

Rethinking Area Studies, the Disciplines, and the Policy Sciences for the Twenty-First Century: China, Russia, and Transatlantic Perspectives, May 22-23, 2026

Conference Venue: IDIS, Panteion University, Athens, Greece

In an era marked by geopolitical rivalry, technological disruption, economic fragmentation, and heightened global uncertainty, the need for deep, context-sensitive knowledge of regions and societies has never been greater. Yet area studies today in Europe and the US face renewed questions about their intellectual form, institutional location, and relevance within increasingly abstract disciplinary frameworks and more results-driven policy-science approaches. Focusing on China and Russia as countries of concern — and drawing on the expertise of Panteion’s Department of European and International Studies, Columbia’s Weatherhead East Asian Institute and Harriman Institute and of colleagues from European academic and policy institutions — this Columbia–Panteion conference brings together area specialists, disciplinary scholars, and policy analysts to examine how Greece/Europe and the United States understand, analyze, and respond to the challenges these actors pose to the contemporary world system. Anchored in the growing partnership between Columbia University and Panteion University, including the forthcoming Dual Master’s Degree linking the M.Sc. in *Global China* and the M.A. in *Regional Studies: East Asia*, the conference positions this collaboration as a laboratory for rethinking the roles of area studies, the disciplines, and the policy sciences for the twenty-first century.

Format: Plenary discussion. Panels of lead speakers, each of whom will have 5–7 minutes to share their reflections on the topic, followed by an open discussion.

Day 1 (22/5): Understanding Power, Risk, and Difference: China and Russia in a Changing World Order

A) 9:30-10:30am Conference Welcome and Introductory Remarks on the Columbia-Panteion Collaboration:

Overview of the Columbia–Panteion Dual Degree as a reference point, its origins and purpose to combine deep area knowledge with analytical and policy skills; how graduate programs can prepare students to work on China and Russia-related global challenges; conference origins and purpose.

Welcome and opening remarks by: Kostas A. Lavdas (Panteion), Stathis Gourgouris (Columbia), Alexander Cooley (Columbia-Harriman), Sarah Jessup (Columbia-Weatherhead), Stefanos Gandolfo (Columbia-Athens Global Center), Andreas Gofas (Panteion)

B) 10:30-12:00pm Session I - What Kind of Knowledge Serves Greece's Interests in Dealing with Russia and China?

Greece's position in the international system and relations with Russia and China. Reflections on the historical aspects, current situation and relevant knowledge infrastructure in the country.

Chair: Vassilis Paipais

Lead Speakers: Constantine Arvanitopoulos, Kostas A. Lavdas, Harry Papatotiriou

12:00-13:00 LUNCH BREAK

C) 1:00-2:00pm Session II – Transatlantic Ways of Knowing: How Europe and the United States Study China and Russia

This session explores how American and European academic traditions have approached the study of China and Russia differently, in terms of disciplinary organization, methodological priorities, and proximity to policy communities. It asks how these differences shape what is seen as analytically relevant, which questions are asked, what blind spots are created and how and what kind of knowledge travels across the Atlantic.

Chair: Philippe Peycam

Lead Speakers: Peter Gries, Eugenia Lean, Alexandra Vacroux

2:00-2:15 COFFEE BREAK

D) 2:15-3:00pm Session III- How to Teach Human Rights?: The Roles of Area Studies, the Disciplines, and Policy Sciences

What should we teach students who intend to work on human rights issues in authoritarian societies?

Chair: Alexander Cooley

Conversation led by Andrew J. Nathan & Jack Snyder

E) 3:00-4:30pm Session IV – Revisionism and Reframing: How China and Russia Read the International Order They Challenge

This session explores how Chinese and Russian elites and media interpret and present the international order they contest, and how these interpretations compare with Western analytical frameworks. It examines the elite beliefs, media institutions and information strategies each side deploys to shape narratives about global order and Western policies, from Chinese outlets such as Xinhua, CGTN, and Global Times to Russian outlets such as RT and Sputnik. The panel assesses how these competing readings and changing global media landscape shape revisionist behavior, with implications for strategic misperception, escalation, and global stability..

Chair: Kostas A. Lavdas

Lead Speakers: Thomas Christensen, Alexander Cooley, Natalia Moen-Larsen, Zoe Zongyuan Liu, Dimitris Triantafyllou

5:00 Rector's welcome at IDIS & reception

Day 2 (23/5) – Rethinking Area Studies and Graduate Training: *From Diagnosis to Design*

A) 10:00-11:15pm Session V - **Is the Policy-Areas Studies Nexus Broken?**

In light of the cuts of the federal government to the policy and think tank world. Is the nexus between area expertise and policy relevance in the US permanently severed? And how does this new situation in the US affect the global university landscape

Format: Guided discussion anchored in concrete examples from China and Russia studies.

Chair: Jack Snyder

Lead Speakers: Michael Kimmage, Eugenia Lean, Lü Xiaobo, Vassilis Paipais

11:15-11:30am COFFEE BREAK

B) 11:45am-1:00pm Session VI – **What Should “New Area Studies” Look Like?**

Rather than revisiting familiar debates about the decline or return of area studies, this session treats China and Russia as empirical test cases for rethinking how area-based knowledge should be organized today. It explores problem-driven approaches, methodological pluralism, the role of language and new forms of integration with disciplinary and policy-oriented research.

Chair: Eugenia Lean

Lead Speakers: Elise Giuliano, Philippe Peycam, Michael Vatikiotis, Lü Xiaobo, Zoe Zongyuan Liu

1:00-2:00pm LUNCH

C) 2:00-3:00pm Session VII – **Designing Graduate Training for Global Risk**

This session examines area studies in graduate training, with a focus on equipping students with the analytical, and policy-relevant skills needed to navigate an era of global risk shaped by geopolitical competition, technological change, and systemic uncertainty.

Chair: [Elise Guliano](#)

Lead Speakers: [Kristin Fabbe](#), [Stefanos Gandolfo](#), [Tinatin Japaridze](#),
[Konstantinos Tsimonis](#)

3:00-3:15pm COFFEE BREAK

D) 3:15pm-4:30pm Session VIII Roundtable - **Employability, Expertise, and Professional Pathways**

This session brings employers and practitioners into direct conversation with faculty about the professional trajectories of graduates trained in area studies, international affairs, and global risk analysis. Rather than focusing on generic “skills,” the discussion centers on how employers evaluate expertise on China and Russia, how they distinguish depth from surface-level competence, and what kinds of training genuinely enhance graduates’ employability in risk-related fields.

Chair: [Sarah Jessup](#)

Lead Speakers: [Margarita Dimova](#), [Aris Iliopoulos](#), [Ilya Roubanis](#), [Alexandra Vacroux](#), [Zoe Zongyuan Liu](#)

E) 4:30-5:15: Session IX Closing Remarks: **How to Promote China and Russia Expertise in the 21st Century**

Speakers: [Thomas Christensen](#), [Alexander Cooley](#)

5:30pm Conference Ends

7:00pm Final Group Dinner (venue TBA)

Speakers

1. [Constantine Arvanitopoulos](#), Professor of International Politics, Panteion University, former Minister of Education
2. [Thomas Christensen](#), Professor of Public and International Affairs & Director of the China and the World Program, Columbia University, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs with responsibility for relations with China, Taiwan, and Mongolia
3. [Alexander Cooley](#), Claire Tow Professor of Political Science, Barnard College
4. [Margarita Dimova](#), Independent Investment Advisor, Emerging Markets
5. [Kristin Fabbe](#), Professor at the European University Institute, Chair in Business and Comparative Politics, Florence School of Transnational Governance, European University Institute
6. [Stefanos Gandolfo](#), Director of the Athens Columbia Global Center
7. [Elise Giuliano](#), Senior Lecturer in Political Science, Director of the MARS-REERS Program & Director of the Program on U.S.-Russia Relations, Harriman Institute, Columbia University
8. [Andreas Gofas](#), Professor of International Relations, Panteion University & Director of the European Cultural Centre of Delphi
9. [Stathis Gourgouris](#), Professor of Classics, English, and Comparative Literature & Society Director, Director of the Program of Hellenic Studies, Department of Classics, Columbia University
10. [Peter Gries](#), Professor of Chinese Politics, Lee Kai Hung Chair and Director of the Manchester China Institute
11. [Aris Iliopoulos](#), Research Director, 1830 Lab
12. [Tinatin Japaridze](#), Director of Geopolitics, Anadyr Horizon
13. [Sarah Jessup](#), Associate Director, Weatherhead East Asian Institute, Columbia University
14. [Michael Kimmage](#), Director of Kennan Institute, Wilson Center
15. [Kostas A. Lavdas](#), Professor of European and Comparative Politics and Director of the Department of International and European Studies, Panteion University
16. [Eugenia Lean](#), Professor of Chinese History, Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs, Columbia University
17. [Natalia Moen-Larsen](#), Senior Research Fellow, Research Group for Eastern Europe and Asia, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs
18. [Andrew J. Nathan](#), Class of 1919 Professor of Political Science, Columbia University
19. [Vassilis Paipais](#), Professor of International Political Theory, Panteion University & Director of the Institute of International Relations
20. [Harry Papasotiriou](#), Professor of International Relations, Panteion University
21. [Philippe Peycam](#), Director of the International Institute of Asian Studies, Leiden University
22. [Ilya Roubanis](#), Senior Research Fellow, Institute of International Relations & Research Fellow, Aletheia Research Institution
23. [Jack Snyder](#), Robert and Renée Belfer Professor of International Relations, Columbia University
24. [Dimitris Triantafyllou](#), Professor of International Politics, Panteion University

25. [Konstantinos Tsimonis](#), Assistant Professor in Chinese Politics, Panteion University & Academic Lead of the Institute of International Relations (IDIS) China Program,
26. [Alexandra Vacroux](#), Director of the Davis Center & Vice President for Strategic Engagement, Kyiv School of Economics
27. [Michael Vatikiotis](#), Writer, Journalist and Private Diplomat
28. [Lü Xiaobo](#), Ann Whitney Olin Professor of Political Science, Barnard University
29. [Zoe Zongyuan Liu](#), Maurice R. Greenberg Senior Fellow for China Studies, Council on Foreign Relations, and Adjunct Professor of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University



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