

SLOVO

Journal for East European, Central Asian,
and Russian Affairs

Editorial

2025-26 Editorial Team

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It has been a privilege to work with a fantastic team to produce the first issue of SLOVO in two years. The period since the last issue was released in February 2024 has seen a number of important developments in Eastern Europe, Central Asia and Russia. Some foster pessimism. Russia's war on Ukraine is well into its fourth year, with little prospect of a durable peace settlement. May Ukraine continue to resist the illegal Russian aggression, and may the rest of Europe find the will to increase its level of support. Authoritarian control over Russian society grows ever tighter. Georgian Dream seeks to pivot away from Europe. There have, however, been salutary examples of the resilience and triumph of an ideal: the path towards liberal democracy. Moldova has shown its resilience to Russian attempts at interference in 2024 and 2025, returning Maia Sandu to the presidency and a PAS majority in the parliament. Hungary voted overwhelmingly for an end to the regime of Viktor Orbán and Fidesz; the onus is on the new Tisza government to practice what it has been preaching. Most recently, the Civil Contract Party's convincing victory in the Armenian elections reinforces that country's gradual pivot away from Russia. The study of Central and Eastern Europe, Russia and Central Asia remains critical for an understanding of international affairs and developments.

SLOVO prides itself on drawing out the complexities of the region through its interdisciplinary focus and presentation of scholarship from early-career researchers, contributing to a broad and deep understanding of salient issues. We are lucky to be able to present a broad range of work for this issue. There are research articles, film reviews, book reviews and original artwork.

Though the research articles vary in focus and subject matter, there is an underlying thread of an examination of identity and identities.

Cristina Dicusar (Moldova State University) and Andreea Mironescu (Alexandru Ioan Curza University of Iași) examine the contested nature of post-colonial ‘Moldovanness’ through the lens of ‘inter-imperiality’. They focus particularly on the role and perceptions of music and musicians in political and social issues, and the creation and contestation of a ‘Moldovan’ identity.

Daniel Majer (Alumnus, University of Oxford) examines the phenomenon of ‘guitar poetry’ in Czech and Polish culture, focusing on self-referentiality in their works. Majer argues that Karel Kryl and Jacek Kaczmarski, major exponents of the form, resisted mythologization as they were cast as ‘focal points for civil resistance’. Identity comes to the fore in the analysis of the role of the self, author and artist, where self-perception is often at odds with public perception and instrumentalization of output. Sometimes these artists parody their public role, sometimes they reject it.

Hayley Anderson (University of London, School of Advanced Studies) examines the question of overlapping identities and memory in Král’ovský Chlmec, a small, Hungarian-speaking town in the east of Slovakia. Through her micro-historical study of this town perceived as on the margins of Slovak society, in a region assumed to be apathetic and disillusioned, she demonstrates how civic participation through the restoration of historical sites can revitalize communities.

Emma Tarasenko (University of Manchester) analyses the transformation of the Russian-speaking queer media landscape in a time of war and repression, during the period following the 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Tarasenko notes a shift from physical presence and party scenes to online media networks dedicated to education and support. It is clear that, despite the seeming vitality of queer life in 2017-2021, there was nonetheless an environment of ongoing legal repression. The resilience of these communities provides a salutary example of innovative forms of queer world-making across borders in times of authoritarian constraint.

As is customary, SLOVO presents a range of other work in addition to its research articles. There is a thread running through the subjects of this issue’s film reviews, too. The idea of violence is examined directly and obliquely, explicitly and implicitly by the works analysed. In Elem Klimov’s *Come and See*, released forty years ago last year and reviewed by Maya Evans (UCL, School of Slavonic and East European Studies), violence is front-and-centre. The impact of war on the humans that it is forced upon is examined in brutal detail. In Igor Bezinović’s *Fiume o Morte!*, reviewed by Robert Frasin (UCL, School of Slavonic and East European Studies), violence is re-enacted and rendered almost humorous. In Jonathan Glazer’s *The Zone of Interest*, reviewed by Jack Howell (UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies), violence hides behind the facades of a comfortable family life, hinted at by aural impressions. A different form of violence permeates HBO’s *Chernobyl*, reviewed by Caden Wait (Reed College); that of violence against the truth.

This issue’s book reviews are varied. Izabela Gorska (UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies) provides a thoughtful, detailed review of Masha Kirasirova’s *The Eastern International: Arabs, Central Asians, and Jews in the Soviet Union’s Anticolonial Empire* (2024). Janko Paunović reviews the revised and expanded second edition of Stephan Karl Sander-Faes’ *Urban Elites of Zadar: Dalmatia and the Venetian Commonwealth (1540-1569)*, highlighting its unique contributions to the historiography of the Renaissance Adriatic. Jekaterina Shulga (Independent Scholar; Alumna, UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies) reviews Jonathan Littell and Antoine D’Agata’s *An Inconvenient Place* (2024), which examines Babyn Yar

within the context of the unspeakable crimes committed during Russia's ongoing full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

We are particularly excited to feature the work of Julia-Anna Simonchuk (Alumna, UCL Slade School of Fine Art), a London-based Ukrainian artist. Her *Vilnius Project* —comprising three short films: *The Time We Danced*, *Testimony of Chaika-II*, and *Backgrounds* —presents an artistic reaction in film to a series of visits to Lukiškės Prison 2.0 and the Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights in Vilnius. The three films are united by their exploration of gaps, grey areas and that which remains unseen; the films are about the lives and experiences of people, though they have no human characters. A still from *Backgrounds* can be found on the front cover.

The production of a journal after a period of hiatus is no mean feat, and there are a number of thanks in order. First, to all of our contributors, who have been a pleasure to work with. Prompt with revisions and responsive to queries, they are a credit to the discipline. To the anonymous peer reviewers who provided excellent, detailed feedback, without which the process would not be possible. To Ian Caswell at UCL press, whose help and advice has been invaluable. To Dr Sergei Bogatyrev and Dr Michał Murawski who have provided academic support. Special thanks go to Mark Galeotti for kindly agreeing to speak at our Launch event on 7 July 2026.

Most importantly, thanks must go to the wonderful SLOVO editorial team — Toby, Stefan, Harri, Jada, Akhil, Petros, Regina, Jack, Milica, and Han — who have gone above and beyond to produce this issue. It has been a pleasure to work with such a fine group of people, dedicated to furthering the study of the region. This issue serves as a testament to their hard work and dedication.

With this, dear readers, it gives me great pleasure to present the Spring 2026 edition of SLOVO on behalf of the editorial team.