

## **Call for Participation**

### **Autumn School of the “KONTAKTI Project” Research Network**

#### **October 27 – November 1, 2025 | Batumi, Georgia**

Following the success of its first edition in 2023, we are pleased to invite applications for the second Autumn School of the “KONTAKTI Project” research network. The school will take place in Batumi, Georgia, from October 27 to November 1, 2025 with financial support of the French-Georgian University.

### **About the KONTAKTI Project**

KONTAKTI is an interdisciplinary research network uniting scholars in anthropology, geography, sociology, and political science from Georgia, Germany, and France. Initiated in 2023 by Mariam Darchiashvili, Sofya Gavrilova, Eva Bertrand, Olga Bronnikova, and Maroussia Ferry, the network promotes international scholarly exchange and collaborative teaching with a focus on the Caucasus.

### **2025 Autumn School Theme:**

**"Exploring Contact Zones in Times of Crisis: Bordering, Conflicts, and Mobilities in Georgia".** This year's Autumn School will focus on the dynamics of borders and mobility in times of crisis in the Caucasus, particularly Georgia. Participants will engage with these themes through a blend of theoretical sessions, field-based case studies, and interactive discussions with local and international experts.

### **Highlights of the Program:**

- **Keynote lectures and panel discussions with members of KONTAKTI group, Eleni Sideri (University of Macedonia, Greece), Florian Muehlfried (Ilia State University, Georgia), Sophie Zviadadze (Ilia State University, Georgia) and others to be confirmed.**
- **Three thematic fieldwork laboratories:**
  - Everyday Peacemaking
  - Mobilities of Crisis
  - Cultural Circulations and ethno-religious minorities
- **Writing workshops** with academic mentoring.
- **Media and storytelling sessions** with journalists and documentary filmmakers.
- **Opportunities for co-authored publication projects.**
- **Cultural program** including documentary screenings and local site visits.

### **Thematic Focus**

This second edition of the Autumn School of the KONTAKTI Project focuses on the South Caucasus—and Georgia in particular—as a site of intersecting crises and shifting borders. The region has long served as a geopolitical and cultural contact zone between empires, ideologies, and global powers. From imperial and Soviet legacies to contemporary conflicts and migration flows, Georgia remains a key arena for understanding how borders are constructed, negotiated, and experienced.

In recent years, Georgia has emerged as a hub for displaced populations, including migrants fleeing war in Ukraine, Russia, and the Middle East. Its deregulated economy and liberal visa regime have attracted entrepreneurs, digital nomads, and others seeking refuge or opportunity in a volatile global landscape. At the same time, Georgia's positioning along the so-called Middle Corridor—as a transit point between Europe and Asia—has heightened its strategic relevance, while exposing it to new forms of external influence and internal tension. The theme **"Exploring Contact Zones in Times of Crisis"** invites participants to critically examine how bordering practices, mobilities, and social imaginaries are shaped in conditions of uncertainty and transformation. We are particularly interested in how a crisis—understood not only as rupture but also as a productive force—manifests in everyday life, public discourse, and state policy.

The Autumn School will also explore how narratives of national identity, belonging, and exclusion are constructed and contested in Georgia's border regions. These areas often remain peripheral in official historical accounts, despite being at the forefront of interethnic contact, cultural hybridity, and geopolitical friction. Our aim is to foreground these silenced or overlooked perspectives through interdisciplinary methodologies that draw from anthropology, geography, sociology, and political science.

Participants will engage in fieldwork in Batumi, a Black Sea city shaped by Ottoman, Russian, Soviet, and contemporary global influences. Batumi is not only a tourist and investment hotspot, but also a space where diverse populations—including Adjarians, Armenians, Azeris, and recent migrants—navigate complex questions of identity, memory, and coexistence.

By engaging with these themes through ethnographic immersion, spatial analysis, and collaborative reflection, the Autumn School aims to provide a space for emerging scholars to rethink crisis not only as breakdown, but also as a condition of creativity, negotiation, and reconfiguration in border zones.

### **Eligibility & Financial Support**

The Autumn School is open to:

- **PhD students** whose research aligns with the themes of the school
- **Master's students** intending to pursue a PhD in a related field  
We welcome applications from students based in Georgia, the broader Caucasus region, and across Europe.

#### **There is no tuition fee.**

Financial support is available and may include full or partial travel grants and free accommodation (single or shared double rooms). All participants will receive an official certificate upon completion.

### **Application Process**

Please submit the following documents (in English) to [autumn.school.fgu@gmail.com](mailto:autumn.school.fgu@gmail.com) by **June 15, 2025**:

1. **Curriculum Vitae**
2. **A short abstract (max. 500 words)** describing your current or planned research (Master's or PhD)
3. **A motivation letter (max. 800 words)**  
Incomplete applications will not be considered. Successful applicants will be notified by **the end of July 2025**.

**Organizing committee**

Eva Bertrand (French-Georgian University, Georgia)

Olga Bronnikova (University of Bordeaux Montaigne, France)

Mariam Darchiashvili (Ilia State University, Georgia)

Maroussia Ferry (École Normale Supérieure of Paris, France)

Sofia Gavrilova (Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography, Germany)