

International Conference  
**Exit-Voice-Labour: Reassessing Central and Eastern European Migration in a  
Transnational and Historical Perspective**

University of Vienna, 16-18 November 2026

Call for Participation

The spread of global approaches in the study of migration and diasporas at the turn of the century purportedly rendered Albert O. Hirschman's traditional "exit, voice, and loyalty" model outdated. Nevertheless, this concept has recently gained renewed traction among migration scholars. Applied to the research of the interplay between migration and political circumstances, Hirschman's original interpretation conceived "exit" and "voice" as irreconcilable options.<sup>1</sup> Citizens of a nation-state could allegedly choose to express dissatisfaction with the authorities by migrating out of their country (exit) at the cost of articulating discontent domestically (voice). Rather than completely dismissing this framework amid criticism of methodological nationalism, scholars have been reviving the model in recent years by emphasizing new forms of transnational political activism, as well as the potential for simultaneity and crisscrossing of traditional analytical categories enabled by novel technologies and enhanced mobilities.<sup>2</sup>

Hirschman himself revised the previously conflicting relationship between "voice" and "exit" while analysing the ongoing 1989 social transformation in the German Democratic Republic, concluding that mass migration abroad had in fact reinforced domestic social movements.<sup>3</sup> Today, scholars of Central and Eastern Europe are increasingly employing updated interpretations of this classic concept to analyse the complex effects of migration – and return – on both host societies and countries of origin. Some recent examples include bifocal research on Russian anti-war emigration or critics of Balkan "stabilitocracies" relocating abroad.<sup>4</sup> However, the potential to apply transnational conceptualizations of "exit, voice, and loyalty" to the study of contemporary and historical migrations from Central, Southeastern, and Eastern Europe remains largely untapped.

We invite scholars from a range of disciplines, including sociology, political science, economics, history, cultural studies, and social anthropology, to submit papers that present innovative and critical perspectives on the study of migrations and migrant agency in relation to political systems in the region. We especially encourage research broadening the state of the art in the following directions:

**Exit, Voice, and Labour:** Most migration research on Central and Eastern Europe focuses on transnational mobility driven by differences in income levels between peripheral and core regions. Non-economic migration, on the other hand, is usually observed in drastic cases, such as war refugees or forced displacements (i.e. former Yugoslavia, Ukraine, Israel/Palestine). We aim to analytically connect the search for "normal life" with responses to a wide range of political challenges (nepotism, rising authoritarianism, captured institutions, etc.) via labour. How do economic and broader social, political, and cultural concerns rank and interplay within personal or group decisions for migration? How are economic migrants politically socialized in diasporic communities and received by labour movements in the destination countries? How does the possibility of "exit" affect the chances of successful labour and social movement organizing in the countries of origin?



**Historicizing Exit and Voice:** Transnational migration in Central and Eastern Europe is closely tied to the turn-of-the-century EU expansion and visa liberalization regimes. Indeed, mobility in the region has expanded greatly in recent years, compared to the restrictions on movement imposed by state socialist regimes. Nevertheless, the historiography of “socialist globalization” during the Cold War challenges the historiographic clichés of the autarchic Eastern Bloc and highlights multidirectional East-South exchanges. Going back even further, one can apply the analytical insights of the “transnational turn” to the migrations in the interwar period or the 19<sup>th</sup> century. To what extent can we talk about return influences of diasporas and the circulation of people in earlier decades and centuries in the face of technological limits and different migration regimes?

**“Exit, Voice” Beyond “East-West”:** Despite the expanded theoretical conceptualization of transnational spaces, the actual geographic focus of research on Central and Eastern European migration remains fixated on the East-West axis, with Western Europe as the prime destination point. This is understandable given the geographic proximity, number of people migrating, unequal economic development, and the political and cultural attraction that the EU core enjoys in its Eastern semi-periphery. Still, there are many other migration trajectories, historically and contemporarily, along the West-East, East-South, North-South, or East-East axes that deserve to be highlighted. Are there new discernible patterns of movement emerging inside the former Eastern Europe in the wake of unequal spatial spread of the EU and the recent war in Ukraine? Can we see any continuity or new trends in Central and Eastern European overseas migration? What are the differences in “voice” across different migration routes?

#### Submission guidelines:

The application for participation in the conference should include the author’s full name, affiliation, author’s email address, the title of the paper, an abstract (max 300 words), and a short academic bio (up to 200 words). Applications should be sent to the official email address of the conference: [exit\\_voice.recet@univie.ac.at](mailto:exit_voice.recet@univie.ac.at).

The working language of the conference is English. Conference participation is free of charge. The organizers will provide participants with meals and refreshments. Limited accommodation and travel grants will be offered, prioritising early-career researchers without access to institutional funding.

#### Relevant dates:

- Submission of proposals – 18 May 2026
- Notification on acceptance – 15 June 2026
- Conference – 16-18 November, 2026

The conference is organised as a collaboration of the University of Vienna – Research Centre for the History of Transformations (UNIVIE RECET) as the host, Faculty of Political Sciences University of Banja Luka (FPN UNIBL), Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Science and Arts – Institute of Culture and Memory Studies (ZRC SAZU) and Leibniz Institute for East and Southeast European Studies (IOS) in Regensburg, in the framework of the Horizon Europe project “Enhancing Capacities for Quality and Impactful Research on Transformations, Labour and Migration in Southeast-Europe (RETLAMI-SEE)” funded by the European Commission.

#### Scientific Committee:

Anđela Pepić, FPN UNIBL

Dalibor Savić, FPN UNIBL

Bojana Vukojević, FPN UNIBL

Tanja Petrović, ZRC SAZU Institute of Culture and Memory Studies



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Ana Hofman, ZRC SAZU Institute of Culture and Memory Studies  
Nejra Čengić, ZRC SAZU Institute of Culture and Memory Studies  
Goran Musić, UNIVIE RECET  
Rory Archer, UNIVIE RECET  
Ulf Brunnbauer, IOS Regensburg  
Jacqueline Nießer, IOS Regensburg

**Organizing Committee:**

Goran Musić, UNIVIE RECET  
Rory Archer, UNIVIE RECET  
Tanja Petrović, ZRC SAZU Institute of Culture and Memory Studies  
Anđela Pepić, FPN UNIBL  
Ulf Brunnbauer, IOS Regensburg

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<sup>1</sup> Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty. Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge/Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1970)

<sup>2</sup> Bert Hoffmann, *Bringing Hirschman Back In: Conceptualizing Transnational Migration as a Reconfiguration of “Exit”, “Voice”, and “Loyalty”*, GIGA Working Papers, No. 91 (Hamburg: German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA), 2008)

<sup>3</sup> Albert O. Hirschman, “Exit, Voice, and the Fate of the German Democratic Republic: An Essay in Conceptual History”, *World Politics*, Vol. 45, No. 2, 1993, 173–202.

<sup>4</sup> Evgeny Roshchin, “Exit as Voice: Implications of Russia’s War for the Understanding of Dissent under Authoritarianism”, *Perspectives on Politics*, 2025, 1–16; Julia Rone and Tom Junes, “Voice after exit?: Bulgarian civic activists between protest and emigration”, *East European politics and societies*, Vol. 35, No. 1, 2021, 226–246.



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