

14th European History Forum 2026

History of Environmental Movements in East and Southeast Europe

Thursday, 21 May, 2026, 10:00 – 20:00h

Friday, 22 May, 2026, 09:30 – 15:30h

The Chernobyl / Chornobyl* nuclear disaster of April 1986 is widely regarded as a watershed moment in modern European history. It propelled increasingly intense debates and the growing mobilization around environmental pollution and energy policy—developments that had been building since the late 1970s—to the forefront of public discourse. In environmental and technological history scholarship on Western countries, this event has been used, among other things, to explain the emergence of a broad anti-nuclear consensus in West Germany as well as the Italian referendum on phasing out nuclear power.

At the same time, environmental protests had also been gaining considerable momentum in Eastern and Southeastern Europe since the 1980s. In these countries, resistance to ecologically destructive mega-projects promoted by centrally planned economies frequently served as a catalyst for independence movements, which ultimately contributed to the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact in 1991.

Marking the 40th anniversary of Chornobyl, the 2026 European History Forum examines, from a historical perspective, the origins and development of environmental movements across Europe and their entanglements with the legacy of Chornobyl. The primary focus lies on socialist and post-socialist states, while also adopting a comparative perspective on West Germany and reunified Germany. What factors contributed to the emergence of environmental awareness and environmental movements? Which groups of actors and political formations developed, and how did environmental protests intersect with other protest movements at both the national and international levels? What political successes were achieved? Where and why were environmental concerns marginalized? On which traditions and experiences can today's environmental initiatives build?

The European History Forum is taking place at a time when Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has resulted not only in immeasurable loss of life and the destruction of cities and infrastructure, but also in dramatic ecological devastation — often described as ecocide. The Forum will therefore open with a discussion of the relationship between authoritarian rule, violence, and environmental destruction in Ukraine and Belarus, the two countries most severely affected by the Chornobyl disaster.

Since 2011, the European History Forum, organized by the Heinrich Böll Foundation (hbs), has provided a vibrant platform for exchange among historians, students, museum professionals, journalists, and activists from non-governmental organizations working on the histories of Eastern and Southeastern Europe. A central aim of the Forum is to foster dialogue across borders and disciplines, bringing these perspectives into conversation with German historiography and scholars based in Germany.

In doing so, the Forum seeks to create a genuinely transnational space for debating contemporary history and its interpretations. At the same time, it warmly welcomes all participants who engage critically with the history of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and with the ways this history is researched, communicated, and discussed—whether in professional, voluntary, or personal contexts.

The event is held in English.

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** “Chornobyl” is the name of the Ukrainian town near which a large nuclear power plant, consisting of four reactors, was built starting in the 1970s. During the Soviet era, however, reports on nuclear power and this location were primarily written in Russian, leading to the Russian transcription of the place name, “Chernobyl,” becoming established in German as well.*

Today, however, the term is commonly used to refer to far more than just the place itself; it serves as a symbol of the historical rupture caused by the severe reactor accident at this site on April 26, 1986, and its consequences for large parts of Europe.

Thursday, 21 May

10:00-10:15 **Welcoming speech - Jan Phillip Albrecht**, hbs Berlin

10:15-11:15 **Introductory talk**

State, People, Environment: Historical Continuities from the Chernobyl Disaster to the War-Induced Ecocide in Ukraine

Tetiana Perga, Kyjiw/TU Berlin. **The importance of ecological historiography**

Iryna Sukhi, Co-founder of Ecodom and coordinator of the Green Network of Belarus. **Commentary of an environmental veteran of the green movement**

Host: **Walter Kaufmann**, hbs Berlin

11:15-11:45 Coffee break

11:45-13:15 Fishbowl 1

Catalysts of Environmental Awareness: Ecological Crises and Mobilisation in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe

- Which ecological crises and environmental disasters played a decisive role in the formation of environmental awareness in Eastern and South-Eastern European countries?
- Through what mechanisms and practices did these issues stimulate mobilisation at the local level?
- To what extent did the Chernobyl nuclear disaster function as a turning point and catalyst for the emergence and consolidation of environmental movements?

Prof. Dr. Amir Duranović, University of Sarajevo. Focus: history of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Yugoslavia, diplomacy, and environmental history.

Dr. Astrid Sahm, Head of International Centre for Education and Exchange (IBB gGmbH). Focus: energy and environmental policy, development of political systems and integration policies of post-Soviet states (especially Belarus and Ukraine)

Dr. Kacper Szulecki, Research Professor in International Climate Governance at NUPI, and a Professor II at the Centre for Development and the Environment (SUM), University of Oslo (via zoom)

Host: **Vika Andrukovich**, hbs Dialogue Office Vienna

13:15-14:30 Lunch

14:30-16:00 Fishbowl 2: Green Resistance I: the Post-Soviet case

Green Resistance: Environmental Movements between Anti-Establishment Opposition and Democratic Transformation (Ecology “from below”)

- What role did environmental concerns and movements play within oppositional politics under state socialism?
- In what ways was environmental activism interconnected with other social and political struggles (for democratisation, civil rights, national self-determination)?
- When did the demands of environmental movements combine with anti-liberal and nationalist tendencies?
- How did the relationship between ecological movements and post-socialist states evolve, particularly in terms of institutionalisation, co-optation, or opposition to neo-liberal agendas?
- How and under what conditions did green parties emerge, and in which political and national contexts were they able to achieve sustained electoral or policy success?
- How were environmental concerns institutionalised within the political and administrative frameworks of post-socialist states following the collapse of the Eastern Bloc?

Avet Vardanyan, GWZO Leipzig. Focus: Environmental activism and civic engagement in the late Soviet and post-Soviet periods, comparative analysis of anti-nuclear movements in Armenia and Eastern Europe

Giorgi Tsintsadze – Brown University, USA. Focus: Modern Europe; intellectual history; environmental history; history of science; Eastern Europe; the Russian Empire

Anna Ackermann - policy analyst for IISD's Energy team. Focus: green reconstruction of Ukraine, energy, environmental policy, and just transition

Host: **Nina Happe**, hbs Berlin

16:00-16:30

Coffee break

16:30-19:00

Excursions

1. Guided tour with **Tim Eisenlohr**, *1973 (tbc), eyewitness/ activist from [Berlin Umweltbibliothek Zionskirche](#)
2. Deutsches Historisches Museum (DHM): Guided tour/ discussion with **N.N.** at the exhibition [Ausstellung Natur und Geschichte](#)

19:00

Dinner

19:30

Finissage [Chornobyl Is Everywhere](#)

Dr. Stephen Milder, Richard Carson Center, University of Munich

Christian Halbrock, Historian and environmental activist, co-founder of the environmental library in the GDR

Olha Kovalevska, journalist, photographer and producer from Ukraine, founder of the music agency Urban Lys

Host: **Clara Fryszacka**, hbs Berlin

Friday, May 22

09:30-11:00

Fishbowl 3: Green Resistance II: the Balkan and the German - German case

Green Resistance: Environmental Movements between Anti-Establishment Opposition and Democratic Transformation (Ecology “from Below”)

- **Guiding questions see Fishbowl 2**

Valbona Mazreku, founder and director of Milieukontakt Albania. Focus: Albanian Environmental Movement in European Context (1990-2010)

Luan Shllaku, Riinvest Institute, Kosovo. Focus: Environmental Governance, Industrialisation, and Institutional Rupture: Kosovo in the Yugoslav and Post-Socialist Context

Dr. Stephen Milder, Richard Carson Center, University of Munich. Focus: grassroots anti-nuclear activism, environmentalism in West Germany and the GDR

Juraj Rizman, TV presenter, former Chairman of Greenpeace Slovakia (tbc)

Host: **Clara Fryszacka**, hbs Berlin

11:00-11:30

Coffee break

11:30-13:00

CASE STUDIES FROM DIFFERENT ANGLES to be discussed!

1. [CSN Lab's](#) project on water ecosystem of Yerevan

The *Blue Yerevan* project is a cross-disciplinary research initiative that investigates the transformation of Yerevan's water infrastructures and their impact on the city's environment, cultural and social memory. Situated at the intersection of urban studies, memory studies, and environmental anthropology, this project aims to examine how water bodies in post-Soviet Yerevan have been reshaped, degraded, or erased over the past decades.

Presented by **Tigran Amiryan**, Yerevan

Host: **Eviya Hovhannisyan**, hbs Yerevan, South Caucasus Region

2. **The Case of Montenegro –**

Presented by **Miodrag Vujović**, environmental activist at KOD, Podgorica

3. **Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis and UFU - Unabhängiges Institut für Umweltfragen – Archiving activism in West-Germany and the GDR**

Host: **Jana Falkenroth**, hbs

13:00-14:00	Lunch
14:00-15:00	Brief summary of workshops & joint evaluation and conclusion Hosts: Clara Frysztacka & Walter Kaufmann , hbs Berlin
15:00	Get together and coffee