

Conference

13th European History Forum

1945-2025: 80 years of narratives about the end of World War II

In April and May 2025, Europe commemorates the 80th anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Europe. Yet, can this anniversary serve as a unifying moment for the continent?

As Europe marks this milestone, it does so in the shadow of the most extensive armed conflict on the continent since 1945—Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. The year 1945 remains a profound historical rupture in the collective memory of European societies. However, despite extensive historiographical inquiry, interpretations of this rupture remain contested. Was it defined primarily by the defeat of National Socialist Germany by the Allied forces? The liberation of Eastern and Southeastern Europe from fascist rule by the advancing Red Army? The triumph of anti-fascist resistance movements, aspiring to establish a Europe of independent and homogeneous nation-states? Or was it, for some, the mere replacement of one oppressive regime—the Nazi dictatorship—by another—the Soviet system? Perhaps it was the initiation of a judicial reckoning with Nazi atrocities through the Nuremberg Trials, which laid the groundwork for contemporary international law.

These and numerous other narratives surrounding 1945 have undergone continuous transformation over the past eight decades. Such shifts are attributable not only to evolving historiographical insights but also to changing political contexts. Interpretations of the Second World War and the post-war order have historically diverged—not only between Eastern and Western Europe but also within the respective former Cold War blocs. The ways in which societies memorialize decisive historical events are inevitably shaped by national and regional perspectives. However, 1945 stands as a particularly striking example of how official commemorations are often influenced by political agendas and propaganda. In contemporary Russia, for instance, President Vladimir Putin frames his war of aggression against Ukraine within the historical legacy of the Red Army's anti-fascist struggle. Within this framework, challenging the official narrative of 1945 can result in severe legal repercussions, including imprisonment.

The European History Forum of 2025 will explore the end of the war as experienced in various countries across Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe. The discussions will address shifts in both official and societal discourses about 1945 over recent decades, particularly in light of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Additionally, the forum will examine the political visions of resistance movements against the Axis powers and the legal and societal processes of reckoning with war crimes in the post-war period.

Simultaneously, the forum will provide a platform for scholars and practitioners from the fields of historical studies, media, museums, and non-governmental organizations with a focus on Eastern and Southeastern Europe. Participants will have the opportunity to network and showcase innovative research, didactic approaches, and remembrance initiatives. The forum remains committed to fostering a multi-perspective European culture of memory—one that prioritizes international dialogue, scholarly collaboration, and the advancement of critical, independent historiography and historical pedagogy.

Monday, May 19, 2025, 10:00-21:30
Tuesday, May 20, 2025, 10:00 - 18:00

The event will be held exclusively in English.

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Agenda		
Monday, 19 May		
10:00-10:15	Welcoming speech	Jan Phillip Albrecht , hbs Berlin
10:15-11:15	Introductory talk Ending revisited: Changing commemoration of 1945	Chair: Walter Kaufmann , hbs Berlin Jaroslav Hrytsak , Catholic University, Lviv Claudia Weber , European University Viadrina, Frankfurt/O.
11:15-11:45	Break	
11:45-13:15	Fishbowl 1: Preparing for the post-war: political aims, successes and disavowal of the resistance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What concepts for the post-war order were advocated by the various resistance movement?</i> • <i>Which parts of the resistance movement were subsequently praised, which forgotten or condemned?</i> • <i>Is there a comparative history of the resistance movements against National Socialism in Europe?</i> 	Chair: Paola Petric , hbs Sarajevo Elma Hašimbegović , Historical Museum of of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo Andi Pinari , University of Tirana Iryna Kashtalian , Buchenwald Memorial, Weimar
13:15-14:30	Lunch	

<p>14:30-16:00</p>	<p>Fishbowl 2:</p> <p>Narrating and remembering the End of the War: Stories and Myths of Liberation and Occupation from 1945 to the Present Day</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What aspects of the WWII have been/are at the centre of remembrance, what has been forgotten or tabooed?</i> • <i>What does "decolonizing WWII memory" mean in different historical and national contexts?</i> • <i>How World War II narratives are being instrumentalised in Russia's war against Ukraine?</i> 	<p>Chair: Eviya Hovhannisyan, hbs Yerevan</p> <p>Sergey Rumyantsev, Center for Independent Social Research CISR Berlin</p> <p>Oksana Khomiak, Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, Kyiv</p> <p>Vjeran Pavlaković, University of Rijeka, Croatia</p>
<p>16:00-16:30</p>	<p>Coffee break</p>	
<p>16.30-18:00</p>	<p>Presentations: How can historical education be different</p> <p>Teaching/Communicating "1945"</p> <p>1) "The war and its victims" project by dekoder.org</p> <p>visually appealing story telling project about interpretations of WWII and the Holocaust in the Soviet Union (DE/UKR/RU) addressing young people</p> <p>2) Plattform Copernico</p> <p>In a special thematic issue on 1945, the <i>Copernico</i> portal brings together 13 blog articles about different aspects of the end of the war in Eastern Europe—rooted in academic research and engagingly presented for a broad audience.</p> <p>3) Light of the Fireflies – Public space interventions and mobile application – A bilateral memory culture project involving youth in Belgrade and Berlin at original sites of suffering and Nazi persecution.</p> <p>4) The public organization After silence works in the fields of memorial culture, public history and social anthropology to develop a critical understanding of Ukraine's past and present.</p>	<p>Chair: Nina Happe, hbs Berlin</p> <p>Peggy Lohse, Dekoder, Berlin</p> <p>Anne Kluger, Martin-Luther-University Halle-Wittenberg</p> <p>Branka Pavlović, Free Zone Belgrade Human Rights Film Festival, Belgrade/Berlin and Nikola Polić, Belgrade</p> <p>Daria Reznik, Anna Yatsenko, Leipzig/Lviv</p>

18:00	Dinner	
19:00	Literary perspective: Heinrich Böll	Foyer "Sheep Staircase" Introduction: Maria Birger , hbs Berlin/Köln Reading: Tom Alterman , Berlin

Tuesday, May 20		
10:00-12:00 3 parallel workshops	<p><u>Workshop 1: Women 1945: Roles, images, narratives</u></p> <p><i>How have female perspectives and remembrance evolved since the end of the war? In how far are they represented in official/private history?</i></p> <p>Housewives on the home front: Depicting women's roles in Georgian personal correspondence during World War II</p> <p>Invisible Archives: Makedonka (1944-52) Organ of the Women's Antifascist Front</p> <p>Antifascist Women Front Albania</p>	<p>Room: Conference Room 1</p> <p>Chair: Lilia Chikhladze, hbs Tbilisi (tbc)</p> <p>Nino Tskipurishvili, Tbilisi (tbc)</p> <p>Jana Kocevaska, CINIK Center for the Research of Nationalism and Culture, Skopje</p> <p>Ermira Danaj, American Graduate School, Paris</p>
	<p><u>Workshop 2: Returning men and women</u></p> <p><i>The return of soldiers, refugees and prisoners of war did not take place on a single day, but often over a longer period of time. The experiences left wounds and traumata in the returnees. How are the encounters with relatives who have been missing for years remembered? How did integration and appreciation take place?</i></p> <p>A story of resilience, hope and longing: Home Soon documentary</p> <p>Prisoners' experience (WWII and the aftermath)</p>	<p>Room: Great Hall 2</p> <p>Chair: Eviya Hovhannisyan, hbs Yerevan, Walter Kaufmann, hbs Berlin</p> <p>Seda Grigoryan, Hetq Media Factory, Yerevan</p> <p>Korab Krasniqi, Pro Peace, Pristina</p>

	<p><u>Workshop 3: Monuments</u></p> <p><i>What signs did states and societies send out at the end of the war? Where is heroization to be found, where victimization? What endurance do monuments have, how have they been treated over the decades (maintained, removed, replaced)?</i></p> <p>Soviet War Memorials in Germany</p> <p>The Image of Heroism during and after the War: The Case of Soviet Armenian Art</p>	<p>Room: Small Hall 1</p> <p>Chair: Kateryna Kvashnytska, hbs Kyjiv</p> <p>Eva Yakubovska, Vitsche e.V., Berlin</p> <p>Nare Sahakyan, Johannissyan Institute, Yerevan</p>
12:00-14:00	Lunch	
14:00-16:00	<p><i>Fishbowl 3</i></p> <p>Coming to terms with / processing the end of the war</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What attempts, what approaches were taken in 1945 to start the legal processing of the Holocaust and other war crimes? What was the dominant pattern/goals?</i> • <i>When did the historical and legal judgement and investigation begin - immediately after the end of the war, or only years later?</i> • <i>Which war crimes were not dealt with judicially and in the public discourse? When, how and through which actors did these crimes begin to be discussed and processed in the societies of the various post-war countries?</i> 	<p>Chair: Clara Frystacka, hbs Berlin</p> <p>Sabina Ferhadbegović, Leibniz Institute for European History, Mainz</p> <p>Dominika Uczkeiwicz, Pilecki Institute Warsaw</p> <p>Janine Fubel, Fern-Universität Hagen</p>
16:00-16:30	Coffee Break	
16:30-17:30	Working Group presentations, Joint Evaluation and Conclusion	
18:00	Dinner (non public)	