



SOFIA UNIVERSITY
ST. KLIMENT OHRIDSKI



UNICA IRO GROUP MEETING 2023

*“Enhancing International Collaboration and
Student Support in Higher Education”*

Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, 6 – 8 November 2023

Biographies of Chairs & Speakers

Elena AVGOUSTIDOU-KYRIACOU | Acting Director of the International Relations Service, University of Cyprus, Coordinator of the UNICA IRO Group and IRO Observer to the UNICA Steering Committee | Overall Chair



Elena was born in Nicosia, Cyprus and was educated in the UK. She holds a BSc in Economics (University of Leicester) and an MBA-Finance (Imperial College London). She has been the Acting Director of the International Relations Service of the University of Cyprus (UCY) since 2019 and the Director of the Confucius Institute at UCY since 2014. She is also the UCY Erasmus+ Institutional Coordinator and the Secretary of the UCY International Relations Committee. She has been working in international relations since 1993 and has an expertise in mobility, international cooperation, international development, cultural diplomacy, as well as international recruitment and promotion and publications.

Anastas GERDJIKOV | Rector, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” and Member of the UNICA Steering Committee | Welcome address



Prof. Dr. Anastas Gerdjikov is Rector of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, the oldest and largest University of Bulgaria. Previously he has been Member of the Academic Council, Vice-Rector responsible for Accreditation and Research and Vice-Rector responsible for PhD education of Sofia University, as well as member of the board (2015–2022) and Chairman (2020–2022) of the Bulgarian Rectors’ Conference. He graduated with a master’s degree in Classical Philology from Humboldt University, Berlin and since 1991 is Professor in Latin language, Ancient and Medieval literature at Sofia University. He is member of the editorial board of several scientific journals. Along with research publications and monographs in the field of classical philology, he is author of a book and a number of articles on Bulgarian education.

Prof. Gerdjikov has been Vice-Minister of Education and Science, responsible for higher education (2001–2003) and Chief executive of the Bulgarian Science Foundation (2008–2009). As Vice-Minister and later as expert at the Education and Science Parliamentary Committee to the National Assembly of Bulgaria he has participated in the preparation of analyses, laws and regulations in the field of education and science, in particular in the preparation of the chapter on accreditation in Bulgarian Higher Education Law. He has also developed policies and strategies in the field of higher education and scientific research.

Sorin COSTREIE, UNICA President | Welcome address (online)



Prof. Sorin Costreie is Vice-Rector for Public Relations and University Networks of the University of Bucharest. He was previously Vice-Rector for International Relations and Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy in 2016 and 2017, and is a member of the University Senate since 2011. In between, in 2016, he was Adviser to the Minister and State Secretary in the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research. He was the Head of the Quality Management Department (2008-2016).

He is Associate Professor at the Department of Theoretical Philosophy, University of Bucharest. He holds a PhD in Philosophy (University of Bucharest, 2007), with a thesis in philosophy of mathematics, and pursued further doctoral studies in philosophy of language at the University of Western Ontario, Canada between 2000 and 2008. He has published articles, books and edited volumes with Routledge, Springer, Oxford University Press, Taylor & Francis, Elsevier, Humanitas, University of Bucharest Press, etc.

He was awarded several scholarships and fellowships to study for extended periods in Canada, United States, Germany, Spain, and Italy. His area of interest has lately focused on mathematical cognition and critical thinking. He is member of various professional associations, and since 2014 he is member of the Steering Committee of the European Society of Analytic Philosophy.

Ibrahim YORGUN | Director International Cooperations Office, Middle East Technical University (METU) | Chair and speaker



Ibrahim Yorgun has been working in the METU International Office and in the internationalization policies and strategies area since 2003 and is the Head of the International Cooperations Office at METU since 2019.

He is a member of the UNICA IRO Core Group since 2020, and in 2023 he was nominated as representative of the network in the KA131 Higher Education Working Group.

Ibrahim holds a Ph.D. in History, a M.Sc. degree in European Studies and a B.A in Foreign Language Education. He has published a book and several articles in academic journals.

Vito BORRELLI | Team leader Erasmus+ programme – Higher education, European Commission | Keynote speaker (online)



Since September 2022, Vito Borrelli leads the team in charge of the Erasmus+ programme, higher education, in DG Education and Culture at the European Commission. From 2017 to 2022, he has been Acting Director of the Representation in Italy of the European Commission and Head of the political sector. Previously, he has been – among others - responsible for the coordination of the “EU-China High Level People-to-People Dialogue”.

Vratislav KOZÁK | Director of International Relations, Charles University | Chair & Speaker



Vratislav Kozák works as a Head of the International Relations Office at the Rectorate of Charles University. Since 2019 he has been a coordinator of international European projects and numerous national Projects in the IRO field. Outside of his position he is an executive editor of a scientific journal and a university teacher with a background in classical and contemporary history and sociology. In history, his specialization is the history of Armenia and he has a Ph.D. in Historical sociology from Charles University.

Neli KALINOVA | Education & Youth Policy Coordinator, Erasmus Student Network | Speaker



Neli has educational background in European Studies and Public Policies, and professional experience in corporate administration. She joined ESN in Bulgaria after her Erasmus+ mobility at the University of Warsaw, and for the last seven years she has been committed to improving learning mobility in higher education. She had the unique opportunity to put forward her vision and ideas for mobility during her traineeship at the European Commission. Today she continues her mission to advocate for better mobility in the role of Education and Youth Policy Coordinator of ESN.

Andrej PIRJEVEC | Executive Committee member, European Student Union | Speaker



Andrej Pirjevec has been an active student representative for over 5 years, working his way up from the local level to the highest positions in the national and now European student movement. Andrej, a student of International Relations at the University of Ljubljana, became the President of the Slovenian students' union (ŠOS) after leading the extracurricular committee and representing his local student organisation in the Presidency of ŠOS. During his tenure, he led the organisation steadily through a period marked by pandemics, while also achieving major success by successfully lobbying for one of the most widely adopted and biggest Student Acts in the history of his home country. During his student advocacy efforts, Andrej specialised in the field of Quality Assurance, serving in many national and governmental working groups and in the Council of the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency.

Kwanza MUSI DOS SANTOS | Expert of Diversity & Inclusion, Trainer & Consultant | Training



Italian and afro Brazilian, Kwanza Musi Dos Santos specializes on antiracism, environmental justice and intersectionality, and currently works with different profit and non-profit organizations across Europe. After a bachelor's degree in political science and international relations at Roma Tre University, an Erasmus exchange experience at Jena University (Germany), she attended a Master in management of cultural diversity at Tilburg University, The Netherlands. She is a member of the Advisory Board at the European Union of Justice, a European, independent, people of colour (POC)-led organisation dedicated to racial and climate justice. She is also co-founder of the inter-cultural Association "Questa è Roma", created in 2013 and led by a group of young Italians of colour aimed to erase any form of discrimination through culture, politics, social awareness, and art. Recently, she has been teaching with Camilla Hawthorne and Angelica Pesarini about Black

Italy at three editions of the Black Europe Summer School in Amsterdam and she featured in the Vice News Documentary "Black Lives Matter in Italy".

Madeleine DANOVA | Dean of the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology, Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski | Keynote speaker



Madeleine Danova is Professor of North American literature and culture in the Department of English and American Studies at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". She has published extensively on American and Canadian literature, literary modernism, mass media, ethnicity, nationalism, and cultural identity. She has been involved in several international projects on mass media, intercultural communication, ethnicity and English and Canadian studies. She is the author and editor of books on mass media, nationalism, identity, and postmodern bio fictions. Her most recent book is *The Jamesiad: The Postmodern Lives of Henry James* (Polis, 2011).

Irena ATANASOVA, Head of IRO, Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski | Speaker



Irena Atanasova was born in 1971 and graduated at Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski in 1994 with a master's degree in "Landscape sciences and Environmental Protection", Faculty of Geology and Geography.

Irena has been working in the International Relations Office of Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski since 1997, and she is the Head of IRO and Administrative Erasmus+ Coordinator since 2000. She also works on several of the university's major projects in the field of higher education and science:

- Transform4Europe Alliance: The European University for Knowledge Entrepreneurs - sustainable model of a European university with joint management and services,
- MODERN-A: Modernization in partnership through digitalization of the Academic ecosystem, National Program "Science & Education for Intelligent Growth" backed by the European Social Fund,
- ANIME: Academic Network on Inclusiveness, Multilingualism and Excellence; 12 partner universities from Latin America, Africa, Central and Eastern Europe and the Middle East,
- SUMMIT: Sofia University Marking Momentum for Innovation and Technological Transfer.

Catherine CONVERY, Global Mobility Manager, UCD Global, University College Dublin | Speaker



Catherine Convery has over twenty years of experience in international education and projects, and leads the Exchanges and Mobility team in UCD Global. Beginning by supporting the Erasmus programme, Catherine has mainly worked on Erasmus+ KA131, but has also participated in KA2 projects in the role of a partner institution. She also oversees UCD's mobility partnerships with partners outside of Europe and the Erasmus programme, and acts as the Institutional Erasmus co-ordinator. Catherine is committed to ensuring a positive mobility experience for incoming and outgoing students, and developing partnerships that offer them the best possible academic and personal opportunities.

José Alfonso LAFUENTE GARCÍA, Head of The International Relations Office, University of Alcalá | Speaker



José Alfonso Lafuente García is the the Head of the International Relations Office of the University of Alcalá since November, 2022. He manages the human, financial and material resources linked to the International Relations Office. He has worked at different International Relations Offices in Alcalá and in Complutense University of Madrid for almost 20 years. He was an Erasmus student back in 1995, and he has travelled with Erasmus grants for Staff to plenty of International Staff Training Weeks all over Europe. Hi studied English and German Philology in Complutense University (Madrid) and holds a PhD in Romanic Studies. Making internationalization possible for students and for the rest of his colleagues is his main goal.

Lara RAUWERS | International Officer, International Service of the ULB, Université libre de Bruxelles | Speaker



Lara Rauwers has a degree in International Relations and International Law from Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB). She joined ULB's International Service in 2019. Since then, she has been in charge of partnerships with China and cross-disciplinary internationalization issues, including the Sensitive Partnerships Committee.

Tea GERGEDAVA | Head Department of Foreign Relations & ERASMUS+ ICM Institutional Coordinator, Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University | Speaker



Tea Gergedava currently serves as the Head of the Department of Foreign Relations at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University (TSU). With a career spanning over two decades in the realm of higher education, she has dedicated herself to fostering international collaboration and elevating TSU's global standing.

In her capacity as the head of the Department of Foreign Relations, Tea plays a pivotal role in driving TSU's internationalization efforts. Her responsibilities include cultivating strategic partnerships with esteemed international higher education institutions, executing bilateral agreements, and overseeing the coordination of joint programs and projects. Under her leadership, TSU has successfully forged connections with more than 200 partner universities and research centers, solidifying its reputation as a global hub of academic excellence. She actively contributes to the university's research-based strategic planning and development processes. In recognition of her expertise, Tea was selected as a member of the Higher Education Reform Expert (HERE 2022-24) group by the National ERASMUS Office of Georgia.

Tea's professional journey includes roles as a PhD concept project consultant at the TSU Center for Social Sciences and a Liaison Person for the international graduate programs "Transformation in the South Caucasus" and "Gender Studies." Presently, she spearheads the development and internationalization of projects funded by external agencies, including but not limited to, EACEA, DAAD Eastern Partnership, and DIKU.

Her educational background encompasses humanities, social sciences, education planning, and administrative sciences. Tea holds a Master's Degree in Education Management from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Additionally, she possesses two Master's degrees in Social Sciences and Humanities from Ivane Javakhsishvili Tbilisi State University. She also obtained an International Diploma in Educational Planning from the National University of Educational Planning and Administration in New Delhi, India.

Tea obtained various scholarships including a Class gift 2009 from Harvard Graduate School of Education, an Edmund S. Muskie Freedom Support Act fellowship by the US Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, a PhD fellowship by a Polish Academy of Sciences as well as study grants from the Open Society Foundation, Turkish and Indian governments.