

## REPORTS

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## REPORT FROM THE CENTRAL EUROPEAN CONGRESS OF MODERNIZATION, HELD ON 23–25 OCTOBER 2024 IN RZESZÓW

**Abstract:** The Central European Congress of Modernization, an interdisciplinary scientific event dedicated to broadly understood modernization processes in Central and Eastern Europe and beyond, took place in Rzeszów from October 23 to 25, 2024. The Congress was organized by the University of Rzeszów and gathered over 130 speakers from 23 countries. The program included lectures on history, media studies, education, sociology, political science, economics, and cultural studies.

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The Program Council of the Modernization Congress 2024 was formed of outstanding representatives of science from various academic centers in Central and Eastern and Southern Europe, which reflected the international and interdisciplinary nature of modernization. Her composition ensured a high level of expertise at the congress, and also guaranteed methodological and thematic pluralism of the presentations. The Council consists of researchers specializing in socio-economic history, social com-



munication and media studies, as well as economists, political scientists and experts in cultural studies. The event was attended by prestigious national universities and research institutes, including: Warsaw University, Jagiellonian University, Łódź University, Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz, Silesian University, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Polish Academy of Sciences, as well as foreign research centers such as the University of the Peloponnese, Taras Shevchenko University, Milton Friedman University, University of Oradea, Kodolányi János University, University of Vienna, University of Prešov, and Collegium Carolinum.

The first day of the congress began with a plenary session, dominated by comparative and global speeches. Professor Zenonas Norkus from Vilnius University discussed Lithuania's economic growth in the 1930s in a comparative context in Central and Eastern Europe, focusing on institutional and geopolitical factors that differentiated the effectiveness of the response to the crisis. Next, Prof. Rashmi Gujar from India discussed the impact of artificial intelligence on the development of the global economy, presenting the challenges faced by developing countries in the face of advancing automation. Professor Henrietta Nagy focused on the social aspects of implementing ESG principles, pointing out the need for their local roots in Central European conditions. Dr. Siphisine Nene from South Africa presented a case study on regional integration in Africa, taking into account the role of South Africa as an infrastructurally dominant country.

The 'History, Media, Society' panel discussed the channels of penetration of modernization ideas in 18th and 19th century Romania, the impact of transport infrastructure on the competitiveness of regions, as well as the transformation of social policy in Central Europe. A team from the University of Oradea presented an interpretation of Avram Iancu as a cultural hero and a symbol of the bridge between the past and the present. The speech on the relationship between climate risk and climate policies was also particularly interesting, and it fits into the broader discussions on eco-modernization.

The 'Media as a Modernization Factor' panel was dedicated to new forms of media communication and the impact of digital technologies on social and educational changes. A study of film tourism was presented using Krakow as an example, as a tool for modern communication of cultural heritage. The role of the Internet of Things (IoT) in industry and new models of media management and academic education were discussed. The

presentations also covered the digitization of Radio Free Europe archives, the impact of war on media freedom in Ukraine, the cognitive threats generated by artificial intelligence, and philosophical reflections on classical and contemporary modernization models.

The afternoon panels focused on social attitudes towards modernization, as well as the multidimensionality of this process. Among other things, the discussion covered communication skills as a condition for participation in modern society, cybersecurity issues, the idea of fair redistribution through wealth tax, and entrepreneurial opportunities in the conditions of real socialism in Czechoslovakia. Some of the papers also dealt with cultural phenomena, such as the evolution of gender roles in advertising or cultural propaganda in Soviet Latvia.

The second day of the congress began with speeches highlighting the tensions between conservatism and modernity. Professor Robert Ci-borowski proposed an interpretation of Schumpeter's creative destruction as a historical force changing the social order, while Professor Sławomir Kamosiński analyzed the role of family businesses in the transformation of the Polish economy after 1989. Professor Wojciech Gizicki pointed to Central Europe as a potential security community, while Professor Jacek Wasilewski presented a set of contradictions inherent in the modernization process itself.

Thematic panels dedicated to selected aspects of modernization in the 19th and 20th centuries were held later in the day. Among other things, the development of industry and forestry in Central and Eastern Europe, the modernization of the Kingdom of Poland after the Crimean War, and social reforms in Volhynia in the interwar period were discussed. A separate panel dealt with economic transformation after 1945 – from the relations between the People's Republic of Poland and the Federal Republic of Germany to the analysis of phenomena such as civilization diseases, the economy of art works, military armament, and environmental problems that are the legacy of industrialization in the People's Republic of Poland. The speeches on educational reforms and the role of artificial intelligence in transforming school and university spaces drew attention (see more: *Central European Congress...*, 2024).

The third day began with a plenary panel, in which Dr. Alicja Waszkiewicz-Raviv presented the results of the European REBOOT project, concerning the transformation of the audiovisual market and the role of film as a tool for shaping public discourse. A team of researchers from Rzeszów discussed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the experi-

ences of women in the academic environment. The next part of the program dealt with the deinstitutionalization of social services, rehabilitation education, modernization of rural areas and agriculture, as well as economic self-government and its historical continuity.

The 'Media and Modernization' panel included speeches on media as a creative sector, their role in democratization, the electoral obligations of broadcasters, and the problems related to disinformation and the influence of artificial intelligence on the depiction of reality. The closing panel focused on the contemporary challenges of modernization on a global scale – from EU cohesion policy, through economic diplomacy, to the role of political elites and women from the periphery in social transformation.

The Congress concluded with an interdisciplinary panel discussion on the past, present and future of modernization processes, their achievements and opportunities, as well as threats. The discussion was attended by professors Teresa Sasińska-Klass (sociologist), Prof. Bartłomiej Biskup (politologist), Prof. Piotr Franaszek (historian), Prof. Tomasz Goban-Klass (media researcher) and Prof. Andrzej Pieczewski (economist). The extremely interesting panel was led by Professor Paweł Grata, who represented the organizers of the Congress.

The event was attended by representatives of 51 scientific institutions from 23 countries on four continents. The Central European Modernization Congress. History-Media-Culture was one of the project activities undertaken by the staff of the Institute of History of the University of Rzeszów as part of the 'Social Responsibility of Science' program. The project's publication output includes two multi-author monographs: *Selected aspects of modernization processes in the CEE Region* (Grata and Kinal, 2025a); *Wybrane aspekty modernizacji w Europie Środkowej* (Grata and Kinal, 2025b).

**Paweł Grata**, dr hab., professor at the University of Rzeszów. His academic interests focus on Polish social policy in the 20th century, economic policy of the Second Polish Republic and economic and social transformation in south-eastern Poland in the second half of the 20th century and early 21st century. he is the author of over one hundred academic publications, including four original monographs: *Polityka społeczna Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej. Uwarunkowania – instytucje – działania* [Social policy in the Second Polish Republic. Conditions – institutions – actions], *Monopole skarbowe w polityce podatkowej Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej* [Fiscal monopolies in the fiscal policy in the Second Polish Republic], *Miejsce monopoli skarbowych w reformie stabilizacyjnej Władysława Grabskiego (1923–1925)* [The role of fiscal monopolies in the stabilization reform of Władysław Grabski], *Przemysł gorzelniczy w II Rzeczypospolitej* [Spirit industry in the Second Polish Republic]. He was also an editor for 11 collective monographs, including five volumes of the 'Studies on Polish Social Policy of the 20th and 21st centuries' and participated in numerous scientific conferences, both national and international.

**Jarosław Kinal**, PhD, Adjunct Professor at the Institute of History. Proxy of Vice Rector of the College of Humanities University of Rzeszów. Sociologist and media researcher. Author, co-author and editor of more than 90 scientific publications – monographs, scientific articles, reports and reviews, including several from Scopus and Web of Science databases. Participant of more than 100 scientific conferences. Member of the editorial board and reviewer of leading scientific journals at home and abroad. Member of project teams implemented under the ‘Routes of Independence’, ‘Excellent Science’, ‘Development of Scientific Journals’, ‘Support of Scientific Journals’, ‘Social Responsibility of Science’, ‘Interreg’ and ‘Science for Society’ programs. He has held scientific internships at leading scientific institutions in the country including the Jagiellonian University (2022) and in the world including the University of Bologna (2016), Comenius University Bratislava (2018) and the University of Vienna (2017).

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