

# ASEEES NewsNet



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Association for Slavic, East European & Eurasian Studies (ASEEEES), established in 1948, is a nonprofit, nonpolitical, scholarly society and is the leading private organization dedicated to the advancement of knowledge about Russia, Central Eurasia, and Eastern & Central Europe.

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### Call for Submissions: Spotlight on Central Asian Studies

For 2025, *NewsNet* invites ASEEEES members—including graduate students—to submit pitches for cover articles on any subject relating to Central Asian Studies. *NewsNet* also continues to seek original, public-facing essays of 2,500-3,000 words that explore contemporary issues or topics of broad interest to the Association’s membership. To review past cover articles, please visit the *NewsNet* [webpage](#). If you are interested in contributing, please submit an abstract of no more than 300 words, along with ideas for visual illustrations, to Leah Valtin-Erwin at [newsnet@pitt.edu](mailto:newsnet@pitt.edu).

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*Note: The views expressed in NewsNet articles are solely the views of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of ASEEEES or its staff.*

**Cover Photo:** Europe Square in Tbilisi during the 2023-24 protests in opposition to the “Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence.” Photo by Nikoloz Darsania.

2 ASEEEES thanks Timothy Blauvelt for his assistance in obtaining the cover image.

# Foreign Agent Laws: New Challenges for Academic Freedom?

by Maxim Krupskiy

Over the past two years, foreign agent legislation has experienced a burst of development. Legislative initiatives on the registration of foreign agents and their analogues have appeared in [France](#), [Slovakia](#), [Bulgaria](#), [Republika Srpska](#), [the European Union](#) as a whole, [the United Kingdom](#), [Canada](#), [Kyrgyzstan](#), [Georgia](#), [Myanmar](#), and [Turkey](#). In Russia, following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the legislation on foreign agents in force since 2012 was significantly tightened, as reflected in the adoption of a [new law](#), “On control over the activities of persons under foreign influence,” in July 2022. Some of the initiatives listed above have also already gained the force of existing laws, despite negative reactions from international bodies and the public. For example, in Georgia, the process of adopting this legislation was accompanied by large-scale [protests](#), and the very appearance of the law led to the [suspension](#) of the country’s integration into the European Union.

Foreign agent laws are a form of foreign influence transparency legislation, and in all jurisdictions they are officially declared as a means of protecting sovereignty

and national security against covert foreign interference in domestic and foreign policy, as well as covert foreign influence on public opinion. However, despite the similar rhetoric that accompanies the development of these laws in different countries, as well as the sometimes identical terminology used by lawmakers in the texts of these regulations, it is necessary to distinguish genuine foreign agent laws from their fake analogues, which are discriminatory in nature, have nothing to do with the very idea of transparency, are usually promoted by non-democratic actors and are aimed at suppressing civil society, independent media, and dissenters in general.

The active development of fake laws on foreign agents, such as the Russian and Georgian laws and the Bulgarian draft law, leads to the erosion of the rule of law, creates a real threat to human rights and freedoms, in particular the rights to freedom of speech and freedom of association, and, to a large extent, threatens academic freedom. However, some experts are now concerned about the potential negative consequences for civil society relating not only to the intentionally repressive initiatives on

“foreign agents,” but also to those that are declared by proponents in democratic contexts.

## The Origins and Abuses of Foreign Agent Laws

The need to develop legislation requiring transparency of foreign influence and, in particular, laws on foreign agents in such jurisdictions as Canada, the United Kingdom, France and the European Union as a whole is primarily due to the increased intensity in recent years of disinformation campaigns, interference in the electoral process, as well as covert support for far-right and nationalist political forces organized by foreign non-democratic



In Tbilisi during the 2024 protests against the “Foreign Agents” bill. Photo by Vladimer Shioshvili.

actors in these jurisdictions. In Canada, for example, the relevant legislative initiative appeared amid an investigation into Chinese [interference](#) in two Canadian federal elections. In Germany, there is growing concern about the links between far-right political forces and Russia. In particular, the far-right party Alternative for Germany (AfD) has been [described](#) by many as an instrument of covert Russian influence operations and the promotion of a pro-Kremlin agenda within the country. Similar [concerns](#) exist in France about the links between Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally party and the Kremlin. It seems that these concerns have not least influenced the introduction of a [draft law](#) aimed at preventing foreign interference in France in the National Assembly in February 2024. In December 2023, the European Commission [adopted](#) the Defense of Democracy package, the centerpiece of which is a legislative proposal to increase the transparency of representation activities on behalf of third countries aimed at influencing policy, decision-making and democratic space. The authors of the initiative [declare](#) this document a tool to counter attempts by authoritarian regimes to exploit societal division and stoke mistrust of established democratic institutions.

Perhaps the main common characteristic of the above legislative initiatives is the attempt to identify those actors—agents—who covertly carry out their activities on the territory of the country in the interests of foreign third parties—principals—at their request and under their control or direction. It is this legal construct that contains the key features of foreign agent activity and reflects the main idea of the classic law on foreign agents—the [American FARA](#), which first appeared in 1938 and in recent years has inspired similar laws on countering foreign interference in different countries of the world.

Non-democratic actors also choose to refer to FARA and exploit the rhetoric of defense of sovereignty to justify their legislative initiatives, developing fake laws on foreign agents—deliberately repressive tools to combat dissenters. The main difference between these laws and their democratic analogues is their complete absence of key features of foreign agent activity. For example, neither the [Russian](#), [Georgian](#) nor Bulgarian laws contain even the very notion of the key figure of the beneficiary of foreign agency activities—the foreign principal in whose interests the agent should act. They also do not require any evidence of the potential “agent's” activity in the interests of a third party and under its direction. This is what gives us the right

to call such regulations “fake” laws on foreign agents, since they have nothing to do with ensuring transparency of foreign agent activities.

## Non-democratic actors exploit the rhetoric of defense of sovereignty to justify deliberately repressive tools to combat dissenters.

Another important feature of non-democratic legislative initiatives on foreign agents is their strongly discriminatory nature, manifested both in the severe legal restrictions and prohibitions imposed on “foreign agents” and in public smear campaigns designed to stigmatize potential and actual holders of this status. For example, the Russian law, without any evidence of public harm caused by foreign agents, [prohibits](#) them, inter alia, from carrying out educational activities for minors and pedagogical activities in state educational organizations, and from receiving funding and other material support from the state. In turn, the Bulgarian draft law, also absent any legal grounds, not only provides for a [complete prohibition](#) of the activities of foreign agents in public and private kindergartens, schools, universities, but also a complete ban on the participation of foreign agents in any form in activities that may affect the domestic or foreign policies of the country.

### Impact on Academia

As a rule, the main targets of repressive foreign agent laws are non-profit organizations receiving foreign funding and the independent media. It is these actors who are primarily affected by stigmatization and discriminatory legal restrictions. However, since the goal of the proponents of fake foreign agent laws is to suppress any critical voices and discipline society as a whole in order to ensure political loyalty, the consequences of these laws extend far beyond non-profit and journalistic activities to culture, the arts, business, legal services, education, academia, and many other spheres of public life.

Although much less is known about the impact of the above-mentioned legislation on foreign agents on academia compared to the effect it has on the non-profit sector, the available evidence suggests that research

institutions, scholars themselves, and the academic environment as a whole are experiencing serious toxic effects as a result of these laws. For example, the authors of the [report](#) “Understanding Academic Freedom in the Russian Context,” prepared in 2020 based on the results of a sociological survey, point out that, according to respondents, “the labeling of a research organization as a ‘foreign agent’ has the effect of limiting institutional opportunities to cooperate with government organizations, obtaining information for research, and increasing control over the organization’s activities.” The report also notes that the “foreign agent” status “makes it difficult to find new partners and expand cooperation.”

## Foreign agent laws contribute to the flourishing of self-censorship in the academic environment.

The vague legal wording and scholars’ concerns about garnering foreign agent status contribute to the flourishing of self-censorship in the academic environment. The authors of the above-mentioned report [emphasize](#) that it is not so much Russian state censorship as self-censorship that “has a greater impact on the choice and wording of research topics, as well as on the dissemination of results.” As examples of self-censorship, the respondents to the study cite, among other things, “refusal to discuss sensitive political topics with students, or to supervise theses on sensitive political issues.” The authors of the report also refer to the refusal of private universities to receive foreign funding from international foundations due to the threat of garnering foreign agent status as an example of self-censorship.

A separate threat to academic freedom in the context of international cooperation in relation to the development of legislation on foreign agents is the increased control over academic institutions and researchers by security and law enforcement agencies. “Understanding Academic Freedom in the Russian Context” states, in particular, that the strengthening of such control creates an atmosphere of suspicion regarding the international contacts of scholars, “which destroys the liberal atmosphere of academic organizations.”

Amidst increasing political repression within the country

УТВЕРЖДЕНО

Учебно-методическим советом  
по довузовскому образованию  
(УМСДО)  
протокол от 14.06.2023 г № 4(э)

**Программа вступительного испытания в форме собеседования  
Творческое испытание  
на образовательную программу «Журналистика».  
(Этап собеседование)**

*“Program of the entrance test in the form of an interview. Creative test for the educational program ‘Journalism.’” The description states: “During the additional entrance test the applicant is obliged to observe business ethics of speech, as well as the legal norms in force in the Russian Federation...The use of materials prohibited for distribution on the territory of the Russian Federation, as well as those prohibited for children, including mentioning or quoting products produced by an agent recognized in Russia, will lead to the annulment of the interview results.” Source: Official website of the Higher School of Economics.*

and the tightening of Russian legislation on foreign agents in 2022, its impact on the academic environment in Russia is now taking new forms. For example, the ban on the production of information materials for minors by foreign agents envisioned by the Russian law has been put into practice in a rather unexpected way. In 2023, the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE), one of the leading Russian universities, in its [instructions](#) for the entrance interview for its journalism program prohibited applicants during the exam not only from using, but also even mentioning or quoting materials created by foreign agents, under the threat of annulling the results of the exam. It should be emphasized that the text of the law itself does not explicitly prohibit the use by minors for any purpose of materials produced by foreign agents. The ban created by the HSE is a vivid example of truly limitless opportunities for interpreting and implementing the vague legislation on foreign agents.

One example of direct discrimination against members of the Russian academic community who are bearers of the status of “foreign agent” is the Russian Academy of Sciences’ refusal to grant a commemorative medal to its member Yulia Sineoka in March 2024, who in February of the same year was included in the register of “foreign agents.” The reason for such a decision by the president of the Russian Academy of Sciences was the corresponding request of one of the deputies of the State Duma of the Russian Federation. According to the deputy himself, he will further seek the exclusion from the RAS of all scientists

who have received the status of “foreign agent” in Russia.

It is worth noting that Russia is by no means the only country in which the active development of legislation on foreign agents and its analogues weaponizing transparency, as well as public smear campaigns, have led to serious negative consequences for academia. As another striking example, the de facto ban on Central European University (CEU) in Hungary resulted from [amendments](#) to the Hungarian education law in 2017, which were later found by the Court of Justice of the European Union to be [inconsistent](#) with EU law and limiting academic freedom. However, despite this court ruling, in 2019 CEU [was forced](#) to cease its activities in Budapest and commence operations in Vienna. Interestingly, in October 2023, the Prosecutor General’s Office of the Russian Federation [declared](#) CEU an undesirable organization, which means that from that moment on, any participation in the activities of this university could result in administrative or criminal [liability](#) with penalties of up to four years in prison.

The anti-democratic developments in Russia and Hungary have not stymied the development of repressive legislation on foreign agents and its negative impact on academia in other countries. For example, the Bulgarian draft law on foreign agents, introduced in September 2024 in the National Assembly and still under consideration, poses a serious threat to academic freedom, as the Bulgarian Center for Not-For-Profit Law (BCNL) points out in its [detailed review](#) of this document, rightly calling this initiative “the law against civil liberties.”

### Further Caution to Academia

There is no doubt that fake foreign agent laws used as instruments of the weaponization of transparency have a negative impact on academic freedom. However, certain legislative initiatives undertaken in democratic contexts, have also drawn certain concern from some experts in terms of their potential negative effects on human rights and freedoms and, in particular, on the fundamental rights of freedom of expression through public participation in policy-making processes, freedom of

association and right to privacy. For example, the European Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ECNL), in its [position paper](#) of April 9, 2024, while recognizing the legitimacy of the goal to bring to light any unduly covert influence by third country administrations as stated by the proponents of the Proposal for Directive establishing harmonised requirements in the internal market on transparency of interest representation carried out on behalf of third countries and amending Directive (EU) 2019/1937, notes that “the Directive lacks clarity and legal certainty on key definitions.” According to experts, “such legal ambiguity risks having a chilling effect on the participation of civil society in the public exchange of views and consultations in the EU.”

For the purposes of this article, it is important to emphasize that the Directive does not refer only to non-profit organizations. As is clear from the explanatory note within the Directive, the authors of the document [explicitly envisage](#) its scope to include academic activities. At the same time, they draw attention to the need to distinguish between independent academic activities in accordance



Strasbourg, 12.12.2023  
COM(2023) 637 final

2023/0463 (COD)

Proposal for a

### DIRECTIVE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL

establishing harmonised requirements in the internal market on transparency of interest representation carried out on behalf of third countries and amending Directive (EU) 2019/1937

(Text with EEA relevance)

{SEC(2023) 637 final} - {SWD(2023) 660 final} - {SWD(2023) 663 final} - {SWD(2023) 664 final}

with the principle of academic freedom as well as the freedom of scientific research, enshrined in Article 13 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, “pursued by researchers in a subject of their choice, the dissemination of the findings of that research, or teaching and educational activities that are conducted in accordance with the principle of academic freedom and institutional autonomy” and academic activities for foreign interests, “where the clear purpose of these activities is to influence the development, formulation or implementation of policy or legislation, or public decision-making processes, in the Union and they are carried out on behalf of a third country entity.” Unfortunately, the Directive does not contain any clear legal criteria to distinguish between these types of academic activities, which creates significant risks that, in practice even independent, absolutely legal academic activities not posing any threat to the democratic order will fall under the scope of the Directive and will be subject to registration as “interest representation activities.” This, in turn, may have a chilling effect, which ECNL experts warn about, on academic institutions and researchers, and may, to a certain extent, create obstacles for international academic cooperation.

## Academic activities are increasingly perceived as a very convenient sphere for foreign interference.

It is worth noting that the inclusion of academia in the scope of the laws on ensuring transparency of foreign influence and, in particular, the laws on foreign agents, is not accidental. Today, academic activities are increasingly perceived as a very convenient sphere for foreign interference, and therefore they are also commonly part of proposals for greater control within the frameworks of the above-mentioned legislation on ensuring transparency. For example, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), in its 2024 [Public Governance Review](#) “Strengthening the Transparency and Integrity of Foreign Influence Activities in France: A Tool for Tackling Foreign Interference Risks,” explicitly states: “The many opportunities for academic and cultural exchanges and travel, as well as the openness and freedom of academic research, political analysis, civic space and cultural activities

in democracies, can easily pave the way for foreign interference.” As an example of such foreign interference, the review refers to the 2021 Institut de Recherche Stratégique de l’École Militaire (IRSEM) report, “[Chinese Foreign Influence Operations: A Machiavellian Moment](#),” which cites the Confucius Institutes “that have been documented on numerous occasions as being involved in such activities, under the guise of teaching language and culture.”

Given this recent intensification of multifaceted destructive activities on the part of non-democratic actors aimed at undermining the democratic order in Europe and North America, it seems that the scope of the legislation on foreign agents will only expand, including, inter alia, academic activities. One of the arguments supporting this viewpoint is the proposal contained in the OECD review to significantly reduce the list of activities excluded from the scope of the legislation on transparency of foreign influence. Thus, the authors of the review treat the detailed lists of exemptions in the [American FARA](#) and [Australian FITS](#) as more of a weakness, which, as stated, “according to the authorities responsible for administering these laws, may be too broad.” The OECD, in particular, believes that FARA’s transparency goals could be inhibited by certain exemptions relating to, inter alia, “academic activities which may be exploited to avoid FARA’s disclosure requirements”.

### Academic Freedom as Vulnerability or Strength?

According to data presented in “Democracy Winning and Losing at the Ballot,” the latest [report](#) from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Institute, based in Sweden, democracy is in decline around the world today. For the first time in decades, there are more closed autocracies than liberal democracies and autocratization remains the dominant trend. There is no doubt that democracies nowadays face unprecedented pressure from non-democratic actors using a variety of methods to achieve their political goals. These circumstances create the need to develop effective legal mechanisms to ensure the resilience of democracy, an example of which is legislation to ensure transparency of foreign influence.

At the same time, in their attempts to protect themselves from covert destructive interference from abroad, democracies should not lose their core pillars, which, first and foremost, include the rule of law and human rights and freedoms. Academic freedom is undoubtedly also

one of the most important components of a democratic society, and in many ways its very existence plays an important role in maintaining democratic order. It is rather difficult to agree with the OECD’s [position](#) that “the openness and freedom of academic research, political analysis, civic space and cultural activities in democracies present vulnerabilities.” On the contrary, it seems that it is precisely the openness and freedom of academic research, backed by genuine scientific methods and a developed critical analysis of the information we consume, ensuring the possibility of establishing objective facts, that are the strengths of democracy in the fight against non-democratic actors whose main weapon is misleading. It is academic freedom that should be the key to success in the fight against disinformation campaigns and fake news, nationalist, far-right narratives, and political populism.



**Maxim Krupskiy** is a research scholar at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, College of Law, human rights defender, attorney-at-law and PhD in Philosophy with more than twelve years of law practice in Russia defending refugees, civil activists persecuted by the Russian authorities for political reasons,

and NGOs labeled as “foreign agents.” He is a former visiting scholar at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, former non-resident fellow at The George Washington University and former research scholar at The Kennan Institute of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars (Galina Starovoitova Fellowship on Human Rights and Conflict Resolution). Maxim has been published in such outlets as The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs, The Conversation, Russia.Post, Forbes Russia, Foreign Affairs and others. Currently he is conducting a comprehensive comparative research project on “foreign agents” legislation in Russia and other countries of the world from the resilient democracy perspective, as well as studying various other authoritarian mechanisms used to suppress civil society.

## CFA: COHEN-TUCKER DISSERTATION FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

**DEADLINE: JANUARY 29, 2025**

The Cohen-Tucker Dissertation Research and Dissertation Completion Fellowships offer maximum stipends of \$28,000 for graduate students in any discipline whose dissertation topics involve 19th–early 21st century Russian historical studies. Please see the ASEEES website for full eligibility requirements. The Stephen F. Cohen–Robert C. Tucker Dissertation Fellowship Program is sponsored by the KAT Charitable Foundation.

**APPLY**



“I conducted research in five archives...allow[ing] me to complete all of the research for this project and to move seamlessly to the writing phase...I would like to thank ASEEES and the funders of the Cohen-Tucker Dissertation Research Fellowship for this incredible opportunity and tremendous boon to my development as a scholar.”

Griffin Creech (History, University of Pennsylvania)  
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[Read about the 2024 Cohen-Tucker fellows here!](#)



# 56th ASEEES Annual Convention

Boston Marriott Copley Place, Nov. 21-24, 2024  
Virtual Convention, Oct. 17-18, 2024

## Theme: [Liberation](#)

2024 ASEEES President: Vitaly Chernetsky, University of Kansas

### Virtual Convention

ASEEES members who are registered for the 2024 Annual Convention can watch recorded sessions from the 2024 Virtual Convention (October 17-18) on the [convention site](#) until November 18, 2024.

### Membership and Registration

This year, online registration will reopen at the on-site rate on November 8. All participants must be current members.

 [Become a Member](#)       [Register](#)

### Badge Pick-Up and On-Site Registration

Badge pick-up and on-site registration (located on the 4th Floor) will open from 2:30 - 5:00 pm on Wednesday, November 20 and at full capacity at 9:00 am on Thursday, November 21.

### Explore Boston

Newly renovated, the hotel is close to an array of restaurants and other attractions. [Explore our guide to visiting Boston!](#)

Please review the ASEEES [Code of Conduct Policy](#) and [Health & Safety](#) policies and the updated [Accessibility and Inclusivity Guidelines](#).

### Download the Mobile App!

[Download](#) the ASEEES Annual Convention App to personalize your schedule, view maps, and receive real time announcements. Only convention registrants will be able to access the [mobile app](#).

### Childcare Discussion Board

Use the online [childcare discussion board](#) on the ASEEES member site to share and find childcare information. You must be a convention registrant and logged in to see and participate in the discussion board.

### Social Media

We look forward to informative and productive engagement on social media at [#ASEEES24](#). Please read the ASEEES [rules for recording and social media](#).

### [DONATE](#) to the ASEEES Convention Grant Funds

In 2024, ASEEES awarded over 100 travel grants and 30 childcare grants. Help us sustain these important funds and support scholars traveling to the Annual Convention by making a donation today.

 [Donate](#)

## Special Events

### Thursday, November 21

#### ASEEES Opening Reception & Exhibit Hall Tour, 5:30 - 7:00 pm

All registered convention attendees are welcome to attend the opening reception

#### Graduate Student and First-Time Attendee Networking Event, 7:00 - 8:00 pm

Drop in for a casual meet & greet with fellow graduate students and first time attendees

### Friday, November 22

#### REEES Think Tank: Undergraduate Research Showcase, 8:00 - 9:45 am

#### Presidential Plenary: Identifying and Applying Liberating Perspectives in Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies, 12:00 - 1:15 pm

Vitaly Chernetsky, U of Kansas (chair)

Alex Averbuch, U of Michigan

Botakoz Kassymbekova, U of Basel (Switzerland)

Dragan Kujundzic, U of Florida

Maria Popova, McGill U (Canada)

Maria Sonevytsky, Bard College

Kimberly St. Julian Varnon, U of Pennsylvania

#### ASEEES Annual Meeting of the Members, 5:30 - 6:00 pm

#### Voices from Belarus: Conversation, Readings, and Discussion (followed by a reception), 6:30 - 8:30 pm

#### Contemporary Ukrainian Poetry Reading, 7:30 - 8:30 pm

#### Na stsenu! From the Footnotes to the Footlights - A Performance Showcase of Creative Research, 7:30 - 9:00 pm

### Saturday, November 23

#### Vice Presidential Roundtable: Publishing Your First Book: Demystifying the Process, 10:00 - 11:45 am

#### ASEEES Awards Presentation & President's Address, 6:30 - 8:00 pm

"Liberation as Goal, Practice, and Strategy: A Paradigm Shift for Our Field in Challenging Times" by Vitaly Chernetsky, 2024 ASEEES President

#### Live Concert: Winds and Tides: Music from Southeastern Europe and Beyond, 8:30 - 9:30 pm

For more information, please visit the [2024 Special Events webpage](#).

## Film Series

#### Ukrainian Animation: Animating the War

Thursday, November 21, 7:30 - 10:00 pm

Introduced by Olga Blackledge, U of Pittsburgh, and Anna Tropnikova, Yale U

#### From *Winter, Go Away* to *Of Caravan and the Dogs*: Documentary Films by Askold Kurov

Friday, November 22, 3:30 - 5:15 pm

Introduced by Tatiana Saburova, Indiana U Bloomington

#### *My Socialist Home*

Saturday, November 23, 4:00 - 5:45 pm

Introduced by Ketevan Gurchiani, Ilia State U (Georgia)  
Q&A moderated by Ecem Saricayir, Cornell U

#### *Wings of a Serf* (offsite, with live accompaniment)

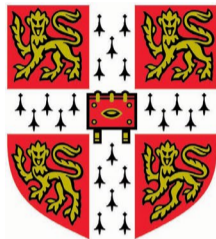
Saturday, November 23, 7:00 - 9:00 pm

Introduced by Maya Garcia, Harvard U  
Q&A moderated by Daria Khitrova, Harvard U, Yuri Tsivian, U of Chicago, and Kevin Platt, U of Pennsylvania

For information on our Film Series, please visit the [2024 Film Series webpage](#).

# 56th ASEEES Annual Convention 2024 Sponsors

**ASEEES gives special thanks to our sponsors, whose generous contributions and support help to promote the continued growth and visibility of the Association during our Annual Convention and throughout the year.**



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57th ASEEEES Annual Convention  
November 20–23, 2025  
Washington Hilton, Washington, D.C.

## Theme: Memory

2025 ASEEEES President  
Adrienne Edgar, UC Santa Barbara

Memory is both personal and collective, and shared ways of remembering help to define human communities. In Eastern Europe and Eurasia, individual and “unofficial” memories have often been seen as more trustworthy than the history recounted in official sources. Yet individual memory is inevitably affected and shaped by public memory, which some states and political elites try to manipulate for their own gain. Authoritarian rulers, whatever their ideological stripe, seek to control historical memory in order to bolster and justify their rule.

The study of memory is interdisciplinary, engaging cultural and literary theorists, social scientists, historians, and others. Remembrance is also crucial to the work of archivists, librarians, museum curators, and other professionals. For several years, our field has been reexamining long-held assumptions and incorporating new, previously marginalized or silenced perspectives. This process of decolonization brings with it changes in how we remember and commemorate the past. At the same time, a broad assault on truth in our digital age makes the collective memories that sustain communities more contested and fragile. All of these developments highlight the importance of our work as scholars for understanding both the past and the present of Eastern Europe and Eurasia. The 2025 ASEEEES convention invites scholars working in all disciplines and historical periods to explore the theme of memory as it relates to our region.

**Deadline: March 1, 2025**

Submission platform opens early January 2025



NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR EURASIAN AND EAST EUROPEAN RESEARCH

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*The National Council for Eurasian and East European Research invites proposals for the 2025*

## **Title VIII National Research Grant**

## **Title VIII Short Term Research Grant**

## **Title VIII Dissertation Completion Grant**

*Deadline for all Programs: December 31, 2024*

### **ABOUT THE NATIONAL RESEARCH COMPETITION**

The National Research Competition provides support for both collaborative and individual research projects. **Research Contracts** support collaborative projects involving multiple scholars or researchers who are U.S. citizens and hold the PhD. **Research Grants** support research projects conducted by individual scholars or researchers who are U.S. citizens and hold the PhD. The maximum award for Research Grants is \$20,000 and \$40,000 for collaborative Research Contracts. Competitive proposals will show a compelling relevance to current US foreign policy toward the region of Eurasia and Eastern Europe. Please visit [www.nceeer.org](http://www.nceeer.org) to view countries eligible for research.

### **ABOUT THE SHORT TERM RESEARCH GRANT COMPETITION**

The Short Term Research Grant program provides a maximum award of \$2,500 for policy-relevant research on the countries of Russia, Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Balkans. To qualify, applicants must be U.S. citizens holding the PhD.

### **ABOUT THE DISSERTATION COMPLETION GRANT**

The Dissertation Completion Grant provides a maximum award of \$20,000 to scholars who are U.S. citizens and in the final year of a doctoral program in the area of Eurasian and East European Studies. Awards can range from 9-12 months in length and will culminate in the completion of the scholar's dissertation.

### **FUNDING AND APPLICATION**

Founded in 1978, NCEEER supports research projects that facilitate a mutually beneficial exchange of information between scholars and policy makers and contribute to a better understanding of current developments and future prospects Eurasia and Eastern Europe.

For more information and to apply, visit NCEEER's website at [www.nceeer.org](http://www.nceeer.org). The deadline for application submission is December 31, 2024. NCEEER's Board of Directors will evaluate the competition. Applicants will be notified of the outcome by March 1, 2025.

Funding for all programs is provided by the Title VIII Program of the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Intelligence and Research.

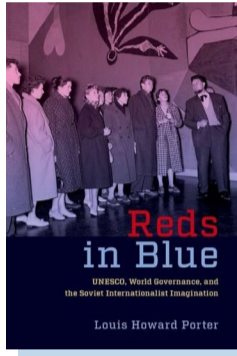
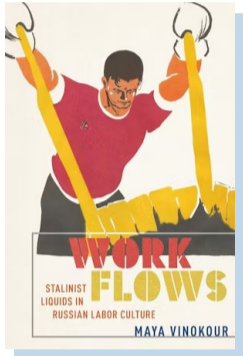
## Fall 2024 ASEEES First Book Subvention Recipients

### ASEEES congratulates the recipients of the Fall 2024 [First Book Subventions](#):

Cornell University Press for *An Imaginary Cinema: Sergei Eisenstein and the Unrealized Film* by Dustin Condren

University of Wisconsin Press for *Women Under Suspicion: Fraternization, Espionage, and Punishment in the Soviet Union During World War II* by Regina Kazyulina

### Past Recipients



Supported by a Spring 2023 First Book Subvention, Maya Vinokour published [Work Flows: Stalinist Liquids in Russian Labor Culture](#) (Northern Illinois University Press, an imprint of Cornell University Press, 2024).

Spring 2022 FBS Subvention Recipient Louis Porter's *Reds in Blue: UNESCO, World Governance, and the Soviet Internationalist Imagination* received the 2024 Marshall Shulman Book Prize (Oxford University Press, 2023).

ASEEES [First Book Subventions](#) are awarded twice annually. The next application deadline is February 1, 2025.

2024 First Book Subvention Committee: Brigid O'Keeffe (chair), Molly Brunson, Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, and Gwen Walker

# Managing Mid-Career Milestones

This fall, ASEEES hosted two interdisciplinary panel discussions exploring big picture questions and practical strategies for success in the mid-career. Topics included the considerations surrounding taking on administrative roles, challenges and opportunities relating to second book projects, and strategies for balancing teaching and research.

[ASEEES members can watch the panels here.](#)

## Meet your writing goals with ASEEES!

In Spring 2025, pending sufficient interest, ASEEES will facilitate a six-week structured accountability group for mid-career scholars, fostering a supportive environment for setting and achieving writing goals through weekly check-ins. ASEEES also plans to host networking sessions with senior scholars, providing participants with new professional contacts alongside insights from colleagues who have successfully traversed mid-career milestones.

Please fill out the Interest Form if you are interested in participating:

[Interest Form](#)

**NEW FROM SLAVICA PUBLISHERS**

John W. Steinberg et al., eds. *Military Affairs in Russia's Great War and Revolution, 1914–22, book 4: Operations on Imperial Russia's Western Borders, 1914–17*, xvii + 371 p.; *book 5: The Wider War, Strategy, Planning and Leadership, 1914–22*, xxv + 469 p. (978-089357-522-9; 978-089357-532-8), \$44.95.

These books address the operations of the Imperial Russian army in WWI. Based largely on archival research by an international cohort of military historians, the chapters present novel views on Russia's Great War, encompassing issues of command, logistics, military learning, and specific campaigns. New approaches include contributions on the war's domestic military impacts, the roles of naval and aerial warfare, Russo-Romanian military cooperation, and the Austro-Hun-

garian war effort in Ukraine. The books conclude with a reflection on the war's intellectual and political legacies, and how they shaped the Soviet Red Army. Readers will find important and interesting new insights into this epochal conflict, whose impact still resonates in the present day.

Charles H. Arndt III. *"Our Common People Are a Vagrant Before Anything": Wanderer-Pilgrims in the Nineteenth-Century Russian Literary Landscape*, vi + 287 p. (ISBN 978-089357-529-8), \$22.95.

This volume examines the depiction of wanderers and pilgrims in Russian literature during the era of the abolition of serfdom (1861). Arndt breaks new ground by connecting the rise of interest in wanderers with the then-burgeoning field of folklore studies.



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Three String Books is an imprint of Slavica Publishers devoted to translations of literary works and belles-lettres from Central and Eastern Europe, including Russia and the other successor states of the former Soviet Union.

Julia Nemirovskaya and Anna Krushelnitskaya, eds., *Dislocation: An Anthology of Poetic Response to Russia's War in Ukraine*, xxv + 469 p. (978-089357-524-3), \$44.95.

This collection reflects the developments and effects of the Ukraine War as seen by Russophone poets from all over the world. Divided into thematic clusters, the book delves into the death, despair, displacements, and dislocations brought on by the war, and explores the complexities and conflicts of affiliation with the language and culture of the country ruled by Putin's aggressive and repressive regime. The featured poems were sourced from Kopilka, a repository of current antiwar poetry.



Shahzoda Samarqandi.  
*Mothersland*, trans.  
Shelley Fairweather-  
Vega, after the  
Russian ver-  
sion trans.  
from Persian  
by Yultan  
Sadykova  
(Red Intel-  
lect, 2019),

**Three String Books**

iv + 72 p., 2024  
(ISBN 978-089357-527-4), \$19.95.

This haunting novel by the world's leading Tajik-language novelist is a time-twisting reverie on the bond between mothers and daughters. Growing up in late Soviet-era Uzbekistan, Mahtab feels more at home in the cotton fields—and in the past, as depicted in her mother's diary—than at school, where the books in the library are rewritten with every new political trend. When a Russian film crew comes to town to make a movie about cotton, starring Mahtab in the role of her hero-worker mother, Mahtab suffers an accident that scrambles her memory. As she struggles to recover, she must untangle her mother's story from her own, and navigate the hazy contours of memory, love, storytelling, and country to finally find herself.



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*Kritika* is dedicated to critical inquiry into the history of Russia and Eurasia. The quarterly journal features research articles as well as analytical review essays and extensive book reviews, especially of works in languages other than English. Subscriptions and previously published volumes available from Slavica—including, as of 16, no. 1, e-book editions (ePub, PDF). Contact our business manager at [slavica@indiana.edu](mailto:slavica@indiana.edu) for all questions regarding subscriptions and eligibility for discounts.



# ‘Who Wants to be a Billionaire?’ Teaching Russian Capitalism with Monopoly

by Alexis Peri

“Who wants to be the thimble?” I asked. The class, which had been rather quiet, began buzzing as students—particularly those from the United States—reached for their favorite game pieces. Several international students looked around blankly, wondering what kind of board game asked its players to pose as irons and boots. The more seasoned players quickly brought them into the fold, describing past *Monopoly* games that stretched into weeks or dissolved into epic feuds. Students regaled each other with stories about notorious uncles who embezzled from the bank and little sisters who surreptitiously nudged their game piece a few squares ahead when they thought no one was looking. “Sheltering in place” during COVID, it seems, had inspired more than a few family games of *Monopoly*.

Determined to reignite their interest and make the tragedy of privatization meaningful for them, I proposed a game.

I was just glad to hear them talking. It was week three of my undergraduate seminar on post-Soviet Russia, and I was on the verge of losing them. This was an introductory course with no prerequisites in Soviet history, and the

learning curve in weeks one and two had been steep. Fundamental information about the Soviet Union, including what socialism was and why it collapsed, swirled uneasily in my students’ heads. They had enrolled in my course hoping to hear about glitzy oligarchs and Kremlin intrigue, but they found themselves—like Gorbachev—mired in the tedium of the Congress of People’s Deputies. Our class discussions grew halting as they struggled to wrap their tongues around “perestroika” and “glasnost’.” Today’s class was our first foray into the privatization of the socialist economy. While I was prepping, I realized that the reading I had assigned was dry, technical, and would be a slog to unpack. It was time for something hands-on! Determined to reignite their interest and make the tragedy of privatization meaningful for them, I proposed a game.

“Why do you think we are playing *Monopoly*?” I asked them. “To teach us about capitalism?” one student suggested. “Yes,” I replied, “but this version has a few tweaks.” Twenty pairs of eyes flitted down to the gameboard. The names of Soviet companies had replaced “Marvin Gardens” and “Park Place.” The spaces for utilities had been covered up, and the currency had been converted to rubles. “Passing Go” now meant losing 20 rubles due to inflation, but jail—a mainstay of western capitalism and Soviet socialism—was still there.

In groups of five, each with its own gameboard, students elected one member to be the (state) banker. They each received 200 rubles in starter funds and—following the privatization plan executed by the Yeltsin administration—a





Image: Alexis Peri's "crude, homemade" version of Monopoliia, used to teach Russian privatization.

voucher for 10,000 rubles. Next, I instructed the banker to give an extra 10,000 rubles to whoever had selected the top hat game piece and 5,000 extra to the player with the race car. I added another wrinkle: only the race car and top hat could draw from Community Chest. The rest of the players had to try their luck with Chance. The deck was stacked against them from the start.

We rolled the calendar back to 1992. They tossed the dice and started to play. Basic properties, like the Mikoyan Shoe Plant or the Novosibirsk Chocolate Factory, cost 10,000 rubles to buy with a "rent" (landing penalty) of 100 rubles. More elite properties like the AvtoVAZ car plant cost 20,000 rubles to buy, 200 to "rent."

In the first round, the unlucky students who had seized the thimbles, dogs, and boots and who were financially disadvantaged as a result, clung to their vouchers. Afraid to lose what little they had, they avoided buying anything. Even so, they soon landed on a "mafia tribute" square, passed "go," or drew a Chance card, which depleted their funds. "Because of inflation, your monthly wages are only worth half as much. Give 50 rubles to the top hat," one orange card instructed. Another announced: "The local governor is excising a new tax" or "Currency devaluation! Give up 50% of your money to the state bank." Meanwhile, the top hats and race cars purchased properties quickly and often, egged on by the Community Chest: "Your daughter marries a mafia boss, so you no longer have to pay when you land on a tribute square!" Another card proclaimed: "Your cooperative has formed a joint-stock

company and now has the chance to sell oil abroad! Give the state bank 20 rubles for the license and collect 500 rubles from the foreign bank." So it went. By the time the players completed one sojourn around the board, at least one of the poorer game pieces had been bankrupted and eliminated from each group. Others survived but had to pawn their vouchers for cash.

The race cars and top hats snatched up Yukos and Aeroflot, feeling what it was like to buy political power and obtain unparalleled wealth.

In round two, the clock rolled forward to 1993, and I introduced a foreign banker (played by myself), who had much larger sums of cash to dispense to elite players. I thrust new Community Chest cards into the deck, like: "The ruble is in free fall. You transfer 200 rubles to the foreign bank, where it is converted into dollars. As the ruble falls further, you make a 100 rubles profit. Collect that from the foreign bank." More boots and doggies declared bankruptcy, while toppers and roadsters prospered. For round three, we fast-forwarded to the year 1995, and I uncovered the utility squares on the gameboard to reveal major oil and gas companies, now for sale. "To raise funds for his 1996 presidential bid," I explained, President Yeltsin is asking for a loan, putting up these companies as collateral. If you land one, you can buy a controlling share by paying 2,000 rubles to the state bank." The race cars and top hats snatched up Yukos and Aeroflot, feeling what it was like to buy political power and obtain unparalleled wealth through Yeltsin's "loans for shares" scheme. Sly smiles spread across their faces; they had carte blanche in a world where everything was for sale.

During round four, my plan was for the foreign bank to cut deals with the owners of big oil and gas, but no thimbles, dogs, or boots made it out of round three. The room grew thick with frustration and the games dissolved. As the students began returning the game pieces to their boxes, we started to discuss what had transpired. The first comment several students made was how much shorter this version, which I dubbed *Monopoliia*, was than

*Monopoly*. Many remarked on how unfair it was to start with such an uneven playing field, frustrated that they had different amounts of money and unequal access to financial opportunities, credit, and foreign markets from the outset. “Were you excited to purchase something when I first handed you your voucher?” I asked. “Yes, but I had to cash it in just to get out of mafia tribute,” one thimble protested, “I never got a chance to invest it.”

Many remarked on how unfair it was to start with such an uneven playing field.

For the oligarchs (top hats) and New Russians (race cars), the thrill of easy money made them buy and risk more in each round. All they had to do was dabble in currency speculation or arbitrage; they did not even need to build hotels, as the traditional version of the game instructed. “Why didn’t you invest some of your profits in your companies with hotels?” I asked the top hats. “Why bother?” was the gist of their replies. They had learned firsthand how and why the post-socialist Russian economy was driven by capital, not by production. So the Soviet rust belt was born.

Moreover, Yeltsin’s loophole economy, represented as a “Community Chest,” allowed social elites to avoid legal and criminal obstacles, like tax-hiking governors and avid crime bosses. For the thimbles and shoes in this unjust world, there was no social safety net. Currency devaluation, unpaid wages, and skyrocketing prices ate up their reserve.

In three short rounds, *Monopoliia* taught my students what the lumbering article I assigned explained over 25 dense pages: during the 1990s, the highly anticipated “magic of the market” failed to materialize in Russia. Privatization of state assets brought neither democratization nor a redistribution of wealth. Those who were well connected or affluent from the start became richer; the poorer never had a chance. Inequality only grew with each new round, each new set of economic opportunities. With this lively experience under their belts, the students turned to the assigned reading, the policies it described

already concretized, even personalized for them. “How do you think your person” —represented by your game piece—“might have felt about capitalism and the promise of democracy after these tumultuous three years covered by the game?” I asked. Hands shot up. The thimbles were deeply resentful, the top hats giddy with power. The game had conjured within them an ability to imagine and empathize with a range of Russians’ reactions to the economic crisis. It kindled the students’ powers of historical imagination and empathy.

The board game was also a Soviet pastime, one that similarly fed expectations about “the magic of the market” and allowed people in the USSR to play at capitalism.

Researchers like [Jessup Michael](#), [Catherine Coghlan](#), and [Denise Huggins](#) have explored how playing *Monopoly* can shift the players’ senses of equity and stratification. Since its first Depression-era edition in 1935, [Philip E. Orbanes](#)



Image: Parker Brothers’ Monopoliia, exported to the Soviet Union in 1988.

notes, “*Monopoly* has presented capitalism as a fantasy dreamland. It encourages a sense of superiority in the player who accumulates property, wealth, and power until everyone else is broken.” But, as Mary Pilon has recently shown, the game’s original though uncredited inventor created it to teach about exploitative landlords in New York City. An afternoon game of *Monopoly* becomes a romp through the triumphs and tragedies of capitalism. And this was true for Soviet people too.

When I made my crude, glue-and-scissors version, *Monopoliia*, I had no idea that playing the board game was also a Soviet pastime, one that similarly fed expectations about “the magic of the market” and allowed people in the USSR to play at capitalism before such experiments became a matter of state policy. In 1988, under the liberalizing reforms of perestroika, Parker Brothers exported to the USSR a “limited edition” (though this is misspelled in Russian on the box), “Moscow Version” of the game called *Monopoliia*. Parker Brothers did not change the rules or the eclectic assortment of tokens for a Soviet audience, but it did add one new game piece: a stereotypical Russian bear. In this version, the currency was in rubles, the properties were mostly in Moscow, and “Community Chest” was rebranded the “Societal Fund.” But the goal was still greed: “Become the richest player by buying, selling, and renting property,” the instructions commanded Soviet players, endorsing actions that had been vilified and criminalized in their society for over seventy years.

*Monopoliia* was a hit. It spawned several Soviet imitators such as *Manager*, created by the cooperative Petropan in 1988, and NEP (New Economic Policy), created by the cooperative Osen’ in 1989. These enterprising cooperatives were the type of private companies that were legalized during perestroika and that often became the bases for future oligarchs’ multi-billion-dollar enterprises.

That a socialist country would import this game and allow its citizens to play it speaks volumes about the ideological disintegration that Gorbachev’s perestroika unleashed. But, of course, there were cracks in the dam well before Gorbachev opened the flood gates. In the early 1980s, a few *Monopoly* sets arrived in the USSR and Eastern Bloc through consulates and foreign visitors, and the game garnered a mystique as a highly coveted, forbidden treasure from the west. As [Roman Abramov](#) has shown, it became popular for young Soviets who had heard of the game to make their own versions to play with friends—a kind of *samigrat*. They developed their own rules and titles—some renamed the game “United States”—and drew what they imagined American greenbacks looked like to use as currency. Some players, woefully ignorant of American placenames, made their gameboards international, such that moving from space to space also provided a virtual way to travel abroad—another fantasy route out of the Soviet system. Later, when these youngsters got their hands on the officially imported version of *Monopoliia* or the locally produced imitators, they were often disappointed that they were narrowly focused on a national, as opposed



Image: Osen’s NEP, first sold in the Soviet Union in 1989.

to global, financial market. Whether imported, produced domestically, or homemade, all versions of the game reinforced the dream of capitalism in the USSR.

Winning *Monopoly*, [Abramov](#) points out, is based on a combination of randomness and rational action. My homespun *Monopoliia* placed a far greater emphasis on chance than on skill to give my students a sense of the disappointment and helplessness that Yeltsin’s “shock therapy” unleashed on working and middle-class Russians.

All told, we only played *Monopoliia* for about fifteen minutes that day. This experiment was short-lived, but it opened my eyes to a world of pedagogical

possibilities. Next time, I will give the class some context on the history of this board game in the United States, Soviet Union, and Russia, asking them to think critically about how the act of playing a game can shape one's sense of reality. I will assign each game piece—the thimble, the top hat, and so on—a specific historical personage that matched its social status. Or, I will ask my students to invent historically plausible biographies for their game tokens. I used the game as a one-time exercise but, looking back, I could have expanded it by creating more players—“red managers,” “young reformers” from Yeltsin’s cabinet, and foreign businessmen. I could have introduced more complex financial opportunities to the top hats and race cars, such as allowing them to form joint-stock companies. I could have added in new rounds with events like the war in Chechnya, the parliamentary elections, or Putin’s anti-monopoly laws intended to rein in oligarchs. Finally, the game could also be used to teach about nostalgia for the Soviet Union in Russia today. In 2021, Hasbro, which acquired Parker Brothers, released a [Monopoly SSSR](#) edition in Russia. Alongside the iconic Mr. Monopoly (aka “Uncle Moneybags”) caricature, Yuri Gagarin smiles up from the center of the gameboard. The board itself features Soviet landmarks like Hotel Rossiia and Luzhniki Stadium. But the goal is still to bankrupt the other players. The eclectic tokens—including the plucky thimble—remain the same with one important change. Instead of the bear, the game includes a tiny Gagarin waving from inside his cosmonaut suit. I can’t imagine anyone wanting to be an iron when they could be the first man in space.

How can the act of playing a game shape one's sense of reality?

I now see the potential of turning this into a month-long, even semester-long game in the style of *Reacting to the Past*, famously created by historian [Mark C. Carnes](#). Still, even as a short exercise, D.I.Y. *Monopoliia* is an efficient, effective way to present uninitiated students to what some Russians called “prikhvatizatsiia” (grabbing) rather than “privatizatsiia” (privatization). There is so much interest in contemporary Russia today. Students are asking: “how did Russia’s politics and economics end up this way?” *Monopoliia* is an engaging way to help them begin their journey toward understanding. Plus, there is a [new movie](#)

in the works from producers Lionsgate and Margot Robbie’s LuckyChap. It promises to lampoon *Monopoly* as it did [Barbie](#). *Monopoly* will surely spark more interest and political commentary among our students in the years to come.



**Alexis Peri** is an Associate Professor of History, specializing in Russian, Soviet, Cold-War, and women’s history. She has published *The War Within: Diaries from the Siege of Leningrad* (Harvard University Press, 2017) as well as articles in *Kritika*, *The Russian Review*, and *Diplomatic History*. Her new book, *Dear Unknown Friend: The Remarkable Correspondence between American and Soviet Women*, comes out

with Harvard University Press in October 2024. Peri teaches courses on Soviet, Russian, American, and wartime history, and she is the recipient of the Gitner Family Family Prize for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching, conferred by the History Department in 2019, and the Metcalf Award for Teaching Excellence, conferred by Boston University in 2024.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and Cornell University Press invite nominations for books to consider for translation and publication in the ongoing series: *Holocaust Studies in Translation*. The submission deadline is **November 15, 2024**.

### [Nomination Form](#)

The series is edited by the Museum’s Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies. *Holocaust Studies in Translation* is funded in part with assistance from the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, sponsored by the Foundation “Remembrance, Responsibility and Future,” and supported by the German Federal Ministry of Finance.



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# Challenges and New Trends in Ukrainian Studies: An Interview with Isabelle DeSisto

*This interview is the first in a three-part series which Sarah Wilson Sokhey conducted with emerging scholars in SEES whose work focuses on Ukraine.*

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine renewed interest in studying the country. This series highlights the perspectives and work of 3 junior scholars whose research reflects current trends in the study of Ukraine and points us to a future path for studying a country showing remarkable resilience and facing decades of reconstruction. Each of these scholars has a unique and important perspective on studying Ukraine today including the challenges and opportunities. They offer practical suggestions to the ASEEES community for how we should do so. – Sarah Wilson Sokhey

**Why does the study of Ukraine remain important? What do you consider some of the most important questions about Ukraine that scholars today need to address?**

Today, the study of Ukraine is more important than ever. With Donald Trump's recent victory in the 2024 US presidential election, Ukraine is in a precarious position. Trump's comments about rapidly negotiating a deal between Putin and Zelenskyy raise concerns about the

future of US support for Ukraine. The fate of NATO is also uncertain, given Trump's previous criticism of the alliance. Russian missiles regularly strike civilian objects in Ukraine and Ukrainian soldiers continue to die on the frontlines in their fight for freedom. Ukraine needs our support. To provide that support, we need skilled policymakers and diplomats, experienced journalists, passionate nonprofit and humanitarian workers, and more. When the war is over, their combined skills can help Ukrainians rebuild their country. The academic community plays a crucial role in educating these professionals and the general public. The students we teach today are the politicians of tomorrow, and the research we do can make important contributions to our collective understanding of Ukrainian politics, history, and culture.

Political scientists studying Ukraine have many important questions to grapple with. I am interested in understanding the sources—both historical and contemporary—of Ukraine's impressive resilience in the face of Russian aggression, and what lessons history can teach us about the consequences that the war will have for Ukrainian societies. On a more meta level, scholars and teachers need to think about how we can better design our research and curricula to incorporate the Ukrainian perspective and represent the Ukrainian reality while avoiding a russo-centric approach.

But, of course, Ukraine should be studied not only through the lens of the ongoing war or in conjunction with Russia. From a political science perspective, Ukraine is a large, diverse country whose political dynamics can hold lessons for many other countries too—about identity, protest and revolution, civic activism, diaspora and refugee studies, and so much more.



*On the night train from Kyiv to Lviv in (December 2021). I didn't get much sleep on the bottom bunk, but it was certainly an adventure!*

*Photo by Isabelle DeSisto.*

**Would you tell us more about the work research you are doing on Ukraine? What are the implications of your work for how we understand Ukrainian politics, and political dynamics in general?**

I am currently a 4th year PhD candidate studying political science, with a regional focus on Eastern Europe. My broader dissertation project examines the long-term effects of exposure to political violence on political participation (primarily, voting and protest) in the region. I am interested in two main questions: First, how is knowledge about historical events—such as mass repressions during the Soviet period—transmitted across generations? Second, how does knowledge about these traumatic events affect the way that children and grandchildren of victims engage with politics today? I take a broad approach in my research, studying countries across the region, including Ukraine. I use various types of evidence, like surveys, archival data, and qualitative interviews. One need look no further than Russia's war against Ukraine to see the contemporary relevance of this topic. Many of Russia's tactics in Ukraine have been lifted from the old Soviet playbook, and their effects will be felt for a long time to come. My research can help us understand not only how past repressions have affected subsequent generations of Ukrainians, but also how ongoing atrocities committed by Russian forces will shape politics in the future. My work also has implications for the study of post-authoritarian regimes more broadly, as I aim to show the mechanisms by which past repression leads to political mobilization (or demobilization) in the long term.



*The Government House in Chişinău, Moldova, adorned with Moldovan and EU flags. Both Moldova and neighboring Ukraine became EU candidates in June 2022. A memorial to the victims of communism, erected in 2010, stands in front of the building. Moldova, like Ukraine and other post-authoritarian countries in eastern Europe, continues to grapple with the legacies of state-sponsored violence. Photo by Isabelle DeSisto.*

In addition to my dissertation, I am working on smaller research projects related to Ukrainian politics. One topic I am studying is the effects of Ukraine's decentralization reforms for attitudes toward local government and public services. I became even more interested in Ukraine's experience with decentralization after the full-scale invasion, when local authorities like mayors and governors emerged as leaders in Ukrainian resistance against Russian forces. I have begun to explore the implications of decentralization for Ukraine's resistance using quantitative data from public opinion surveys and Telegram channels. This research matters both for current Ukrainian politics and, likely, post-war political dynamics that will play out as Ukraine rebuilds itself and pursues EU membership.

**What does the public and the academic community commonly misunderstand or get wrong about Ukraine today?**

There are, unfortunately, a number of common misconceptions about Ukraine that I see circulating on the news, in the academic community, and even among friends and family. The first is what I call the "NATO narrative," or the idea that NATO expansion somehow "provoked" Putin to invade Ukraine. I'm sure it's unnecessary for me to explain to most ASEEES members why this narrative is at best inaccurate and, at worst, detrimental to European security. Did Putin support Eastern European countries joining NATO? Of course not, but NATO's actions do little to explain the timing and scale of Putin's full-scale invasion. Never mind the fact that NATO membership was not on the table for Ukraine at the time of the invasion. A misleading complement to the NATO narrative is the idea that the US is somehow waging a "proxy" war against Russia. Defeating Russia may be in the strategic interests of the US and its European partners, but characterizing the war in these terms takes agency away from Ukraine, which is not simply a pawn in a larger US-Russia conflict. In my view, the US should be doing more to help Ukrainians in their fight for freedom—not less.

Additionally, I think that many people across the globe, including in the U.S., are ill-informed about all of the historical, cultural, and political factors that make Ukraine distinct from Russia. Of course, the two countries share a common historical background in many respects, but since the 1990s their political trajectories have diverged considerably (as the title of Maria Popova and Oxana Shevel's [new book](#) makes clear). Ukraine may still have many challenges it must work on, but it has made

considerable progress in improving governance and strengthening democracy, especially since 2014.

### What is the most challenging part of doing research on Ukraine today?

Researchers working on Ukraine today face many challenges—logistical, methodological, and otherwise. Visiting most parts of Ukraine, even those far from the frontlines, is still risky due to Russia’s continued attacks across the country. I have, unfortunately, only visited Ukraine once (as a tourist in 2021) and have been unable to visit for fieldwork as a graduate student. Scholars who work with “human subjects” (surveys, interviews, ethnography, etc.) must receive approval from their university ethics committee (IRB), and often the global safety department, to conduct research abroad—at least in all American universities with which I am familiar. Given the security risks, universities are hesitant to authorize travel, as are faculty members who—rightly—want to keep their students safe. I know some researchers who have traveled to Ukraine since Russia’s full-scale invasion, and I commend them for their important work. Of course, this choice involves its own dilemmas and normative questions, which others are better positioned to discuss.

Although much is lost when we are unable to conduct fieldwork in-country, this should not dissuade students and scholars from continuing to study Ukraine. There are plenty of ways to stay engaged even from one’s home university.

For example, it is possible to conduct virtual interviews or interview Ukrainians who are living abroad. (I have not done interviews with Ukrainians but am considering doing so later on.) Despite some war-related restrictions, there is plenty of data available online; below I mention some sources I have used. Additionally, it is possible to partner with research assistants and scholars who are still doing great work from inside Ukraine. Fieldwork-related challenges can also breed creativity. For example, for a paper I presented at the ASN conference in May 2023, I used Telegram data from news channels to understand how Ukrainian mayors’ activities changed in the wake of the full-scale invasion.

### For those wishing to incorporate Ukraine into more of their research and teaching, are there particular books, articles, blogs, news sources, or datasets you would recommend that are particularly useful?

It is difficult to select just a few resources to recommend, given how much interesting material on Ukraine has been produced recently! For an insightful discussion of contemporary politics in Ukraine, I recommend [The Zelensky Effect by Olga Onuch and Henry Hale](#) and [Russia and Ukraine: Entangled Histories, Diverging States by Maria Popova and Oxana Shevel](#). I can recommend two excellent political science papers that relate to my own research on the legacies of political violence: [“The Legacy of Political Violence across Generations” by Noam Lupu and Leonid Peisakhin](#) and [“Mass repression and political loyalty: Evidence from Stalin’s ‘terror by hunger’” by Arturas Rozenas and Yuri Zhukov](#).

Although I generally leave it to historians to recommend history books, I feel obliged to promote Serhii Plokhii, a masterful and prolific historian – and a fantastic mentor whose kindness and generosity I benefited greatly from as an undergraduate at Harvard.

I will also call attention to a few great resources for students and scholars interested in conducting research on Ukrainian politics. Harvard developed [a helpful guide to resources about Russia’s war on Ukraine](#). After 2015, the Ukrainian government made a [concerted effort to increase access](#)



24 On holiday in Kyiv in December 2021. Photo by Isabelle DeSisto.





Reading room at the Estonian National Archive in Tartu, Estonia. Taken on a research trip in January 2023. Scholars of Ukraine (and Russia) who are unable to visit their “home” archives should consider expanding their work sites to neighboring countries. I have worked in Moldova, Estonia, and Latvia, where I found valuable documents about Soviet repressive policies—especially Stalin-era deportations—in Eastern Europe. These documents can be used to help us understand history across the region, including Ukraine. Photo by Isabelle DeSisto.

[to public data in many different spheres](#). Ample public opinion data is available online through the [National Bank of Social Data](#). For those interested in studying local politics in Ukraine, the Kyiv School of Economics has set up an excellent [GitHub repository](#). Telegram is another underutilized data source that I think can provide a lot of insight into Ukrainian politics.

For news on Ukraine (in English), I recommend *The Kyiv Independent*. *The BBC* and *The Telegraph* newspapers also have regular podcasts about Ukraine and its fight for freedom. Lastly, I think that studying a country’s language and culture always provides great insight into its political life. When I have time, I try to read Ukrainian fiction and listen to music and podcasts in Ukrainian. I especially like the work of Serhiy Zhadan, Oksana Zabuzhko, and Andrey Kurkov.



**Isabelle DeSisto** is a fourth-year PhD candidate in Politics at Princeton University. She holds a BA in Government and an MA in Regional Studies: Russia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia, both from Harvard University; an MPhil in Politics and International Studies from the University of Cambridge; and an MA in Politics from Princeton. She studies comparative politics, with a regional focus on eastern Europe. Her dissertation focuses on the effects of exposure to political violence

on political participation in the region. More information about Isabelle can be found on her website. She can be reached via email at [isabelledesisto@princeton.edu](mailto:isabelledesisto@princeton.edu) or on X (@isadesisto).



**Sarah Wilson Sokhey** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Colorado Boulder, the founding director of Studio Lab for Undergrads, and a Faculty Associate at the Institute of Behavioral Science. Her research focuses on the interplay between politics and economics. Her book, *The Political Economy of Pension Policy Reversal in Post-Communist Countries* (Cambridge University Press, 2017) examines

backtracking on social security reforms in the wake of the 2009 financial crisis and won the Ed A. Hewett Book Prize for outstanding publication on the political economy of Russia, Eurasia and/or Eastern Europe from ASEEES. Her current research focuses on the provision of public goods at the local level in Ukraine.

## Support innovative research in Ukrainian Studies!

“My dissertation examines the ways that...Odesans continuously defined and redefined themselves within literature, cinema, and various forms of media as a means of adapting to the tumultuous conditions within which the city found itself in the 20th and 21st centuries.”

Yana Lysenko (Comparative Literature, NYU)  
2024 Dissertation Research Grant in Ukrainian Studies Recipient

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## Event Series: Bodies in Focus

The six-part virtual event series “[Bodies in Focus](#)” will examine body matters within Eurasia through a variety of disciplines and themes. The body-as-method has emerged recently to provide novel insights on society, culture, and identity by foregrounding alternatives to Western traditions that marginalized the corporeal dimensions of social and personal existence.

- Why is the body good “to think with” on both intellectual and professional matters?
- How do classed, diversely abled, gendered, and raced bodies interact in the daily lives we study or inhabit through our avocations?
- What is the continuously evolving relationship between the body and the body politic, whether the nation, empire, the EU, or NATO?
- Is research and teaching disembodied and can recentering “embodied and uncomfortable knowledge” therefore move liberation in East European and Eurasian Studies forward?

To address these questions, “Bodies in Focus” will have six virtual, recorded panels featuring speakers from various disciplines and institutions. Panelists and the audience will explore how bodies matter for the study and teaching of East European and Eurasian social and material environments, our understanding of power and equity, and for the cultivation of human capacities in our field.

### November 8: Why Bodies Matter

11:00 am - 12:30 pm (EST) | 10:00 am - 11:30 am (CST) |  
8:00 -9:30 am (PST)

[REGISTER](#)

Moderator: Vitaly Chernetsky, ASEEES/University of Kansas  
Speakers: Maria Cristina Galmarini, William & Mary  
Pawel Lewicki, Independent Scholar  
Darya Tsymbaluk, University of Chicago

### November 15: New Directions in Research

11:00 am - 12:30 pm (EST) | 10:00 am - 11:30 am (CST) |  
8:00 -9:30 am (PST)

[REGISTER](#)

Moderator: Maria Cristina Galmarini, William & Mary  
Speakers: Katharina Wiedlack, University of Vienna  
Gala Kornienko, The Ohio State University



This series was developed and implemented by the Center for Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies at the University of Pittsburgh, the Center for Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies at The Ohio State University, and the Center for Russia, East Europe, and Central Asia at the University of Wisconsin-Madison with support from the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies. The organizing institutions thank our scholarly consultants Maria Cristina Galmarini, Darya Tsymbaluk, and Pawel Lewicki for shaping this initiative intellectually in collaboration with us.

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### January 24: Endangered Bodies & Activism

11:00 am - 12:30 pm (EST) | 10:00 am - 11:30 am (CST) |  
8:00 -9:30 am (PST)

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Moderator: Darya Tsymbaluk, University of Chicago  
Speakers: Zhanar Sekerbayeva, Kazakhstan Feminist Initiative “Feminita”  
Oksana Kazmina, Kone Foundation (Finland)  
Aydin Khalilov, Independent Living Center for People with Disability (Azerbaijan)

### January 31: Emerging Scholars on Body Studies

Details forthcoming.

### February 7: Centering the Body in Pedagogy & Teaching

Details forthcoming.

### February 21: Body Matters & Liberation in East European and Eurasian Studies

Details forthcoming.

# In Memoriam



**Howard I. Aronson**, Professor Emeritus in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, the Department of Linguistics, and the Committee on Jewish Studies at the University of Chicago, passed away on October 26, 2024.

Read Howard I. Aronson's obituary [here](#).



**Barry Scherr**, Associate Professor of History at Northeastern University, Professor Emeritus of Russian language and literature at Dartmouth University, passed away on September 12, 2024.

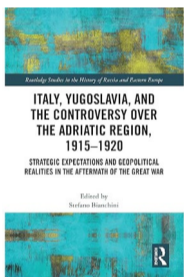
Read Barry Scherr's obituary [here](#).



**Michela Venditti**, Professor of Russian Literature at the University of Naples "L'Orientale," passed away on August 15, 2024.

Read Michela Venditti's obituary [here](#).

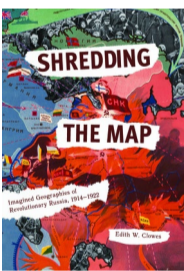
# Member News



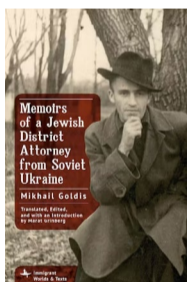
**Stefano Bianchini** published the edited volume [Italy, Yugoslavia, and the Controversy over the Adriatic Region, 1915-1920: Strategic Expectations and Geopolitical Realities in the Aftermath of the Great War](#) with Routledge.



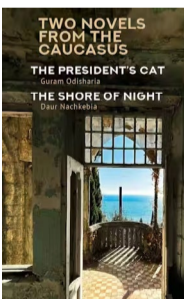
**Vitaly Chernetsky** and **Iryna Shuvalova**'s translation of *Winter King* (Lost Horse Press) was shortlisted for the [2024 National Translation Award](#) in Poetry.



**Edith Clowes** published [Shredding the Map: Imagined Geographies of Revolutionary Russia, 1914-1922](#) with Amherst College Press.



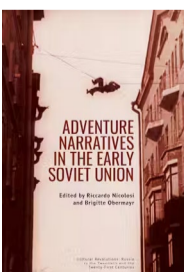
**Marat Grinberg** published a translation of [Memoirs of a Jewish District Attorney from Soviet Ukraine](#) by Mikhail Goldis with Academic Studies Press.



**Felix Helbing** and **David Foreman** published a translated volume entitled [Two Novels from the Caucasus: Daur Nachkebia's "The Shore of the Night" and Guram Odisharia's "The President's Cat"](#) with Academic Studies Press.



**Shoshana Keller** launched the interactive website [Mapping the Peoples of Kazakhstan](#), which combines Soviet census data with Geographic Information Systems to create a series of maps that show the location and movement of the many nationalities of Kazakhstan.



**Maria Khotimsky** published the edited volume [Contemporary Translation in Transition: Poems, Theories, Conversations](#) with Academic Studies Press.



**Riccardo Nicolosi** and **Brigitte Obermayr** published the edited volume [Adventure Narratives in the Early Soviet Union](#) with Academic Studies Press.

**Julian G. Waller**, with **Nathan J. Brown**, **Steven D. Schaaf**, and **Samer Anabtawi**, published [Autocrats Can't Always Get What They Want: State Institutions and Autonomy under Authoritarianism](#) with University of Michigan Press.

**Kimberly Zarecor** was appointed as a full-time program director in the [National Science Foundation's Regional Innovation Engines \(NSF Engines\)](#) program.

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For 2024, we have launched a fundraising campaign to support two research grant programs:

[Dissertation Research Grant in Ukrainian Studies](#)

[Dissertation Research Grant in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies](#)



"I dedicated [the grant period] to collecting essential material, engaging deeply with lamenters in various villages...Without this support, the immersive fieldwork in Gjirokastër [Albania] and the collection of crucial data for my dissertation would not have been possible."

**Grija Spiri** (Music, UC Santa Cruz)

2023 Dissertation Research Grant in Women's and Gender Studies Recipient

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The [ASEEES Legacy Society](#) honors those who have made plans to support the future of the field with a gift through their will or estate planning. Your support will have a lasting impact on future generations of scholars and research in the region.

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