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EUROPEAN ENCYCLOPEDIA CONFERENCE 2025, ROME, ITALY, 13–15 OCTOBER

The Institute of the Italian Encyclopedia Treccani organised and hosted the fourth European Encyclopedia Conference, which was held in Rome on 13–15 October 2025 and brought together encyclopedia editors and publishers from thirteen countries.

The first European Encyclopedia Conference was held in Brussels in 2019, organised by the *Great Norwegian Encyclopedia*, the European Parliamentary Research Service, and the Mission of Norway to the European Union, the second 2022 in Zagreb, organised by the Miroslav Krleža Institute of Lexicography, and the third in 2024 in Oslo, organised by the *Great Norwegian Encyclopedia*.

Representatives of professionally edited general and national encyclopedias from Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Georgia, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Montenegro, Norway, Slovakia, Spain (Catalonia), Sweden and Ukraine gathered in Rome in order to discuss the role of encyclopedias in contemporary societies as well as to explore the future of encyclopedic knowledge.

Following the introductory written address by the president of the Treccani Institute, Carlo Ossola, who could not be present at the conference opening, the introductory speech on 13 October was given by the Institute's director general, Massimo Bray, who reflected on the history of encyclopedism, emphasising that it is not only the history of organisation but also of the interpretation of knowledge, which justifies the growing scholarly interest in the institutions that create major national encyclopedias. Namely, in an era when knowledge-transmission can easily be manipulated through new technologies, the certification of knowledge provides the only guarantee of reliability. Bray gave an overview of the Treccani Institute's development over its 100 years of existence. In a continuous pursuit of innovation and in

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full respect of tradition, the Institute continues to be an essential institution for the promotion of scientific research in Italy as well as internationally.

Editors and publishers then gave brief presentations on their respective encyclopedias and institutions, with emphasis on the achievements and challenges since the last meeting in Oslo in 2024. Dragana Marinković-Dubljević, secretary of the Lexicographic Centre of the Montenegrin Academy of Sciences and Arts, talked about the past and present academic, lexicographic, and cultural efforts to establish the *Encyclopedia of Montenegro*. Nataša Jerman, assistant director for research and inter-institutional cooperation at the Miroslav Krleža Institute of Lexicography in Zagreb, presented the activities and achievements of the Institute in its 75-year-long tradition, with emphasis on the Institute's online editions. Marie Bilde Rasmussen, head of editorial at *Lex – Denmark's National Encyclopedia*, talked about the increased public awareness of this encyclopedia in Denmark, and its newest technological shift, i.e. the development of a chatbot, which is underway. Táňa Šrámková from the Encyclopaedic Institute at the Slovakian Academy of Sciences presented the recent developments of the *Encyclopaedia Beliana* and the main challenges faced in 2025 due to the reduced number of authors and editors. Per Söderberg, editor-in-chief of the Swedish *National Encyclopedia*, which is celebrating 25 years online, presented its services, with emphasis on the children's encyclopedia, its new design, new features, and AI-avatar. Ralitz Gueleva-Tzvetkova, editor-in-chief of the *Bulgarian Encyclopedia*, published by the Scientific Information Centre »Bulgarian Encyclopedia« of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, presented »The Bulgarian Online Encyclopedia«, a project that started in December 2024 with the financial support of EU. Kjersti Kanestrøm Lie, chief operating officer at the *Great Norwegian Encyclopedia*, talked about the total ban of AI generated text that the *Encyclopedia* introduced, and pointed out the decrease in reading of the *Encyclopedia* in the last year. Zurab Abashidze, editor-in-chief of the *Georgian Encyclopedia*, published by the I. Abashidze Main Scientific Editorial Office of the Georgian Encyclopedia at the Georgian National Academy of Sciences, presented the history of encyclopedias in Georgia and highlighted the bilingual website (Georgian and English) of the *Georgian Encyclopedia* available from 2023. The development of Lithuanian encyclopedistics was presented by Arturas Mickevičius, head of the Science and Encyclopedia Publishing Centre at the Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania. As a conclusion of this session, a newly participating encyclopedia as well as a new member of the European Encyclopedia Network (EEN), *Encyclopèdia Catalana*, which is online since 1997, was welcomed and presented by its director general, Consol Vancells Casanovas.

Subsequently, invited talks were given by directors of encyclopedic institutions from Croatia and Ukraine, Bruno Kragić and Alla Kyrydon, as well as by Naja

Bentzen, a political analyst at the European Parliament, and Michael Coates, an independent scholar from the USA.

In his talk entitled »Is the universal encyclopedia a lost cause?« Bruno Kragić, director general of the Miroslav Krleža Institute of Lexicography, editor-in-chief of the *Croatian Encyclopedia*, and chairman of the EEN, reflected on the challenges and threats that encyclopedias were subjected to since the beginning of the 21st century, primarily by the appearance of Wikipedia. Its global spreading led to the transition of a great deal of encyclopedias from printed to online form, thus introducing changes in encyclopedic principles and encyclopedic concepts of knowledge. The goal of traditional printed encyclopedias was to provide an overview of relevant human knowledge and to put it in coherent, logical order, with the defined range, number, and dimensions of entries, which is not the case in the digital sphere. The new threat is AI, which, according to Kragić, cannot be defeated. However, since online universal encyclopedias are one of its content providers, encyclopedia publishers should continue to bring verified information in national languages and thus fulfil their educational and cultural mission.

Naja Bentzen joined the audience via Zoom, giving an overview of evolving challenges to the global information sphere. Against the backdrop of a changing geopolitical landscape, the European Commission's European Democracy Shield (published in November 2025) includes new actions to strengthen information integrity—both in and beyond the EU—in addition to the enforcement of the EU's digital regulations, such as the Digital Services Act and the AI Act. With eroding trust in the information sphere in an era of generative AI, knowledge providers who enjoy high trust and high credibility, including verified and editorially independent encyclopedias, play an increasingly important role in Europe's collective cognitive resilience. A growing EU focus on the role of cultural heritage as a component of societal resilience against foreign information manipulation and interference can offer opportunities for European national encyclopedias. Bentzen's talk was followed by an update on the EEN participation in the European Democracy Shield Initiative, which was given by Erik Bolstad, editor-in-chief of the *Great Norwegian Encyclopedia*. Bolstad also recalled the EEN complaint to EU authorities about the ongoing cooperation between Google and Wikipedia/Wikimedia Enterprise in 2023.

Alla Kryrydon, director of the Ukrainian State Research Institution »Encyclopedia Press«, which publishes the *Great Ukrainian Encyclopedia*, together with her colleagues Alla Aristova and Nina Petrukha, talked about universal encyclopedias as markers of national identity and the culture of memory. Universal national encyclopedias provide a synthesis of the achievements of the cultural and historical development of a nation, and therefore the existence of a national encyclopedia is a significant element of the prestige of a state. Kryrydon presented the *Great*

Ukrainian Encyclopedia (print edition since 2016, online since 2018), as well as other editions of »Encyclopedia Press«, emphasising the changing role of encyclopedias in times of war.

Michael Coates spoke about the *Encyclopædia Britannica*'s efforts to rethink the genre of the encyclopedia in the face of social, political, cultural, and technological change in the 1950s and 1960s. *Britannica*'s editors felt that a new model was needed for the encyclopedia, and they sought to create a »world encyclopedia« featuring interdisciplinary »umbrella articles« that would orient readers in their changing world and inform the editing of all the other articles. Coates connected this project with some of the challenges that encyclopedia publishers and the encyclopedia as a genre are facing in today's world from generative AI, disinformation, and changing reading habits.

Lastly, a guest lecture, »Organising knowledge: AI and the future of encyclopedias«, was given by Gino Roncaglia, professor at the Roma Tre University. Roncaglia gave a detailed overview of the origins of contemporary AI and its development, and explained how large language models (LLMs) function, pointing out two of their limitations: hallucinations and biases. Comparing traditional systems of knowledge organisation and new generative AI, he pointed out that traditional encyclopedias are tools for specific research, i.e. for finding a specific information in a given text, while generative AI LLMs offer the possibility of tailoring the answer according to users' queries and of providing personalised outputs. Roncaglia emphasised both advances and shortcomings of using generative AI in encyclopedias, but also warned about the unpredictable future of AI.

The second day of the conference, 14 October, started with the talk given by Valeria Della Valle, scientific director of the *Treccani Dictionary*, who provided an overview of the development of Italian lexicography and linguistics, with emphasis on the relationship of the Treccani Institute and the Italian language in the past 100 years. She presented all the Institute's editions that elaborated many different aspects of the Italian language, as well as their editors, concluding that, thanks also to the many dictionaries and lexicographical collections published by the Treccani Institute, the Italian language is one of the best described languages in the world.

Subsequently, Erik Bolstad gave a talk on the possibilities and challenges of AI for encyclopedias. The effect of AI on encyclopedias is visible in the decline of readership (the *Great Norwegian Encyclopedia* suffered a 25% decrease in pageviews since Google launched AI overview in 2025), reputation risk (readers blame the *Encyclopedia* for errors made by AI summarisation), and data theft and misattribution. Bolstad highlighted the constructive uses of AI in editorial work as well as its shortcomings when it comes to fact-checking, producing trustworthy text, maintaining neutrality, understanding local context, taking responsibility, etc. As a coun-

termeasure, he mentioned the Norwegian government funding of the development of Norwegian language models, which are to be trained on current, copyright protected content. Countermeasures would also entail producing more encyclopedic content at a faster pace, i. e. increased efficiency in writing and updating articles.

Sandro Cappelletto, scientific director of the *Encyclopedia of Music 1900–2025*, introduced this four-volume encyclopedia dedicated to contemporary music. It includes entries about the protagonists who transformed the musical landscape of the last century: artists, groups, composers, producers, etc. as well as major events, symbolic places, genres, trends, and languages that have transcended all boundaries. As for the intersection of music with social and historical context, Cappelletto emphasised that the aim of this *Encyclopedia* is also to learn about history through music, as music is the instrument that enables us to understand the reality that surrounds us. He also brought up the issue of AI, which is perpetrating the most serious attack on creative music.

Presenting the digital learning platform *Edulia Treccani Scuola*, Andrea Vitelli spoke about the Treccani Institute's role in the world of digital education. The platform integrates high quality content with innovative teaching methodologies. It offers a wide range of tools; teaching materials include multimedia lessons, videos, podcasts, interactive assessments (quizzes and tests), etc. Vitelli emphasised that Treccani has never been just an encyclopedia—from the very beginning it has had an educational mission, that is, to make reliable, curated knowledge accessible to all.

Lastly, Valters Ščerbinskis, editor-in-chief of the Latvian *National Encyclopedia* of the National Library of Latvia, gave a talk on differing interpretations and opinions in encyclopedias, drawing attention to the issue of their trustworthiness. Historically, encyclopedias offered simplified information for the general public, usually in short articles with a limited amount of information. In an online sphere, articles are considerably longer, covering a wide variety of different concepts and topics in competition with other sources. Ščerbinskis suggested solutions for treating »complicated« articles (article structure, covering all major aspects and perspectives, separate articles for different elements, author neutrality, peer-reviewing).

At the end, a meeting of the EEN was held under the chairmanship of Bruno Kragić. It was agreed that the next conference would be held in Tbilisi, Georgia, organised by the *Georgian Encyclopedia* at the Georgian National Academy of Sciences. When it comes to the admission of new members, Nataša Jermen informed the participants about the submitted expression of interest of the Institute of Cultural History at the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, publisher of *The New Slovenian Biographical Lexicon*, to join the Network. The EEN members voted in favour for the admission of the Institute of Cultural History and *The New Slovenian Biographical Lexicon* to the EEN.

The success of the fourth conference of European encyclopedias is certainly also due to the efficient and professional management of the Treccani Institute's dedicated personnel, Marta Leonori, Isabelle Ragnetti, and Cristina Bravi.

Along with the exchange of knowledge and experiences through the contributions of experts in the field of encyclopedism from various European countries, attending the conference at the Treccani's headquarters in the Palazzo Mattei di Paganica, located on the Piazza della Enciclopedia in the very heart of Rome, provided an opportunity to mark the Institute's centenary. Furthermore, on 15 October the hosts organised guided tours of the Sacred Area of Largo di Torre Argentina and Capitoline Museums, enabling participants to gain a deeper insight into the rich Roman history.



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