



American Institute for Southeast European Studies

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AISEES Fall 2026 NEWSLETTER

Greetings from Dan Weiss, Chair, AISEES Board of Trustees

Warmest greetings from wherever I may be when you receive this: likely in Charlottesville, maybe Turkmenistan, possibly Chicago...

2026 was and is a year of connection and outreach. In May, I attended the inaugural virtual summer intensive on “Theorizing Communication in, of, and from the Balkans” hosted by the University of Maine and others. The summer intensive offered opportunities to learn about borderlands and culture-centered theorizing and envision future research and applied collaborations. I engaged with other AISEES members and new colleagues to foster a multinational, interdisciplinary, and intercultural scholarly community around shared interests in questions of communication in the region. The Fall will find me even further east as I participate in a Fulbright Specialist Program in Archaeological Conservation and Museum Studies in Turkmenistan. Upon my return, I will chair the *Yugoslavia after Empire III: Hubs and Networks across Borders in Southeast Europe* roundtable at the ASEEES 58th Annual Convention in Chicago.

Additionally, growing collaboration with the Council of American Overseas Research Centers, cultural heritage initiatives in the United States, and cultural institutions abroad promise a future of continued advancement for research and impact across our focus countries. I look forward to this growth and anticipate great things.

News from Eric De Sena, Executive Director of AISEES

Dear Colleagues and Friends, this is my favorite part of being the Director of AISEES. Each year, I look back, and I get to boast about all the fantastic people who are part of our community in this newsletter.

The most important news of the year is that AISEES was voted unanimously to be a member of the **Council of American Overseas Research Centers (CAORC)**! We are grateful to Heidi Wiederkehr, Jeff Badger, Julianne Kay, and the Board of CAORC for this amazing honor and opportunity. Through the CAORC network, Dan Weiss and I have joined an initiative of the Penn Museum’s Cultural Heritage Center, the Western Balkan Heritage Network. This endeavor, led by Brian Daniels, aims to support the cultural heritage sector in the Western Balkans by developing an expert network attentive to the needs of the region and strengthening international law enforcement mechanisms and democratic governance. We have been meeting regularly with Penn-CHC’s Sarah Tucci, who is coordinating the initiative in three countries of the Western Balkans, Albania, Kosovo, and North Macedonia.

This year AISEES welcomed **Jelena Bogdanović** and **Zsuzsanna Magdó** to the Board of Trustees. **Jelena** (Vanderbilt University) studies cross-cultural and religious themes in the architecture of the Balkans and the Mediterranean. Her authored and edited books include *The Framing of Sacred Space: The Canopy and the Byzantine Church* (Oxford UP, 2017), *Icons of Space: Advances in Hierotopy* (Routledge, 2021,

2023, open access 2024), *Perceptions of the Body and Sacred Space in Late Antiquity and Byzantium* (Routledge, 2018, 2020), and *On the Very Edge: Modernism and Modernity in the Arts and Architecture of Interwar Serbia (1918–1941)* (Leuven and Cornell UP, 2014, with Lilien Robinson and Igor Marjanović). **Zsuzsanna** is Associate Director at the University of Pittsburgh’s Center for Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies where she manages regional studies programs to support interdisciplinary scholarship and public education on the world regions of Central and Eastern Europe, Russia, and Central Eurasia. A native of Transylvania, she received her Ph.D. in History from the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign.

In 2026, we welcomed five new AISEES Fellows to our growing community of scholars: **Dr. Michael L. Galaty** (2026 Lynn Roller Senior Fellow – USA) – University of Michigan Museum of Anthropological Archaeology – for archaeological research in Kosovo. **Dr. Edlira Andoni** (2026 Lynn Roller Senior Fellow – SE Europe) – Institute of Archaeology, Academy of Science in Albania – for archaeological research in Albania. **Amber Kearns** (2026 Graduate/Early Postdoc Fellow) – University of Texas, Austin) – for archaeological research in Serbia. **Bakir Ovcina** (2026 Graduate/Early Postdoc Fellow) – Vanderbilt University – for historical and ethnographic research in Bosnia & Herzegovina. **Olivia Pape** (2026 Graduate/Early Postdoc Fellow) – University of California, Irvine – for research in Serbia and Kosovo on early 20th century Socialist movements.

We supported three SE European scholars with their travel expenses to attend international conferences: **Nevena Manic** (University of Belgrade, Serbia) who presented “From Sacred Messengers to Poaching Victims: Econarratives of Birds in Serbian Folklore and Media” at the International Society for Folk Narrative Research Congress (ISFNR2026) in Reykjavik, Iceland, June 12-17, 2026. **Andrea Pambuku** (National Institute of Cultural Heritage, Albania) who presented “Interaction, Connectivity and Mobility in the Balkans: Diachronic Perspectives on Land Use and Human–Landscape Relationships” at the

32nd Annual Meeting of the European Association of Archaeologists (EAA), in Athens, Greece, from 26 to 29 August 2026. **Strahil Panayotov** (Bulgarian Academy of Sciences) who presented “New Discoveries on Phlegm and Sputum: A Common Medicine from Cuneiform to Hippocrates,” in the panel “The Shared World of Ancient Medicine: A Conceptual Framework for Technical Circulation and Exchange in Eurasia and North Africa” at the Joint Meeting of the European Society for the History of Science (ESHS) and the History of Science Society (HSS), to be held in Edinburgh, Scotland, 12–16 July 2026.

During the 2025-26 academic year, we hosted excellent lectures in our online series. In an outstanding presentation, “The Lighting of Sacred Spaces and Imperial Ambitions in Post-Byzantine Moldavia,” **Vladimir Ivanovici** (University of Lugano) and **Alice Isabella Sullivan** (North of Byzantium) examined the economy of artificial light in medieval churches across Eastern Europe, the Mediterranean region, and the broader medieval spheres. **Ehlimana Memišević** (University of Sarajevo and 2025 Lynn Roller Fellow) presented the lecture “Justice Undone: Prosecution of Wartime Rape and Sexual Violence in Bosnia & Herzegovina,” which examined the unfinished business of dealing with a brutal episode in human history. **Zala Pavić** (University of Hradec Králové, Czech Republic and 2025 AISEES Travel Grant Awardee) presented “Friendship and Everyday Nationhood: Lessons from Yugoslav Alpinism and Beyond.” The lecture focused on the narratives of friendship in the disintegration of Yugoslavia and how, in the post-war period, they emphasized multiethnicity through narratives of reconciliation. **Ivana Stepanović** (UNESCO, Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainability Office, Köszeg, Hungary) presented “#Balkans and Algorithmic Reconciliation: Digital Ethnographic Research of Alternative Peacebuilding on Former Yugoslavia,” which highlighted a digital ethnography of platform algorithms to examine alternative reconciliation practices at the intersection of political activism, digital economy, and cultural production. A case

study of Balkan influencers shows how platforms, with their embedded AI systems and monetization schemes, can enable cross-border cooperation and stimulate peacebuilding in unexpected ways.

I am developing the 2026-27 lecture schedule, so please contact me if you would like to present a lecture (aiseesorg@gmail.com).

We are able to accomplish everything thanks to the generosity of our donors and members, which include 17 Institutional Members as well as the Disney Corporation! The annual fees remain unchanged since we recruited our first members: Institutional (\$250), Regular (\$50), and Student (\$25) membership. The funds are used to support

our programs. Among the benefits of membership is the ability to apply for our funded programs. Institutional members are especially important since they support the membership of AISEES in the Council of American Overseas Research Centers.

If you are already a member of AISEES – Thank You! If not, please join us and/or help spread the word about AISEES. This is your Institute, and we look forward to hearing from you. For information on how to become a member of AISEES or renew your membership, please visit:

www.aisees.org/membership

Meet the 2026 AISEES Fellows and Travel Grant Awardees

Dr. Edlira Andoni (2026 Lynn Roller Senior Fellow – SE Europe) is a Scientific Researcher and permanent member of the Department of Prehistory at the Institute of Archaeology, Academy of Sciences of Albania. Her research focuses particularly on Neolithic archaeology and ceramic studies, with a broader interest in settlement patterns, cultural change, and the Neolithization of the Balkans.

As a 2026 Lynn Roller Fellow, Andoni is continuing her work on Contextualizing the Neolithic of the Korça Plain, an international collaborative project involving the Institute of Archaeology in Tirana, the University at Buffalo, and the University of Cologne. The project seeks to understand the emergence and development of early farming communities in southeastern Albania by bringing together evidence from archaeological excavations, landscape surveys, geomagnetic prospection, and environmental research. The Korça Plain offers an exceptional setting for this research. Once occupied by the Maliq paleolake, the fertile basin preserves evidence of some of the earliest farming communities currently known in Albania, dating to approximately 6450 BC. Yet despite their importance, these settlements have remained

relatively underrepresented in broader discussions of the Neolithic Balkans. Andoni and her colleagues are working to change this by placing individual sites within their wider landscape and cultural context.



Recent excavations have already produced significant results. At Luadisht, a Middle Neolithic settlement near the modern village Podgorie, the team uncovered building remains, pits, midden deposits, pottery, daub, lithics, and faunal remains, as well as what is currently the first Neolithic ditch identified in Albania. At nearby Podgorie, investigations have also revealed evidence of Early and Middle Neolithic occupation. The AISEES fellowship is allowing Andoni to take the next important step: moving from excavation to the detailed study of the pottery recovered from these sites. By systematically analyzing the ceramic assemblages, she hopes to refine the chronology of the settlements and explore questions of pottery production, technology, cultural connections, and interaction among Neolithic communities across southeastern Europe.

This detailed work is essential because individual pottery sherds can provide clues to much larger questions: when communities settled in the region, how long they remained, what traditions they shared, and how ideas and technologies moved across the Balkans. The resulting ceramic dataset will help place the Neolithic of southeastern Albania more firmly within wider European archaeological research.

The fellowship will also have an important training dimension. Working with a student assistant, Andoni will provide practical training in ceramic classification, documentation, drawing, photography, and database management, contributing to the development of new expertise in archaeological ceramic studies in Albania. The research supported by AISEES will ultimately contribute to presentations, reports, and scholarly publications. More broadly, Andoni hopes that the project will help bring the archaeological landscapes of the Korça Plain—and the communities that inhabited them more than 8,000 years ago—into a more prominent place in our understanding of the Neolithic Balkans.

Dr. Michael L. Galaty (2026 Lynn Roller Senior Fellow – USA) is Professor of Anthropology and Classical Studies at the University of Michigan in the Departments of Anthropology and Classical Studies and Curator of European Archaeology at the Museum of Anthropological Archaeology.



His fellowship project, *Excavations at the Prehistoric Pepaj Site, Western Kosova*, supported ongoing field research in the Dukagjin region of western Kosova. A joint field team composed of archaeologists and students from the Archaeological Institute of Kosova, the University of Prishtina, and the University of Michigan spent the month of June 2026 digging at the archaeological site of Pepaj, located in the village of Lubozhdë, near the city of Istog. Pepaj was identified in 2018 by a Regional Archaeology in the Peja and Istog Districts of Kosova (RAPID-K) survey team. RAPID-K was an intensive, diachronic survey project that operated in the Dukagjin region from 2018-2022. It was designed to determine whether there were direct connections, e.g., movement of people, animals, and trade goods, between northern Albania and

western Kosova via mountain passes during prehistory.

Finding large numbers of prehistoric (Bronze and Iron Age) surface artifacts at Pepaj was not a complete surprise, given its proximity to a known hillfort and nearby tumuli, excavated in 2008 and 2014 by an Archaeological Institute of Kosova team. What was surprising, however, was the extremely large size of the artifact scatter, circa 20 ha, indicating a potentially very large settlement. In 2018, we extracted charcoal for radiocarbon dating by Beta Analytic, Inc. from cultural strata exposed by a construction cut, returning a date of circa. 1200 BC. A program of shovel testing in 2019 and geophysical survey in 2021 confirmed Pepaj's large size and largely prehistoric date.

During the month of June 2025, we conducted test excavations at Pepaj. Eight 1x1 m and one 1x2 m sondages were excavated across the site, down to sterile soil or bedrock, in order to identify intact stratigraphy, determine more precisely the settlement's chronology, and plan future excavations. One of the units excavated in 2025, unit 5, was unlike all the others: it produced the most pottery, the most small finds, the most faunal bone from the most species, and a wide variety of botanical remains. At the bottom of unit 5, at circa 1.5 m, we contacted a burnt clay floor, overlain by ash and daub, interpreted as the remains of a possible structure. Levels 11 and 12, just above and including the floor, were AMS radiocarbon dated by Beta Analytic, Inc. to 1900 - 1740 cal. BC and 2057 - 1920 cal. BC, very early Middle Bronze Age (or transitional from the Early Bronze Age).

Based on the results of 2025's test excavations, in June of 2026, with AISEES support, we excavated a larger, 4x4 m unit, encompassing 2025's unit 5. While we are still processing the results, we can report, preliminarily, the presence of perhaps three superimposed houses, dating to the Middle Bronze Age, the Late Bronze Age-Early Iron Age, and the Late Iron Age. Artifact, fauna, and botanical analysis, followed by radiocarbon dating, to take place in the coming year, are expected to clarify the site's chronology, function, economy, and

trade connections, with implications for the history of Dukagjin and Kosova, generally. In fact, our work will have an impact well beyond the immediate region. The combination of prehistoric flat settlement, hill fort, and tumuli, all of which have been excavated, is rare in the Balkans. We expect our results to make major contributions to European archaeology, helping further integrate Kosova's archaeological record with that of the rest of the continent.

Bakir Ovcina (2026 Graduate/Early Postdoc Fellow) is a PhD candidate at Vanderbilt University. His PhD dissertation explores alcohol production, consumption, and regulation in Bosnia and Herzegovina between 1878 and 1941, spanning the transition from Habsburg imperial rule to the interwar Yugoslav 'nation-state.'



At its core lies rakija, a fruit brandy deeply embedded in daily life that remained constant even as empires collapsed, borders shifted, and political identities were remade. The project asks how alcohol production, regulation, and consumption changed during the transition - and what those shifts reveal about the relationship between states and societies.

How did governments attempt to regulate a substance so tightly woven into daily life? What happened when imperial and national authorities tried to tax, reform, or restrict locally embedded social practices? I posit that the social, economic, political, and environmental worlds surrounding alcohol often proved more durable than the political regimes themselves. Orchards, brandy stills, and drinking customs persisted amid dramatic political upheaval, complicating efforts by both the Habsburg and Yugoslav authorities to influence daily life. Alcohol offers a simple yet revealing lens for examining continuities and ruptures in modern Southeast European history.

Drawing on archival sources in German and Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, the dissertation follows alcohol across its full lifecycle - from cultivation and distillation, through state laws and license systems, temperance activism, to public health campaigns. In doing so, it places Bosnia's diverse communities and overlapping imperial legacies at the center of larger conversations about modernization, governance, ideologies, and social change. Although the Habsburg and Yugoslav states are long gone, alcohol remains central to Bosnian social life. Orchards still dot the countryside, and debates around regulation and public health persist. By tracing the history of a common yet potent substance, the project shows how everyday practices illuminate political transformations and how people navigated them.

Olivia Pape (2026 Graduate/Early Postdoc Fellow) is a PhD student in History at the University of California, Irvine. She focuses primarily on the histories of labor struggle, imperialism, and state-building in the early to mid-20th century Balkans. Her dissertation research explores the history of the Trepça/Trepča mining complex, located today in the city of Mitrovicë/Kosovska Mitrovica, in contemporary Kosovo. Olivia researches Trepça/Trepča during the 1930s and 1940s, at which point Kosovo was located within the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and Trepça/Trepča was owned by the British mining finance enterprise Selection Trust. In this research, Olivia explores 1930s Trepça/Trepča as a site of

capital accumulation, uneven and combined development, and labor resistance.



Olivia's research explores how, by looking at the Trepça/Trepča mining complex, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia mediated interwar capital expansion through foreign investment, alongside the global acceleration of finance and empire. Existing literature on Trepça/Trepča has focused on the years of socialist industrial development, and the later importance of Albanian miners at Trepça/Trepča during the anti-Milošević movement of 1988-1989. Olivia's research sheds light on the earlier years of Trepça/Trepča's modern history, when the mines were controlled by British shareholders, ran by a primarily British supervisory and engineering staff, but employed a mining labor force from across Yugoslavia. Olivia is particularly interested in examining these processes from the bottom-up, looking at the development of class struggle, socialist and communist organizing, anti-imperial resistance, and how the multiethnic Trepça/Trepča mining workforce forged their own identity and movement through their shared conditions of exploitation.

This summer, thanks to AISEES' support of my research, I was able to travel to London, England, in order to visit the library of the London

School of Economics, which contains the full Selection Trust archives. In addition, I travelled to Belgrade, Serbia in order to find archival materials relating to Trepča/Trepča at the Archives of Yugoslavia and National Library of Serbia. Lastly, this summer, I travelled to Mitrovicë/Mitrovica and visited the Trepča/Trepča mining complex, still in production today, where I was able to meet with museum curators, archaeologists, engineers, and other local scholars and activists working to preserve the memory and legacy of Trepča/Trepča for future generations.

Nevena Manic (AISEES Travel Grant Awardee; University of Belgrade, Serbia) is a researcher and a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade. My research sits at the intersection of ecolinguistics, culture studies, and discourse analysis. My work examines how storytelling shapes our relationships with the nature, focusing particularly on the cultural and ecological narratives surrounding Serbian wildlife. I'm also a translator, interpreter, writer, and activist.



With the support of an AISEES Travel Grant, I traveled to Reykjavík, Iceland, to present my paper, *From Sacred Messengers to Poaching Victims: Econarratives of Birds in Serbian Folklore and Media*, at the 18th Congress of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research (ISFNR), themed *Nature(s) in Narrative*. My research traces how birds (the cuckoo, the stork, the sparrow, and above all the imperial eagle of the national coat of arms) have long served as sacred messengers and carriers of moral knowledge in Serbian oral tradition, epic poetry, and children's stories. Yet this cultural reverence sits uneasily alongside ecological reality: Serbia has, until recently, hosted only a handful of nesting pairs of the eastern imperial eagle, and an estimated 200,000 birds are killed annually through illegal hunting, poisoning, and trapping. Drawing on ecolinguistics (Stibbe, 2021) and ecological discourse analysis, my paper examined how folkloric reverence, literary idealization, media silence, and hunting practices produce conflicting econarratives that shape Serbia's ecocultural identity today.

Presenting at ISFNR was an opportunity to share this research with an international community of folklorists and ecocritics, and to hear how scholars from around the world are grappling with similar tensions between cultural heritage and environmental crisis. Between panels, I had the chance to explore Iceland's own dramatic landscape, including a walk behind the thundering curtain of Seljalandsfoss waterfall, which was a fitting reminder of the conference's central theme. I am grateful to AISEES for making this trip possible. I don't think I exaggerate when I say I came home a different person.

Amber Kearns (2026 Graduate/Early Postdoc Fellow) is a PhD Candidate and recipient of the Outstanding Graduate Student Fellowship at University of Texas, at Austin, in Classics, focusing on the application and development of novel bioarchaeological techniques. Her dissertation focuses on the demographics of sex among infants in Roman burial contexts to better understand biological fragility and social pressures based on sex. Her AISEES fellowship

has allowed her to travel to Serbia to collect samples of Roman infants from Viminacium for proteomic research.



Children are one of a number of ‘invisible populations,’ a group under-represented in literary and physical evidence leading to limited information on their daily lives, that have received special attention in Classical literature in recent decades. Additionally, because children cannot be reliably and accurately divided by sex in the absence of named graves due to limited differences in remains, studies of demographic trends among subadults in Roman burial contexts is nearly impossible. Instead, early childhood mortality, nutrition, and health differences between males and females have been studied through proxies. My research aims to suggest a solution for this problem in scholarship by utilizing the growing field of proteomics to determine the sex of sub-adult individuals in unmarked burials.

Andrea Pambuku (AISEES Travel Grant Awardee; National Institute of Cultural Heritage, Albania) presented “Interaction, Connectivity and Mobility in the Balkans: Diachronic Perspectives on Land Use and Human–Landscape Relationships” at the 32nd Annual Meeting of the European Association of Archaeologists (EAA), in Athens, Greece, from 26 to 29 August 2026.

Strahil Panayotov (AISEES Travel Grant Awardee; Bulgarian Academy of Sciences) is an Assistant Professor at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. He also teaches courses on the Ancient Near East in the Department of Arabic and Semitic Studies at Sofia University’s Centre for Eastern Languages and Cultures. He earned a Master’s degree in Assyriology, Egyptology, and Near Eastern Archaeology from Heidelberg University, supported by the Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes, which enabled extensive research travel throughout Europe and the United Kingdom as well as in Syria and Turkey. He received his PhD in Ancient History from Sofia University. He further advanced his expertise as a postdoctoral researcher on a ground-breaking ERC project on Babylonian medicine at Freie Universität Berlin under Prof. Markham J. Geller. He has served as Curator for Assyrian Medicine at the British Museum in London, supported by a Wellcome Trust grant, and was awarded a Pforzheimer Fellowship at the Centre for Advanced Study in Sofia.



Beginning in October, he will join a new ERC Advanced Grant project on Babylonian Pharmacy with Prof. Geller at University College

London. Strahil's main research interests lie in cuneiform medicine and magic, as well as in comparative studies of ancient medicine in the Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Graeco-Roman worlds.

With the generous support of the AISEES Travel Grant, Strahil presented his paper, "New Discoveries on Phlegm and Sputum: A Common Medicine from Cuneiform to Hippocrates," at the Joint Meeting of the European Society for the History of Science (ESHS) and the History of Science Society (HSS) in Edinburgh, Scotland (12–16 July 2026). He co-organized the panel "The Shared World of Ancient Medicine: A Conceptual Framework for Technical Circulation and Exchange in Eurasia and North Africa" together with Maddalena Rumor (Case Western Reserve University) and Colin Webster

(University of California, Davis). His paper introduced a Middle Babylonian cuneiform tablet (ca. 1500 BC), the earliest known systematic treatise on phlegm and sputum. This text, along with other new discoveries from the Persian period, reframes the relationship between Mesopotamian and Greek medicine and helps to bridge the cuneiform tradition and the Hippocratic corpus. Strahil's participation in the ESHS/HSS meeting in Edinburgh coincided with his invitation to contribute a chapter, "Metaphors and Diseases," to the new edition of *The Cambridge History of Ancient Medicine, Volume 1* (Cambridge University Press), with an editorial workshop held in conjunction with the conference. He is deeply grateful to AISEES for its generous support through the Travel Grant Program, which proved especially vital given the financial constraints at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

Notes from AISEES Scholars and Members

Professor Lynn Roller, professor emerita at the University of California, Davis, and long-time AISEES Board member, was invited to deliver the Elizabeth S. Ettinghausen Lecture at Princeton University in April, where she spoke about her work at the Gluhite Kamani cult complex in southeastern Bulgaria. Professor Roller is a Co-Director of the Gluhite Kamani project, together with Bulgarian colleagues Dr. Georghi Nehrizov, Bulgarian National Archaeological Institute with Museums, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, and Dr. Julia Tzvetkova, University of Sofia. Gluhite Kamani is best known as a Thracian cult site, active during the Iron Age, ca. 11000-600 BCE. It was one of several Thracian cult sites in southeastern Bulgaria, and recent research indicates that it may have been a regional center for cult activity. Professor Roller is working with Drs. Nehrizov and Tzvetkova to prepare the final publication of their work at the site.

Alexey Kotelvas (University of Florida, Gainesville; 2025 AISEES Fellow). I am pleased to share that I have received a 2026 Next Generation Dissertation Research Fellowship from AISEES. This funding will allow me to complete archival research during a nine-month research trip to Moldova and Romania. My project, "Dividing Nations," examines Romanian-Moldovan tourism and cultural diplomacy between 1964 and 1991.

An archival research trip to Moldova supported by an AISEES grant laid an important foundation for my dissertation. It allowed me to develop the research proposal at an early stage of the project. The AISEES fellowship now gives the project new momentum and will enable me to conduct the extensive archival research necessary to complete and defend my dissertation in May 2028, five years after beginning my PhD program.

Alexandra Karppi (King's College London; 2021 AISEES Fellow) has had tremendous success with the podcast, *Talk Eastern Europe*, co-hosted with Adam Reichardt and Nina Panikova (<https://talkeasterneurope.eu/>). *Talk Eastern Europe* brings you expert analysis, thought-provoking commentary, and engaging interviews on the region's most pressing issues. From the ongoing war in Ukraine to the rise of populism and the challenges of European integration, we explore the complexities of the region and the forces shaping its future. Join us as we delve into the latest news and trends, uncovering the stories that matter most to Central and Eastern Europe. TEE will soon celebrate our 300th episode!

Bavjola Gami (University of Mississippi and Member of AISEES) Spring 2026 was a successful and productive period for me, as I received two important grants that support my teaching and research. In May 2026, I was awarded a Course Enhancement Grant for the 2026–2027 academic year by the Department of Writing and Rhetoric at the University of Mississippi. The project, *Memory, Images, and Reflection: Narrating the Self through Memory and Images in a Creative Multimodal Text*, focuses on integrating multimodal approaches to self-narrative and reflection on literatures in the Balkans.

In February 2026, I received a grant from the Office of Research and Economic Development (ORED) at the University of Mississippi to conduct research in the archives of the Albanian secret police during Summer 2026. I also presented the paper, "The Rhetoric of Religious Persecution in Communist Albania," at the 23rd Biennial Conference on Balkan Languages, organized by the University of Newcastle, Australia, on May 20–24, 2026. In addition, I presented the paper, "The Rhetoric of Survival in Women's Life Writing in the Eastern Bloc: Light that Comes from the Abyss by Drita Çomo and Gender and Survival in Soviet Russia: A Life in the Shadow of Stalin's Terror by Ludmila Miklashevskaya," at the University of Kentucky, April 16–18, 2026.

Sandra Davidoci (City University of New York and Member of AISEES). "A Year Between Mitrovica and Tiraspol". Over the past year I made four trips to the two places my dissertation is built around, North Kosovo and Transnistria/the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic (PMR). The project asks a simple question: what happens when people build working institutions alongside the very states they are formally held to belong to, and whether that arrangement makes a return to conflict more likely or less.

I was in North Mitrovica and the surrounding municipalities in October 2025 and again in May 2026. The interviews centered on five institutional domains: the bridge-watchers, the Serbian National Council, the hospital, the courts, and the university. I spoke with former and current local officials, judges and court staff, medical personnel, and university faculty, several of whom had set these institutions up in the years right after 1999. This was followed by archival work in Belgrade and by further interviews there.

In September 2025 and June 2026 I was going back and forth across the Dniester, trying to arrive without the vocabulary of either side, which is harder than it sounds. My days were spent juggling English, which few people speak, Romanian, which I do not speak at all, and Russian, which carried me through most of the fieldwork. I managed to interview representatives of the main institutions in the PMR. Personally, Tiraspol reads to me like a Russian socialist novel, or a memory from my own upbringing in socialist Serbia, and I found myself at home there in a way I had not expected and cannot entirely explain.

In both places I was received warmly and with a running joke, never fully resolved, about whether I was a Russian spy or an American one. I expect the matter to be settled when I defend my dissertation. In the meantime these frontier regions have become dear to me, and I look forward to contributing whatever I can to a better understanding of them.

I will be presenting the Kosovo half of this argument at the AISEES convention in Chicago in November, and I would be glad to talk with anyone working on either region.

AISEES 2027 Fellowship and Grant Programs

AISEES 2027 “Lynn Roller” Fellowships for Senior US and Southeast European Faculty and Scholars

AISEES offers two fellowships for senior scholars, defined as someone who is more than five years beyond the Ph.D. One fellowship of \$5000 will be awarded to a university faculty member or independent scholar based in the USA, and one fellowship of \$3000 will be awarded to a faculty member or independent scholar based in southeastern Europe. The fellowships will be used to support research in southeastern Europe (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, and Slovenia). Projects in fields within the Social Sciences, Humanities, and related disciplines are eligible. The deadline is **December 31, 2026**. For more information, see:

<https://aisees.org/fellowships-grants/lynn-roller-research-fellowships/>

AISEES 2027 Fellowships for Graduate Students and Early Postdocs in USA

AISEES offers three fellowships for graduate students and early postdoctoral scholars based in the United States to support research in southeastern Europe (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, and Slovenia). The 2027

AISEES Fellows will be awarded \$3000 each. Projects in fields within the Social Sciences, Humanities, and related disciplines are eligible. The deadline is **January 20, 2027**. For more information, see:

<https://aisees.org/graduate-postdoctoral-fellowships>

AISEES 2027 Travel Grants

We invite applications for the AISEES Travel Grant Program (deadline on **January 20, 2027**). The travel grants are for the travel expenses of advanced students or scholars living in and traveling from southeastern Europe (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, and Slovenia) to present original research at a professional conference or symposium of international importance within the domains of the Humanities and Social Sciences. The conference/symposium must take place outside the scholar's country of residence and must be of international importance (for example, European Association of Archaeology, American Anthropological Association, ASEES, Byzantine Studies Association). The travel grant may be used for a one-time or recurring conferences/symposia hosted by a university or an academic institute. For more information, see:

<https://aisees.org/travel-grants>

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