

This conference aims to address the emergence of the working class, labor struggles, and socialism in the Balkans. The starting point of this meeting is that the specific dynamics of the capitalist mode of production, inter-imperial struggles for influence, and competing nationalist movements within a highly ethno-religiously divided demographic context created similar and comparable conditions for the formation of working classes and the struggles for socialism in the so-called Balkans.

The Balkan Socialist Federation initiative after the 1908 Revolution in the Ottoman Empire and the Balkan Communist Federation in the 1920s are important reflections of the common history of leftist movements in this region.

The aim of the conference is to bring together scholars who, beginning with the last quarter of the nineteenth century and within this broader context, seek to explore labor struggles and organizations, the formation of the socialist movement across different localities, and the place of socialism in relation to other political and ideological currents, most notably nationalism.

## ORGANIZERS



Centre for Southeast European Studies  
Zentrum für Südosteuropastudien



Center for Southeast  
European Studies,  
University of Graz



Istos Publishing House



Social History Research  
Foundation of Turkey  
(TÜSTAV)



United Metal Workers' Union

## INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

# SOCIALISM and LABOR STRUGGLES in the BALKANS

The Age of Empires and the  
Interwar Period  
(1871 – 1939)

**15 - 16 November 2025**  
**Türkan Saylan Cultural Center**  
**Izmir, Turkey**

## DAY 1 – 15 NOVEMBER 2025, SATURDAY

### 10:00 – 10:30: Opening Remarks

**Florian Bieber** (University of Graz)

**Özkan Atar** (United Metal Workers' Union)

### 10:30 – 12:00: Panel I

#### Peasant Question – Socialism in the Countryside

**Chair: Serkan Öngel**

(United Metal Workers' Union & TÜSTAV)

**Pelin Tıg˘lay** (Panteion University)

*A Rural Socialism: The Macedo-Bulgarian Activists and the Peasant Question in the Late Ottoman Empire*

**Anna Mandru** (University of Birmingham)

*The Limits of Compromise: Romanian Socialism and the Peasant Question in the Long 19th Century*

**Alp Yücel Kaya** (Ege University & TÜSTAV)

*Agrarian Question and Revolutionary Movements in the Late 19th and Early 20th Century Ottoman Empire*

### 12:00 – 13:00: Lunch Break

### 13:00 – 14:30: Panel II

#### Labor Movement, Women, and Socialism

**Chair: Derya Özkaya** (University of Graz & TÜSTAV)

**Leda Papastefanaki** (University of Ioannina)

*Women's Labor Struggles and Socialism in Greece, 1871–1940*

**Stefo Benlisoy** (Istanbul Technical University)

*Evolution of a Labor Organization in the Ottoman Capital from Revolutionary Syndicalism to Bolshevism, 1909–1922*

**Sezgin Boynik** (Rab-Rab Press, Helsinki) & **Tevfik Rada**

(Central European University)

*The Different States of the Socialist Fecri: The Unknown History of the Labor Movement in Macedonia, 1909–1922*

### 14:30 – 15:00: Coffee Break

### 15:00 – 16:30: Keynote Lecture

**Maria Todorova** (University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign)

*Socialisms and Their Generations*

## DAY 2 – 16 NOVEMBER 2025, SUNDAY

### 12:00 – 14:00: Panel III

#### Komintern and the Making of Communist Movement

**Chair: Alp Yücel Kaya** (Ege University & TÜSTAV)

**Burak Sayım** (University of Basel)

*Overseas Communism: Thessaloniki, Odessa, and the Comintern's Southern Bureau*

**Florian Bieber** (University of Graz)

*Strong in Unexpected Places: The Paradox of Communist Party Strength in Interwar Yugoslavia*

**Nikos Christofis** (University of Thessaly)

*The Emergence and Evolution of the Communist Party of Cyprus, 1926–1940*

**Aykut Soner Alban**

(Middle East Technical University & British Institute at Ankara)

*The “Prosfygokommounistis” Phenomenon: Refugee Radicalization in Interwar Greece*

### 14:00 – 14:30: Coffee Break

### 14:30 – 15:30: Panel IV

#### Ideology, Revolution, and the National Question

**Chair: Stefo Benlisoy**

(Istanbul Technical University & Istos Publishing)

**Stefan Gužvica** (Higher School of Economics, St. Petersburg)

*Leninism before Lenin? Understanding the Revolutionary Conjecture on the Periphery*

**Kostas Paloukis** (Independent Researcher)

*Avraam Benaroya: “I Was Born in Three Cities” – A Balkan Life Across Borders*

### 15:30 – 16:00: Closing Remarks

**Erol Ülker** (Işık University & TÜSTAV)

*Reflections on the History of the Left in the Context of the Balkans and Mete Tunçay's Legacy*

### 16:00 – 17:00: Forum

*History of Socialism and the Future of Balkan Studies*