



## The Phanariot Past and its Multiple Afterlives: Historicizing “Corruption” in Central-South-East Europe (1750s-1920s)

*June 15-16, 2026*

*New Europe College - Institute for Advanced Study, Bucharest*

### Description

The Phanariots have long animated the historiography of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Southeast Europe. These Grecophone, Orthodox Christians with ties to Istanbul’s Phanar district serviced the Ottoman state, occupying positions from princes of Wallachia, Moldavia, and Samos to the Grand Dragoman of the Sublime Porte. Phanariots worked in the tsarist administration as diplomats, state counselors, and military officers. They created thick webs of trade and credit that bound together economic interests across the Ottoman and Russian empires and connected them to commercial networks throughout the European continent. The outbreak of the Greek War of Independence in 1821 altered many of these configurations. The Porte ousted the Phanariots from positions of power and closed institutions associated with them. The conflict, and eventually Greek independence, followed later in the century by the creation of nation-states across the Balkans, reshaped patterns of trade and diplomacy in which the Phanariots had heretofore played a significant role.

These events brought an era of Phanariot prominence across Ottoman Southeast Europe to a close. They did not, however, erase the idea of the Phanariot from political debates in the region. Indeed, contemporary political commentators, as well as historians seeking to construct national(ist) narratives, branded the Phanariots with critiques of corruption, foreign interests, and the legacies of the Ottoman past. In the Principalities these rhetorical moves became associated with the notion of “Phanariotism,” in an independent Greece they often manifested as condemnations of heterochtones – or elites born outside the confines of the new state.

Since the start of the twentieth century, some scholars have worked to rehabilitate the Phanariots. Historians and literary specialists from Constantin Dimaras to Pompiliu Eliade have cast the Phanariots as conduits of modernity across Southeast Europe, rather than as sources

of political and economic corruption. More recently, researchers have attempted to rethink what (and who) the Phanariots were. Christine Philliou, for example, stresses that no separate Phanariot dossier exists in the Ottoman archives. Romanian historians, including Bogdan Murgescu and Andrei Pippidi emphasize the fallibility of the long-standing distinction drawn between “Phanariots” and “native” boyars in the Danubian lands. They also note that the term “Phanariot” had little, if any, currency in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth-century. Their work suggests that the Phanariot “caste,” as well-defined social, economic, cultural, and political group apart from other regional notables, was a later invention. Yet, scholars have conducted scant research on how and why “Phanariots” and “Phanariotism” came to signify corruption, bad governance, and a seemingly inescapable Ottoman past after 1821.

This workshop tends to this gap in historiography. Through studies grounded in both conceptual history as well as social and political history, participants are invited to explore how diverse historical actors linked the concept of the Phanariots/Phanariotism to notions of individual and systemic “corruption” as well as forms of retrograde governance. The speakers are invited to investigate which historical actors mobilized the specter of the Phanariot from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century and why they did so, by locating these articulations in the regional rise of nation-states, processes of political democratization, and economic modernization. The workshop’s overall aim is to historicize and contextualize these concepts, tropes, and discursive practices associated with the Phanariots and “Phanariotism.”

This collective study of the Phanariot legacy, as both politicised cultural practice and scholarly conundrum, has relevance across the region’s national borders. To varying degrees, Phanariot rule and post-Phanariot memory constitute part of the histories of Wallachia, Moldavia (including Bukovina and Bessarabia), Bulgaria, Albania, North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey, and Greece. At present, however, research integrating these disparate historiographies, transnational in method, concepts and substance, is still very much needed.

The workshop invites contributions on the following and related themes:

1. **The Phanariots and their era.** What and who were the Phanariots? What was their understanding of bad governance, administration, or institutional-political design? Conversely, what notions of good governance and reform did the Phanariots promote as individuals or a group? How did they mobilize and construct their trans-imperial political and cultural connections, networks?
2. **Transition: 1821 and its aftermath.** How were the events of 1821 perceived in relation to (and by) the Phanariots? What effect did 1821, the Greek War of Independence, and Greek statehood have on Phanariotes as elites in the region, and how patterns differ between imperial contexts and emerging national ones? What actors remained in positions of power or prominence, how, and where? What strategies of identity reinvention did they use? Who took up positions once occupied by Phanariots and what

new posts came into existence? How and why did a cleavage between a Phanariot past and a post-Phanariote present first appear and how did actors politicised it?

3. **The afterlives of the Phanariots: national(ist) narratives, political polemics.** How, by whom, and why was “Phanariotism” coined as a pejorative “-ism”? How did an “*ancien régime*,” allegedly characterized by multiple forms of “corruption” become synonymous with the Phanariots? What kind of legal-institutional, ethical, individual, or systemic discursive variations can we identify in denunciations of “Phanariotism” and the Phanariot past? How, when and where the “Phanariotes” themselves became floating signifier with xenophobic considerations? How and why did actors deploy these concepts in a populist register in an era before the rise of mass politics? And how did these rhetorical strategies evolve into the twentieth century?

To submit your paper proposal, please provide a title, an abstract of 250-300 words, and a brief biographical statement, to be sent to Gențiana Avriganu, [gentiana@transcorr.eu](mailto:gentiana@transcorr.eu). The deadline for submissions is **February 15, 2026**. The final decision on the received proposals will be announced by early March 2026. For any inquiries, please contact Silvia Marton, PI, [silvia.marton@unibuc.ro](mailto:silvia.marton@unibuc.ro)

We ask that participants plan on pre-circulating their papers by **June 1st, 2026**. We anticipate publishing selected papers in an edited volume.

The organizers will reimburse travel costs and provide accommodation.

The organizing committee consists of Constantin Ardeleanu, Gențiana Avriganu, Silvia Marton, Andrei-Dan Sorescu, and Alex R. Tipei.

This workshop is part of the research agenda of “Transnational histories of 'corruption' in Central-South-East Europe (1750-1850)”, funded by the European Union (ERC, TransCorr, ERC-2022-ADG no. 101098095) and hosted by the New Europe College – Institute for Advanced Study in Bucharest.