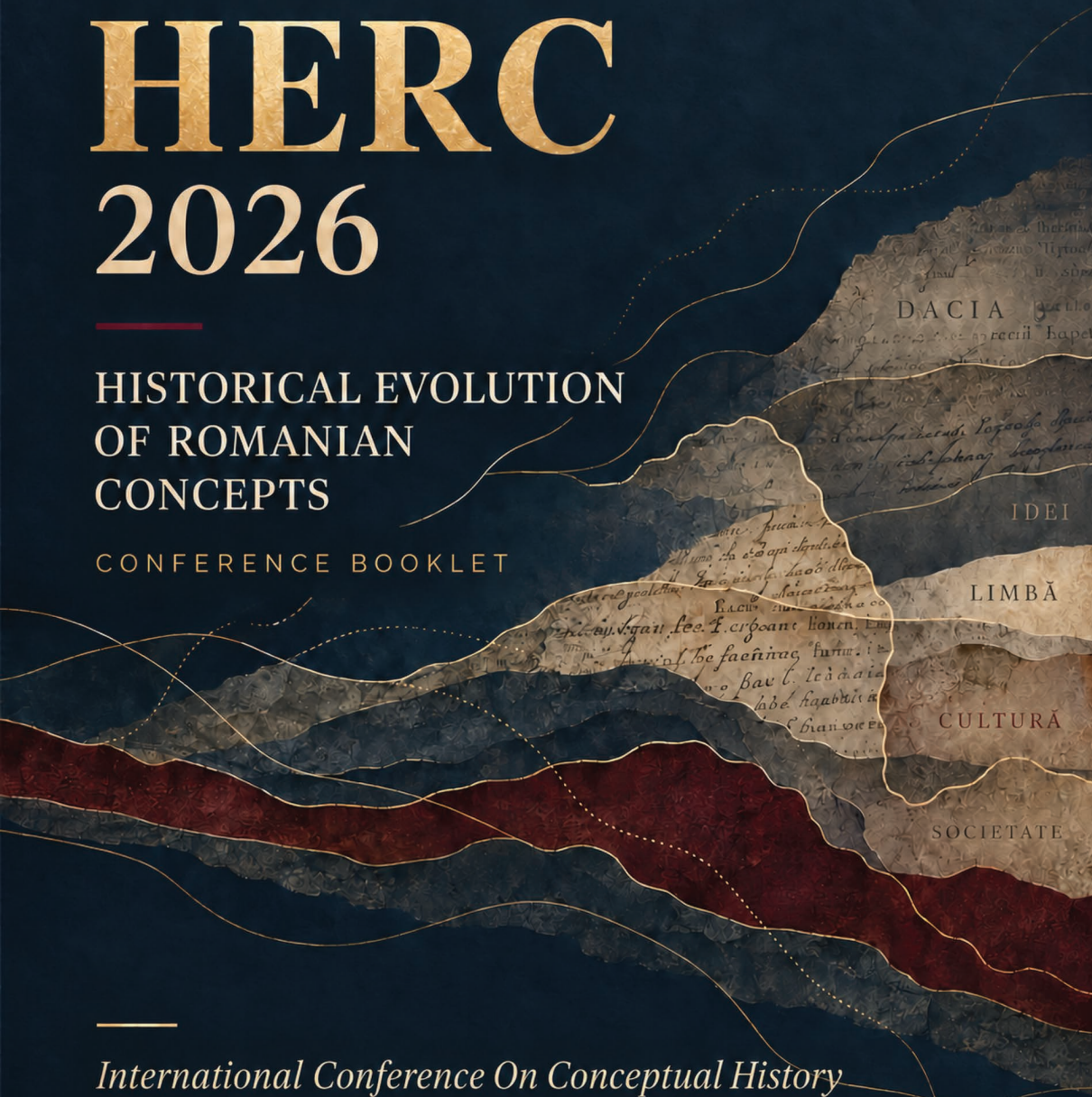
# HERC 2026

## HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF ROMANIAN CONCEPTS

CONFERENCE BOOKLET




*International Conference On Conceptual History*

Timişoara · 14–16 October 2026

editura DATAGROUP

UNArte

*In memory of Reinhart Koselleck*

**Scientific Director**

Professor Victor Neumann

**Organisers**

Editura Datagroup Timișoara
and the
National University of Arts in Bucharest

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# About the conference

HERC 2026 brings together historians, philosophers, philologists, art specialists and social scientists to discuss the historical evolution of Romanian concepts. The initiative begins with the question of how ideas of European modernity were translated, contested and given new meanings in Romania's historical experience. By examining political, cultural and social languages, the conference connects Romanian history with international debates in conceptual history.

The announced themes include language and modernity, the tension between convergence with Europe and institutional delays, and the multiple meanings of "Europe". Nation, state, freedom, democracy, culture, civilisation and identity are among the concepts under consideration. In the tradition of *Begriffsgeschichte* associated with Reinhart Koselleck, the aim is a comparative study of Romanian vocabulary that contributes to the project of a *Lexicon of Fundamental Romanian Concepts*.

The event is organised under the auspices of Datagroup Timișoara and the National University of Arts in Bucharest, with Victor Neumann as Scientific Director. According to the programme provided, the opening takes place on 14 October and the academic sessions on 15–16 October 2026.

# Introduction

## Timişoara and Reinhart Koselleck

Timişoara is a city where languages, faiths and cultural traditions meet. This historical experience of the Banat provides a fitting setting for a conference on how concepts move between places and change their meanings. The city was a European Capital of Culture in 2023, and the opening of its cultural programme highlighted the diversity of its communities and languages.

Reinhart Koselleck's connection with Timişoara is institutional as well as intellectual. At the West University of Timişoara, Victor Neumann and Armin Heinen founded the International Doctoral School of Conceptual History that bears his name. On 10 February 2014, the university's Centre for Advanced Studies in History inaugurated the Reinhart Koselleck Library, established through a donation from the historian's family; Katharina Koselleck attended the ceremony. Among other events, the Centre hosted the annual international conference on conceptual history in 2015. The dedication of HERC 2026 thus continues a documented intellectual and institutional relationship.

## Romanian past: a privileged terrain for history of concepts

European modernity - which today we frequently integrate into socio-political discourse - cannot be reduced to industrialization, technical progress, or administrative secularization. Above all, it represents a fundamental renewal of the language through which society seeks to describe itself, in which concepts such as citizenship, rights, public opinion, education, and the social contract constitute the principal symbolic infrastructure of the modern world. The century of nationalities and the century of extremes produced successive distortions of identity-related ideas: the nation was often transformed from a civic contract into an exclusive identity, a cultural nation, or an organic nation. As for

the state, it became an absolute political reference point, to the detriment of its juridical function, while culture, instead of being an exercise in formation (Enlightenment *Bildung*), became an instrument of communal demarcation based on language, religion, history, and tradition. At present, the European difficulty is not merely institutional, but also profoundly semantic: despite the circulation of the same words, notions, and concepts, they do not always refer to the same meanings. For this reason, European harmonization cannot be limited to the administration of resources, economic regulation, or bureaucratic coordination within the European Union. It also presupposes the reconstruction of a shared understanding of fundamental concepts.

The German concept of *Begriffsgeschichte* originates in the work of the German scholar Reinhart Koselleck, who continuously developed it beginning in the 1950s, and which corresponds to the French history of ideas and to Anglo-American new intellectual history. His ideas reflect the formative power of language and the manner in which human beings, society, events, and facts are conceptualized, while history itself is shaped. The linguistic investigation of historical facts lies at the center of his inquiry, as do questions concerning the diversity of politically and socially fractured interpretations. Following the National Socialist experience, Koselleck's aim was to limit the manipulability of concepts and to awaken sensitivity toward political language. He was justified in developing a discipline — the temporal evolution of concepts and the conceptualization of history — with his research focusing on the multiple sources of German intellectual history through an interdisciplinary approach. In Koselleck's terms, modern societies live in a permanent tension between the experience of the past and the anticipation of the future.

Romania offers a privileged terrain for observing this tension, because its modernization has been discontinuous, accelerated, and often contradictory. An important point pursued by the initiators of studies of this kind is the relationship between conceptual history and translation. Recent research within the History of Concepts Group insists on the fact that translation represents not merely lexical transfer, but also cultural transformation. For example, the Romanian concept of "culture" partially adopted the German meaning of Bildung, but also the French dimension of civilization and the romantic-national dimension of ethnic specificity. The

result is not a simple borrowing, but an original semantic configuration. Romania may be described as a country of asynchronicities, with different political and social regimes, with a modernization that remains incomplete to this day, constituting a cultural-linguistic space of multiple conceptual overlaps. All of these aspects must be analyzed. Conceptual history is a historical science. It deals with past societies and with what they have left behind as linguistic material and as structures of cultural and social thought. Romanian culture has long been the subject of studies in linguistic and intellectual history. Studies in conceptual history focus not only on the development of language and the historicity of words, but also on those concepts that have appeared "recently" in Romanian culture and the arts against the backdrop of socio-political changes. Through them, temporality and its significance within languages may be understood more thoroughly. The interdisciplinary Romanian research that we promote will contribute to an awareness of reciprocal influences and interferences, as well as to the identification of the causes that generate political instability. What we propose concerns the analysis and interpretation of Romanian concepts in their historical evolution.

In this context, the project of a Romanian lexicon of fundamental concepts becomes comparable to similar European projects, such as *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* in Germany, *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies in France*, and conceptual history projects in Finland, the Netherlands, Italy, Spain and Latin America. It may contribute to the mapping of Romanian modernity, to the analysis of cultural transfers, to the identification of semantic traumas produced by totalitarianisms, and to the clarification of tensions between tradition and European integration. This scholarly undertaking is all the more important because, through the deconstruction and reconstruction of the meaning of concepts in their historical evolution, we seek to achieve a better understanding of facts and events, of the relationship between culture, history, and the formation of both the individual and the community, as well as of the relationship between art and the evolution of political ideas. Finally, it is likewise through this approach that we will be able to read messages correctly, by identifying contexts and understanding the socio-cultural environments of both sender and receiver.

Victor Neumann

# Conference Programme

## ▪ Wednesday, 14 October 2026

| Throughout the day | Arrival of participants |
|---|---|
| **17.00–17.10** | **Welcome Address**<br>**Victor Neumann** – Scientific Director of the Project<br>**Ruxandra Demetrescu** – Professor, National University of Arts Bucharest, former Rector |
| **17.30–18.00** | **Victor Neumann** · opening keynote<br>*Begriffsgeschichte/History of Concepts: Its Role in the Reform of Romanian Historiography* |
| **18.00–18.30** | Discussion |
| **19.30–21.00** | **Dinner** |

## ▪ Thursday, 15 October 2026

| Session I | |
|---|---|
| **09.00–09.30** | **Andrei Marga** · Keynote Lecture<br>*The Contemporary Significance of the Concept of Freedom* |
| **09.30–10.00** | Discussion<br>*Chair:* ***Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu*** |
| **10.00–10.30** | **Hans Erich Bödeker** · Keynote Lecture<br>*History of Concepts as History of Knowledge* |
| **10.30–11.00** | Discussion<br>*Chair:* ***Victor Neumann*** |
| **11.00–11.30** | Coffee break |
| **Session II** | |
| **11.30–12.00** | **Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu**<br>*Sociology, a Science of the Nation? Metamorphoses of a Concept* |
| **12.00–12.30** | **Lucian Zeev Herşcovici**<br>*The Concept of Haskala (Jewish Enlightenment) and the Emancipation of the Jews in Romania* |
| **12.30–13.00** | Discussion<br>*Chair:* ***Andrei Marga*** |
| **13.00–14.00** | **Lunch** |

# Conference Programme

| Session III | |
|---|---|
| **14.00–14.30** | **Ruxandra Demetrescu**<br>*The Paradox of Freedom: A Study of Visual Art Production Under Totalitarian Regimes* |
| **14.30–15.00** | **Mario-Alexandru Grădinaru**<br>*From "Freedom" to the "Account of Humanity": The Meanings of the Concept of Freedom in Religious Discourse and the Romanian Press (1989–1990)* |
| **15.00–15.30** | **Irinel Daniela Iacob**<br>*The Transformation of the Concept of Art in Interwar Romanian Culture: From "New Art" to "Avant-Garde"* |
| **15.30–16.00** | Discussion<br>*Chair:* ***Sorin Ciutacu*** |
| **16.00–16.30** | Coffee break |
| **Session IV** | |
| **16.30–17.00** | **Cora Saurer**<br>*Kulturnation and Willensnation in Simion Bărnuțiu's Blaj Speech (May 1848)* |
| **17.00–17.30** | **Sorin Ciutacu**<br>*Conservatorismul românesc din perspectiva istoriei conceptuale* |
| **17.30–18.00** | **Damjan Selaković**<br>*Civilisation and Culture: An Investigation in Conceptual History* |
| **18.00–18.30** | **Attila Kardos**<br>*Monarchism: A Metavalue of the Organisational Culture of the Habsburg Army (1740–1914)* |
| **18.30–19.00** | **Alexandru Nan**<br>*Biopolitics, Sex Education and Modernisation in Romania in the 1900s* |
| **19.00–19.30** | Discussion<br>*Chair:* ***Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu*** |
| **19.30–21.30** | **Dinner** |

# Conference Programme

## ▪ Friday, 16 October 2026

| | |
|---|---|
| **Session I** | |
| **10.00–10.30** | **Gheorghe Schwartz** · Keynote Lecture<br>*Antisemitism: A Concept in Motion* |
| **10.30–11.00** | Discussion<br>*Chairs:* ***Andrei Marga, Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu, Victor Neumann*** |
| **11.00–11.30** | Coffee break |
| **Session II** | |
| **11.30–12.00** | **Horea Corneliu Oprean**<br>*Justice Between Truth and Fairness* |
| **12.00–12.30** | **Dacian Palladi**<br>*The Concept of Freemasonry in Romania: Between Myth and Modernity* |
| **12.30–13.00** | **Bogdan Ioja**<br>*The Concept of Memory in Romanian Family Discourse: Theological, Philological and Historical Meanings* |
| **13.00–13.30** | Discussion<br>*Chair:* ***Horea Corneliu Oprean*** |
| **13.30–15.00** | **Lunch** |
| **Session III** | |
| **14.30–15.00** | **Snezhana Dimitrova**<br>*'Catching up with Europe': A Trauma of Bulgarian National Identity. Some Thoughts on the Current Conditions of History Writings* |
| **15.30–16.00** | **Neil Titman**<br>*Navigating Today's "Cultural Channels": Notes from a Publisher* |
| **16.00–16.30** | Discussion<br>*Chair:* ***Sorin Ciutacu and Victor Neumann*** |
| **16.30–17.00** | Coffee break |

# Conference Programme

| Session IV | |
|---|---|
| **17.00–18.30** | **Round Table**<br>*Why a Lexicon of Fundamental Romanian Concepts?*<br>*Participants:* ***Andrei Marga, Ruxandra Demetrescu, Hans Erich Bödeker, Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu, Sorin Ciutacu, Snezhana Dimitrova and Victor Neumann*** |
| **19.00–22.00** | **Gala dinner** |

## ■ Saturday, 17 October 2026

| | |
|---|---|
| **09.00–12.00** | Departure of participants |

# Short Biographies of the Participants

### Hans Erich Bödeker

Hans Erich Bödeker is an emeritus research scholar who worked for many years at the Max Planck Institute for History in Göttingen (1977–2006) and the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science in Berlin (2006–2009). His research covers cultural history, the history of the book, political theory, science and music in the early modern period, as well as conceptual history. He edited Begriffsgeschichte, Diskursgeschichte, Metapherngeschichte (2002) and co-edited works on the practice of the Enlightenment and the human sciences in Göttingen around 1800. He has been a fellow at NIAS and a visiting professor and researcher at institutions in the United States, France, Italy and Mexico. In 2006, Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest awarded him the titles of honorary professor and honorary doctorate.

### Sorin Ciutacu

Sorin Ciutacu holds a doctorate and is an associate professor in the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures at the West University of Timişoara. His teaching and research encompass English literature, German studies and cultural history. He is a member of a research and innovation centre within the department. The academic profile provided for the conference highlights his interest in bringing the study of modern languages and literatures into dialogue with cultural history.

### Silvelia Ruxandra Demetrescu

Silvelia Ruxandra Demetrescu is a professor in the Department of Art History and Theory at the National University of Arts in Bucharest. She earned her doctorate in art history and theory with research on the theory of "Reine Sichtbarkeit" and the artistic context of 1875–1900. At the same university, she served as Vice-Rector (1999–2003), Rector (2004–2006) and Director of the Doctoral School (2012–2013). From 2006 to 2012 she held the Arnheim Professorship at Humboldt University in Berlin and

received research fellowships at New Europe College and the Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna. Her recent publications address visuality, the materiality of images, women's artistic production and Aby Warburg's intellectual legacy.

### Snezhana Dimitrova

Snezhana Dimitrova is Professor of Balkan History at South-West University "Neofit Rilski" in Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria, and editor-in-chief of the journal *Balkanistic Forum*. She holds a PhD in History from Sofia University and has taught and undertaken academic appointments at University College London, Paul Valéry University in Montpellier, and Le Mirail University in Toulouse. Her research encompasses reflexive history, gender studies, microhistory, and the history of emotions, with a particular focus on the social experience of war, epidemics and public health policies, as well as the role of collective emotions in diplomacy. She is the author of books and studies on the Balkan Wars, the First World War, and the relationship between social life, memory, and political power.

### Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu

Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu holds a PhD in Sociology from the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) in Paris and is Professor Emeritus at Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iaşi. He is an associate member of the Centre de Sociologie Européenne and the Centre d'Études de l'Emploi et du Travail in Paris, as well as editor-in-chief of the journal *Psihologia Socială*. His most recent co-edited volume, prepared together with Simona Corlan-Ioan and Abel Kouvouama, is *Itinéraires des élites africaines dans le monde. Réseaux et transferts entre diasporas et «petites sociétés»*, published by Alexandru Ioan Cuza University Press in Iaşi in 2021.

### Mario-Alexandru Grădinaru

Mario-Alexandru Grădinaru is a graduate of the Bachelor's programme in History at Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca and is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Translation and Interpreting at the West University of Timișoara. His Bachelor's thesis, entitled *Deng Xiaoping: A Pragmatic Leader or an Opportunist?*, was written under the supervision

of Professor Virgiliu-Leon Ţârău. He has published a study on Steaua Bucharest's achievement of the first Eastern European victory in the European Cup in the *Yearbook of the Seminar Introduction to the Contemporary History of Romania*.

### Lucian Zeev Herşcovici

Lucian Zeev Herşcovici is a historian and specialist librarian at the National Library of Israel in Jerusalem. He graduated in history from Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iaşi and earned his doctorate from Paul-Valéry University in Montpellier in 2009, with a thesis on the Haskalah movement among Romanian Jews. He taught Hebrew in Montpellier and was a visiting lecturer in Jewish history at Babeş-Bolyai University. His research and publications explore Jewish intellectual and cultural history, including influences of the Haskalah from Galicia and Bukovina. He contributed to the Encyclopaedia of the Jews in Romania (2012) and the volume Iuliu Barasch: A Jewish Enlightenment Thinker in Wallachia (2022). The Romanian Academy awarded him the Eudoxiu Hurmuzaki Prize in 2010.

### Irinel Daniela Iacob

Irinel Daniela Iacob is a visual artist and, since 2024, the representative for Romania of the International Council for Art within UNOTA and an ambassador for VISION ART MEDIA in New York. Her paintings have been shown in exhibitions in Romania, Ecuador, Argentina, Italy, Spain, France, the United Kingdom, South Korea, India, Bulgaria and the United States. She has received international distinctions including the Leonardo Da Vinci Award (2023 and 2025), the Botticelli Award (2024), the International Paris Prize (2022) and the International Caravaggio Prize (2022). Her works are held in museum collections in Romania, Bulgaria and South Korea. Her exhibition activity and participation in international artistic initiatives give her career an intercultural dimension.

### Bogdan Ioja

Bogdan Ioja is a philologist and theologian, a graduate of "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad and the West University of Timişoara, where he is currently pursuing a Master's degree in American Studies. His research

lies in the fields of cultural studies and ethnology and has received First Prize in the Cultural Studies–Ethnology section of the *Bucharest Best Letters Colloquia* for two consecutive years. He is also a poet and essayist, with works published in literary journals and collective anthologies, and was awarded First Prize for essay writing at the "Bogdania" International Festival and Competition. He currently works as an editor at Sens Publishing House in Arad, where he writes prefaces and translates works of literary and cultural interest.

### Attila Kardos

Attila Kardos holds a doctorate in history from the West University of Timișoara. His research concerns the military history of the Banat in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, an important period for understanding the region's institutional and territorial transformations. This specialisation contributes to the study of the Banat's past through military organisation and the historical context in which it developed. The CV provided identifies his field of research and the institution where he earned his doctorate.

### Andrei Marga

Andrei Marga is a professor at Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, with interests in contemporary philosophy and argumentation theory. He undertook specialist study in Germany and the United States and taught in Munich, Vienna, Montpellier and Jerusalem. He is a recipient of the International Herder Prize and other international distinctions. His work combines the analysis of contemporary philosophical currents with research into argumentation and the development of his own philosophical perspective. He published Argumentation (2005), the surveys Introduction to Contemporary Philosophy (2016) and Philosophy of the Present (2025), and The World as Action (2026), which systematises what he calls "reflexive pragmatism".

### Alexandru Nan

Alexandru Nan graduated from the Faculty of History and Philosophy at Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca. He completed his undergraduate history degree in 2026 as the top student in his cohort. His university

training in history places him among a younger generation participating in discussions about interpretations of the past and methods of historical research. The CV provided records these studies and his academic achievement upon graduation.

### Victor Neumann

Victor Neumann is a historian and professor of the history of European culture and civilisation at the West University of Timişoara and the National University of Arts in Bucharest. He is a member of Academia Europaea. Together with Professor Armin Heinen, he founded the Reinhart Koselleck International Doctoral School of Conceptual History at the West University of Timişoara. His research concerns the intellectual history of Central and South-Eastern Europe, conceptual history, Romanian and European political identities, and the multicultural and intercultural features of the Banat. His publications include The Temptation of Homo Europaeus: An Intellectual History of Central and South-Eastern Europe; Kin, People or Nation?; Ideology and Phantasmagoria; and The Conceptualisation of History and the Limits of the National Paradigm. Alone or with other scholars, he edited volumes such as The History of Romania through Concepts and The History of the Banat, which have also appeared in international editions.

### Horea Corneliu Oprean

Horea Corneliu Oprean is a lawyer, former judge and professor at the Faculty of Law of Vasile Goldiş University in Arad. He was President of the Arad District Court from 1997 to 2002, an experience that complements his teaching and writing in law. His books include Criminology (1996), The History of Romanian Law (1997), Introduction to the Study of Law (1998) and Introduction to Cosmic Law (2001); some have been reprinted several times. He received the National Medal for Merit in 1999 and the Judicial Merit distinction in 2001. His career combines legal practice, court administration and the study of legal history and the foundations of the discipline.

### Dacian Salvator Palladi

Dacian Salvator Palladi is a lawyer and legal and economic consultant who graduated from the Faculty of Law at Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca. His career encompasses public administration, university teaching and parliamentary work: he served as City Manager of Oradea, a lecturer at the Faculty of Law of the University of Oradea, and a parliamentary adviser. He holds a doctorate and has written legal works including Roman Private Law (1995) and Civil Law: Succession (1996). These activities give him a perspective on the application of law both in institutional practice and in teaching and explaining legal concepts.

### Cora Saurer

Cora Saurer studied Romance linguistics, specialising in Romanian and French, at the West University of Timişoara. In the early 1990s, she studied semiotics at the International School of Semiotics in Urbino under Professor Umberto Eco. Her professional experience includes teaching languages at the University of Bern and working as a multilingual translator for the Swiss Confederation. Her doctoral thesis approached cultural history through a comparative analysis of educational policies in multilingual settings. She teaches multilingualism in the modern history department at Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca. Her recent publications include a study of George Barit and an article on language choice as social action in Transylvania, the Banat and Switzerland.

### Gheorghe Schwartz

Gheorghe Schwartz is a professor of philosophy and social sciences at Aurel Vlaicu University in Arad, a research scholar and a member of the Romanian Writers' Union. His work combines literary creation with scholarly and university pursuits. According to the biography provided, he has published 54 books and several thousand articles, and his writings have appeared in publications and with publishers in 17 countries. For his cultural contribution, he was awarded the Order of Cultural Merit at the rank of Commander, as well as prose prizes from the Romanian Writers' Union and the Romanian Academy. The diversity of his work reflects his interests in literature, philosophical reflection and the social sciences.

### Damjan Selaković

Damjan Selaković graduated from the Applied Modern Languages programme at the West University of Timişoara, where he studied English and French. He is currently pursuing a master's degree in foreign languages applied to European business at Sorbonne University in Paris. In extracurricular activities, he has helped promote the Romanian language, culture and civilisation and raise the visibility of Romanian communities in Serbia, his country of birth. For this conference, he prepared a paper on the concepts of "civilisation" and "culture". He is also working on a monograph on the historical, cultural and rhetorical conditions that make political legitimacy possible. His interests bring together language study, reflection on concepts and research into political discourse.

### Neil Titman

Neil Titman is Managing Director of Kulturalis Ltd, a publishing house he founded in 2023 to publish works on world cultures. He has almost 30 years of experience in British publishing: first in the editorial department of The Folio Society, then in developing publishing programmes for Third Millennium Publishing and Scala Arts & Heritage Publishers. For nearly a decade he produced publications for museums, galleries and other heritage institutions across Europe, Asia and North America. At Kulturalis, he oversees the development of projects in Central and Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Central and South-Eastern Asia, Africa and the Americas. He holds a doctorate in French and Latin literature and speaks several European languages.

# Presentation Abstracts

**Hans Erich Bödeker**

*Conceptual History as a History of Knowledge*

This paper proposes reconsidering conceptual history as a history of knowledge, developing a dimension identified by Reinhart Koselleck, Rolf Reichardt and other scholars in the field. Its starting point is the plurality of forms of knowledge, constituted socially and historically within competing discourses. Language and knowledge are interdependent: communication participates in the constitution, assessment and circulation of knowledge, while the concept is understood as a tool of thought and argument, tied to concrete language use. From this perspective, a historiographical history of concepts as a history of knowledge calls for a new theoretical collaboration between semantics and hermeneutics.

**Sorin Ciutacu**

*Romanian Conservatism from the Perspective of Conceptual History*

This research considers the social and political language of Romanian conservatism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries from the perspective of Koselleckian conceptual history. Romanian conservatism reflects the tension between the "horizon of expectation" of Western modernisation and the "space of experience" of a predominantly rural society attached to cultural continuity. "Forms without substance" diagnoses the mismatch between imported institutions and social structure; the "social organism" values hierarchy and treats sudden change as an anomaly. The state is viewed as a guarantor of balance, and the nation as a historical inheritance. The paper attends to the historical evolution of the Romanian concept and shows how social and political languages do not reject modernity, but subordinate it to continuity, making the pace of change a central political issue.

**Silvelia Ruxandra Demetrescu**

*The Paradox of Freedom: Artistic Creation under Totalitarian Regimes*

This paper examines the autonomy of art in the final decade of Romania's communist regime and asks to what extent creative freedom was possible beyond official art. Drawing on Hannah Arendt's reflections, the author distinguishes between art conceived as the production of a high-quality object and art as a space for social claims and political contestation. The artist's studio may seem a place of freedom, but its autonomy remains precarious without the guarantees of the rule of law and depends on the regime's arbitrary will. Another paradox arises when artistic practice becomes public action and a form of civil disobedience: freedom manifests itself in the gathering and collective action of those who challenge power. The analysis connects the images and discourses of the period, using the early works of the artist Iosif Király as a case study.

**Snezhana Dimitrova**

*"Catching Up with Europe": A Trauma of Bulgarian National Identity. Reflections on the Present Conditions of Writing History*

Is it still possible today to write history from the perspective of a shared European experience beyond the East–West divide? Beginning with the generational experience of a failure—our confrontation with a traumatic history dominated by images of violence, defeat, catastrophe and suffering—the author examines the Bulgarian case. As a professional historian active during the transition (1989–2007) and afterwards, I took part in efforts to rewrite Bulgarian history in search of a European identity. With several colleagues, we sought to decommunise national history, confront the communist legacy and recover traumatic sites of historical memory. We hoped to achieve these aims by adopting new historiographical paradigms, opening archives and recovering memories suppressed by communist discourse. Nothing happened as we had imagined. Why have we been unable to move beyond either Marxism and the reformist historical discourse of the 1980s or the traumas of Bulgarian collective memory? Why, instead of recovering a positive memory of relations between national identity and Europe and reintegrating Bulgaria into the European space, have we insisted on "catching up with Europe", thereby emphasising the difficulty of achieving

this goal precisely? Ultimately, Europe became the significant "other" against which Bulgarian national identity was constructed negatively, by invoking an "ancestral heritage" marked by anti-European pathos and the "fossils" of ethnonationalism. Answers to these questions lead to reflection on the present condition of historiography as a concept in Bulgaria. Could reflexive history offer a way to free regional historiography from the complexes that have led it to be seen chiefly as a field of empirical achievement rather than theoretical construction?

**Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu**

*Sociology, a Science of the Nation? The Metamorphoses of a Concept*

This paper traces the emergence and transformations of the concept of a "science of the nation" in Dimitrie Gusti's work. Although the nation appears in his earliest writings, the phrase was not explicitly established until 1937, in the journal Sociologie românească. Gusti understands the nation as a social unit realised through collective will and regards knowledge of it as a mission of social science. The analysis compares this ambition with the practice of the Bucharest Sociological School: monographic research concentrated on rural communities, while the nation remained primarily an aim of theoretical construction. The paper situates the concept's establishment amid the political crisis of the 1930s and recalls the dual orientation of Gusti's sociology, theoretical and applied, expressed in the phrases sociologia cogitans and sociologia militans.

**Mario-Alexandru Gădinaru**

*From "Freedom" to the "Account of Humanity": The Meanings of the Concept of Freedom in Religious Discourse and the Romanian Press (1989–1990)*

In the first days following the collapse of Nicolae Ceaușescu's regime, "freedom" emerged as one of the central concepts in Romanian public discourse. Initially understood predominantly in political terms—as liberation from dictatorship and a break with the communist order—the concept gradually acquired new meanings, becoming associated with social solidarity, support for the victims of the Revolution, and the assumption of moral responsibility towards the community and the common good.

This study examines this semantic transformation and diversification through the case of the "Libertatea 1989 Account" and the involvement of the Romanian Orthodox Church, as well as other religious communities, in the donation campaign. The central research question is how "freedom" evolved from a political concept expressing victory over dictatorship into a principle of collective mobilisation and, subsequently, into an instrument through which certain institutions asserted their position within the new political order.

**Lucian Zeev Herşcovici**

*Concepts Relating to the Haskalah Movement and the Emancipation of Jews in Romania*

This paper analyses the vocabulary of the Haskalah, or Jewish Enlightenment, in Romania outside the Carpathians and in Romanian-Jewish historiography. Emerging here later than in Galicia and Russia, the movement drew on concepts in Hebrew, Yiddish, German and French, translated and adapted into Romanian. The first generation of maskilim, which included Iuliu Barasch, introduced themes of modernisation and emancipation; the generation active in the 1880s and 1890s advanced civic claims more emphatically and contributed to Romanian-language culture. The author examines the meanings of concepts such as "emancipation", "progress", "choral temple" and "Romanian Israelite", as well as interest in the antiquity of Jewish communities in Romania. Finally, he studies reinterpretations of the Haskalah in interwar historiography and in the works of historians originally from Romania who settled in Israel.

**Irinel Daniela Iacob**

*From "New Art" to "Avant-Garde": The Transformation of the Concept of Art in Interwar Romanian Culture*

This paper traces how "new art", "modern art", "avant-garde" and "avant-gardism" were introduced and contested in interwar Romanian culture. Its central question concerns the changing meaning of art in Romania: from beauty, representation and aesthetic autonomy to experiment, revolt and social transformation. From the standpoint of conceptual history, the research examines the transfer of "avant-garde" from military and political

language into art, and the distinction between the avant-garde's radical stance and its subsequent classification as "avant-gardism". Contributions by artists and authors including Marcel Iancu, Victor Brauner, M. H. Maxy, Hans Mattis-Teutsch, Tristan Tzara, Ilarie Voronca, Ion Vinea and Saşa Pană are analysed. The magazines Contimporanul, Punct, Integral, 75 HP and unu illustrate interdisciplinary dialogue among painting, literature, graphic art, architecture and performance.

**Bogdan Ioja**

*The Concept of Memory in Romanian Family Discourse: Theological, Philological and Historical Meanings*

Based on interviews with members of rural communities in Arad, this paper analyses memory as a moral act of remembrance and testimony, rather than merely a record of the past. It examines accounts of the interwar period, war, collectivisation and urbanisation. From a philological perspective, regional speech preserves terms of everyday experience that resist administrative categories and the ideological language of the communist regime. From a theological perspective, painful events are interpreted through notions such as trial, providential order and bearing one's cross; the loss of land acquires the meaning of an experience of moral resistance. Understood as martyria, recollection of the past unites faith, local language and personal biography and shows how speakers negotiate the distance between official political discourse and lived life.

**Attila Kardos**

*Monarchism as a Conceptual Metavalue of the Habsburg Army's Organisational Culture (1740–1914)*

This paper examines monarchism as a language and central value of the Habsburg army from Maria Theresa's accession to the outbreak of the First World War. Loyalty to the sovereign ordered the military hierarchy, transformed service into a moral duty and provided a common point of reference for soldiers from different territories, confessions and language communities. This loyalty was associated with concepts such as religious and national tolerance, competence, civility and the duty to educate subordinates. The Theresian reforms professionalised dynastic service;

the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars connected the monarch to the defence of imperial territories; and the crisis of 1848–49 revealed both the strength and the limits of allegiance. After 1867, the common oath and the figure of Franz Joseph I sustained the army's unity, increasingly challenged by nationalisms. Monarchism remained the normative axis of official culture, though it was not shared identically by all soldiers.

**Andrei Marga**

*The Contemporary Significance of Freedom*

This paper examines historical interpretations of freedom to establish the contemporary significance of individual freedom. The author argues for the relevance of "creative freedom" and discusses it in relation to different historical and contemporary experiences: the emergence of German idealism, illustrated by Hölderlin; American "social individualism", associated with Brandeis; the emancipation of Jews in Germany in connection with Mendelssohn; the experience of the city of Shenzhen; and the challenges posed by artificial intelligence. These examples seek to clarify how individual freedom can be understood and exercised today.

**Alexandru Nan**

*Medical Discourse and the Modernisation of Romanian Society: The Meanings of the Term Syphilis*

This paper traces the evolution of Romanian medical discourse on syphilis in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Based on writings by C. I. Istrati, Victor Babeș and Eraclie Sterian, it examines the disease both as a public health issue and as an expression of the anxieties of a society undergoing modernisation. Istrati and Babeș associate syphilis with the nation's health and future; this biopolitical perspective supports medical controls, expanded care and more rigorous health statistics, but also stigmatises groups presented as the "other". In Educația sexelor [Education of the Sexes] (1907), Sterian shifts the emphasis towards information, prevention and sex education instead of shame and blame directed at people with the disease. The contrast between these approaches shows how discourse about disease contributed to defining Romanian modernity.

**Victor Neumann**

*Begriffsgeschichte/Conceptual History: Its Role in the Reform of Romanian Historiography*

What intersections has historiography had with the ideologies of the modern world, particularly those of twentieth-century totalitarian political systems? Is a multi-perspective view of Romania's history useful today? Beyond administrative changes and declarations, there are many examples – especially in a former communist state – of interpretations of the past that reveal continuity from one political system to another. Collective memory is also preserved through official memory policy. Koselleck argued that politics is inspired by historians' controversies. Because of disputes over method, but also a frequent failure to recognise the role of concepts in reforming vocabulary and social and political thought, history has remained a discipline not only of disputes but also of ideas through which ideologies of state authority are propagated. The tragedies of the past – especially Romania's recent past, still alive in the memories of its survivors – cannot be concealed or transferred away once personal experiences are taken into account.

**Horea Corneliu Oprean**

*Justice Between Truth and Fairness*

This paper traces the evolution of the concept of justice in Romania from the nineteenth century to the present, distinct from a general history of Romanian law. The author relates legal institutions to the philosophical notions of truth and fairness and asks whether the application of law is sufficient to achieve them. Justice is considered both as society's response to antisocial acts and as the exercise of state authority in resolving civil and criminal cases. The analysis begins with early legal codes in Moldavia and Wallachia, then focuses on the evolution of modern criminal legislation and systems of punishment. From this perspective, it discusses changes in the relationship among social protection, truth, fairness and state power.

**Dacian Salvator Palladi**

*Freemasonry in Romania: History, Elites, Modernisation and Myth*

How can we reconstruct the history of Freemasonry in the Romanian lands in relation to political modernisation, elite networks and institutional transformation? Lodges offered settings for sociability, trust and the circulation of ideas, especially in the nineteenth century, but individual Freemasons' participation in historical events does not prove that the organisation pursued a coordinated strategy. The analysis traces changes in the meanings of the Romanian concepts of liberty, equality and fraternity, and distinguishes legitimate solidarity from the risk of favouritism. It examines both the myth that attributes all achievements of modern Romania to Freemasonry and the myth that makes it an occult explanation for crises. For the post-communist period, the author proposes the notion of "reconstructed continuity". The conclusion argues for critical assessment of documents and for distinguishing facts from probabilities, traditions and myths.

**Cora Saurer**

*Kulturnation and Willensnation in Simion Bărnuțiu's Blaj Speech (May 1848)*

Can Simion Bărnuțiu's speech of May 1848 be reread through the concepts of Kulturnation and Willensnation? How do we account for the meeting of linguistic and historical identity with the political will to secure rights, equality and constitutional recognition? Collective will does not create the nation; it acts in the name of a community perceived as already existing. The presentation will highlight the political meanings of terms and concepts in Romanian Transylvanian discourse of 1848, including representation, participation and sovereignty, together with the idea of coexistence in a federation. It compares Bărnuțiu's position with the reactions of Transylvanian Saxons and identifies overlaps between Romanian concepts of identity and European political thought.

**Gheorghe Schwartz**

*"Antisemitism": A Concept in Motion*

This paper begins with the renewed public debate about the existence of the State of Israel, the acknowledgement or denial of the Holocaust, and the place of Jews in the world. The author notes that antisemitic attitudes

have reappeared in different historical and political contexts, with motives that change over time. Against this background, we propose a case study of the situation of Jews in Austria-Hungary, focusing on the Banat, to bring out the mobility of the meanings and manifestations of "antisemitism". The analysis connects regional history with contemporary debates about prejudice, memory and politics.

**Damjan Selaković**

*Civilisation and Culture: An Investigation in Conceptual History*

This paper explores the relationship between the concepts of "civilisation" and "culture" and their role in how communities understand their historical experience. Instead of universal, stable definitions, the author proposes reconstructing the intellectual and historical contexts in which the two notions were distinguished, brought together or contested. Is a change in their relationship accompanied by changes in how a community describes its past and social world? The Romanian conceptual pair civilisation–culture becomes a case study of the broader connection between conceptual change and the reinterpretation of collective experience.

**Neil Titman**

*Navigating the "Cultural Channels" of the Present*

Drawing on the analysis of the circulation of texts and the role of libraries in spreading ideas in Victor Neumann's Tentaţia lui Homo Europaeus/The Temptation of Homo Europaeus, this paper examines the present-day successors of these "cultural channels": academic, institutional and general-interest publishers. The author discusses publishers' responsibility for transmitting ideas and values in a dynamic cultural landscape subject to pressure from various interest groups. Drawing on his experience as a British publisher of works for art and heritage institutions across several world regions, especially Central and Eastern Europe, he examines both the advantages and limitations of being an external collaborator supporting academic and cultural institutions in Romania and neighbouring countries.

# List of Participants and Contact Details

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# Venue and accommodation

### Casa Calfelor Kolping

Casa Calfelor Kolping Str. Dr. Ioan Bonţilă nr. 12–14, 300315 Timişoara, România

According to the programme provided, the opening and conference sessions take place here. The venue has conference spaces and facilities for breaks and meals. The organisers will confirm the exact room.

Contact: +40 757 021 716 · *casacalfelor@kolping.ro*
Venue information: *https://herctm.org/ro/venue/*

### Accommodation

Casa Calfelor Kolping offers accommodation in the same building as the conference spaces. The HERC venue page lists 42 rooms and four apartments, rated three stars, as well as parking and internet access. For invited participants, room assignments, the number of nights, breakfast and payment arrangements must be confirmed by the organisers; the programme does not provide these details.

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Source for hotel information: *https://herctm.org/ro/venue/*

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