



REPORT

2025/2026 academic year
-1st semester-

New Europe College
Institute for Advanced Study

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AUTUMN - WINTER
1 October 2025 - 28 February 2026
-1st semester of the 2025/2026 academic year-

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The 2025/2026 academic year began with the launch of two new initiatives at New Europe College: the *Trust* Fellowship Program, which aims to examine the factors that contribute to the erosion of trust in science in the digital age, and the *POLARIS* research group, which explores contemporary democratic crises.

Erosion of Trust in Science in the Digital Age

The digital revolution, characterized by instant communication and unprecedented access to information, has ushered in an era of abundant and democratized knowledge production and dissemination. However, as increasing numbers of people globally rely on digital platforms for daily information, this same revolution has fostered environments conducive to misinformation and skepticism toward science. For science communication, this digital landscape is a double-edged sword. On one hand, scientists and research institutions now possess unparalleled tools to instantly share their discoveries with global audiences. On the other hand, the online environment is saturated with scientific misinformation, disinformation, and pseudoscience, often overshadowing or distorting genuine scientific facts.

Amidst rising global political polarization, science frequently becomes embroiled in broader cultural and identity conflicts. Influencers and advocates of pseudoscientific beliefs have successfully harnessed digital tools to propagate misleading narratives, which have tangible real-world consequences. Issues such as climate change, vaccine safety

and efficacy, and the COVID-19 pandemic (labeled by some as a “pandemic”) have become focal points, alongside once-fringe conspiracy theories like flat-Earth beliefs, 5G technology-related surveillance and mind control, and theories alleging secret plots by global elites to control and eliminate nations. The proliferation of these narratives significantly shapes political discourse, influences public opinion, and threatens social cohesion.

The *Trust* Fellowship Program, developed with financial support from the Porticus Foundation, aims to examine the factors that contribute to the erosion of trust in science in the digital age. Open to both Romanian and international scholars in the humanities and social sciences, the program invites research into the cultural, historical, ethical, and symbolic dimensions of digital misinformation.

Constantin Ardeleanu
 NEC Academic Coordinator;
 Senior Researcher, Institute for South-East
 European History, Bucharest



Making Sense of Polarization

The research group *Politics, Legitimacy and Representation in Strained Societies* (POLARIS) brings together scholars from political science, sociology, philosophy, history, and other related fields to analyze the erosion of intermediary bodies and of accountability mechanisms in general, the decline of public trust, and the reconfiguration of political authority in an age of uncertainty.

However one might conceive democracy, it can only function properly when citizens are willing to engage in meaningful discussions with one another. In polarized societies this important background condition is threatened, as citizens start to divide into opposing camps and to perceive the others not merely as people who hold different political beliefs, but as existential threats. Under most institutional configurations of a democratic polity, polarization is an increasingly prominent (and dangerous) phenomenon. As societies split into antagonistic camps, not only institutional but also interpersonal trust dwindles; dialogue becomes scarce; the essence of democracy ends up withering away.

Some degree of tension is inevitable and healthy in any society. Vigilance has long been held to be an absolutely necessary ingredient in the political realm, as it contributes to political elites' accountability and responsiveness. Complex, vibrant societies are also pluralist ones, marked both by "an identity of interests as well as by a conflict of interests," as John Rawls stated. Nonetheless, any semblance of fundamental common interests is lost once polarization

becomes entrenched. Matters become even more complicated once political entrepreneurs take advantage of deep-rooted conflicts and push parts of society further away in order to make electoral gains.

To the extent that we care about democracy—whether democracy helps us relate to one another as equals or it delivers a variety of public goods we desire, there are plenty of reasons to care about it—polarization should be concerning. It is disruptive, detrimental to the quality of democracy, and tough to reverse, especially in contexts where deep polarization is followed by anti-democratic actors scoring electoral victories. Societies confronted with democratic erosion see key institutions, such as Constitutional Courts, packed with supporters of the autocratizing elites. They adopt legislation that negatively impacts human rights. These are just some of the reasons why studying the origins, forms, and consequences of polarization seems to us of utmost importance.

Part of the scholarly work on democracy has been marked by decades of unbridled enthusiasm when it came to democratization processes.

Of course, some worries persisted—for instance, David Collier and Steven Levitsky were wondering as early as 1997 if the definitions of democracy that scholars and practitioners operated with had become too expansive, a practice that they called “democracy-with-adjectives”. Recent cases of autocratization have unequivocally shown that such worries were legitimate, and that there was nothing inevitable about such democratization. Instead, democracy turned out to be a fragile thing that had not only to be cherished, but also protected. It is in this context that the challenge of polarization has to be addressed, as when the legitimacy of elections is contested, when the “Other” generates feelings of existential dread, when dialogue between political opponents becomes impossible, can we still talk about a healthy and fully functional democracy? And, more importantly, how can we safeguard democracy? Our interest is not only in the study of polarization, but also in the analysis of institutional solutions that are bound to make democracy more resilient.

“[...] David Collier and Steven Levitsky were wondering as early as 1997 if the definitions of democracy had become too expansive, a practice that they called ‘democracy-with-adjectives’”

Founders of the *POLARIS* research group:

Adelin Dumitru, NEC Alumnus; Assistant Professor, National University of Science and Technology, Bucharest

Camil Pârveu, NEC Alumnus; Associate Professor, University of Bucharest

Alexandru Volacu, NEC Alumnus; Associate Professor, University of Bucharest



Photo:
Camil Pârveu and Adelin Dumitru

Current Fellowship Programs

Nearly 1000 fellowships have been awarded to Romanian and international scholars in 32 years of activity.



Photo: Sorin Vieru, Andrei Scrima, Andrei Pleșu, H.-R. Patapievici (NEC Archives, 1994)

1994

NEC

The core fellowship program of the Institute was initially dedicated solely to Romanian scholars. Starting in 2000, NEC gradually extended its invitations—first to researchers from neighboring countries, and later to scholars worldwide. Over time, this core program gave rise to two additional initiatives: *NEC International* and *Ștefan Odobleja*.

UEFISCDI Award

This program represents an acknowledgement of NEC's excellence and its consistent success in being awarded prestigious European Research Council (ERC) grants. (supported by UEFISCDI)

2016

Ștefan Odobleja

These fellowships target only Romanian scholars in the field of the humanities and social sciences. The program bears the name of the esteemed Romanian scientist Ștefan Odobleja (1902–1978), in recognition of his enduring legacy. He is known for his contributions to the study of cybernetics. (supported by UEFISCDI)

Landis & Gyr Residency

The recipients of *Landis & Gyr* grants work on their projects, give public presentations, and are welcome to take part in all the activities at the Institute. (supported by the *Landis & Gyr* Foundation, Switzerland)

2000

2008

2008 NEC International

Fellowships in this program target early career international researchers, irrespective of their country of origin.

Traduki Residency

NEC is set to commence a collaboration with the Traduki network, within which it will host Traduki fellows in annual literary residencies in Bucharest, thereby contributing to the promotion of intercultural dialogue and the circulation of literature between Southeast Europe and the German-speaking world.
(supported by S. Fischer Stiftung, Germany)

present

2025

Trust

This program aims to examine the factors that contribute to the erosion of trust in science in the digital age.
(supported by the Porticus Foundation, Germany)

2023

Mattei Dogan

This program targets early career scholars from Central and East European and Black Sea states, who are affiliated to an academic institution in these countries at the time of application.
(supported by Foundation Mattei Dogan, France)

2023

IWM for Ukrainian Scholars

The program targets mainly Ukrainian scholars in the humanities and social sciences whose academic careers have been affected by the current war in Ukraine.
(supported by IWM, Austria)

Gerda Henkel

This program invites post-doctoral researchers working in the fields of humanities and social sciences (in particular history, art history, history of law, history of science, historical Islamic studies, archaeology, prehistory and early history) from former Soviet countries.

(supported by the Gerda Henkel Foundation, Germany)

2017

2018

Lapedatu

An international researcher in the field of Romanian Studies works with a young Romanian scholar to organize an academic event at NEC. At this colloquium, debates gravitate toward themes that cover important topics of Southeast European history.

(supported by the Lapedatu Foundation, Romania)

2020

AMEROPA

This program aims to investigate the conditions and prerequisites for democratic stability and economic prosperity in Romania and the neighbouring region.

(supported by Ameropa, Switzerland, and its subsidiary in Romania)

2022

GCE St. Gallen

This program targets scholars in the humanities and social sciences whose academic careers have been affected by the current war in Ukraine.

(supported by the Center for Governance and Culture in Europe (CGE), University of St. Gallen, Switzerland)

2022

TANDEM

Author with Translator
Translator with Author

This innovative fellowship program is exclusively dedicated to literati, writers and translators, with the aim to promote authors from the Black Sea region by encouraging the translation of their work into local languages.

(supported by S. Fischer Stiftung, Germany)

2023

SUS-(VUIAS)

This program aims to support scholars from the regions affected by Russia's war against Ukraine. Every year, one of the SUS fellows is also affiliated with the Virtual Ukraine Institute for Advanced Study (VUIAS), an initiative coordinated by Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin and supported by VolkswagenStiftung.



It's Wednesday at New Europe College—a time to
come together, share ideas, and reflect.





Photos: The opening of the 2025/2026 academic year on 1 October 2025
Above: Valentina Sandu-Dediu and Lelia Ciobotariu
Left: Andrei Pleșu and Anca Oroveanu; Right: The 2025/2026 cohort of Fellows

2025/2026 academic year

36 Fellows from 13 countries

(Armenia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, The Czech Republic, Germany, Georgia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine)

Maria Andrei (Romania), *Tandem* Fellow;
Translator

Arsen Arzumanyan (Armenia), *Tandem* Fellow;
Translator

Alexandru Axinte (Romania), *Ștefan Odobleja*
Fellow; Lecturer, Faculty of Horticulture,

Alexandra Bacalu (Romania), *Trust* Fellow;
Lecturer, Faculty of Foreign Languages,
University of Bucharest

Alexandru Bar (Romania), *Ștefan Odobleja* Fellow;
Research Associate, University of York

Lavinia Braniște (Romania), *Tandem* Fellow;
Author

Nicolle Aïcha Bussien (Switzerland), *Landis & Gyr*
Fellow; Artist

Iuliana Cindrea-Nagy (Romania), *Ștefan Odobleja*
Fellow; Independent Scholar

Radu-Matei Coheci (Romania), *Ștefan Odobleja*
Fellow; Lecturer, "Ion Mincu" University of
Architecture and Urban Planning, Bucharest

Dan Coman (Romania); *Tandem* Fellow, Author

Emanuel Conțac (Romania), *Ștefan Odobleja*
Fellow; Associate Professor, Pentecostal
Theological Institute of Bucharest

Adriana Cupcea (Romania), *Ștefan Odobleja*
Fellow; Researcher, Romanian Institute for
Research on National Minorities, Cluj-Napoca

Stilyan Deyanov (Bulgaria), *Tandem* Fellow;
Translator, Journalist

Theodora Dimova (Bulgaria), *Tandem* Fellow;
Author

Gábor Egry (Hungary), *Lapedatu* Fellow;
Director, Institute of Political History, Budapest

Tudor Elian (Romania), *Ștefan Odobleja* Fellow;
Teaching Assistant, "Ion Mincu" University of
Architecture and Urbanism, Bucharest

Adrian Grama (Romania), *Lapedatu* Fellow;
Researcher, Trinity Hall, University of Cambridge

Sorin Grigoruță (Romania), *Ștefan Odobleja*
Fellow; Researcher, A. D. Xenopol Institute of
History, Iași

Alexandra Ion (Romania), *Ștefan Odobleja* Fellow;
Independent Scholar

Volker Kohler (Germany), *NEC International*
Fellow; Researcher, Technical University,
Darmstadt

Julia Korniihuk (Ukraine), *GCE St. Gallen &*
IWM for Ukrainian Scholars Fellow; Independent
Scholar

Vitaliy Lytvyn (Ukraine), *SUS-VUIAS* Fellow;
Professor, Ivan Franko National University of Lviv

Natalia-Cornelia Malancu (Romania), *Ameropa*
Fellow; Adjunct Professor, National University of
Political Studies and Public Administration,
Bucharest

Iuliana Matasova (Ukraine), *Gerda Henkel* Fellow;
Independent Scholar

Michiel Meeusen (Belgium), *NEC Award* Fellow;
Researcher, Humboldt University, Berlin

Stefan Peychev (Bulgaria), *NEC Award* Fellow;
Independent Scholar

Vojtech Pojar (The Czech Republic), *Mattei Dogan*
Fellow; Assistant Professor, American University
of Central Asia, Bishkek

Hannah Riedler (Austria), *NEC Award* Fellow;
Lecturer, University of Klagenfurt

Carl Rommel (Sweden), *NEC Award* Fellow;
Researcher, Uppsala University

Adelina Ștefan (Romania), *Ștefan Odobleja* Fellow;
Researcher, University of Ostrava

Tea Topuria (Georgia), *Tandem* Fellow; Author

Nataliia Trokhym (Ukraine), *Tandem* Fellow;
Translator

Justyna Turkowska (Poland), *NEC Award* Fellow;
Lecturer, University of Bielefeld

Matthias Wittmann (Austria), *Landis & Gyr*
Fellow; Researcher, Johannes Gutenberg-
Universität (Mainz)

Mykhaylo Yakubovych (Ukraine), *Sustaining*
Ukrainian Scholarship Fellow; Researcher, Freiburg
University

Veronika Zinchenko (Ukraine), *Sustaining*
Ukrainian Scholarship Fellow; Senior Lecturer,
R. Glier Kyiv Municipal Academy of Music

NEC seminars →



Iuliana Matasova, *Gerda Henkel* Fellow, presented her research project titled “Precarious Exercises in Joy: Women’s Popular Music of the 1990s in Ukraine” on 8 October 2025.

This study reads Ukrainian women singer-songwriters’ popular projects as a precariously joyful audiotopia of the Ukrainian 1990s, thus attending to the interplay of precarities and joys in the operation of women musicians who defined the new Ukrainian popular culture. Identifying the ethics, aesthetics, and materialities of what can be called a women’s decade in Ukrainian pop, this critique posits that Sestrychka Vika, Iryna Bilyk, Marichka Burmaka, and others musically claimed new personal and national stories and translated diverse Ukrainian experiences and imaginations of past, present, and future into music genuinely loved by audiences. Inevitably then, this study stands as an exercise in recent cultural history and in the history of the present.



Emanuel Conțac, *Ștefan Odobleja* Fellow, Associate Professor, Pentecostal Theological Institute (Bucharest), presented his research project titled “Crossing Cultural and Confessional Boundaries: The Reception of Wolfgang Musculus in ‘The Meaning of the Gospels,’ the First Romanian Church Postil (1567)” on 15 October 2025.

In my research, I analyze the 66 homilies of “Tâlcuț Evagheliilor” (The Meaning of the Gospels), the first Romanian Church Postil (1567), to determine their dependence on the scholarship of Wolfgang Musculus (1497–1563). Building on my 2023 preliminary finding that at least 15 homilies draw from Musculus’s “Commentary on Matthew” (1544), I will investigate the extent to which the Romanian Postil relies on works written by Musculus or other Reformed authors.



Maria Andrei (Translator) and **Theodora Dimova** (Author), *Tandem* Fellows, presented their project—the translation of the novel titled *Adriana* from Bulgarian into Romanian—on 22 October 2025.

Synopsis of *Adriana*:

Dimitar Dimov, the author’s father, is a celebrated figure in Bulgarian literature, whose works are widely read and taught in schools. After his death in 1966, an unfinished manuscript, “Untitled Novel”, was discovered among his papers, ending abruptly mid-sentence. Revisiting his novels, including “Tobacco”, “Doomed Souls”, and “Lieutenant Benz”, the author repeatedly discovered new layers in his writing. During a later reading of the manuscript, the heroine *Adriana*—a 29-year-old, wealthy, educated, and restless woman—came vividly to life. Imagining her living through Bulgaria’s bourgeois, totalitarian, and transitional eras, the author heard her voice, her stories, her confessions.



Volker Köhler, *NEC International Fellow*, Researcher, Technical University, (Darmstadt), presented his research project titled “‘Aux Armes, Citoyens’—Data History of Public Administrations in the 19th Century” on 29 October 2025.

At the heart of my research is the relationship between a data-gathering and interpreting state and its subjects and citizens, symbolised in the battle cry “Aux armes, Citoyens” of the French national anthem. In order to turn citizens into soldiers and pupils into subjects, European administrators produced and interpreted pages of statistics and carried out many experiments. This process yielded data. In my project, I attempt to contextualise this process of gathering and interpreting data. In doing so, I intend to write a political history of knowledge, a history of the relationship between the individual and the state. I aim to show that such a history is also a history of contingent developments, of conflicts, and of participation.



Alexandru Bar, *Ștefan Odobleja Fellow*, Researcher, University of York, presented his research project titled “REMIX: Reimagining Modernist Identities through the Transcultural Legacy of Marcel Janco” on 5 November 2025.

This project reimagines modernism beyond its conventional geographic and formal boundaries—not as a fixed canon, but as a lived and negotiated response to rupture, displacement, and cultural hybridity. Focusing on Marcel Janco (1895–1984), co-founder of Dada and both painter and architect, *REMIX* traces how modernism was made not only in Zurich or Berlin, but also in Bucharest, Jaffa, and Ein Hod. Working with newly accessed materials, I explore how abstraction becomes an ethical strategy: from compressed Holocaust drawings to hybrid architectural idioms that blend European modernist rigor with Middle Eastern vernaculars.



Stilyan Deyanov (Translator) and **Dan Coman** (Author), *Tandem Fellows*, presented their project—the translation of *Ce preferi?*, a collection of short stories, from Romanian into Bulgarian—on 6 November 2025.

“Ce preferi?” (What do you prefer?) is a collection of short stories published by Polirom in 2022—18 stories about the fragility of existence, which can be overwhelming for anyone, regardless of circumstances or social status. It is a book about how a family handles moments of crisis: through overprotection or through neglect? What brings two people together: physical attraction or affinities? What happens when communication becomes more of an obstacle than a bridge? And above all, can the body offer solutions? Instinct, vulnerability, and desire may join forces with reason, but nothing guarantees inner peace.



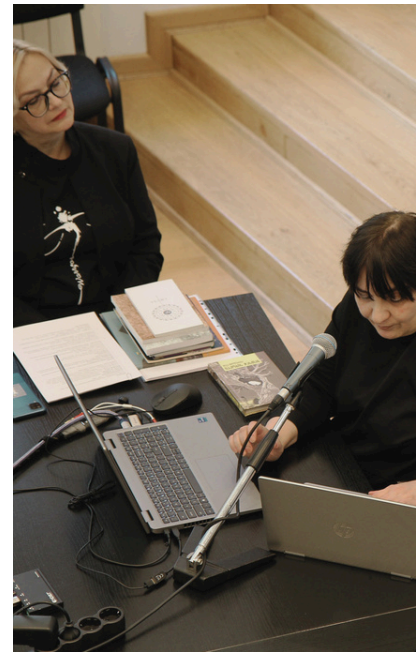
Michel Meussen, *NEC Award* Fellow, Researcher, Institute for Classical Philology, Humboldt University (Berlin), presented his research project titled “Science and Society in the High Roman Empire” on 12 November 2025.

This project aims to explore the rich interaction between science and society during the High Roman Empire, a pivotal period in political and intellectual history. “Science” broadly defined (including natural philosophy, medicine, technology, mathematics, physiognomy, etc.) was not restricted to specialists or experts exclusively but circulated more widely in Graeco-Roman society. To give only a few examples: there was a lively debate on natural scientific problems at ancient symposia, doctors performed gruesome anatomical demonstrations in public, physiognomic theory was deployed by sophists to discredit their opponents, and mechanical engineers devised fully automated theatres to perplex their audiences.



Alexandru Axinte, *Ștefan Odobleja* Fellow, Lecturer, University of Agronomical Sciences and Veterinary Medicine (Bucharest), presented his research project titled “The Disciplinary City and the Disobedient Informal Practices” on 19 November 2025.

The research aims to trace the reflections of collective housing modernizing project in the narratives of documentary films, produced in socialist Romania. Following Anna Tsing’s (2021) perspective on the “latent” commons as inherent to living together, while expanding on previous research about collective housing illustrating creative and disobedient informality as a local form of “discreet commoning” (Axinte, 2024), the project evidences the legacy of the socialist city in today’s world. By focusing on the representations of informal practices, the research seeks to map the evolving relations between the socialist state and its tenants.



Nataliia Trokhym (Translator) and **Tea Topuria** (Author), *Tandem* Fellows, presented their project—the translation of *By Jacob’s Well* from Georgian into Ukrainian—on 24 November 2025.

By Jacob’s Well is a novel about an ethnic group, a people, human beings, and the real or imaginary dimensions in which a person can exist. The book is written in the genre of magical realism. It does not have a single main character. Its characters are different parts of one whole, each with their unique stories and most sacred feelings. Why does a person come into this world? What is their burden or experience as an individual? How does each person search for their path—up to death and even beyond it—since in this novel, some remain alive even after death? The story takes place in an imaginary country and an invented time.



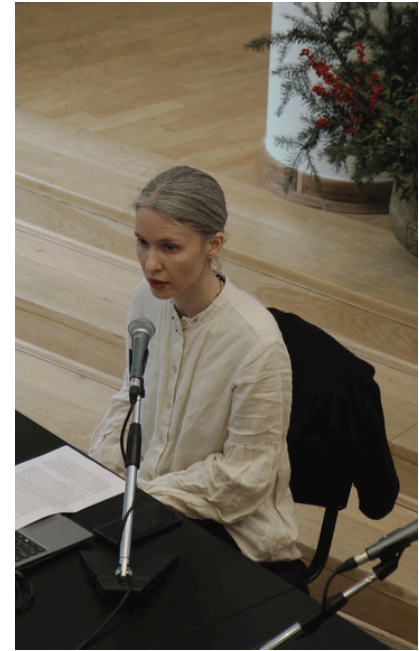
Sorin Grigoruță, Ștefan Odobleja Fellow, Researcher, “A. D. Xenopol” Institute of History, Romanian Academy (Iași), presented his research project titled “Being a Physician in Moldavia (1800–1850): Education, Transfer of Knowledge, and Medical Practice” on 26 November 2025.

The project examines the biographies of some of the physicians from Moldavia in the first half of the 19th century, most of them foreigners, to see if they can be considered as “agents of modernization”. I intend to investigate the cultural background acquired by the physicians in the years prior to coming to the Romanian Principalities, also in their homelands, but especially in the cultural areas where they had studied. I analyse aspects such as the education level, professional experience, but also the way they integrated in Romanian society. Last but not least, I emphasize the role of these physicians in the medical knowledge transfer and in creating a public and political conscience regarding the importance of the idea of public health.



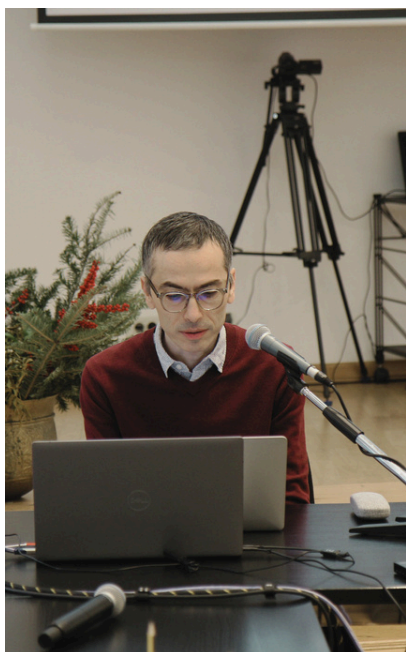
Maria Rybakova (NEC Alumna), Writer and Assistant Professor of Literature, Nazarbayev University (Kazakhstan), gave the presentation “The Hidden World of Quaternity: Jung, Brâncuși, and the Crimes of Despair” on 3 December 2025.

Maria Rybakova visited Bucharest for the launch of her recently translated book, *Quaternity: Four Novellas from the Carpathians* (Romanian title: *Cuaternitate. Patru nuvele din Carpați*), published by Junimea (Iași, 2025). The volume was translated by Marina Vraciu during their *Tandem* Fellowship at NEC in the 2022/2023 academic year. Originally published in September 2021, *Quaternity* brings together four thematically linked novellas exploring obsessive relationships, stolen identities, and illusions of grandeur in the post-1989 Carpathian-Balkan region.



Alexandra Ion, Ștefan Odobleja Fellow, presented her research project titled “Archaeogenetics Deconstructed. A New Take on Neolithic Migrations in Southeast Europe” on 10 December 2025.

Archaeologists have been debating for over a century whether the changes in material culture were due to demic or cultural diffusion. Since 2010, the advancement in the study of ancient DNA has introduced a new actor in the debate: genes. Archaeogenetics has reframed the way we think about the past, leading to a shift towards big data, and large-scale narratives, bringing back migration stories. But the fact that genetics is currently driving the discussion on past historical processes raises important ethical and interpretative issues. This project questions what lies behind large-scale prehistoric migration narratives in order to bring into focus human-scale histories.



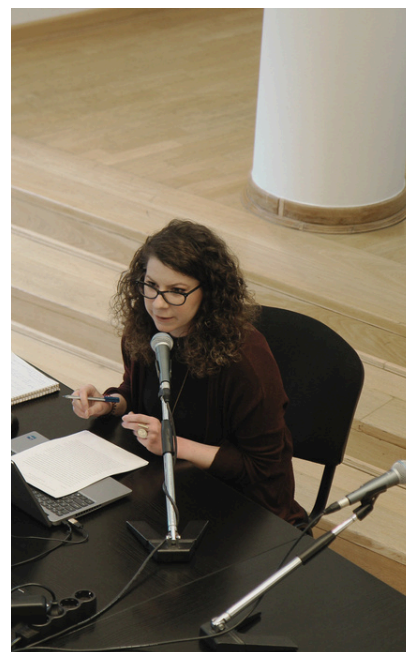
Stefan Peychev, *NEC Award* Fellow, presented his research project titled “Fire and Water: The Hydrothermal Landscapes of the Balkans in the Age of Geological Travel, ca. 1500–1900” on 17 December 2025.

This project studies the geological exploration of the Balkan Peninsula, focusing on descriptions and analyses of thermal water produced by traveling naturalists and scientists from the early sixteenth century to the late nineteenth century. The project examines how the exploration of the thermal hydrology of the Balkans was situated in the broader study of the peninsula and how it influenced travelers’ perceptions of Balkan societies and cultures. I focus on the nineteenth century, the “golden age” of geology, when the thermal water resources of the Balkans were surveyed by some of the leading European geologists. I am particularly interested in examining the works of Ignaz von Born, Johann Ehrenreich von Fichtel, and Belsazar Hacquet on the geology of Transylvania and the Carpathian Mountains.



Iuliana Cindrea-Nagy, *Ștefan Odobleja* Fellow, presented her research project titled “Hidden Galleries, Silenced Communities: Homegrown Religious Communities and the Secret Police in 20th Century Romania” on 14 January 2026.

This project provides the opportunity to revise and publish my dissertation, retitled “Creative in Struggle, Watchful in Liberty: Homegrown Religious Communities and the Secret Police in 20th Century Romania,” as a scholarly monograph. The book examines the lived experiences and creative resistance of two Romanian religious minorities—the Old Calendarists and the Tudorists—under authoritarian regimes. Drawing on both secret police archives and internal community materials, it explores how these groups used religious artifacts, visual media, and personal testimonies to assert their identities and contest state narratives.



Alexandra Bacalu, *Trust* Fellow, Lecturer, Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures, University of Bucharest, presented her research project titled “The Rise of Stoic Self-Help Today and the Psychocentric Discourse of Human Resilience” on 21 January 2026.

One variety of popular therapeutic discourse that has become particularly prominent across media in the last two decades is (neo)Stoic self-help—a recent movement led by a robust network of historians, philosophers, psychotherapists, and self-help authors that includes Donald J. Robertson, John Sellars, Massimo Pigliucci, Gregory Lopez, Ryan Holiday, and others. Although this revival of Stoic practical ethics has centred around these key figures, this is a much larger trend shaping contemporary self-help literature and popular philosophy, online advice blogs and forums, and self-care content on social media.



Justyna Aniceta Turkowska, *NEC Award* Fellow, Lecturer at University of Bielefeld, presented her research project titled “Brokers of Change: Geological Experts in West Africa and Mapping of the Postcolonial Order in the 1960s–1970s” on 28 January 2026.

The most critical question of the era of independence and during the decolonisation process was: Which globally and industrially relevant natural resources do Sub-Saharan African countries possess, which ones are recoverable, who could benefit from their exploration, and what would a broadened international cooperation mean for the logic of the Cold War? In this instance, Ghana, as a darling of the developing world, became the centre of geological scrutiny and a mecca for technical assistance, a meeting place for various interests and actors, many of them coming from the socialist East. Such international mapping efforts in Ghana are the focus of this project.



Arsen Arzumanyan (Translator) and **Lavinia Braniște** (Author), *Tandem* Fellows, presented their project—the translation of *Interior zero* from Romanian into Armenian—on 4 February 2026.

Interior Zero by Lavinia Braniște portrays the unembellished reality of young women facing the pressures of urban life. Cristina, a 30-year-old employee in a toxic construction company, feels alienated from her impulsive boss and incompatible colleagues, one of whom owns her apartment. Her distant relationship with Mihai reflects her emotional uncertainty. Unable to take decisive action, Cristina’s life changes when the company goes bankrupt and her relationship ends after an unexpected pregnancy. Published by Polirom in 2016, the novel gained international translations and stage adaptations.



Radu-Matei Cocheci, *Ștefan Odobleja* Fellow, Lecturer, “Ion Mincu” University of Architecture and Urban Planning (Bucharest), presented his research project titled “Housing in Suburban Areas: The Divide Between National Urban Planning Discourses and Local Planning Cultures in Romania” on 11 February 2026.

Romania’s suburbanization patterns resemble those of other post-socialist countries, driven by privatization, economic deregulation prioritizing private interests and de-centralization of urban planning responsibilities to local authorities. The project has two objectives. First, it examines the evolution of law and public policies influencing suburbanization since 1990, in order to identify paradoxes. Second, it investigates local planning cultures, understood as the informal norms and values guiding municipal planning decisions.



Julia Korniiichuk, *GCE St. Gallen & IWM for Ukrainian Scholars* Fellow, presented her research project titled “Between Conviction, Rights, and Tool: Orthodoxy in EU Enlargement Talks after 2022” on 18 February 2026.

This project examines the intersection of religion and politics in the European Union integration processes of Orthodox-majority countries following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. It focuses on how Orthodox religious institutions, discourse, and actors have become more visible in shaping political legitimacy and influencing how EU accession is framed in response to the shifting geopolitical landscape. The project explores three interconnected aspects: the presence of religious themes in discourse surrounding the EU and its possible enlargement; the transformation of religious rhetoric in anti-EU campaigns; and the role of religious dynamics in Ukrainian–Romanian relations within the broader framework of EU integration.



Tudor Elian, *Ștefan Odobleja* Fellow, Teaching Assistant, “Ion Mincu” University of Architecture and Urban Planning, presented his research project “URBANITY IN FLUX. The Role of Informality in the Persistence of a Historical Urban Culture within Contemporary Bucharest” on 25 February 2026.

Bucharest developed outside Western urban models, as a merchant city without fortifications and in continuity with its rural surroundings. This trajectory produced a vernacular urban configuration. Despite the progressive imposition of the modern urban project from the nineteenth century onward, this alternative urban culture appears to have endured through spontaneous, improvised and community-based uses of space. Contrary to common interpretations that reduce the informal to an amnesic phenomenon, this research advances the hypothesis that in Bucharest a premodern local urban culture persists precisely through certain contemporary informal spatial practices.

more to come

The *TransCorr* seminars—academic exchanges
open to the general public

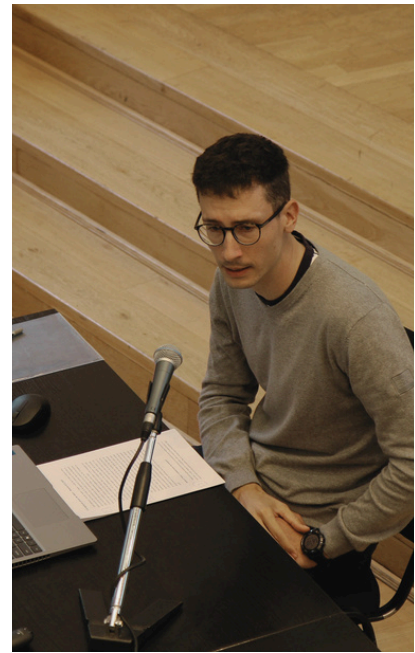


The *TransCorr* Seminars: Exploring Corruption, Modernity, and Regional Discourses



Michał Wasiucionek, Member of the ERC Project *TransCorr*, Researcher, “Nicolae Iorga” Institute of History, Romanian Academy (Bucharest), gave the presentation “A Knez and His Purse: Power, Wealth and Corruption in Miloš Obrenović’s Serbia and Beyond” on 9 October 2025.

In the history of the Balkans, traditional historiographies have generally framed the nineteenth century as a watershed that brought about a radical break with the “Ottoman yoke” and allowed the region’s peoples to resume their “natural” historical trajectory as part of the European world following the path of national state-building and modernization. Although in recent decades the historiographical paradigm has been refined and nuanced, the basic assumptions behind this narrative have proven difficult to dislodge and the Ottoman past has continued to be perceived as an obstacle that the emergent nation-states had to overcome. Among these vestiges, the notion of corruption played a central role.



Ricard Torra-Prat, Guest Researcher, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München; Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, gave the presentation “Corrupted Are Always the Others: Systemic Corruption in Eighteenth Century Spain” on 3 November 2025.

This presentation discusses the third chapter of my forthcoming monograph, *Corruption and Office in Premodern Catalonia, 1350-1800*, under contract with Routledge. While the first two chapters examine the emergence of the concept of corruption through the lens of late medieval legal culture, and trace how this concept was shaped within the political and legal traditions of early modern Catalonia during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, this third chapter turns to the eighteenth century, a period marked by the end of Catalonia’s distinctive institutional and legal order.



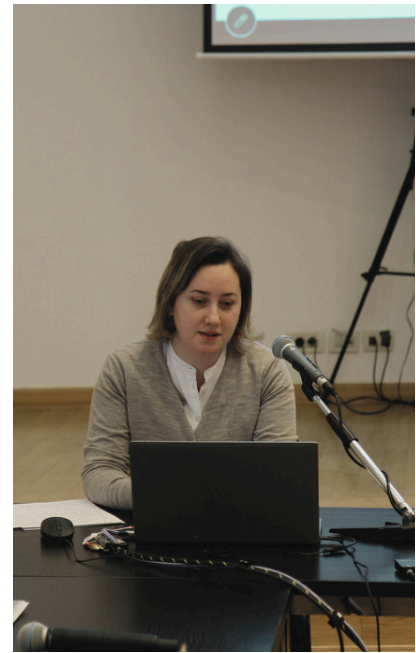
Boriana Antonova-Goleva, Member of the ERC Project *TransCorr* and Assistant Professor at the Institute for Historical Studies of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia, gave the presentation “The Bulgarian Community in Istanbul between Networks, Corruption, and Modernization” on 9 December 2025.

The talk will explore the Bulgarian (and Ottoman) transition to modernity during the nineteenth century by focusing on the contemporaries’ perceptions of corruption and associated practices related to advancing modern technological projects and capital investments. It will discuss the emergence of the topic in the public sphere, as well as the role of some Bulgarian sites within the Ottoman capital as places of publicity.



Augusta Dimou (NEC Alumna), Member of the ERC Project *TransCorr* and Chair of Comparative European History, University of Leipzig, gave the presentation “Rising Capital Entrepreneurship and Community-Building among Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the Habsburg Occupation. The case of Gligorije M. Jeftanović”, on 22 January 2026.

Gligorije Jeftanović (1840–1927) was indisputably a leading, if not the leading figure in the Movement for Church and School Autonomy among the Serbs of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the last decades of the nineteenth century. As a rule, he is commemorated as a larger than life personality, an adept and devoted national leader. In the aftermath of the recent Yugoslav wars and due to the subsequent hardening of historiographic fronts, Jeftanović has been portrayed as a forerunner of Serbian unity and territorial consolidation, and has acquired almost hagiographic traits for having led the Serbian peoples’ strivings for freedom, and statehood.



Oana Sorescu-Iudean, Member of the ERC Project *TransCorr* and Researcher at the Centre for Population Studies of the Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, gave the presentation “‘de internis non nisi deus judicat’: Networks, Insiders, and the State in Transylvania, cca. 1750–1800” on 23 February 2026.

The present paper examines how Transylvanian elite actors navigated and described networks and practices of network building at several levels, between roughly the early 1750s and the end of the eighteenth century. The enquiry is framed by two major collections of correspondence stemming from two Transylvanian Saxon elite families, whose scions effectively and deftly negotiated positions within the estate-level, the “national” and the imperial administrations over the course of the second half of the century.



Photos: A selection of photos from the *TransCorr* public seminars of the first semester
Above: Michał Wasiucionek and Silvia Marton; Left: Oana Sorescu-Iudean;
Right: Participants at Boriana Antonova-Goleva's presentation at the seminar.

Research projects—producing original knowledge and
developping new concepts, or interpretations





TransCorr

Transnational histories of “corruption” in Central-South-East Europe (1750–1850)
European Research Council Advanced Grant (ERC-2022-AdG no. 101098095)

Timeframe: 2023–2028 | www.transcorr.eu

Project Leader:

Silvia Marton, PhD (Associate Professor,
Faculty of Political Science, University of
Bucharest)

Experienced Researchers:

Constantin Ardeleanu, PhD (Senior
Researcher, Institute for South-East
European History, Bucharest / Academic
Coordinator, New Europe College,
Bucharest)

Augusta Dimou, PhD (Privatdozentin,
Institute of Cultural Studies, Chair of
Comparative European History,
University of Leipzig)

Lucien Frary, PhD (Professor,
Rider University)

Mária Pakucs, PhD (Senior Researcher,
“N. Iorga” Institute of History, Bucharest,
Romanian Academy)

Judit Pál, PhD (Professor, Babeş-Bolyai
University of Cluj)

Alex R. Tipei, PhD (Assistant Professor,
University of Montréal)

Constanța Vintilă, PhD (Senior Researcher,
“N. Iorga” Institute of History, Bucharest,
Romanian Academy)

Postdoctoral Researchers:

Boriana Antonova-Goleva, PhD (Assistant
Professor, Institute for Historical Studies of
the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences)

Andrei-Dan Sorescu, PhD

Oana Sorescu-Iudean, PhD (Researcher,
Centre for Population Studies,
Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca)

Michał Wasiucioneck, PhD (Researcher,
“Nicolae Iorga” Institute of History,
Bucharest, Romanian Academy)

International Advisory Board:

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Political History / Politikatörténeti Intézet,
Budapest)

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Princeton University)

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University of Avignon)



Photo: Constantin Jiquidi, *Electoral hooligan* (1898)
Source: Artmark.ro

CONFERENCE PRESENTATION

Silvia Marton, “Voting and Electoral Fraud in Nineteenth Century Romania. A Contribution to the History of Corruption”

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona
28–29 January 2026

Silvia Marton, principal investigator of the ERC project *TransCorr*, presented the paper “Voting and Electoral Fraud in Nineteenth Century Romania. A Contribution to the History of Corruption” at the international conference *Electoral Fraud and Political Distrust: Entanglements and New Perspectives of Study in Modern Europe (c. 1750–c. 1950)*, organized at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona on 28–29 January 2026.

This paper discussed the role of trust and distrust in electoral politics during the pre-democratic period of limited suffrage in Romania. Specifically, it examined the techniques for directing and influencing the vote, and the social dimension of voting in the electoral colleges. The paper’s main questions were: Was trust a variable to understand the electoral process? Why did certain electors vote constantly for the same candidates and were loyal to a specific party/faction’s candidates, while others voted “the government,” whoever that was out of the two political groups, the Liberals or the Conservatives? How to understand the volatile voters’ behavior? The paper showed that the numerous mechanisms of vote control and influence denoted a lack of trust, mainly of the candidates in the voters.

Becoming Axolotl: Empathy, Simulation, and Embodiment in Medieval Narratives

financed within the framework of the second Swiss Contribution MAPS

(project code: F-RO-CH-2024-0193/ Grant Number IZ11Z0_230118)

This project is funded by the SNSF (Swiss National Science Foundation), UEFISCDI (The Executive Unit for Financing Higher Education, Research, Development, and Innovation of the Romanian Ministry of Research), and HRZZ (The Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts). MAPS (Multilateral Academic Projects) is a funding scheme targeted toward Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Poland, and Romania, implemented under the second Swiss Contribution, mandated by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

Timeframe: 2025–2029 | www.nec.ro/programs/becoming-axolotl

Project Director:

Cătălin Țăranu, PhD (NEC Alumnus)

Members:

Oana Cojocaru, PhD (NEC Alumna)

Alexandra Iliina, PhD (NEC Alumna;
Lecturer, Faculty of Foreign Languages and
Literatures, University of Bucharest)

Partner Team (Switzerland):

PI: Annette Kern-Stähler, PhD (Professor,
Department of English, University of Bern)

Hannah Piercy, PhD (University of Bern)

Abbie Fray, PhD (Researcher,
University of Bern)

Partner Team (Croatia):

PI: Mirko Sardelić, PhD (Croatian Academy
of Sciences and Arts, Zagreb, Croatia)

External Partners/Collaborators:

Stephanie Trigg, PhD (Professor, Medieval
English Literature, University of Melbourne)

Suleiman Mourad, PhD (Professor, Religion
and Middle East Studies, Smith College)

Dominik Perler, PhD (Professor, Medieval
Philosophy, Humboldt University, Berlin)

Tommaso Alpina, PhD (Professor, Medieval
Philosophy, esp. Islamic Philosophy,
University of Pavia)

Pia Campeggiani, PhD (Professor,
Philosophy of Emotion and Moral
Philosophy, University of Bologna)

Francesca Fiaschetti, PhD (Director
of the Mongolia Cluster, Austrian
Academy of Sciences)

Keith Holyoak, PhD (Professor, Cognitive
Psychology, University of California,
Los Angeles)

Giovanni Tarantino, PhD (Professor,
History of Emotions, University of Florence)

A key insight from the exploratory phase of the project is that medieval narratives enact experiences for the reader less through interiorized minds and more through environmentally mediated cues, especially in watery and coastal milieus.

Becoming Axolotl explores medieval European texts that invite readers and listeners to try on radically different ways of being—not just other humans, but animals, plants, objects, monsters, spirits, and even people cast as not-quite-human. Instead of treating these as mere symbols, we look at how narratives nudge audiences to simulate thoughts, emotions, and senses that do not fit modern boundaries between human and nonhuman, mind and matter. The project's aim is developing a new, comparative toolkit for understanding how medieval cultures imagined empathy and perception, across languages and regions, long before modern philosophers asked “What is it like to be a bat?” medieval writers were already asking (and making their audiences feel): “What is it like to be a tree, a sword, a beast, a spirit—or a stranger?”

The first semester in our activity was quite eventful, although it is part of the exploratory stage of the project. We mainly consolidated the project's comparative methodology and began testing it in public-facing research contexts.

A key moment was the work meeting in Split, Croatia (2–5 October 2025), where all partner teams (Switzerland, Romania, Croatia) aligned the project's stages, analytical vocabulary, and dissemination plan, ensuring that the same core question can be pursued across the project's diverse corpora. In parallel, the Romanian team presented early results internationally and in invited venues: at the University of Oslo's *Eco-Emotions on Water* (3–5 September 2025), Cătălin Țăranu and Alexandra Ilina delivered a joint paper, “The Binding Sea: Marine Emotions in Old French Lays and Old English Elegies,” and Oana Cojocaru



Photo: Team members at the first project workshop in Split, Croatia (2–5 October 2025)

delivered an invited lecture at the University of Tampere on 22 October 2025, “Empathy: Cognitive and Affective Imagination in Medieval Byzantine Texts.”

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Cătălin Țăranu and Alexandra Ilina,
“The Binding Sea: Marine Emotions in Old French Lays and Old English Elegies”
Eco-Emotions on Water Conference
University of Oslo, 3–5 September 2025

Oana Cojocaru,
“Empathy: Cognitive and Affective Imagination in Medieval Byzantine Texts”
University of Tampere, 22 October 2025

Oana Cojocaru,
“A Latourian Approach to Hope and Healing in Medieval Byzantium (9th–10th Centuries)”
Romanian Society for Byzantine Studies,
9 December 2025

A further milestone came with Oana Cojocaru's guest presentation for the Romanian Society for Byzantine Studies (December 9, 2025), "A Latourian Approach to Hope and Healing in Medieval Byzantium (9th–10th Centuries)," which served as a focused demonstration of how the project can connect narrative perspective-taking to broader networks of nonhuman and supra-human agency (bodies, environments, saints, material media) without collapsing them into mere allegory.

Across these events, our team refined a shared approach to becoming *other* that remains attentive to embodied perception and affect while staying anchored in close reading and genre-specific affordances (elegy, lai, rhetorical exercise). No scientific publications were produced during this first exploratory stage, as planned; instead, this period was used to stabilize the conceptual toolkit and to calibrate it against feedback from different disciplinary audiences.

For 2026, we have planned four conferences where we will share our work: the International Medieval Congress (University of Leeds), *Eco-emotions on Earth* (University of Oslo), *L'animal, objet du savoir médiéval* (Université de Pau et des Pays de l'Adour), and *ZOOMATHIA: Animal Behaviour and Environments: Ecological Perspectives from Antiquity to the Present* (University of Athens). One new idea emerging from this exploratory phase is that simulation in medieval narratives may often be less a matter of inhabiting a fully interiorized mind and more a form of environmentally mediated perspective-taking: texts repeatedly build other-than-human viewpoints through shared milieus (especially watery and coastal ecologies) and through distributed cues—

soundscapes, textures, rhythms, and material constraints—that invite readers to track agency as relational rather than self-contained.

This hypothesis, first crystallized through the Oslo "marine emotions" case study and then sharpened by the Byzantine work on hope/healing as networked practice, gives the project a concrete comparative angle: it lets us compare how different medieval traditions make otherness knowable not by psychological transparency alone, but by anchoring experience in the interactions between beings, matter, and environment.

Cătălin Țăranu



Photo: Oana Cojocaru and Alexandra Iliina presenting the project at the Swiss–Romania Cooperation program MAPS – *Research on the Spotlight*, organized by UEFISCDI at NEC (13 October 2025).





Photos: A selection of photos from the research group meetings of the first semester
Above: Camil Părvu and members of the POLARIS group; Left: Andreea Eșanu;
Right: NEC-TECH group

Research Groups initiated by NEC Alumni—
incubators for future projects and applications

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of fluid, connected loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Technology-Culture-Humanities (NEC-TECH) is a multi-disciplinary research group, established at the intersection of technology, society, and culture, and runs in collaboration with The Institute for Logic and Data Science (ILDS), Bucharest.

Since 2023

Coordinators:

Andreea Eșanu, PhD (NEC Alumna; Non-tenure Lecturer at University of Bucharest, Faculty of Philosophy; Researcher & Publications Coordinator at NEC)

Răzvan Nicolescu, PhD (NEC Alumnus)

Members:

Alec Bălășescu, PhD (Associate Faculty Royal Roads University, Head of Corporate Engagement at Casa Paleologu)

Cristian Ducu, PhD (General Manager of the Centre for Advanced Research in Management and Applied Ethics - CARMAE, Bucharest)

Florin Gogianu (Researcher at Bitdefender)

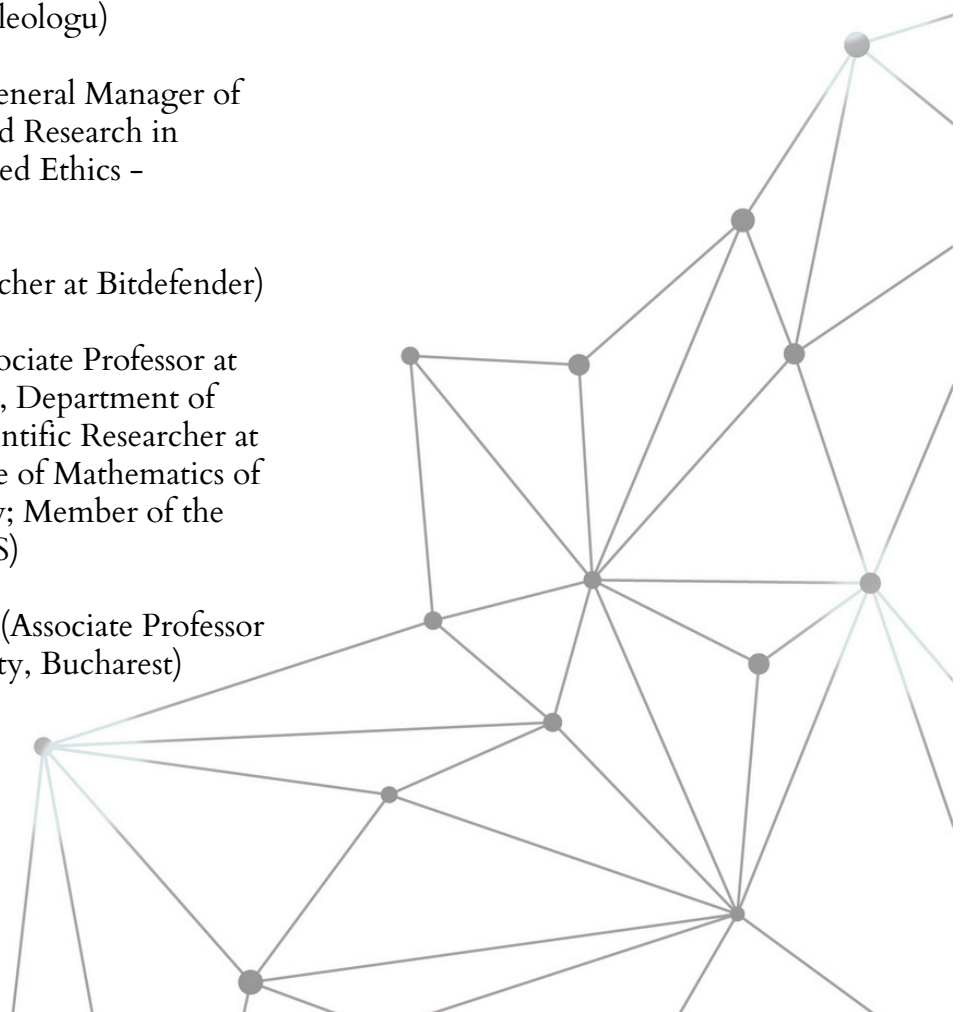
Andrei Sipoș, PhD (Associate Professor at University of Bucharest, Department of Computer Science; Scientific Researcher at Simion Stoilow Institute of Mathematics of the Romanian Academy; Member of the executive board of ILDS)

Mircea Toboșaru, PhD (Associate Professor at Polytechnic University, Bucharest)

Doctoral students:

Larisa Gogianu (PhD Candidate, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Bucharest; PhD Candidate, Faculty of Biology, University of Bucharest; Research Scientist at the National Institute for Research and Development in Microtechnologies, Bucharest)

Petrișor Ivan (PhD Candidate, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Bucharest)



The Use of AI in Research and Scientific Writing

Artificial intelligence tools and large language models in particular are used more and more intensively in both research and scientific writing across domains.

There is no reason to believe that this trend will slow down or will reverse any time soon. Probably even to ask “Is it a good or a bad thing?” is a little late. Things are already in motion: as we can well see in the chart (overleaf), the adoption rate is growing quite fast in some fields, while other literature shows that disclosure rates of AI use are still low in all fields. So maybe an alternative question to ask would be “What can we make of it?” or “How can this be turned into a good thing after all?”

Such questions are often the focus of our discussions at NEC-TECH. We are always looking at ways to problematize over issues that are current and pressing, in manners that are not always straightforward or conventional, while taking facts (such as the one above) at face value.

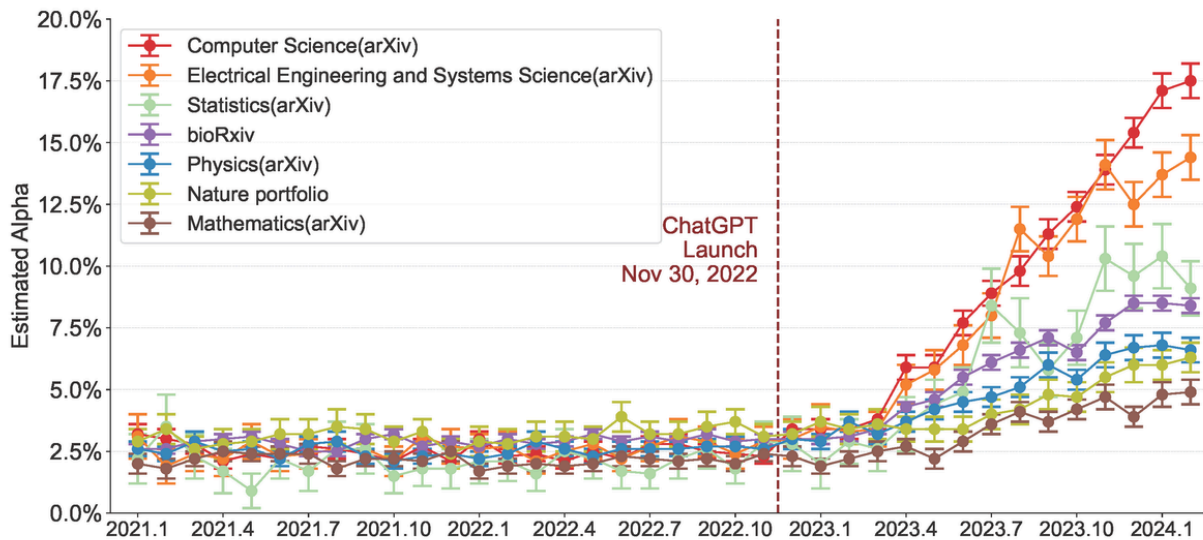
For example, could the incentivization of researchers to be more open about how they

use LLMs or AI tools in general in both their research and writing be a more promising way forward—rather than pressing them harder with ethical use requirements and sanctions (for things that at least for now seem hard to prove anyway)? Incentivization for disclosing AI use both in research and in writing could mean behaviors from the part of editors, reviewers, etc. that do not downgrade work strictly because it (allegedly) uses AI, but focus instead on research quality. Incentivization for disclosure could also help in addressing authorship issues: an author willing to disclose how they use AI specifically in their research and production of science can be held accountable all along the way, and so on.

This is, of course, just one angle. And it is debatable. This is why, for anyone who wishes to engage in the debate, NEC-TECH is itself an open group, willing and ready to accommodate many angles.

Andreea Eşanu





Estimated share (α) of LLM-modified sentences in paper introductions over time across academic venues, focusing on introductions as the most consistently available section. Source: Weixin Liang et al., “Mapping the increasing use of LLMs in scientific papers” (2024), *arXiv preprint arXiv:2404.01268*.

Papers discussed during the NEC-TECH seminars:

Alan Turing, “Computing Machinery and Intelligence” (*Mind*, 1950)

Jamie Susskind, “Digital Republic” (Bloomsbury, 2023)

Luciano Floridi and Anna Ascani, “Augmented Democracy in Action: AI Systems for Legislative Innovation in the Italian Parliament” (*Minds & Machines*, 2025)

BaHammam AS, “Balancing Innovation and Integrity: The Role of AI in Research and Scientific Writing” (*Nat Sci Sleep*, 2023)

Gilles E. Gignac, “The AI Attribution Gap: Encouraging Transparent Acknowledgment in the Age of AI” (*Intelligence* 108, 2025)

Clare Birchall, “Just Because You’re Paranoid, Doesn’t Mean They’re Not Out to Get You”, chapter II from *Knowledge Goes Pop. From Conspiracy Theory to Gossip* (Berg Publishers, 2006)

Richard Evans’s chapter “The Apperception Engine” in *Kant and Artificial Intelligence* (De Gruyter, 2023)

E. Schwitzgebel and J. Sebo’s “The Emotional Alignment Design Policy” (*Topoi*, 2026)

ROUNDTABLE

Artificial? Naturally!

On 10 December 2025, the group held the roundtable “Artificial? Naturally!,” dedicated to Alexandru Bălăşescu’s book *Climate Change in the Age of Artificial Intelligence. Nature, Culture and the Politics of Technology* (Springer, 2025).

The presentation was followed by a lively debate tackling how AI intersects with environmental politics, technological governance, and contemporary cultural narratives about nature. A particular topic that raised the interest of the audience was one of a rather philosophical sort: what is *data*, ultimately? And what does *data* mean in the ecosystem of AI engineering? Although no conclusions were reached at the end, the discussions sparked interesting moments of reflection on the deeper issue of (human) rationality and its relationship to information (data) and quasi-autonomous technologies gathered under the umbrella of AI.



Excerpt from the book:

“We certainly should not think that there is only one way of being and doing that is mathematically codifiable and universally transferable. The danger with AI is not that it will ‘take over’ humanity but that it will augment a reduced vision of humanity that takes over everything else while, and by, transforming that everything into objects of exploitation.”
(Chapter “What Now?”, p. 164–165)

Photo: Alexandru Bălăşescu is an anthropologist. He defended his PhD in 2004 at the University of California, Irvine.



Environmental Humanities (EH)

This research group is an interdisciplinary collaboration between four scholars who critically analyze the development of ideas about the natural landscape in Romania, the interaction between human and nonhuman species and the environment as represented in the political, scientific, artistic, literary and socio-ecological spheres.

Since 2024

Team members:

Valeska Bopp-Filimonov, PhD (Assistant Professor of Romance/Romanian Studies, Friedrich Schiller University Jena/Germany)

Cosmin Koszor-Codrea, PhD (NEC Alumnus; Postdoctoral Researcher, New Europe College and Regional Representative of Romania, European Society for Environmental History)

Cosmin Minea, PhD (NEC Alumnus; Postdoctoral Researcher, Masaryk University, Brno)

Adrian-Nicolae Furtună (PhD Candidate, the Research Institute for Quality of Life of the Romanian Academy)

During the timeframe October 2025–January 2026, the group continued its series of regular meetings, public events and individual archival research.

They engaged with up-to-date theoretical frameworks to better understand how semi-peripheral landscapes around the Southeastern Carpathian Mountains were transformed, contested, and reimagined between the 1830s and the 1940s under expanding extractive regimes. Thus, their research raised new questions on how to accommodate theories dealing with

“extractivism” and “neo-extractivism,” which relate to the ways in which imperial expansion, global capitalism and nation-state reframing made Carpathian environments legible as “wood and oil resources.”

Furthermore, they examined how these processes produce environmental inequalities and various forms of environmental violence along gendered, racialized, and class lines. In this context, the team invited researcher Adrian-Nicolae Furtună to join the group and to place the history of enslavement into the wider context of the global history and criticism of the Anthropocene, tracing racialized anthropocentric visions of exclusion and domination. In the context of extractive projects, Cosmin Minea also focused on the relation between resource exploitation and notions of architectural and cultural heritage. Discussions within the group have further focused on postcolonial ecocriticism and the “new material turn” in environmental humanities, raising new theorization paths.

Cosmin Koszor-Codrea



CONFERENCE CONTRIBUTIONS

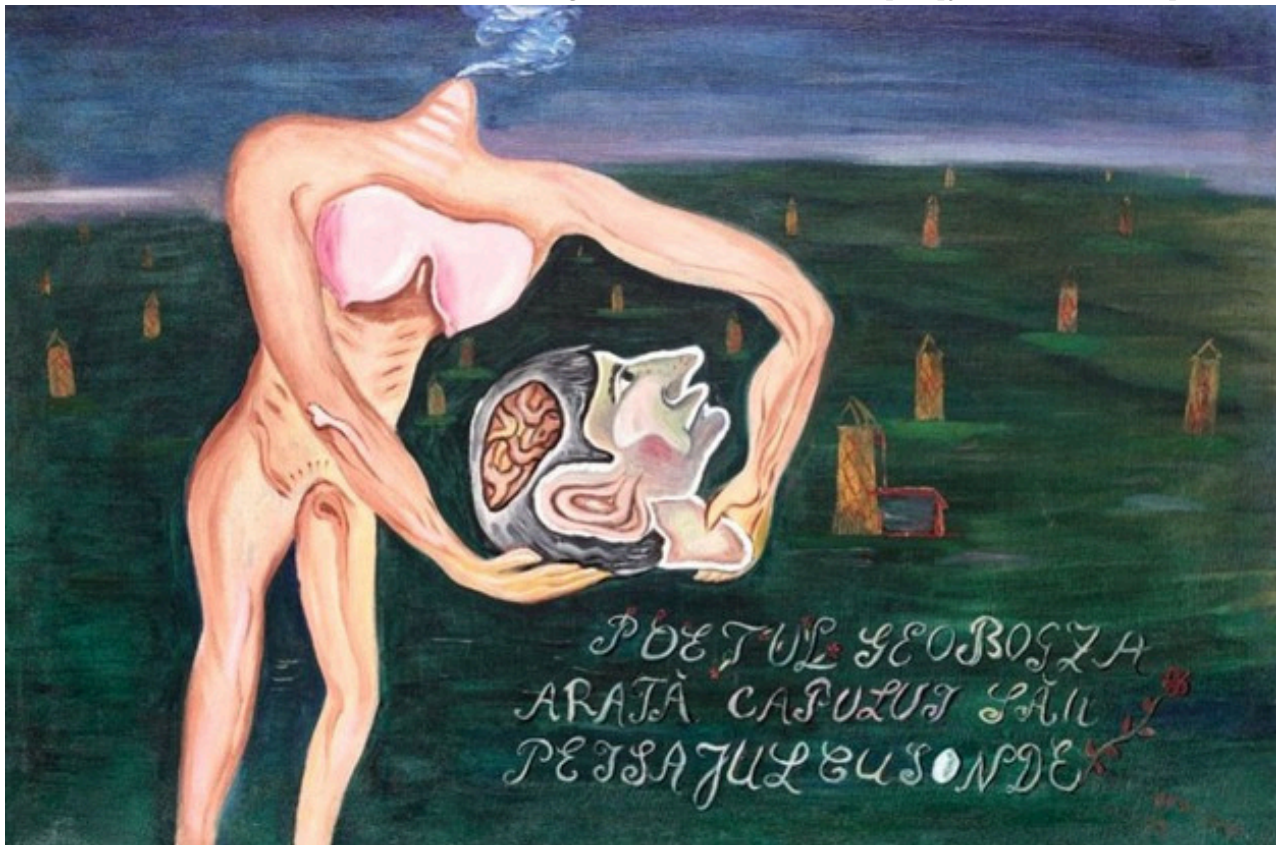
Valeska Bopp-Filimonov and
 Romanița Constantinescu,
 “Representing Natural and Social Horror:
 Petro-poetics of Possession in Geo Bogza’s
Poem petrolifer (1932)”
Early Petro-poetics International Conference
 University of Vienna, 15–16 January 2026

Cosmin Koszor-Codrea, discussant for the
 launch of the book: Ștefan Dorondel and
 Luminita Gâtejel (eds.), *Flowing Progress:
 Transforming the Danube Through Infrastructure*
 (Purdue University Press, 2025).
 The roundtable was organised online on
 24 October 2025 by *Review of Democracy*.

Cosmin Koszor-Codrea, convener of the
Environmental History Today monthly webinar
 series, which focuses on recently published books,
 projects or studies that reflect the environmental
 history agenda of the 22 regions of the European
 Society for Environmental History.

The “new material turn” is a recent
 shift in the humanities that rethinks
 how we understand matter, nature,
 and the physical world. Instead of
 seeing nature as something humans
 control or use, the new material
 turn sees humans and non-humans
 as deeply interconnected,
 influencing each other.

Victor Brauner, Poet Geo Bogza shows his own head the pumpjack-ridden landscape (1929)



Politics, Legitimacy and Representation in Strained Societies (POLARIS)

This group explores the nature of contemporary democratic crises

Since 2025

Team members:

Adelin Dumitru, PhD (NEC Alumnus; Assistant Professor, National University of Science and Technology, Bucharest)

Camil Pârnu, PhD (NEC Alumnus; Associate Professor, University of Bucharest)

Alexandru Volacu, PhD (NEC Alumnus; Associate Professor, University of Bucharest)

The monthly meetings have initially focused on the origins, forms and democratic implications of political polarization (through its different meanings: issue-based, ideological, affective, etc.) in European, American and Romanian contexts. This comparative approach allows the participants to explore both the transnational forms of knowledge production and circulation, and the country-specific articulations with their historical roots. It also facilitates the identification of strategies for democratic resilience adapted to the particular ways in which polarization may affect given societies. The group examined the context that generated US-style political polarization (constitutional choices, a two-party system, and a history of racial exclusion) which do not easily “travel” conceptually and institutionally to many European countries. In Europe, the different media landscape (with powerful and regulated public media

institutions), a different institutional and legal protection of free speech that excludes hate speech, as well as a multi-party system that eschews in most cases the binary logic of US party system—have at least delayed, if not attenuated, the impact of political polarization. The broader phenomenon of sorting and stacking multiple political identities into one overarching set of polar opposites (arguably, the current dynamic of political polarization in the US) is still only partially at play in most European politics. However, the European societies are not uniformly resilient—and the Romanian recent political history is a case in point. A series of questions emerges out of the above considerations, and the group intends to explore these (and others) during the remainder of the academic year, as well as through applications to Romanian and European research grants to be implemented at NEC. One such question would ask whether the Romanian case is closer in fact to the American forms of polarization, or to the broader European plurality of still polarized experiences? A further question is “What is left of the political center, once the dynamics of polarization draws citizens further apart?” The post-WW2 Western societies had designed constitutional frameworks that produced and ensured the political dominance of the political center (including through the development of a sizable middle class). In the aftermath of the populist upsurge in almost all Western party systems, the very idea of a political center (which used to be both a normative and an empirical presupposition) is in crisis.

Adelin Dumitru



Yiddish Culture in Interwar Romania (1918–1940)

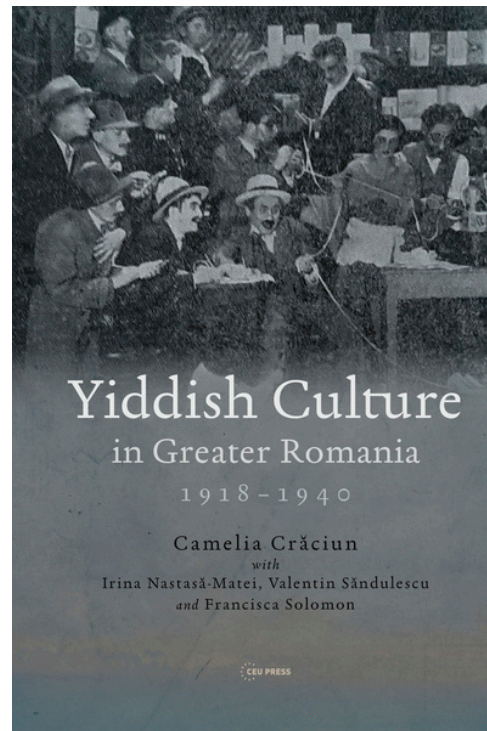
Project number: PN-IV-P8-8.1-PRE-HE-ORG-2023-0055

Since 2025

Camelia Crăciun, PhD (NEC Alumna;
Associate Professor in Jewish Studies,
University of Bucharest)

From October to December 2025, within the framework of the *NEC Fellowships – Academic Research Excellence and Institutional Development* funded by UEFISCDI, I continued developing a large-scale research project, building on my previous project, *Yiddish Culture in Interwar Romania (1918–1940)*, also conducted at New Europe College and funded by UEFISCDI, between 2021 and 2023. The new project expands the results obtained from the Romanian case study into a broader comparative and theoretical framework addressing the impact of Yiddish theatre in the interwar period on non-Jewish societies across East and Central Europe, particularly in Romania, Hungary, Czechia, Slovakia, Lithuania, Poland, and potentially Ukraine. During this period, I extended the documentation and research related to these countries, worked on identifying an appropriate theoretical framework for the project, and continued efforts to establish a network of collaborating institutions and researchers.

At the same time, I further developed the structure of the project provisionally titled “*We don’t have to understand the language*”: *The Non-Jewish Reception of Yiddish Theatre in East and Central Europe. Some Insights into Transnational Communication and Transcultural Transfer in a Radicalizing Context.*



The project aims to explain the paradoxical popularity of Yiddish theatre—particularly touring companies—among non-Jewish audiences in East and Central Europe, many of whom did not speak Yiddish, and to analyze its cultural influence on local elites during a period marked by fluctuating anti-Semitism and even anti-Jewish legislation. To support this initiative, I continued identifying potential collaborators, including Prof. Szonja Komoroczy (ELTE, Budapest), and undertook a research stay in France (Tours and Orléans), where I met with Dr. Sophie Mentzel and Dr. Benoit Barut at the University of Orléans within a partial fellowship offered by LE Studium Institute for Advanced Study. I also organized a workshop on the importance of literary studies and delivered a lecture on Yiddish theatre in interwar Romania at MSH Val de Loire / LE Studium Institute for Advanced Study on November 20, 2025.

Camelia Crăciun



The Group for Anthropological Research and Debates (GARD)

Since 2019

Team members:

László Fosztó, PhD (Researcher, the Institute for Research on National Minorities, Cluj-Napoca)

Giuseppe Tateo, PhD (NEC Alumnus; Senior Research Fellow, University of Leipzig)

Cătălina Tesăr, PhD (NEC Alumna; Researcher, Romanian Peasant Museum, Bucharest)



Photo: Cătălina Tesăr at the *Sonic Turn* conference organized by *The Attic* magazine, at the National Theatre, Bucharest (14–15 November 2025)
©*The Attic* (theatticmag.com)

PRESENTATIONS

László Fosztó, lecture: “Charismatic Revival Movements in Roma Communities in Transylvania,” followed by a workshop on “Anthropological Analysis of Rituals”
Church and Society—Talent Care Day
“Faith and Knowledge”

The Protestant Theological Institute of Cluj-Napoca, 27 November 2025

Giuseppe Tateo, presentation: “Grace and Gift among Romanian Orthodox Christians”
For a Religious History of Kindness Conference
Roma Tre University, Rome
21 October 2025

Giuseppe Tateo, paper: “A Concrete Microcosm: The Infrastructural Expansion of the Romanian Orthodox Church and its Environmental Predicaments”
Religion, Environmentalism, and War in the Age of the Anthropocene in the Black Sea Region Conference
Ilia State University, Tbilisi
20–22 September 2025

Cătălina Tesăr, talk: “Are Arranged Marriages Forced Marriages? Answers from a Roma Community in South Transylvania”
The Sonic Turn Conference
14–15 November 2025, Bucharest

Cătălina Tesăr, presentation: “Marriage Making and Breaking among Romanian Romani Cortorari: On the Creative Potential of De-kinning”
On Conflict, Separation and Estrangement in Kin Relations Workshop

Lucerne University, 9–12 February 2026
She will contribute to a special issue resulting from the workshop on Kinning and De-kinning.

PUBLICATIONS

László Fosztó, chapter submitted & accepted: “Diaspora Nationalism: The International Romani Movement(s) Revisited”, in Ayhan Kaya, Nilay Kılınç (eds.), *Handbook on Diasporas and Migration* (Edward Elgar Press, forthcoming in 2026)

László Fosztó, manuscript submitted & accepted: “Minorities in Romania amid the Rise of Sovereignist Politics” for the quarterly journal *OST-WEST. Europäische Perspektiven* (forthcoming in 2026)

Simion Pop and Giuseppe Tateo, “Nationalist Hagiopolitics: Orthodox Canonization in Romania and Russia, 1988–2025”, in *Political Theology* 1–19, (December 2025)

Silvia Omenetto and Giuseppe Tateo, “The Conversion of Heritage and the Heritage of Conversion: Two Case Studies from Trentino”, in *Religions* 16(2) (2025)

Valeria Fabretti and Giuseppe Tateo, “Exploring Religion and Migration Spatially in the Alpine Area: The St. Mark Romanian Orthodox Church in Trento,” in *Immigrant Christianities. Religious Migration from Romania to Italy*, edited by Marco Gugliemi (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2025), pp. 146–160

Giuseppe Tateo, “A Few Things the Church-Building Industry Tells Us About Contemporary Romania,” in *New Europe College Yearbook 2024–2025*, vol. 1 (2025): pp. 283–313

Photo:
László Fosztó conducting a workshop on
“Anthropological Analysis of Rituals”
at the Protestant Theological Institute of Cluj-Napoca
(27 November 2025)
© Benkő Ákos





Public workshops, roundtables, conferences—
knowledge transfer and interdisciplinary dialogue





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Sailing the Waves Beyond the Nation
13 October 2025

*The Horia Bernea Foundation in
the Context of 20th-Century
Artistic Legacies*
16 October 2025

The Eastern Question
23–24 October 2025

*Capital and Empire in Modern
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4 December 2025

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SPOTLIGHT
21–28 September 2025

ACADEMIC COOPERATION

Multilateral Academic Projects – MAPS
13 October 2025



Photo: Claudiu Oancea (NEC Alumnus)

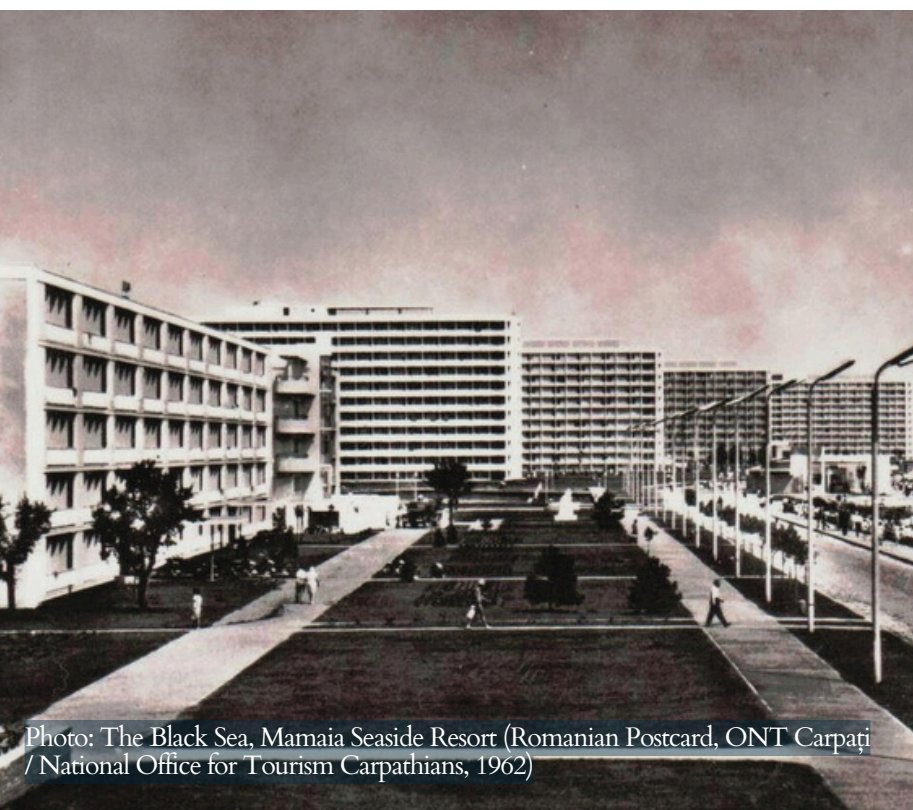


Photo: The Black Sea, Mamaia Seaside Resort (Romanian Postcard, ONT Carpați / National Office for Tourism Carpathians, 1962)

WORKSHOP

*Sailing the Waves Beyond the Nation:
Transnational Encounters in the Black Sea
Region during the Cold War*
(13 October 2025)

Convener:

Claudiu Oancea, PhD (NEC Alumnus)

Participants:

Alexandru D. Aioanei, Mioara Anton,
Rory Archer, Constantin Ardeleanu,
Alexandra Bardan, Mauricio Borrero,
Iuliana Dumitru, Alexander Gogun,
Orazio Maria Gnerre, Tetiana Kostiuik,
Alexey Kotelvas, Claudiu Oancea,
Corina Oprea, Valentina Sandu-Dediu,
Ilaria Sicari, Adelina Ștefan,
Taylor Zajicek, Mladen Zobec

The purpose of the workshop *Sailing the Waves Beyond the Nation: Transnational Encounters in the Black Sea Region during the Cold War* was to construe the Black Sea region as a place of transfers and convergences during the Cold War era, which bypassed the Iron Curtain, despite its plethora of riparian countries from both the Socialist Bloc and Asia. Based on a transnational perspective, the workshop aimed to examine cultural transfers and consumerist practices on the Black Sea Coast, from the 1950s until the late 1980s.

This workshop was funded by the University of St. Gallen, Center for Governance and Culture in Europe, as part of the *Black Sea Initiative* for 2025–2026.

WORKSHOP

The Horia Bernea Foundation in the Context of 20th-Century Artistic Legacies
(16 October 2025)

Conveners:

Irina Cărăbaș, Ioana Măgureanu,
Anca Oroveanu, Magda Radu,
Ștefan Sava, Ioana Vlasiu

Participants:

Lisa Le Feuvre, Daniel Grúň,
Iolanda Costide, Irina Bitzan,
Ioana Măgureanu

The workshop aimed to foster an open panel discussion on the key challenges and responsibilities faced by foundations devoted to artists, including managing artistic legacies, securing financial resources, and navigating relationships with cultural institutions. It also sought to encourage participants to share experiences and identify urgent priorities, while exploring new activities and strategies for strengthening the local and international presence of such foundations.

The colloquium was organized in collaboration with Salonul de proiecte, the Horia Bernea Foundation, the Ivan Gallery, the Faculty of Art History and Theory at the National University of Arts (UNARTE, Bucharest) and the National Cultural Fund Administration (AFCN).



Photo: A view from Horia Bernea's studio in Otopeni © Ștefan Sava, 2024



Photo: Magda Radu, Anca Oroveanu, Ioana Măgureanu



Photo: Geopolitical Europe, satirical map, circa 1871
Source: Wikipedia

WORKSHOP

The Eastern Question: Diplomacy, Historical Narratives and Perceptions
(23-24 October 2025)

Convener:
Daniel Cain

Participants:
Antonio d'Alessandri, Constantin Ardeleanu, Daniel Cain, Simion Câlția, Adrian-Bogdan Ceobanu, Lia Brad Chisacof, Andrei Cușco, Rudolf Dinu, Özhan Kapıcı, Serkan Keçeci, Metin Omer, Viorel Panaite, Ștefan Petrescu, Bogdan Popa, Silvana Rachieru, Ivan Roussev, Dimitris Stamatopoulus, Aleka Strezova, Nikolai Todorov

Marking the 150th anniversary of the outbreak of the Eastern Crisis in 1875, the Institute for Southeast European Studies convened its annual colloquium, *The Eastern Question: Diplomacy, Historical Narratives and Perceptions*, at NEC on 23 and 24 October 2025. Bringing together historians from Romania, Italy, Greece, Bulgaria, and Türkiye, the event revisited a defining period of European geopolitics. Participants examined how imperial rivalries, mass migration, and nascent infrastructure fundamentally reshaped Balkan history. By investigating the roots of modern state formation and regional identity, the colloquium underscored the enduring relevance of the Eastern Crisis to contemporary debates over memory, power, and political stability across Southeastern Europe and beyond.



Photo: A view from the workshop

WORKSHOP

Capital and Empire in Modern Southeastern Europe
(4 December 2025)

Conveners:

Gábor Egry and Adrian Grama

Participants:

Constantin Ardeleanu, Klaus Buchenau, Gábor Egry, Gabriel Godeffroy, Adrian Grama, Martin Ivanov, Gergely Izsák, Silvia Marton, Botond Nagy, Oliver Pejic, Elati Pontikopoulou-Venieri, Lucy Riall, Bianca Sendrea, Andreas Wild

The international workshop *Capital and Empire in Modern Southeastern Europe* was part of the *Lapedatu Fellowship Program* at NEC. Organized by fellows Gábor Egry and Adrian Grama, the event challenged conventional narratives of economic nationalism by framing capital and empire as intertwined, transnational practices. Moving beyond “methodological nationalism,” participants—starting with a keynote from Lucy Riall—explored themes of informal imperialism, sovereign debt, and the resilience of economic elites following imperial collapse. By analyzing the region as an extractive periphery and tracing complex cross-border business networks, the workshop successfully integrated Balkan history into the broader global history of capitalism.



Photo: Lucy Riall and Silvia Marton



Photo: Participants in the workshop



Photo: Participants in the workshop

WORKSHOP

*Are We Still Allowed to Laugh?
Uses and Abuses of Humour in British
Culture and Cultural Studies*
(19 January 2026)

Conveners:

Sabina Draga-Alexandru and
Andreea Paris-Popa

Participants:

Sidonia Ariton, Atanasia Bărlădeanu,
Sabina Draga-Alexandru, Alexandra
Bacalu, Jessica Copilaş, Ana Iordache,
Dragoş Ivana, Umid Mammadov
Andreea Meceanu, Andreea Paris-
Popa, Valentina Sandu-Dediu, Diana-
Noella Sava, Bogdan Ştefănescu,
Raluca Tenea, Daria Tutungiu,
Bianca-Antonia Varzaru



Photo: Antonia Vărzaru

Since Aristotle divided tragedy and comedy, culture has ranked “serious” over “mundane.” Yet humour has long helped address difficult issues—seen in William Shakespeare and Ben Jonson, and later in works like *Comedians*. Though sometimes dismissed, humour remains a powerful ethical and political tool today, capable of both critique and harm.

This event was organized in collaboration with the Centre of Excellence for the Study of Cultural Identity (CESIC) and the British Cultural Studies Centre (BCSC) of the University of Bucharest.

WORKSHOP

Voices of the Past: Empowering Communities Through Oral History Workshops
(4–6 February 2026)

Conveners:

Sandra King-Savić and
Daniel Ursprung

Participants:

Aliya Bolatkhan, Anna Fersztand,
Hasan Hasanovic, Tereza Hendl,
Botakoz Kassymbekova, Sandra
King-Savić, Andreas Maercker,
Nataša Mišković, Amina Smajlovic,
Daniel Ursprung

The workshop explored how oral history can preserve and amplify community voices through practical skills and ethical storytelling. The program included working group discussions on “Trauma in research projects” and “How do we work with traumatized individuals?” Also, the workshop included a presentation of Anna Fersztand’s book, “The Politics of Storytelling,” which critically examined oral history interview settings and the researcher’s responsibilities.

The workshop was organized in collaboration with the Oral History Archive at the Chair of East European History, University of Zurich, and supported by the Center for Governance and Culture in Europe (GCE-HSG), University of St. Gallen.

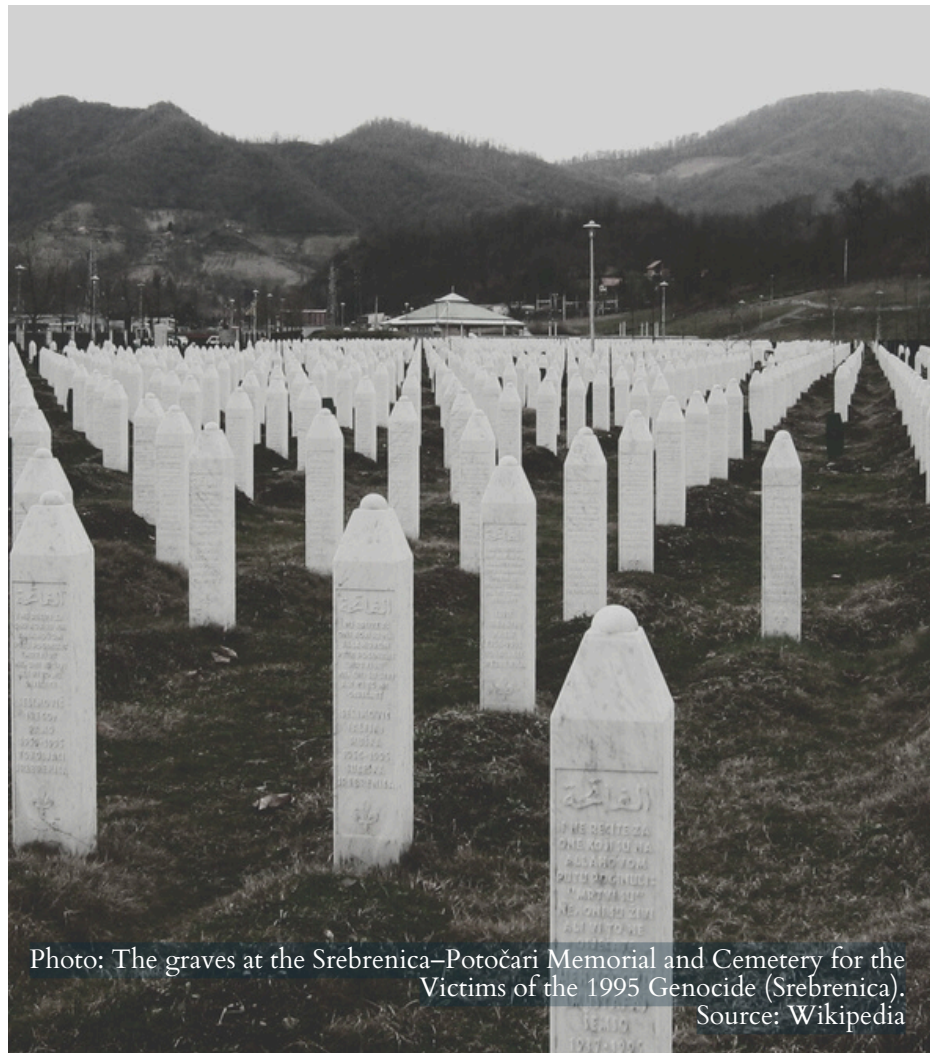


Photo: The graves at the Srebrenica–Potočari Memorial and Cemetery for the Victims of the 1995 Genocide (Srebrenica).
Source: Wikipedia



Photo: Participants in the workshop



Photo: Cristian Pătrășconiu, Bogdan Tătaru-Cazaban, Anca Vasiliu, Marilena Vlad, Theodor Baconschi

ROUNDTABLE

Roundtable discussion on the book:
 Anca Vasiliu, “Imagini ale sinelui în Antichitatea târzie” [*Images of the Self in Late Antiquity*] (Spandugino, 2025)
 (24 September 2025)

The roundtable on *Images of the Self* by Anca Vasiliu examined how individuals relate to the universal through processes of self-representation and reflection. Drawing on the book’s exploration of Late Antiquity texts, participants discussed how the “image of the self” mediates between singular identity and shared human experience.

Anca Vasiliu is a research director at the CNRS, the Léon Robin Research Center for Ancient Thought, at the University of Paris-Sorbonne. Her publications in French (a selection) include: *Divines techniques. Arts et langage homérique à la fin de l’Antiquité* (Classiques Garnier, 2016); *Penser Dieu: noétique et métaphysique dans l’Antiquité tardive* (Vrin, 2018); *Montrer l’âme. Lecture du Phèdre de Platon* (Sorbonne Université Presses, 2021); *Toucher par la vue. Platon, Aristote, Plotin sur la lumière et le sensible* (forthcoming, Brill, 2026).



Anca Vasiliu, “Imagini ale sinelui în Antichitatea târzie” [*Images of the Self in Late Antiquity*] (Spandugino, 2025)



Photo: A few members of the STEPPE team at NEC

ROUNDTABLE

*Transnational Illiberalism in Regional Context:
Romania and Bulgaria*
(27 November 2025)

Moderator: Camil Pârnu

Participants: Liviu Andreescu,
Stilyan Deyanov, Alexandra Iancu,
Ruzha Smilova, Balázs Trencsenyi

Scaling the Transnational. Entangled Political Imaginaries and Practices in East and West Europe (STEPPE) seeks to offer an innovative take on studying the transnational engagement of political movements and ideological paradigms across the symbolic dividing line of Western and Eastern Europe. It focuses on multi-directional transfers and interactions, transnational imaginaries of the self and the other, and the

underlying experiences that came to shape the European public sphere in the 21st century. STEPPE is structured around four main research directions: transnational rule-of-law activism, the spread of illiberal movements, leftist networks, and academic exchanges between Eastern and Western Europe.

The team of researchers seek to shed new light on the interplay of the national political infrastructure and the transnational transfers of ideology, organizational know-how, and mobilizing strategies. This project is run by New Europe College in cooperation with CEU-Democracy Institute, Budapest, Institute of Political Science, Leipzig and Center Marc Bloch, Berlin. More at: steppe.hypotheses.org



Photo: Ioana Pârvulescu and Valentina Sandu-Dediu

DIALOGUE & RECITAL

From Schönberg to Thomas Mann: The Sound of Literature with a Dodecaphonic Echo
(8 December 2025)

Marking 150 years since the birth of the German novelist Thomas Mann, New Europe College, in collaboration with Goethe-Institut Bucharest and the National University of Music, Bucharest, organized a special event. In a concert–dialogue format, the musicians of the *Arsis* Quartet, together with writer Ioana Pârvulescu and musicologist Valentina Sandu-Dediu, guided the audience on an intellectual journey through the works of Thomas Mann and Arnold Schönberg.

Writer Ioana Pârvulescu gave a rich and insightful presentation on the works of Thomas Mann and their resonances with the

music of Arnold Schönberg, impressing the audience with its depth and attention to detail. The dialogue situated Schönberg's groundbreaking musical language within the broader cultural and intellectual landscape of the 20th century. It explored the relationship between sound and text, and the resonance of dodecaphony in literary thought. Schönberg's break with traditional tonality marked a decisive shift toward modernism, redefining the expressive possibilities of music. In parallel, Thomas Mann engaged deeply with musical structures and ideas, using them as a framework to reflect on the spirit of his time.

The *Arsis* Quartet is composed of Mihaela Mitrofan and Andreea Nistor (violins), Mihai Todoran (viola), and Valentin Simion (cello), with soprano Daria Bârzu joining them as a special guest.

Photo: NEC Alumnus Cătălin Cernătescu conducts the musical group *Psalmodia* at NEC. In recent years, each December, they have come to the Institute to sing season carols.





Photo: HE Massimo Baggi, Ambassador of the Swiss Confederation to Romania

DIALOGUE & RECITAL

Clara Haskil. The Music of the Inner Truth, part of the *130th Anniversary of Clara Haskil's Birth* series
(11 December 2025)

Moderator:

Valentina Sandu-Dediu

Participants:

Lena Vieru Conta, Ștefan Costache,
Monica Isăcescu Lup, Irina Nițu,
Yvonne Toader

Program:

Domenico Scarlatti – *Sonata in B minor, K. 87* – performed by Antonia Tașu
Ludwig van Beethoven – *Sonata Op. 31 No. 3, 1st movement* – performed by Carla Bufu
Robert Schumann – *Abegg Variations, Op. 1* – performed by Antonia Tașu

The year 2025 marked the 130th anniversary of the birth of Clara Haskil (1895–1960), one of the greatest pianists of the 20th century.

Born in Bucharest on 7 January 1895, into a Sephardic Jewish family, Clara Haskil would go on to perfect her art in Paris, eventually performing alongside the world's greatest musicians, from conductor Herbert von Karajan to Dinu Lipatti, who became a close friend. In 1942, the pianist settled in Vevey, Switzerland. Today, as a lasting tribute to her legacy, one of the world's leading classical music competitions bears her name: the Clara Haskil International Piano Competition in Vevey.



Photo: Irina Nițu, Monica Isăcescu Lup, Valentina Sandu-Dediu, Lena Vieru Conta

Program of the anniversary events:

*The Neighborhood Listens to Clara—
An Artistic Intervention in Public Space*
(11 December 2025)

Ten locations in the Jewish Quarter became, for a day, meeting points where people and music came together, creating a “sound path” along which the public could listen to a selection of the artist’s performances.

Clara Haskil. The Music of the Inner Truth—Roundtable & Concert
(11 December 2025)

Notes and Roots: The Legacy of a Jewish Voice in International Music
(14 December 2025)

This event offered an intimate exploration of the connection between Clara Haskil and her roots, shedding light on how her identity and sensibility grew from a modest Jewish cultural soil.

Film screening: “Clara Haskil: Le mystère de l’interprète” (Pascal Cling, Pierre-Olivier François, Prune Jaillet, 2017, 1h 10min)

(16 December 2025)

The documentary traces the extraordinary journey of Clara Haskil, from the child prodigy who began studying piano at the age of 5 in Bucharest to her international career marked by personal and historical difficulties.

The anniversary series of events was organized by Headsome Communication Association, Bucharest.



Photo: Clara Haskil (1895–1960)



Photo: Clara Haskil congratulated by Pablo Casals (1953)
source: www.eugeneistomin.com



Photo: Participants at NEC © Michał Wanke

SUMMER SCHOOL

SPOTLIGHT Audiovisual Capturing of Dynamics of Place Attachment and Identity in Central and Eastern Europe— Summer School on Documentary Filmmaking in Social Sciences (4th ed.) (21–28 September 2025)

The one-week-long, on-site summer school was dedicated to exploring the potential of documentary filmmaking for social science research and dissemination. It offered an intensive, practice-based learning experience which acquainted the participants with audio-visual research methods and collaborative ethnographic filmmaking.

Conveners:

Ágnes Erőss, Karina Gaibulina, Clara Kleininger-Wanik, Michał Wanke

Lecturers:

Ágnes Erőss, Karina Gaibulina, Clara Kleininger-Wanik, Radoslava Kuneva, Ana Vlad, Michał Wanke

Organizers:

Centre for Governance and Culture in Europe, University of St. Gallen (GCE-HSG), New Europe College (NEC), “I.L. Caragiale” National University of Theatre and Cinematography (UNATC), Free University of Bozen-Bolzano (unibz), University of Opole (UO), FORTHEM Diversity and Migration Lab UO, and Moving.Lab



Photo: Fieldwork in Văcărești Natural Park © Michał Wanke

Co-organized interdisciplinarily between visual anthropology, human geography, sociology and documentary filmmaking, the workshop offered an immersive experience for the participating students from all over Europe.

The theme of this edition was “more-than-human relations in the city”, which led participants to engage extensively with fieldwork (at sites such as Văcărești Natural Park, other urban parks, garden blocks, and neighborhood socializing areas) alongside their theoretical seminars at NEC. The previous editions of SPOTLIGHT dealt with “identity of place” (Opole, Poland, in 2022), “migration and diversity” (Józsefváros, Budapest, Hungary, in 2023) and “architecture and city dwelling” (Bucharest, Romania, in 2024).

More-than-humans in the semi-peripheries. On ways of seeing and being-seen-as other species

Why this theme? The organizers argued that the semiperipheral status of Central and Eastern Europe creates structural inequalities in knowledge production, marginalizing both certain human groups and non-human actors. They highlighted that dominant binaries—such as nature versus culture and human versus animal—have historically legitimized systems of exclusion and exploitation. As a result, non-human species are often neglected, controlled, or misrepresented.



Photo: Fieldwork in Bucharest © Michał Wanke



Photo: Public screening of the documentaries at UNATC © Michał Wanke



Photo: The event brought together representatives of the academic and research community.

ACADEMIC COOPERATION

Launching Event

Multilateral Academic Projects – MAPS

(13 October 2025)

Organized by the Romanian Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI), the launch event of *Research in the Spotlight: Making Ideas Visible* aimed to present research projects currently developed under the *Multilateral Academic Projects – MAPS* scheme. UEFISCDI is the Romanian partner in the Multilateral Academic Projects – MAPS program, financed through the second Swiss Contribution to Romania. The event was attended by Adrian Curaj, General Director of UEFISCDI, as well as HE Massimo Baggi, Ambassador of the Swiss Confederation to Romania.

MAPS promotes knowledge exchange by supporting cross-border collaboration among researchers from Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Poland, and Romania. The program aims to strengthen competitiveness within the European Research Area and responds to the research communities' need for greater international integration and enhanced collaboration with partners in Switzerland and across Europe. The complete list of projects can be accessed at uefiscdi.gov.ro; a selection of these is presented on the next page.

A selection of MAPS projects under the Swiss–Romanian cooperation scheme

source: uefiscdi.gov.ro

- *Shedding Light on Lower Danube Black Sea Region Paleoclimate Since the Mid-Brunhes Event (MBE) by Novel Loess–Paleosol Records – LOEs-CLIMBE* (Zurich U – Romanian Academy, Cluj-Napoca Branch – Bulgarian Academy of Sciences)
- *Combinatorial Synthesis of Cyclic Peptide Libraries and Their Application Against Emerging Therapeutic Targets* (École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne – Babeş-Bolyai U – Hungarian Academy of Sciences)
- *Change Generation by Soft Materials and Devices* (Swiss Federal Laboratories for Materials Science and Technology – National Institute for Research and Development of Isotopic and Molecular Technologies, Cluj Napoca – Sofia U)
- *Avalanche Mitigation and Forest Dynamics Under Climate Change in the Mountains of Southeastern Europe and the Alps* (Swiss Federal Institute for Forest, Snow and Landscape Research – West U of Timișoara – U of Forestry, Sofia)
- *Becoming Axolotl: Empathy, Simulation, and Embodiment in Medieval Narratives* (U of Berne – New Europe College – Croatian Academy of Science and Arts); [led by NEC Alumnus Cătălin Țăranu](#)
- *Adapted Forest Management for Biodiversity Conservation in Mountain Norway Spruce Forests Under Climate Change* (Swiss Federal Institute for Forest, Snow and Landscape Research – National Institute for Research and Development in Forestry “Marin Dracea” – Bulgarian Academy of Sciences – U of Zagreb)
- *Implications of Nano/Microplastic Pollution on Aquatic Environment Health* (U of Geneva – Babeş-Bolyai U, Cluj-Napoca – U of Dubrovnik)
- *Enlightenment and Publicity: The Problem of Deception in Late 18th-Century Political and Religious Thought* (U of Fribourg – Institute of Philosophy and Psychology, Romanian Academy – Jagiellonian U, Kraków); [NEC Alumna Tinca Prunea-Bretonnet is a member of the project team.](#)
- *EXperiMental: Wearable Technology and EXplainable AI for Mental Health and Inclusivity in Schools* (Università della Svizzera Italiana – Alexandru Ioan Cuza U, Iași – U of Zagreb)
- *AI-based Brain Metastases Tracking and Segmentation – A-BEACON* (U of Berne – Lucian Blaga U, Sibiu – Medical U, Varna – National Research Institute of Oncology)
- *AquaChain Connecting the Trophic Levels of a Freshwater Aquaculture Food Chain* (Zurich U of Applied Sciences – Alexandru Ioan Cuza U, Iași – AgrobioInstitute, Sofia)
- *IMAGO: How Do Images Speak? The Dynamics of Figures, Metaphors and Symbols in Christian Discourse and Beyond* (U of Berne – Lucian Blaga U, Sibiu – Sofia U); [NEC Alumna Georgiana Huian is a member of the project team.](#)
- *Magic Bullet Gels: Unleashing Antimicrobial Peptide Metal Complexes* (U of Fribourg – Macromolecular Chemistry, Iași – U of Wrocław)
- *Exploring the Triad of Academic Writing, Critical Thinking and AI Literacy: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Undergraduate Thesis Writing (TRAI)* (Zurich U of Applied Sciences – West U of Timișoara – Bulgarian Academy of Sciences)
- *Children’s Honest and Deceptive Behavior During School Transitions: Developmental Insights from Three European Educational Systems (CHOICES)* (U of Zurich – Babeş-Bolyai U – Nicolaus Copernicus U)

NEWS

• In June 2025, Professor Valentina Sandu-Dediu, Rector of New Europe College, was appointed member of the International Advisory Board of the College of Fellows at the University of Tübingen.

• Katharina Biegger, Strategic Advisor, Center for Governance and Culture in Europe, University of St. Gallen, was invited to join the editorial board of the journal *Deutsch-Rumänische Hefte*.

• Several NEC Researchers, Fellows, and Alumni took part in the 57th Annual Convention, 20–23 November 2025 in Washington, DC.

• Vojtěch Pojar (2025/2026 *Mattei Dogan* Fellow) received the 2025 Austrian Award of Excellence for his PhD thesis, “Experts in Post-Imperial Transitions: Entanglements and Diverging Trajectories of Eugenicists between the Habsburg Empire and the ‘Miniature Empires,’ c. 1900–1939”, which he defended in 2024 at CEU.



Photo: Vojtěch Pojar



Photo: Sabina Leonelli
source: wiko-berlin.de

upcoming

• Sabina Leonelli, philosopher of science and professor at the Technical University of Munich, will be keynote speaker at the sixth conference of the East European Network for Philosophy of Science in Bucharest (18–19 September 2026, Bucharest). The conference is organized by the East European Network for Philosophy of Science (EENPS), in co-operation with the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Bucharest and New Europe College.

• Cătălin Partenie (NEC Alumnus) launched his *Atlantida și copiii lui Platon* (Ratio et Revelatio, 2025) at the Gaudeamus Book Fair in December 2025.

• Ioana Pârvulescu (NEC Alumna) launched her *Alfabetul domnilor. Viața și aventurile bărbatului din cărți văzute prin ochii unei femei* (Humanitas, 2025) at the Gaudeamus Book Fair in December 2025.

Events of the *Tandem, Author with Translator – Translator with Author* Program

• A *Tandem* panel was hosted by the International Festival of Literature and Translations held in Romania: FILIT (Iași). *Tandem* fellows Dan Coman, Stilyan Deyanov, Teodora Dimova, Tea Topuria, Nataliia Trokhym and Marina Vraciu participated, along with Program Coordinator Mihaela Danga, boosting awareness of *Tandem* among professionals in the book industry. (24 October 2025)

• The Program gained further visibility when *Tandem* fellows Dan Coman and Stilyan Deyanov were guest speakers in episode 9 of *Translators and Writers in Dialogue*, an online series of meetings carried out within UNESCO's *Iași. City of Literature* Program. (3 December 2025)

• At the Gaudeamus Book Fair in Bucharest, writer Maria Rybakova and translator Marina Vraciu launched the former's collection of four novellas, *Cuaternitate. Patru nuvele din Carpați* (Junimea, 2025). (4 December 2025)

• *Tandem* alumna Lora Nenkovska moderated a presentation given by Dan Coman and Stilyan Deyanov at the Sofia International Book Fair. (13 December 2025)

Recent publications:

Cătălin Pavel, *Bizi İnsan Yapan Hayvanlar* (*Animalele care ne fac oameni*, The animals that make us human), translated from Romanian into Turkish by Metin Omer. (Ankara: Gordium Yayıncılık, 2025)

Liliana Corobca, *Kinderland*, translated from Romanian into Azerbaijani by Jalə İsmayıl. (Baku: Park, 2026)

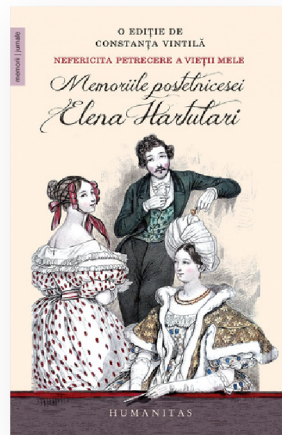
Photos © FILIT:
Dan Coman and Stilyan Deyanov at
International Festival of Literature and
Translations FILIT, Iași



A selection of recently published books



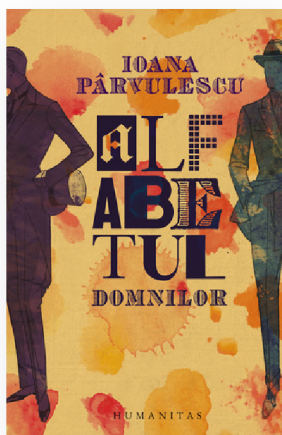
Alex Drace-Francis
(Member of the NEC
Academic Board),
translator and editor,
Bernhard Stolz.
*Reportaje dintr-o lume
în tranziție*
(Humanitas, 2025)



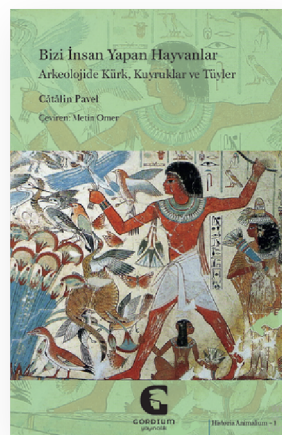
Constanța Vintilă
(NEC Researcher)
(ed.), *Nefericita
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