles and his circle of poetry buddies.

This study is part of a larger project concerned with medieval literary subjectivities, and in particular with the question of self-fashioning—how writers in the Middle Ages construct a sense of poetic identity within and against inherited forms. Initially, I set out to examine how the entry of the self onto the intersubjective terrain of language already conditions it through inherited codes of self-expression. I aimed to show that, rather than hindering the voicing of an authentic individuality, these inherited codes allowed medieval authors to shape identifiable writerly personae through conscious emulation. My interest lay in the tension between originality and intertextuality—how the literary “I” is constructed not from within, but through echo, citation, and formal tradition. Over time, however, my focus narrowed to the extraordinary manuscript of Charles d'Orléans: BnF MS fr. 25458. At first glance, it is a personal poetic album, begun during Charles's

long captivity in England after the Battle of Agincourt and continued upon his return to France. But it is also something more: a living, dialogic manuscript that grew to include entries from his camarilla—secretaries, courtiers, companions—and guest poets who engaged with Charles’s poetic voice, sometimes in admiration, sometimes in parody, but always in conversation. What emerges is not simply a constellation of individual voices, but a poetry of engagement with the textual persona of Charles himself. As I worked more closely with the manuscript, I came to see that what I was observing was not the self-fashioning of distinct authorial personae, but the expansion of a particular literary “I”—a shared lyric subjectivity shaped through imitation, exchange, and poetic play.

The core objective of this research was to examine a series of poetic exchanges within BnF MS fr. 25458, with particular attention to how the lyric “I” is voiced, shared, and transformed across contributions. I focused on two key sequences: the ballade cycle beginning with “Je meurs de soif auprès de la fontaine,” and the group of poems orbiting the incipit “En la Forêt de Longue Actente” (both ballades and rondeaux). Through close reading, I sought to address the deceptively simple but foundational question: who says “I” in these poetic jousts? As my study unfolded, this question opened into broader inquiries about authorship and voice. How does subjectivity work in a shared poetic space? When poets within and around Charles d’Orléans’s circle reuse his idioms, refrains, and emotional lexicon, are they performing their own poetic identity, or contributing to the expansion of a collective poetic self? What kind of authorship is staged in such a manuscript: is it a record of individual voices, or a site of relational self-fashioning, where identity is not declared but collaboratively shaped through imitation, irony, and reply? One of the central questions that emerged was how Charles’s poetic persona—so idiosyncratic, emotionally precise, and stylistically coherent—came to function as a flexible model of lyric subjectivity, inviting appropriation and response across genre, speaker, and manuscript context. His poetic signature reverberates beyond this manuscript, shaping the *Cycle de la*

Belle Dame sans Mercy, informing the heart-centered allegories of René d'Anjou (particularly *Le Livre du Cœur d'Amour Épris* and *Le Mortifiement de vaine plaisance*), and playing a crucial role in the organization and tone of late medieval anthologies. At stake is the larger theoretical challenge of understanding intersubjective subjectivity—a lyric mode in which voice is neither fully individual nor impersonal, but negotiated across a poetic community.

Methodologically, I proceeded in a manner respectful of the material structure and poem sequence of BnF MS fr. 25458, allowing the manuscript's internal logic to guide my analysis. I began by examining Charles d'Orléans's strategies of poetic self-fashioning—how he constructs a layered, affectively charged persona across his lyric corpus. From there, I approached the manuscript's poetic exchanges as scaffolded dialogues: poets not only rework Charles's idiom but also respond to one another, creating a dense network of intra-manuscript dialogue and shared meaning-making. This network of textual echoes is held together not only by shared themes but by formal cues: repeating rhyme patterns, incipit/refrains that accrue generic force through repetition and variation. These features shape the manuscript's poetic landscape and show how voice circulates and mutates within it.

I first considered the entries in these poetic competitions as a form of gloss on the contradictions of Charles's literary persona, drawing on reception theory. I then explored the idea of self-portraits in the language of another, where distinctive voices like Villon maintain their own poetic identity while closely emulating Charles's signature poetics. Finally, I arrived at a third hypothesis: that Charles's poetic persona offers a compelling alternative to the outdated model of troubadour subjectivity. In a cultural moment when courtliness had become a rigid and inadequate framework for articulating inner life, innovations such as the *rhétoriciens'* poetics began to reshape the lyric "I" in more technical or impersonal terms. In contrast, Charles's voice remains affective, reflexive, and narratively coherent. By opening itself to literary play, it offers an expanded first person—capacious enough to host a collective, even generic identity, more attuned to fifteenth-century

sensibilities. This shared lyric voice remains anchored in Charles's singular idiom, even as it accommodates a plurality of perspectives on subjectivity. Throughout, I approached poetic subjectivity not as a static imprint of authorial voice, but as something dialogically produced, shaped through patterns of imitation, response, and creative inhabitation.

Among the more notable discoveries of this study is the persistent tension between tradition and innovation in the articulation of the lyric "I." The poetic exchanges within the manuscript reveal a push and pull between inherited models of courtly subjectivity and emergent, more reflexive forms of selfhood. Participants who revert too comfortably to the conventional courtly "I" are, at times, subtly mocked or destabilized, suggesting a shared awareness that the old scripts no longer suffice. Rather than focusing on the formal echoes between poems catalogued in previous scholarship on the concours, I aimed to offer cohesive readings of the exchanges as a laboratory in which a new model of subjectivity is collectively developed. The nature of the material called for crossing the lenses of subjectivity and ludic studies, in order to reveal that literary play is not gratuitous but instrumental—both in expanding poetic personae and in innovating new ways of saying "I." I tried to map a process of construction that is also one of iconoclasm and unmaking, where subjectivity emerges precisely in the blur between reception and creation, as poets become readers and responders to each other's verse. In doing so, I hope to contribute to ongoing conversations about fifteenth-century subjectivity, affirming its fundamentally dialogic character. My readings seek to illuminate the hallmarks of the subjectivity collectively constructed at Blois: traversed by epistemic and existential uncertainty, unstable in its shifting affect, and reflective of the collective trauma of a century marked by war and political upheaval.

One of the most challenging aspects of this project, from a philological standpoint, has been the attempt to reconstitute the individuality of the voices of the various *intervenants* in the manuscript. This has required meticulous efforts to gather biographical information about contributors in order to cross-reference it with manuscript

entries and assess whether individual poetic voices can be identified with some degree of confidence. I am still working through this process, drawing extensively on the invaluable database compiled by Élisabeth Gonzalez as an annex to her book *Un prince en son hôtel* (Éditions de la Sorbonne). More broadly, I am still in the process of developing a fuller understanding of the late medieval anthologies that may echo or transmit the influence of the Blois circle. Much of this corpus is scattered across satellite manuscripts, many of which I am only now becoming familiar with.

Looking ahead, I plan to expand my knowledge of fifteenth-century anthologizing practices and to make fuller use of tools such as the IRHT Jonas database to trace poems from the Blois milieu across other manuscript contexts. My aim is to better understand the literary production of the Blois camarilla beyond the Duke's personal manuscript. I am currently investigating BN nouv. acq. fr. 15771, and intend to consult Carpentras BM 375 (associated with Marie de Clèves) as well. I also hope to identify and trace recurring poetic contributors across anthologies, to formulate hypotheses about their individual styles and how their poetic voices may have been shaped through contact with the Blois manuscript culture. This remains a work in progress, but it has opened up exciting new directions for further research.

Another promising direction for further study involves a more systematic exploration of Charles d'Orléans's literary posterity. This would entail a closer examination of late medieval anthologies and early print compilations that reconfigure or adapt the Aurelian corpus—particularly works such as Antoine Vérard's *La Chasse et le Départ d'Amours* and the widely circulated *Jardin de Plaisance et Fleurs de Rhétorique*. I am also interested in investigating the formal and thematic connections between Charles's poetics and the collaborative circle behind the *Cycle de la Belle Dame sans Mercy*, with special attention to the ways in which his lyric idiom is echoed or transformed in that context. In addition, I hope to devote more sustained attention to Charles's influence on the work of René d'Anjou, especially as a way of understanding the emotional and symbolic afterlife of his poetic persona. As someone deeply engaged with

questions of medieval intertextuality, I see all of these as rich and generative directions for extending the study of Charles's legacy.

Two research trips in particular opened my project to new perspectives—though not always in ways that are strictly quantifiable. The first, a visit to Orléans, became more a moment of poetic musing than direct archival research. I attempted to retrace Charles d'Orléans's steps, visiting the Château de Blois, but was a bit disappointed that successive refurbishing had all but erased the medieval building. Yet the most vivid sense of the Orléans family emerged unexpectedly on the second trip, at Châteaudun, the castle of Charles's younger brother, the Bâtard d'Orléans. Though I cannot claim that this visit yielded direct scholarly insight, the experience of physically inhabiting those spaces, imagining the textures of courtly life, and simply daydreaming in place, became a quiet but necessary form of motivation. Research is often carried forward not only by poring over texts, but also by moments of affective connection across time that shape the scholarly imagination.

A final word must be said about the scholarly affordances of New Europe College, whose vibrant intellectual life greatly enriched this project. I benefited immensely from the exchanges around the Wednesday seminars, particularly the conversations with fellow medievalists. Sometimes, simply picturing a friendly and rigorous audience helps frame one's arguments in a way that is less idiosyncratic and more attuned to the intersubjective transference of thought that defines research. The community at New Europe College is, in this respect, the epitome of openness and generosity.

During my fellowship, I participated in a seminar on medieval emotions, which was instrumental in developing my approach to affect in medieval literature, especially as we engaged with the latest scholarship in the field. I also took part in a seminar on medieval paleography, alongside colleagues, and briefly joined discussions in NEC Tech, a group dedicated to the ethics of artificial intelligence. Each of these experiences contributed to a richly stimulating intellectual environment, and I feel deeply fortunate to have been part of this generous and interdisciplinary scholarly community.

In closing, I have come to think that engaging in research—of any kind—is not unlike the act of writing poetry. Both demand the ability to abstract oneself from the immediacy of the world and to access a space of contemplative clarity, a kind of intellectual altitude I imagine as rising above the clouds. I am deeply grateful to have been part of a community where such spaces were not only made possible but shared. To witness the intellectual preoccupations of my colleagues and to listen to their presentations was, at times, akin to partaking in a collective reverie—a momentary suspension of the contingent in the name of thought. It is a rare privilege to experience such fellowship, and I carry that sense of elevation with me as I move forward.

Alena Bagro is an independent scholar in Kyiv, Ukraine. She studied the history of fortification and transfer of engineering ideas, the history of borderlands in East-Central Europe, and the military history of Ukraine in the sixteenth–seventeenth centuries. Dr. Bagro received her PhD in 2016 and her dissertation title is: “Ukrainian Cossacks and the First Azov-Dnipro Campaign. The confrontation between the Moscow State and the Ottoman Empire in the late 17th century.” Dr. Bagro took part in a research project and was the compiler-in-chief of a scientific publication to Ukrainian early modern sources—an edition of Samilo Velychko’s *Chronicle*, which received the Ukrainian national prize as one of the thirty most important publications of 2020. Before joining the New Europe College in 2024, Dr. Bagro participated in a scholarship program called *Research Perspective for Ukraine* at the German Historical Institute in Warsaw and Warsaw University, Poland. She researched the peculiarities of the fortifications of the Ukrainian region Podolia as part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

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Research Report

Alena Bagro

Early in the morning of February 24, 2022, when I looked out of my window and saw tanks, I made a difficult decision for myself and my children—to take them and leave. Without knowing what lay ahead, and not even suspecting the terrible things we are only now discovering, I realise that this decision was the only right one. However, the uncertainty and unpredictability of the future brought new challenges. Among them, the first tasks were finding a new temporary home and settling in, providing a social environment for the children and facilitating their communication, and, most importantly, searching for a means of subsistence while timidly attempting to preserve my profession during this searching process.

Many institutions in different countries have responded to the demands of war and created programmes and scholarships, including some for researchers who arrived from Ukraine. Unfortunately, after a couple of years of full-scale war, there are increasingly fewer such special opportunities for Ukrainians. As is often said, the opinion of various representatives of the European community is expressed in the following statement: the European society has long been tired of news and wartime events. In these conditions, it is all the more valuable that centers such as the New Europe College in Bucharest, Romania, and the Centre for Advanced Study (CAS) in Sofia, Bulgaria, operate on a permanent basis, where participants from Eastern Europe, among others, can apply. These centers bring together scholars from various fields of the humanities.

At the beginning, feeling a little embarrassed by the very fact of such diversity (one of the first seminars was on jurisprudence) I saw in all the participants a keen interest in the presentations and in the topics of their colleagues. I used to think that only at historical conferences, where narrow specialists with similar topics

gather, could one find such understanding and response. But here, among my new friends, I found not only a lively, genuine interest in the issues I study, but something more—the sincere support and approval from those around me.

The emotions I felt after my seminar are inspiring and give me confidence that my work and my choice (whether to be a historian, philosopher, linguist or literary scholar) were right and valid. And it is necessary to continue our research with courage. That interdisciplinarity, diversity, and multi-vector approach of the specialists gathered here, which at first seemed a little unusual, became a powerful stimulus for further scientific work. It was especially motivating when people who were unfamiliar with the historical complexities of my country were firmly convinced that this history was worthy of their attention and deeper study, so they wanted to learn more about it.

In my turn, I must be honest and admit that when I was choosing the country for my future stay (for a scholarship) I did not expect to hear so many noteworthy topics during seminars and conferences and to learn so much about them.

Even more enthusiasm is evoked by the fact that, during these discussions, expected and unexpected parallels arise, related to the history of different countries. Of course, the first regions that come to mind are those geographically close to each other on the European continent, which were part of the same political alliances; their development proceeded in parallel, and this evolution is easy to compare. However, areas where representatives of very distant regions meet and interact provide an opportunity to compare phenomena that are geographically far apart but similar in essence (such as the emergence of Cossacks in Ukraine, on the Don River, Tatar Cossacks, and Hajduks in the Balkans). Comparisons can be made, and this in turn provides grounds for future analysis. Dobruja, Transylvania, Moldavia, or Podolia, the late Middle Ages and the extremely complex history of the twentieth century offer many vectors and directions for future research, as well as numerous opportunities for joint projects. Everything mentioned above once again demonstrates the necessity of our work—to tell

the history of our people and states in foreign languages and in different countries.

I would like to thank my colleagues for inviting me to conferences on issues of Black Sea regional security that are common for Ukraine and Romania. I thank them for the questions they asked after my presentation at the seminar, for the books written by them that they shared with me, and for their advice on further scientific research.

During my visit to the conference at the “Ovidius” University in Constanța (Black Sea Institute) on the invitation of Dr. Metin Omer, I first began to think and reflect on the magnates of Transylvania and the complicated historical period that both the region and these people of Hungarian origin experienced after Transylvania was incorporated into the Romanian state. Through informal talks during breaks and dinners at the conference, I formulated a compelling new direction for my research: the adaptation of former private fortifications and palaces, which became state property in the twentieth century, for medical use, such as military hospitals or sanatoriums after World War II. At the same time, the news about the preparation of scientific anthologies on this topic stimulated me to write new scientific texts.

The possibility of a research trip to another country to continue my studies was an unexpected and pleasant surprise for me, when I read about it in the contract given to us at the beginning of the scholarship. My highly ambitious plan, which previously had little chance of being realised—to travel to Italy, and especially to Florence, a city that not only concentrates the main architectural and artistic monuments of the Renaissance and Early Modern Period, but is also a center for archival documents—was realised thanks to the funding provided by my fellowship. During this research trip, I contacted with researchers from the University of Florence, SAGAS Department (Department of History, Archaeology, Geography, Art and Entertainment), and the Department of History at the European University Institute (EUI).

The NEC administration made it possible for us to stay in the European Union for the whole scholarship period by taking care

of the administrative formalities and getting us the documents we needed. This, in its turn, gave me the chance to accept an invitation from my colleague Olga Tikhonova from Seville, Spain, who studies the fortifications of Ukraine and Western Europe as well, to go to a festival of science *Science is Wonderful!*. This festival is organised every year by the European Union to present scientific research from various fields of scientific inquiry that has been supported by funding. It also aims to tell children of all ages (from first grade to high school) from different European Union member states about these studies in an accessible and understandable way. In 2025 five thousand primary and secondary school students from all over Belgium and abroad took part. At this event, they could get to know more about various aspects of science in a fun way, ask questions, learn about our work, and explore what a research career looks like. I got to talk about my research at NEC, my working process, and why it's important to learn about fortifications and save architectural heritage, including in Ukrainian territories. It was particularly valuable experience for me to interact with groups from other countries speaking many languages, including schoolchildren who had come to Europe from Ukraine in order to seek safety from the war. When I spoke to them about Ukrainian historical monuments and started speaking Ukrainian, I saw how this immediately changed the perception of these Ukrainian refugee kids in their school groups. In my opinion, this was the most I could do for them, and what I did on an individual basis over this year...

I would particularly like to emphasise the ability to work productively during the fellowship—not only thanks to the comfortable living conditions and friendly atmosphere, but also thanks to the discussions, sometimes during but often after research seminars and conferences, which stimulate intellectual activity, a fast work pace and productivity, and, even more so, the desire to achieve as much as possible—a wonderful aspiration.

During this time, I completed the planned amount of work—chapters of a (co-authored) popular science book about the small Ukrainian Cossack town of Keleberda, which appeared in the sev-

enteenth century on the border of the uninhabited steppe, from where devastating attacks by Tatar troops were carried out.

Being immersed in the culture and history of a country that is new to me makes me explore this culture directly (and for me this means primarily studying architecture)—it motivates me to go out into the streets, walk around the neighbourhood, study the preserved monuments, and talk to the inhabitants. It is very important for me to see the objects I study with my own eyes, because sometimes such a live experience gives unexpected results. In this regard, I have planned several trips to the castles of Romania, especially in the Transylvania region, for the last warm months of the year. All of this, which attracts my attention, forces me to recharge emotionally, brings peace of mind, and gives me the strength to work and live on.

I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to feel safe—to take a break from the cycle of sleepless nights and alarms or alarming signals.

During the most dangerous periods of this wartime in our country, my children and I had and still have the opportunity to come to safety, take a “vacation” for as long as we need, take a break and not think about the danger for a while. I am sincerely grateful to the NEC team and each employee individually for this. To the women and men who do not ask uncomfortable questions but tactfully show concern for us: I am appreciative of their smiles and friendly conversations.

* * *

I’ve finished writing and prepared for printing a popular science book called *Keleberda*, which describes the history of the town from when it first emerged as a Cossack settlement in the 1670s to the present day, as well as an overview of the history of this location prior to the seventeenth century, including the period of the first settlements in the sixth–eighth centuries, based on archaeological findings. The book was co-authored with Dr. Tatiana Tairova-Yakovleva.

As a result of the research conducted during the course of the fellowship, I wrote an article entitled “The South-Eastern Border Fortifications of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the Ukrainian Historical Narrative.” I plan to publish the article in the *Ukrainian Historical Journal* issued by the Institute of History of Ukraine. Alternatively, I may submit it for publication in a collection that will be produced for the 3rd Congress of Researchers of the History of Belarus, Lithuania, Poland, and Ukraine on the subject “New Narratives—New Concepts in Historiography and Public Discourse,” in which I plan to participate.

November 2025: Following the invitation of Dr. Metin Omer I took part in the *Securing the Black Sea: Challenges and Solutions* conference at “Ovidius” University in Constanța (Black Sea Institute) with a report entitled “The Security System on the Black Sea Coast: Approaches to the Construction of the Defense System in the Ottoman Empire, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Russian Empire in the 17th-18th Centuries. A Comparative Perspective.”

March 2025: I participated in the annual science festival *Science is Wonderful!*, which brings together European Union-funded researchers and interactively shows research projects to children through presentations, practical experiments, games, and quizzes. The *Science is Wonderful!* festival was attended by schoolchildren from across the European Union.*

8 March 2025: The Centre for Advanced Study Sofia hosted the *Sustaining Ukrainian Scholarship* workshop in Sofia, to which all current fellows from Ukraine were invited. At the meeting, we discussed and proposed strategies for the further development of Ukrainian studies at universities in Western Europe.

April 2025: I attended the *Fortifications of the Mediterranean Coast* international conference—the largest conference in this field, which has been bringing together fortification history experts from all over Europe for the past ten years. At the event, I met architectural historians and employees of various castle museums in Italy

* marie-sklodowska-curie-actions.ec.europa.eu/science-is-wonderful

and abroad. As a result of these new contacts, I later met separately with historians in Florence and planned to participate in a similar conference next year, as well as a conference in Pula, Croatia (*Fortified Architecture for the Culture of Peace*).

Following the results of my research trip, I am preparing an article entitled “The Interconnection and Influence of Italian Fortification Systems of the Late Renaissance on Podolian Castles in Ukraine during the Early Modern Period,” which will examine issues related to the transfer of engineering scientific thought in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

I have applied to participate in several conferences in 2025, including those organised by our fellowship holders:

In Constanța—the international scientific session *Pontica: History and Archaeology in the West Pontic Region* (at the invitation of Dr. Metin Omer), with a report “The Trade and Military Routes Used by both the Tatars and the Turks in 17th Century on the Ukrainian territory”

In Sibiu—The *Inter- and Transcultural Heritage: Conflicts, Overlaps, Coexistence* conference, organised within the project *Establishing a Laboratory of Cultural Heritage in Central Romania* (at the invitation of Dr. Daniela Stanciu-Păscărița)

In Croatia—*Fortified Architecture for the Culture of Peace—FORTIC* international scientific conference 2025 (organised by Dr. Nataša Urošević, whom I met on a trip to Florence and at a conference in Naples) with a report entitled “Fortified Sites as Green Areas: Examples of Implementation in Western Ukraine at the End of the 19th Century”

In Kyiv/Warsaw—*3rd Congress of Researchers of the History of Belarus, Lithuania, Poland, and Ukraine*, “A New Image of Our Neighbours—A New Language, New Narratives, and New Education about the Past, Present, and Future”

In Warsaw—The international scientific conference *Castles of the Silver Age—Old and New in Residential Construction in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth of the 17th century* (at the Royal Castle in Warsaw).

Raluca Bujor is currently teaching Philosophy and Logic at “Sf. Sava” Highschool in Bucharest and she is an Assistant professor at the Faculty of Philosophy and Faculty of Journalism, University of Bucharest. Her PhD thesis focused on Socrates’s *atopia* in the Platonic dialogues and it was defended in January 2022, at Sorbonne University, Paris. She has published several papers on topics related to Ancient and Contemporary Philosophy, as well as her first translation from English to Romanian. She also collaborates with cultural and artistic NGOs on projects dedicated to heritage, art and philosophy.

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Research Report

Raluca Bujor

When I received the news that I obtained the *Ștefan Odobleja* scholarship at NEC, for the academic year 2024–2025, my feelings were a bit contradictory. Initially, I was naturally full with enthusiasm, but later a rather peculiar state of mind started to creep in. Ever since I was a teenager, roaming around on my bike on the small secret streets of Bucharest, I used to admire the NEC villa and its location on Plantelor Street. In college, I started meeting people who studied at NEC and who were very much in love with the atmosphere of the place and its library. I also knew New Europe College was devoted to defending democratic values and freedom, an aspect that was particularly valuable in my eyes. So, bringing all these bits of context together, when I found out that I will actually be able to participate in NEC seminars and have access to the renowned library, it was at once marvelous and... scary. I guess the only thing that was absent now from this old picture was my old bike.

The project I submitted and pursued was entitled “Celebration and Leisure: Nonlinear Time in Plato’s *Symposium*.” It was primarily dedicated to the question of philosophical leisure (*skholê* in ancient greek) and its relation with unexpectedness or surprise. In the dialogue *Theaetetus*, Socrates famously contrasts philosophers with those raised in the spirit of courtrooms, agora and politics. The latter’s discourse is measured by a water-clock, a circumstance that establishes, in Socrates’s eyes, servitude and lack of *skholê* (172c-173b). Linear time, being essentially measurable, cannot account for, or even welcome, moments of rupture or qualitative leap. This type of temporality probably resists moments of discontinuity. Being “busy” is incompatible with welcoming whatever path of discussion the argument brings forth. What we want is to proceed from A to B, in order to obtain C. By consequence, we tend to avoid

and even blame digressions. They are “a waste of time” for anyone experiencing time as linear and “occupied.” Plato’s dialogues, on the contrary, are very often indulging in detours and digressions. The interlocutors, with Socrates as leading figure, exhibit a very specific form of availableness to the unexpected, i.e., to whatever the argument presents almost by and of itself. The water-clock is no longer efficient in philosophical pursuit and what interested me was to see what takes its place, so to speak—what exactly happens in philosophical leisure that escapes the common ways? A preliminary answer was that this form of leisure welcomes discontinuity and unexpectedness in the thought process.

This immediately made me think about one of Plato’s most renowned dialogues, the *Symposium*. On a narrative level, this text is particularly rich in twists and turns (I counted ten moments where some kind of rupture occurs). Also, the context of the nocturnal meeting and discussion described in the *Symposium* is a festive one: a theater festival had just taken place in Athens, as part of the Lenaia festivities dedicated to the god Dionysos. Bridging the gaps, it occurred to me that one way to understand what is proper to festive time was to look, as with philosophical leisure, at the former’s relation with discontinuity and unexpectedness. Indeed, festive time seems to welcome ruptures and alterity in general. The historians focusing on ancient Greek festivals and contemporary authors such as H.-G. Gadamer confirmed this. Festive time is suspended, it is synonymous with distance from normality and the day-by-day temporal rhythms. The water-clock is silenced. If philosophical leisure amounts to being available to address the unexpected movements of thought or, as I like to call them, to carry “oriented wanderings” in search of what something is or of the answer to how a human being should live (Socratic questions par excellence), festive time is closely related to it in that it is both digressive and structured.

As I said earlier, in festive times “normality” is suspended, alongside its use of time. Whereas, in Platonic dialogues, what orients the search is the question and ultimately the Being, in the case of ancient Greek festivals, the steadfast points were the theatrical

performances, the athletic competitions, the ritual processions and other rites that were performed from city to city. Everything that happened *around* these moments spent with the community was, we might suspect, as available for the unexpected as platonic leisure. Of course, not all unexpected turns are philosophically relevant, but rendering oneself available for such developments is, in itself, a shift of attitude which could lead to the philosopher's approach.

Trying to work out this connection between philosophical *skholê*, availability for unexpected turns of thought or twists of the argument, the discontinuous narrative structure of the festive *Symposion* and festive time in itself, I realized that this project was much more convoluted than I expected. As I was preparing my presentation in April, it became very clear to me that at the end of my research I will have enough "material" not for one, but for two or three papers. Many delimitations had to be made and I presume, in the end, I will try to publish a paper dealing solely with *skholê* in the *Theaetetus* and another one approaching the narrative structure of the *Symposion* and festive time. One thing is nevertheless clear: I am very much interested in the phenomenon of surprise.

Coming back to the beginning of my scholarship, one of my first visits at the NEC library actually led to a beautiful surprise: I discovered in the attic the entire Loeb collection of classical Greek and Roman texts, garnished in the green and red book covers I knew so well and recognized at first glance. This collection eventually inspired and facilitated a change of course in my research: I decided to browse more through ancient Greek comedy and tragedy, looking for how the poets had built unexpectedness in their plots. In the end, these readings (and others) offered me much more than I initially estimated as I tried to point out above. The pleasure of finding things you don't exactly know you're looking for was at once an experience I was having at NEC and the topic of my own research on the Platonic dialogues. In a sense, everything was starting to articulate organically right under my nose.

During the first seminars, lunches and coffees sipped in the courtyard, one of my most vivid impressions was again related to the question of academic leisure: NEC had created a *skholê*

ambiance around it, especially thanks to the staff and their openness. Meeting the board a few months later strengthened the impression that equality and transparency are very important for the identity of NEC. Beyond their righteous objectives and resources, NEC is one of the few academic environments that also has a spirit.

On another note, during my year at NEC, I was especially grateful to find out more about Ukraine, its past and present, including aspects related to the aggression Russia started against the country back in 2014. Some of the fellows presented various situations related to the current war—for example, one colleague was a lawyer working for the liberation of Ukrainian prisoners. His stories were particularly powerful. They made me realize what horror and lack of basic human decency lie behind such conflicts and how little is covered in the local media these days.

Politics was always on the table during the spring semester, mainly due to the cancellation of the Romanian Presidential elections in the winter, the rise of far-right populism and the renewed Legionary movement that was slowly emerging from the shadows. I remember frequently talking with Madame Mihaela Danga, our beloved librarian, about the political ambiance and its potential causes, or about ways to defend democratic values. Since politics was everywhere those days, having the possibility to meet such involved persons as Madame Danga and other staff members or fellows was therapeutic for me.

All the presentations I attended were an opportunity to learn something about a topic I often didn't know much about. What slowly became apparent was that I had the chance to learn more about the neighbors of my country and to fill in the many gaps in my general education. While listening to colleagues that were working on various subjects related to the history or the political life of Greece, Hungary or Poland, I often felt grateful and amazed.

Even if only two of my colleagues were working in the field of Philosophy, the Wednesday morning seminar was sometimes an opportunity for me to explore how philosophical thinking might contribute to research in architecture, history or social sciences. I believe this was very valuable, even if it mostly happened in my secret

interior life. But, needless to say, other times I was simply listening, trying to take in as much information as I could. The discussion following the presentation, including in my own case, represented a pleasure in itself, since the Q&A session was generally very alert.

I would say that the main ethos behind these moments, when we were presenting our work in front of others, was resisting the general trend toward specialization or the limiting of one's research to a very narrow topic, concept, etc. None of this was present at NEC, quite the contrary, the interdisciplinary approach prevailed. The long oval table and the chairs around it, where the Wednesday seminars took place, were an image of this movement of bringing minds together. This was not patchwork or a sort of simulacrum, I strongly believe we were all honestly curious and trying to explore the "research language" of the others. All this was of course discreetly encouraged and sustained by the delicious lunches after the seminars. The simple fact of sharing this moment nourished not only our hungry bellies, but also the feeling of being part of something, at least in my case. It was undoubtedly a moment where festive time and academic leisure could meet.

While in my previous PhD experience in France, I was one of the international students and I would hang out with other lost souls in Paris (very few of them French), at NEC I no longer had this status, as I am living and was born in Bucharest. So, from the margins, as a satellite, I enjoyed seeing how "the internationals" were slowly forming a group and exploring the streets and bars in town, often under the guidance of Raluca Trifa, our generous architect colleague. This change in my position made me think that nowadays I have fewer social resources than I used to. I quickly realized that working in a public high school, as I do, can sometimes limit one's social availability. So, I maintained a close friendship with the quiet and luminous library, while New Europe College offered a kind of sanctuary from the crowded routine of my daily school life.

I doubt that the end of the scholarship will mean an end of my relation with NEC. On the contrary, I believe this was the beginning of a beautiful friendship, as the saying goes. The events hosted

at NEC interest me both on an academic and personal level. A personal favorite are the wonderful music events that sometimes take place. This reminds me: I haven't yet mentioned the piano that overlooked us during the seminars and, as the seasons were changing, from the corner of the room. Or the many cats waiting patiently outside for us to finish lunch and for them to start theirs. "As I Was Moving Ahead Occasionally, I Saw Brief Glimpses of Beauty."

Much is yet to be discovered.



Christian Costamagna was born in Bra, Piedmont, in 1979. He earned his PhD in Historical Sciences from the University of Eastern Piedmont (Vercelli, Italy) in 2013 with a dissertation on Milošević's rise to power in the late 1980s. Following his doctorate, he taught as an external contract lecturer at the same university and at high schools in Italy. He has recently resumed his academic career. Prior to his current position, he was a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Leibniz ScienceCampus "Eastern Europe–Global Area" (EEGA) at the University of Leipzig, Germany, during two periods: June–August 2023 and March–September 2024. He also held a Postdoctoral Fellowship at the Center for Advanced Studies Southeast Europe (CAS SEE) at the University of Rijeka, Croatia, from October 2022 to February 2023 and again in Spring 2023. Additionally, he received a Visegrad Scholarship at the Open Society Archives (OSA) in Budapest, Hungary, which he undertook in February–March 2023.

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An Oasis of Intellectual Freedom: My Experience at the New Europe College

Christian Costamagna

Personal Introduction

My background is interdisciplinary, having earned a BA in Communication Sciences, an MA in International Relations and Human Rights, an MA in Italian Literature, Language and Culture (Philological Track) and a PhD in Historical Sciences. However, the common thread of my studies and research is represented by the recent history of former Yugoslavia, a field I have cultivated over time with great interest and curiosity. My academic path has not been linear and continuous, which is why my professional age as a researcher does not align with my biological age. What has driven me since youth has been the desire to understand the causes of the conflict in Yugoslavia in the 1990s. From a certain perspective, what was the present during my adolescence has become, for chronological reasons, recent history. But the core of my curiosity, while renewing itself and changing perspectives as my knowledge deepened (both purely intellectual knowledge in the world of academic literature and experiential knowledge on site, wherever I travelled and stayed between 1997 and 2025) has remained essentially the same. This is because, as my knowledge and awareness increased, I have repeatedly changed my opinions, ideas, and perspectives. Central to this process has been the long and complex learning of the Serbo-Croatian language, as it would have been called in the not-so-distant past.

When I learned, in the spring of 2024, that I had been admitted as a fellow to NEC, I was particularly enthusiastic and honoured. I had long known that in the Eastern European landscape NEC represented an excellent node within the network of Institutes for Advanced Study. Moreover, I had already attempted the application

about ten years earlier, unfortunately without success. Therefore, the communication I received was doubly important to me, as it was also a message of hope, showing that commitment and perseverance can be rewarded. However, having had no previous direct knowledge of the Institute, or of the city of Bucharest and Romania more generally, I did not know exactly what to expect. But I was firmly convinced that the prospect of an entire academic year dedicated to study and research in a stimulating, new, and dynamic environment would inspire, enrich, and improve me professionally.

The Research Project

My research aims to understand the causes that led to the Kosovo War in 1998–1999 and NATO’s military intervention against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, namely the aerial bombing of the country from March to June 1999. I should premise that I am aware this is an ambitious objective from many points of view, because it concerns a relatively recent event, and various archival collections are not yet accessible and probably will not be for several years. Also, because it is an extremely vast topic, and it is a theme that has seen the production, in about a quarter of a century, of thousands of articles, chapters, monographs, papers, etc., whose reading and consultation would probably go beyond the capabilities of a single researcher. Not to mention the necessary linguistic skills to consult sources in some of the main European languages. However, while aware of the intrinsic and extrinsic limits of this research work, I have chosen to operate on two parallel tracks. To understand the causes and internal dynamics of the conflict, and particularly Belgrade’s point of view (capital of then Yugoslavia), both from a political and military perspective, I have focused on declassified Yugoslav and Serbian sources, digitized and archived online, used by the ICTY during the trials of Slobodan Milošević and other Yugoslav state leaders. Regarding the causes that moved NATO to intervene, I have had to partially remodulate my ambitions in the absence of NATO documents, relying instead on a substantial corpus of declassified documents from the second Clinton administration in the United States. To a lesser extent, but no less importantly,

some declassified documents from the British government of the time have also contributed to adding some important elements to understand certain dynamics of those historical events. The working hypotheses have partially overlapped and been modified during the work. For example, on the NATO side or, more precisely, the United States, there was a general approach metaphorically similar to a medical intervention in which, to protect their national and security interests in Europe, there was a need to stabilize the former Yugoslav area and include it in the broader general trend of democratization that had begun in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Belgrade's ethno-nationalist policies, begun in the late 1980s, and the armed reaction to such policies by the Kosovo Liberation Army, especially from 1997 onward, would have pushed Washington, albeit gradually and with strong uncertainties, toward a form of assertive diplomacy, up to its extreme limit, to prevent a large-scale conflict in the region and all its potential consequences.

My approach falls within Digital History. By this I mean that I use digitized sources made available online by archives, such as the Clinton Presidential Library or The National Archives in London. I can define myself as an enthusiastic user of this type of source, because it allows virtual access from anywhere in the world without having to undertake expensive trips that pollute the environment. My strategy has been to consult recently declassified and released documents because, when compared to each other and to the existing academic literature on the topic, as well as other sources such as memoirs and autobiographies of some of the main political and military figures involved, it is possible to reconstruct some aspects, dimensions, and dynamics that would otherwise be incomprehensible, indemonstrable, or sometimes unimaginable.

During my stay at NEC, I managed to complete two book chapters, present my research work at two international conferences (Tutzing and Pristina), present my work at three distinct academic venues in Bucharest, obviously including NEC, as well as participate in other conferences (including one in Pristina and others in Bucharest at NEC), seminars, both in-person and hybrid, workshops, including one in Graz, and organize a webinar with five

international experts who work on the same topics. I'm working on a journal article, and another will be drafted before the end of the fellowship. I gave an interview for an English-language think tank on the recent demonstrations in Serbia, and the contents of my presentation at the Pristina conference last February were covered in an article on the website of the Kosovar daily Koha. Furthermore, I have had the opportunity to submit various applications, a type of activity that requires a lot of time, with highly uncertain outcomes, but fundamentally necessary, with the aim of being able to continue the research path I have undertaken (I would like to thank all those who have supported me in this process and, in this context, special thanks to the NEC Rector, Prof. Valentina Sandu-Dediu for her generous support). So far, one of these applications has been successful and will allow me to continue my work at a prestigious European university during the Winter Semester 2025–2026. Throughout the duration of my NEC fellowship, I have been able to extend my contacts through networking and create new professional relationships with international researchers.

Progress has been made in several directions. First, the exchange of ideas with my co-fellows at NEC, who, with diligent patience, have subjected my research to fruitful and important feedback, has helped me broaden my perspectives. Furthermore, I have had the time and mental space to consult and reflect on the numerous digital sources I have collected over time, often archiving them in a folder on my laptop, but without having sufficient time to investigate the material more deeply, given its vastness. One of the most important results is having consolidated some of my initial research hypotheses. For example, I have managed to isolate some of the probable motivations that ultimately pushed NATO to intervene, although at the current stage I cannot affirm beyond any doubt that they are absolutely correct, and they could therefore be subject to future revisions. Among the probable causes, as detected in American documents from 1998 and 1999, I can indicate, for example, in no necessarily hierarchical order, fears of the outbreak of a regional-scale conflict in the Balkans over Kosovo, the risk of breaking the fragile peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina after the

1995 Dayton Accords, NATO's credibility (and, consequently, that of the USA in case they had not intervened), as well as the risk that Serbia could have generated, through the mass expulsion of Kosovar Albanian civilians, a massive and persistent presence of refugees in countries neighboring Serbia, destabilizing the region and shifting the burden to the international community. Obviously, the list is not complete and each single instance would deserve an in-depth analysis. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to a scholar who accompanied me during my doctorate, many years ago now, and beyond. I thank my doctoral supervisor, Lecturer Guido Franzinetti, who taught me and encouraged me to interpret sources with due caution and to cultivate doubt.

Although it was not possible to access archives or specialized libraries useful for my research purposes in Bucharest, I managed to overcome this obstacle in various ways. Clearly the first way was to exploit the digitized resources already collected previously. Secondly, when bibliographic resources were not available at NEC, I was able, thanks to my host, to obtain some significant texts for my research. Finally, what allowed me to explore new directions and test the consistency of new archival collections was the experience of the research trip generously supported by NEC. Specifically, in May, I was able to spend about three weeks in Kosovo, conducting field research primarily as a guest at the archives of the Kosovo Institute for War Crimes (IKKL). Thanks to the courtesy of all the IKKL staff (a special thanks to Atdhe Hetemi, Director of the Institute), I managed to investigate some Yugoslav and Serbian documents that remained in Kosovo after the beginning of the international administration established by the technical-military agreements of Kumanovo in June 1999.

The research experience has been largely satisfactory compared to what was anticipated. In fact, originally, I did not yet have a clear idea of whether to take the research trip to Kosovo or elsewhere. And should I have gone to Kosovo, the outcome would have been essentially uncertain, especially in the absence of online catalogs with source descriptors. Without doubt, I began to reflect on aspects that were originally barely sketched ideas with uncertain

contours. For example, I began to reflect on other themes connected to the Kosovo war, such as the local dimension experienced on the territory and not only the political decisions taken at the top of the state—for instance, in the actions of Belgrade’s security forces in Kosovo. This has contributed to broadening my vision and my perspectives of research and understanding of historical events. I am indebted, as always, to many people, but in this case, I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. Constantin Ardeleanu, Academic Coordinator of NEC.

Academic Interactions

During this academic year spent at NEC, I have learned much from my colleagues as well as from the NEC staff. One of the central aspects, if not the central one, concerns interdisciplinarity and intellectual curiosity as well as open-mindedness. Because, while it is true that it is objectively not possible to become omniscient, it is intellectually healthy and positive to step out of one’s comfort zone of a hyperspecialist in a small field of knowledge, and confront other specialists, because in this way opportunities for learning present themselves, from one’s peers, of different working methods, research approaches to sources and texts. Furthermore, one can understand how to communicate with non-specialists in one’s field and be oriented toward a broader audience. I would like to spend some words of sincere thanks to my co-fellows. Thanks to them I have been able to improve my skills, both in terms of method and communication, but also in other areas, crucial for those involved in research, such as sharing information about calls or discussing how to write application projects. These are extremely important soft skills in the field of research and beyond.

Social, Cultural and Environmental Experience

NEC represents an oasis of intellectual freedom and active support for research. All the staff is extremely professional, expert, and shows constant courtesy and kindness. The weight of bureaucracy is virtually eliminated, and one can immerse oneself in one’s work.

With all the NEC staff members with whom I have most interacted, from the Program Coordinators (special thanks to Ana, Ana-Maria, Ioana), to the Publications Coordinator (Andreea) to the Library (thanks particularly to Mihaela and Ilinca) as well as the IT sector (Dragos, for helping me patiently with the printer), and also the financial department (Cristi), I have always found an open door, professionalism, and a smile. I cannot find words to thank everyone heartily.

NEC's facilities are ideal, because they offer all the necessary services and spaces, from dedicated desk spaces to the library with various rooms, broadband Wi-Fi, the printers, a coffee machine and so on. Furthermore, NEC's elegant building, while being in a central area of the capital, is located in a quiet residential neighborhood, well connected by public transport. The accommodation offered by NEC, which is located a short distance from the Institute and easily reachable on foot, is excellent, well-furnished and equipped with everything necessary, practical and comfortable. Moreover, if necessary, it is also possible to visit other libraries in the center or close to it, such as the National Library and the University Library.

At NEC the cultural offering is comprehensive and ranges from weekly fellows' seminars, to conferences, lectures, webinars, and other activities in the field of humanities, with subjects ranging from democracy and rule of law in Eastern Europe to cultural and literary studies, historical transformations, biblical studies, philosophy, musical performances, and contemporary debates on society and politics. One of the moments that created a sense of community, experienced with cordial pleasure and conviviality by all the members, was on Wednesday, on the occasion of the usual lunch offered by NEC to the fellows, after the weekly seminar. Often, during and after lunch, deep discussions about our research opened. As a human being, even before being a historian dealing with a recent conflict in Eastern Europe (the Kosovo War), my thoughts go to the numerous Ukrainian colleagues and their families, for the enormous sacrifices to which they have been subjected

during three years of military invasion and daily bombing by the Russian Federation.

In the initial phase of the fellowship, thanks also to the collaboration of former fellows, NEC proposed a series of cultural activities, such as guided tours of the city, which allowed for socializing as well as getting to know the territory. Living in a European capital certainly grants many privileges. One of these is being able to visit, on weekends, part of the city's numerous museums, to learn at least a little of the history and culture of Romania. Being a native Italian speaker, and therefore of a neo-Latin language like Romanian, it was not so difficult for me to understand a bit of the language, including the descriptive panels in museums. The city parks are also very well maintained and pleasant. Special thanks go to our colleague Raluca-Maria Trifa, who, with great generosity and patience, revealed to us the secrets of Bucharest's architecture and introduced the NEC fellows to various musical events in the city, as well as to interesting excursions in the region and beyond, such as the trip to Braşov. A small personal note: I was surprised to find seagulls in Bucharest and amused by the steam rising from the manhole covers, which reminded me of New York City.

Personal Reflections

The experience at NEC has broadened my worldview, bringing me in contact with excellent Romanian and international scholars, each of whom has brought a benefit and left a mark on my experience and reflections. I have learned that research is never exhausted in the achieved results but is nourished by confrontation with others. If there is a lesson that this experience has left me, it is that being a researcher means, first of all, being capable of questioning oneself, of listening, and of remaining curious, even (and especially) in the face of one's own certainties.

During these months spent at NEC, I believe I have learned much, both on a professional, personal and human level. Similarly, it has been interesting to meet people whom I would never have met if it had not been for the experience at NEC, and to discover

that with some of them I share contacts, experiences, and similar aspirations and interests.

Conclusions

The experience at NEC has been crucial for continuing my research, for having the time and resources to dedicate myself to my work, and to come into contact with a community of international scholars. I hope to have contributed at least a fraction of what I have been able to generously receive. I believe that NEC is the ideal environment for conducting research, in an intellectually free and stimulating environment. This experience has contributed substantially and importantly to consolidating my professional profile.

In reiterating my most sincere thanks to all the NEC staff for having welcomed me warmly and to my esteemed colleagues, I would like to add a personal note, addressed to my family. I would like, in this context, to thank my partner, Luisa, for having generously supported me and accepted my path during these months, in which we have been (most of the time) apart. It has been both a practical and emotional challenge. Last but certainly not least in importance, I want to address my beloved children, Sofia and Diego, and ask their forgiveness for my prolonged absence as their father. Evening WhatsApp video calls can never compensate for the time we have been apart during their childhood. I hope, however, that one day when they are adults, they may—if not justify—at least understand the passion for knowledge that has guided my choices and that I have tried to transmit to them by taking them to libraries and bookstores, and especially through our reading together. Through my example, I want to show them never to lose hope when pursuing a big dream.

Oleksandra Demianenko worked as an Associate Professor at Bohdan Khmelnytsky National University of Cherkasy (Ukraine) and as a columnist for All-Ukrainian newspaper *The Mirror of the Week*. In 2023 she was a Visiting Fellow at the Institute for Human Sciences (IWM) in Vienna and completed an internship at the Austrian Institute for International Affairs. She gained experience in public opinion research as an analyst at the Center for Analytical Research “Pragma” and served as a political consultant in the Ukrainian Parliament (2012—2014) and the Cherkasy Regional Council (2020—2022). Her research focuses on civil society, decentralization, and social policy in Ukraine.

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Social Protection under Decentralization and Martial Law: Research Reflections from New Europe College

Oleksandra Demianenko

As my fellowship at New Europe College came to a close, I often found myself reflecting on just how transformative this year had been. I arrived in Bucharest with a research project focused on social protection in Ukraine in the context of two defining forces: the decentralization reform, launched in 2014, which profoundly reshaped public governance in the country; and the state of martial law imposed following Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022.

Even prior to the fellowship, I had combined academic inquiry with practical political work. As a political adviser to a member of the Cherkasy Regional Council, I was in direct contact with local authorities—the newly established *hromadas* (amalgamated local communities), which have become the cornerstone of Ukraine's new administrative and territorial structure. This unique synergy of theory and practice allowed me to explore real-life success and failure cases and to analyze how both objective (institutional capacity, financing) and subjective (leadership, human agency) factors influenced the outcomes of decentralization on the ground.

My analytical materials resonated not only within academic circles but also reached a broader audience through national media—in particular, I was published in *Dzerkalo Tyzhnia* (*The Mirror of the Week*), a respected Ukrainian newspaper known for its in-depth political and social analysis.

With the start of Russia's full-scale invasion, my topic took on new dimensions. Social policy and protection systems became not just matters of administrative design, but issues of human survival. Social protection turned into a core component of what political theorists call human security—the capacity of a state to ensure the safety, dignity, and well-being of its people during an existential crisis. How do local governments respond to war-related shocks?

How are basic needs met under constant threat? What happens to the balance of responsibilities between the central state and municipalities? And how do innovation and technology enable resilience?

New Europe College provided me with a unique environment for deep interdisciplinary reflection. Weekly seminars, informal conversations with fellows, collaborative workshops—all of these widened my perspective and sharpened my research questions. This text summarizes the aims, methods, findings, and reflections of the research I conducted during my time at NEC, highlighting not only scholarly insights but also the personal experience of a researcher working at the intersection of theory, practice, and public policy.

Research Goals and Methodology

The objective of my study was to analyze how the decentralization reform reshaped social protection mechanisms in Ukraine and how these evolved under the extreme conditions of martial law. My specific goals included

1. analysis of the transformation of social protection policy implementation during Ukraine's decentralization process;
2. case-based exploration of social protection practices under martial law at the municipal, regional, and national levels; and
3. assessment of the role of digital tools and online services in the delivery of social protection during wartime.

Over the course of the research, the project evolved to incorporate a conceptual lens—the idea of human security as articulated by sociologist Mary Kaldor and adopted in the UNDP's *Human Development Report* (1994). This “new security paradigm” shifts the focus from protecting the state to safeguarding individuals—their lives, dignity, and capacity to function during crises. It provides a valuable framework for understanding social protection not merely as a form of welfare policy, but as a core pillar of national security in the face of contemporary threats.

My approach combined multiple methods: policy and legal analysis; review of empirical cases from various regions and local communities in Ukraine; study of government reports and legislation from the Ministry of Social Policy, the Verkhovna Rada committees on Social Policy and Veterans' Rights, and the Commissioner for Human Rights; and analysis of international reports from the World Bank, International Labour Organization (ILO), European Commission, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

Key Findings

The decentralization reform, despite its ambitious design, revealed significant disparities in implementation. Local outcomes depend not just on legal frameworks but on human capacity, leadership, fiscal autonomy, and civic engagement. Some communities developed innovative social service practices, while others remained confined to basic administrative functions. This exacerbated systemic fragmentation and territorial inequality.

The full-scale war exposed the structural weaknesses of local governance even more starkly. *Hromadas* became frontline responders to the humanitarian crisis—hosting displaced persons, supporting vulnerable populations, and improvising emergency services. In this context, social protection was no longer merely a bureaucratic function but a vital lifeline for human security.

Yet decentralization also brought challenges: lack of coordination, uneven access to resources, and institutional gaps at the local level. Rural communities in particular faced severe personnel shortages, limited budgets, and overburdened social workers. These inequalities risked eroding trust in public institutions and increasing social fragmentation.

The research led me to a fundamental conceptual shift: from viewing social protection as a system of material assistance to seeing it as a structure for ensuring human security. When local governments are under-resourced and support systems are fragmented, the principle of equal protection is jeopardized. Without strong

coordination and capacity, decentralization may turn from a resilience tool into a source of instability.

One promising response to these challenges has been Ukraine's rapid digital transformation. The creation of the Unified Information System of the Social Sphere (UISSS), the integration of social services into the Diia platform, and the launch of the Ministry of Social Policy's digital portal in 2025 were critical steps toward streamlining services, reducing bureaucracy, and enhancing transparency. According to the UN e-Government Development Index, Ukraine ranked forty-sixth in 2022—a remarkable achievement under wartime conditions. However, digital solutions are not a substitute for human empathy and contextual understanding, particularly in work with vulnerable populations.

Another crucial insight is the role of informal actors in filling institutional voids. Volunteers, faith-based groups, and civil society organizations often provided faster and more targeted responses than state structures. Their contributions highlight the need to formally recognize and integrate such efforts into national frameworks of social protection. Without this integration, informal efforts may remain fragmented and unsustainable.

Reflection on the above-mentioned factors led me to conclude that in the post-war period strengthening social protection must become a core priority of national policy in Ukraine. This means overcoming fragmentation, ensuring fair resource allocation, increasing institutional capacity at the local level, and developing professional skills among social service providers. It also requires integrating informal support systems—volunteers, religious groups, and community-based initiatives—into national strategies. These actors often respond faster and more effectively than formal institutions.

Long-term rebuilding efforts should be guided by an inclusive understanding of well-being that goes beyond economic indicators. The trauma of war has generated new forms of vulnerability—psychological, social, and existential. Social protection systems must evolve to address these layered forms of insecurity, using tools such as community-based care, trauma-informed services, and participatory planning.

The war has shown that community resilience is built not only through funding and infrastructure, but through social capital: trust, solidarity, and connectedness. The future of social protection in Ukraine lies at the intersection of effective public policy, digital innovation, human empathy, and civic responsibility.

To conclude, Ukraine's social protection system faces extraordinary strain amid ongoing challenges. However, this crisis also presents a critical opportunity to advance decentralization reform with a renewed emphasis on human dignity, strengthening local capacities, and promoting sustainable development. Social protection must be understood not as a peripheral issue but as a cornerstone of Ukraine's democratic and social reconstruction. Decentralization goes beyond technical adjustments; it represents a profound political and moral challenge—a test of effective local governance, committed leadership, and community solidarity in the face of adversity.

Academic Collaboration and Public Engagement

A major highlight of my fellowship was immersion in NEC's interdisciplinary and international community. Conversations with fellows from fields like philosophy, history, political science, and literature offered unexpected insights and challenged my disciplinary assumptions. I came to see social policy not just as a set of metrics or service delivery schemes, but as a mirror of societal values: dignity, solidarity, and collective responsibility.

A particularly rewarding dimension of my fellowship was organizing joint educational initiatives for Ukrainian students. Together with Olena Uvarova (*SUS* fellow 2024–25), we held an online guest lecture for students of Odesa National Medical University (Ukraine) entitled “Civil Society in Ukraine: The Experience of Solidarity During the War.” I also co-organized an international online workshop with Daniel Filip-Afloarei (*Stefan Odobleja* fellow 2024–25) for students of Bohdan Khmelnytsky National University in Cherkasy (Ukraine) on the theme “The Polish Revolution of the 1980s and the Neo-Stalinization of the Romanian Regime.” These initiatives were not only educational but also symbolic acts

of academic solidarity at a time when many Ukrainian students and faculty continue to work and study under extreme circumstances, while also deepening the understanding of key topics and expanding the horizons for future collaboration.

Thanks to the network of Institutes for Advanced Study, I had the opportunity to participate in international events, including

- the *Sustaining Ukrainian Scholarship* workshop (March 7, 2025, CAS Sofia), where I joined a panel on “The Future of Slavic/Transnational Studies in Eastern Europe”;
- the international conference *Alarmed Science: Knowledge Production in a State of Emergency* (January 20–22, 2025, Budapest, Hungary), organized by VUIAS / CEU IAS, where I spoke as a panelist on “Emergency Funding Mechanisms & Grants Economy During the War,” addressing the risks of donor-driven research agendas, the brain drain, and the challenge of rebuilding academic infrastructure; and
- the Fellows Round Table *The Relevance of the Humanities in the Digital Age* (July 3, 2025, NEC), where I presented on “Digital Technologies and Their Impact on Political Participation: Opportunities and Threats.”

These engagements were more than professional obligations. They were opportunities for mutual learning and moments of genuine connection between scholars navigating a rapidly transforming world.

Research trip

One of the most valuable aspects of my fellowship at New Europe College was the opportunity to undertake a short-term research visit to the European University Institute (EUI) in Italy, generously supported by NEC. This visit proved to be exceptionally enriching both intellectually and professionally. The stimulating academic environment, access to world-class resources, and the welcoming scholarly community at EUI greatly contributed to advancing my research project.

During my time at EUI, I engaged in a variety of academic events, consultations, and discussions focused on comparative

analyses of European social protection models, with the aim of applying these insights to the Ukrainian context. Highlights of the visit included attending the EUI Workshop on Political Behaviour in Central and Eastern Europe. These experiences broadened my understanding of current political research trends and provided valuable perspectives on the societies of Ukraine's neighboring countries—Hungary, Romania, Poland, Slovakia and the Balkans.

Additionally, I participated in the international conference *European Politics in Turbulent Times: Risk, Resilience, Reaction*, organized by the Robert Schuman Centre, which focused on key themes such as democratic legitimacy, post-truth politics, and security and defence challenges—topics highly relevant given the current challenges Ukraine faces during wartime, especially in light of Ukraine's prospects for EU membership, global changes, and the increasing threats to stability both within the EU and worldwide.

Thanks to the comprehensive resources of the EUI Library and its digital network, I was able to gather important data that significantly enhanced the analytical base of my project.

Overall, this research trip offered a unique chance to refine my study framework, build academic networks, and participate in important debates on European integration, governance, and resilience. The insights gained will be directly integrated into my ongoing research, helping to contextualize Ukraine's social policy transformation within broader European reform processes.

Closing Reflections

This academic year has been transformative—both for me as a researcher and as a person. It taught me that academic work is not only about texts, concepts, or data, but also about trust—in the people with whom you share a space for thinking; about responsibility—to the society you come from; and about silence—the inner kind in which real questions begin to form. I came to NEC with a project, and I leave with the awareness that research doesn't always provide answers, but it always teaches us to ask honest questions. Sometimes, that is enough to keep one's inner compass steady in times when everything around feels uncertain.

Throughout my time at NEC, I was able not only to deepen my current research but also to gain clarity on the broader directions for my future academic and public engagement. Attention to detail, the ability to think across disciplines, openness to dialogue, and an overview of European and international perspectives are tools I now carry with me as I embark on new research projects and collaborative initiatives. These skills will be essential in navigating the complex and evolving challenges of rethinking social protection in Ukraine under decentralization and martial law, as well as in contributing to ongoing efforts to strengthen democratic governance and social resilience.

I leave NEC with deep gratitude—for the space to think, for the colleagues who inspired me, and for the intellectual community that made room for Ukraine’s experience as a source of valuable knowledge about challenges and resilience in the face of adversity. I am especially grateful to the NEC team for their warm professionalism, to my fellow researchers for their support, and to the broader academic network for embracing Ukraine as part of the shared European scholarly space and facilitating its further integration as an equal partner.

Thank you.



Between October 2024 and July 2025, **Adelin Dumitru** benefited from an AMEROPA fellowship at New Europe College. He is also Assistant Professor at the National University of Science and Technology POLITEHNICA Bucharest, as well as a researcher at the Romanian National Council for Refugees. He has a PhD in Political Science, although in his research activity he has focused mostly on political theory and political philosophy. He has published articles in journals such as *Perspectives on Politics*, *Journal of Value Inquiry*, *Philosophia*, *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, *Ethical Perspectives*. He is currently interested in democratic theory and, more specifically, in identifying institutional innovations that can safeguard democracy from an increasing number of real-world challenges, most significantly the dangerous allure exerted by ethno-populism.

“Leave It to the People.” Inheritance Taxation and Open Democracy

Adelin-Costin Dumitru

I started my fellowship at New Europe College in a real-world context marked by a worrisome worldwide decline in the quality of democracy. Things would not get much better over the course of the next couple of months, as the capacity of democratic institutions to resist shocks has been continuously tested by electoral gains made by populist parties and movements. Romania itself faced its most significant political crisis at the end of 2024 when, for the first time in its history, a major election had to be cancelled by the Constitutional Court, pursuant to evidence that the integrity of the first round of the presidential elections had been tampered with to such a degree that any outcome would have been illegitimate. This decision was followed by a whirlwind of events that truly tested the limits of Romania’s democratic institutions up to the successful second attempt to organize the presidential elections in May 2025. The end of 2024 also witnessed political crises in France and South Korea, while the first half of 2025 was marked by a generalized feeling that democracy is under siege.

A similar worry is highlighted by looking at the recent literature on democratic theory. Contemporary approaches to democracy emphasize that, empirically, we face increasing challenges that affect democratic societies, ranging from failures to properly represent citizens’ preferences to crises that shatter the very foundations of democracy. Electoral crises, like the one that monopolized public attention in Romania in early 2025, are just one form such crises could take. The widespread use of the twin concepts of “democratic backsliding” and “democratic erosion” highlights an issue that Collier and Levitsky had first mentioned in 1997: is “democracy-with-adjectives” really a signifier of the essence of democracy?*

* David Collier and Steven Levitsky, “Democracy with Adjectives. Conceptual

Or have we already taken too many steps on the path to authoritarian rule once we have to qualify democracy with increasingly more convoluted labels?

On the other hand, we have witnessed the emergence of a new literature, focused on the causes and forms of democratic resilience, reflecting the capacity of an institutional framework to insulate itself from the adverse effects mentioned beforehand. This direction is not completely separate from another one, which starts from the premise that we can have multiple instantiations of democracy. Many of the research agendas associated with this direction emphasize the necessity of dealing with what Guerrero calls “the failure of responsiveness,”* the incapacity of democratic systems to fulfill the vital function of representation. Replacing or supplementing electoral mechanisms with sortition, institutionalizing deliberative democracy, moves toward “open democracy,”† all are attempts to revitalize democracy and to strengthen the normative foundations of the concept. What they—together with many other empirical and normative approaches—have in common is the fact that they put forth the necessity of democratic innovations (be they citizen assemblies, mechanisms to develop civic culture, rediscovering institutions such as the Tribune, or proposals to safeguard the conditions for democracy for future generations, to name just a few).

My research project at New Europe College focused on one such innovation (the mini-public), intertwined with the idea that citizens themselves can properly rule, once a proper institutional framework is set up in a polity. Far from the pressures of competitive, adversarial politics, human beings are quite competent decision-makers, as epistemic defenses of democracy‡ or Con-

Innovation in Comparative Research,” *World Politics* 49 (1997): 430–451.

* Alexander Guerrero, “Against Elections: The Lottocratic Alternative,” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 42 (2) (2014): 135–178.

† Helene Landemore, *Open Democracy. Reinventing Popular Rule for the Twenty-first Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020).

‡ Helene Landemore, “Deliberation, Cognitive Diversity, and Democratic Inclusiveness: An Epistemic Argument for the Random Selection of Representatives,”

dorcet’s jury theorem* have long held. Such assumptions are vital for those approaches in deliberative democracy which emphasize the role of mini-publics—“structured deliberations among microcosms of the public that generate recommendations, monitor government, and sometimes directly contribute to enacting policy.”[†] The idea that I had for this research project is one that operates within the framework of optimism regarding the potential of ordinary citizens to take proper, normatively acceptable decisions, once an institutional framework of the right kind is at work in society. It was also concerned with the fact that inequalities disrupt the potential of deliberation.[‡] In this context, I wanted to connect discussions on the far-reaching effects of inheritance with discussions taking place within deliberative democracy—and, more specifically, ones that start from what Landemore calls open democracy,[§] a model in which access to power is facilitated to ordinary citizens through different channels, such as delegating votes to trusted representatives, voting in referenda, contributing to an initiative, or participating in randomly selected assemblies.

Normative discussions of inheritance taxation can be placed on a continuum where one end is occupied by right libertarianism, which “insists that resources are not manna from heaven waiting to be distributed, but something to which individuals have entitlements, and this entitlement includes the full right to transfer resources to others,”[¶] and the other by strict equality of opportunity, according to which “the perspective of the giver must be

Synthese 190 (2013): 1209–1231.

* David Austen-Smith and Jeffrey Banks, “Information Aggregation, Rationality, and the Condorcet Jury Theorem,” *The American Political Science Review* 90, no. 1 (1996): 34–45.

† Christopher Karpowitz, Chad Raphael and Allen Hammond, IV, “Deliberative Democracy and Inequality: Two Cheers for Enclave Deliberation Among the Disempowered,” *Politics & Society* 37, no. 4 (2009): 576–615, p. 578.

‡ Jack Knight and James Johnson, “What Sort of Equality Does Deliberative Democracy Require?,” in *Deliberative Democracy. Essays on Reason and Politics*, ed. by James Bohman and William Rehg (1997): 279–320.

§ Landemore, *Open Democracy*.

¶ Jorgen Pedersen, “Just Inheritance Taxation,” *Philosophy Compass* 13, no. 4 (2018).

ignored because of the importance of ensuring each individual an equal start in life.”* Most of the accounts of inheritance taxation, however, are situated between these two points. The question asked is not whether or not to forbid bequest, but rather how to restrict the right to bequest (which most of the times involves taxation). The effects of inheritance are far-reaching—for instance, Lafaye mentions that 67 percent of the wealth of the super-rich in the United States could be traced back to inheritance[†] (and this percentage has probably increased since 2008!). It is very easy to draw the conclusion that one of the leading causes of the disconnect between law-making and citizen preferences starts from the very issues of bequests. To this, one can add that such inequalities form a background of injustice that is bound to influence the quality of deliberations, and you’ve got all the ingredients for a potential failure of an otherwise normatively compelling institution.

My work at New Europe College has focused on identifying the proper form that a mini-public should take, and on arguing for experimenting with open democracy, beginning with the topic of inheritance taxation. Nonetheless, the contribution that New Europe College has already made for my academic career is much larger than this rather limited research direction that I described so far.

It is due to this fellowship that I had the opportunity to meet other researchers from a variety of other fields, that opened my eyes to new and intriguing ways of thinking about the world. I have taken advantage of the Wednesday seminars, where each of us had to present their work in progress, to familiarize myself with completely novel research directions that I might want to explore, at least marginally, in the future. I have managed to present my work at New Europe College in multiple academic settings, from the University of South Florida to the University of Porto. I have had the honor of organizing a workshop on democratic innovations at New Europe College in June, and to realize how many political theorists

* Pedersen, “Just Inheritance Taxation.”

† Caroline Lafaye, “Ethics of Inheritance,” *Philosophy Today* 52, no. 1 (2008): 25–35.

have turned their attention to the dangers that our democracies face nowadays.

I think that one of the most significant results that I have gotten out of my research is realizing the fact that all of us—whether we are researchers, activists, or “just” citizens—have to do our part in safeguarding democracy. We must ensure that democracy will not be the exception—a failed experiment in the history of forms of government. For too long, we might have taken for granted the fact that democracy constituted “the end of history.”* Recent events show us that this is far from being the case, and that democracy needs to be defended—and innovated, lest it becomes an empty shell. This is the research direction on which I aim to focus in the future. I believe that the time that I have spent at New Europe College (which seems too short, now that I think about it!) has been vital in consolidating this research interest that I’ve too long focused on as being simply a matter of academic inquiry. Turns out that having the opportunity to properly reflect upon the real-world relevance of your work does wonders!

I’m ending this fellowship at New Europe College much more optimistic regarding the resilience of democracy than I imagined. In one of the most complicated years that our world has seen for a long time, one in which the erosion of democracy will probably be highlighted once again in the reports of organizations such as Freedom House, V-Dem or the IDEA Institute, I have gained confidence in the potential of democratic institutions to escape crises. But there is nothing magical, deterministic or surreptitious about that—instead, this is only going to hold if proper steps are taken to innovate democracy. Nadia Urbinati concludes one of her recent articles on populism by mentioning that “in the end, seeing democracy as an ideology leaves us with no argument against internal political adversaries of democracy.”† I believe that to leave democracy as it is means to treat it as an ideology. Instead, democracy

* Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?,” *The National Interest* 16 (1989): 3–18.

† Nadia Urbinati, “Political Theory of Populism,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 22 (2019): 111–127.

needs to be innovated and improved. New institutions, new venues for facilitating citizen representation, new settings in which citizens can truly express their interests are needed. The path forward will not be easy, but I believe that it is possible to save democracy. My research project at New Europe College aimed to offer a possible cure, but it is far from the only one (or the easiest to implement!).

I want to end this brief essay, however, with a distinct idea: how important it is to have an organization such as New Europe College, which offers scholars the opportunity to reflect not only on their academic work, but also on the impact it can have in the real world. There are very few places that I know of in Romania (and elsewhere!) that give researchers such opportunities. I am grateful and honored to have been part of New Europe College even for a while.



Daniel Filip-Afloarei was a fellow of the *Ștefan Odobleja* Program at New Europe College (2024–2025), where he carried out the research project “The ‘Self-Limiting’ Revolution in Poland in the 80s: A Turning Point for the Romanian Communist Regime.” He is currently Expert II at the Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile (IICCMER), Bucharest, within the Research and Special Investigations Unit. He holds a PhD in History since 2022 from the Faculty of History, “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași. His doctoral research, focused on Romanian-Polish relations during the last decade of state socialism, was published in 2023 under the title *Un Deceniu Zbuciumat. România și criza regimului comunist din Polonia în anii '80 (A tempestuous decade. Romania and the crisis of the communist regime in Poland in the 1980s)* (Mega Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca; ISBN: 978-606-020-733-7), and is currently in the process of being translated for publication by the Institute of National Remembrance in Warsaw. Currently he is an expert at The Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile – Bucharest, Romania

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The “Self-Limiting” Revolution in Poland in the 80s: A Turning Point for the Romanian Communist Regime

Daniel Filip-Afloarei

When I began my fellowship at New Europe College in October 2024, I brought with me a set of questions I had long carried as a historian of late communism in Eastern Europe. My project, “The ‘Self-Limiting’ Revolution in Poland in the 80s: A Turning Point for the Romanian Communist Regime,” grew out of previous research into Romanian-Polish relations and a sustained interest in understanding how regimes in the Eastern Bloc responded not only to pressure from above—from Moscow—but also to transformations generated from within the socialist space itself. In this regard, Poland’s Solidarity movement provided an exceptional case study, but also an interpretative challenge: how could a Revolution that defined itself by self-restraint resonate beyond its borders, and particularly in one of the most rigid regimes in the bloc—Ceaușescu’s Romania?

The NEC fellowship provided not only the time and institutional support to address these questions but also the right intellectual atmosphere in which to test, question, and refine them. From the very beginning, the diversity of the academic community—spanning historians, philosophers, political scientists and anthropologists—encouraged a constant exercise in translation: how to make one’s research relevant and comprehensible beyond disciplinary boundaries. This was not simply a stylistic challenge but one that reshaped the way I thought about the historical significance and contemporary relevance of my topic.

The project set out to analyze how the self-limiting revolution in Poland (1980–1989) impacted the ideological and institutional behavior of the Romanian Communist Party. The research was guided by three main objectives. The first one was to trace diplomatic and

political reactions of the Romanian regime to key events in Poland—the emergence of Solidarity in 1980, the imposition of Martial Law in 1981, and the Roundtable negotiations leading to the fall of communism in 1989. The second objective was to examine how Polish events were interpreted, represented, and sometimes instrumentalized in Romanian official discourse, both in internal party documents and public media narratives. Another key objective was to assess how useful analytical concepts like the “turning point” and the “fractal crisis” are for understanding Romania’s path during the broader collapse of Eastern European socialism. Although much of Romanian historiography emphasizes the regime’s isolation and apparent ideological rigidity, I hypothesized that the country’s political elite was, in reality, highly responsive to regional developments. Beneath the surface of self-proclaimed independence and doctrinal consistency, the leadership closely monitored shifts within the Eastern Bloc, adapting its strategies and rhetoric in reaction to perceived threats or opportunities arising from events beyond its borders.

One of the first realizations I had during the initial months at NEC was how deeply the community shaped not only the rhythm but also the substance of the research. Weekly seminars provided a rare combination of rigorous critique and genuine encouragement. Presenting my project on February 19, 2025, to the other fellows, was a pivotal moment. The feedback I received, especially from scholars in political science and philosophy, challenged me to reconsider the theoretical underpinnings of my work—particularly the way I employed the concepts of “anti-politics” and “turning point.” This collegial form of intellectual scrutiny was extremely valuable, and it helped me avoid the common trap of relying on historical “common sense” or inherited Cold War narratives. Moreover, informal conversations in the library or over lunch were often just as stimulating—whether about the legacies of dissent in Eastern Europe, the role of ideology in authoritarian regimes, or the nature of political time. These exchanges led me to rethink the relevance of the Polish case not only in terms of Romania’s communist past, but also in broader conceptual terms—as a model

of how regime adaptation and resistance coexist in tension, not in binary opposition.

By April 2, 2025, I had restructured key sections of the project, following another round of feedback, this time from my colleagues at the Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile (IICCMER). The internal seminar I organized there helped further refine my arguments. One critical suggestion I integrated was the need to better articulate why the “fractal crisis” model was essential for understanding the long *durée* of Romanian ideological responses. I was also encouraged to more clearly distinguish between rhetorical alignment with Soviet narratives and deeper ideological divergences—a line of thought that later fed into the final version of the paper I presented internationally. Throughout these exchanges, both at NEC and at IICCMER, I began to see the full potential of the project as one not simply of historical recovery, but of conceptual re-evaluation. The question shifted from “What did Romania do in response to Poland?” to “What does Romania’s reaction to Poland tell us about the internal logic and limits of late socialist regimes?” The first phase of the project was dedicated to archival research, which began in Romania with the consultation of key collections at the National Archives and the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This stage culminated in a two-week research visit to Warsaw, Poland, between March 10 and 22. In Warsaw, I worked in multiple archival institutions, including the Archives of the New Acts, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, the Digital Archives, and the Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance. The documents revealed a complex diplomatic balancing act: Romania publicly expressed support for the Polish United Workers’ Party, while privately showing signs of concern and unease. The Polish events were both too close to ignore and too dangerous to be acknowledged openly. The visits to Warsaw were not only intellectually fruitful, but also personally challenging, given the linguistic barrier. To address this, I enrolled in Polish language courses at the Faculty of Letters and Foreign Languages, Department of Russian and Slavic Philology, University of Bucharest, under the guidance

of Ms. Justyna Szczepaniak. These courses greatly improved my ability to navigate Polish documents and deepened my appreciation of cultural nuance—an essential asset for interpreting Cold War discourses.

Throughout the academic year, I also had the opportunity to present my findings in national and international forums. In October 2024 I traveled to Warsaw to participate in the international conference *Communist Parties in the Soviet Bloc in 1985–1989: Fall of the System*, organized by the Institute of National Remembrance. My presentation, focusing on Romanian-Polish relations under Gorbachev, prompted insightful questions on the Romanian regime’s oscillation between ideological inflexibility and diplomatic opportunism. In December I attended a commemorative workshop at the “Nicolae Iorga” Institute of History in Bucharest, marking thirty-five years since the Romanian Revolution. My contribution was dedicated to the Polish expressions of solidarity with the Romanian people during the fateful days of December 1989—an angle often overlooked in mainstream narratives. In May 2025, I was invited to speak at the 16th Annual International Conference on Baltic and Nordic Studies, hosted in Sibiu, where I discussed Jaruzelski’s 1985 visit to Bucharest as a performative moment of bloc unity masking deeper fractures. A few days later, on May 15, I presented a paper at the online conference *A Step from Poland, A Step Towards Poland*, organized under the Polish Presidency of the Council of the European Union. This time, I explored the pragmatic dimensions of Romanian-Polish cooperation in times of regional crisis from the 1970s to the 1980s.

One of the most moving experiences during the fellowship came from a less expected invitation: on May 8, I was hosted online by the Department of International Relations and History at the University of Cherkasy, Ukraine, at the initiative of my NEC colleague Oleksandra Demianenko. My presentation on the Polish revolution and the neo-Stalinization of the Romanian regime triggered a lively discussion with Ukrainian students, many of whom drew parallels with their current political and geopolitical context. The symbolic

timing of the event—on V-Day—made it even more powerful, as we reflected on the unfinished struggles for freedom and sovereignty in Eastern Europe.

These research activities would not have had the same depth without the everyday life of NEC, which provided not only infrastructure and access to excellent library resources, but also something rarer: a community of scholars working across languages, disciplines, and generations. I felt genuinely at home in this space of intellectual generosity, whether in formal seminars or informal gatherings—including the light-hearted moments, like the Secret Santa exchange, which reminded us that the life of the mind also needs joy from time to time.

The culmination of my fellowship coincides with the organization of the international workshop *Romania as a Global Cold War Actor in Politics and Culture* at New Europe College on July 9, 2025. Together with my fellow NEC colleague Maria Adamopoulou, I have worked to shape a program that brings together researchers from Central European University (Budapest), the University of Bucharest, the University of Łódź, the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Research on Consequences of War (Graz), Utrecht University, and the Institute of Political Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences. My own presentation, “Romania and the Second Cold War: the Ideological Struggle for the Salvation of Communism in Poland,” brings to the fore many of the questions I have explored during this past year—questions that no longer belong only to the historical past but continue to resonate in our present political imagination. This final event stands not only as a symbolic closure of my year at NEC but also as a concrete outcome of the space of trust and exchange cultivated here. The support of the NEC team, both logistical and intellectual, made it possible to move from an individual research project to a collaborative academic endeavor. I leave this fellowship not only with a more refined scholarly argument but also with a broader sense of how history, memory, and political theory can intersect meaningfully when nourished in the right institutional setting. More than anything, the NEC experience

taught me that the richness of a research journey does not lie in the strict pursuit of conclusions, but in the openness to reframe problems, to let go of assumptions, and to listen to voices from adjacent disciplines, other languages, and different intellectual traditions. The seemingly secondary elements—the discussions over coffee, the walks between seminars, the candid moments in the library—are, in retrospect, just as formative as the formal milestones of any academic year.

In a time marked by historical rupture and war in our region, this fellowship has allowed me to look back at the ideological fractures of the 1980s with renewed urgency and clarity. It has also reminded me that history is not a solitary discipline. It is a collective act of reconstruction and re-imagination—and NEC has been, for me, the most fitting place from which to perform that act.



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Romanian Carpets

Andrea Umberto Gritti

March 30, 2025. While visiting Braşov and its surroundings I step into the fortified church of Hărman with a group of colleagues from NEC. Wiktor nods in my direction, drawing my attention to the Uşak carpets that adorn the walls. I think to myself that their vibrant, intricate patterns perfectly capture the patchwork aesthetic that inspires his research this year. But in the spirit of intellectual exchange that I've often observed at NEC, his gesture points instead toward my own interests. He speaks of the circulation of objects between the Ottoman Empire and Central Europe—of how traces of Ottoman art came to drape the Gothic skeleton of a Saxon church, later inscribed with epitaphs in memory of the faithful fallen in the world wars.

In the months before and after, I used the time that research left free to travel through different regions of Romania. I was struck by the carpet culture that each of them has helped shape. Beyond the techniques of their making—richly documented in ethnographic volumes and museum captions—I became increasingly interested in the history of their circulation and their role in village life. As markers of the prosperity of the families who display them, carpets also retain the warmth of the rooms they adorn.

In reflecting on my experience at NEC, my thoughts return to two notions in particular: affluence and warmth. I mean them in a figurative sense (though I have no complaints about the material conditions of my stay in Bucharest—quite the contrary, I am grateful to NEC!). The carpets I encountered in Romania now furnish the home of my knowledge. In working on my project I sought to expand that home by addressing a question that began to take shape at the end of my doctoral research. I set out to understand how, when, and why the Ottoman administration in the Balkans,

over the course of the nineteenth century, came to adopt principles of governance inspired by political economy—often at the expense of the considerations that had guided its economic actions in earlier periods. To this end, I aimed to build on the findings of my dissertation and to explore how the phases of international trade shaped this institutional transformation.

Over the past several months, I have certainly reflected on the history of trade—in Hărman and elsewhere. But my interlocutors, both at NEC and more broadly in Bucharest and across Romania, encouraged me to explore other questions as well. Discussions within a research group focused on the political and social history of Romania in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, directed by Prof. Constantin Ardeleanu and Prof. Silvia Marton, prompted me to draw comparisons—and note divergences—with regions of the Ottoman Balkans that I know better. I shared my observations on the latter with colleagues at the Institute for Southeast European Studies of the Romanian Academy, from whom I gained valuable insights into other periods of Ottoman history. Equally stimulating were the questions I received from participants in the meetings of the Center for Turkish Studies at the University of Bucharest, organized by Prof. Silvana Rachieru, which helped shape the direction of my subsequent analysis.

Missions and journeys have enriched my intellectual pursuits during these months. Visits to the Ottoman archives in Sofia and Istanbul furnished me with the documents necessary to advance my current research. Realizing how perilous a journey from Bucharest to Ruse can be without a car reinforced my interest in a future project on border fragmentation in Southeast Europe. As I walked along Bulevardul Unirii and ventured into Văcărești Park, I felt myself plunging into the dizzying vertigo of modernity. I emerged with a renewed determination to examine the economic dimensions of nation-building processes in the Balkans. The abandoned factories that served as the backdrop for my train journeys and urban strolls evoked memories of my adolescence in Val Seriana (Bergamo, Italy) and spurred me to compare these experiences with similar processes of de-industrialization.

Both the technical routines of my craft as a historian and the wandering thoughts I allowed myself this year have nourished the conclusions I reached regarding the question at the heart of my project. In the article I wrote at the end of my stay, I proposed a periodization of the Ottoman administration's evolving attitude toward merchants and international trade, divided into three distinct phases. The first phase, lasting until the Crimean War, was marked by consistent opposition to merchant activity, as traders were accused of depleting Ottoman territories of foodstuffs and raw materials essential for the subsistence of the population and for local industries. The second phase, covering the 1850s and 1860s, saw a shift: the participation of Ottoman agricultural producers in international trade was increasingly encouraged. Nevertheless, the administration continued to supervise the distribution of the resulting profits, concerned that they might escape state taxation. In the third phase, beginning in the 1870s, the Empire's deepening financial instability prompted the government—as well as local administrators in the Balkans—to associate merchants and their capital with industrialization plans deemed necessary to redress the growing trade deficit.

If such was the wealth of knowledge that enriched my research, it would not have withstood the test of time had it not been for the warmth provided by the hearth of NEC. As I look back over the calendar of this past year, each month brings its own vivid memories. One evening of Ukrainian music, brought to life by Serhiy, stirred my spirit with melodies of songs I had never heard before. I can't say I fully understood the words that introduced them—except for those thoughtfully translated by Roman. It was November, the season of departures in the agricultural year. Not long after, both would return to Ukraine. A month later, the approach of Christmas was marked by the arrival at NEC of a group of *colindători*. As my imagination drifted toward the vanished scenes of rural life depicted in the photographs hanging in NEC's conference hall, I pictured myself awaiting Christmas on the doorstep of a house painted by Ștefan Luchian. Rather than us individually offering a token in return, as is customary when receiving such beautiful songs,

it was NEC that invited the *colindători* to the Wednesday table—a meal shared each week with those who take part in its community.

Some conversations need not wait for the right season; they arise naturally from the rhythms of daily life. Recurring, as one might expect, are shared reflections on international politics—or non-politics—and on the vocation of the researcher. More fleeting, though no less vivid in this moment of recollection, are certain particularities that stand out. The Latin quotations that opened my exchanges with Liliana. Olena's remarks on the sociability of Odesa and the importance of eating well. My impressions shared with Alena about the best routes through Italy for those drawn to Renaissance art and fortresses.

Just as fleeting are the details that caught me by surprise while traveling the country with Lena. A poster for an upcoming performance of *The Barber of Seville* in Suceava, featuring a singer in a colorful eighteenth-century costume—strikingly juxtaposed with the brutalist architecture of the House of Culture of the Trade Unions to which it was affixed. The sculptures in travertine in Pia-tra Neamț, both skeletal and embracing in their form. The dazzling variety of tropical plants in the Cluj-Napoca Botanical Garden. And the storks' nests perched on pylons lining the roads of Maramureș.

These are traces of the complexity that grants a country its role as a crossroads—both past and present—along the migratory paths of birds as well as the routes through which human civilizations have traveled. It is a complexity in which I might well have lost myself, had I not been able to rely on the steady support of the NEC staff. From the very start, Ana offered her prompt and thoughtful assistance with administrative procedures. Later, Mihaela welcomed me with kindness into the library, where I found many fruitful readings, and offered thoughtful insights into Romania's current affairs and recent history. My understanding of many questions is only just beginning.

I now turn my gaze away from the Romanian carpets I will take with me when I depart. I cannot yet discern all the threads knotted within them. But I will continue to follow their unwinding in the years ahead, hoping to grasp—and perhaps one day emulate—something of their beauty.



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Research Report

Györgyi Horváth

I did not choose NEC by accident. Beyond, of course, my desire to be part of a high-quality academic institution (a wish that has certainly been fulfilled), I was also seeking a place where there are many researchers from so-called “Eastern European” countries, that is, scholars coming from the former Soviet bloc. This was important to me because my research topic—currently focused on Hungarian digital grassroots feminism—while situated within a national interpretive framework, is one I wanted to explore from a comparative perspective as well. To do this meaningfully, I hoped to draw on the experiences and feedback of scholars from countries with similar historical trajectories, specifically, those that joined the European Union in the 2004–2007 enlargement wave. When I first began working on this topic at a so-called “Western” university—that is, within one of the core hubs of global social science knowledge production—I repeatedly encountered the limitations of such a context. The dominant references and frameworks in the field typically emerge from these academic centres and pass through their institutional filters. From within this centre, I found that the “East” was either insufficiently visible or visible only in stereotypical terms. Specifically, while people in the former Eastern Bloc were likely well aware of the contradictions and hypocrisies of official state ideologies long before 1989–1990, many Cold War-era stereotypes still persist (and often vividly) on the “Western” side of the wall. These assumptions subtly influence attitudes toward, and the perceived value of, scholarship emerging on/from post-socialist countries. For this reason, I was especially eager to find an intellectual environment where researchers from both East and West—or more precisely, from both the centre and the

semi-periphery—are present in a more balanced way, and from a diverse array of countries. When I applied to NEC, I reviewed the list of previous fellows and saw that this was exactly the kind of environment I would be joining, and I have not been disappointed.

I'm not sure to what extent NEC is aware of the unique position it holds in Europe—unique at least in certain academic fields. In effect, it has something of a quasi-monopoly: there are very few institutions where, on the one hand, one can apply for longer-term fellowships (not just residencies of a few months), and on the other, one finds such a balanced and intentional mix of “Eastern” and “Western” researchers. For me, it has been an exceptionally refreshing experience to receive feedback and engage in discussions with scholars from countries that are geographically close—sometimes even immediate neighbours—and that often share overlapping histories. This has enriched all of our work with new insights and comparative perspectives. I am convinced that far more opportunities of this kind are needed in European academia. In this sense, I believe the NEC gets the balance just right. The ratio of Romanian to international fellows is nearly equal, and this diversity is further enriched by the presence of the Ukrainian group. I also deeply appreciated that NEC's permanent fellows contribute from this transnational and comparative perspective as well.

On a related note: speaking of history, NEC sometimes feels “history-heavy,” which may make it somewhat more challenging for researchers from other disciplines to engage with the programmes as frequently or intensely as historians do. However, on closer examination of the various programmes and events, I noticed a rich array of offerings in literature, art history, philosophy, religious studies, and the social sciences as well. From a disciplinary standpoint, I was especially pleased to discover NEC's dedicated literary translation programme, as well as its ongoing support for residencies involving artists. Overall, intellectual life at NEC is vibrant. There is always something happening, and the infrastructure is truly excellent. To be honest, I'm quite sad that my fellowship is coming to an end. I could easily imagine spending several more

ten-month periods here: conducting research, engaging with the work of others, meeting fascinating people, and, of course, enjoying the delights of Romanian cuisine at the Wednesday NEC lunches. Thank you again for the opportunity to be here.

Binyamin Hunyadi was born in 1985 in Budapest. He earned his PhD from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where he completed a dissertation on “Yiddish Anarchist Press and Literature, 1890–1918.” His scholarly work explores various facets of Yiddish literary and press history, with articles published in English, Hebrew, Hungarian, and Yiddish, across academic journals and edited volumes. In 2017, he edited and translated into Hungarian the most comprehensive collection to date of Zalmen Gradowski’s writings, composed during his time as a member of the so-called Sonderkommando in Auschwitz (*The Scroll of Auschwitz – In the Heart of Hell*). Most recently, his article on Volf Tambur, a major figure in Yiddish cultural life during the Ceaușescu era in Romania, appeared in *Socialist Yiddishlands: Language Politics and Transnational Entanglements between 1941 and 1991* (2024), a pioneering study of Yiddish creativity behind the Iron Curtain. Hunyadi’s literary translations have likewise appeared in English, Hebrew, and Hungarian. Currently he is working as an archivist and research assistant at the National Library of Israel.

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The Return of No Return: My Year Investigating Yiddish Writers in Communist Romania

Binyamin Hunyadi

The Israeli writer Yotam Reuveni (1949–2021), born in Iași and raised in the small northeastern Romanian village of Bivolari, emerged as a Jean Genet-like figure within the Israeli Hebrew literary scene from the late 1970s onward. Reuveni’s prose writing, characterized by a dense and evocative stream of consciousness style, marked him as both a literary pioneer and, paradoxically, an anachronism. As Hebrew literature moved toward spare realism or postmodern pastiche, Reuveni clung to a baroque interiority. His stylistic singularity lent his writing a certain artistic depth but simultaneously pushed him to the margins, as though he were insisting on adorning literature with a sensibility that had fallen out of fashion.

The Romanian past that shaped Reuveni’s earliest years surfaces only sparingly in his work, yet its traces are palpable in moments of sensory and symbolic recollection. His writings include a Proustian attention to objects and rituals, such as the bowl of *mămaligă* around which his family gathered, eating without utensils—a scene imbued with both intimacy and estrangement—or the stained glass in his aunt’s apartment, a fragile portal into a forgotten world. These glimpses, however, are mere fragments. They point to a past that Reuveni largely suppressed, aligning with the Israeli ethos of the 1960s and 1970s that encouraged new immigrants to cast off their diasporic identities in favour of a new, homogenized Israeli self.

Reuveni never cultivated a Romanian identity in any overt or sustained way, but this suppression seemed to create a vacuum, a haunting absence that eventually compelled him to revisit the landscape of his youth. This compulsion—what might be called a post-traumatic nostalgia—manifested in a return journey to Romania in the late 1980s. Haunted by the “Black Angel”—a metaphorical

figure in his stylized diaries (*Nocturnal Diary*, vols. 1–3, 1987–1989) symbolizing sickness and malaise, possibly a veiled reference to the AIDS epidemic. This looming spectre perhaps prompted his departure to Bucharest, where he hoped to reconnect with a version of himself that had been buried under layers of historical and personal dislocation.

Yet Reuveni's return to Romania was thwarted by his own interior resistance. During his week-long stay in Bucharest, he never left the confines of his hotel room. His "return" thus remained largely symbolic, a conceptual journey rather than a physical or emotional reconciliation. But the gesture marked a turning point. In the later phase of his life, Reuveni gave voice to the hidden self he had long kept in the shadows. He authored *The Autobiography of Jean Rivian* (2015) in Hebrew, adopting his birth name as a sign of symbolic reintegration. Even the title of his only Romanian-language novel, *Întoarcerea* (*The return*, 2008), echoes the paradox of homecoming in exile—a return haunted by the impossibility of full restoration.

If Reuveni exemplifies the internal exile of a Hebrew writer with Romanian origins, Norman Manea (b. 1936) offers a contrasting yet complementary trajectory—that of a Romanian-Jewish writer in voluntary exile. Manea left Romania as an adult, already an established intellectual, and settled in the United States. When he returned to his native country after the 1989 revolution, his homecoming, too, was fraught with alienation and grief. Manea's strategy for processing his personal and collective trauma was to channel it through the literary persona of Mihail Sebastian (1907–1945), the Romanian Jewish writer and diarist who offered one of the most penetrating critiques of interwar Romanian society. In *Întoarcerea huliganului* (*The Hooligan's Return*, 2006), Manea conjures Sebastian's spectral presence as both a historical witness and a mirror of his own displacement, laying bare the ambivalent yearnings that define diasporic return.

Manea's reflections also engage critically with the Romanian intellectual climate of the 1990s, which sought to sanitize or romanticize the pre-communist past. Nationalist discourses often reframed

Romanian history in terms of mythical continuity, marginalizing the narratives of minorities, especially Jews. Manea's confrontation with this cultural amnesia offers insight into a broader East European trend, wherein the post-communist reclamation of identity frequently involved a selective remembering—one that elided the multiethnic, multilingual realities of the past.

While Manea and Reuveni serve as emblematic figures of Jewish return—haunted, incomplete, and illuminating—the case of the Romanian Yiddish writers under Ceaușescu adds a surprising counterpoint. From the 1970s onward, certain Yiddish writers in Romania were afforded an unusual degree of recognition by the state. In a regime otherwise marked by repression, censorship, and increasing nationalism, these Yiddish writers occupied a peculiar position: marginal yet visible, culturally distinct yet state sponsored. Figures like Volf (Wolf) Tambur (1915–1995) and Haim Goldenstein (1912–1997) became prominent voices in a literary sphere that had all but disappeared elsewhere in Eastern Europe.

Their biographies read like composite portraits of the twentieth century Jewish experience: revolutionary fighters in the Spanish Civil War, partisans in Romania, forced labourers in Hungary, prisoners of war in the Soviet Union, Zionist activists, and communist loyalists. They bore names that shifted across languages and political affiliations—Maior Vladimiru, Volf (Wolf) Tambur (Tamburu), Vladimir Tambour, Jean Koller, Jean Tovjean and Haim Goldenstein—each iteration corresponding to a different phase in their lives, each name a facet of a fractured yet resilient identity.

Unlike the literary pseudonyms of Western modernism, these names were not mere masks but real historical adaptations to rapidly changing circumstances. The writings of Tambur and Goldenstein, and others grouped around the annual Yiddish literary anthology *Bukareshter shriftn* (Bucharest writings, 1978–1988) published in Bucharest, embodied the paradoxes of state-sponsored minority literature. Their works were made possible by Ceaușescu's peculiar cultural agenda, which included a so-called "minor cultural revolution" from the 1970s onward that reimagined Romanian

culture along nationalist communist lines but also promoted ethnic diversity as a sign of Romanian modernity—even as it narrowed the space for actual dissent.

Why would Ceaușescu, whose regime grew increasingly xenophobic and antisemitic, promote Yiddish literature? The answer lies in the instrumentalization of minority culture. Yiddish, by the 1970s, had become a largely symbolic language—a cultural artifact rather than a living medium of mass communication. Its political and subversive potential had been neutralized, making it a relatively “safe” showcase for the regime’s multicultural credentials. In this ironic twist, antisemitism may have played a perverse role in promoting Yiddish: the language’s perceived powerlessness rendered it useful for creating an image of an open, liberal multi-ethnic state.

Yet despite the state’s backing, these Yiddish writers were far from being sycophants of the regime. They exercised remarkable freedom in the literature they produced. Unlike their Romanian or Hungarian language counterparts, they were often exempt from strict censorship simply because the authorities could not read Yiddish and were not particularly interested in fiction written in an obscure language in Romania. Their works were deemed inaccessible and thus harmless. The lack of translations into Romanian further isolated their literary production, creating a peculiar island of expression within a sea of surveillance. This paradoxical autonomy allowed them to explore topics that were otherwise taboo in Romanian literature: the Holocaust (and Romania’s complicity therein), the traumas of collectivization in the 1950s, Jewish vs. communist identity, antisemitism in the Eastern Bloc, state-enforced anti-abortion policies, and the psychological toll of existing as a minority in a communist-nationalist state.

The Yiddish novels of this period were often marked by a sense of fatalism—a resignation to the idea that history cannot be altered but must be endured. Still, they were not stylistically conservative. In contrast to post-Holocaust Yiddish literature in Israel and the United States, which had largely abandoned modernist experimen-

tation that characterized the interwar period, Romanian Yiddish writers adopted avant-garde forms such as the French *nouveau roman*, injecting their narratives with formal innovation even as their themes largely explored Jewish cultural and historical experiences.

In addition to original works, these writers produced translations into Yiddish from German, Hungarian, Romanian, and Ukrainian—an exceptional feat, given the general decline in Yiddish translation across the globe in the second half of the twentieth century. These acts of translation were more than literary exercises; they were gestures of preservation and cultural bridging. By translating the works of other minorities, these writers reaffirmed Yiddish as a medium of cosmopolitan exchange and ensured that it remained a participant in the broader literary currents of Eastern Europe.

One especially notable figure in this context is Anton Celaru (formerly Yoysef Feuerstein, 1919–2010). A journalist, translator, and editor, Celaru worked with various Yiddish publications and was part of the Yiddish broadcast team at the Romanian National Radio. He continued to translate well after the fall of communism, striving to integrate Yiddish literature into Romanian cultural memory. But like his peers, he struggled to train successors. No new generation of Yiddish *kultur-tuers*—a uniquely Yiddish term for cultural activists—emerged to carry the torch.

My own investigations into this world were shaped by the fragmented nature of the sources and the scattered traces of memory. Archival documents, overlooked volumes, marginal notes, forgotten reviews—all of these surfaced through serendipitous encounters. Cultural memory was more discontinuous than buried when it came to Yiddish in Romania. To reconstruct it was to navigate a terrain shaped as much by absence as by presence. I often found myself grappling with fundamental questions: Who owns this legacy? Who is its intended audience in the twenty-first century? What can it teach us about the historical relations between majority and minority cultures in Romania and Eastern Europe? What's the role of a minority language under a totalitarian regime? How may

or did writers subvert the expected aesthetic criteria of social realism? And in more general terms, what are the relations between literature and politics?

At times throughout my research, I felt I was walking through a *hefker-land*—a no-man’s land of cultural heritage, where memory clings to fading artifacts but no longer anchors a living tradition. And yet, this very state of liminality makes the Romanian Yiddish literary corpus all the more poignant. It speaks to an irreparable rupture, but also to the astonishing resilience of a language and its practitioners. It reminds us that even in moments of apparent cultural extinction, voices continue to speak, often from the margins.

The 1989 revolution in Romania transformed the country’s literary landscape irrevocably. With the shift to capitalism, the state-sponsored Yiddish literary culture of the Ceaușescu years lost its institutional support. The last Yiddish book to be published in Romania appeared in 1991—*Tsaytn azoayne* (Such times) by Shloyme Fridental—through the Kriterion Publishing House. Since then, Yiddish publishing in Romania has effectively ceased.

Yet one institution endures: the State Yiddish Theatre in Bucharest (Teatrul Evreiesc de Stat / TES / Dos bukareshter yidisher melukhe-teater). Its continued existence serves as a kind of memento mori. The theatre rarely performs in Yiddish today, and its connection to the Yiddish theatrical tradition is tenuous at best. Still, its presence testifies to a longing—to fill a cultural void, to preserve a memory that no longer fits easily into contemporary Romanian identity. In this sense, it mirrors the Yiddish writers of the 1970s and 1980s who produced work in a language with no immediate audience, attempting to restore a culture from a place of irreversible loss, or to go back to the title of this short essay, to produce an echo of a return from a point of no return. They, like Reuveni and Manea in their different registers, remind us that the return is always partial, haunted, and deferred. And yet, perhaps it is precisely in this haunting—this impossible return—that a deeper cultural truth resides.



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Harmonisation of Ukrainian Intellectual Property Legislation with the European Union: The Case of Compulsory Licensing and Government Use of Medical Products

Oksana Kashyntseva

Introduction

Intellectual property (IP) law plays a crucial role in balancing the protection of innovation and the public's right to access essential medicines. The war in Ukraine and the country's path toward European integration have necessitated significant reforms in the national legal framework, particularly in compulsory licensing (CL) and government use (GU) of medical products. This research aims to address this need by aligning Ukrainian IP law with European Union standards, drawing from relevant EU legislative frameworks and best practices.

The ongoing military conflict, and the economic crisis it has triggered, highlighted the urgency of this research. Ukraine's dependence on foreign pharmaceutical markets and on a struggling domestic industry necessitates a strong legal framework that allows the State to provide uninterrupted access to essential medicines and vaccines. This report outlines the objectives, methodology, key findings, challenges, and broader reflections stemming from this research. Furthermore, it provides a comprehensive discussion on the feasibility of adapting EU legal frameworks to the Ukrainian context.

The main outcome of the research is that its results have been taken into account by the Cabinet of Ministers in developing Ukraine's Resolution on compulsory licensing, which was adopted before the completion of the project, on February 21, 2025.*

* Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, Resolution No. 195 of February 21, 2025 *On Amendments to the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 877 of December*

In addition to the above, the research was also focused on how Ukraine's IP framework can be aligned with European Union standards to enhance public health preparedness while maintaining incentives for pharmaceutical innovation. This report provides a detailed account of the objectives, methodology, key findings, challenges encountered, and reflections from my research experience, drawing from comparative legal analysis and policy evaluations from Ukraine and the EU.

Thanks to NEC, which supported this research, the key recommendations for the draft document were prepared in safe conditions, with reliable internet access, and full availability of necessary resources.

Objectives and goals

The main objectives of this research were the following:

1. **Legal Reform:** Collaborating with the National Office of IP and Innovation to draft amendments to the Patent Law of Ukraine, specifically in CL and GU. Assess the deficiencies in Ukraine's IP legislation, particularly regarding compulsory licensing, and propose reforms that align with EU best practices.
2. **Policy Development and Strategic Recommendations:** Formulating Guidelines on Granting Compulsory Licenses, which would be formalised in an official order by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. Evaluating the extent to which TRIPS (Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights) flexibilities can enhance access to essential medicines during crises, with a focus on wartime needs and post-war recovery. Developing a roadmap for Ukraine to modernise its IP laws in ways that balance the interests of pharmaceutical companies, public health priorities, and international trade obligations.
3. **EU Best Practices in Data Exclusivity and Trade Secrets Protection:** Examining how CL interacts with test data protection and trade secrets, ensuring regulatory alignment with EU laws.

4, 2013 URL: <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/npas/pro-vnesennia-zmin-do-postanovy-kabinetu-ministriv-ukrainy-vid-4-hrudnia-2013-r-877-195-210225>

Identifying the most applicable legal grounds for CL and GU based on successful models from EU member states.

4. Stakeholder Engagement: conduct roundtable discussions with Ukrainian policymakers, patient organisations, and academic institutions to determine the best approach to implementing these reforms.
5. Economic and social impact assessment: Evaluating the potential consequences of introducing a well-defined CL framework on Ukraine's pharmaceutical sector, public health, and international trade obligations.

Methodology and approach

- Comparative legal analysis: a thorough examination of IP laws in Ukraine and selected EU countries, focusing on compulsory licensing provisions.
- Case studies: analysis of past instances where compulsory licenses were issued in European jurisdictions, particularly in response to COVID-19.
- Empirical data collection: interviews with Ukrainian policymakers, legal experts, and representatives of pharmaceutical companies and patient advocacy organisations.
- Policy workshops: discussions with European legal scholars and policymakers to assess the feasibility of Ukraine adopting similar models.
- Impact assessment: evaluating IP reforms' potential economic and social consequences on Ukraine's pharmaceutical industry and healthcare system.

Particularly in the field of comparative legal analysis of EU and Ukrainian IP laws, I focused on:

- Primary legal sources: reviewing TRIPS Agreement (Article 73), EU pharmaceutical IP regulations, and CL frameworks in countries such as Germany, France, Hungary, and the Netherlands.
- Case studies: analyzing the COVID-19 pandemic response regarding the issuance of CLs in Hungary, Indonesia, and Israel, drawing insights for Ukraine.

- Empirical data collection: consulting stakeholders, including Ukrainian government agencies, legal experts, and patient advocacy groups, to assess the practicality of CL and GU provisions.
- Historical review: examining past attempts to introduce compulsory licensing provisions in Ukraine and identifying the political, legal, and economic obstacles that hindered progress.

Key findings, progress and outstanding results

1. Legal gaps in Ukraine's CL framework:
 - Current Ukrainian legislation lacks clear legal definitions for CL and GU, leading to legal uncertainty and limiting the ability to use CL as an instrument for public health.
 - The failure of voluntary licensing negotiations has made it difficult for Ukraine to secure local manufacturing of essential medicines and vaccines.
2. Ukraine's IP framework and its shortcomings
 - Ukraine's current IP laws lack clear provisions for emergency-based compulsory licensing, causing delays in accessing generic versions of essential drugs.
 - The absence of streamlined procedures has discouraged domestic pharmaceutical manufacturers from investing in local production under compulsory licenses.
3. Impact of war on Ukraine's health system:
 - Since February 24, 2022, Russian attacks have completely destroyed 173 hospitals, partially damaged 540, and impacted 1,218 healthcare facilities.
 - The decline in GDP (by at least 30%) has further exacerbated the affordability crisis for medicines, emphasizing the urgency of a reformed CL framework.
 - The increased reliance on humanitarian aid and imports from the EU and US underscores Ukraine's vulnerability in securing essential pharmaceuticals.
4. European legal precedents:
 - EU members have successfully utilized CL for addressing public health emergencies, particularly during the Covid-19 crisis.

- Germany and France have clear provisions for issuing CLs in cases of urgent medical need.
 - Hungary implemented a wartime CL mechanism, which could be adapted for Ukraine's national security framework.
5. Lessons from the EU experience:
- Germany and France have well-defined pathways for issuing compulsory licenses in cases of national emergencies, allowing rapid response to public health crises.
 - Hungary's wartime licensing model provides a useful precedent for Ukraine, as it incorporates national security considerations into IP governance.
6. Public health and national security considerations:
- The war has significantly disrupted Ukraine's healthcare infrastructure, with over 1,200 healthcare facilities damaged or destroyed.
 - Demand for wartime medical supplies, including trauma care products and essential vaccines, has reinforced the need for a flexible IP policy.
7. Need for data exclusivity waivers:
- Ukraine's Law on Medicinal Products does not contain provisions allowing the waiver of data exclusivity in cases of CL or GU.
 - This restricts domestic manufacturers from producing generic versions of patented medicines, delaying accessibility.

Challenges and how they were addressed

1. Political barriers:
- The 2017 and 2020 Patent Law Reforms failed to address CL due to opposition from patent holders and international pharmaceutical lobbies.
 - Advocacy efforts: engaging with patient organizations (e.g., "100% Life") and international legal experts to push for reforms.
2. Political and industry pushback ○
- Challenge: opposition from major pharmaceutical companies concerned about revenue losses and weakened patent protections.

- Solution: engaging with EU policymakers and patient advocacy groups to emphasize the human rights dimension of IP flexibilities.
- 3. Lack of legislative clarity:
 - The absence of clear CL guidelines in Ukrainian patent law created implementation difficulties.
 - Solution: drafting a legislative amendment package, incorporating EU legal provisions and TRIPS flexibility.
- 4. Limited Institutional Support:
 - Ukrainian institutions lack experience in enforcing CL provisions.
 - Solution: establish an international expert working group to guide policy adaptation.

Reflections on the research experience

Conducting this research during political instability and war provided a unique perspective on the intersection of law, public health, and national security. Key reflections include:

- The value of EU collaboration: interactions with the Max Planck Institute and European IP scholars demonstrated that international cooperation is essential for effective IP reforms.
- Bridging academia and policy: this project reinforced the importance of translating academic research into actionable policies.
- The role of advocacy: working alongside patient advocacy groups showed that legal and humanitarian considerations must drive legal reforms.
- Bridging law and public health: one of the most significant takeaways was realising how intellectual property law is not merely a commercial concern but a crucial determinant of public health outcomes.
- The power of comparative analysis: studying European models underscored the importance of adapting international best practices to local contexts rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach.

Conclusions and recommendations

This research highlights the urgent need for Ukraine to modernise its IP laws to facilitate equitable access to medicines while maintaining compliance with international agreements. Key recommendations include:

1. Legislative reform: amend Ukraine's patent law to introduce clear provisions for compulsory licensing and government use of patents during crises.
2. Procedural streamlining: develop simplified guidelines for issuing compulsory licenses, ensuring efficiency and legal clarity.
3. Strengthening institutional capacity: provide specialised training for IP regulators, ensuring they can effectively implement TRIPS flexibilities.
4. International advocacy: work with EU institutions to ensure Ukraine's integration into the European regulatory framework includes provisions for safeguarding public health needs.
5. Public awareness campaigns: educate the general public and policymakers on how IP policies affect medicine accessibility and affordability.

As Ukraine continues its path toward EU integration, reforming its IP framework will be crucial in ensuring that intellectual property laws serve both economic and humanitarian objectives. The lessons drawn from this research offer a foundation for aligning Ukraine's IP governance with broader European and global public health priorities.

Final Thoughts

Conducting this research amid ongoing geopolitical instability reinforced the importance of legal adaptability in times of crisis. Ukraine's experience presents a compelling case for how intellectual property governance can be leveraged as a tool for resilience, ensuring that patents do not become barriers to life-saving medical interventions. The next steps involve translating these research findings into actionable policies, contributing to Ukraine's broader efforts to modernise its legal and healthcare systems in alignment with EU standards.

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A Syncopated Year in Bucharest

Dana Katz

I was elated to learn about my acceptance as a NEC *UEFISCDI* fellow, news I received while I was briefly living in Tirana last year. During the online interview I met the board members and committee for the first time and was so impressed by their engagement and tough questions that I knew, if given the opportunity, this was where I wanted to spend the next academic year. After a painful detour due to a smashed finger I sustained in Germany (for which I received excellent urgent care upon my arrival in Bucharest), I was able to begin my fellowship in earnest.

What followed were ten intensely rewarding and intellectually stimulating months during which I had the privilege of working alongside a remarkable community. I quickly settled into the NEC-designated apartments on Matei Basarab Street, a space shared with many other international fellows that fostered a strong sense of camaraderie. Life in Bucharest developed its own rhythm centering around the weekly Wednesday seminars: an anchor in our schedules and, for me, the highlight of each week. Led by the NEC rector, Prof. Valentina Sandu-Dediu, they featured the steady participation and helpful interventions of Constantin Ardeleanu, Andreea Eșanu, and Silvia Marton. These seminars were not only intellectually invigorating but also deeply rewarding, offering the chance to engage in rigorous, open dialogue with fellow scholars across a wide range of disciplines and backgrounds.

The year at NEC has been rich with experiences. Having the opportunity to engage with the other fellows and their research during seminars was thrilling, as well as learning so much about Eastern Europe—a place that was so close to the area of my specialty on the Mediterranean, but about which I knew a great deal less in terms of its history and historiography. Although this was my first visit to Romania, I arrived with a sense of connection shaped

by stories I had heard growing up. My parents came to Bucharest as students only a few months after the 1977 earthquake and told me of their impressions of the city. They had described the kind hospitality of those they had met and how the Jewish Quarter—where I found my home throughout the NEC fellowship—was badly damaged by the earthquake. In copies of letters they had sent to their friends at the time they recorded their visit to the Jewish center in the city, where they came across teenagers practicing Hebrew songs for the intended arrival of the Israeli PM, Menachem Begin, in the following week.

This year was particularly special for New Europe College, as it celebrated 30 years. In addition to board members, we had the opportunity to meet with NEC alumni. They helped the international fellows understand its unique place in Romanian intellectual life and the durability of the institution founded in a pivotal moment of transition, resonating even more in this year of elections. Beyond its abundant intellectual vitality, daily life at NEC offered many unexpected delights. Chief among them were the communal lunches after the seminars, where I was introduced to Romanian cuisine. However, these meals quickly became more than just a break in the day: they were moments of informal exchange, shared curiosity, and genuine cultural discovery. One especially memorable occasion was the holiday concert and lunch (which followed my own seminar where I presented my book project). The singing of Christmas carols and hymns in the Slavonic tradition was a deeply evocative musical experience that opened a new tonal world to me.

Equally eye-opening were the *Tandem* translation workshops, which offered an inside look at the complexities of working across languages, ranging from Romanian to Georgian, Ukrainian, and Bulgarian. These sessions revealed translation not just as a technical skill but as a deeply nuanced practice of interpretation and cultural navigation. A particularly humorous and revealing moment came during a discussion on how to accurately translate four-letter expletives that are part of compound words from Romanian to Bulgarian (while respecting the particularly rich vocabulary of the former!). Such seemingly simple expressions often resist easy equivalence

across languages and cultures, whose differing emotional registers pose unique challenges. I spent a good deal of time after the *Tandem* seminars working through the notes I took on my impressions and conclusions that I felt were highly applicable to my own research on the myriad cultures, religions, and languages of the medieval Mediterranean.

Over the course of the year with other NEC fellows, we visited numerous places, among which was a memorable visit to the Brâncovan palace in Mogoșoaia. We were led by Gabriela Badea, a medievalist NEC fellow, on a particularly cold day in late January, afterward rewarding ourselves with an excellent lunch of chicken livers and *mămăligă*. Other shared events were numerous visits to the National Opera with Sabine Walther and Binyamin Hunyadi. Outings to concerts at Sala Radio and Atheneum were usually led by Raluca Trifa, who greatly enriched our time in Bucharest. As the resident NEC architect this year, she coordinated a highly successful fellows' trip to Brașov in February that included a visit to the Saxon enclave of Hărman, just outside the city.

Frequent moves as an academic inevitably bring not only new opportunities but also logistical challenges. Foremost among them are the necessities of navigating visa and residency applications and other relevant bureaucratic procedures. I owe a special debt of gratitude to the indefatigable staff at NEC—Ana Buculei, Ana-Maria Sîrghi, and Ioana Wasiucionek—who made the transition to living in a new country remarkably smooth. I am also thankful for the kind assistance of the NEC driver, Mr. Nelu, who accompanied me and other fellows to the immigration office on several occasions and marched up to the counter at the immigration office with us (located in a nondescript, maze-like mall on the outskirts of Bucharest). His calm and generous manner made what could have been a stressful experience immeasurably easier. Over the course of the year, I was able to accomplish a great deal thanks to the resources available at NEC, which include the library run by Mihaela Danga, who assisted with access questions. Equally helpful was Dragoș Jula, the System Administrator, who resolved all kinds of technical issues. Thanks to the collective outstanding

efforts of the NEC staff, the often-daunting administrative aspects of international research life became far more manageable (and richer!), allowing me to focus on the intellectual and cultural possibilities of the fellowship.

Among the many memorable moments and welcome intermissions to the steady rhythm of the semester was the invitation to give a lecture at the National University of Arts in Bucharest. This opportunity came through Dr. Mihnea Mihail, a NEC alumnus, who generously invited me to present my research in a talk I entitled “The Multicultural Arts of Medieval Sicily,” as part of the class co-taught with Dr. Vlad Bedros, also a former fellow. In this lecture, I considered the key concept of multiculturalism, a dominant scholarly framework for the period I am working on in Sicily. I aimed to unpack how this model was constructed in the historiography and what assumptions it carries. Along with the students and several colleagues, we considered whether the concept of *hybridity*, which is so prevalent in modern scholarship, truly helps us grasp the complexities of pre-modern societies. Is hybridity a productive analytical lens, or does it risk flattening historical nuance? Can it work “against us,” by establishing scholarly narratives that are easier to digest for those studying transregional contexts of the past? I was inspired to re-evaluate these key questions in my own work this year. This was since, while at NEC, I encountered the methodological approaches of other fellows exploring the highly varied population and cultures of Eastern Europe far less familiar to me than the Mediterranean (also frequently working in languages inaccessible to me). Thus, these opportunities to present my research on monuments and landscapes of medieval Sicily made me engage fully with both the potential but also the limitations inherent to applying comparative frameworks.

This scholarly connection at the School of the Arts in Bucharest was made possible thanks to the kind coordination of Professor Anca Oroveanu. Her presence and support throughout the year, along with her numerous insightful comments during the Wednesday seminar presentations and conferences held at NEC, were consistently incisive and thought-provoking. I vividly recall that in

the fellowship interview, Prof. Oroveanu's questions were among the most challenging I have encountered, in addition to those of the other members of the selection committee. They underscored the seriousness and intellectual rigor that characterized the past year spent at NEC. Having the chance to share my work in a setting shaped by such high standards of critique and curiosity was both a privilege and a formative challenge, and one that I know I will always value.

At NEC, I was able to make substantial progress on my book project by producing a complete draft of the manuscript. Provisionally entitled *Courtly Ecologies in an Earthly Paradise: The Royal Parklands and Palaces of the Norman Kingdom of Sicily*, the monograph explores the intersections of landscape, power, and cross-cultural interaction in the medieval Mediterranean. The core of the project centers on the circuit of parklands and palatial complexes that once encircled twelfth-century Palermo, then the capital of the Kingdom of Sicily. This period saw the consolidation of power by a dynasty of Northern French (specifically Norman) origin, who governed a highly diverse population of Arabs, Berbers, Orthodox Greeks, Latin Christians, and Jews. For a brief period, their dominion extended to the North African coast, or present-day coastal Tunisia, Algeria, and Libya. The book aims to provide a historical framework for understanding the Normans' reshaping of the natural and built environments of the area surrounding medieval Palermo. These changes were not merely functional or aesthetic but also profoundly political, reflecting a royal vision of sovereignty expressed through architecture and curated landscapes.

In support of the project, the thirty-day research trip I undertook proved invaluable. I could access rare archival materials and library collections, in addition to establishing new professional connections. My journey began in Hamburg, where I conducted research at the Staatsarchiv, studying the papers of Adolph Goldschmidt. A pioneering art historian, his foundational work on the medieval palaces of Palermo is central to my project. At the University of Hamburg, I was able to spend several days consulting the archives of the Warburg Haus, specifically that of the art historian

William Heckscher, whose work and research focused on the after-life of antiquity during the Middle Ages. Reading material from this collection offered invaluable perspectives for my study on medieval Sicily. On this trip I returned to Palermo, where I had the chance to consult secondary works relating to my project, inaccessible outside Sicily, at the Biblioteca Centrale della Regione Siciliana. At the Museo Archeologico Regionale "A. Salinas" I examined the papers of the Sicilian Orientalist and Arabist Michele Amari, essential for understanding the early scholarly reception of Sicily's Islamic heritage. In addition to archival work, extensive fieldwork is key to my project on the integration of architecture and landscape. I conducted site visits to the medieval palaces of La Favara (Maredolce), La Zisa, and La Cuba, as well as the Norman church at Altofonte. I also gained access to the Palazzo dei Normanni and the medieval chapel (Cappella Palatina), while documenting various architectural features at the Cathedral of Monreale, specifically the extensive reuse of antique material in the medieval building.

In closing, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the NEC staff and the academic board for providing this wonderful opportunity to engage with such a vibrant intellectual community. I would also like to thank my fellow scholars, with whom I enjoyed an invigorating environment of exchange (notwithstanding our shared larger geopolitical worries and more local ones surrounding the elections). I can confidently say that we all experienced intellectual and also personal growth this year. As NEC is just past its thirtieth birthday, I can only wish for no less than ninety more successful years of bringing together colleagues for fruitful discussions in the historic Rococo revival villa on Strada Plantelor.



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Respublica Literaria in Bucharest

Roman Kyselov

The fellowship at NEC allowed me to focus on my project, “Views on Plagiarism in Europe on the Eve of the Age of Copyright (Late 17th–Early 18th Centuries),” by providing a financial support and great working conditions in Bucharest. Unfortunately, because of restrictions caused by Russia’s aggressive war against my country, I could only spend a month in Bucharest (in November), and arrange a short final visit in June. Those periods were the most productive, both in terms of research and in making acquaintances whose genuine interest stimulate scholarly work. This lets one feel the full enjoyment of what they are doing. I truly have no idea how NEC managed to create an efficient scholarly community of people dealing with quite different things in the fields of humanities. The search for common scholarly issues during the seminars and beyond them was never a problem, and the perspectives of colleagues from adjacent fields were often insightful.

As to the particular topic of my project, the simplest description of its objective is that I wanted to find out and define what may be considered plagiarism in early modern texts. To expand on this explanation a bit more, I can say that I wanted to distinguish between actual plagiarism, the legitimate application of rhetorical theories of imitation, and the innocent use of others’ material that, despite formally resembling plagiarism by today’s standards, would not have been judged as such at the time.

The views on this phenomenon in the Ancient Roman culture have already been researched well enough, and the conclusions of these studies were helpful for my work as well. Moving on to more recent times, there are many works describing cases of plagiarism in specific countries and periods, the scandals they caused, and a few journal papers discussing theoretical views on this matter. However, I couldn’t find attempts to review all significant thoughts and

theoretical contributions of the early modern intellectuals concerning the phenomenon of plagiarism. Moreover, there seem to be no works trying to establish some criteria for early modern plagiarism. I have previously tried to fill this gap for the period before the first comprehensive work on plagiarism, written by Jacob Thomasius and first published in 1673, based on the list of his predecessors compiled by Thomasius himself, with some supplements to his bibliography that I could add. I had also translated into Ukrainian (from Latin) the theses of Thomasius's *Philosophical Dissertation on Literary Plagiarism* (1673) and published a commentary on them. In this project I wanted to cover the period from 1673 until the conventional starting date of the copyright era, which is 1710, when the famous English copyright law was issued.

This time, I have shaped the list of core sources of my study based mostly on two annotated bibliographies written and published in the eighteenth century. The first one is a specialized work by Johann Gottfried Büchner, scholar from Greiz (1695–1749). Its title, translated from Latin, is “Historical and literary survey of the writers who dealt with the vices of the learned men” (Leipzig, 1718). I also used a reputable annotated bibliography on humanities compiled by Jena professor Burkhard Gotthelf Struve (1671–1738), later supplemented by Johann Friedrich Jugler (1714–1791) and named *Bibliotheca historiae litterariae selecta* (Jena, 1754–1763).

The main criterion of plagiarism in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries remained the same as for the main theorist of the issue, Jacob Thomasius, and his predecessors. It happened when someone stole the fame of the other using their texts (and not vice versa!). But to discern whether an author really intended to steal another's work and fame, criteria of non-plagiarism are also needed, to indicate when the use of someone else's text was not meant as theft. In this respect the theorists of the period, especially Johann Konrad Schwarz, significantly expanded on Thomasius's approach.

The established criteria for justifying the use of the other's text without precise indication of it included general recognition that the work was not meant to be independent; the element of compe-

tition (i.e., the desire to significantly improve the material used); the use of rhetorical imitation, which sometimes was interpreted as mere compilation and reinterpretation; the expected recognition of the used text; and the knowledge and expressions in common use. In his work, *A Book on Literary Plagiarism* (1706), Johann Konrad Schwarz testified that the possible qualification of work as plagiarized depends also on the genre and the status of both the source author and the new author. There were irrelevant genres and categories of authors (e.g., non-specialists, the elderly and already recognized prominent scholars) that were seen as inappropriate targets for accusations of plagiarism. Other authors who wrote on plagiarism (Johann Albert Fabricius, Thomas Crenius, et al.), although they expressed some interesting thoughts about this phenomenon, focused mainly on collecting cases of plagiarism and quasi-plagiarism. In this research I managed to compile a list of criteria for plagiarism and non-plagiarism in early modern texts from the perspective of contemporaries. I think this should be useful material for literary historians. A relevant paper to the topic, as well as a commented translation of the ninth chapter, "On the Tricks of Plagiarists in Disguising Plagiarism," of Schwartz's *Book on Literary Plagiarism*, are proposed for publication in the journal *Sententiae*. At the request of my colleagues among this year's NEC fellows who were interested in my research topic, I delivered lectures to post-graduate students of the Research Institute of Intellectual Property of the National Academy of Legal Sciences of Ukraine ("European Ideas of Literary Plagiarism as a Crime/Moral Transgression from Roman Antiquity to the 18th Century," April 15, 2025) and to students of Odesa National Medical University ("Views on Plagiarism in Europe before the Age of Copyright," May 5, 2025).

My time in the libraries of Bucharest was very fruitful as well. In the manuscript department of the Library of the Romanian Academy I managed to find two previously unknown manuscripts of poetry courses recorded by a student from Romania (he called himself Constantinus Multanski, which means he was from the Moldavian region) in 1685–1687 at the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, as well as a rhetoric course from the Lviv Jesuit College, taught in 1665.

A paper about these manuscripts from Ukraine was published in the journal *Slovo i Chas* (2025, no. 2). The previous issue of the same journal published a paper about a course on rhetoric by the prominent religious and cultural figure Lazar Baranovych, which he delivered at the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy in the academic year 1648/1649. I was actually able to finish it, using the materials I had collected earlier, in the cozy atmosphere of my Bucharest apartment. During my fellowship at NEC I was also able to finish and publish in academic journals two more papers on Kyiv-Mohyla rhetoric, take part in a seminar “Issues of Education and Knowledge in Pre-Modern Ukraine” on February 4, 2025, and take a research trip to Bulgaria and Poland to work in libraries and archives.

Finally, I would like to add a few words about the atmosphere of the NEC program. Not only the scholarly exchanges, but also the cultural events, particularly those within the *Tandem* project (which unites authors and their translators), which harmoniously complemented the weekly seminars, made the stay in Bucharest feel like a holiday. In addition, the multilingual environment (united by a common understanding of English, of course) made it possible to organize language exchanges. After many years of not being able to travel to Greece (first because of Covid, then because of the war), I finally had the wonderful opportunity to speak Greek with the historian Maria Adamopoulou, who learned Ukrainian. It was pleasant that the program organizers themselves were always deeply involved in each event intellectually. Perhaps that is why it was possible to create a lively academic community out of researchers from different countries, working on different topics and periods, in various fields of the humanities. I think this experience will continue to have an active influence on the creative life of each of the participants in one way or another.



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A Year at New Europe College, but What a Year!

Andrei-Tudor Man

When I applied for a NEC fellowship, I had the feeling that great things would happen soon and, indeed, my life has truly changed since the day I sent my file. In brief, I received the great news of being awarded a *Ștefan Odobleja* fellowship at NEC shortly after getting married, and it was during my stay at NEC that my wife made an even greater announcement: we were expecting a son. I am profoundly honoured and grateful that New Europe College has become this way a permanent part of my life, as I know that it has become for many alumni in the footsteps of whom I am now walking.

The project that I proposed in my fellowship application continued my doctoral work, but it also forced me to get out of my scientific safe space and to explore a domain which, even though it still intrigues me, continues to be mysterious. During my doctoral research, in one of my PhD chapters I studied a Greek notion that made me particularly curious, as I was finding occurrences of it in various areas of ancient literature, from philosophy to medicine, and from divination and astrology to Christian theology. *Sympatheia* is a notion forged by the Stoics as a causal explanation of various natural phenomena whose cause is rather non-evident, finally designating a force that keeps the world in cohesion and unity. This kind of causality, which is difficult to establish, was the object of different semiological arts of Antiquity, but *sympatheia* emancipated itself as a common notion, used broadly, without any reference to its Stoic origin. The great period between the apparition of this notion in Hellenistic philosophy and its use in fourth and fifth century Christian Patristics is quite intriguing, making me curious about the changes such a conceptual history had to pass through.

The idea of a monography on *sympatheia* soon arose together with the decision that I should start my investigation from the end

backward. The project accepted by NEC, entitled "The Dynamics of Sympathy in Late Antiquity: Philosophical and Christian Perspectives on the World, Society and the Individual," aimed to study the occurrences of *sympatheia* in three Church Fathers: Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine of Hippo. Exploring this vast literature I have discovered certain complementary views in the works of the two Cappadocian brothers, Basil and Gregory, which pushed me to approach them more closely and to leave Augustine for future research. While I have an education in ancient philosophy, the fourth-century patristic writings of the Cappadocians were more or less terra incognita to me. I am particularly grateful to the NEC reviewers for their bet on my daring to expand my research horizon.

Before presenting some of the findings I did while studying at NEC, it is a good moment to emphasise that my interest in the academic study of religion is linked to one of the great figures in the history of the College. It was in my teenage years that I discovered in a bookshop in Braşov, my hometown, a book bearing on its cover the fascinating portrait of a monk. The way in which Father André Scrima, one of the tutelary figures of early NEC, reflected on religious subjects through philosophical reasoning fascinated me at that time and is, in a certain way, the source of my curiosity for subjects that lay at the very intersection between philosophy and religion. All my recent work seeks to tackle the canon of authors and subjects of Western philosophy by proving the philosophical relevance of authors and notions that are not part of what we now understand philosophy to be. Religion and religious authors are in this particular situation. The work of Father André Scrima continues to be a source of inspiration for my research, and I am glad and honoured that a part of my work in this area has been done in the vicinity of the Scrima Archive hosted at NEC.

Sympatheia, as the Cappadocian fathers understood it, would be considered by contemporary philosophy a theological notion. However, my research has proven that the great partner of dialogue of the two Cappadocian brothers in shaping this notion was not theology, but philosophy. Moreover, a very original alliance

between philosophical reasoning and biblical hermeneutics brings to mind a similar alliance in the Neoplatonist milieu of Late Antiquity, where Plato, Aristotle and the Chaldean Oracles were read authoritatively through the lens of philosophy. One of the main hypotheses of my research was, therefore, that the Cappadocian fathers are particularly important in the philosophical history of the notion of *sympatheia*, where they brought an original shift in the understanding of this notion. The devotional character of their theoretical reflections and the mystical orientation of their thought are not arguments for refuting the philosophical relevance of the Cappadocians, as the pagan philosophical counterpart of that time had a devotional dimension and was mystically oriented as well.

While the notion was applied before to natural phenomena, the Cappadocians extended the application of this notion to a three-level structure: the world, society and the individual. Moreover, the three levels are unified into a common eschatological view. These two aspects are, in my opinion, the original stance of the Cappadocian understanding of *sympatheia*. Numerous passages of Basil and Gregory attest to their knowledge of the Stoic theory of cosmic sympathy. It is particularly interesting how Basil, in his homilies, *On the Hexaemeron*, cites Posidonius, the Stoic philosopher who used the explanation through *sympatheia* extensively. The context is in itself particular, as Basil is preaching in front of his congregation in Caesarea about the creation of the moon on the fourth day by quoting a passage in which Posidonius explains through *sympatheia* the relationship between the movements of the moon and the tides of the Sea and the Ocean. It is truly surprising to find in a homiletic context the presentation of a meteorological theory of Hellenistic antiquity, but this proves in the end the familiarity of Basil with the Stoic views on cosmic sympathy.

The second level of *sympatheia*, according to the Cappadocians, concerns the Christian community, the members of which are linked together through the ties of *sympatheia* into a common body. While Basil develops a practical reflection on solidarity as a principle of cohesion of the monastic communities that he was founding and of the lay communities he was guiding, Gregory has developed

a profound reflection on the theological foundations of such a practical vision. The two positions are completely complementary. What unites the two reflections is also their biblical foundation on St. Paul's 1 Corinthians 12, a passage infused with Stoic elements. In interpreting the biblical passage, Basil plays with the two meanings of *sympatheia* in Greek, where, along with the philosophical meaning, the word also designates the reciprocal emotion that the English word "sympathy" does. Therefore, because the faithful are linked in the community by the links of sympathy, just as the organs are linked together within a body, the sorrow or joy that one of the organs feels commonly affects all the organs. We have here one of the first representations of community as a body, written long before Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* or Ernst Kantorowicz's *The King's Two Bodies*. *Sympatheia* as solidarity became thus a principle of the constitution of the Christian community, but the corporeal representation of community should not be read as a metaphor.

Gregory of Nyssa shows the real existence of a common body, whose head is Christ, in which all the members of the Church are contained. The two brothers show that the pursuit of the common good keeps the members united in the common body, while the pursuit of particular goods dismembers the body. However, the good is not a mere ethical notion, but the common good is God himself. To pursue the common good means, therefore, to participate in God. The common body has a real consistency as the members are united with God through the initiatory mysteries of Baptism and Eucharist, and the ascetical life. According to Gregory, there is an ontological transformation that Christ's resurrection operates through sympathy within the entire humankind and that each individual is called to continue in order to unite with Christ. The ontological unification with Christ directly causes the *sympatheia* within the Christian community.

A third level of *sympatheia*, concerning the human individual, has been emphasised by Gregory of Nyssa. This genre of sympathy is a consequence of the creation of the human being according to the image of God. Because Christ, the Prototype of the human, kept in unity inside him the entire world before determining the succession

of the chains of different beings—a theory that Gregory developed in his *On the Hexaemeron*—the human being, image of the prototype, has the ability to internalise the world through knowledge. The *sympatheia* of the parts within the individual is, thus, the same as cosmic sympathy, man being a microcosm. The tripartite *sympatheia* within the world is a temporal state of being between the unity of all in Christ before creation and the unity of everything in Christ at the end of times. The call to unity within the Christian community and the solidarity reigning in it are, therefore, an anticipation of the final unity at the *eschaton*.

It is a captivating view on the world that the Cappadocian Fathers exhibit through the notion of *sympatheia*, one that reunites the world, the human community and the individual. The alternance between a past unity, a present sympathetic solidarity of things and humans, and a future perfect unity is, finally, the understanding of contemporaneity as situated between a lost state of being and a promise. The Cappadocians seem to understand well that the fulfilment of the promised unity can be enacted temporarily in our present through our efforts. It is from this standpoint that Basil begins a social campaign in his church, orienting the monks to a transformative role within the cities they were living in. My future research will try to better understand the political dimension of this theory by studying different Christian attitudes to power and imperial politics.

My research at NEC and my plans for the future would not have been possible without the unwavering support of my mentors: Philippe Hoffmann, Andrei Timotin, and Bogdan Tătaru-Cazaban. I had the chance to meet them again this year in Paris and Bucharest and to receive their advice, for which I am grateful. I will certainly always remember the Wednesday seminars and the fun that I had during mine. I would have never thought that my research would raise so many questions and commentaries; this kind of rich dialogue on science is something I have encountered only in Plantelor Street. NEC is certainly a place to make friends. I am thankful for all the amazing interactions I had with Raluca Bujor and Octavian Puric, two fellow lovers of ancient thought, Octavian Negoită,

Metin Omer, Daniel Filip and Adelin Dumitru, just to name a small part of the wonderful NEC fellows. I will certainly remember the long journeys between Bucharest and Braşov that I shared with Daniela Stanciu-Păscăriţa. NEC is an example of institutional and academic practices; the academic and administrative staff of the college has been very supportive of all of us during this year, and they all deserve our gratitude.



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Polish and Romanian Political Entanglements. Notes from Two Layers of Time

Wiktor Marzec

Living in Bucharest for the time of the NEC fellowship, I explored many neighborhoods. Doing my own research on the history of parliaments in patchwork states in the interwar period, I also like to visit parliamentary buildings and surroundings. In this case, understandably, the contemporary parliament operates in the late-socialist magnificent *Casa Poporului*, so manifestly in a different place than in my research period. Nonetheless, this was a highlight of my urban explorations and for long I had kept this cherry to be picked up later.

When some non-academic colleagues from Poland came to pay me a visit, we booked a guided tour and visited the building. After the tour, taking place a day before the memorable presidential elections in Romania, we left the premises from the “senate” side. There, we spotted an unusual guest, a Polish right-wing politician, former member of the European Parliament, representing the Law and Justice (PiS) party, Ryszard Czarnecki. Initially puzzled, we soon figured out that he is giving an endorsement speech for the like-minded presidential candidate in the Romanian presidential elections, George Simion from the *Alianța pentru Unirea Românilor* (AUR).

With a little help of the friends

My Polish friends, interested in current political affairs but unabatingly bored with my own research in interwar parliamentarism, started to inquire about this connection and current affairs in the Romanian political scene. My somewhat eccentric interest in Polish and Romanian post-imperial parliamentary cultures of the interwar period suddenly brought me unexpected kudos. My friends

and various pundits alike began to notice uncanny similarities, unexpected reversals and entangled regional legacies impacting electoral results in both countries.

Polish elections were to follow a while after and, indeed, Simion reciprocated this endorsement, popping up at electoral rallies of another rightist historian, Karol Nawrocki, bidding for the Polish presidential seat. A week later, Simion, a vocal supporter of U.S. president Donald Trump, attended a rally in Zabrze, Poland, where he publicly supported Nawrocki, emphasizing shared values of freedom and national sovereignty against perceived European overreach. This move was seen as a gesture of solidarity between nationalist and conservative forces in both countries. Simion's support for Nawrocki was framed as part of a broader struggle against what he described as unelected European authorities and external influences, interestingly re-occupying critical language of democratic sovereignty.

Moreover, his neoliberal contender, Nicușor Dan, the mayor of Bucharest, eventually elected president of Romania, made a significant gesture of political support for the Polish pro-EU candidate Rafał Trzaskowski, currently the mayor of Warsaw, backed by the Civic Coalition (PO) and the incumbent prime minister Donald Tusk. Dan visited Poland on May 25, 2025, shortly before his inauguration, and took part in a large rally in Warsaw supporting Trzaskowski. Too little, too late: in Poland the incumbent liberal mayor of the capital, marshaling liberal elites frightened of sovereigntist nationalism yielded, and lost the elections to the pro-Trump, masculinist Nawrocki by a small margin.

Both elections occurred amid the ongoing war in Ukraine and concerns about Russian influence in Eastern Europe, which heavily influenced political rhetoric and alliances. While sovereigntist platforms were largely based on resistance against allegedly unelected transnational structures, EU being the main culprit, they willingly endorsed bandwagoning the waning American superpower to counterbalance the European influences. Meanwhile, the pro-EU liberals bent over backward to suggest vested Russian interest in triumphs of domestic nationalists, aiming at weakening

European solidarity. Choosing your own imperialism was a main bone of contention, a bitter pundit might have wished to add. The Polish and Romanian elections were thus intertwined, with candidates and political leaders crossing borders to support ideologically aligned counterparts.

This cross-national political engagement reflects the broader contest in Central and Eastern Europe between nationalist-conservative forces and pro-European, centrist coalitions, and at the same time localist factions of the elite confronting the more globalized actors, a division reflected in the programs, biographical resources and personal style of the respective candidates. This clash of social backgrounds and self-stylization understandably found a reflection in the regional differentiation of electoral support. However, the obvious opposition of provincial voters, not profiting from metropolitan globalization, additionally teased by a shameless standing out of capital mayors as paragons of liberalism, was not the main cleavage.

The regional differentiation of electoral support for presidential candidates in recent elections in Poland and Romania is deeply influenced by both historical legacies and economic factors, reflecting distinct political cultures and socio-economic conditions in different parts of each country.

Poland's electoral geography is shaped by "phantom borders"—historical partitions and legacies from when the country was divided among Austria-Hungary, Prussia, and Russia. These historical divisions still influence contemporary political behavior, with regions formerly under Russian control and formerly Austrian Galicia tending to support more nationalist and conservative candidates, while areas with Prussian influence, either because of the partitions or border shifts after World War II, are more inclined toward liberal candidates.

Poland's imperial residues

When Poland regained independence in 1918, it wasn't built from scratch—it was stitched together from the remnants of three empires. Each had left behind its own legal system, political traditions,

and civic cultures. Prussia brought bureaucratic order and civic institutions, Austria contributed parliamentary experience and cultural conservatism, and Russia left a legacy of centralized control and uneven modernization.

Interpretations of these divides often fall into cultural-psychological frameworks. Western Poland is praised for its civic maturity and “European” rationalism, often attributed to Prussian or Austrian legacies. By contrast, the east—particularly the former Russian Partition—is frequently portrayed through Orientalist stereotypes: backward, authoritarian, and unmodern. These interpretations risk oversimplifying the persistence of inequality and obscuring deeper structural forces.

These divides aren’t just political—they’re structural. The west benefits from solid infrastructure and industrialized agriculture rooted in nineteenth-century land reforms. After 1989 it also profited from proximity to Germany, attracting foreign investment and trade. The east, meanwhile, remains dominated by small farms, traditional villages, and tight-knit communities centered around the Catholic Church. These patterns reflect not only cultural legacies but also the socio-economic structures inherited from the partitioning empires.

Indeed, economic and land-use patterns may be more decisive than inherited political culture. In the Russian and Austrian zones, fragmented land ownership and a reliance on small-scale agriculture still dominate. These regions lack the industrial agriculture and dispersed urban networks of the former Prussian territories. The communist-era transformation of former Junker estates into state-run farms in the west further cemented these differences. Today, while most of these lands are privatized, their scale and structure remain a world apart from the eastern smallholder model.

Thus, Poland’s deep spatial divisions are not simply a legacy of attitudes or beliefs—they are embedded in land, infrastructure, and class. While cultural memory and regional identity shape electoral behavior, they interact with hard economic realities and institutional inheritances. What began as a patchwork state has

never fully sewn its pieces into a seamless whole. Poland's past lives on—not just in memory or myth, but in roads, farms, voting booths, and the quiet resilience of historical space.

Historical and ethnic factors in Romania

The 2024–2025 presidential elections in Romania featured a contest between the far-right nationalist George Simion and the centrist pro-EU reformist Nicușor Dan. Dan's victory in Bucharest and other urban centers contrasts with Simion's strong support in more rural and economically disadvantaged areas, where nationalist and eurosceptic sentiments resonate more.

Economic challenges, such as high budget deficits and public debt, exacerbate regional disparities. Voters in poorer regions are more susceptible to far-right nationalist appeals promising radical change and opposition to perceived corruption and foreign influence. Meanwhile, urban and economically dynamic regions prioritize EU integration, and anti-corruption reforms, supporting candidates like Dan.

Romania's regional electoral patterns are influenced by its complex history, too, including the legacy of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in Transylvania, voting more liberal, and the communist era's economic disparities. The Hungarian minority, concentrated in Transylvania, tends to support parties defending minority rights and European integration, contrasting with nationalist sentiments more prevalent in other regions.

The last straw of the shared trust

However, given the scale of population shifts—moving Eastern groups to Poland's post-German western territories, or mixing Romanian regions with distinct identities—regional political differences in both countries cannot simply be explained by residual imperial mentalities. The persistent temptation to “Orientalize” the (Russian, post-Ottoman, etc.) east, portraying it as inherently backward or authoritarian-prone, is analytically lazy and should be abandoned once and for all.

Instead, growing political polarization—more accurately described as a divide between metropolitan centers and provincial areas, rather than simply urban versus rural—may partially reflect the enduring legacy of entrenched elites. In both Poland and Romania, the cultural heirs of the nobility (Polish *szlachta* and Romanian *boyars*) often morphed into modern urban elites who retained a patronizing attitude toward other social classes. This legacy may still influence the tone of liberal discourse in both countries. Yet, given that similar polarization patterns appear across far more diverse political systems, this explanation risks being overstated.

What's clearer, however, is that liberal elites in both contexts often misread the socio-economic grievances driving the protest vote—grievances that frequently push voters toward the populist right. These elites have shown a surprising disconnect from material realities, preferring to moralize rather than understand.

In Romania, enough of the alarmed middle class mobilized to defeat the populist challenger. In Poland, however, the liberal camp failed to generate sufficient turnout. The narrow defeat raises the possibility that disaffected leftist voters, alienated by both the nationalist right and an out-of-touch liberal center, chose to abstain. Anecdotal evidence from the “leftist bubble” supports this theory.

All in all, while in Romania enough frightened middle-class people went to the polls to outvote the sovereigntist contender, in Poland the liberal elite was not able to harness enough support. With a small margin of defeat, one can say that those who perhaps stroke the (im)balance were leftist voters repelled by the nationalist right and arrogant liberals alike, as anecdotal evidence from the lefty bubble suggests.

As I write, a storm brews in Poland over the validity of the election results. Reports have surfaced of irregularities: some ballots were allegedly counted correctly but assigned to the wrong candidates by electoral commissions. This has triggered outrage among segments of the liberal public, who now suspect a right-wing conspiracy to manipulate the outcome.

What complicates the matter further is the compromised judiciary. The chamber responsible for certifying the election's legality

was shaped by the previous Law and Justice government and is not recognized by international legal bodies. The legitimacy of the entire process now hangs in the balance, raising the specter of a severe crisis and mutually non-recognized electoral results.

This moment echoes, almost farcically, Romania's canceled presidential elections—an eerie *déjà vu*. The last threads of trust in electoral institutions, still fraying across the region, may be about to snap.

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“Muhammad and His Book Called Qur’an”: Greek Anti-Islamic Works in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire

Octavian-Adrian Negoită

For many years now NEC has been renowned not only among Romanian scholars, artists, students, and intellectuals, but in the worldwide academic community. It stands out as a remarkable hub for advanced research, offering a dynamic setting where academic freedom and collaboration are actively cultivated. The connections forged here between all those who pass through its doors are emblematic of NEC’s international configuration and interdisciplinary milieu. As for myself, I visited NEC for its academic events since I was a mere student, and I have always been astonished that such an institution can exist right here in Bucharest. The high standards of research, the stimulating academic environment, the community of scholars gathered around the institution, its amazing staff, along with the rich academic infrastructure built here throughout the years are only a few of the things I was constantly hearing about NEC from friends in academia and former professors, who became themselves alumni of this fine establishment. Therefore, applying for a NEC fellowship was the easiest decision I ever had to make. As easy as this was, I remember how eagerly I was waiting for the final decision. All my thoughts that were going back and forth in this period concerning the feasibility and quality of my prospective project vanished once I got the answer on a warm day of May: I was about to be a NEC fellow...

I became interested in the interreligious and cross-cultural relations between the Greek Orthodox Christians and Muslims in the Ottoman Empire some time ago. In 2017 I defended at the Central European University in Budapest an MA thesis about an Athonite monk living in the Ottoman lands, which laid the foundations for the PhD degree I earned a few years later (2020) at the University

of Bucharest. During my career I was able to develop my conceptual and methodological framework as I became a team member of several renowned ERC-funded research projects, which allowed me to enlarge the range of my approaches and subject material. But it was at NEC in Bucharest where my research on the Greek anti-Islamic literature took another important turn.

The Greek Orthodox engagement with Islam and the Qur'ān during the early modern Ottoman Empire has a long tradition of polemical writing that begun in Byzantium and developed along the centuries among the Greek Orthodox literati. The fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in 1453 brought into a sharper focus the interaction between the Greek Orthodox communities and their Muslim neighbors, and, as such, the polemical corpus of texts was articulated according to different historical and religious contexts. The authors of the polemical narratives produced in Greek after 1453 build their argumentation by incorporating polemical tropes and theological reasoning from Byzantine works. But what texts informed Greek Orthodox audiences about Islam and the Qur'ān during the Ottoman rule? How did they circulate among the community of believers and how did these texts polemicize against *Muhammad and his book called Qur'ān*? What textual connections can be detected regarding the polemical discourse(s) between the medieval treatises and their early modern counterparts? These and many others were the questions I was trying to answer during my NEC fellowship. Of course, I got help on my journey. I presented my project in the framework of NEC's seminars quite early on during my fellowship, which allowed me to absorb all the feedback I received from my fellow colleagues. But here is the magic of NEC: it brings together people specializing in various fields—with expertise (on many occasions) very different than yours—who can either ask questions you never thought about, open new paths for your imaginative project that you never walked on, and even help you acquire materials you never thought you could get your hands on... I am thankful to all my colleagues and NEC researchers who listened to my project for all their incisive

questions, productive criticism, and the friendly discussions we have had over multiple cups of coffee.

My project benefited greatly from the research trip I undertook to Athens between February 10 and 23, 2025, where I was able to visit the manuscript and rare book collections of the Cultural Foundation of the National Bank of Greece (MIET), the National Museum of History, and the National Library of Greece. As such, I have managed to consult materials that have not been accessible to me before, which have helped me to even better map the development of the anti-Muslim corpus and discourse(s) during the Ottoman rule. While in Athens, I visited especially the microfilm collection at MIET, which proved to be extremely useful for my research at NEC, since this institution hosts materials from places not always easily accessible to scholars (e.g., the monasteries of Mount Athos, Alexandria—The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, Mount Sinai—St. Catherine Monastery). While at MIET, I have used extensively this collection of microfilms, which saved me plenty of time and further research trips to consult the material I needed. After checking the catalogues, I have discovered that in this microfilm collection there are Greek manuscripts of anti-Muslim works. I studied their production and circulation by looking at scribes, marginalia, illustrations, and notes of ownership. I have also managed to acquire digital copies of all the manuscripts, which I was able to consult further for my project at NEC. I took advantage of my stay in Athens to also see other collections of Greek manuscripts, such as the smaller one at the National Museum of History. Here, I discovered two manuscripts: Athens, National Museum of History, MS gr. 50 and Athens, National Museum of History, MS gr. 71, both containing anti-Muslim works from the seventeenth century, which helped me understand the articulation of polemical discourse(s) during Ottoman rule.

The last important institution visited in Athens was the National Library of Greece, which besides its primary collection of manuscripts and rare printed editions, also hosts the manuscript collection of the Metochion of the Holy Sepulcher (MPT), which

features very valuable manuscripts that previously belonged to renowned Greek Orthodox clerics (Patriarch Dositheos II, Patriarch Chrysanthos Notaras) and erudite laymen associated with the Patriarchate in Constantinople (e.g., the grand logothete John Karyophylles, the Phanariot bibliophile Nikolaos Karatzas). In this case too, I was able to extract important data from the marginalia, ownership notes, and signatures, as well as from the bookbinding and watermarks, which were informative regarding the circulation and transmission of knowledge about Islam and the Qur'ān among the Greek-speaking communities of the Ottoman Empire. Finally, while researching the MPT collection, I also looked at the main collection of Greek manuscripts and rare book collection of the National Library (EBE), where I was able to find more material concerning the anti-Islamic corpus of John VI Kantakouzenos, in its Greek vernacular redaction by the Cretan theologian Meletios Syrigos. Apart from the manuscripts, I have also investigated printed editions preserved in the EBE collections, especially early modern Greek chronicles that speak about the Prophet Muhammad, the Qur'ān and the Muslim holy places of Mecca and Medina: Pseudo-Dorotheos of Monemvasia, *The Book of Histories* (Venice, 1631); Matthew Kigalas, *New Synopsis of History* (Venice, 1637); Meletios of Athens, *Geographia* (Venice, 1728); and Nektarios of Jerusalem, *Compendium of Sacred-Secular History* (Venice, 1677). All these editions that build their historical accounts on Byzantine models had a great appeal to Greek-speaking audiences, which through them received information not only about ecclesiastical affairs or their medieval past, but also about their Muslim neighbors and rulers.

My NEC fellowship was very productive as I was able to finish and to advance with some studies on the topic of my project that were lurking on my desk for a while. First, I am currently working on a monograph on the early modern Greek anti-Muslim works in the Ottoman Empire, which is based on the PhD thesis I defended in 2020 at the University of Bucharest. During my stay at NEC, I was able to advance with the book manuscript, which I am now confident that I would submit by the end of the year to a renowned publishing house. Secondly, I managed to edit and submit the

papers for a Special Issue of the journal *Historical Interactions of Religious Cultures* (HIReC; Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck) on the topic of Eastern Christian Polemical Interactions during Ottoman rule. This special issue includes five studies on Arabic, Armenian and Greek polemical texts that were produced during the Ottoman times, and we are currently waiting for the peer-review results. My own text is about the anti-Muslim polemical treatise of Pachomios Rousanos (1508–1553), an Athonite monk who was the first Greek Orthodox theologian to write such a text after 1453. Finally, I have been able to finish a few entries for the online version of the renowned bibliographical history *Christian-Muslim Relations II* (i.e., “Gerasimos Blachos, *On the religion of Muhammad and against the Turks*” [addition to the existing entry in CMR 10, 271–81]; “Panagiotes Nikousios [?], *History of the Growth and Upbringing of Muhammad*”; “Iakovos the Monk, *About the Imposture of Muhammad*”; “Nikolaos Karatzas, *Othomanica*”). All these entries concern texts that were produced and circulated among Greek-speaking audiences during Ottoman rule.

With all this in mind, I can truly say that my fellowship at NEC has been an extraordinarily rich and transformative chapter in my academic journey. The intellectual environment fostered by NEC is one of rare openness, curiosity, and generosity—qualities that have profoundly shaped both the direction and depth of my research. Surrounded by an engaged and diverse community of scholars, I found not only the freedom to pursue my work rigorously, but also the inspiration that comes from regular, meaningful exchange across disciplines. The friendships I forged here, grounded in shared conversations, laughter, and mutual respect, have been among the most cherished aspects of my stay. These personal and professional bonds will endure far beyond the duration of the fellowship. I leave NEC with a deep sense of gratitude: for the institutional support that allowed my project to flourish, for the many ways in which my thinking has evolved, and for having been part of a community that so passionately values both ideas and the people behind them.

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Research Report

Vanessa R. de Obaldía

Travels in Romania

The Black Sea was a region with which I had fallen in love during a trip to Türkiye's Giresun and Trabzon in 2022 to undertake research about the establishment of the Latin Catholic Franciscans following their expulsion from Russian Georgia in 1845.* The southern shores of this strategically and commercially significant region are wild and mysterious. The imposing Pontic Mountains of a volcanic promontory tower, above the coastal road, along which the towns are abundant in wild cherry and hazelnut orchards. It is a region that has for millennia incited curiosity in the mind of the intrepid visitor travelling by sea or land, whose imagination has transformed experiences into narratives of myths and legends. That experience determined my decision to choose Constanța as the first city to visit outside of Bucharest when I arrived in Romania in March of 2025. As I travelled by train knitting a new blanket for my Turkish friend's cat, I contemplated the landscape with its agricultural fields stretching far into the distance. I arrived on Saturday afternoon on the 15th of March and immediately proceeded to the Chief Muftiate of Romania in the hope of discussing issues of religious and cultural heritage with the chief mufti. Upon finding him absent, I directed my attention to visiting historical and religious monuments in the

*"Santa Maria della Purificazione: The First Capuchin Church in the Black Sea Region." *Eurasian Studies* 17 (1) (2019), pp. 1–22. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1163/24685623-12340061>; "Giresun Children's Library: The Curious Case of a Republican Era Conversion of a Latin Catholic Church in the Black Sea Region." In *The Conversion of Spaces and Places of Worship in Anatolia*. International Conference Proceedings, 10–11 April 2021, prepared by Doğan Bermek and prepared and edited by Vanessa R. de Obaldía. İstanbul: ADO, 2022. pp. 164–183 ("Giresun Çocuk Kütüphanesi: İlginç Bir Olay: Karadeniz Bölgesi'nde Bir Katolik Kilisesinin Cumhuriyet Döneminde Dönüştürülmesi." *Anadolu'da İnanç Mekânlarında Dönüştürmeler*. Uluslararası Konferans Bildiriler. 10–11 Nisan 2021, dir. Fatih Demir. İstanbul: ADO, 2022. pp. 164–183).



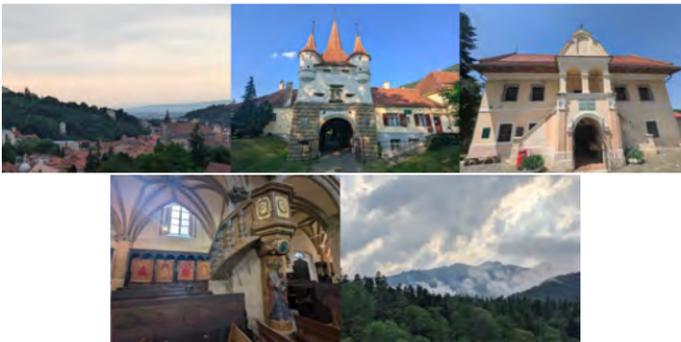
Saints Peter and Paul Orthodox Cathedral, Carol I Mosque, Armenian House with Lions, Latin Catholic St. Anthony of Padua Basilica, Călnău House (Photos: Vanessa R. de Obaldía, 2025).

old quarter. I admired the Carol I / Royal Mosque (1910–1913) with its impressive architecture from the outside, because it was closed; others I came upon by chance, such as the Greek and Romanian Orthodox churches (1865–1867, 1883–1885), and an Armenian merchant’s House with Lions (1898–1902). I was delighted to find a Latin Catholic neo-Romanesque Basilica consecrated in 1938 to the popular Portuguese saint Anthony of Padua (1195–1231), with whom I had a spiritual and professional connection from my days as a researcher in Istanbul.* Although I did not have the opportunity to sample Tartar or Turkish cuisine, I enjoyed dinner with great service at the Queen Elizabeth restaurant at the grand Călnău

* I presented scientific research on the churches and veneration of Saint Anthony in Istanbul at: “Saintly Statues and Sacred Icons: Interreligious Materiality at Istanbul’s Latin Catholic Churches,” in the IRSSC international workshop *Materialities of Everyday Religiosity: Historical and Contemporary Dynamics in Turkey and Iran* at the Orient-Institut in Istanbul (online) on 17–20 June 2021; then most recently at “Churches of Istanbul: Interreligious and Interdenominational Stories in Shared Spaces” at *Religious Co-Existence: Embodied Interactions in Sacred Spaces and Faith Practices* exhibition and international symposium held at Newcastle University on 13–15 January 2025.

House, an emblematic architectural gem constructed between 1913 and 1926, with a panoramic view of the sea. I strolled contentedly along the promenade as I made my way toward the train station to return to Bucharest. The city of Constanța does not boast the magnificent scenery of Türkiye’s Black Sea region nor the impressive historical traces of the numerous communities and empires: Hittite, Roman, Pontus Greek, Seljuk, Byzantine, Armenian, Genoese and Turkmen, the Empire of Trebizond (1204–1461) and the Ottomans (1461–1923). In contrast, it has both preserved the histories of multireligious, multicultural, multiethnic, and multilingual communities which lived and worked side by side as well as maintained the living coexistence of these communities until today. The churches are not just structural relics of the past but are hosts to living communities: open doors, ringing bells, chanting of religious rites, candles lit in veneration by parishioners and visitors.

My second visit outside of Bucharest was with my dear mother to the Transylvanian city of Brașov. This was a time to explore and to enjoy the cuisine. Of all the monuments we visited, I limit myself to mentioning three of the most interesting. The Complex of Saint Nicholas with its church (1519) and school (1583) that is now a museum in the Șchei District, which had originally been located outside of the city gates and was traditionally the Roma district. Saint



View of Brașov, Catherine’s Gate, First Romanian School Museum, Black Church (interior), Mount Caraiman (Photos: Vanessa R. de Obaldía, 2025).

Nicholas Church was the first Orthodox church to be constructed in Transylvania (as was the school). One of the two southwestern gates that demarcated Braşov's boundaries was the medieval Catherine's Gate, built by the Tailors' Guild as part of the fortifications of the historic citadel. Our visit to the Black Church revealed a delightful surprise: decorating the pulpit, benches, walls, and gallery of the church were approximately two hundred exquisite woollen Ottoman carpets woven in western Anatolia. By the seventeenth century it had become an established custom to decorate churches with Ottoman textiles such as velvets, brocades, or embroidered linen cloths. Rugs were imported from Anatolia as a status symbol to demarcate the pews of the guilds during religious services or as a commemorative offering for the deceased. The Ottoman textiles in the form of Anatolian rugs were a connection to both my Athonite-related research* and my great affection for a region where I have travelled extensively for research and pilgrimage, such as to the Seven Sites of Revelation mentioned in the Bible. Our return journey by train was accompanied by impressive views of the misty Bucegi mountain range, with a gleaming crucifix dedicated to Romanian WWI heroes just below the 2,384 metre-peak of Mount Caraiman.



Catholic, Luteran, and Jewish places of worship, a Romanian Orthodox convent (Photos: Vanessa R. de Obaldía, 2025).

* I am a member of an international interdisciplinary team comprising a digital humanities specialist, an art historian specialising in Ottoman textiles, and a paper conservator working on a project titled "Material History: Ottoman Archives of Simonopetra Monastery."



Handmade icons and embroidery at an arts and crafts fair (Photos: Vanessa R. de Obaldía, 2025).

The Romanian capital of Bucharest was where I spent most of my five-month fellowship. When not at the libraries, archives, or working from the apartment, I spent my time visiting places of worship, cultural centres, museums, art galleries, an arts and craft fair and meeting with people from Bucharest's various communities. Of the many positive experiences, here I mention only the most touching. A talented young Romanian scholar kindly took me on a tour of the "H.V. Dudian" House of Culture where I learned of the history and culture of this ancient community. Although the Romanian state does not officially recognise the Armenian Genocide due to political reasons, compassionate Romanians did much to assist the Armenians during those troubled times, especially the orphans. In profound appreciation, the Armenians of Romania celebrate Easter together with the Romanian Orthodox Church.

New Europe College and *DigiHum* Fellowship

I received a five-month *Relevance of the Humanities in the Digital Age* (*DigiHum*) fellowship, which was developed jointly by the Centre for Advanced Study in Sofia and New Europe College in Bucharest and financed by the Porticus Foundation. The *DigiHum* fellowship provided me with the support I needed to complete a complex multilingual research paper. Outside of the contract, NEC was flexible and inclusive, giving me permission to display a photographic exhibition entitled *Athos Through a Woman's Lense* to complement



New Europe College Seminar, May 21, 2025 (Photos: Courtesy of NEC, 2025).

my Wednesday seminar as well as to participate in a roundtable on the Relevance of the Humanities in the Digital Age. One of the most beneficial aspects of being at NEC was the multidisciplinary nature of the fellowships, resulting in the gathering of a Romanian and an international cohort of researchers at weekly Wednesday seminars as well as at international workshops, conferences, and roundtables. This structure provided the time and space for knowledge exchange and learning outside of my own field of Ottoman Studies with history (ancient to contemporary, cultural), political sciences, literature, philosophy, international studies, human rights with the participation of artists, poets, translators, composers, and a climate activist. The structure of the Wednesday seminars allowed for the formal discussions to continue as informal conversations afterward at the delicious lunches. During the lunches and coffee breaks, I learned a lot about the foreign fellows' home countries of Ukraine, Russia, Moldova, Poland, Hungary, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Greece, Germany, Italy, Israel, the USA and the challenging circumstances some of them are facing. One of the most enjoyable events at NEC was an uplifting concert and recital of music from the Phanariot era on May 21, 2025. The NEC library has an impressive collection of books and journals as well as online resources which I found very beneficial. The library had all the published catalogues of Romanian archival documents that I needed for my research and numerous important secondary sources. The library staff with whom I would enjoy a chat were very helpful and the space was bright, quiet, clean, and had comfy chairs and air conditioning.



Enjoying a musical night out at Sala Radio with New Europe College Fellows Raluca and Olena (Photo: Courtesy of Raluca Trifa).

I also had a special interaction with Django, an adorable mixed-collie dog belonging to one of the fellows, who kept me company at the library one day.

My scientific research at NEC took the form of an article entitled “Patronage of the Holy Mountain: The Case of the Romanian Principalities and Simonopetra Monastery, 1580-1714,” to be published in a peer-reviewed journal. The objectives of the study are three-fold: first, to relate a detailed history of the Romanian *metochia* of Simonopetra Monastery contributing to already published literature (based on Greek and Romanian archival documents); second, to provide new perspectives about the nature of the *metochia* through Ottoman sources; third, to examine patron-Athonite relations through prosopography. The history of the acquisition of *metochia* can only be accurately pieced together through a multilingual study of extant textual and material sources. The textual sources consist of Greek, Romanian, and Slavic-language documents preserved within the important archival collections of Simonopetra Monastery, and which have been published in catalogue form as well as unpublished Ottoman Turkish-language documents at the Monastery and at the Istanbul Ottoman Archives,

thus adding further pieces to the jigsaw of the Danubian Athonite *metochia*. Material sources comprise of the moveable and immovable properties of the former Simonopetritian *metochia*. One of the main challenges faced was reading the catalogue of published Romanian archival sources due to my basic knowledge of the language, which I addressed with a dictionary and various translation apps. The other challenge was locating the historical churches of the *metochia*, one of which had been moved in an incredible feat of engineering and the other destroyed during the communist era.* During my research a new perspective was brought to my attention by a fellow's question during my seminar about the neglected aspects of *metochia* in relation to the Roma. A much misunderstood people whose history is intertwined with myths and legends from their migrations from the Orient (India) to the West, the Roma have an ancient civilisation and a rich culture, skilled in the arts (specifically music) and trades. Upon their arrival in the Romanian Principalities in the fourteenth century, they were enslaved until their emancipation in the mid-nineteenth century.

* "The great escape: how Bucharest rolled entire churches to safety," *The Guardian*: <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/dec/14/bucharest-moved-churches-safety-communist-romania>.



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NEC: My Academic Home

Metin Omer

I must confess that it is very difficult for me to write this essay. When I work on a scientific article, based on the research I have done, I know there are some rules, a methodology, a way of citing, etc., that I must follow. On the other hand, when you write an essay, this is where the originality lies, the key to success, in writing something without respecting too many rules. Of course, it is not my intention here to innovate essay writing or to create a new genre and to provoke a debate among humanists. I am just looking for a way to express a set of feelings, thoughts, and ideas about a period which I believe will mark my academic career.

The inspiration to write this text came from a story that circulated in the Turkish-Tatar community in Romania very intensely during the interwar period, with reverberations to the present day. It is said that Queen Maria of Romania's best friend in Balchik was an old Tatar woman, Şefika Teyze (*teyze* means aunt in Tatar and Turkish, this being the nickname with which Mrs. Şefika was remembered). Every time the queen came to Balchik, Şefika Teyze was invited to the palace, visited at home and accompanied the queen on her walks around the town. She had even visited the queen at the palaces in Bucharest or Sinaia as a guest of honor. For Queen Maria, Şefika Teyze was *ahretim*, meaning "friend beyond death" in Turkish and Tatar. It was curious, however, that Şefika Teyze did not know any Romanian, nor did Queen Maria know any Turkish or Tatar. What were the two doing together for so long? How did they communicate? Well, the explanation given was that the souls can communicate directly, without the need for any language. So, I will also write a few lines from my heart here, hoping that any literary or artistic clumsiness or lack of originality will be forgiven.

I will start with a confession about what I cannot say. In various academic and less academic circles I used to mention that the most beautiful period of my life was that of my doctoral studies. After I got married, my wife very delicately pointed out to me that a married man cannot have other “most beautiful” periods of his life (here I feel the need for an emoticon with a smiling and happy face, so that the message is not misunderstood). So, the description “the most beautiful period of my life” is out of the question and is no longer valid for doctoral studies either.

The second confession is that the choice to apply for a New Europe College scholarship did not require any time of reflection from me. It is an option (as an idea, a pattern of things) for anyone who wants a free space for thinking, whose only goal is to complete the research project. It was more difficult to work up the courage to apply for a fellowship, and I will not say here exactly how long it took from the moment I decided to apply until I sent a proposal so as not to discourage potential candidates. In any case, I regret not having done it sooner.

What I heard most often when discussing the chances of receiving a NEC fellowship was that “the project matters.” Yes, that is what I would say now after being a fellow. But it does not matter in the sense that only certain topics are sought, or certain fields, or a specific vision or approach is needed. It did not seem to me that NEC had a list of preferred topics (in my opinion it would be perfectly legitimate if they wanted to announce that they were offering fellowships on certain topics) or that they were trying to impose certain assumptions and conclusions. “The project matters” in the sense that the research must be innovative, offer a new perspective on a known subject, or, in a nutshell, show the potential of an “advanced study.”

I could exemplify this through my project. Not because it is a benchmark, but because it is what I know more profoundly. The research for which I received a NEC scholarship in the 2024–2025 academic year is entitled “Islamic institutions in Romania: From Religious to Secular-Political Actors (1878–1947).” The project aims to explain how the main institutions of the Muslim community

in Romania functioned: the Muftiat (the central body that coordinated the activity of religious personnel and which had an important role in all developments in the community), the Muslim Communities (institutions that were in charge of administering the community's properties) and the Qadiates (also known as Islamic tribunals). The subject is also relevant for the current times because the first two institutions still function. The Qadiates were abolished in the interwar period because of the influence of the Kemalist reforms. No one has explained so far why the Muftiates and Qadiates in Romania functioned until the communist period without having a statute, that is, a law regulating how muftis or those in the leadership of the Muslim Communities were elected, how long their mandates were, what their attributions were. It is interesting that the muftis, most of the time, changed with the government. Likewise, those in the leadership of the Muslim Communities were also the most active in Romanian politics. During the interwar period, the lack of a statute for the Muslim community was also an obstacle in obtaining a constitutional right, that of having a senator by right in the Romanian legislature. A statute for the Muslim community was adopted only in 1949. It did not matter much because throughout the communist period the position of mufti was held by a single person. Understanding the functioning of these institutions is relevant because their staff was involved in processes that marked the evolution of the community, such as emigration, or even in defining its identity.

These would be, in short sentences, some of the ideas that I have developed in my study. To succeed in this very important endeavor, the sources used are important. The most relevant are the Romanian archives (for example, the Ministry of Worship and Arts fund at the National Archives of Romania has been very little used), the Turkish archives (it is a great advantage that very recently the documents from the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs funds from the republican period have been made available for research) and the community press (almost not at all used in research on the Muslim community in Romania). My hypotheses contradict even the ideas my professors formulated during my university years,

who always talked about the “models of multiethnic coexistence” and the “millenary presences on these lands.” I will not give their names here; I mention them enough in my studies.

I would not want to give the impression that NEC is the starting point for anyone with research on Islamic studies, minority studies or institutional history (where I could fit my study). It is that too. However, the beauty of NEC lies in the fact that it manages to bring together researchers from different fields, with diverse topics and still create a unified whole.

If I were to make a list of arguments for applying for a NEC fellowship, this would be a starting point. It is a great advantage to be able to talk to people with diverse research themes. Of course, it is not easy to satisfy the curiosity of someone who looks at your topic from a perspective that you have not even thought of. But this helps you get out of your comfort zone, forces you to look at your hypotheses from a different perspective and helps you evolve. In the end, it is a challenge to stay with a topic after you have faced a set of questions coming from the entire area of the humanities.

The second reason why NEC is the right address for any researcher lies in the way it implements its mission to help “advanced studies.” Here, the words really speak for themselves. That is, everything at NEC works to help the fellow complete his research. From the procedures to the debureaucratized system, the excellent library, the advice you receive from experienced researchers, everything is designed to serve the fellow. The way the bureaucracy at NEC works (simple things like obtaining a certificate or making a statement) should be an example for any institution in Romania. The library is excellent not only because of the staff or because of the collection it houses, but also as a study space, warm in winter and cool in summer. And, a little secret, NEC has a very appreciated and welcoming space for study, discussions, and meditation, a garden separated from the city, with the scent of spring and the chirping of birds.

Before mentioning the penultimate point for which I would always recommend NEC, I would like to specify that this list is not in order of importance, but random. I could not even make a

ranking. So, I express my gratitude to the entire NEC staff for all the effort they made to make me feel pampered, special, like a man whose work really matters during this entire period. There are no words to express my gratitude to them. Thank you!

Finally, there are those things at NEC that seem small but are actually big gestures. It was a comfort to the soul to see a bouquet of flowers on the table, to drink a warm coffee or to be greeted with a smile every time.

I hope this list is not perceived as an advertisement. That is not my intention. These are just the thoughts of someone who had the chance to be a NEC fellow twice. Once with the project mentioned above, and the first time with the translation program, *Tandem*, in which I had to put myself in the role of a translator (which I am not very used to) and translate an excellent archaeology book (I am a historian, not an archaeologist, unlike archaeologists, who are also historians). I had the pleasure of being part of the first series of *Tandem* fellows, a program that I hope will continue. For me, this was the way I came into contact with NEC and the period that taught me you can learn to do things you never thought you were able to do.

I would like to end with a(nother) confession. After the last presentation of this academic year, I did not say “goodbye” to my colleagues or the NEC staff. It was as if I did not want to end this chapter of my life in this way. For me, New Europe College will always remain an academic home to which I will return and which I will always carry in my heart.

Oleksii Plastun is a Professor at the Chair of International Economic Relations at the Sumy State University (SSU). Before joining the SSU, he was a trader and analyst in several investment and financial companies. He still trades in different financial markets using his own trading strategies. Professor Plastun tries to reconcile his experience as a trader with academic theory and is constantly searching for market inefficiencies. He is the author of over seventy peer-reviewed (indexed) research papers published in such outlets as *Finance Research Letters*, *Research in International Business and Finance*, *Journal of Economic Studies*, *The North American Journal of Economics and Finance*, *Journal of Applied Economics*, and many others. He worked as an expert for several organizations, including the World Economic Survey IFO Institute (Germany), the CESifo research group (Germany), and the Scientific Council of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine. He is the editor in chief of the academic journal *Banks and Bank Systems* (Scopus). Bloomberg interviewed Professor Plastun as an academic expert. He has participated in many research projects worldwide as a project leader and a member. Professor Plastun has led the ranking of top authors in Ukraine according to RePEc (one of the world's largest depositories on economic papers). He was awarded with scholarships from Berkley University (USA), University of Liverpool (UK), the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, The National Bank of Ukraine and New Europe College (Romania).

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Life in Ukraine During the War: The Case of Sumy. Between Life and Death

Oleksii Plastun

Local citizen

I live in Sumy. It's a city about forty kilometers from the Russian border. That is why, on the first day of invasion, Sumy was occupied. Columns of tanks and armored vehicles drove right through the center of the city.

All military personnel, policemen, secret service officers, basically anyone who could, in theory, defend the city, left it the day before the invasion. It was kind of sad.

Still some local men with proper experience stayed, and there was a fight 500 meters from my living apartment. There were sounds of machine guns, explosions, a truck on fire, dead occupiers lying right on the walkways where just the day before I had been walking with my three-year-old daughter.

Afterward I took my car and my family and left my home. It has been empty ever since. We moved to my mother's in the city center, because there were no fights there, and it seemed a safer place to stay.

A few days after, the Russian columns moved on to Kyiv, and there was an opportunity, with the help of local guides and using local roads, to leave Sumy. I moved my wife and daughter closer to the border with Moldova. I left them with my savings and car, and since then my family has been separated. Three years. In April, my daughter will turn seven. So, for half of her life she has had no father, and I have had no daughter.

I am not sure whether this is the proper term, but this is not life in the usual sense. This is not death either. It's something in between. Maybe this is what Schrödinger was trying to show us.

Air raid and missile alerts in Sumy are more or less constant.

The sounds of artillery shots can now be heard even in the city center. Jet warplanes are flying low. Quite noisy. The air is shaking. You can physically feel it.

Shaheds (these are Russian unmanned aerial vehicles developed by Iran) are flying every day and night. From time to time, they hit living apartments. There are more and more holes in the city. Anyway, every time Shaheds fly over, mobile groups with machine guns try to hit them. This is noisy.

By the way, did you ever think: where do the bullets go after they are fired? They fall from the skies. Gravitation, you know. I play tennis on the court in the city center, and here is what I found there, right on the tennis court: a bullet, just in case.

From time to time Russians launch ballistic missiles. This means an inevitable hit and deaths.

But life somehow goes on. There are people in the streets. Cafés are working, shops as well. Schools and universities are online. So, we have kind of a lost generation. Five years of constant online education (pandemic plus war) have produced a generation of extremely poorly educated children.

Funerals are everyday: young men, middle aged men, men over fifty. War cemeteries are huge and getting bigger day by day. It's not only about cities. Every village has its own as well. By the way, this is not only about a person who has lost his or her life defending the motherland. They had mothers and fathers, wives and children. Their lives are broken, with no chances to recover.

One of my classmates was killed in action. A wife and two small daughters were left behind.

Another classmate, my best friend from school, was heavily wounded. Half of a year he couldn't walk. But now he has recovered, and last week he was even promoted to colonel. I am very proud.

To sum up: I have lost my family, my job, my apartments, my car. More or less everything. And the funny thing is, I am lucky. My mother and brother are alive, my wife and daughter are safe, I have a place to live, I have a job. Millions of Ukrainians are in a much worse situation.

I have left my usual research activity. My field of study was financial markets. But now, I see no reasons to study them and work on papers. When you can die at any moment, it simply has no sense. And, besides, it is not fun anymore.

Interesting observation: The level of stress is so high and constant that you need some way to shift away from doomscrolling and heavy thoughts. That is why, during the last year, I have written two books: one is science fiction on trading in the financial markets, the other is a textbook for children on financial literacy. There is a feeling that it would be nice to leave something behind. Just in case.

Another option is to transform your anger and hate into something. For example, donations. You donate on FPV drones. They kill Russians. You sleep a little bit better. For me, an additional option was to reduce the presence of Russian science (its political side) in international science, as was done at CERN. This is a focus of my current research activity.

Academician

Doing science during wartime is no easy task. Focusing on research while air raid sirens wail, gunfire is constant, and explosions echo in the distance, is hardly an ideal environment for scientific work. And then, there's the issue of motivation—why research anything today if tomorrow you might simply not wake up? So, what's a scientist supposed to do during wartime? Dive into an academic death spiral?

I found an alternative: writing a school textbook might be a decent option.

Life in Sumy, just forty kilometers from the border with Mordor, hasn't exactly been the safest or most peaceful since the start of the full-scale invasion. And with the launch of the Kursk campaign, the situation has only become more dynamic—in the worst possible sense of the word.

Naturally, all sorts of thoughts creep into your mind, ranging from “Why are you even wasting oxygen on this planet?” to “If a Shahed drone actually hits tonight, what will be left?” (Physically,

not much, obviously. But in terms of a legacy, it would be nice to leave something behind.)

And since life, as it turns out, can be surprisingly finite, it makes sense to take all the expertise and knowledge gathered over a rather active professional career and share it. Preferably in a form that reaches not just one to two hundred specialists in a narrow academic niche, but thousands of people from the general public. As a bonus, you get to have a goal—something worth sticking around for a little while longer.

There's also a need to break out of the information bubble and doomscrolling—with all the Trumps, Musks, and Orbáns constantly flooding the news. Immersing yourself in something entirely new is an excellent way to mentally reset. And if you're also given the freedom to create, you might even come out ahead in terms of mental well-being.

Speaking of creative freedom—there's always that nagging feeling that everything around you is being done in a half-baked way, and the world is desperately waiting for you to finally make things right. And then, suddenly, you get the chance to do exactly that.

At the same time, there are some unresolved issues with Ukrainian academia—a system so deeply entrenched in its “methodological foundations” and “scientific-methodological approaches” that you can almost physically feel the need to prove that it is, in fact, possible to speak and write like a normal human being. That explanations can be clear instead of deliberately convoluted. That you can make knowledge accessible.

And then there's the positive motivation—children are our future, after all. Writing a textbook for kids means believing that the future will exist and that it's worth laying a foundation for it right now (outside the context of erasing the occupiers from the face of the earth, because that goes without saying).

The result? A school textbook on financial literacy. Because... why not?



Photo: Oleksii Plastun

Experience as a *SUS-VUIAS* fellow at NEC

I live in survival mode—with, let's say, extra fees. Russians are constantly trying to ruin Ukraine's energy system. There were months when electricity was available for only a few hours a day. So, you need equipment to somehow keep your life running. Rather costly equipment.

Plus, as I've mentioned, I've lost my major sources of revenue. Thanks to NEC, I can literally keep myself alive. The NEC fellowship physically gives me light.

But it's not only about physical support—it's about mental support as well. Seminars and webinars at NEC and VUIAS are a good reminder that only my own life has stalled. The rest of the world keeps on living, researching, exploring. And it's a good reminder that there is light at the end of this black hole. It's kind of inspiring.

What I mean is that, here and now, I am spatially detached from most of the discussions, but it's always a pleasure to see a normal life—a life I've lost.

Octavian Puric is an independent researcher working in Ancient Philosophy, with a special interest in Plato. His main focus is the interplay between the notions of being and appearance in Plato's metaphysics, epistemology and ethics.

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An Ivory Cabin

Octavian Puric

It just so happened that the opening day at NEC coincided with my birthday. While partly engulfed in meditations on the inevitable decay of all things and the worrying light-footedness of time that tends to accompany such festive occasions after a certain age, I heard something during the opening ceremony that pulled me out of my nostalgic musings. I was listening to Prof. Pleşu and Prof. Sandu-Dediu talk about the history of NEC, how it was founded in the nineties, and how it evolved and grew during all this time.

Just one year older than me, I thought to myself. Suddenly, the brightly lit room of the NEC conference hall, filled as it was with scholars from so many different domains, the opportunity I had, all of it took on the tint of accidentality, of that which could have just as well not been. Just like all things born into this world, I thought, there was something that made it happen and that still works to keep it all together.

I got distracted imagining how NEC and I lived these parallel existences during the 1990s and 2000s, and how the fashions of those years left their stylistic imprint on its lofty air, as they did on me. Running it in my mind like this, I found myself feeling a sort of naïve gratefulness that our paths intersected as if by some accident. Like a flying trapeze act where the swing of the catcher synchronises with the jump of the flying acrobat: the starting point of these two swings came all the way from the beginning of the nineties to coincide thirty or so years later. And now here I was, gripping onto its invisible institutional hands and gaining new momentum for the next jump!

I remember that the moment I set foot at NEC and met its people, I remarked a sort of subtle elegance that permeated the place. It was this light, elegant air that made it hard for me to imagine how NEC was born in what I remembered as the gaping greyness of

nineties Bucharest, where I grew up. I remember a city of cracked asphalt, squeaking Dacia taxis, harsh winters, and people in furry oversized winter clothes rushing about, as if the whole city was gripped by this indistinguishable mix of fear and excitement.

Now, it's obvious to see that nineties Romania was no inspiration either for NEC's aesthetics or its spirit. And while you can sometimes still see a mysterious yellow Dacia taxi in its parkway, there is nothing cracked and grey about the building, the people's clothes have long since lost their fur and comical sizes, and nobody seems to be rushing, besides those running late for the weekly seminars. Instead, you get this pervasive feeling of being welcomed without being pushed, which in my experience is preciously rare. Thus, it seemed to me then that NEC somehow managed to exist despite the cement and paranoia-tinted anxiety of its material and cultural surroundings, and become something fortunately apart from what I have experienced in Romania.

This curious fact gave birth to a sort of recurring questioning during my stay at NEC. It was the sort of questioning that never actually took the form of an explicit question that I wanted to settle; rather, it manifested in disparate but recurring moments of amazement, little surprises that kept being propped up by a variety of things that struck me. Sometimes it was an interaction with one of NEC's staff members—which could only be described as wholesome—or a funny, quirky chat with one of the fellows. Other times, it was just some small, elegant detail in the design of the place that caught my eye; most importantly, it was this feeling of ease and possibility that its atmosphere gave me. It was this positive strangeness, verging on mirage, that prompted me to melt down these bits of surprise into an explicit question: how is it possible that something can go so happily out of sync with its milieu?

Plato uses the phrase *theia moira*, a divine fate, to explain how a great spirit like that of Socrates can spring out of nowhere in the middle of an otherwise corrupted society. One would hope that there is more to Plato's answer than just an appeal to divine intervention, and I think there is. For Plato also says somewhere else that while sight's similarity to knowledge makes it the most

divine of the senses, the most divine things are only accessible to the mind's eye. To the possible distress of the religiously inclined, one frequent way in which Plato uses the word "divine" is to label the ultimate causal and explanatory principles of the world, causes which all lack any visibility. Since these are the most divine things there are, that is why our only way of relating to them, which is by intellectual contemplation, is also called divine. That is, it is not only "things" that are divine, but by extension also that which enables our relation with them. A fate can be called divine since, just like a sense, it engenders a relation to divine objects.

As such, Socrates's existence can be thought of as a *theia moira* because it bears little or no relation to the causal force of its societal context. Instead, the only way to explain it is by reference to these divine causes. A strange causal relation nonetheless, for it is Socrates's love and pursuit of this eluding knowledge of ultimate causes that makes him who he is and that determines his fate. One's fate, Plato seems to suggest, is not essentially determined by the accidental contexts of life, but by what one pursues, or strives for, their telos, or end goal. If the goal of one's life is divine, so is one's fate in turn.

So, maybe just as well, NEC did not mysteriously spring out against the causal current of its cultural and material context, but rather its existence has to do with something strived for, and that, like all true causes, is not visible to the eye.

I remember that after the opening ceremony I went straight to NEC's library on the upper floor. It was perfectly still and quiet, and I felt what for many non-academics would probably seem like a comically misplaced sense of excitement. Feeling a rush when surrounded by stillness and silence, at the feel of pristine loneliness, could seem just a peculiar misfire of our sophisticated monkey brains. But it's just that the larger the emptiness, the more it can be filled with what you like, I think.

I arranged my notebook and papers on the table, opened my laptop, created my to do list for the day and was ready to start being a productive philosopher. Yet, just before starting, the ceiling window caught my eye.

The window frame cropped a random image: a large piece of deep blue sky made up the greater part of the frame, while the upper parts of some distant buildings protruded from its lower side. At times, as in a divination ritual, flocks of birds would crisscross the frame in haphazard directions.

I couldn't see anything in particular clearly; what I think took me in was just the simple pleasure of looking through that window. That window frame was like one of those perfume samples you get in the stores, but for the sense of sight itself: "Would you like to have sight, sir? If you haven't decided yet, here is a small sample for you. One of our greatest senses, wouldn't you agree?" And I completely agreed, letting myself fantasise for almost an hour or so about how well a fully contemplative life would suit me. So much for my to do list.

When I finally turned around toward my immediate surroundings, I found that the rows of books around me were teeming with a sort of energy. It was the same sort of experience that would eventually leave such a strong impression on me during my NEC-funded research trip to Freiburg. On the old Philosophy University Building, just behind the muscular backs of the statues of Homer and Aristotle, I noticed the bullet marks made in the Second World War. Those little holes, now more than seventy years apart from the lead that had, for a split second, filled them, I felt, were stirring with violent energy. They were small statues of their own, giving a face to what would otherwise evade, even destroy comprehension. For in their static emptiness, these tiny holes managed to make manifest to the mind that most forceful violence, a violence which would otherwise turn the spirit to stone if it ever experienced it directly.

The books were like these small bullet holes, I now think, turning back, for in their still silence they made manifest to me the type of life whose joys and pursuits I recognised then to be my own. They showed me something of myself which was too close for me to comprehend directly, I suppose. Aristotle called this type of life the contemplative life and, as expected from someone nicknamed "the Philosopher," ranked it as the best there is. Couldn't agree more!

It seems to me now that NEC's reason for being, its invisible cause, so to speak, can be traced down to what Aristotle expressed as man's love of knowledge, a quote one finds written on the side of his large statue overseeing the entrance to the Freiburg Faculty of Philosophy: "All men by nature desire to know." But, more than that, I believe it is the particular closeness of its founders to that type of desire for knowledge and to the life that builds itself around it that made NEC's atmosphere feel so welcoming to me. For all those aspects that pleasantly surprised me did so because they reflected back and made me aware of what I myself always appreciated. And this type of understanding is always assured by something common that transcends the individual and time. Like those lonely cabins one can find when venturing deep into the mountains, with dry matches and supplies left for the weary traveller by someone they have never known, but who seems to know their needs so intimately well. Months or even years apart, one from the other, the gesture of care is as timely as if it were done right there and then. For to those who venture deep into the mountains particular differences wane, making space for what is essential and, as it turns out, common and binding. And this cuts across time as well. Probably that is why sometimes one can find such direct complicity with writers who lived hundreds or even thousands of years ago.

In the *Republic* Plato talks about the city as a reflection of the souls of those who established it. Its fundamental pursuits and values, its vices and virtues, its organisation, all of it find their ultimate externalisation in the constitution of a city and the life of its society. So, if the outside mirrors the inner, one can then peer inside the soul of the individual or the society by decoding their actions and habituations. I think that if you were to peer through NEC to make out what stands behind it, you would find people who are in tune with the same pursuit as those for which it caters. And I believe that this shared pursuit is the very root of its deeply welcoming atmosphere.

Deep inside the woods, one is grateful to find an ivory cabin.

Daniela Stanciu-Păscărița is a historian and teaching assistant at “Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu, interested in understanding what everyday life was like in the past. A coffee lover, she chose to focus her PhD research on the institution of the coffeehouse in Transylvania and Banat, bringing together urban and nationalities history. Transformation processes on regional, national and supranational levels are of interest to her, focusing especially on the paradigm Transylvania as a multicultural space within the Habsburg Empire, Hungarian Monarchy, respectively in interwar Romania. Public space, discourses and leisure activities are some key points of her research. Daniela loves working with students and sharing with them some of the knowledge she gained during scholarships in Austria, Germany and the United Kingdom. Her favorite course to teach at ULBS regards the history of mentalities and she finds it particularly interesting to share with students aspects like stereotypes and forms of collective nationality building.

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Making the State. Sociability of Old and New Networks in Post-Imperial Realities

Daniela Stanciu-Păscărița

Introductory Testimony

Describing my experience at NEC is both a mental challenge and an opportunity for reflection on my own research and on myself. New Europe College is a hub that gathers around it people who are deeply passionate about their research—a space conducive to professional discussion and debate, surrounded by unique elements that give it character and personality: the coffee during seminars, which served as a vehicle for the circulation of ideas; the snacks, as food for thought; the shared lunch with colleagues in the beautifully restored nineteenth-century building; the always fresh and inviting flowers; the birch trees in the NEC garden, which were, at times, the only witnesses to the thoughts typed on my laptop; the wine and dessert enjoyed at the end of a seminar, accompanied by stories that become timeless.

When I applied for a fellowship at New Europe College, I was primarily thinking of the prestige such a grant would bring to my academic path, I admit, without fully considering the real gains and opportunities it would offer. Now, at the end of my time at NEC as a fellow, I'm filled with a sense of nostalgia and profound personal and professional reflection. I ask myself: what has this experience at NEC brought me? In what ways have I grown, become better, more professional?

I must begin by confessing that it wasn't easy to travel every week from Sibiu to Bucharest and back, whether by car or by train. The five-and-a-half, sometimes six-hour journey had something intrinsically romantic and reflective about it—I often felt that my existence was split between my life in Sibiu and my life in Bucharest. When I received the news that I had won the NEC fellowship, I imagined I would read a lot of literature on the Sibiu-

Bucharest–Sibiu route. But in reality, I now confess, I didn't. I often read the articles and chapters sent by colleagues who were going to present their research. Or I worked on my own articles and reports, answered emails, or chatted with friends. The pace of our life is fast and hectic, but the train carriage or the passenger seat in the car driven by my husband provided peace and time for reflection—and sometimes the chance to finally reply to those emails that had been weighing on me for a while. This existence shared between Sibiu and Bucharest has something romantic and romanticizing about it—a constant longing for the city you are not currently in, whether for the Transylvanian city that is my home, Sibiu, or for the city that adopted me for one night a week, Bucharest.

In this introduction to my testimony, it is only right to offer a few words of thanks to those who supported me personally during this ten-month endeavor in Bucharest. First and foremost, to my pillar of strength, Florin, who juggled domestic life and caring for our daughter, Catinca—whose first sentence was, “Mommy goes to work in Bucharest”; to the grandparents who supported us with a warm meal from time to time; to my colleagues at the university who stepped in for me in various situations; and to my students, who were patient and attended the make-up seminar sessions.

The Research

The research project I initiated during my time at NEC highlights the connection between two aspects that might initially appear incompatible: the sociability and loyalty of the Transylvanian Saxons during times of upheaval and historical transformation. The first objective of the research was to reconstruct the spaces of political sociability, in conjunction with cultural and economic ones, in order to identify the relevance of physical space in the complex network of symbolic and social capital that it intrinsically holds for the communities in question. The premise underlying my research is that there is a link between the Transylvanian habitus at the beginning of the twentieth century and the sociability spaces frequented—namely, that through the lens of memory culture, these spaces become, in terms of mental representation, places of

memory, encapsulating various events that are representative of historically significant moments.

In this sense, I have selected a number of key moments from the imperial and post-imperial history of the Transylvanian Saxons that played an important role in the development of the community, through the political decisions made at specific points in time. From this perspective I introduce the concept of loyalty (*questioning loyalty*) into the broader picture of political transformations within the Austro-Hungarian monarchy following the end of the Great War. I start from the question: what were the strategies employed by the Transylvanian Saxons in responding to different state visions during a time marked by change? The two components of the study—sociability on one hand and loyalty on the other—will be analyzed under the broader conceptual umbrella of historical change and post-imperial realities.

The first component of the research began with the premise of identifying public spaces within the urban habitat of the two cities studied: Sibiu and Braşov. To achieve this objective, I relied on city directories from these locations for the 1900–1930 period—valuable documentary sources for creating a virtual archive of public spaces. The comparative approach to sociability in these two cities also highlights the originality of my research, as it ultimately offers a broad perspective on urban leisure in both the imperial and post-imperial contexts.

A second key component relevant to the research framework lies in the concept of *loyalism* and its metamorphosis from the imperial to the post-imperial period. Of major importance is the macro-political shift that occurred as a consequence of World War I, particularly the years 1918, 1919, and 1920, a time marked by profound transformations and decisive actions. I emphasize here the Declaration of Saxon Allegiance to Romania, signed in January 1919 by the Saxon elite, through which they affirmed their belonging to the Romanian national state. From this moment onward a new chapter begins in the history of the German minority in Transylvania, characterized by the redefinition of political behavior, negotiation strategies, and sociability.

The central research question focuses on how the process of transforming loyalty and integration unfolded—from an imperial to a monarchical/post-imperial historical context—in the lives of Transylvanian Saxons. A major interest was also the identification and reconstruction of networks and communication channels, not only within the group itself, but also in relation to the power elites in Bucharest. In this respect, I analyzed the relationships, attitudes, and political behavior of the Transylvanian Saxons, who as a minority within Greater Romania, had to navigate interactions with the Romanian majority.

The core research question thus revolves around the methods through which the political and social integration of the Saxon minority into the new political framework was achieved. The examination of case studies involving prominent German figures from the interwar period also proved valuable for reconstructing prosopographical elements and attitudes toward the governing elite.

I believe the most significant outcome of this project was the opportunity to join research networks and working groups that include scholars at various stages of their academic careers. Through the conferences and seminars I attended and the conference I organized I had the chance to meet researchers who value studies in political and cultural sociability. I would like to mention Silvia Marton, Constantin Ardeleanu, Cosmin Koszor-Codrea, Cosmin Minea, Maria Pakucs, Constanța Vintilă, Raluca Alexandrescu, and James Koranyi—scholars with whom I hope to collaborate in the future to further complete the complex picture of integration and the formation models of post-imperial realities.

Results

At the end of 2024 my book, *Leisure in Times of Peace and War: Germans from Sibiu and Timișoara* (Mega Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2024, 340 pages), was published. At the end of January I had the honor of being invited by Silvia Marton to present the book within the framework of the research group “Reflections on the

Political and Social History of the 18th and 19th Century.” Thus, we gathered for a roundtable discussion held on January 30, 2025. My colleague and now friend Cosmin Koszor-Codrea, a researcher at New Europe College, graciously moderated the discussion and offered valuable suggestions for improvement and future reflection with the perspective of publishing the book in English.

The event, attended by esteemed researchers and professors from Bucharest and other academic centers—as well as friends—was a deeply meaningful one for me. I regarded it as both a celebration of the results of my doctoral research and an opportunity to reflect on the intricate social relations of the nineteenth century on the periphery of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. At the end of the roundtable, a fellow Transylvanian colleague now living in Bucharest shared with me that he had missed hearing a Transylvanian accent in a discussion about realities from the region, right in the heart of Bucharest. I found this remark especially meaningful, as it underscores the ongoing need to incorporate the rich, deep history of Transylvania and Banat into the broader scientific discourse centered in Romania’s capital.

Another important deliverable of my activity at the New Europe College was the organization of an international conference entitled *Spaces of Negotiation in Post-Imperial Orders*, which took place May 5–6, 2025. At the initiative of my colleague Wiktor Marzec, we drafted a call for papers centered on two key themes: spaces of negotiation and the complex post-imperial realities that shaped the world after the end of the Great War. The call was met with enthusiastic responses from 22 researchers, both from Romania (Bucharest, Constanța, Cluj-Napoca, Iași) and abroad (Berlin, Bratislava, Budapest, Frankfurt (Oder), London, Tbilisi, Warsaw). Guided throughout by the support of researchers Constantin Ardeleanu and Silvia Marton, and with the invaluable help of the entire NEC staff—especially the exceptional organizational skills of Ana Buculei—the conference proved to be a success and opened new avenues in the study of post-imperial Europe. We were also honored to host a keynote lecture by Gábor Egró, who

introduced innovative methods for analyzing sociability in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and outlined new conceptual and methodological research directions.

In addition to fostering research networks, a key future outcome of this conference will be the proposal of a special issue in a peer-reviewed journal indexed in international databases, dedicated to publishing the results of the presented research.

April 9, 2025, was marked on the calendar as the day I presented my research project at New Europe College, in front of fellow researchers, other NEC fellows, colleagues from Sibiu, as well as from other research centers in Romania and abroad. Although the day was charged with a wide range of emotions, the presentation of my project, “Making the State: Sociability of Old and New Networks in Post-Imperial Realities,” was met with productive and thought-provoking discussions. The feedback and comments I received only helped to generate new perspectives and angles for the historical, social, and anthropological analysis I am pursuing. Together with my colleagues, we identified the potential of the research and found meaningful connections with other ongoing projects. Moreover, I was deeply honored by the online presence of my colleagues from Sibiu and other universities, my family, and my students—people who were able to gain a clearer understanding of the directions my academic research is taking, and to whom I would like to extend my thanks (once again) through this report.

Epilogue

The time I spent at NEC will always remain etched in my memory as a fruitful period, filled with both professional and personal achievements. The discussions held in the main hall of NEC—or outside of it—were often inspiring, deeply academic, and wonderfully collegial. I will miss them, as well as the evenings spent with colleagues at Grădina Olari, where our conversations would joyfully continue.

With heartfelt thanks for making NEC a space of thought and knowledge in an increasingly turbulent world,

Dana



Eszter Szabó-Reznek is a theatre historian with a PhD in the social history of nineteenth-century Transylvanian theatre, focusing on regional identities, self-fashioning of theatre, institutional networks. Following her studies at the Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj and the University of Szeged, between 2017 and 2024 she worked as a researcher at Institute for Literary Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Budapest. She was part of the “Political Economy of Literature” Research Group funded by the Hungarian Academy. Working closely with the Archive of the Hungarian State Theatre of Cluj, Romania, her research focused on the period of transition to socialist theatre practices and the Stalinization of culture in Romania.

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Photo: Eszter Szabó-Reznek

Research Report

Eszter Szabó-Reznek

The abstract map of Bucharest with the grey line of Plantelor Street suddenly turning into the tangible Beaux-Arts building, with the discreet “New Europe College” plaque blending into the white walls, a generous and elegant gesture in a city in which texts and images from every inch of usable surface try to convince you to consume or commemorate. The city of some of my favourite Romanian movies, chaotic streets where Radu Jude’s characters walk or drive. Where, as Cristi Puiu shows us, in labyrinthic and claustrophobic apartments a bunch of people wait for a priest that, just like Godot, never arrives. But *Angela goes on** and, anyway, *do not expect too much from the end of the world*.† We all have our personal versions of the same city (mine is structured by cinemas). The first seminar at NEC, ties forming and re-forming throughout the year. Living in the Lucaci *mahala*‡ for ten months. Ending the days of research at the Library of the Romanian Academy with *merdenea*§ and orange Uludağ from *nea* Mihai on Amzei Square Street. Pigeons and honking cars. “My religion is cinema, I believe in Robert Bresson,” words on the walls of a house in the Armenian district. Listening to church bells on Easter Vigil. Lunches in the back garden of NEC and the homelike tradition of pretzels and wine following afternoon events. Cats on windowsills. Street of Time, Street of the Half Moon—scattered pieces of the nineteenth-century city.

* *Angela Goes On* (1981, dir. Lucian Bratu), the title character is a taxi driver in Bucharest, following her around, the camera captured later destroyed parts of the city.

† *Do Not Expect Too Much from the End of the World* (2023, dir. Radu Jude), the film—among a multitude of mediums—uses footage from *Angela Goes On*.

‡ *Mahala*, coming from Turkish, originally meaning a district of a city, later used pejoratively for ill-famed neighbourhoods—I’m using it in its original sense.

§ *Merdenea*, a delicious, salty, cheesy pastry of Turkish origins, that goes well with ayran, yoghurt or the Turkish soft drink Uludağ.

Two swallows making a nest on the balcony. Taking breaks from reading theatre related documents of the Ministry of Arts and Information from the 1950s in the garden of the National Archives of Bucharest, surrounded by socialist blocks of flats, sitting on a bench under the vines, with the old dog of the Archives sleeping close-by. From creatures of the archive to archived creatures, finding a list of animals from the 1950s among the documents of the state circus of Bucharest: one camel, three trained Carpathian bears, one wolf, one vulture, trained horses, named, as they follow, Odor, Budi, Selin, Cristal, Doru, Willi, Nonius, Giuri, Bator, Picolo, Sultan, and, finally, Rigoletto (*sic!*), the donkey. Watching a movie alone at Eforie Cinematheque on my first night in Bucharest. Other nights, other movies followed, sitting together at Elvira Popesco or Union. “Tomorrow I’ll think of you”—words on walls again. My days getting populated by nineteenth-century photography and the sweet and sour taste of *Artemisia absinthium* in red wine. Walking home in the heavy floral scents of May nights. Turning thirty-five in the Bucharest summer. Noticing the unnoticeable everyday changes of the neighbourhood. Reading about mining industry in the Jiu Valley, because the history of socialist realist theatre can take you to unexpected places. Looking for the memories of others at the flea market and reading work reports of actors in Romania between 1949 and 1952: turning literature and cinema from an activity of leisure into ideological education. Theatre as a factory, the actor as a worker, production meetings as ritualized events. Learning more about archives and thinking about how we use them. Going to exhibitions and to screenings of newsreels made by the Sahia Studio in socialist Romania. The uneasiness of watching a montage of local newsreels from the 1940s, with members of the Legionary movement parading in Unirii Square, a reminder that public spaces are not neutral, nor innocent. Sharing a morning coffee before the NEC seminars outside the small café at the intersection of Călărași and Sfântul Ștefan Street, watching the morning rush. Waiting for the black and white images of the city to reveal themselves on medium format film. Living between archival sources, public gardens, subway stations and languages. Recognizing pieces from

a roll of 35mm film turned pink in time, found years ago at a flea market in Budapest with photos from Bucharest in the 1970s–80s, such as the modernist building of the Ciclop Garage on Magheru Avenue or the Palace Hall. Historical and urban curiosity, because the professional is personal. Layers of the city, like a found footage film. Ten months that make you want to stay.



Photos: Eszter Szabó-Reznek

Raluca-Maria Trifa is a Romanian architect and researcher, specialized in architectural heritage, urban history, and industrial heritage. She holds a PhD in Architecture from “Ion Mincu” University of Architecture and Urbanism, Bucharest, where she is a Teaching Assistant. Her research focuses on sustainable rehabilitation of historical industrial architecture, with a notable publication on Timișoara’s industrial heritage. She has actively contributed to projects like “Catalog București” and is a member of OAR (The Romanian Order of Architects) and ICOMOS Romania (International Council on Monuments and Sites).

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A Series of Fortunate Events: My (Slightly Chaotic) Fellowship Experience at NEC

Raluca-Maria Trifa

Serendipity (or How I Accidentally Became a Fellow Overnight)

October 1st, 2024, started like any other morning filled with deadlines at the office: our team was racing to finalize an architecture competition entry, with the submission date looming just a few days away. I was deeply involved in the process of double-checking renderings, text, and layout files, while surviving on espresso and dark chocolate. Business as (almost) usual. Then, precisely at 13:17, my phone rang. The screen lit up with a name I hadn't thought about in months: Ana Buculei.

Now, this was unexpected. I had saved Ana's number when I first applied to the NEC Fellowship, but my application ended with the classic "Thank you, unfortunately..." rejection email. There had been a small consolation prize: I was kept as a reserve. The kind of consolation that gives a little hope, but not much expectation. So, when Ana said, "Something quite unusual has happened..." I didn't know what to say. Someone had withdrawn, a place was available, was I still interested? Also: it would start tomorrow. First, I laughed nervously and asked, "Are you serious?" (just in case it was a joke), took a long pause, and then answered with a breathless, definite "Yes!" The architecture competition? It was out of my mind, at least for the moment.

And so began my unexpected, intense, yet transformative experience at the New Europe College.

A Little Chaos (or Learning to Dance with Spontaneity)

When I received the initial rejection email, I placed the NEC idea into the "maybe next year" category in my mind and tried to move on. I told myself the usual: "Perhaps it was not meant to be."

Then, to cope with the disappointment, I quickly overcommitted: to teaching at the university, to new design projects, to research collaborations. In short, I said yes to everything. Soon, my schedule became the kind that leaves you feeling both proud and a little overwhelmed. So, of course, the sudden call from NEC destroyed all this careful planning. In less than twenty-four hours I had to change many things: adjust class schedules, inform my colleagues and superiors at the university, write emails to collaborators, print and pack research documents, and, most importantly, try to change my mindset. From being fully occupied with teaching, projects, and strict deadlines, I had to switch to something different: full-time research and reflection. At least that's what I thought it would be.

Now, I must admit something: I am quite an organized person. Not obsessively, but I like having lists, calendars, and clear plans. Organization is not just a habit for me; it is how I manage the chaos of academic and professional life. I find peace in predictability. So, the experience at NEC, with all its spontaneity, was exciting but also a bit scary. I also hadn't planned any break from my other responsibilities. So, for many weeks, the fellowship felt like moving between two different worlds without being fully part of either. I was often tired, always catching up, and constantly shifting between contexts: one hour I was giving lectures or meeting students, the next I was at a seminar, or having spontaneous coffee talks with other fellows. But, still, somehow it worked. It became one of the most intense, surprising, and (strangely) productive periods I've had in years.

I never missed a seminar. No matter how full the day was, or how late the previous night had ended, the weekly NEC seminar became a kind of a personal ritual. It was my oasis, a space of mental clarity and positive energy. The intellectual atmosphere was so inspiring that even short coffee breaks became moments of powerful exchange of ideas. I looked forward to those meetings every week, not only for the academic content, but also for the atmosphere, the people, and the respectful rhythm of listening and dialogue. There, everything slowed down in a good way. There was room to think, to ask questions, to make connections.

What I did miss, unfortunately, were many of the other NEC-organized events: lectures, public talks, concerts. I often had to skip them because of my overlapping academic and professional commitments. And for that, I do feel regret for not being able to join more often, as those moments offered rich opportunities to learn and connect in different ways.

The Social Network (or Building Friendships Beyond the Seminar Room)

The other fellows turned out to be some of the brightest, kindest, and most intellectually generous people I have met in years. Even though our academic backgrounds and cultures were very different, we shared a surprising common ground: a curiosity about the world and a strong love for coffee. Everyone took their work seriously, but also wanted to connect, ask questions, and sometimes just relax and chat over a glass of wine.

Outside the seminar room, special moments happened in unexpected ways. During train rides to Mogoșoaia or at dinner table discussions about memory, politics, and post-war architecture, we created a unique and wonderful fellowship within the Fellowship itself. Somehow, I became the unofficial cultural guide, organizing city walks, museum visits, and several excursions that beautifully blurred the line between cultural enrichment and joyful indulgence. Together, we explored Brașov and Hărman, carefully analysing baroque facades, debating the semiotics of silence in Saxon architecture, imagining urban futures, and testing the theory that every town has at least one excellent pastry shop. But it was not only about sightseeing. I felt a strong commitment to introduce my colleagues to Romanian culture in all its complexity and contradictions—and I mean every aspect of it: I took them to restaurants, cafés, cinemas, theatre, opera, symphonic concerts, and yes, even to a disco or two (because we must also help stimulate the economy!).

At the same time, we unexpectedly found ourselves caught up in the broader Romanian political drama. The annulment of the first round of the presidential elections in November created a collective

civic shock. We followed debates with growing interest and even joined protests. At lunch we talked about electoral reforms and the public's trust in democracy. It was deeply moving to watch my fellow fellows gradually understand the Romanian context with its messiness, its beauty, its contradictions, and to share these moments of insight together.

The Pursuit of Happiness (or My Year of Surprises and Discoveries)

My project, "Bridging Histories: Unveiling the Industrial Evolution Across the Habsburg Empire's Periphery," explores the enduring legacies of the Habsburg Empire through the lens of industrial development in peripheral cities, with a focus on Timișoara and other cities like Pécs, Brno and Rijeka. Using a comparative and interdisciplinary approach, I looked at political, administrative, economic, and architectural dimensions from the nineteenth century to the present. In doing so, I sought to move beyond the imperial core to understand the unique industrial trajectories, post-imperial challenges, and adaptive strategies of these cities, also reflected on how they managed their industrial heritage.

Although the case studies were initially selected somewhat intuitively, based on general interest and superficial assumptions made during the application phase, I was soon struck by how extraordinarily rich and meaningful these places turned out to be for my research. I stopped believing it was just a coincidence. Every city helped me think in a different way and I was often surprised by their complexity, beauty, and cultural richness. From architecture and books to people and their memories, each place added something special to my research.

For me, as an architect, it was essential not only to study these cities through texts and archives but also to observe and understand their urban and architectural contexts directly. Seeing the physical environments, walking their streets, and experiencing the spatial realities added an invaluable layer of understanding to my research.

In Timișoara I explored materials at the local archives. The documents, mainly activity reports, correspondence, complaints,

and petitions from entrepreneurs, banks, and individual firms, shed light on how industrial activity shaped economic and spatial realities. While I didn't come across spectacular findings, the documents helped me understand the nuanced administrative and entrepreneurial rhythms of the city.

In Pécs, I had the pleasure of meeting Prof. Mónika Pilkhoffer at the University of Pécs. Our conversations about mining and post-industrial transformations were illuminating. We visited the Szent István and Széchenyi mines and the surrounding workers' colonies, and we discussed urban shifts after the closure of extraction sites. These explorations offered a comparative framework I later used when analysing other Central European industrial contexts. We continued our discussions at the university, followed by visits to repurposed industrial buildings such as the Zsolnay Cultural Quarter, once a porcelain and ceramics factory.

Brno was another key site. I met with Petr Svoboda, coordinator at the Methodological Centre for Modern Architecture at the Czech National Heritage Institute. Our discussions focused on industrial modernism and adaptive reuse strategies. I visited Villa Stiassni and later the Tugendhat and Löw-Beer villas—residences of prominent Jewish industrial families that offered insight into the interplay between architecture, economy, and status in early industrial society. Fieldwork included exploring former factories, the municipal slaughterhouse, power plants, and more, each telling a layered story of Brno's industrial diversification and transformation. I also had the chance to meet Dr. Petra Mertová, director at the Institute of Ethnography of the Moravian Museum. Her expertise on Brno's textile heritage brought the city's industrial identity into focus. Our guided tour through former textile factories and worker housing completed a vivid portrait of the human and spatial impact of industrialization.

In Rijeka, I toured important industrial landmarks and met Prof. Iva Mrak, whose knowledge about maritime and port-related industries helped me better understand how coastal cities developed from an industrial point of view. Exploring the port areas, old shipyards, and factories gave me a clearer idea about the specific

challenges and opportunities of industrialization by the sea. I was surprised to find how much of the city's history was written in the docks and warehouses, and I felt lucky to see these places with someone so passionate and knowledgeable.

Beyond the fieldwork, these travels gave me the chance to discover valuable printed materials I could not have accessed otherwise. I found rare books and archival publications in local libraries and institute collections, resources that would have been impossible to consult remotely. These materials significantly expanded the theoretical and empirical scope of my project. Equally transformative was the chance to connect with scholars and researchers across disciplines and institutions. I reached out to many, often hesitantly, and was amazed by their responsiveness and generosity. Researchers such as Michaela Ryšková, Lukáš Beran, and Biró Dániel, whom I contacted independently, shared key materials with me: books sent by post, scanned publications, unpublished papers, and thoughtful suggestions. Their support made a significant impact on my research. This spirit of academic generosity, whether in a quiet library or a friendly email, was probably the most rewarding part of the year.

NEC gave me the rare chance to do all this in a focused, structured, and supported way. This experience made me very happy and grateful. For the first time, I truly understood how beautiful it is to do research in decent conditions, without constant stress, financial worries, or time pressure. Having the space and support to focus deeply on my work was a rare and precious gift. And I am deeply grateful for having been given this chance.

The Secret Garden (or Love Letters to the NEC Space and Its People)

The physical space of NEC deserves a love letter of its own. Imagine a beautiful old house nestled in one of Bucharest's most elegant neighbourhoods. The seminar room where theory meets practice. The courtyard is where the seasons change slowly, and ideas grow quietly. And the lunch table? Honestly, the best place for interdisciplinary thinking I've ever experienced. We would gather around the table and swap stories: about obscure theorists, film recom-

mendations, the best local wines. It was during those lunches that I became friends with fellows I now consider very dear.

Beyond the fellows, the staff also made a big impression on me. They were always kind, helpful, and welcoming. Their support created a warm and encouraging atmosphere that made each day easier, whether it was organizing events, helping with logistics, or simply sharing a friendly smile. Their presence was an essential part of the NEC experience, making the whole place feel like an intellectual home, not just an institution.

Catch Me If You Can (or How Life's Detours Led to Meaningful Growth)

Looking back, the NEC fellowship was many things for me: a rescue mission from burnout, a lesson in academic spontaneity, a reminder of why research matters, and proof that community can make everything better. But more than anything it was an affirmation: that even when life doesn't go according to plan, it can still lead somewhere meaningful. That even if you come in through the back door, last minute, with your bags unpacked and your schedule a mess—you can still belong. You can still contribute. You can still grow.

During this experience, I remembered why I love cities, stories, and shared intellectual struggle. And somewhere along the way, things started aligning: I was invited to panels, roundtables, editorial boards.

I'll miss the weekly seminars, the courtyard coffees, the wandering conversations, the dinners that turned into debates. I'll miss the constant intellectual surprises, the unexpected insights, and the beautiful feeling of being surrounded by people who care deeply about thinking and about the world. I left NEC with a research project advanced, but also with a dramatically expanded professional network and deep intellectual friendships.

Also, I now know exactly how many coffees I need to survive a twelve-hour day of teaching, designing buildings, and research: three and a half cups.

Thank you, NEC, for everything.

Olena Uvarova is a historian and Associate Professor at the Department of Social Sciences at Odesa National Medical University, Ukraine. She was born in 1980 in Odesa. Olena graduated from the Odesa I. I. Mechnikov National University in 2003 with an honors degree and obtained a PhD in World History there in 2008. After having received her doctoral degree she joined the Odesa National Medical University, where she still teaches humanitarian courses. For many years of her academic career, her research was dedicated to the international relations within the framework of the Eastern question (eighteenth–nineteenth centuries) and the history of Greek community in Odesa. In recent years Olena has collaborated with the Branch of the Hellenic Foundation for Culture in Odesa and participated in joint research projects. In 2023 she received an honorary title of professional delegate—awarded by the Hellenic Foundation for Culture (Athens) presented in recognition of the contribution to the development of Greek culture and civilization. In parallel, in recent years, she has become interested in the issue of the evolution of medical education. The countries where she has participated in scientific conferences include Ukraine, Romania, Finland, and Latvia. She was a Visiting Fellow at the Aleksanteri Institute, University of Helsinki, Finland (2023), and a Virtual Fellow at the Linda Hall Library, Kansas, USA (2024).

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God Works Through People

Olena Uvarova

Introduction 🥰

Life is a series of events, but it is also shaped by the people we meet along the way. Our achievements are the result of our ideas, aspirations, and hard work, but also of meeting people who supported us, offered us advice, took the time to give us a hand, and were simply happy for us. Sometimes it's enough to hear someone say "Keep going!" to continue your life's research. I spent the entire 2024–2025 academic year surrounded by such people at New Europe College.

Receiving this fellowship was a gift from God. During a difficult time for my country, I was given help and the opportunity to continue my work—and even just to stay in a safe place. Bucharest turned out to be exactly that—a city that gradually won me over.

Bucharest and Its People 🍰

We all know the call to look ahead. But in Bucharest I often found myself looking around—to catch every detail of the old buildings, to peek into every alleyway, and to make sure I didn't miss a single café with delicious cakes.

In this city, you truly feel that history isn't just a science about something long gone, read about in libraries or archives. Bucharest itself is that history—broad boulevards built where the historic center was once destroyed, churches that were relocated and saved, abandoned villas still waiting for their owners... Incredibly green parks, rich museums, a charming mix of architectural styles, and streets named after great figures! Here, tradition meets modernity—and in that intersection, there is life.

The people of Bucharest are a true example of empathy and sensitivity, of care and support, of wishing safety and peace for others. They're not afraid to spend their energy on a smile. They

don't forget to ask "How are you?" They don't rush to leave you with a problem—they help you solve it. And now, I have friends among the people of Bucharest!

The People of NEC 🧐

Behind every detail in the old Bucharest building of NEC stands the careful work and attentiveness of its staff. The well-organized processes and deep dedication are evident in everything—and the constant presence of a fresh flower bouquet in the sunlit conference room adds a unique vitality to the environment.

The entire NEC team functions as a coordinated mechanism, working to create a sense of home for all fellows. Every request—whether related to daily practicalities or consultations regarding essential academic materials—was met with attentiveness, professionalism, and genuine care. This atmosphere of support made it possible not only to focus on research but also to feel truly welcomed and understood, even while far from home.

When the invitation for a research fellowship at NEC arrived in my inbox, I realized that someone had seen more in my project than I had seen myself. My research proposal had been read, a promising idea had been found in it, and someone believed I should be given the time and space to develop it. That formal invitation opened doors not only to professional growth, but also to personal transformation. Someone saw in me not just a set of lines on a CV, but a person—a future member of a multinational cohort of fellows.

Fellowship People ☀️

One of the most profound changes I experienced this academic year was the transformation of my social circle. Imagine having coffee with colleagues from Italy and the UK, heading to lunch with scholars from Switzerland, Bulgaria, and Poland, laughing with a Greek friend, attending a symphony concert with Romanians, going to a farewell party for a German colleague, and reading the poems of a Georgian poetess. That was my reality.

These people were not just colleagues—they became my advisors. Through their feedback, I began to see myself not only through an academic lens, but also on a deeper, human level. Different languages, cultural traditions, and life experiences enriched me as a person. And it wasn't just geographical diversity—it was the diversity of academic approaches, perspectives on history, culture, philosophy, and art. Living and working in such a community meant being in constant dialogue, exchanging thoughts, and experiencing the joy of discovering unexpected connections. For example, at the invitation of one of my fellowship friends, I took part in two conferences in Romania - in Constanța and Bucharest.

My worldview expanded significantly during our weekly seminars, where fellows presented their projects. At times I caught myself thinking—as Socrates once said—“I know that I know nothing.” But this is precisely the purpose of an interdisciplinary community: it is a space where new knowledge is acquired, and unexpected ideas are born—sparking fresh momentum in our research.

The People of My Research Project 🤖

My research project is entitled “Great Powers in the ‘Fight’ for Ottoman Christians: Ideology and Implementation of Patronage Politics, 1774–1856.”

In short, the project offers a comparative perspective on the relations between the Great Powers, the Ottoman Porte, and Ottoman Christians, with particular attention to the ideological dimension. Its aim is to explore the diverse ways in which the Great Powers employed patronage politics toward Christian groups—treating them, at times, as strategic minorities. The research seeks to explain how different imperial powers attempted to counterbalance each other's influence, especially in the shifting context of the Eastern Question.

A short description, however, does not mean the project itself is small. On the contrary, it is a vast and complex topic. The project problematizes the notion of a “protectorate” over Orthodox coreligionists and, more broadly, offers a comparative view of the

multilateral relations among the Porte, the Great Powers, and local elites in regions such as Greece and the Archipelago, Moldavia, Wallachia, Bulgaria, and Serbia. It aims to show how imperial powers sought to manage the rising influence of their rivals by leveraging their connections to local populations.

Through conversations with colleagues and in response to the feedback and questions I received during the seminar where I presented my ideas, I decided to shift the focus slightly—toward the more local aspects of the topic. Fortunately, I have archival materials to support this direction, gathered over recent years from the State Archive of the Odesa Region. This material will help bridge an important gap between macro-historical analyses of Great Power politics and a micro-historical view of everyday life—including the political, economic, and religious choices made by Ottoman Christians relocated to the city of Odesa.

In February 2025, during a few cold days, I worked in the archives in Chişinău, where I was warmly welcomed and gathered valuable materials on Greek migrants displaced by the Greek War of Independence. This deepened my interest in the subject, as for nearly a decade—while revolutionary events and their consequences unfolded in Greece—many of these refugees lived in Odesa. The topic remains largely underexplored and, for me, it became a natural next challenge.

As part of my fellowship work, I prepared an article examining the integration of Greeks into the imperial society of nineteenth-century Odesa. In June 2025 I presented my key findings at an international conference held at NEC, where I was joined by colleagues from Ukraine.

People from My Country 🙌

NEC became a place where Ukrainians—scattered across different countries by circumstance—could finally meet. Our cohort of Ukrainian fellows was quite diverse: historians, political scientists, literary scholars. Yet regardless of the topic, our conversations always returned to a shared focus—news from the homeland.

Our weekly lunch talks often led to collaborative ideas. As a result, we organized several online events for the academic community at my home university in Odesa, where I teach.

In March 2025 we took part in the workshop *The Future of Slavic / Transnational Studies in the Context of Eastern Europe*, held at the Centre for Advanced Study in Sofia. It brought together Ukrainian fellows from the *Sustaining Ukrainian Scholarship (SUS)* program. Sunny Sofia and the CAS team welcomed us with great warmth.

A particularly meaningful milestone for me was co-organizing the international conference *Transnational Trade Networks and the Development of the Black Sea Port Cities during the Modern Age: A Comparative Analysis*. I was especially glad to invite other scholars from Ukraine to Bucharest—giving them the opportunity to expand their academic networks, exchange ideas, and enjoy the beauty of a Bucharest summer. The conference took place at NEC in June 2025 and was held within the framework of the *SUS* program. This gathering of like-minded scholars deeply inspired me—just as my earlier trip to Greece had.

People in Athens 🕶️

Thanks to the NEC fellowship, a long-held dream of mine came true—I finally visited Greece, where I had the opportunity to examine the collections of the Gennadius Library in Athens. Since my first year at university and throughout my postgraduate studies, I have worked on the history of the Greek community in Odesa. Visiting the country whose culture helped shape modern civilization—and whose people played a foundational role in the early history of my city—was a deeply meaningful experience. Access to the monographs and research housed in the Gennadius Library, especially in the field of Modern Greek Studies, will be crucial for the continued development of my project.

During the nearly two weeks of my research trip, my daily routine followed a cherished rhythm: walking along narrow sidewalks to the Gennadius Library to study new monographs, then visiting various museums in Athens to gather visual materials. In between,

a small cup of fragrant Greek coffee paired with sweet *loukoumi* always kept me energized and focused.

In my free time I attended a Greek folk dance concert, explored the National Archaeological Museum and the Museum of Cycladic Art, and admired Athens' architectural landmarks. These experiences allowed me to fully immerse myself in Greek culture—and inspired me to continue working on my topic and improving my Greek language skills.

The people of Athens—attentive library staff, welcoming museum curators, strangers who helped me find my way, and scholars who guided my research—made this journey both productive and unforgettable.

People I Am Grateful To 😊

I won't mention any specific names—except for Socrates—in this report, because I am truly grateful to everyone I met during this academic year. I am also deeply thankful to the NEC team for recognizing the value of my research proposal.

That's how God works—through the person who smiled at you by the NEC gates, through the one who offered an insightful scholarly comment, through the one who found an essential monograph on a library shelf. Each of them became part of my journey.

Conclusions 😊

Receiving an invitation to a fellowship at NEC is not just a career opportunity—it is an experience that can transform and deepen your understanding of yourself, of science, and of others. NEC offered a space for reflection, dialogue, and intellectual growth—an environment where depth is valued over haste. The fellowship brought not only tangible results, but also new perspectives. It gave me the time to reflect—both on my project and on my personal journey.

It was a break from duties and constant stress. Without rush, without unnecessary movement or anxiety, I had the chance to listen to myself—and to truly feel my own aspirations.

Writing this essay marks the approaching end of the fellowship. But the outcome is not just a submitted article. There are new friends, new ideas, new contacts—and promises to travel to all the countries from which we came together in Romania. There are shared photos and memories. Here is the first photo at NEC, when all the fellows gathered together. Here is the first photo of Bucharest—a majestic, unfamiliar building, and me standing next to it. Here I am in the natural history museum beside a dinosaur. And here we all are on a trip to Braşov, laughing the whole way on the train.

God continues to act through the people we meet. And if you found yourself at NEC and gained a new experience—then perhaps now it's your turn to be that person for someone else.

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With a background in Medieval Latin, Classics, and Scandinavian Studies, she primarily works at the intersections of these fields, where she is interested in questions of cultural transfer, translated literature, historiography, geography, religion, and mythology. Her current main projects focus on the matter of Troy (*Trójumanna saga*), pre-Christian Germanic religions, and narratives surrounding holy objects, particularly *arma Christi* relics. Sometimes she enjoys exploring various theoretical approaches, including postclassical narratology (narratives as rhetorical acts within their social context), Polysystem Theory, New Philology, Cultural Memory, and Ecocriticism.

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Walking the Streets of Bucharest

Sabine Heidi Walther

Upon my arrival in Bucharest during a warm and sunny afternoon in early October, I took a remarkably fast taxi. This vehicle, unfortunately lacking functional seatbelts, navigated swiftly through the dense midday traffic, bringing me directly to New Europe College, situated in the heart of Bucharest's Old Town. I was warmly welcomed by the NEC staff, who then escorted me to a charming little apartment just around the corner. This would be my home for the next ten months and, from the very first moment, I felt incredibly fortunate to be there.

The Old Town

For me, one of the greatest joys of moving to a new place is discovering fresh routes for walking. Bucharest offers no shortage of such opportunities. As the capital city of Romania, it is a vibrant and lively metropolis, yet it possesses a distinct character that sets it apart from other major urban centers I have visited before.

Bucharest is widely known as the "Paris of the East" and its most iconic street, the famous Calea Victoriei, lives up to this reputation with numerous palatial structures, many of which now house museums. My favorite among these is the Museum of Art Collections, which showcases forty-four collections amassed by private collectors, including doctors, musicians, diplomats, artists, and authors, displayed separately, allowing an appreciation for the diverse tastes and ideas behind their formation. The collections primarily consist of Romanian paintings from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries but also include pottery, furniture, and artifacts from the Near East and East Asia.

Much of the city's architecture dates from the period between the end of the nineteenth century and the 1930s. Not many of the older structures have survived, but there are still traces of its earlier history, some churches, inns, and the palace of Vlad the Impaler.

Unfortunately, the palace is in a state of disrepair due to an unfinished restoration project, but it has found new tenants—a colony of lovely cats. One architectural style that struck me as particularly distinctive is the Brâncovenesc style, which I had never encountered before. Unique to Romania, it is a fascinating blend of Byzantine, Ottoman, and late Renaissance elements that emerged under the rule of Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

Beyond its broad and splendid boulevards, the Old Town's structure is strikingly polycentric. It is organized around churches and old inns, from which streets radiate outward and then overlap with the outward vectors of the neighboring centers.

Remnants of the Communist Era

The charm of the old town is juxtaposed with the questionable grandeur of Bucharest's Communist-era legacy. Some parts of the old town were lost to Nicolae Ceaușescu's grand urban projects. His most infamous creation is the colossal Palace of the Parliament (*Palatul Parlamentului*), allegedly the heaviest building in the world. Built as part of Ceaușescu's vision for a systematized city, this monumental structure is connected to the Union Boulevard (*Bulevardul Unirii*), which stretches between Constitution Square (*Piața Constituției*) and Alba Iulia Square (*Piața Alba Iulia*). Along the way, it passes through Union Square (*Piața Unirii*), one of the largest urban squares in the world. At its center is an enormous fountain, which becomes a crowded spectacle of illuminated colors on weekend nights during the summer.

These massive undertakings, inspired by North Korea's *Juche* ideology, were part of a broader systematization effort that began in the 1970s, following Ceaușescu's visit to North Korea in 1971. The devastation caused by the 1977 earthquake further facilitated these projects. However, by the time the regime fell, many of these ambitious projects were left incomplete, leaving behind a heavy burden for the city to manage.

The Cats of Bucharest

Walking through the streets of Bucharest, I have encountered numerous cats, each with their own personality and routines. At a house on my walking route to the center I frequently met a friendly gray cat sitting on a small gray box attached to the facade of a house. She has become something of a neighborhood fixture, reliably occupying her spot each evening. First, I saw a passerby stopping to greet her, gently petting her while she enjoyed the attention. The next time, it was me who greeted her.

Just down the street from my apartment lives another feline resident—a black cat, possibly a professional mouser belonging to a hotel. This elegant creature often lounges atop a high green cable box, observing the world with a mix of curiosity and indifference. Sometimes it welcomes a friendly pet, though at times it prefers solitude.

There are almost as many dogs as there are cats in Bucharest, but they are for a dog person to describe.

So Much Culture

There is so much to explore in Bucharest: operas, museums, concerts, and films. The Atheneum stands out as a stunning venue for musical performances, a true temple dedicated to the art of music. However, opera has always held a unique place in my heart. It offers a rare opportunity to escape from the endless cycle of worrying about past regrets, present challenges, and uncertain futures. I had not attended opera performances and concerts so regularly since my early university days. The opera house in Bucharest presents a diverse mix of timeless classics and contemporary works, all performed to remarkable standards. One particularly unforgettable event was the world premiere of the opera *Procesul lui Eichmann* by Gil Shohat, a performance that left a lasting impression. Over time, I also began exploring Romanian compositions, starting with *Œdipe*, a cornerstone of twentieth-century opera by the Romanian composer George Enescu. This piece presents the life of Oedipus in chronological sequence, offering a different perspective on the well-known myth.

Romania and the State of Global Affairs

The year was overshadowed by significant global events, including Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine and the reelection of Donald Trump in the United States. Both developments played a notable role in Romania's presidential elections, which turned out to be far more contentious and drawn-out than initially anticipated.

As a guest living in a foreign country, it is delicate and complex to form or express opinions on local politics. Romania, since the fall of Nicolae Ceaușescu's regime, has not always been the focal point of international media. When the presidential elections began to gain attention, early foreign coverage was often superficial and riddled with inaccuracies. However, as the elections progressed, international observers and media outlets started to realize the high stakes involved. Romania's geographical position at the frontier of the European Union made the elections critically important. After a prolonged and arduous campaign, the pro-Western, pro-European Union candidate ultimately emerged victorious. While this result marked a significant victory in safeguarding Romania's future on the European stage, it was also a reminder that broader challenges remain. A battle may be won, but the larger struggle against authoritarianism continues—not only in Romania.

Russia's war against Ukraine gained a personal dimension for me and, certainly, also for other fellows at the NEC, given that our group included several scholars from Ukraine. Reports of assaults on Ukrainian cities became linked to our new colleagues and friends, some of whom were in Bucharest and others who remained in Ukraine, all endeavoring to secure a better future.

Life at NEC and Beyond

Life at NEC was centered around the weekly Wednesday seminars and lunches. Each week, fellows presented their research, which led to engaging and thought-provoking discussions. I was truly impressed by the quality and depth of these projects. Unlike many conferences where questions can sometimes feel perfunctory, at NEC the discussions were genuinely rich and extended far beyond the formal sessions. These lively exchanges could easily fill an hour,

reflecting the shared passion and intellectual curiosity among the fellows. Conversations often continued over lunch, where we enjoyed excellent food—those desserts were truly something!—along with wine and coffee. These gatherings also became opportunities to plan outings: concerts, operas, films, dinners, and weekend trips.

Two memorable excursions were organized by our Romanian colleague, Raluca. First, on a crisp winter day, we took a train to the Palace of Mogoșoaia. This beautiful palace, built between 1698 and 1702 by Constantin Brâncoveanu, is a prime example of the distinctive Brâncovenesc style. Situated by a tranquil, then-frozen lake, the palace is a popular spot for weddings and film shoots. Inside, it houses a museum and art gallery, and its basement holds a fascinating collection of frescoes from lost churches and monasteries.

Another trip led by Raluca took us to Brașov, a charming city nestled in the Carpathian Mountains. We started with a visit to the fortified church of Hărman, built by German settlers in the Middle Ages. Afterward, we explored Brașov's lively streets and historical sites, experiencing its blend of Transylvanian Saxon heritage and contemporary Romanian culture.

These excursions were not only a chance to see more of Romania but also to share meaningful moments with the other NEC fellows, deepening the connections we made during our time there.

On Writing

Until now, this report may have read like this fellowship was an extended vacation but, indeed, it was a time of immense productivity. I worked in one of the offices designated for fellows, seeing as my apartment, unlike the other apartments, lacked a desk for work. In hindsight, this arrangement proved incredibly advantageous. It compelled me to leave the house daily and focus on my tasks in an environment free from distractions, fostering both structure and productivity.

However, I did not start the project with a blank desk; I had plenty of ongoing projects to tackle. Alongside my primary research project, I managed to write two articles completely from

scratch and revised several others. Notably, one of these articles—on the amber trade between the Baltic Sea region and the Mediterranean—sparked new ideas for my NEC project.

Sitting in the basement office, immersed in my work, occasionally a curious cat would observe me for a moment through the window, grow disinterested, and then quietly vanish.

The NEC Research Project

As a scholar, I am primarily working with pre-modern Scandinavian texts, specifically Icelandic ones. However, having also studied Medieval Latin, Classical Latin, and Greek, as well as some German Studies and other subjects, I have a wide range of interests. My NEC project not only combines my two main fields but also has a connection to Southeastern Europe: I am collecting and evaluating the Greek sources of pre-Christian Germanic religions. I had already finished a handbook article on the topic, but I felt that I would like to explore the topic much deeper, focusing on the authors, their circumstances of writing, and their literary dependencies.

There are many reasons for this approach. Understanding the motivations and methodological frameworks of these Greek authors is crucial to evaluating their accounts, as they were not ethnographers in the modern sense. Their interest in Germanic peoples often stemmed from military or political interactions with the Roman or Byzantine Empires. Consequently, their narratives tend to focus on limited aspects of Germanic religious practices, often restricted to wartime or migratory contexts. Moreover, their information might have been derived from older written sources or filtered through contemporary informants aligned with Roman or Greek biases. Thus, the authors' personal attitudes and the narrative contexts within which their observations occur warrant careful scrutiny.

To get started with the project right away I chose to present my project very early in the fellowship. When I prepared my presentation, I thought about how to communicate the relevance and timeliness of my project to the other fellows. This meant digging into the problematic history of the field of "Germanische Religions-

geschichte" (History of Germanic religion). Of course, I was well aware that research in the field had found political interest and funding during the Third Reich and that the main handbook in the field was written by a Dutch scholar, Jan de Vries, who made a career during the German occupation of the Netherlands. It was still interesting to see that even simple collections of source texts are not free from ideology. This is particularly obvious in Baetke's sourcebook (1938), which categorizes source passages under titles such as "Zusammenhang mit Blut und Boden" (In connection with blood and soil) and "Religiöse Verfallserscheinungen" (Symptoms of religious decline), revealing not only the interpretations of the 1930s but also potentially influencing later research. These findings, which I initially intended to use solely to highlight the relevance of my project to my audience, led me to consider including a chapter on this earlier research in my larger project. Not only to critically evaluate this older research as part of the history of my field but also to reveal and confront its appropriation by contemporary nationalist ideologies. Another part of my project is to actually replace these source collections with a sourcebook featuring annotated commentary.

Being Challenged and Feeling Refreshed: Mulțumesc!

I am sincerely grateful to NEC and the Romanian Ministry of Education for funding my project and providing me with the opportunity to focus on my research for an entire academic year in an ideal environment surrounded by like-minded fellows, all fully engaged in their projects but always eager to discuss the state of the humanities as well as the state of our world. A heartfelt thanks also goes to the NEC staff for their warm welcome and unwavering support. My time at NEC, experiencing the Romanian language and culture, walking the streets of Bucharest—and meeting its cats—will remain a cherished memory.

Iryna Yakovenko is a Ukrainian scholar at Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University, specializing in contemporary Anglophone literature, Ukrainian diaspora studies, cultural and memory studies. She has held fellowships at the University of Louisville (USA), Free University Berlin (Germany), New Europe College Bucharest (Romania), and American University in Bulgaria. Currently, she resides in Berlin under the temporary protection scheme for Ukrainian war refugees.

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Summing Up: A Year of Belonging and Discovery

Iryna Yakovenko

In this short personal essay (a rare genre for my academic writing) I reflect on my experience at New Europe College Bucharest, where I was a fellow in the *Sustaining Ukrainian Scholarship* program from October 2024 to July 2025. Since 2022 my life outside Ukraine has been marked by displacement, uncertainty, and the ongoing challenge of adapting to a life lived away from home. Amid these challenges, my time at NEC became a period of stability and certainty for ten months, a source of intellectual growth, and renewed purpose.

When I arrived in Bucharest in October 2024, my knowledge of both the city and the New Europe College was minimal, virtually non-existent. Yet, from the very beginning, both surprised and inspired me. București (Bucharest), the city of *bucurie*, or of joy and happiness, unfolded as a vibrant, dynamic capital, rich in contrasts, layered with history, and filled with warmth. New Europe College, with its collegial atmosphere and intellectually stimulating environment, quickly became a welcoming academic home for me.

My residency in București became, above all, a journey of discovery: of a previously unfamiliar cultural and geographical landscape, of a generous and engaged scholarly community, and of new dimensions within my own research. Over the ten months at NEC I developed a strong sense of belonging to a network of fellow scholars, individuals who share not just research interests but also the rhythms of academic life, with its responsibilities, deadlines, and, often, its nomadic nature.

The New Europe College fellowship became a turning point in my academic journey, not only broadening the scope of my research but also allowing me to see it through new and unexpected lenses. Presenting my work for the NEC fellows and receiving their

feedback, engaging in debates, and exchanging ideas with fellow scholars helped reveal new perspectives in my research.

For me, *Sustaining Ukrainian Scholarship* at NEC opened pathways to valuable professional connections, both within the College and across wider academic networks. With the immense support of Constantin Ardeleanu and Ana-Maria Sirghi and thanks to the generous funding from the Volkswagen Stiftung Foundation, I organized the international workshop *Uprooted: Central and Eastern European Diasporas in North America*. This event brought together scholars from Ukraine, Poland, and Turkey for a rich exchange of ideas on diaspora and migration, which is a rare and valuable opportunity to engage with like-minded colleagues in a collaborative and intellectually rich setting.

The 2024–25 academic year was also defined by a period of intensive scholarly mobility. As part of a series of academic visits, I conducted research at the Faculty of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures within the Institute of English Studies at the University of Wrocław. I am especially grateful for the warm hospitality of Professor Dominika Ferens, whose generosity and intellectual engagement made my time there particularly meaningful. The second part of my research trip was related to the Ukrainian Free University in Munich, an educational institution of the Ukrainian diaspora with a history spanning over a century. Working in the Library and Archive of UFU provided access to rare and valuable materials, most notably a unique collection of periodicals published by Ukrainian intellectuals in displaced persons camps in postwar Europe.

I also had the opportunity to travel to Sofia for a joint *Sustaining Ukrainian Scholarship* workshop, where my Ukrainian colleagues and I engaged in meaningful dialogue with scholars from the Centre for Advanced Study, an institution whose mission and ethos closely align with those of New Europe College. In June, I participated in the 2025 *Summer Institute for the Study of East Central and Southeastern Europe*, organized by the American Council of Learned Societies in collaboration with the Centre for Advanced Study Sofia. This two-week program offered further space for

reflection, dialogue, and connection within a vibrant international academic community. Together, these scholarly visits and the Summer Institute enabled me to reconnect with colleagues and establish new professional ties.

Beyond academic work, the year was also enriched by moments of cultural discovery. Excursions to Braşov and the historic Saxon village of Hărman offered glimpses into Transylvania's layered past, with its medieval architecture and multicultural heritage. In Bucureşti guided walking tours, visits to museums, and time spent contemplating the city's eclectic architectural landscape allowed me to engage more deeply with Romania's complex history.

In conclusion, I want to express my gratitude to the wonderful staff of NEC and the "architects" of the *Sustaining Ukrainian Scholarship* program. Thank you for giving me "a room of my own" and the precious time to reflect, write, and reconnect. My fellowship at NEC was not only a significant professional milestone but also a personal refuge during a time of uncertainty. It also reminded me that academic work can be both a lifeline and a bridge—connecting people, places, and ideas across borders.