



ACADEMIA ROMÂNĂ



Synchronism

Academia Europaea și Academia Română

International Conference

Bucharest, 10-11 May 2025

Aula, Romanian Academy, Calea Victoriei 125

Conveners: Sorin Antohi, Balázs Trencsényi, Stefan Troebst, Daniel Șandru

Partners: Institute of Advanced Study at Central European University, Institutul de Investigare a Crimelor Comunismului și Memoria Exilului Românesc, Universitatea din București, Muzeul Municipiului București

In 2024-2025, several conferences held in Romania as parts of a joint academic and public project address, among others, the theme of *synchronism*, the core of a seminal three-volume work, *Istoria civilizației române moderne* (“A History of Modern Romanian Civilization”) by literary critic E. Lovinescu, published in 1924-1925. Since the 1860s, with antecedents dating back to the 1830s and even to the 1700s, Romanian elites had been debating their perceived (and self-perceived) backwardness, their lands’ (later, their land’s) lagging behind (Western and Central) Europe. This theme, as well as the associated subthemes of catching up with (synchronization), or the—(counterfactual) fantasies of—preceding or overcoming the West, have become cultural-ideological-political obsessions, and have remained so to this day. In a liminal space where Utopia never flourished,

Uchronia framed the social imaginary, recycling historical mythology, and subverting/re-placing time, historicity, History.

Synchronism is a shorthand for synchronization, modernity, modernism, modernization, imitation and transfer, emulation and development, mimetic competition and rivalry, *Sonderweg* and Europeanism, stigma and utopia, liberalism (*lato sensu*) in economy, society, culture, politics. In many ways, this (sadly, failed) liberal agenda, dramatically challenged and defeated in the interwar period, has never fared better ever since and is still with us. As it is with the entire planet, all (interactive) centers and peripheries included.

As the post-Enlightenment symbolic geography of Europe was relegating the Romanian land(s) to a hopeless multiple periphery, the symbolic chronology of Europe, part of the same vision of history and temporality as the very concept of *civilization*, was pushing Romanians into an inferior temporality or, to link two familiar concepts, into a subaltern regime of historicity.

Ironically, while Lovinescu's plea for *modernist synchronism* (inspired by Gabriel de Tarde's laws of imitation) was failing, the interwar period was witnessing the rise of *antimodernist synchronism*. In many ways, the local Fascists (the Iron Guard and the intellectuals close to them) were also solving the old dilemma of the *forms without substance* (which, according to a classic 1868 article by literary critic, cultural guru, and politician Titu Maiorescu, were the inevitable result of imitation). While modernist liberalisms and modernizing leftisms (from immigrant *narodniks* to native social-democrats to communists) were going down the drain, *antimodernist synchronization* peaked in the dictatorship of the Iron Guard and in a military dictatorship, only to be defeated and replaced by Stalinism (arriving from the Soviet Union with its own synchronism). A special mention is due to *ethnic ontologies* and to related religious/mystical/spiritualist worldviews which were de-historicizing, fragmenting historical human experience into heterogenous and conflicting paradigms/practices, or cancelling time and space altogether, refusing historicity, human agency, causality (this latter point is resonating with Jung's *synchronicity* as well as with various other perennialisms and metaphysical systems, ranging from the suspension and dissolution to the repetition and apocalyptic ending of time/history).

This international conference placing the Romanian case in comparative and theoretical contexts and dealing with other relevant cases is held under the joint auspices of the Academia Europaea and the Romanian Academy, marking the opening of their joint project, the Academia Europaea Bucharest Regional Knowledge Hub. The conference is closely related to the same project, and plans

to intensively explore concepts, theories, contexts and cases, as we believe synchronism and the debates/projects inspired by it are still recurring and highly topical in Europe and beyond. Also, the conference is connected to the Ideas in the Agora Series, launched in 2017 at the Bucharest City Museum, and (so far) has included over 110 public events (dialogues, colloquia, conferences), placed since 2024 under the aegis of the Academia Europaea. The ‘closest of kin’ conference, *Sincronisme. România și Europa* (Synchronisms. Romania and Europa), convened by Sorin Antohi and Daniel Șandru, was the Royal Colloquium VII, under the High Patronage of the HRH Prince Radu of Romania.

Saturday, 10 May

18:00-20:30 I.

Sorin Antohi, Opening Remarks, Moderator

Daniel Șandru, Greetings

Dragoș Paul Aligică, *Revisiting Synchronism: Charting the Conceptual Territory and Updating the Theoretical Apparatus*

Balázs Trencsényi, *The Discourse of Crisis as Synchronism*

Matthias Middell, *Conflictual Synchronisms* (Zoom)

Joep Leerssen, *Modernity and Its Discontents* (Zoom)

20:30 Dinner

Sunday, 11 May

9:00-11:00 II.

Balázs Trencsényi, Moderator

Victor Rizescu, *Westernizer Modernism, Political Liberalism, Free-trade vs. Economic Closure: E. Lovinescu and the Romanian Interwar Alternatives*

Călin Cotoi, *The Crisis of Liberal Temporality at the Periphery: Russian Narodniks, Ukrainian Anarchists, and Romanian Nationalists*

Erwin Kessler, *Before and After: Progressive and Regressive Synchronisms in Twentieth-Century Romanian Art*

Liisi Keedus, *'Time outside History': Asynchronism in the Work of Franz Rosenzweig and Mircea Eliade*, Zoom

11:00-11:15 Coffee Break

11:15-13:15 III.

Edoardo Tortarolo, Moderator

Gilad Ben-Nun, *Purveyors of Synchronization: Jews, Jewish law, and the Making of International Law*

Fernando Esposito, *Noncontemporaneity: The Politics of Historicism in the Mezzogiorno*.

Stefan Troebst, *(De)Synchronizing (Anti)Slavism*

Marius Turda, *Synchronised Whiteness and the Blackness of Others*

13:15-14:30 Lunch Break

14:30-16:30 IV.

Stefan Troebst, Moderator

Maciej Janowski, *In Praise of Periphery: Mountains as a Land of Liberty, Between Literary Topos and Socio-political Reality*

Edoardo Tortarolo, *Is There a Synchronicity in the Secularization Process?*

Sorin Antohi, *The Tree of Synchronism: The Morphodynamics of an Idea*

16:30-17:00 Coffee Break

17:00-17:30 Book Launch: Balázs Trencsényi, *Intellectuals and the Crisis of Politics in the Interwar World and Beyond. A Transnational History* (Oxford University Press, 2025). Interventions by the author and Sorin Antohi, discussion.

19:00 Dinner

Participants

1. **Dragoș Paul Aligică**, Senior Research Fellow, George Mason University, Washington, and Professor, University of Bucharest
2. **Sorin Antohi**, historian of ideas, Bucharest
3. **Gilad Ben-Nun**, Substitute Professor of Cultural History, Leipzig University
4. **Călin Cotoi**, Professor of Sociology, University of Bucharest

5. **Fernando Esposito**, Assistant Professor of History, University of Konstanz and currently at the University of Münster
6. **Maciej Janowski**, Professor, Tadeusz Manteuffel Institute of History, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, and Recurring Visiting Professor of History at Central European University, Budapest/Vienna.
7. **Liisi Keedus**, Professor of History, University of Tallinn
8. **Erwin Kessler**, Researcher, Institute of Philosophy, Romanian Academy, Bucharest
9. **Joep Leerssen**, Emeritus Professor of European Studies at the Universities of Amsterdam and Maastricht
10. **Matthias Middell**, Professor of Cultural History, Leipzig University
11. **Victor Rizescu**, Associate Professor of History, University of Bucharest
12. **Daniel Șandru**, Executive President of the Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile (IICCMER), and Professor, “Petre Andrei” University of Iași
13. **Edoardo Tortarolo**, Professor, University of Eastern Piedmont, Vercelli/Turin
14. **Balázs Trencsényi**, Professor of History, Central European University, Budapest/Vienna, and Director, CEU Institute of Advanced Study, Budapest
15. **Stefan Troebst**, Emeritus Professor of History, Leipzig University
16. **Marius Turda**, Professor of History, Director of the Centre for Medical Humanities, Oxford Brookes University