

## Fall 25: Protests, Social Transformations, and the EU: Rethinking the Balkans for Ukraine

**Time: 17.00 CET / 18.00 (Kyiv time)**

**ZOOM link** <https://ceu-edu.zoom.us/j/93598293189> - **NEW LINK WILL BE ISSUED!!!**

**Meeting ID: 935 9829 3189**

**Passcode: 283695** 



The southeastern peninsula of the European continent, more commonly known under the loaded term Balkans, is a region of astonishing ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity, where some of the greatest empires and political blocs have bordered each other. This semester the course focuses on protests and social transformations in the context of EU integration, drawing parallels with Ukraine. It highlights different dimensions of past and present civil, intellectual, labor, academic, student, feminist, and environmental resistances aimed at political and social change in the Balkans. The specificities of different resistances will be discussed, along with their regional and transnational connections. Issues of identity, including language, belonging, religion in the Balkans, and dealing with the past, as well as their connection to social movements and protests will be likewise addressed through the series of lectures. The relationships between protests and social transformations, particularly in the context of the rise of authoritarian regimes and populism, on the one hand, and EU integration, on the other will be explored.

## Course codirectors

- ♦ Marija Mandić (University of Belgrade), marija.mail@gmail.com
- ♦ Olesia Marković (Kyiv-Mohyla Academy), olesia.markovic@gmail.com

## Course coordinator

- ♦ Aleksandar Pavlović (University of Belgrade), pavlaleks@gmail.com

## Mentors

- ♦ Ivana Mihaela Žimbek, Maksym Snihyr, Damir Zejnulahović, Ivana Milićević

## Format

The course would combine theoretical approaches with practical insights, resting on lectures, discussions, workshops, individual assignments and mentoring of students of social sciences and humanities from Ukraine and the region of Southeastern Europe, in complementarity with their original studies. The course consists of 12 lectures and mentoring sessions.

## Requirements

- Attendance and informed participation in class discussions
- One-page insight

## Recommended readings

Maria Todorova (1994) The Balkans: From Discovery to Invention. *Slavic Review*, 53 (2): 453–482.  
Dejan Jović: “The Disintegration of Yugoslavia: A Critical Review of Explanatory Approaches”, *European Journal of Social Theory*, 2001, No 4, 101-120.

## LECTURES

### I OPENING LECTURE

**October, 3 2025**

In the first lecture, we will introduce the course structure, present the curriculum, and introduce the course directors, coordinator, mentors, and students. We will discuss plans for the semester, mentoring, and student expectations.

Marija Mandić (University of Belgrade)  
Olesia Marković (Kyiv-Mohyla Academy)  
Aleksandar Pavlović (University of Belgrade)

## **I MODULE “STUDENT AND CIVIC PROTESTS AND RESISTANCES”**

### **II October, 10**

Title: “Students and civic protests in Serbia - their organization, European and transnational dimension”

Lecturer: Jelena Vasiljević, Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory University Belgrade

**Discussants: Ivana Milićević, Tara Tepavac**

Moderator: Marija Mandić

Suggested readings:

Bibere, Kmezić, Pollozhani: The Future of the Protests and Democracy in Serbia, BiEPAG publication  
Adriana Zaharijević, Serbia's students are showing the world how to restore democratic hope, *Guardian*, 6. February 2025.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/feb/06/serbias-students-showing-world-democratic-hope>  
Katarina Beširević (2025), “Nisi nadležan”: How a Student Movement Dictates Political Change in Serbia (2024/2025), *Contemporary Southeastern Europe* 2025, 12(1): 30-38.  
Knežević, Aleksandra (2025), "An Autoethnographic Account of the Anti-Corruption Student Protests in Serbia 2024/25", *Contemporary Southeastern Europe*, 12(1), 51-61.

### **III October, 17**

Title: “From Mobilization to Limited Transformation – The Unfulfilled Dreams of the Colorful Revolution in Macedonia”

Lecturer: Ivan Stefanovski, University American College Skopje

**Discussant:**

Moderator: Olesija Marković

Since 2013, Macedonian society has experienced multiple cycles of protest advocating for comprehensive social transformation grounded in the principles of rule of law, anti-corruption, de-partization of institutions, meritocracy, and protection of human rights. These mobilizations initially emerged in opposition to the authoritarian tendencies of Nikola Gruevski’s government,

which led to Macedonia being characterized as a "captured state." The protest movement reached its peak with the Colorful Revolution, a pivotal moment that symbolized aspirations for positive societal change and significantly raised public expectations following the regime change in 2017. However, the subsequent dissolution of the Special Prosecutor's Office (SPO), the incomplete reform of the security and judicial apparatus, and a series of corruption scandals involving the SDSM-led government revealed the persistent fragility of democratic governance in the country. This lecture will critically examine the movement's claims, policy outputs, and policy outcomes associated with the Colorful Revolution, assessing its "relative success" within the broader context of democratization in North Macedonia. Additionally, it will contextualize the 2016 mobilization by addressing both preceding and subsequent mobilizations, including most recent protests against corruption in the aftermath of the Kochani tragedy.

Recommended readings: ferences:

Crăciun, C., & Rammelt, H. P. (Eds.). (2025). Power and protest in Central and Eastern Europe. Palgrave Macmillan.

Stefanovski, I. (2025). North Macedonia—Two sides of the same coin pleading for democratisation from below. In Power and protest in Central and Eastern Europe (pp. 191-216). Springer Nature.

Pollozhani, L., & Bieber, F. (2025). Protests for change: Mass protests against competitive authoritarian regimes in the Western Balkans. *Third World Quarterly* 46(2), 193-214.

#### **IV October, 24**

Title: “Ecoprotests in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Albania”

Lecturers: Aida Kapetanović, Centre on Social Movement Studies (Cosmos), Scuola Normale Superiore, Florence, Italy., Tibissai Guevara-Braun, postdoctoral fellow at University of Strasbourg, Interdisciplinary Thematic Institute MAKerS “Making European Society”.

Moderator: Marija Mandić

Faced with the dual pressures of EU accession and climate change mitigation, Western Balkan countries have committed to a green transition while transposing EU environmental *acquis*. The EU Green Agenda for the Western Balkans has led to a proliferation of hydropower projects. While promoted as renewable, these projects have had significant socio-environmental effects, fostering the marginalization of affected communities and their exclusion from decision-making. At the same time, many accounts of backsliding in terms of environmental protection have affected protected areas in Western Balkan candidate countries without the EU calling into question their accession process. Local struggles have emerged across the region's peripheries, gaining support from environmental NGOs and experts, which has allowed them to scale their efforts to the national and regional levels. This lecture will use political science and a sociological lens to examine distinct case studies from the region. This first part will examine the development of river protection movements in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. It will

explore how framing strategies have facilitated community mobilization and trans-local coalition-building. It will investigate how environmental struggles are fostering the reaffirmation and transformation of collective identities, challenging dominant localist and nationalist narratives. The second case study on Albanian environmental activism will discuss the interplay of biodiversity and habitat degradation and democratic corrosion in the framework of a stalling Enlargement process. It will explore how Albanian environmental CSOs and NGOs have crafted europeanized and internationalized campaigning strategies and engaged in environmental legal lawfare while lamenting the lack of substantial EU political backing.

#### Recommended readings

Kurtović, L. (2022). Riverine Struggles Against Plunder and Dispossession: Water Defenders in Postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina. *Europe Now Journal*. 18th May 2022

<https://www.europenowjournal.org/2022/05/17/riverine-struggles-against-plunder-and-dispossession-water-defenders-in-postwar-bosnia-herzegovina/>

Rajković, I. (2023). Whose death, whose eco-revival? Filling in while emptying out the depopulated Balkan Mountains. *Focaal: European Journal of Anthropology*, 2023(96), 71-87. <https://doi.org/10.3167/fcl.2023.960106>

Freund, P., Gjini, P., Cham Kee, C., Malaj, D., Schönthaler, S. (2021). « Local Resistance in Environmental Struggles: The Case of Zall-Gjoçaj, Albania, Event Analysis ». *Contemporary Southeastern Europe*. Vol.9. Nr1. Pp. 65-77. DOI 10.25364/02.9:2022.1.5.

Malaj, D., Pali, B. (2024). “We Will Persevere Until Justice Prevails”: Mapping Criminalised Environmental Resistance in Albania. In: Di Ronco, A., Selmini, R. (eds) *Criminalisation of Dissent in Times of Crisis. Critical Criminological Perspectives*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-75376-3\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-75376-3_5)

#### IV October, 31

Title: “Anti-gender Mobilizations: Backlash or Project?”

Lecturer: Adriana Zaharijević, Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory University of Belgrade

#### Discussant:

Moderator: Marija Mandić

It has become quite common to refer to anti-gender mobilizations as a form of backlash. We find such references in scholarly papers, as well as in policy bills issued by relevant European and international bodies, aiming to understand and prevent, now it seems, the unstoppable rise of right-wing politics. Together with backlash, the notion that signals that things have changed for the worse - and that they used to be better or even good before, anti-gender mobilizations are

subsumed under the vague notion of populism. I want to question these trends. The vantage point I am taking is related to the current students' protests in Serbia and to Trump's second term, which began with the notorious Project 2025, itself strongly articulated around gender. The talk is organized in a form of auto-ethnographic reflection on the last nine years of my work on anti-gender issues, mainly but not exclusively in Serbia. I want to show that the notion of backlash does not apply, while the notion of populism obscures the political events on ground. This is where the East/West divide comes in handy. Instead, I propose we see anti-gender today, in Serbia and elsewhere, as a form of project, or a political strategy of those in power, used when and so long as it is opportune, discarded when it is not.

Recommended readings:

<https://link.springer.com/book/9783031924125>

## II MODULE “PRESENT, FUTURE AND EU INTEGRATION”

### VI November 7

Title: “Watershed: Political Protest, Unski Život, and Riverine Citizenship in the Balkans”

Lecturer: Azra Hromadžić, Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs

**Dicussant:**

Moderator: Olesija Marković

Drawing on long-term ethnographic and archival research, this project explores people–river conviviality and the concept of riverine citizenship (Hromadžić 2024) in the Bosnian city of Bihać. At the heart of this inquiry lies the Una River—a vibrant, sensorial, and agentic presence that is simultaneously a subject of human affection, desire, intervention, and destruction. The lives of Bihać’s residents are deeply entangled with the river’s rhythms and flows, revealing a mode of being locally known as *unski život*, or “the Una style of life.” *Unski život* is more than a cultural expression—it is a way of inhabiting the world that binds people, institutions, land, and biota into overlapping civic relations. This orientation gives rise to *riverine citizenship*, a form of belonging and responsibility rooted not in allegiance to an ethnic group, city, or state, but in a shared commitment to the river itself. For many in Bihać, this connection is what anchors them to place. These insights raise urgent questions: How can we think and enact politics in ways that account for multispecies entanglements—such as those between the Una River and its human cohabitants? And what implications might this have for policy-making in an environmentally and

socially precarious world? To explore these questions, I begin with a specific site: the spring of the Una River in Croatia, and the transborder, transpolitical protest it sparked in summer 2024. This moment offers a lens through which to examine how human and more-than-human alliances can shape political action and inform more ecologically attuned policy interventions.

**Readings:** The book *Riverine Citizenship: A Bosnian City in Love with the River Citizens of an Empty Nation: Youth and State-Making in Postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina* *Care Across Distance: Ethnographic Exploration of Aging and Migration* is open access. Recommended readings are *Chapters 4 and 5*. If time allows, we recommended also *Chapters 3 and 6*.

## **VII November 14**

Title: “EU integration, informality and clientelism practices in Albania”

Lecturers: Enriketa Papa-Pandelejmoni, Gentiana Kera, University Tirana

Moderator: Olesija Marković

This lecture provides an overview on EU integration, informality and clientelist practices in Albania and their expressions in everyday life. Using survey and ethnographic data, we discuss citizens’ perceptions and practices towards informality, highlighting the domains where informality permeates everyday life. The lecture will specifically address the organization of free and fair elections as an essential element of a functioning democracy and for Albania’s EU accession process. We discuss several issues related to clientelist practices and private funding of electoral campaigns and the ways in which private funding of electoral campaigns works in practice.

Recommended readings:

Chapters 1, 6 and 7 in the book *Meaningful Reform in the Western Balkans. Between Formal Institutions and Informal Practices*, Eric Gordy and Adnan Efendić (Eds). Peter Lang.

Eric Gordy and Adnan Efendic (2019). “Engaging Policy to Address Gaps Between Formality and Informality in the Western Balkans” In *Meaningful Reform in the Western Balkans. Between Formal Institutions and Informal Practices*, Eric Gordy and Adnan Efendić (Eds), 7-20. Peter Lang.

Vjollca Krasniqi, Nenad Markovikj, Ilina Mangova, Enriketa Papa-Pandelejmoni and Jovan Bliznakovski. “Leaders’ Meetings: Facilitating or Replacing the Formal Political Processes in the Western Balkan Countries?” In *Meaningful Reform in the Western Balkans. Between Formal Institutions and Informal Practices*, Eric Gordy and Adnan Efendić (Eds), 117-132. Peter Lang.

Vjollca Krasniqi, Enriketa Papa-Pandelejmoni, Armanda Hysa and Gentiana Kera. “Informality and Everyday Life: How ‘Things Get Done’ in Contemporary Western Balkan Societies”. n *Meaningful*

*Reform in the Western Balkans. Between Formal Institutions and Informal Practices*, Eric Gordy and Adnan Efendić (Eds), 133-146. Peter Lang.

## **VIII November 21**

Title:

Lecturer: Čarna Brković, Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz

**Discussant:**

Moderator: Marija Mandić

## **IX November 28**

Title: “Skopje 2014 Project and the Antiquisation Narrative in Macedonia”

Lecturer: Ivan Dodovski, University American College Skopje

**Discussant:**

Moderator: Olesia Marković

With the breakup of the Yugoslav Federation, some Macedonians embarked upon a new definition of their ethno-genesis: though still maintaining the view about an amalgamation of ancient Macedonian and Slavonic roots, they started placing the emphasis upon the former, rather than the latter. This cultural tendency of the 1990s has morphed into an official social engineering in the 2000s. The lecture considers some of the causes that gave rise to this revised narrative of Macedonian national identity as illustrated in the Skopje 2014 project as well as in several fiction and dramatic works which had a wider resonance with the Macedonian public.

Suggested reading:

Georgievska-Jakovleva, L. (2023). The dissonant narratives of the Skopje 2024 project. In R. Hudson & I. Dodovski (Eds), *Macedonia's Long Transition: From Independence to the Prespa Agreement and Beyond* (pp. 195-205). Palgrave Macmillan.

Dodovski, I. (2023). Claim on Antiquity in Macedonian fiction and drama. In R. Hudson & I. Dodovski (Eds.), *Macedonia's Long Transition: From Independence to the Prespa Agreement and Beyond* (pp. 179-193). Palgrave Macmillan.

## **X December 5**

Title: “Mnemonic Murals, Political Graffiti and Protest Movements: A Global History”



Lecturer: Vjeran Pavlaković, University of Rijeka

**Dicussant:**

Moderator: Olesija Marković

## **XI December 12**

Title: “Spaces of Peripheralization: Extractivism, Pollution and Environmental Future in Southeastern Europe”

Lecturer: Ger Duijzings, University of Regensburg, College of Europe Natolin-Warsaw

The lecture "tackles pressing ecological issues in Southeastern Europe that often remain under the radar but have nevertheless triggered various local efforts to counter both environmental degradation and the re-production of the region's image as a European (semi)periphery. In his lecture, I will apply a comparative approach and showcase several examples of ecological and waste colonialism in the region. The event thus encourages approaching Southeastern Europe through an ecological justice lens, rarely considered in academia to date. Such an approach contributes to positioning concerns of local populations at the heart of the discussion.

Moderator: Marija Mandić

Recommended readings:

## **XII December 19**

Workshop. Presentations of students' research papers, wrap-up