

Annual Review



2023/24

With the **establishment of the Viadrina Center of Polish and Ukrainian Studies** (VCPU) in June 2023, through a merger of the *Centre of Interdisciplinary Polish Studies* and the *Entangled History of Ukraine* chair, European University Viadrina created an institution serving to consolidate and strengthen interdisciplinary research on the society, culture, politics, economy and legal development of Poland and Ukraine both historically and in the present day, taking account of their European and global connections and the transnational perspective. This is in line with Viadrina's founding mission – to support interdisciplinarity and internationality, cooperation between Poland and Germany and in Eastern Europe, and pan-European integration.



The **centre is headed** by professors Dagmara Jajeśniak-Quast and Andrii Portnov. The **academic council** consists of six internationally renowned researchers: Professor Rory Finnin (University of Cambridge), Professor Teresa Gardocka (SWPS University, Warsaw), Natalia Khanenko-Friesen (University of Alberta), Professor Brian Porter-Szűcs (University of Michigan), Professor Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska (German Historical Institute, Warsaw), and Professor Yaroslav Prytula (Ukrainian Catholic University, Lviv).

The centre's **opening ceremony** took place on 30 November 2023, attended by many distinguished

guests. Apart from the welcoming speeches given by Brandenburg's science minister Dr Manja Schüle, the Polish deputy ambassador Paweł Gronow, and the Ukrainian ambassador Oleksii Makeiev, particular emphasis was placed on the centre's importance from an academic perspective: "This centre represents a huge enrichment of German science. The visibility of Ukrainian studies, even in the name, is important for strengthening their position on the political agenda," said Professor Maren Röger, director of the Leibniz Institute for Eastern European History and Culture in Leipzig, during a panel discussion chaired by Dr Rory Finnin, Professor of Ukrainian Studies at the University of Cambridge.



Opening the meeting, Finnin noted that for many of those present, delivering students the intellectual tools that would help them better get to know Poland and Ukraine was an everyday task. "Today, during this discussion, we want not only to learn about those countries, but also to learn with those countries. What do we gain when we treat Poland and Ukraine very seriously – not just as objects of investigation?" In his inaugural lecture, titled "*Ukrainian Studies at Viadrina. Thinking about New Possibilities and Challenges*", Professor Andrii Portnov outlined the opportunities that Ukrainian studies at Viadrina offer, underlining the huge potential resulting from the combination of outstanding regional expertise in the Polish–German border area with a transregional, transnational approach.

Simultaneously with the centre's opening came the first decision on financial support for Ukrainian studies at Viadrina: over the next two years the Kurt and Marga Möllgaard Foundation will be funding several formats of improved networking of international Ukrainian studies. This includes the **academic blog *Entanglements: Polish and Ukrainian Studies***. On the occasion of VCPU's first anniversary, the blog was launched with ten posts relating to the question: *What new perspectives for research on Central and Eastern Europe could be opened up by entangled Polish-Ukrainian studies?*

Research, meetings and publications

One of VCPU's key research areas is **transformation in East Central Europe**. The joint project "Obstacles to Modernisation in East German Economy and Science. Emergence and Consequences in Comparison with West Germany and with Neighbouring Countries of East Central Europe" (*Mod-Block-DDR*), which was approved in 2023 for a second phase, with a subsidy of €625,000 for VCPU alone up to September 2025, is already bringing significant results, as presented in publications and conference papers. Of particular note are Dr Falk Flade's monograph *Innovation and Planned Economy?*, published by Duncker & Humblot, as well as the book *Roadblocks to the Socialist Modernization Path and Transition. Evidence from East Germany and Poland*, published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2024, under the editorship of Jutta Günther, Dagmara Jajeśniak-Quast, Udo Ludwig, and Hans-Jürgen Wagener, which communicates the results of the first phase of the project to the English-speaking academic community.^[1]

Professor Dagmara Jajeśniak-Quast, leader of the joint project with the universities of Bremen and Jena, outlined the work that lies ahead: "The results of the first phase of research will now be tested through comparison and contrast with neighbouring countries of East Central Europe, particularly Poland, the Czech Republic, and Ukraine."

Another important area of research concerns **German-Polish-Ukrainian connections in the past and present, the history of German-Ukrainian science, cultural transfer, and the intellectual history of Central and Eastern Europe**. Professor Andrii Portnov has **published numerous books** on these topics, including *Poland and Ukraine: Common History, Asymmetrical Memory* (Berlin-Warsaw 2023), *Omeljan Pritsak and the Intellectual Origins of the Ukrainian "Harvard Miracle"* (Harvard University Press 2024), and, with Tetyana Portnova, *Dnipro. Biografiia velykoho mista v stepu* (Vikhola 2024). Also noteworthy is the anthology (edited jointly with Nataliia Kotenko-Vusatyuk) *Dichtung der Verdammten. Eine Anthologie ukrainischer Dichtung*, selected and translated by Oswald Burghardt (Jurij Klen). This is a bilingual German-Ukrainian edition, published by Arco-Verlag in 2024.

Also in 2024, Dr Stephan Rindlisbacher completed his **habilitation degree**, with a dissertation devoted to research on the drawing of borders in the early Soviet state. The habilitation dissertation of another VCPU historian, Dr Frank Grelka, titled *Murderous Waste. The Beginning of the Holocaust in the General Government*, has been unanimously

[1] Results of the research to date are also presented in volume 11 of the Interdisciplinary Polish Studies series: *Transformation in Polen und Ostdeutschland. Voraussetzungen, Verlauf und Ergebnisse*, edited by Falk Flade, Anna Steinkamp and Konrad Walerski (published in late 2022).

accepted by the habilitation committee of Viadrina's Faculty of Cultural Studies. He is expected to gain his habilitation degree in early 2025. Also, in December 2024, Johannes Kleinmann gained his **doctorate** (under a *cotutelle* arrangement between Viadrina and the University of Vienna), with a dissertation titled *Emancipation through Transformation? Policies and Debates on Work and Gender in Poland (1980–2004)*.

Numerous **scientific meetings and conferences** took place in 2023–2024. In mid-November 2023 we celebrated the 100th anniversary of the birth of Nobel Prize for Literature recipient Wisława Szymborska, with an international conference titled "Some Like Poetry..." – The International Reception of the Work of Wisława Szymborska, organised in collaboration with the Karl Dedecius Foundation and the University of Wrocław. The conference proceedings were published in late 2024 as volume 14 of VCPU's IPUS series.

The first meeting of 2024 was a symposium called "The German–Polish Border Area: Economic Cooperation between Vision and Reality" (April 2024), held by VCPU and Frankfurter Netzwerkstatt. The event was centred around the theses of Daniel Sadecki's study of Frankfurt (Oder)–Słubice as a business location. An extended version of the analysis was published in January 2025 as volume 15 of the IPUS series, in a bilingual German–Polish version.



In May 2024 VCPU organised the 3rd Prof. Jan Winiecki Scientific Conference, for which Viadrina welcomed guests including professors Leszek Balcerowicz and Philipp Ther, two key figures in research on the transformations.

In September 2024, for the first time, Viadrina hosted the conference of the international research network Tensions of Europe. This network conducts international research, teaching and knowledge transfer in relation to technology and European history. The event, organised by VCPU in cooperation with the European New School (ENS), attracted around 150 attendees. The conference was preceded by a three-day summer school attended by about twenty young academics from many European countries.

The last meeting of 2024 was a symposium titled Poland and Its Neighbours in the 20th and 21st Century, 1918–2022. Convergences and Divergences, held on 18 October, organised in cooperation with the University of Warsaw's Faculty of Sociology.

VCPU also participated in numerous other conferences through panel discussions, sectional meetings and full sessions. They included the jubilee conference of Viadrina Center B/ORDERS IN MOTION, "Contesting 21st Century B/Orders" (September 2023), the 6th Polish Studies Congress in Dresden (March 2024), a hybrid conference in Dnipro titled "War and the Perspective of Historian. How Living During Catastrophe Shapes Our Understanding of the Past" (April 2024), the 2nd Congress of Research on Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine and Belarus (September 2024) at the University of Warsaw, and the 56th ASEES Convention in Boston (November 2024).

Teaching and summer schools

In September 2023, in cooperation with Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, VCPU ran the first German–Polish–Ukrainian **summer school** Start Ups, Transfer and Digital Studies, attended by 30 students from those three countries. This was followed in September 2024 by a second German–Polish–Ukrainian summer school, this time in Toruń, under the title The Common Europe as Space and Challenge.

Every semester, VCPU offers from eight to ten courses on Polish and Ukrainian topics, taught in German, Polish or English. Some are conducted in conjunction with the Polish language college at the Language Centre, and also with the Ukrainian language college since 2024. Some classes include as many as four languages, with students reading, reporting on and discussing texts in Polish, Ukrainian, German, and English. To strengthen the position of Ukrainian as an academic language, in January 2024 the **Open Lectures in Ukrainian Studies** were launched, given in Ukrainian. Six lectures in this series have taken place so far, and a video of the speech given by the honorary chairman of PEN Ukraine, Mykola Riabchuk, on 13 May 2024 garnered 4690 views on the VCPU YouTube channel.

For a second time, Dr Kamila Schöll-Mazurek was able to present a **Jean Monnet module** concerning social cohesion in a diverse Europe. She offers a teaching course at Viadrina under the title Onboarding in Europe? Social Cohesion in a Europe of Diversity. Strategies, Controversies, Future.

Networking and transfer

To achieve better networking in research on East Central European topics, the **Jerzy Giedroyc Research Colloquium** has been instituted at Viadrina, supported by the chairs of Dictatorship and Democracy, Germany and Eastern Europe from 1914 to the Present, Culture and History of

Central and Eastern Europe, Eastern European Literatures, Interdisciplinary Polish Studies, and Entangled History of Ukraine. Since its inauguration in the winter semester of 2023/24 more than 50 lectures have taken place, accompanied by discussions. In the 2024 summer semester leadership of the colloquium was taken over by Professor Portnov, who invited young researchers to give presentations of aspects of Polish–Ukrainian connections. One of the most important events was a presentation of the book *Shocks: What Threatens our Democracy from Outside and Within*, involving one of its authors, former German president Joachim Gauck. This attracted such interest that the event had to be moved to a lecture hall.



In 2024, European University Viadrina received support from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) to establish a Frankfurt (Oder)–Berlin **Interdisciplinary Ukrainian Studies Competence Network (KIU)**, which was successful in a competition for the development of interdisciplinary Ukrainian studies at German universities, alongside the Denkraum Ukraine project at the University of Regensburg. Up to the end of 2028, DAAD will award the network a total of almost €2.5 million for that purpose. Alongside Viadrina, the KIU includes the Centre for Eastern European and International Studies (ZOiS), the Humboldt University in Berlin, the Free University of Berlin, the Berlin–Brandenburg Academy of Sciences Berlin, and Wissenschaftskolleg Berlin. Apart from a mobility

programme for academics, this support will enable the introduction of key elements of the development of Ukrainian studies at Viadrina, including a certified course in Ukrainian Studies, an interdisciplinary graduate college, and the holding of a Ukraine Congress for the international networking of Ukrainian research.

In cooperation with the Pilecki Institute, the PAN Centre of Historical Research in Berlin, and the German Federal Archive, the **Festung Archiv Ukraine** initiative has been launched. Staff of various Ukrainian regional archives have been invited to give presentations on their important and challenging work in the context of the ongoing war. In 2024, representatives of the State Archive of Kyiv Region visited destinations including the Frankfurt City Archive.



An important part of VCPU's activity is the organisation of public events in conjunction with other institutions in Berlin and Brandenburg. Examples of such events include a presentation of the book *In the Houses of the Others* with its author Karolina Kuszyk, which took place at the Kleist Museum in June 2023, and a discussion titled Surprising Findings on Modernisation in East Germany and the Polish People's Republic: Potentials for Future Transformations, held at the Brandenburg Land Office in Berlin in March 2024, where participants included Carsten Schneider, minister of state and federal government representative for eastern Germany.

In October 2024, in cooperation with the Institute for Applied History and the German Culture Forum for Eastern Europe, a historical **excursion with Professor Karl Schlögel titled The Centre Lies Eastwards** was organised. More than 60 Viadrina graduates and friends and students of Professor Schlögel visited historical sites east of the Oder. The synagogue in Międzyrzecz (Meseritz), now acquired by the Regional Museum, and the new museum in Zbąszyń (Bentschen) demonstrate the great potential of this region for Polish–German historical work.



The *Interdisciplinary Polish Studies* (IPS) series, published by Harrassowitz, was expanded in 2024 and renamed **Interdisciplinary Polish and Ukrainian Studies (IPUS)**. In 2023–2024 three volumes were published, covering a wide range of topics: the post-war history of Jews in the American and British occupation zones (IPS 12), research on women and gender in Poland during the period of transformation (IPS 13), and a work commemorating the 100th birthday of Nobel prizewinner Wisława Szymborska (IPUS 14). In January 2025, a further volume of the series will contain a study of the attractiveness of Frankfurt (Oder)–Słubice as a business location (IPUS 15).

→ **VCPU publications 2023**, → **VCPU publications 2024**

Highlights of **VCPU's media presence** in the past year included a documentary shown on the ARTE television channel titled *Blackbox Ukraine: Der Kampf um die Geschichte* (2024), in which Professor Andrii Portnov appeared as an expert on Ukrainian history. Work is currently under way on a further ARTE film featuring Professor Portnov, concerning European border regions in the years 1930–1945. Bozhena Kozakevych was interviewed for the ARD documentary *Lenin – Weg in den Terror*.

On 1 August 2024, MDR broadcast an interview with Frank Grelka on the significance of the Warsaw Uprising. Professor Dagmara Jajeśniak-Quast has been a guest on numerous programmes broadcast on RBB radio. She also appeared as an expert in the second part of the film *Deutsch-polnische Beziehungen. Der lange Weg der Annäherung*, produced by FWU (Institut für Film und Bild in Wissenschaft und Unterricht), a media institute for the 16 German states. This film, accompanied by additional working materials, will be available from the new 2025/26 academic year to students in FWU's media library.

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