

Beyond the Headlines: Journalism, Identity, and the Politics of Memory in Southeast Europe: Reflection and Future Outlooks

Location: Ohrid, North Macedonia
11 - 13 October, 2026

Sunday October 11: Joint dinner at 17:30

Location: Villa Arta

Monday October 12

Location: Kasarna HUB, Ohrid

10:00 – 10:45: Welcoming and introduction

Opening remarks:

Michal Vit - Balkanist, Metropolitan University Prague

Gábor Egry - Senior Research Fellow and Director General, Institute of Political History (Budapest)

Stefan Detchev - Associate-Professor, New Bulgarian University (Sofia)

Visegrad Group and the way bilateral issues have become a non-blocking element for collaboration provides an important point of reference for understanding how difficult historical experiences, competing national narratives and bilateral tensions can gradually be transformed through cooperation and integration. Building on the experience of previous My Hero Your Enemy events, the opening remarks will reflect on what lessons from Visegrad dialogue can be relevant for South East Europe, while recognising the different historical and political contexts of the two regions. How to broaden support for dialogue beyond individual projects or professional communities? How to shape sustainable regional dialogue among journalists, civil society, researchers, educators, political actors and other stakeholders?

11:00 – 12:15: Bilateral Dialogue in Regional Context

Chair: **Balazs Jarabik** - founder of Minority Report and **Jon Ivanoski** - former North Macedonian diplomat

Historical narratives are reproduced through education, journalism, political communication, commemorations and everyday public discourse, making the question of who creates and controls the space for historical dialogue particularly important. This panel will explore how such a space can be created and protected. It will consider the role of history education in shaping perceptions of neighbouring countries and communities, alongside the responsibility

of media in either reinforcing established national narratives or opening them to critical examination and alternative perspectives avoiding misinterpretation or disinformation.

12:15 – 12:30: Coffee break

12:30 – 13:45: How to Build Space for Dialogue Through Shared Events of Commemoration

Chair: **Nenad Markovik** - Tenured Professor of Political Science at Faculty of Law "Justinianus Primus" (Skopje) and **Marta Szpala** - Senior Fellow, Polish Academy of Science

The communist experience represents an important shared historical reference across CEE and SEE region. The experience of authoritarian rule, and the democratic transformations after 1989 contributed to a common aspiration for democracy and integration into European and transatlantic structures. More than three decades later, however, this shared experience is increasingly interpreted through separate national narratives. It often emphasises the uniqueness of their own historical experience, while questions of responsibility, victimhood and guilt continue to influence public interpretations of the communist period.

The panel will explore what can be gained by approaching the communist past as a regional experience. It will examine similarities and differences in how societies experienced authoritarianism, resistance and political transformation, and discuss whether a shared regional reflection can move beyond competing national narratives towards a more nuanced understanding of the past.

13:45 – 15:15: Lunch break

15:15 – 16:45: Round table: Dialogue in Southeast Europe: Example of Good Praxis

Chair: **Dominika Kasprowicz** - Director, Villa Decius Institute for Culture (Kraków)

The round table will examine examples of good practice from across the region and discuss what makes such cooperation sustainable. The discussion will explore whether these forms of cooperation can contribute to broader confidence-building and how successful initiatives can be transferred across sectors and countries with focus on experience from Central Europe. A central question will be how practical cooperation between universities, civil society and businesses can develop from individual projects into lasting regional networks capable of supporting dialogue even during periods of political tension.

17:30 – cocktail dinner in Kasarna HUB followed by cultural programme



• Visegrad Fund

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