Our center has the privilege to introduce a new member of our affiliated faculty, Dr. Stefanos Katsikas. Appointed Director of the Modern Greek Studies program and lecturer in the Department of Linguistics, he joined Illinois after a four-year employment at the Department of History, Goldsmiths University of London. Previously, Dr. Katsikas was a Visiting Lecturer at the Department of Russian and Slavonic Studies, University of Nottingham. In 2008-2009, he was a John S. Latsis research fellow for the extensive research project “From Religious Communities to Minorities: Muslims in Greece and the Greek Orthodox in the Ottoman Empire/Turkey, 1830-1940” conducted through the Department of History and Archeology at the University of Athens.

A graduate with a Ph.D. from the School of Slavonic and East European Studies at University College London, Dr. Katsikas’ particular interests focus on issues of democratization, post-conflict resolution and regional security in the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean, in both contemporary and historical settings. For example, published as a monograph (London, 2011), his revised thesis Negotiating Diplomacy in the New Europe: Foreign Policy in Post-Communist Bulgaria sheds new light on the mechanisms and factors which have influenced the making and shaping of Bulgarian foreign policy. Rich in primary sources, including personal interviews with key protagonists, the book offers an invaluable analysis for researchers of Europe’s post-communist international relations, as well as those interested in the processes of democratization and those of foreign policy formation.

Stefanos Katsikas’ broader research interests lie in the modern history and politics of the region. For instance, his edited book, Bulgaria and Europe: Shifting Identities (London, 2010), examines how Bulgarian historiography and literature have created differing conceptions of Europe over the centuries, and in the process, shaped the country’s own shifting identity. Through his analysis, Stefanos Katsikas provides the broader cultural context and historical perspective required to understand the process of Bulgaria’s accession to the EU and its aftermath, and addresses what has arguably been the key question facing the country after socialism and prior to EU accession: “Are we European?”

On the other hand, his co-edited book State-Nationalisms in the Ottoman Empire, Greece and Turkey: Muslims and Christians, 1830-1945 (London and New York, 2012) traces the emergence of minorities and their institutions from the late nineteenth century to the eve of the Second World War, and provides a comparative study of government policies and ideologies of two states towards their respective minority populations.

Besides a number of edited collections, Dr. Katsikas’ articles have appeared in
the European History Quarterly, Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs, Nationalities Papers, Études Balcaniques, and Bulgarian Historical Review. Currently, he is committed to three research projects on Muslim converts to Eastern Orthodoxy (the so-called “New Enlightened Greeks”) in Greece (1821-1880), the transitional justice in post-Junta Greece (1974-), and Greece’s relations with Eastern Europe (1967-1974), respectively.

Dr. Katsikas’s was attracted to Illinois because of the presence of world-leading Balkan and East European scholars, the university’s prominent area studies programs, and the overall vibrancy of its research environment. In particular, he finds that the university’s Modern Greek Studies program is “a challenging and fascinating project to work on” for any leader who wishes to make it shine in the mid-west and have it effectively compete with other Hellenic and Greek studies programs in North America (USA and Canada). While “the large and historic Greek community of Illinois” certainly deserves such a prospect, he adds that leading such a program presents formidable challenges at a time when the recent economic crisis has tarnished Greece’s positive image abroad.