

## Call for papers for 2025 European Workshops in International Studies

**Workshop Title:** Centring the agency of the countries in-between Russia and the European Union: Liminality in times of rupture

**Workshop Convenors:**

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So far, most of the literature on the so-called shared neighbourhood between the European Union (EU) and Russia has tended to ignore the agency and subjectivities of the so-called in-between countries - namely the non-EU countries in Eastern Europe (Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova) and the South Caucasus (Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia). Indeed, these countries have often been perceived as small states struggling to navigate a competitive or even confrontational environment in order to ensure some limited room for manoeuvre in their foreign policies. From this perspective, scholars tend to assume the agency of the in-between countries to be highly constrained by regional and international structures. Portrayed as objects rather than subjects, they are seen as the first victims of the confrontation, stuck between the two regional powers and left with an exclusive choice between their respective regional projects.

This lack of attention for the agency of the in-between countries amid a predominant focus on the external pressures and impact coming from the more powerful actors can be considered a major shortcoming of the literature on the shared neighbourhood. In contributing to closing this gap in the literature, this workshop seeks to explore ways that enable us to centre the agency of those countries and to better understand how agency can emerge from a state of in-betweenness. To do so, the workshop is particularly interested in examining how the concept of liminality – either by itself or in dialogue with other concepts – can help us to centre the agency of these countries and show how, as liminars on the East-West spatial-ideological axis, they articulate their subjectivity and try to draw agency from their liminality.

Recent events in the wider region have led to multiple ruptures, which have in turn caused ontological anxiety among several of the countries. Therefore, the workshop also seeks to explore the effects of such critical junctures on the agency and liminality of the countries. As Krickel-Choi (2022) writes, this can drive creative agency in order to adapt to disruptive contexts. However, when ontological anxiety reaches a more severe stage, it can also become more paralysing.<sup>1</sup>

The workshop is interested in addressing, among other things, the following questions:

- What is the meaning of being liminal, or ‘in-between’, for the countries of Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus?
- (How) have the recent watershed events in the wider region, including Russia’s war in Ukraine, impacted the meaning of being ‘in-between’ for these countries?
- How have these events acted as critical junctures for the respective countries and what implications did the events have for the countries’ agency as liminars?
- How can we further conceptually centre the agency of these countries in dialogue with liminality?
- How can we methodologically study the liminality of these countries? Which levels of analysis can be distinguished?
- Under which conditions can creative agency emerge from a state of ontological anxiety in the face of a critical juncture or rupture of the ontological security narrative?

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<sup>1</sup> Krickel-Choi, Nina (2022). “The Concept of Anxiety in Ontological Security Studies”, *International Studies Review*, 24(3), <https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viac013>.