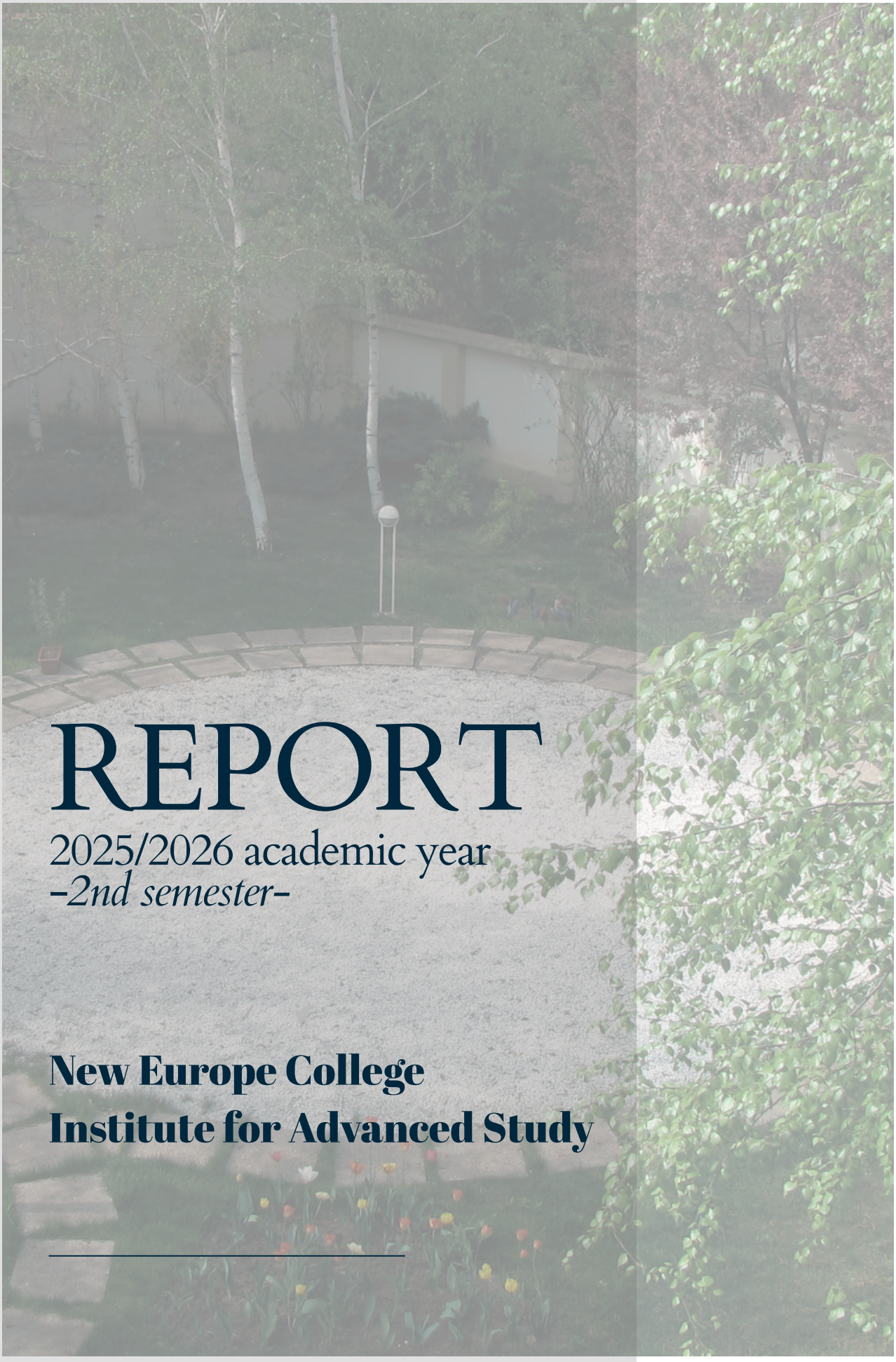


REPORT

2025/2026 academic year
-2nd semester-

New Europe College
Institute for Advanced Study

REPORT

SPRING - SUMMER
1 March 2026 - 31 July 2026
-2nd semester of the 2025/2026 academic year-

New Europe College
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New Europe College

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Is There a Silver Lining to Corruption?

One of the notable academic events of the second semester of the 2025/2026 academic year was the two-day workshop of the ERC-funded project "Transnational histories of 'corruption' in Central-South-East Europe (1750-1850)" - *TransCorr*, titled "The Phanariot Past and its Afterlives: Historicizing 'Corruption' in Central-South-Eastern Europe (1750s–1920s)."
This report opens with an essay by Silvia Marton, the project's Principal Investigator, Associate Professor at the Faculty of Political Science, University of Bucharest.

"One day, we might even have a ministry run entirely by AI. […] That way, there would be no nepotism or conflicts of interest," declared Edi Rama, the prime minister of Albania, during a press conference in 2025. "Societies will be better run by AI than by us because it will not make mistakes […], cannot be corrupted," pressed further Ben Blushi, Albania's former minister of local government and decentralization (both chronicled by *Futurism*). As other countries in the region quietly institutionalize this vision, we should not take lightly such assessments that combine our two major hopes and anxieties: artificial intelligence and (public) corruption.

Corruption has a dark side for many rightful reasons. Corruption accusations and scandals fuel the growing distrust in democratic institutions and procedures and the success of populist and extremist movements. Many critics believe that the relatively new democracies from Central-South-East Europe are particularly vulnerable to corruption, to the point that nowadays corruption has become a catch-all word for a broad range of malfunctions and grievances; and to the point that some officials imagine replacing humans with AI for conducting more qualified and corruption-free governmental and administrative affairs. At the same time, citizens react sharply to any suspected misconduct by public officials, whom they expect to act exemplarily. Integrity and public morality have become increasingly central criteria for judging political action.

By contrast, the bright side of discourses on corruption is rarely acknowledged. The collective research program "Transnational Histories of 'Corruption' in Central-South-East Europe (1750–1850)" precisely illustrates that accusations of corruption can have a creative effect. We show that public controversies centered on corruption have stimulated institutional, administrative, and legislative innovations and change, fostered wide public debate, and reshaped the values and conduct of individuals and organizations. Moreover, today as in the past, conflicts over the very meaning of corruption are an inherent feature of state-building and democratization: debates over public ethics and official conduct shape the regulatory standards and practices of governance and administration.

We contend that corruption, as a politically contested and unresolved concept, must be historicized. And that its history is a fascinating one. (Public) corruption is not an inherent part of human nature, a backward condition meant to disappear as a result of "modernization" or "civilization," or a historical and cultural specificity of the region. Instead, corruption is both a concept and a set of practices, understood in multiple ways and described through a vocabulary that shifts over time. Its meaning depends on social, political, and cultural contexts and is thus contingent upon configurations of political power, historical circumstances, and changing perceptions.

In sum, our research illustrates that at the core of corruption allegations are the continuous renegotiations of the meaning of the public-private divide. As such, corruption allegations have a foundational role that can only be approached through constructivist historicization of practices and meanings.

Silvia Marton

Current Fellowship Programs

Nearly 1,000 fellowships have been awarded to Romanian and international scholars in 33 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*.

2000

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)

2008

NEC International

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

2008

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)

2016

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)

present

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)

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)

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.

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)

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)

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)

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)

2017

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)



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



2025/2026 academic year

38 Fellows from 14 countries (Armenia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Germany, Georgia, Hungary, Montenegro, 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, University of Agronomical Sciences and Veterinary Medicine, Bucharest

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 Branișteș (Romania), *TANDEM* Fellow; Author

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

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

Radu-Matei Cocheci (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

Danka Ivanović (Montenegro), *TRADUKI* Fellow; Writer

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

Julia Korniichuk (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

Jörg Plath (Germany), *TRADUKI* Fellow; Radio Host, Book Editor

Vojtech Pojar (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





The members of the Environmental Humanities (EH) research group—**Cosmin Koszor-Codrea** (New Europe College), **Cosmin Minea** (Masaryk University), **Adrian-Nicolae Furtună** (Institute for Quality of Life of the Romanian Academy) and **Valeska Bopp-Filimonov** (Friedrich Schiller University Jena)—presented their research project titled "[WOUND] A World Unframed: Contested Landscapes, Extractivist Regimes and Unequal Ecologies Around the Southeastern Carpathian Mountains, 1830–1940s" on 4 March 2026.

The project explores how landscapes around the Southeastern Carpathian Mountains were experienced, transformed, contested and reimagined between the 1830s and the 1940s under expanding extractive regimes. Bringing together perspectives from environmental history, social history, heritage studies, and literary studies, the discussion examined logging, drilling, mining, and agrarian restructuring as sites of unequal and racialized ecological change. Focusing on the relation between interimperial expansion, nation-state reframing, and capitalist interests, the speakers highlighted how extractive logics reconfigured institutions as Roma slavery and human relations, created environmental violence, generated resistance to exploitation and binary tensions between human–nonhuman relations across a politically fragmented region.

By foregrounding a postcolonial ecocriticism, intersectional, and multispecies approach to historical and literary sources, the WOUND project seeks to challenge both Western-centric and national narratives of modernity. It aims to situate the Carpathians within wider transregional debates on environmental injustices and provide an introductory critique of its ethnoracial, anthropocentric, and nationalist ecological cultures.

EH is an interdisciplinary collaboration between four scholars who critically analyze the development of ideas about the natural landscape in Romania, the interaction between humans and nature and the relation between nature and the political, artistic and social spheres. They are interested in themes such as the interrelation between rural architectural heritage and the Carpathian landscape, the relationship between the history of nature conservation and the history of science, alpine history, the development of forestry, the ecological history of Romania and Central and Eastern Europe, literary representations of nature, and human and nonhuman animal encounters in Romanian literature and visual arts. The constitution of this group was motivated by the urgency of such research considering the debates about nature exploitation in Romania (deforestation, mining projects) and the ongoing climate crisis as well as by the need to build upon what little groundbreaking research exists on environmental history in Romania.





Veronika Zinchenko, *Sustaining Ukrainian Scholarship* Fellow, Senior Lecturer, R. Glier Kyiv Municipal Academy of Music, presented her research project titled "The Soundscape of War in Contemporary Ukrainian Ballet" on 11 March 2026.

This research explores the distinctive integration of war soundscapes in contemporary Ukrainian ballet, shaped by the country's cultural, historical, and technological context. It focuses on how Ukrainian composers and choreographers utilize electroacoustic music—ranging from fully electronic to hybrid compositions—to express the trauma and resilience of wartime realities. These sonic innovations not only reflect global trends in modern ballet but also contribute to the development of a unique Ukrainian identity within the international dance community. Through case studies the study examines the creative strategies behind blending electronic and acoustic sounds.

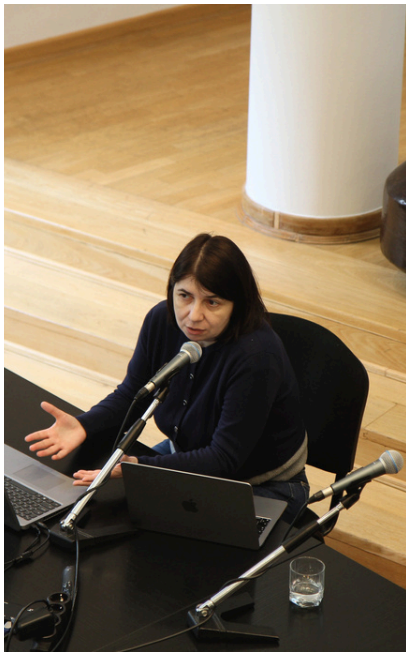
The members of the *Politics, Legitimacy and Representation in Strained Societies* (POLARIS) research group—**Adelin-Costin Dumitru** (NEC Alumnus; Assistant Professor, National University of Science and Technology POLITEHNICA Bucharest), **Camil Pârvu** (NEC Alumnus; Associate Professor, University of Bucharest) and **Alexandru Volacu** (NEC Alumnus; Associate Professor, University of Bucharest)—gave the presentation titled "Polarization and Democracy. Past, Present, Future" on 18 March 2026.

Overwhelmingly, political scientists agree that we are experiencing a period of global democratic erosion, or a third wave of autocratization, that is "unprecedented in length, scope, and magnitude", as Staffan Lindberg has recently argued. Democratic erosion is a complex, multi-causal, process. One phenomenon that often accompanies and likely enables it is that of polarization, and, in particular, one kind of polarization that is not issue-based but rather affective, splitting the community into opposing and mutually distrustful political camps. In this seminar they discussed the problem of polarization from several angles. First, they painted a picture of the breadth of polarization and democratic erosion in contemporary societies, drawing on the available data and the most influential theoretical frameworks in the academic literature. Second, they offered an account of how and why polarization emerges and solidifies in contemporary societies, focusing on institutional mechanisms that facilitate its success. Third, they articulated a range of potential scenarios for what the near future might hold in terms of a deepening of polarization, as well as outlined the contours of some directions for institutional proposals that could help in mitigating these processes. Founded in 2025, POLARIS examines the erosion of "the center," and how insurgent political movements mobilize "alternative expertise" to challenge traditional forms of governance.



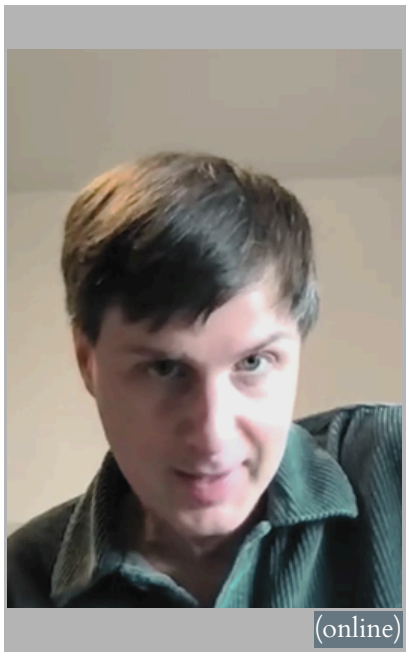
Natalia-Cornelia Malancu, *NEC-AMEROPA* Fellow, Adjunct Professor, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA), presented her research project titled "Young People's Attitudes About the Expansion of Voting Rights for Immigrants and/or Emigrants" on 25 March 2026.

The last few decades have seen more countries adopt policies allowing emigrants to vote in home country elections from abroad, while there has been relative stagnation in extending those same rights to immigrants. Despite an active debate among political theorists on the "boundaries of democratic inclusion," little is known about citizens' own views of this practice. Romania—Europe's leading country of emigration and a young immigration country—provides an ideal setting for studying the attitudes of "sedentary young nationals." We focus on 18–24-year-old nationals because we are interested in attitudes that are still in the making.



Oana Adelina Ştefan, *Ştefan Odobleja* Fellow, Researcher, University of Ostrava, Czech Republic, presented her research project titled "Tourism, Modernization, and Landscape Change in the Romanian Carpathians during the 1950s–1980s" on 1 April 2026.

This project examines the tension between socialist Romania's promotion as a clean and healthy environment so as to lure tourists and its industrial modernization strategy in the Carpathians that involved major changes in the natural landscape. It argues that tourist experts in Romania skillfully navigated between promoting the country as having a clean environment and unspoiled landscapes and its overall developmental strategy, which involved intensive urbanization, as a way to achieve modernization. This tension was especially notable among the Romanian political elites who believed that economic underdevelopment justified a certain ambivalence in relation to the environment.



Mykhaylo Yakubovych, *Sustaining Ukrainian Scholarship* Fellow, Researcher, Freiburg University, presented his research project titled "Preserving the Islamic Manuscript Heritage in Ukrainian Libraries: Challenges of Cataloguing" on 15 April 2026 (online).

This project focuses on the urgent task of preserving Islamic manuscripts housed in Ukrainian libraries during times of war. These manuscripts (ranging from religious texts and legal treatises to scientific and literary works) form an integral part of Ukraine's diverse cultural and intellectual heritage, particularly reflecting the histories of Crimean Tatars and other Muslim communities. As armed conflict threatens archives and cultural institutions, these written legacies face severe risks, including damage, displacement, and permanent loss.



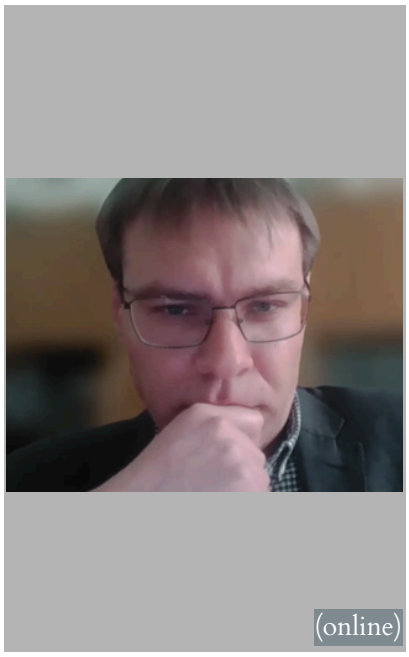
Vojtěch Pojar, *Mattei Dogan* Fellow, Assistant Professor, American University of Central Asia (AUCA), Bishkek, presented his research project titled "The Languages of Race in State-Socialist East Central Europe, 1945–1989" on 29 April 2026.

Resonating with the recent resurgence of interest in historicizing the construction and political uses of the concept of race in East Central Europe, this postdoctoral project examined its role in state-socialist regimes. Through a comparative analysis of Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland, it revealed the enduring —though not central—position of this concept in their political and expert cultures, and identified at least three distinct "languages of race" within these dictatorships. The research project conducted at NEC grew out of the striking observation that many of the radicalized actors, concepts, and networks persisted from the interwar years through the early decades of the state-socialist regimes.



Adriana Cupcea, *Ștefan Odobleja* Fellow, Researcher, Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities, Cluj-Napoca, presented her research project titled "Categorization, Loss and Displacement: Millet and Turkish Tinsmiths in Bucharest" on 6 May 2026.

The project examined the largely overlooked Millet community in Bucharest (also referred to in the literature as Muslim Roma). It aimed to reconstruct the community's past and present through archival research, press analysis, demographic sources, and life-history interviews with community members. The project also explored processes of self-identification and external categorization.
The research identified the key actors/groups placed in a position of external authority and what the means/instruments used by them to impact/influence these communities were.



Vitaliy Lytvyn, *Sustaining Ukrainian Scholarship* Fellow, Professor, Faculty of Philosophy, Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, presented his research project titled "From Erosion to Restoration and Consolidation of Democracy in Ukraine During and After the War: Institutional, Political, Electoral and Eurointegration Dimensions" on 13 May 2026 (online).

This project investigated the prospects for restoring and consolidating democracy in Ukraine during and after the ongoing war, focusing on necessary political, institutional, electoral, and Eurointegration reforms. Despite three decades of attempted democratization since independence, Ukraine's political transition remains incomplete, marked by institutional instability, hybrid regime characteristics, and fluctuating democratic performance. Russia's full-scale invasion has further exacerbated these challenges by suspending democratic processes under martial law.





Carl Rommel, *NEC Award* Fellow, Researcher, Department of Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology, Uppsala University, presented his research project titled "Egypt as a Project: Dreamwork and Masculinity in President El-Sisi's New Republic" on 27 May 2026.

This anthropological research examined dreams taking the shape of "projects" in contemporary Egypt. As lower-middle class men devise small business projects for profit making and social improvement, the military-backed regime undertakes spectacular mega projects in the desert to showcase its grandeur and national-development ambitions. Based on long-term ethnographic fieldwork, media analysis and historical data, the research analyses social, economic and political effects of Egyptian project dreams across scales. It showcases how politicians and ordinary citizens alike turn to projects to set material and social improvements in motion.

Cătălin Țăranu (NEC Alumnus), Director of the project Becoming Axolotl, and **Alexandra Ilina** (NEC Alumna), Lecturer, Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures, University of Bucharest; Researcher, Becoming Axolotl, gave the presentation titled "Becoming Axolotl: Empathy, Simulation, and Embodiment in Medieval Narratives" on 3 June 2026.

The team presented the project to the fellows of New Europe College, situating it within the SNSF's MAPS instrument and its trilateral structure before turning to the project's theoretical framework (cognitive simulation, the 4E mind, affective niches) and a panoramic survey of all three teams' planned work and outputs. Cognitive simulation refers to the mind's ability to run an experience internally without actually living it. When we imagine what someone else feels, the brain partly uses the same mechanisms it would use if we felt it ourselves. This idea connects with the concept of the 4E mind, which assumes thinking doesn't happen in the brain alone. The mind is embodied (shaped by the body), embedded (in its surroundings), extended (into tools and objects) and enactive (formed through action and interaction with the world). From this perspective, emotions are shaped by what can be called an affective niche consisting of the surroundings we shape or seek out (places, objects, rituals, other people) to regulate and sustain our emotions. A quiet place that calms us or a song that lifts our mood are simple cases.
During the seminar, they presented their research on the selected literary case studies. Cătălin Țăranu discussed the Exeter Book riddles as a continuum of human and nonhuman affect; Alexandra Ilina explored Descola's four ontologies in Marie de France's *Guigemar*; and Oana Cojocaru examined Byzantine rhetorical empathy through Theodore Prodromos's *Schede tou Myos*, showing how grammar teaching rehearsed shifts between human and nonhuman perspectives.



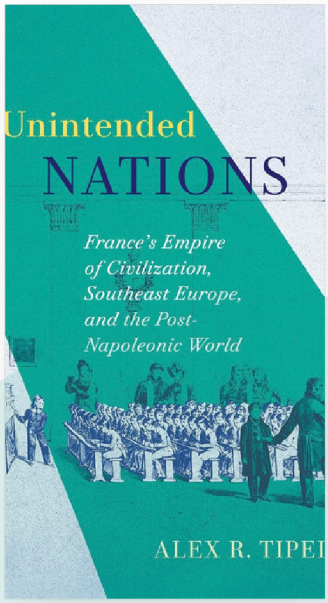


Nicolle Bussien, *Landis & Gyr* Fellow, gave a presentation of her past and current artistic projects, titled "Narratives of Guilt," on 10 June 2026.

This project examines how Swiss news coverage of theft often links crime to origin, producing racialized and stereotype-driven framings—for example references to "Romanian gangs" or "men from Maghreb countries." Such labels shape public perception by treating "origin" as an explanation for crime and by simplifying complex social issues. The research pursues two aims: first, to analyze how these framings are constructed and repeated in everyday reporting (headlines, images, language); second, to foreground collective responsibility by asking which social conditions—inequality, labor regimes, migration policies—contribute to criminalization. The focus shifts from individual blame to broader structures.

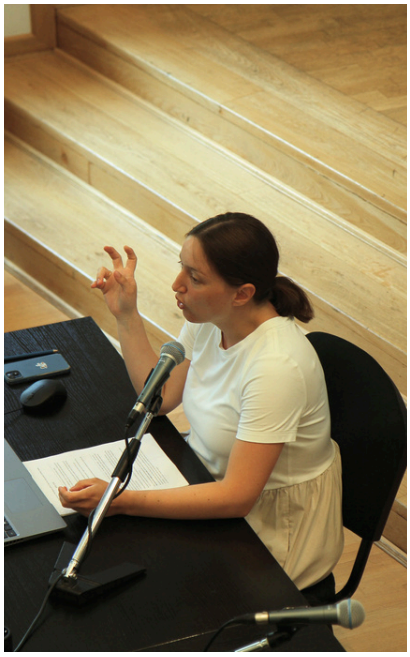
Alex R. Tipei, Assistant Professor, University of Montréal, member of the ERC *TransCorr* Project, presented her research project "Informal Empire and Unintended Nations: Global Interests and the Remaking of Nineteenth-Century Southeastern Europe" on 17 June 2026.

Alex Tipei's *Unintended Nations: France's Empire of Civilization, Southeast Europe, and the Post-Napoleonic World* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2025) is about a specific moment in the development of the concept of civilization and the cluster of discourses, institutions, and technologies connected to it—or what we might collectively call civilization-speak—as well as the cross-continental networks that employed these ideas as an organizing principle. The monograph focuses on historical figures in France and the lands that make up significant parts of present-day Greece and Romania, from the early Napoleonic era through the outbreak of the revolutions of 1848.



The book received an Honorable Mention for the 2026 Barbara Jelavich Book Prize, recognizing it as an outstanding scholarly monograph.
Barbara Jelavich (1923–1995) was an American historian and writer, whose numerous publications included *Modern Austria*, *Russia's Balkan Entanglements*, and the two-volume *History of the Balkans*.





Andreea Eşanu, Researcher, New Europe College; Coordinator, NEC-TECH research group; Associate Lecturer, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Bucharest, and **Larisa Gogianu**, Scientific Researcher, Institute for Microtechnologies, Bucharest; Member, NEC-TECH research group, gave a presentation titled "On Deep-learning AI Systems and Epistemic Trust" on 24 June 2026.

In this presentation, they addressed an epistemological question about deep-learning AI systems: Can anyone justifiably place any sort of epistemic trust in deep-learning AI? By "epistemic trust" they meant the confidence or reliance that someone grants to various sources of knowledge. In the context of deep-learning AI, epistemic trust can be said to involve the belief that the systems we interact with are reliable, fair and trustworthy as sources of knowledge.
First, they examined a set of defeasible conditions for epistemic trust in deep-learning AI, in order to make sure that an epistemically normative notion of trust is in place (i.e., a trust that can be justifiably attributed/revoked in different circumstances). They then distinguished between two concepts of epistemic trust, already discussed in the philosophical literature: basic and enhanced epistemic trust, which differ in their defeasible conditions—in other words, one concept is minimal, while the other is maximal. Finally, relying on this analytic framework with defeasible conditions, they argued that deep-learning AI forms a nonhomogeneous class with respect to how various systems navigate epistemic trust. To illustrate this, they discussed two mini case studies: AlphaFold 2 and ChatGPT (regardless of the model powering it). They concluded that AlphaFold 2 can be endowed with a form of basic epistemic trust, while ChatGPT (regardless of the model powering) is still in a "grey area," which requires further scrutiny from users.

Hannah Riedler, *NEC Award* Fellow, presented her research project titled "An Unwanted Union? Moldavia Within the First Romanian Unitary State 1859–1919" on 1 July 2026.

The 1859 unification of Wallachia and Moldavia remains central to Romania's national history. While Wallachia prospered, Moldavia faced economic decline and centralization from Bucharest. This project reexamines Moldavian separatism and regionalism through detailed source analysis, challenging outdated national narratives. By paralleling it with Risorgimento Italy, Moldavia is situated within broader European state-building processes, highlighting its relevance to international research.







Photos: The closing ceremony, with Professor Valentina Sandu-Dediu awarding diplomas to the Fellows.







Photos: Diplomas and a group photo with a large part of the 2025/2026 cohort of Fellows at NEC.



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



The *TransCorr* Seminars & Events: Exploring Corruption, Networks, and Power



Lucien Frary, Member of the ERC Project *TransCorr*, Professor of History, Rider University, gave the online presentation "Russia's Consular Network in the Ottoman Balkans: Influence, Favoritism, and Patronage in the Pashalik of Belgrade (1815–1821)" on 26 March 2026.

Drawing on Russian foreign ministry records, the presentation examined the extension of Russian patronage and influence in the Ottoman Balkans through human webs. It charted the development of Russia's consular network through the activity of its ambassadors and their use of unofficial and official Eastern Orthodox agents. By 1774, Russia's practice of using Eastern Orthodox clients with linguistic capacities relevant to the region became a potent device to assert tsarist prerogatives. The presentation focused on the participation of Russia's diplomatic and intelligence agents in Serbia's journey toward independence.



Constantin Ardeleanu, Member of the ERC Project *TransCorr*, Senior Researcher, Institute for South-East European Studies / New Europe College, Bucharest, gave the presentation "Follow the Money: Networks, Influence, and Power in 1830s Wallachia" on 4 May 2026.

The presentation aimed to investigate the complex relationship between money, influence, and power in 1830s Wallachia, within a broader system of governance through networks. It explored the inter-imperial networks of business, trust, and patronage that linked Bucharest to Iași, Belgrade, Istanbul, and Vienna; the fluidity of the boundaries between public and private in a world governed by personal loyalties; the emergence of new forms of accountability and transparency, following the introduction of the Organic Regulations and the empowerment of the General Assembly to oversee budgetary expenditures.

Workshop Contributions:

- Constanța Vintilă, N. Iorga Institute of History, Romanian Academy / New Europe College, "In the Shadow of Power: The Career of a Minor Official in Wallachia, 1800–1850"
- Alex R. Tipei, University of Montréal / New Europe College, "It's Complicated: Ion Heliade-Rădulescu, the Phanariots, and Modern Greeks"
- Gábor Egry, Institute of Political History, Budapest / New Europe College, "The Long Shadow of Old Patronage: How Unresolved Legal Transitions Since 1848 Corrupted Interwar Romania's Legal System?"



Photo: Miklós Barabás (1810–1898), *View of Bucharest*, 1832, Private Collection
Caption from Constanța Vintilă's presentation at the workshop.

WORKSHOP

Networks, Patronage, and Corruption in Central-South-East Europe
(2 July 2026)

The speakers' case studies illustrated that making sense of informal networks in a premodern setting, during the incipient phase of state bureaucratization, requires careful analysis. Informal and formal logics are often treated as mutually exclusive in the historiography: patronage, favours, and kinship are presumed to belong to a traditional world that bureaucratization has progressively displaced. Constanța Vintilă demonstrated that personal relations, family and household patronage, were not opposed to public institutions, nor did they conflict with the emerging meritocratic and knowledge-based logic in Wallachia. Alex R. Tipei discussed the entanglement between the imperial Phanariot elites and the local elites in Wallachia and Greece. Gábor Egry examined how patronage and transethnic networks were transformed in postimperial settings.

Research projects—producing original knowledge and developing 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 Studies, 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)

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 (Researcher, New Europe College)

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

Michał Wasiucionek, PhD (Researcher, N. Iorga Institute of History, Bucharest, Romanian Academy)

International Advisory Board:
Gábor Egry, PhD (Director, Institute of Political History / Politikatörténeti Intézet, Budapest)

Molly Greene, PhD (Professor, Princeton University)

Frédéric Monier, PhD (Professor, University of Avignon)

Main Objectives and Methodological Novelties

Photo: Caption from *The Allegory and Effects of Bad Government*, painted by Ambrogio Lorenzetti between 1338 and 1339 in Palazzo Pubblico, Siena. The fresco offers a powerful visual reflection on governance and society.

For centuries, Central-South-East Europe grappled with the stigma of corruption. From 1750 to 1850, politicians, scholars, and writers painted a grim picture of graft, nepotism, and bribery as endemic issues. These allegations shaped the region's identity, linking corruption to cultural backwardness and economic under-development. With this in mind, the ERC-funded TransCorr project explores how regional leaders repurposed traditional practices, labeling them as "corrupt" when juxtaposed with West European modernity ideals. The findings promise to change the way we perceive patronage, graft, and center–periphery dynamics. The emphasis on the intersection of social and political practice and discourse on "corruption" in a transnational context constitutes TransCorr's main methodological novelties and contributions to existing scholarship on Central-South-East Europe.

Results:

Workshops:

- *The Phanariot Past and its Afterlives: Historicizing 'Corruption' in Central-South-East Europe (1750s–1920s)* (15–16 June 2026, at NEC)—see page 56
- *Old Practices, New Interactions? Favoritism, Interests, Patronage in Central-South-East Europe (1750–1850)* (2 July 2026, at NEC)—see page 23

TransCorr Seminars:

- Lucien Frary, "Russia's Consular Network in the Ottoman Balkans: Influence, Favoritism, and Patronage in the Pashalik of Belgrade (1815–1821)"—see page 22
- Constantin Ardeleanu, "Follow the Money: Networks, Influence, and Power in 1830s Wallachia"—see page 22

Publication:

- Silvia Marton and Alex R. Tipei, eds., *Conceptualizing Corruption in the Age of Revolutions: Between Old Regimes and New Orders in East-Central-South Europe* (A Modern History of Politics and Violence Series, Bloomsbury Academic, under contract).

Presently, no transimperial or transnational history of "corruption" in East-Central-South Europe between 1750 and 1850 exists. Yet, in these borderlands, nestled between the Russian, Habsburg, and Ottoman empires, "corruption" became a key concept in political and economic debates during an initial era of modernization. To fill in this gap in the literature, contributors use micro-historical case studies to track how public figures mobilized accusations of "corruption" to legitimize their political and economic aims and assert their own authority. Equipped with a wide range of linguistic skills and archival know-how, the authors capture the variety of discursive possibilities that the language of "corruption" offered to the individuals that they study.



MERTO·O·DISCACCIATE·DISERTO·DI SVSO·CON QVALVNQVE SIA SEGVACE·FORTIFICANDO LGI P NOSTRA PACE·

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 Ilina, 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)

Becoming Axolotl at the World's Leading Medieval Congress

Becoming Axolotl asks how medieval texts invited their audiences to simulate (cognitively, affectively, sensorially) the experience of other-than-human agents: animals, plants, artifacts, racialized humans, and supernatural beings. The project started in July 2025, and the March–July 2026 period saw the Romanian team at New Europe College move from the consolidation phase of Year One into sustained public output.

In July, the Romanian team was complete at last: the new addition, Alexandra Ilina, enabled the project to hit its full stride. Alexandra, a former NEC fellow, now Lecturer in the French Department at the University of Bucharest, joins as the team's second postdoctoral researcher, bringing to the project her work on the interplay of text and image in medieval French romance (e.g., *La Hiérarchie entre texte et image dans le Tristan en prose*, Classiques Garnier, 2020) together with a research program that draws on cognitive-linguistic approaches and Descola's ontological typology to trace how nonhuman actants co-produce meaning in Old French narrative and manuscript culture. Alongside Oana Cojocaru's work on Byzantine emotional culture and Cătălin Țăranu's on Old English and Old Norse, her arrival gave the Romanian team its full three-specialism complement.

The International Medieval Congress (IMC) at the University of Leeds is Europe's largest annual academic conference dedicated to the study of the European Middle Ages. www.imc.leeds.ac.uk

SPECIAL PANEL *at the International Medieval Congress at the University of Leeds* (5–10 July 2026):

Becoming Other: Simulating Non-human Consciousness in Old English, Old French, and Old Byzantine Medieval Texts

- Alexandra Ilina, "An Anthropology of Non-Human Voices in the Lais of Marie de France"
- Cătălin Țăranu, "Community and Non-Human Emotion in the Old English Exeter Book"
- Oana Cojocaru, "In Praise of the Small: Rhetorics, Nature, and the Non-Human in Byzantine Writing"

The three papers demonstrated the comparative purchase of the project's framework across three distinct linguistic and generic traditions—a coherence that was noted in discussion and that has strengthened the case for the planned edited volume.

The Leeds papers also consolidated work already moving toward publication: Cătălin Țăranu's article "Feelings Without a Feeler: Affective Assemblages and Relational Ontology in Old English Verse" was accepted by English Studies, the joint Țăranu–Ilina article on marine emotions in Old French lays and Old English elegies advanced substantially, and Oana Cojocaru's Byzantine animal empathy article progressed toward submission.

Cătălin Țăranu

Photo: The theme of the 2026 International Medieval Congress in Leeds was "Temporalities." One of the event's visuals reproduced the *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, the 12th-century Byzantine icon from the Monastery of St Catherine, Sinai, associated with John Climacus.



Marie de France, from an illuminated manuscript in Bibliothèque nationale de France

Marie de France (c. 1160–1215), whose work Alexandra Ilina is researching, was a poet, likely born in France, who lived in England during the late 12th century. *The lais of Marie de France* are a series of twelve short narrative poems on love and social relationships.



The team members also presented their work to the NEC community on 3 June 2026, under the title "Becoming Axolotl: Empathy, Simulation, and Embodiment in Medieval Narratives." During the seminar, they introduced their literary case studies: Cătălin Țăranu on human and nonhuman affect in the Exeter Book riddles; Alexandra Ilina on Descola's four ontologies in Marie de France's *Guigemar*; and Oana Cojocaru on Byzantine rhetorical empathy in Theodore Prodromos's *Schede tou Myos*, focusing on shifts between human and nonhuman perspectives.—
see page 15



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



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)

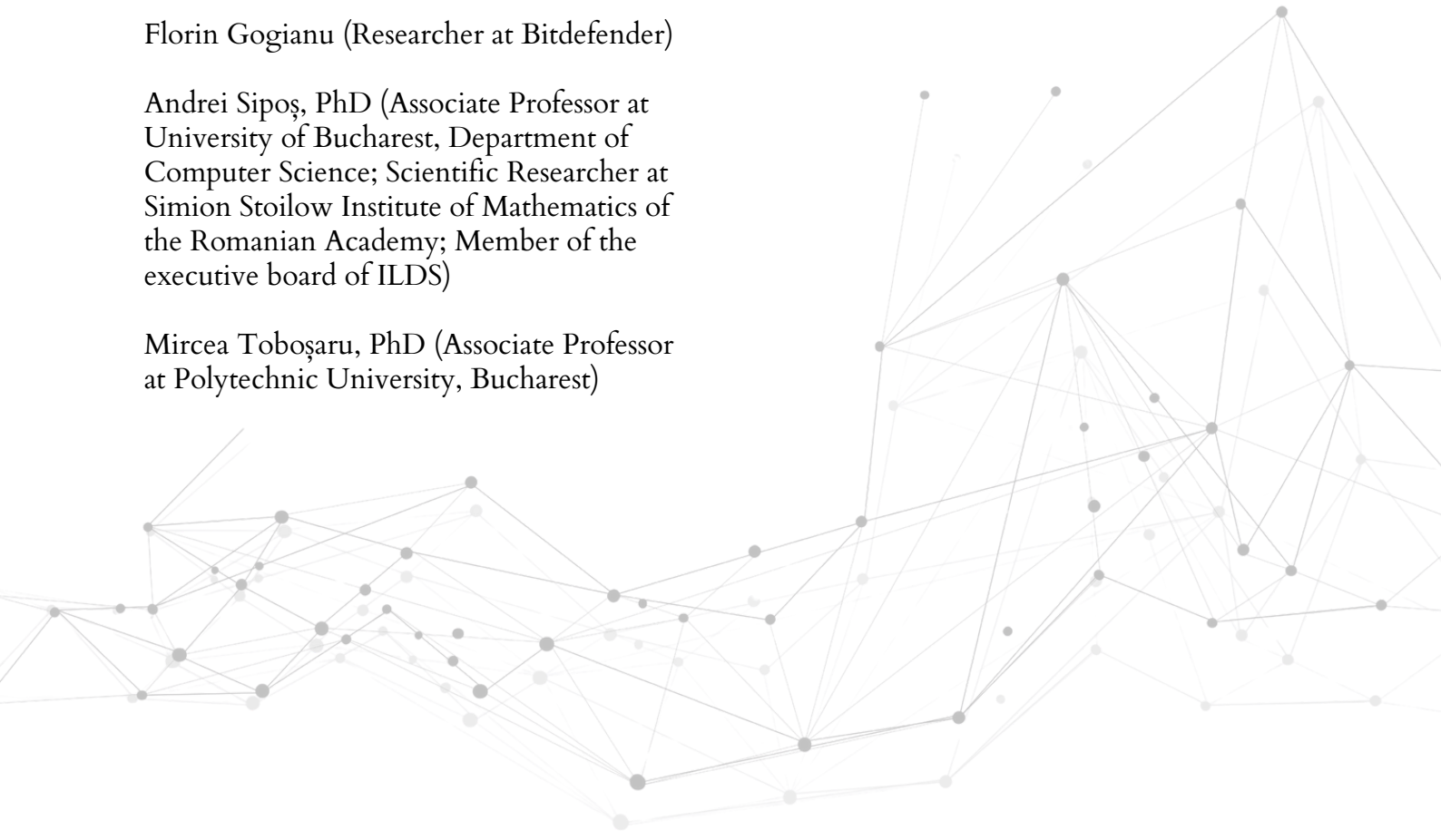
Florin Gogianu (Researcher at Bitdefender)

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)



NEC-TECH, a Consolidated Forum for Research on Humanities and Technology

Between March and July 2026, the NEC-TECH research group delved into various activities of inquiry into the epistemic, ethical, political, and cultural consequences of contemporary technologies. Across research group meetings, invited lectures, an international workshop, and a New Europe College seminar, the group brought philosophical analysis into dialogue with media studies, anthropology, cultural studies, and political and social science. The semester was unified by a central concern: how digital platforms and artificial intelligence are changing the conditions under which knowledge is produced, communicated, trusted, or contested. Technology was examined as part of a broader transformation of expertise, public authority, scientific practice, cultural value, and personal identity.

The semester opened on 19 March with a research-group discussion led by Răzvan Nicolescu and Andreea Eșanu. The meeting focused on Michael T. Hicks, James Humphries, and Joe Slater's article "ChatGPT is Bullshit," published in *Ethics and Information Technology* in 2024. The paper offered a starting point for analyzing the distinctive epistemic risks of large language models.

It enabled the group to consider why fluent output may be detached from a commitment to truth, and why evaluating such systems cannot be reduced to whether information is accurate or inaccurate. The discussion established recurring themes: the relationship between linguistic performance and knowledge, the responsibilities of users and designers, and the difficulty of assigning epistemic authority to systems whose outputs appear meaningful without being grounded in ordinary communicative intentions.

On 6 May, NEC-TECH joined the POLARIS research group for a session on "Digital Public Sphere(s) and the Future of Democratic Autonomy." The discussion paired Petter Törnberg and Richard Rogers's paper, "Towards a Post-Social Media Studies," with Thomas Aylsworth and Clinton Castro's chapter on the duty of group agents to promote digital minimalism, from their volume *Kantian Ethics and the Attention Economy*. Read together, the texts broadened the semester's focus from individual interactions with technology to the institutional and collective organization of attention. Participants considered how changing platform ecologies reshape the public sphere, how inherited categories of social-media research may need revision,

and whether organized groups have moral responsibilities to limit attention-capturing digital practices. The meeting connected democratic autonomy with the design and governance of communicative environments, underscoring that digital agency is conditioned by infrastructures, incentives, and collective norms.

These concerns were further developed at the international workshop held on 19 May, convened by Alexandra Bacalu in a hybrid format at NEC. The workshop examined trust, truth, and expertise through contributions from the humanities and social sciences. Its first session addressed the politics of trust, conspiracy, ideology, and gender. Răzvan Nicolescu explored expertise among digital truth-seekers; Elena Trifan analyzed despair, masculinity, and critiques of capitalism; Dragoș Manea discussed far-right mediascapes through Brian Wood's *Northlanders*. Together, the papers showed how online communities reorganize belonging and authority.

Two sessions then turned to trust in the age of AI. Adriana Mihai examined cultural value and digital cultural production, while Mircea Toboșaru discussed large language models as generators of persuasive but epistemically unstable discourse. Andreea Eșanu presented a framework for epistemic trust in deep-learning systems, and Mihai Ometiță explored agency and identity through virtual cannibalism and artificial wildness. The final session addressed wellness culture and the crisis of expertise. Stephanie A. Baker analyzed therapeutic claims on short-video platforms; Cristian Ducu examined trust in online medical influencers; and Alexandra Bacalu investigated Stoic influencers and ideals of invulnerability.



Photo: Mircea Toboșaru (National University of Science and Technology Politehnica Bucharest) presenting his paper "The Confessions of Large Language Bullshit Machines" at the workshop



Photo: Răzvan Nicolescu, NEC Alumnus (University College London), presenting his paper "'Lately, I Don't Really Discuss This with Anybody': Building Individual Expertise and Reconfiguring Trust Among Digital Truth-Seekers" at the workshop

The research group returned to its reading program on 21 May with a discussion of Andrés Zarankin, María José Cruz, Melisa A. Salerno, and Vinícius Melquíades's "Samantha's Instigations: Reflections on an Archaeology of the Future." The article introduced a material-culture perspective into the semester's work. It prompted participants to consider how imagined technological futures are embedded in present objects, practices, and desires, and how archaeology can illuminate expectations about intimacy, artificial agents, and human-machine relations. The meeting extended the inquiry beyond normative assessment to the historical and cultural interpretation of technological imaginaries.

In June, the program placed current technological change in relation to both the history of science and emerging regulatory practice. On 10 June, Mircea Flonta, Professor Emeritus at the University of Bucharest, delivered a conference on scientific research and changing images of the world. He distinguished the cumulative, progressive development of scientific knowledge from the radical discontinuities that can occur between scientific worldviews. The distinction clarified the different functions of communication among researchers and public discourse about the wider implications of scientific results.

The following day, Irina Marsh led an online session on ULTIMATE, an end-to-end methodology for trust, ethics, and compliance in artificial intelligence. Drawing on the Horizon Europe project conducted between 2022 and 2025, she showed how ethical values can be translated into requirements, metrics, evaluations, documented evidence, risk analysis, and mitigation measures.

The presentation also mapped stages of the methodology onto provisions of the European Union's AI Act, linking philosophical questions about trustworthiness to operational and auditable practices. The session highlighted the importance of integrating ethics throughout the engineering and governance lifecycle rather than treating it as an external or retrospective assessment.

On 24 June, at the weekly NEC Seminar, Andreea Eșanu and Larisa Gogianu gave a presentation on deep-learning AI systems and epistemic trust. Their argument offered a qualified affirmative answer to the question of whether such systems can justifiably be trusted as sources of knowledge. By distinguishing basic from enhanced epistemic trust and articulating defeasible conditions under which trust may be granted or withdrawn, the presentation resisted treating deep-learning AI as a homogeneous category.

Taken as a whole, the activities combined close reading, conceptual clarification, case analysis, public scholarly exchange, and engagement with policy and regulation. They created continuity between foundational and practical questions: what counts as knowledge, how expertise is established, why people trust digital sources, how platforms shape public reasoning, and how ethical principles can become verifiable practices. The semester advanced a coherent research agenda while opening collaborations across NEC, the POLARIS group, universities, independent researchers, and responsible-AI professionals.

Andreea Eșanu

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 March-July 2026, the group continued its series of regular meetings, public events and the individual archival research of each member.

In early spring, the group delivered its presentation as part of the NEC seminar series, titled "[WOUND] A World Unframed: Contested Landscapes, Extractivist Regimes and Unequal Ecologies around the Southeastern Carpathian Mountains, 1830–1940s" (see page 11).

After the presentation, the members focused in particular on ways in which the four research projects could communicate more effectively with one another, taking into account the feedback received during meetings with colleagues Constantin Ardeleanu and Silvia Marton.

During the same period, the team submitted an application for the *Early-career Teams* grant administered by UEFISCDI. The project, entitled "A History of Resource Exploitation and Environmental Transformations in the Carpathian Mountains," aims to examine forms of resource extraction in the Carpathians within the context of imperial and national political regimes, from the perspective of environmental justice.

Cosmin Koszor-Codrea, as the Regional Representative for Romania within the European Society for Environmental History, continued to organize the monthly scientific lecture series Environmental History Today. He is also working on the publication of a forthcoming study entitled "Ecology and the State: Nature Protection, Eugenics, and the Racialization of Ethnic Minorities in Interwar Romania," which will be published in the *Journal of Race, Ethnicity and Politics*.

Cosmin Koszor-Codrea

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

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

Affective polarization—the phenomenon where positive affect towards one's favored group is accompanied by negative affect towards those perceived as outside the favored group (Wagner, "Affective Polarization in Multiparty Systems")—is a multifaceted concept, whose sources are still contested in the literature. What is undeniable is that polarization occurs in societies which are under strain in one way or another. Among the root causes of affective polarization scholars have included deep grievances and social resentments (McCoy and Rahman, "Polarized Democracies in Comparative Perspective"); failing "meso-institutions"—interest groups, state parties, the media (Pierson and Schickler, "Madison's Constitution Under Stress"); and elite behavior that is increasingly less bounded by rules in an environment shaped by media which "caters to niche political audiences" (Druckman, Green and Iyengar, "Does Affective Polarization Contribute to Democratic Backsliding in America?"). Nonetheless, these are just some of the relevant structural transformations which have shaped the background context in which polarization occurs.

In the second half of the academic year, the POLARIS research group has turned its attention to some of these changes which strain the societies undergoing, to varying degrees, affective polarization. As such, we have looked at the way trust has eroded in Romania, inviting Claudiu Tufiș, who has worked over the last couple of years in the TRUEDEM project, whose aim was to analyze the ways citizens judge government performance. We have also engaged in discussions regarding the transformations of the digital environment, reflected in the process of the digital public sphere slowly but steadily abandoning the social media paradigm, thus setting the ground for "post-social formations" such as "algorithmically governed broadcasting plaforms, semi-private spheres, and AI-mediated communication" (Törnberg and Rogers, "Towards a Post-Social Media Studies"). Last but not least, we looked at how protest voting and nostalgia-driven discourse have shaped the Romanian diaspora's turn to far-right parties (Gherghina and Mișcoiu, "Unravelling a New Romance").
Each of these challenges that democratic polities face has been analyzed in a meeting of the research group, thus pushing forward the exploration of affective polarization started in the first half of the NEC academic year.

Report on activities by Adelin Dumitru, Camil Pârvu and Alexandru Volacu

Yiddish Culture in Greater Romania (1918–1940):
In the Aftermath of the Empires and Challenged by the New National State

Since 2025

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

During March–July 2026, I continued working on my current research deriving from the previously UEFISCDI-funded and NEC-supported YIDCULT project, aiming towards creating a network around it and continuing to structure a critical theoretical framework. Placed at the intersection between literary studies, theater studies, and Eastern European social history, my project offers vast opportunities for addressing the central questions both empirically and theoretically.

Therefore, I took the opportunity of presenting my work at the 25th Anniversary Conference "Jewish Studies at a Crossroads: Central Europe and Beyond" which took place at the Central European University in Vienna between 31 May and 2 June 2026. As the event was planned also as a reunion of the graduates of the CEU Jewish Studies program, I took the opportunity of networking and connecting to relevant scholars in the field. My paper, "About the Vilna Troupe in Interwar Romania: A True Love Story," generated an interesting debate and I took the opportunity of promoting the monograph that resulted from the YIDCULT project, *Yiddish Culture in Interwar Romania (1918–1940)*, which was published in 2025 by CEU Press/Amsterdam University Press. After a long period of absence from the international scholarship on Jewish Studies, my monograph chapter as well as my conference presentation came to fill in a void by offering an overview on the Yiddish theater in Romania during the interwar period. As a full member of the European Association of Jewish Studies for almost 20 years, I took the opportunity of participating in its Nachmanides Forum, which took place on 3 June also at CEU, Vienna, addressing the major challenges in the field of research that we are currently facing. The two events offered me the opportunity of connecting with reputed scholars from the field of Jewish Studies while promoting the project and aiming to create the future network such as Andras Kovacs, Michael Miller, Carsten Wilke, Marie Crhova, Ksenia Polouektova-Krimer, François Guesnet, Elisabeth Hollander or Jan Rybak.

Finally, I participated in the annual congress of the Romanian Association of General and Comparative Literature, which took place between 9 and 11 July 2026 at the University of Timișoara. As the 2026 edition proposed a topic relevant for my work, "Hărțile literaturii. Frontiere, margini, literaturi de graniță" (Literary maps: Borders, margins, frontier literatures), I presented a paper titled "Literatura evreiască Între concept și aplicații" (Jewish literature: Between concept and applications), continuing to test my theoretical and empirical framework with Romanian colleagues already working on Jewish literatures in non-Jewish languages.

Informalities as Social and Historical Practices

Since 2026

Team members:

Adelina Ștefan, PhD (NEC Alumna; Researcher, University of Ostrava)

Alex Axinte, PhD (NEC Alumnus; Lecturer, University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine, Bucharest)

Adriana Cupcea, PhD (NEC Alumna; Researcher, Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities)

Tudor Elian, PhD (NEC Alumnus; Assistant Professor, Ion Mincu University of Architecture and Urbanism; Researcher, Museum of the Romanian Peasant)

Ana Szel, PhD Candidate (Researcher and Teaching Assistant, I. L. Caragiale National University of Theatre and Film UNATC, Bucharest)

Starting in May 2026, the group began its regular meetings and organized several film screenings, generously hosted by New Europe College. Some of the films were:
Letter from Romania (Mirel Ilieșiu, 1973)
Winter Holiday (Al. Boagiu, 1965)
Mamaia (Virgil Calotescu, 1962)

The first film screening revolved around tourism practices in socialist Romania. This was followed by a discussion with interested scholars from the Faculty of Journalism and Communication of the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA), as well as New Europe College fellows, in an attempt to understand how officially produced sources regarding tourism described informal practices under socialist dictatorship.

The second film screening explored the connections between minorities and informalities in socialist Romania. Because of our interest in films as a primary source, we invited Ana Szel, a researcher specializing in the history of communist cinema, to join the group.

The group aims to explore theoretical ideas around the concept of informalities and how these shaped social practices in presocialist, socialist, and postsocialist Romania. Adelina Ștefan examines how ordinary people experienced tourism in socialist and early postsocialist Romania, using the concept of informality to understand how citizens negotiated with the state in authoritarian and postauthoritarian societies. Adriana Cupcea is interested in how Muslim minorities coped with the socialist regime's more restrictive policies, as well as in the social and economic transformations of these communities in the post-1989 context. Alex Axinte examines informal practices, such as urban gardening, in the context of collective housing districts in postsocialist Bucharest. Tudor Elian studies maps in an urban context, and Ana Szel focuses on marginal film practices, media archaeology, and useful media as an interdisciplinary research field.

Conferences and Workshops:

Alex Axinte, “The Disciplinary City and the Discreet Commoning Practices,” at the Historical Materialism Cluj/Kolozsvár conference: “Interregnum Here & Now: Post-Communist Collapse, Planetary Crisis, and Emancipatory Resolve,” Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, 16–17 April 2026.

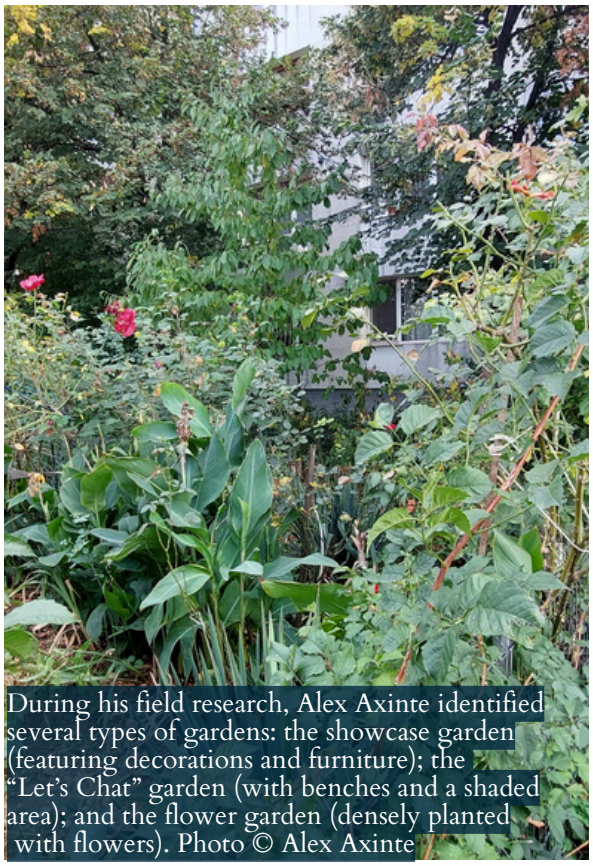
Adriana Cupcea, “Invisible Muslim Identities in Romania. Between Post-Ottoman Legacies and External Classifications,” at the “Middle Eastern Studies in Central Eastern Europe: Past, Present and Future” workshop, Vytautas Magnus University, online, 8 May 2026.

Adelina Ștefan, “Care and Tourism Under Socialism: Spa Resorts as Spaces of Intimacy in Romania Between the 1950s and 1980s,” at the “Intimate States: New Histories of Medicine, Welfare and Care Under Socialism” conference, Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague, Czech Republic, 28–29 May 2026.

Adelina Ștefan, “Tourism, Modernization and Landscape Change in the Romanian Carpathians During the 1950s–1980s,” at the ACLS 2026 Summer Institute for the Study of East Central and Southeastern Europe, Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria, 3–19 June 2026.

Adriana Cupcea, “Invisible Identities at the Black Sea: The Turkish Tinsmiths in Babadağ,” at the “Endangered Black Sea: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Religious and Cultural Heritage at Risk and Viable Solutions” workshop, New Europe College, online, 18 June 2026.

Adriana Cupcea, “Controlled Difference: Turkish and Tatar Communities in Communist Romania,” at “Romanian Communism—Instructions for Use,” Summer University of Râmnicu Sărat, 18th ed., The Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and the Memory of Romanian Exile (IICCMER), Râmnicu Sărat, Romania, 23–28 August 2026.



During his field research, Alex Axinte identified several types of gardens: the showcase garden (featuring decorations and furniture); the “Let’s Chat” garden (with benches and a shaded area); and the flower garden (densely planted with flowers). Photo © Alex Axinte



Photo: Adriana Cupcea presenting at “Romanian Communism—Instructions for Use,” Summer University of Râmnicu Sărat, 18th ed., IICCMER

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)

GARD *Events*:

On 2 April 2026, Michael Stewart, Professor of Anthropology at University College London gave a talk titled "Questions of Race and Nation: The Persecution of the Romany Peoples in Europe 1933–1945." His main field site is in Central and Eastern Europe where he has been working with Romani people. The presentation was based on Stewart's new archival research carried out in Germany and Austria on the treatment of Romanies during World War II.

On 3 April, GARD organized a seminar to discuss the implications of the import of American hegemonic epistemologies—above all, the racism paradigm that Romani studies in Europe have lately absorbed uncritically—for the anthropology of Roma. The participants to the seminar were Ștefania Toma, researcher at the Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities (ISPMN), Cluj-Napoca; Csilla Konzei, lecturer in visual anthropology at Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca; Cătălina Tesăr, researcher at the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant (MNTR); László Fosztó, researcher ISPMN, Cluj-Napoca; and Michael Stewart, Professor, University College London.



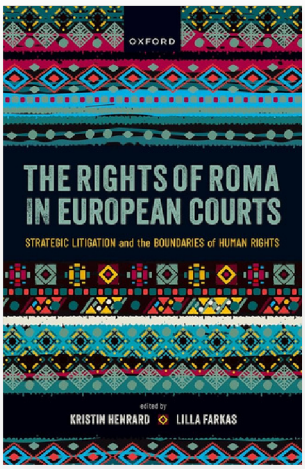
Professor Michael Stewart delivering a public lecture at NEC, introduced by NEC Alumna Cătălina Tesăr. The event brought together anthropologists, NEC Alumni, and researchers from the University of Bucharest

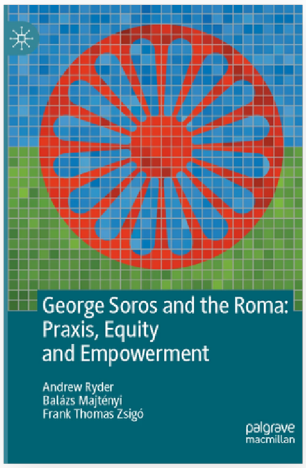


The following day, Professor Michael Stewart led a seminar at NEC on the anthropology of Roma.

From left to right: Csilla Konzei, László Fosztó and Ștefania Toma

László Fosztó
Scholarly events:





- On 5 March 2026, László Fosztó hosted a double book launch: Two new scholarly books addressing key issues concerning Roma rights, emancipation, and social inclusion were presented at Casino – Centrul de cultură urbană (Cluj-Napoca): *The Rights of Roma in European Courts: Strategic Litigation and the Limits of Human Rights*, edited by Kristin Henrard and Lilla Farkas (Oxford University Press, 2025); and *George Soros and the Roma: Praxis, Equity and Empowerment*, by Andrew Ryder, Balázs Majtényi and Frank Thomas Zsigo (Palgrave Macmillan, 2026).
- On 24 March 2026, László Fosztó moderated a roundtable discussion organized by ISPMN, together with the CEU Democracy Institute and the Resource Center for Roma Communities Foundation (CRCR). The event took place in Cluj-Napoca.
- On 2 June 2026, László Fosztó delivered a public lecture, "Empowered by the Holy Spirit: Pentecostal Conversions and Prospects for Social Mobility among Roma in Romania and Eastern Europe," hosted by the Ioan Petru Culianu Institute for Religious Studies at the University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Târgu Mureș.

Publications:

- László Fosztó, "Minderheiten in Zeiten des erstarkenden Nationalismus" (Minorities in a time of resurgent nationalism) in the thematic issue of OWEP (Ost-West Europäische Perspektiven) 2/2026: "Schwerpunkt: Die Vielfalt Rumäniens" (The diversity of Romania).
- László Fosztó, "Diaspora Nationalism: The International Romani Movement(s) Revisited," chapter 15 in *Handbook on Diasporas and Migration*, edited by Ayhan Kaya and Nilay Kılınç (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2026), pp. 154–165.

Giuseppe Tateo
Edited special issues:

- with Caterina Pignotti, "Ripensare il patrimonio religioso a Torino e nel Mediterraneo," *Quaderni di Benvenuti in Italia* 16 (2026).

Articles in peer-reviewed journals:

- Introduction to the Special Issue "Ripensare il patrimonio religioso a Torino e nel Mediterraneo," *Quaderni di Benvenuti in Italia* 16 (2026).
- "'In the world, but not of it': Orthodox ontologies and the Christian Other," Religiographies (forthcoming).

Conferences:

- "30 Years 30 Cathedrals – A Multimedia Exhibition on Contemporary Romanian Orthodox Architecture," 9th Annual Conference of the European Academy of Religion (EuARe), Luiss Guido Carli, Rome, 30 June–3 July 2026 (together with M. Vasile)

Media Exposure:

- ARTE.tv Documentary, "Faith on the rise among Romania's youth?," 5 February 2026.

Cătălina Tesăr
Publications—all under press:

- "Marriage Making and Breaking among Romanian Romani Cortorari: On the Creative Potential of De-Kinning," in *Troubled Kin Relations Conflict, Separation and Estrangement in Kin Relations*, ed. Laura Preissler, Nora Lipp, Bettina Beer, (Transcript Verlag OA, forthcoming, 2027).
- Review of Elana Resnick, *Refusing Sustainability: Race and Environmentalism in a Changing Europe*, (Stanford University Press, 2025), in *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, forthcoming.
- Review of Arpan Roy, *Relative Strangers: Romani Kinship and Palestinian Difference* (University of Toronto Press, 2024), in Social Anthropology, forthcoming, 2027.

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



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19 May 2026

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20–21 May 2026

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11 June 2026

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15–16 June 2026

Understanding Egypt's New Republic
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Venit hora: A Project for the Study of Antiquity
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Essays on Music and Musicians
3 June 2026

Who Needs Trust Anymore?
17 June 2026



Photo: Alexandra Bacalu, *Trust* Fellow
She is lecturer at the English Department of the University of Bucharest, where she teaches eighteenth-century British literature, as well as an MA course on therapeutic culture and the history of the care of the self.

This workshop explored the many ways in which the rise of social media and the advent of new digital technologies, including AI, are currently rewriting the related questions of knowledge and truth.

WORKSHOP

Science and Misinformation in the Digital Age: Challenging Expertise, Credibility, and Authenticity in the Virtual Sphere
(19 May 2026)

Convener:
Alexandra Bacalu, *Trust* Fellow

Participants:
Alexandra Bacalu, Stephanie A. Baker, Cristian Ducu, Andreea Eșanu, Dragoș Manea, Adriana Mihai, Răzvan Nicolescu, Mihai Ometiță, Mircea Toboșaru, Elena Trifan

The workshop focused on the challenges posed by the digital age to the production of scientific knowledge and the credibility of political and public authorities, particularly in the context of the growing influence of anti-rationalism and anti-intellectualism.

Alexandra Bacalu, the convener of the event, presented the paper "'You Are Iron-Spined and Possess a Great and Powerful Will': Modern Stoic Influencers and the Myth of Unshakable Human Resilience." She examined the recent rise of New or Modern Stoic self-help in the 2010s and 2020s across textual and digital genres in terms of the proliferation of psychocentric representations of individual resilience, a key feature of contemporary therapeutic discourses that make use of neoliberal constructions of the self. It focused on popular and prolific self-help author and social media figure Ryan Holiday, a liminal and controversial figure within the Modern Stoic community.

Selected Workshop Contributions:

- Andreea Eșanu (New Europe College), "Deep-Learning AI Systems and Epistemic Trust"
- Stephanie A. Baker, (City St George's, University of London), "Bite-Size Wellness: Trust, Therapy and Miracle Cures on Short Video Platforms"
- Cristian Ducu (Centre for Advanced Research in Management and Applied Ethics), "Why Do We Trust Epistemic Trespassers? The Case of Online Medical Influencers"
- Dragoș Manea (University of Bucharest), "Sons of Odin: Brian Wood's Northlanders (2008–2012) and Far-Right Mediascapes"

For all workshop papers, please visit: www.nec.ro/events-list/



Photo: Mihai Ometiță (NEC Alumnus) presented the paper "Virtual Cannibalism and Artificial Wildness: Agency, Identity, Identification."
He is an Associate Lecturer at the Center of Excellence in the Study of Image (CESI), University of Bucharest.

Along with the ways in which trust is transformed, the papers also highlighted the broader social, political, and economic consequences of these transformations, from the commodification of emotional experience and the spread of medical misinformation and conspiracy theories to the growing reliance on AI as a source of knowledge and a basis for decision-making.

This workshop was organized within the *Trust* Fellowships program at New Europe College, supported by the Porticus Foundation. The program invites research into the cultural, historical, ethical, and symbolic dimensions of digital misinformation. Selected fellows investigate, from within their respective disciplines, the ways in which science is distorted in digital environments.



Photo: The event was convened by Veronika Zinchenko, *SUS* Fellow, Senior Lecturer, R. Glier Kyiv Municipal Academy of Music

WORKSHOP

War and Artistic Responses: Theories, Practices, Meanings
(20–21 May 2026)

Convener:
Veronika Zinchenko, *SUS* Fellow

With the participation of:
H. E. Mr. Ihor Prokopchuk, Ambassador of Ukraine to Romania

Participants:
Constantin Ardeleanu, Volodymyr Balaba, Viktoria Bavykina (online), Katharina Biegger, Yurii Chekan, Galyna Dub, Mykola Homanyuk, Katrya Honcharuk, Tetiana Khoroshun, Olha Kolomyyets (online), Oksana Maksymchuk, Max Rosochinsky, Viktor Ruban, Valentina Sandu-Dediu, Viktoriya Sereda, Iryna Tukova, Daria Vystavkina

On a bus:
"Stop:
Lybidska metro
station.
Terminal.
The nearest
shelter is the
metro station."

Katrya Honcharuk from Radio Kultura presented her radio documentary series, *What Music Means to Me*, focusing on Ukraine's contemporary audio landscape, music therapy for soldiers, and the role of music in rituals of remembrance.

Episodes available on YouTube: @Katrya_Honcharuk



YouTube

Selected Workshop Contributions:

- Valentina Sandu-Dediu (New Europe College), "The Harsh Implementation of Socialist Realism in Romanian Music Institutions after World War II"
- Iryna Tukova (The National Music Academy of Ukraine), "Music of the War: Ukrainian Resistance Case"
- Daria Vystavkina (University of Bonn), "Between Ethnographic Rigor and Theatrical Evocation: Performance Ethnography as Art-Based Research in Wartime"

For all workshop papers, please visit: www.nec.ro/events-list/



Mykola Homanyuk, Professor at Kherson State University, giving the performance-tour, *Look to the Right, Look to the Left, Look to the Sky. Kherson Walking Tour.* He transformed the conventional city walking tour into an experience of wartime surveillance and danger. Participants were led through the streets of Bucharest as though they were in Kherson, instructed to remain alert and constantly scan their surroundings, including the sky, for the possible presence of drones. Photo © Irena Mihaylova

The workshop engaged critically with the multifaceted roles of artistic production in contexts of war, foregrounding its capacity to mediate, contest and reconfigure experiences of violence, displacement and historical rupture. Particularly pertinent in light of the ongoing war in Ukraine, the workshop convened scholars and practitioners across disciplines to explore music, performance, dance, photography, and literature as epistemic and affective frameworks through which war is documented, interpreted and resisted.

The event was organized as part of the *Sustaining Ukrainian Scholarship* Fellowship Program run jointly by the New Europe College (Bucharest) and the Centre for Advanced Study (Sofia), and supported by the VolkswagenStiftung (Germany).


Photo: Oksana Maksymchuk


Photo: Max Rosochinsky

> Many poets were reluctant to participate. They did not want to be pigeonholed as 'war poets,' nor did they want Western audiences to start thinking of Ukraine primarily as a place of war.
> – Oksana Maksymchuk

A special component of the workshop was the presentation by Oksana Maksymchuk, Writer-in-Residence at Künstlerhaus Villa Waldberta, and Max Rosochinsky, Research Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study, Sofia (2025–2026). They introduced their anthology, *Words for War: New Poems from Ukraine*, published in 2017 by Academic Studies Press and the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute. The editors brought together poems by Ukrainian writers from different regions, generations, linguistic backgrounds, and positions in relation to the war. The book addresses not only direct experiences of combat but also displacement, loss, disability, fear, memory, moral responsibility, resilience, and the transformation of ordinary life by war.

"We began working on it after the annexation of Crimea, in 2014, and at that time we did not even know whether the book would eventually be published. The conflict in the East of Ukraine was still being referred to as a 'civil war,' and there was a great deal of ambiguity surrounding it. Many poets were reluctant to participate. They did not want to be pigeonholed as 'war poets,' nor did they want Western audiences to start thinking of Ukraine primarily as a place of war", Oksana Maksymchuk explained.

I Pick up my Footprints

by Vasyl Holoborodko

I stoop to pick up my footprints,
somebody seeing me might think
I'm gathering mushrooms,
healing herbs,
or flowers into a bunch,
but no —
I collect my footprints,
my traces everywhere
I walked for many years:
Here are the footprints I left while herding sheep
on the steppe.
Here, I took this path to school,
and these are my steps from my route to work.

"I'm gathering my footprints here
so that strangers don't trample them,"
I tell anyone who's curious.

(Epiphany:
a footprint is —
a symbol, by definition, of:
"something rooted in the past")

In my mind, I slip my footprints
between the pages —
now whenever I read a book,
I chance upon an old footprint:
I study it for a long time,
the footprint I left as a child
walking beneath a cherry tree.

All the footprints gathered so far,
an entire footstep herbarium in books —
if I put them all in one row,
their path wouldn't lead me home.

Translated from the Ukrainian by Svetlana Lavochkina
from the antology *Words for War*, available as open-access
project at www.wordsforwar.com.



Photo: Natalia C. Malancu, *AMEROPA* Fellow; Adjunct Professor, The National University of Political Studies and Public Administration

Who should be allowed to vote? Who is perceived as legitimately belonging to the political community?

WORKSHOP

Across Borders: Migration, Voting Rights and Democratic Inclusion
(11 June 2026)

Convener:
Natalia C. Malancu, *AMEROPA* Fellow

Participants:
Anatolie Coșciug, Adelin Dumitru, Natalia C. Malancu, Claudiu Tufiș, Daniela Vintilă, Bogdan Voicu, Alexandru Volacu

This workshop was organized within the framework of the *AMEROPA* Fellowships program at New Europe College, supported by Ameropa Switzerland.

The workshop was conceived as an interdisciplinary exchange among scholars of migration, bringing together perspectives from sociology, political science, political theory, migration studies, and communication studies. It engaged with research on youth attitudes toward immigrant and emigrant enfranchisement, comparative public attitudes toward immigration, diaspora representation and emigrant voting, transnational parenthood and anti-system resentment, as well as public discourse and anti-immigration backlash. Bringing together empirical and theoretical perspectives, the workshop explored how migration-related tensions were perceived, politicized, and contested, particularly in Romania and within broader European debates surrounding migration and democratic inclusion.

Key Arguments and Analytical Perspectives

Survey Data

Claudiu Tufiș (University of Bucharest) presented the paper "How important is the immigration issue across the EU? Evidence from a 2025 comparative survey."

This presentation used comparative survey data collected in 2025 across all EU member states to examine how Europeans think about immigration, focusing on two main dimensions: the perceived importance of managing immigration in the country and satisfaction with the government's performance in this area.

Diaspora and Homeland Politics

Daniela Vintilă (University of Liège) presented the paper "The Link between Diaspora and Homeland Politics: Evidence from Spain and Perspectives for Future Research."

Over the past decades, diasporas' engagement in homeland elections has become a salient issue, especially given the implementation of enfranchisement policies for citizens living abroad. This study examined the relationship between diaspora and homeland politics in Spain over three decades.

Romanian Return Migration

Anatolie Coșciug (West University of Timișoara) presented the paper "Strangers at Home: Attitudes towards Romanian National Return Migrants During Covid-19."

Scholars have long acknowledged the importance of understanding public attitudes towards immigrants and refugees but less has been researched on non-migrants' attitudes towards co-national return migrants. This article drew on readers' comments posted in reaction to news articles addressing the unprecedented Romanian return migration at the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Transnational parenthood and Populism

Bogdan Voicu (Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu) and Ana-Maria Dima (The Research Institute for the Quality of Life of the Romanian Academy) presented the paper "Do Anti-System Parties Feed the Resent Generated by Transnational Parenthood?"

Transnational parenthood implies high stress at the level of family relations, and may result in frustration and blaming the political system for this personal state. They hypothesized that anti-system parties, which typically voice the miscontent with the existing political and societal setup may offer food to feed such resentment, and attract the transnational parents.

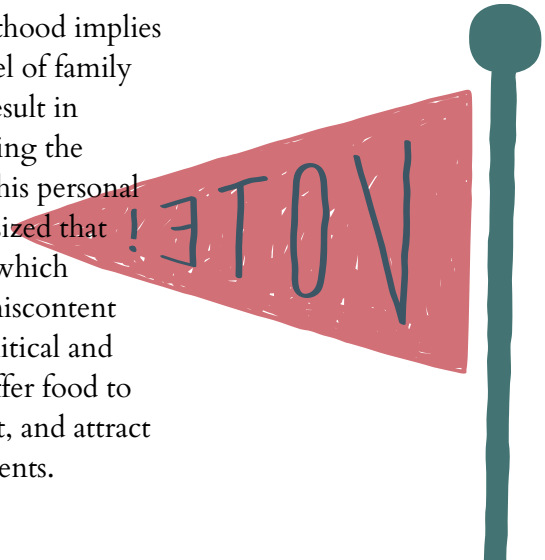




Photo: Silvia Marton, Principal Investigator of "Transnational histories of 'corruption' in Central-South-East Europe (1750–1850)"

The workshop explored how the Phanariots came to be associated with corruption, poor governance, and Ottoman influence in South-East European historical and political narratives.

WORKSHOP

The Phanariot Past and its Afterlives: Historicizing "Corruption" in Central-South-East Europe (1750s–1920s)
(15–16 June 2026)

Participants:
Raluca Alexandrescu, Mihai-Cristian Amăriuței, Boriana Antonova-Goleva, Constantin Ardeleanu, Elif Bayraktar Tellan, Osman Safa Bursali, Raymond Detrez, Augusta Dimou, Lucien Frary, Simion-Alexandru Gavriș, Aristides N. Hatzis, Paul Karras, Dimitrios M. Kontogeorgis, Myrto Lamprou, Kalliope Leivadarou, Silvia Marton, Nicolas Nicolaides, Ovidiu Olar, Mária Pakucs, Silvana Rachieru, Leonidas Rados, Andrei-Dan Sorescu, Alex R. Tipei, Michał Wasiucionek

The Phanariots have long animated the historiography of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century South-East Europe. The end of Phanariot prominence across Ottoman South-East Europe after 1821 did not, however, erase the idea of the Phanariot from political debates in the region. Contemporary political commentators, as well as historians seeking to construct national(ist) narratives, branded the Phanariots with critiques of corruption, foreign interests, and the legacies of the Ottoman past. In the Principalities these rhetorical moves became associated with the notion of "Phanariotism," while in an independent Greece they often manifested as condemnations of heterochthones—elites born outside the confines of the new state. Yet, scholars have conducted scant research

on how and why "Phanariots" and "Phanariotism" came to signify corruption, bad governance, and a seemingly inescapable Ottoman past after 1821.

The workshop aimed to fill this gap in historiography. Through studies grounded in both conceptual history as well as social and political history, contributors explored how diverse historical actors linked the concepts of Phanariots and Phanariotism to notions of individual and systemic corruption as well as to forms of bad governance. They investigated which historical actors mobilized the specter of the Phanariot from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century and why they had done so. The event's overall aim was to historicize and contextualize these concepts, tropes, and discursive practices associated with the Phanariots and Phanariotism. To varying degrees, Phanariot rule and post-Phanariot memory constitute part of the histories of Wallachia, Moldavia (including Bukovina and Bessarabia), Bulgaria, Albania, North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey, and Greece.

The event featured a special session, "From Istanbul to Bucharest: Court Music in the Early Nineteenth Century," during which NEC Alumni Nicolae Gheorghiță, Cătălin Cernătescu, and Costin Moisil, discussed historical court music traditions. The urban secular songs of the Phanariot era were brought into discussion, with connections traced between musical practices in Constantinople and the Romanian principalities. Particular attention was given to their preservation in Byzantine notation by church musicians, revealing the porous boundaries between sacred and secular musical life.



Ovidiu Olar, Researcher at the N. Iorga Institute of History, Bucharest, presented the paper "Short-Circuiting the Ottoman State: A Mid-Eighteenth-Century Phanariot Cartel."



A recital by the "Dimitrie Cantemir" Early Music Ensemble of the National University of Music Bucharest, with special guest Damian Drăghici.

This workshop was organized within the framework of "Transnational histories of 'corruption' in Central-South-East Europe (1750–1850)," funded by the European Union (ERC, TransCorr, ERC-2022-ADG no. 101098095) and hosted by New Europe College.



Photo: Carl Rommel, NEC Award Fellow, convened the event together with Marie Vannetzel

This workshop examined Egypt's New Republic, exploring transformations in governance, security, infrastructure, urban planning, cultural production, and political power.

WORKSHOP

Understanding Egypt's New Republic: Security, Infrastructure, Deserts, and Cultural Production
(16 June 2026)

Participants:
Florian Bonnefoi, Youssef El Chazli, Sixtine Deroure, Jeanne Gorin, Carl Rommel, Giedrė Šabasevičiūtė, Waleed Salem, Yahia Shawkat, Marie Vannetzel

In 2021, President El-Sisi's military-backed regime launched a so-called New Republic (*al-gumhuriyya al-gadida*). Promoted aggressively in government statements and propaganda as well as in the government-aligned media, the New Republic is ostensibly a broad national project encompassing a series of interlinked components: social and cultural renaissance, a national dialogue (*hiwar watani*) between the regime and the opposition, and inclusive economic growth. Thus far, it has been associated most strongly with massive infrastructure investments in the Egyptian deserts, e.g., the construction of a New Administrative Capital 45 kilometers east of Central Cairo. Yet, the label also designates new security measures, reformed social protection schemes, large scale housing projects, and new forms of cultural production.
In this workshop, the partcipants opened a conversation about the different configurations of power that define President El-Sisi's contemporary regime. 15 years after the January 2011 Revolution and 13 years after the 2013 Military Coup, the reserachers insist that it is time to

Selected Workshop Contributions:

- Giedrė Šabasevičiūtė (Czech Academy of Sciences/CEFRES), "Moving Culture to the Desert: How Egypt's New Republic Is Reshaping Its Literary Scene?"
- Sixtine Deroure (Avignon University), "Dying for the Nation's Stability: Martyr-Making in Egypt's New Republic"
- Youssef El Chazli (Paris 8 University), "The Green and the Dry: Climate Politics and Never-Ending Development in Egypt's New Republic"

For all workshop papers, please visit: www.nec.ro/events-list/



Photo: A view from the workshop

unmoor Egyptian political developments from the (post/counter-)revolutionary timeline and to adopt new analytical frameworks. As an emic concept, the "New Republic" provides one such frame. What specific modality of governmentality does this designation invoke? If one assumes a structural rupture between Sisi's regime and its predecessors, what constitutes this rupture? And how does this transformation materialize in practice? The participants have conducted recent ethnographic or document-based research on the New Republic's different components: security, infrastructure, urban planning, subsidies, memory culture, cultural production, judiciary systems, etc. The presentations initiated a cohesive discussion about a new era of Egyptian politics that is long overdue.

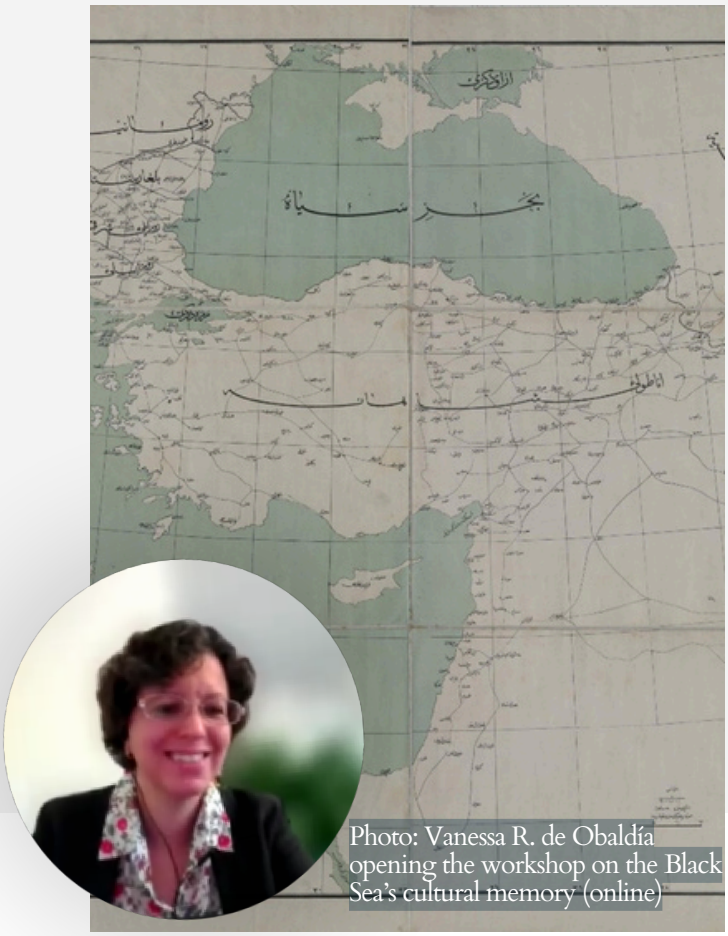


Photo: Vanessa R. de Obaldía opening the workshop on the Black Sea's cultural memory (online)

The workshop sought to draw attention to disappearing historical narratives and to explore viable ways of safeguarding the Black Sea's rich and multiconfessional cultural memory.

WORKSHOP

The Endangered Black Sea: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Religious and Cultural Heritage at Risk and Viable Solutions
(18–19 June 2026)

Participants:
Zeynep Ahunbay, Constantin Ardeleanu, Filiz Tutku Aydın, Alena Bagro, Adriana Cupcea, Veysel Dinler, Nail Elhan, Yelis Erolova, Ediz Hazir, Serhat Keskin, Hakan Kırımlı, Theodosios Kyriakidis, David Neagu, Octavian-Adrian Negoiță, Vanessa R. de Obaldía, Metin Omer, Fatih Sami Özakyol, Silvana Rachieru, Özlem Şendeniz, Melike Tepecik, Olena Uvarova, Tiberiu Vasilescu

This event, convened primarily by NEC Alumna Vanessa R. de Obaldía, provided an interdisciplinary framework for addressing the vulnerable religious and cultural heritage of the wider Black Sea region. Held in June 2026, the event brought together scholars working on a wide range of endangered cultural legacies, from Ottoman rural architecture in Dobrudja and Crimean Tatar diaspora communities to Alevi traditions, the preservation of the Laz language, and Armenian and Greek Orthodox monuments. Through discussions of minority identities, archival preservation, and the politics of heritage, the workshop sought to draw attention to disappearing historical narratives and to explore viable ways of safeguarding the region's rich and multiconfessional cultural memory.



Photo: At Akkerman Fortress (southwestern Ukraine), the 15th-century Bayezid II Mosque has largely disappeared, with only its minaret surviving within the fortress today.
NEC Alumna Alena Bagro gave a presentation entitled "Ottoman Religious Heritage in the Northwestern Black Sea Region: Preservation and the Problem of Collective Memory."



Photo: A glimpse of the endangered cultural heritage of the Cosmopolitan Cemetery in Sulina, Romania.
Constantin Ardeleanu, Member of the ERC project *TransCorr*, presented the paper "The Multiconfesional Heritage of a Cosmopolitan Port-City: The Maritime Cemetery of Sulina."



Photo: Valentina Sandu-Dediu, Professor of Musicology at National University of Music Bucharest and Rector of New Europe College, presented the paper "Anatol Vieru in context: different perspectives on Eratosthenes' Sieve."

SYMPOSIUM

György Kurtág and Anatol Vieru – 100
(29 May 2026)

On 29 May 2026, NEC hosted the conference *György Kurtág and Anatol Vieru – 100*, as part of *ISCM World New Music Days – "Columna Infinită."* Held under the auspices of the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM), an international network dedicated to promoting contemporary music and the work of composers from around the world, the 2026 edition was hosted in Bucharest from 23 to 31 May and organised by the Romanian Section of the ISCM network. The 2026 edition, *Columna Infinită* (Endless column), paid tribute to the 150th anniversary of the birth of the great Romanian sculptor Constantin Brâncuși. His masterpiece—in Romanian *Coloana Infinitului* or *Coloana fără sfârșit*—with its forms resembling sound waves, suggested the opening of musical creators' imaginations towards new heights, the organisers explained.
More at: www.iscm.org

The conference opened with a presentation by composer László Tihanyi of the Liszt Academy in Budapest, titled "György Kurtág—An Atypical Great Composer." Having known Kurtág personally for more than 50 years, Tihanyi drew on his longstanding engagement with the composer and his music, including observing rehearsals with some of Kurtág's most distinguished interpreters, such as Péter Eötvös, Zoltán Peskó, Zoltán Kocsis, Adrienne Csengery, and András Keller.



Photo: Patrick Zuk is Professor of Russian cultural studies and music at Durham University and Director (Arts and Humanities) of Durham's Institute of Advanced Study. His publications include the monograph, *Nikolay Myaskovsky: A Composer and His Times* (Boydell, 2021), which has been acclaimed as "standing alongside the finest books on Russian music" (Gramophone) and setting "a benchmark against which any future archival work [in the field] will be measured" (Music and Letters).

Patrick Zuk presented his paper, "Anatol Vieru and the Soviet Context," at the conference, analysing the importance of Vieru's years at the Moscow Conservatoire, where, after graduating from the Bucharest Conservatoire, he studied composition with Aram Khachaturian until 1954. His sojourn in the Soviet Union proved of major importance, not only personally (in 1954, he married the Russian musicologist Nina Shutikova, who returned with him to Romania), but also professionally: he subsequently maintained contact with Khachaturian and other notable Soviet musicians, including Alfred Schnittke, and played a significant role in facilitating cultural exchange between the USSR and his native country. His paper assembled information from published Russian-language sources, including the composer's reminiscences of studying with Khachaturian, the articles on Romanian music that he contributed to the musicological journal *Sovetskaya muzïka*, and Khachaturian's correspondence and memoirs.

In her essay, "Kurtág and Vieru—Mirrored Views," Iulia Mogoșan, researcher at the Gheorghe Dima National Music Academy in Cluj-Napoca, illustrated how both composers, Vieru and Kurtág, offered unique responses to central concerns of contemporary music (the relationship between tradition and innovation, reduction of material to essential elements, manipulation of time, evolution of modalism). The event closed with a special screening of unique documentaries about composers György Kurtág and Anatol Vieru.


Galatz
Cable
Iovantcha-karassi
Cable
Isaktcha
Cable
Matchin
TULTCHA
Pop. 11,056
6 T. hours
Baba-dagh
Hirsova
15 T. hours
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B
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CONFERENCE

A "Shortcut" Between East and West: Infrastructure and Capitalism in 19th-Century Dobruja
(1 April 2026)

given by

Constantin Ardeleanu, Researcher, ERC-project *TransCorr*; The Institute for South-East European Studies of the Romanian Academy; New Europe College

Drawing on numerous archival collections preserved in the United Kingdom, Romania, France, and Turkey, the presentation examined how this railway transformed Dobruja profoundly and, in 1878, facilitated the province's integration into the Romanian state.

The presentation explored several key themes surrounding the "civilizing" of Ottoman Dobruja: the construction of modern infrastructure and the pursuit of wealth; relations between "natives" and "colonialists" from East and West; rapid urbanization; the suppression of lawlessness and the "taming" of untamed nature. British engineers and capitalists contributed to reinforcing the image of Dobruja as a "Wild East," a peripheral, primitive, exotic, and violent region, yet also a wealthy one, whose development was considered possible only through capitalism, modern technology, and the rule of law. Many of these Orientalist stereotypes persisted after 1878, when Dobruja continued to be portrayed as a backward territory whose development depended solely on the intervention of the Romanian state.

In the 1830s, Dobruja was almost unknown to the Western world. Foreign travelers described it as a sparsely populated and impoverished plain. A peripheral region of the Ottoman Empire, Dobruja acquired greater strategic importance after Russia reached the Danube Mouths and gained control over free navigation on the river. European engineers, merchants, and diplomats proposed the construction of a canal or railway line terminating at Constanța, which would facilitate communications between Central Europe and Istanbul while also bypassing the hazardous waters of the Danube Delta. In 1860, shortly after the Crimean War, a British consortium completed the first railway in the Balkan region, linking Cernavodă with Constanța. This was a shortcut in both space and time and promised to revolutionize the lucrative trade in Danubian grain.



The presentation was based on Constantin Ardeleanu's book, *Un drum de fier prin Estul Sălbatic: Dobrogea otomană în zorii capitalismului* (Humanitas, 2025).

Photo: Map of Dobruja, The National Archives (London)

CONFERENCE

Questions of Race and Nation: The Persecution of the Romany Peoples in Europe 1933–1945
(2 April 2026)

given by

Michael Stewart, Professor of Anthropology; Founder, *Open City* Documentary Festival

This talk concerned the misalignment between different approaches to discussing the persecution of Romany peoples during World War II. After 1945, Romany survivors invested enormous efforts in disputes with the postwar German and Austrian authorities, who insisted that their treatment during the war had not been motivated by racial but by social or other (security) considerations. Survivors rightly argued that theirs was a community of fate: there were no passes to freedom available for them from 1938 to 1945.

Alongside, but separately from, these frustrated and frustrating legal battles, academic characterizations of the underlying dynamic of the Nazi regime were also shifting. An early focus on the totalitarian dictatorship and obedience was displaced by a more ethnographically attuned attention to the quiddity of the "Racial State." This frame allowed for an interest in the enthusiastic uptake of revolutionary Nazi ideas, as well as the recognition of many more victims.

But recent research suggests that race was less a mode of thinking than a convenient and endlessly malleable language of domination. The true character of Nazi social policy arose from the conception of an organic National Community (Volksgemeinschaft). The Romany peoples were anathematized as alien to this community, and "race" provided a rhetoric of justification and exhortation.



Photo: Professor Michael Stewart during the workshop, joined by NEC Alumni and anthropologists in Bucharest.

CONFERENCE

The Long Shadow of Communism over Romania
(21 April 2026)

given by

Dennis Deletant, Professor Emeritus of Romanian Studies at University College, London

Dennis Deletant is Professor Emeritus at the UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies and one of the leading historians of Romania's twentieth-century history. Educated at the University of London, he developed a distinguished academic career at SSEES, where he became Professor of Romanian Studies, and later held appointments at the University of Amsterdam and Georgetown University. He is widely known for his research on communist Romania, with major works such as *Ceaușescu and the Securitate* and *Romania under Communist Rule*, which are regarded as essential for understanding the country's recent past. His scholarship has received broad recognition, earning him academic distinctions and state honors in both the United Kingdom and Romania.

The public talk at NEC was based on Dennis Deletant's recent book, *România sub comunism. Paradox și degenerare* (Humanitas, 2025), in which the author offers a comprehensive examination of Romania's communist past, exploring the regime's political and social contradictions, its human cost, and the enduring challenges of historical accountability. Based on decades of meticulous research, Deletant challenges persistent myths about the communist period and highlights the importance of confronting its legacy through historical inquiry and public debate.



Two of Dennis Deletant's prominent works in the field: *România sub comunism. Paradox și degenerare* (Humanitas, 2025) and *In search of Romania* (Hurst, 2022)



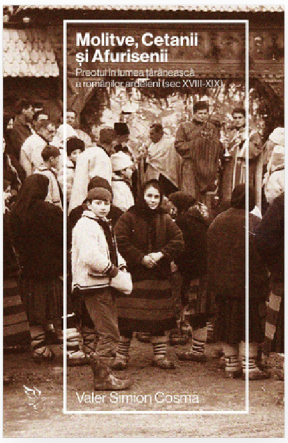
CONFERENCE

The Moral Economy of Sacrifice: Labour, Migration, and Proletarianization in Rural Romania
(25 May 2026)

given by

Valer Simion Cosma, Historian and Anthropologist; Executive Manager of the project *ECOJUST—Doing Environmental Injustice: A Theory in Praxis*

The lecture introduced the concept of the moral economy of sacrifice to examine how transnational labour migration in a non-collectivized mountain community in northern Romania is shaped not only by economic structures but also by moral frameworks that make suffering a necessity, endurance an obligation, and mobility a condition of social reproduction. Based on long-term ethnographic research and auto-ethnographic reflection in Telciu, it shows that sacrifice is neither an exceptional act nor one driven by crisis, but rather a normalized and socially structured condition of labour, learned from childhood, transmitted across generations, and reinforced through mechanisms of community-level moral surveillance. The analysis traces the genealogy of this moral economy, from the Habsburg extractive regime through socialism and the post-1989 restructuring.



In one of his recent books, Valer Simion Cosma examines the religious and social roles of the clergy in rural Transylvania.

Valer Simion Cosma, *Molitve, Cetanii și Afurisenii. Preotul în lumea țărănească a românilor ardeleni (sec. XVIII-XIX)* (Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu Publishing House, 2024)



Photo: Valer Simion Cosma introduced by NEC Alumnus Radu Umbreș.
Members of the NEC-TECH and POLARIS research groups attended the presentation.



Fieldwork in Telciu, Bistrița-Năsăud county, in 2020
Photo © Vlad Petri

The presentation examined migration as a moral obligation, shaped by community narratives that associate hard work and sacrifice with personal character and responsibility.

Valer Simion Cosma drew on ethnographic fieldwork in Telciu, Bistrița-Năsăud County, Romania, to explore the concept of the moral economy of sacrifice and its role in the reproduction of class inequality. He argued that sacrifice was not an exceptional response to crisis, but a normalized structural condition of labour, learned in childhood and transmitted across generations.

Moral frameworks did not merely reflect capitalism; they helped sustain it by presenting hardship and endurance as necessary and virtuous. The lecture traced the historical genealogy of these dynamics, from Habsburg-era timber extraction in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, through socialist forestry practices and post-1989 internal labour migration, to the intensification of transnational migration after 2002.

Context: Romania

- ~46% of the population in rural areas
- 4–5 million Romanians work or live abroad

The moral economy of sacrifice, at its deepest level: workers are desired for what they produce, valued for what their bodies can endure, and disposable when they can no longer endure it.

Scientific Revolutions: Changes in Our Image of the World

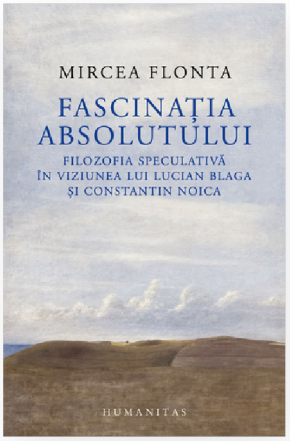


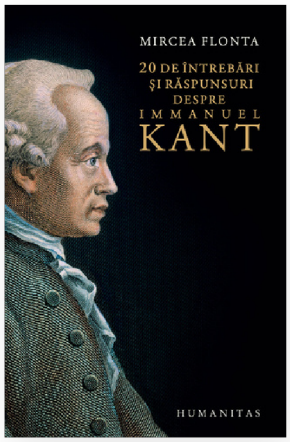
Professor Flonta with his dog, Billie
Photo © Cătălin Cioabă

Mircea Flonta (born 1932) is professor emeritus at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Bucharest, and a member of the Romanian Academy. His teaching career, spanning more than sixty years, has focused on classical and analytic epistemology, the theory of scientific knowledge, the philosophy of language, and the thought of Immanuel Kant and Ludwig Wittgenstein. He has published numerous studies and articles in academic journals and edited volumes in Romania and abroad. In collaboration with others, he has translated works by David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Albert Einstein, Moritz Schlick, Karl Popper, and Ludwig Wittgenstein.

Selected recent works:

Kant în lumea lui și în cea de azi: Zece studii kantiene (Polirom, 2005)
Filozofia cercetătorului: Înțelegerea fizicii cuantelor la Niels Bohr și Werner Heisenberg (Humanitas, 2022)









CONFERENCE

On Scientific Revolutions
(10 June 2026)

given by

Mircea Flonta, Professor Emeritus, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Bucharest

What Are Scientific Revolutions?

On 10 June 2026, NEC hosted a lecture by Mircea Flonta, professor emeritus at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Bucharest, and a member of the Romanian Academy, entitled *On Scientific Revolutions*.

"Radical discontinuities [or revolutions] arise not in the historical development of physical science itself, but in the succession of physical images of the world, images sketched on the basis of scientific results. From this perspective, it is important to distinguish ordinary scientific communication from the discourse of the scientists addressed to an educated public, that is, to those interested in learning about changes in our image of the world to which, in exceptional cases, the results of scientific research may lead." (Mircea Flonta)

Mircea Flonta's central claim about "radical discontinuities" or "scientific revolutions"—such as the emergence of general relativity in physics or the recognition of the historical, non-immutable character of species in evolutionary biology—is best understood through an epistemic distinction within science's broader socio-cultural reach. Scientific research produces an accumulating body of empirically established knowledge, while the broader images of the world built upon that knowledge may change discontinuously, and even become mutually incompatible throughout human history. The transition from Newtonian physics to Einstein's general relativity illustrates this well. Even before 1919, astronomers knew that Mercury's orbit displayed a small anomaly; Albert Einstein did not discover this empirical fact, but provided a theory capable of explaining it, while subsequent observations, such as the gravitational deflection of light, further enlarged the body of established evidence supporting general relativity. This is a case in which scientific knowledge accumulated: more facts were established and more phenomena explained. At the same time, the general conception of physical reality changed profoundly, from gravity as a force acting between bodies in absolute space and time to gravitation as the curvature of a spacetime continuum. For Flonta, the revolutionary discontinuity lies primarily at this latter level. Scientific knowledge can develop cumulatively even when successive scientific images of the world are radically transformed and mutually incompatible. In this sense, scientific revolutions resemble social, political, or cultural revolutions: they are profound changes in the way a society, culture, or civilization conceives the physical world as a whole—but this process is distinct from the historical accumulation of scientific knowledge.

Andreea Eșanu, Coordinator of the
NEC-TECH Research Group

CONFERENCE

Epistemic Dissidence
(24 June 2026)

given by

Viorel Pâslaru, University of Dayton, Ohio, USA

Political dissidence, as a response to the violation of fundamental freedoms in authoritarian societies, is well known and widely studied. Less well known and studied is epistemic dissidence, in which scientists engage in an effort to assert scientific truths that are not permitted in authoritarian societies. Viorel Pâslaru analysed epistemic dissidence through research in Romance linguistics, biology, and physics in the USSR. Given its relevance to Romanian culture in the broad sense, he focused in particular on the numerous attempts by Romance linguists in the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic, as well as by scholars in Leningrad, Moscow, Kyiv, and Minsk during the same Soviet period, to assert the scientific truth regarding the Romance identity of the language spoken in the Soviet republic, its correct name, and its relationship to the Romanian language. Examining research in Romance linguistics, biology, and physics in the USSR allowed him to classify the ways in which authoritarian political power directly and indirectly controls scientific research. For each form of authoritarian political control over science, he then identified the ways in which scientists sought to assert scientific truths.

Viorel Pâslaru's current research focuses on three areas: the nature of mechanistic explanation in ecology; scientific research under authoritarian regimes, with a particular focus on Soviet Romance linguistics and the issue of the "Moldovan language"; and the role of the humanities in the education of students in the natural and social sciences.



Photo: Viorel Pâslaru introduced by Andreea Eșanu

ROUNDTABLE

Unravelling a New Romance: Why Emigrants Support Radical Right Populists?
(11 March 2026)

Participants:
Sergiu Mișcoiu, Professor, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca (online)
Camil Pârvu (NEC Alumnus), Associate Professor, University of Bucharest
Alexandru Volacu (NEC Alumnus), Associate Professor, University of Bucharest
Adelin-Costin Dumitru (NEC Alumnus), Assistant Professor, National University of Science and Technology POLITEHNICA Bucharest

The roundtable took as its starting point the article "Unravelling a New Romance: Why Emigrants Support Radical Right Populists" (2025), by Sergiu Gherghina and Sergiu Mișcoiu

Based on semi-structured interviews with Romanian emigrants following the 2024 presidential and parliamentary elections, the article explored why some emigrants supported radical-right populist candidates and parties in their home country. The findings suggested that this support was primarily driven by protest against mainstream parties perceived as ineffective and unwilling to implement reforms, alongside a search for national identity and spirituality in times of uncertainty. Mild sovereigntist and Eurosceptic attitudes played a comparatively smaller role. The article thus offered a nuanced perspective on the political preferences of emigrants and the factors shaping their electoral choices.



Photo: POLARIS research group

ROUNDTABLE

A Scottish Gael in the Romanian Vineyard
(19 March 2026)

The roundtable discussion was launched with a presentation by James Christian Brown, Assistant Professor of English, British Cultural Studies (University of Bucharest).

The contribution of Katherine Whyte Grant (1845–1928) to nineteenth-century British travel literature about the Romanian lands can easily go unnoticed, not least because she wrote not in English but in her native Scottish Gaelic. This presentation focused particularly on the text "Ceithir-la-deug ann am fion-lios" (Fourteen days in the vineyard) in her 1911 volume Aig Tigh na Beinne (At the mountain house), with an emphasis on the reflection of her own specific cultural, and, especially, religious, background in her interpretation of the Romanian realities that she observes.

For researchers in Romanian studies, travel writing is particularly valuable because it helps reconstruct how Romania and its inhabitants were perceived by foreign visitors across different historical periods. Katherine Whyte Grant's text offers a valuable and relatively unexplored perspective on Romania in British travel literature. She compares Romanian customs and those of the Scottish Highlands, a mountainous region in northern and western Scotland with a distinctive Gaelic linguistic and cultural heritage.



Photo: James Brown delivering the presentation at NEC
This event was organized within *Reflections on the Political and Social History of the 18th and 19th Centuries in Romania* (GRiPs) research group hosted by New Europe College.

ROUNDTABLE

Venit hora: A Project for the Study of Antiquity
(14 May 2026)

Participants: Francisca Băltăceanu, Ioana Costa, Emanuel Conțac, Ștefan Colceriu, Theodor Georgescu, Bogdan Mincă, Cătălin Pavel

In its attempt to sever Romania's ties with the West, Stalinism also targeted seemingly marginal fields of study. The removal of classical languages from schools and the strict institutional separation of related disciplines devoted to the study of Antiquity severely damaged the Romanian education system, from which it has never truly recovered over the past eight decades. Since then, with the exception of an attempt by Mihai Șora as Minister of Education in 1990, to increase the number of Latin classes in secondary schools—a measure soon undermined by regrettable administrative practices—no reform has addressed the field of classical culture, which can only be studied as an integrated and harmonious whole.

The roundtable hosted by NEC proposed a focused discussion between specialists from related fields—including history and archaeology, philosophy, biblical studies, theology, and classical philology—and an interested public. Its aim was to identify concrete steps towards developing and consolidating an integrated institutional hub for the study of Antiquity. In other words, it sought to establish a flexible structure that would serve both early-career researchers in these fields and those who wish to pursue, or are already beginning to explore, the study of Antiquity in its many forms. Following the event, its conveners proposed a research group at NEC dedicated to Classics and the study of Antiquity. The initiative is expected to take shape during the 2026/2027 academic year.



Photo: The roundtable brought together distinguished scholars working in the fields of Antiquity, Classics, archaeology, and translation studies, among them NEC alumni Cătălin Pavel, Ștefan Colceriu, Emanuel Conțac, and Ioana Costa.

ROUNDTABLE

on a recently published book:
Dan Dediu, *Acul urechii. Eseuri despre muzică și muzicieni* (Editura Muzicală, 2026)
(3 June 2026)

Participants: Dan Dediu, Nicolae Gheorghiță, Antigona Rădulescu, Valentina Sandu-Dediu, Ion Bogdan Ștefănescu

"The book you're opening is like a bucketful of popcorn. Some kernels are harder, others—softer, some are rich, meaty, others—tougher, stringy, some—more savoury, others—rather bland. There is no particular order in which you should consume them. You can choose them randomly and swallow them in bulk into speeding, alert mental nibbling, or you can savour them in slow motion, one by one, chainstiching them like laundry on a clothesline. (…) As for the title of this collection, Needle of the Eye, (…) I feel it expresses a rainbow of meanings captured in just a couple of words which reverse the biblical 'eye of the needle', allowing for a beautiful image of 'ballistic' precision. You can almost picture the author, head resting on the palm of his hand, focused on absorbing music closely, with eye-cuity, taking in everything that's parading before the mind, entering the senses like a pencil into a sharpener. Indeed! At the end of the day, this is exactly what I want these texts to accomplish: with music's help, to turn the readers' senses into sharpeners of thoughts."

– Dan Dediu



Dan Dediu has composed over 200 works spanning all musical genres, including operas, symphonic, chamber, and vocal music. He is Professor of Composition at the National University of Music in Bucharest and President of the Union of Romanian Composers and Musicologists.



Photo: On stage, from left to right: Dan Dediu, Antigona Rădulescu, Nicolae Gheorghiță, Ion Bogdan Ștefănescu

ROUNDTABLE

Who Needs Trust Anymore?
Some Thoughts on the Issue of Trust in Romania
(17 June 2026)

with a presentation given by

Claudiu Tufiș, Associate Professor, University of Bucharest, Head of the Comparative European Politics Department

The presentation provided an overview of TRUEDEM, a research project funded by the European Union's Horizon research and innovation program, and carried out between 2023 and 2025. It involved 13 partners from 11 countries: Czechia, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, and Ukraine. The Romanian team was based at the Faculty of Political Science of the University of Bucharest, and led by Claudiu Tufiș. The researchers (over 60 scholars) examined the role of new patterns of electoral behaviour, including electoral volatility and declining voter turnout, as well as the implications of the emergence of new social movements and political parties for the representativeness and legitimacy of European democracies.

The project assessed the impact of the erosion of traditional political cleavages, the emergence of new ones, the radicalisation of political attitudes, and increased political polarisation on the inclusiveness and responsiveness of European democracies.

The study of political trust adopted an interdisciplinary approach, combining insights from sociology, political science, psychology, public administration, cross-cultural studies, and law.
More at: www.truedem.eu



Photo: Claudiu Tufiș

NEWS

❧Adelina Ștefan, *Ștefan Odobleja* Fellow, was awarded the 2025 SRS Book Prize for her monograph *Vacationing in Dictatorships: International Tourism in Socialist Romania and Franco's Spain* (Cornell University Press, 2024).

❧On 1 June 2026, the Romanian Writers' Union held its Awards Gala for the 2025 Publishing Year at the National Theatre in Bucharest. Among the recipients were the following NEC Fellows and Alumni:

Poetry Book Award
Dan Coman, *Lipsa de greutate a lumii* (Charmides, 2025)

Prose Book Award
Vlad Zografi, *Insula de apoi* (Humanitas, 2025)

The "Nicolae Manolescu" Award for the Best Book of Literary Criticism, Essay, and Literary History
Ioana Pârvulescu, *Alfabetul domnilor. Viața și aventurile bărbatului din cărți văzute prin ochii unei femei* (Humanitas, 2025)

Translation Book Award
Diana Yüksel, for the translation of Han Kang, *Nu ne despărțim*, Humanitas Fiction

❧Alexandra Bacalu, *Trust* Fellow, and Adriana Cupcea, *Ștefan Odobleja* Fellow, together with Ioana Wasiucionek, coordinator of the above-mentioned programs at NEC, participated in the *Talents for Good* (TfG) meeting held in Berlin from 20 to 22 July 2026.
The TfG Network is an international community of scholars, fellows, and institutional partners supported by the Porticus Foundation, which also supports the *Trust* Fellowships program at NEC.
The meeting offered an opportunity to build relationships across institutions and to begin shaping a shared vision for the future.



Photo © *Talents for Good*

❧On 26 March 2026, Alex Axinte, *Ștefan Odobleja* Fellow, took part in a debate hosted by the Bucharest Architects Forum (BAF), as part of the Bucharest Architecture Biennale 2026 and the European Capitals Summit. The event also marked the Romanian launch of *Telling the Story. New Towns | New Narratives*, a publication coordinated by the International New Town Institute (INTI) and funded by the EU through the CERV program. The project connects partners from 16 European new towns and the publication, edited by Michelle Provoost and Alex Axinte and published by INTI in 2025, reflects the partners' various ways of shifting the tone and perspective of the usual narratives through which these districts are portrayed.



An exhibition curated by Raluca Paraschiv and Alex Axinte also opened at BAF space, exploring Drumul Taberei, a collective housing district shaped by successive transformations. The exhibition illustrated housing as a process of adapting and personalising standardised spaces, bringing together materials from the district's early years.

❧The special program at New Europe College, *TANDEM: Author with Translator, Translator with Author*, was featured in a dedicated panel at the Leipzig Book Fair, held on 19–22 March 2026.

Entitled "The TANDEM Model at New Europe College Bucharest: Literary Neighbourhoods on the Black Sea – Bulgaria and Romania", the panel brought together Alumni Dan Coman (writer) and Stilyan Deyanov (translator). The discussion was moderated by Mihaela Danga. In October and November 2025, they collaborated on translating Dan Coman's short story collection *Ce preferi?* (Polirom, 2025), in English *What Do You Prefer?*, from Romanian into Bulgarian.

❧The Library of New Europe College received the second batch of a book donation which completes the "Marian Viorel Anăstăsoaie" Special Collection. The Collection now comprises around 590 volumes spanning both well-established and more innovative sub-fields of anthropology, from social and cultural to psychoanalytic and urban anthropology.

❧A new tool on NEC's website allows you to explore the impressive collection of studies produced by NEC Fellows since the institution's founding. Over 30 years' valuable research by NEC scholars thus gains increased visibility and is from now on made available to you at: nec.ro/publications/publications-library/

❧NEC Alumnae Maria Adamopoulou, Nilay Kilinç, and Olena Uvarova organized the workshop *Mediterranean Crossings: Dialogues Between Past and Present Mobilities* on 11–12 June 2026 at the Leibniz Institute of European History (IEG) in Mainz.

MuzA, a Travelling Museum



Diving platform in Brăila
Photo © Mihai Rotaru, 2026

Ștefan Odobleja Fellow Tudor Elian, together with NEC Alumni Ilinca Păun Constantinescu, Ana Maria Zahariade, Irina Tulbure, Celia Ghyka, Theodor E. Ulieriu-Rostás, and Simina Bădică, are part of the team behind MuzA, a travelling museum launched in Bucharest in June 2026.

Running from 2026 to 2029, the project will explore diverse forms of architecture and community responses across several Romanian cities and towns.

Conceived as a four-year pilot program, MuzA is a new kind of museum: without a permanent home, it travels to 11 locations where architecture is experienced, contested, or defended, activating spaces and communities.

The itinerary includes:
2026: București, Băile Govora, Brăila
2027: Cluj, Eforie, Reșița
2028: Brașov, Văleni (Neamț), Timișoara
2029: Petrila, București

MuzA is a strategic project of the Order of Architects of Romania, implemented by the Ideilagram Association. It aims to serve as a national platform for reflection and public dialogue, cultural education, and the appreciation of the built heritage.

More at: www.muzeuldearhitectura.ro



Dreamcatcher, an architectural installation by alt.corp., was presented at the Rural Credit Palace in Bucharest as part of MuzA's inaugural exhibition. Taking the architect's drawing board as its point of departure, the work reimagines this once-essential tool, now displaced by digital design, as a metaphorical net for catching dreams.
Photo © Vlad Pătru, 2026

A selection of recently published books



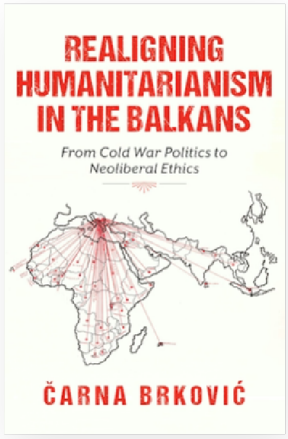
Élena Cristina Brăgea (NEC Alumna), *Les rapports Bucarest-Vatican : aspects diplomatiques, juridiques et confessionnels* (Collection : Cerf Patrimoines, 2025)



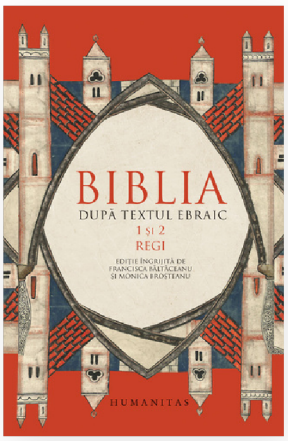
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