

Call for Papers

February 3, 2026

Conference

The Future of Yesterday – Visions, Concepts, Scenarios and German-speaking Communities in Central and Southeastern Europe

The conference adopts an interdisciplinary approach to historical projections of the future formulated by German-speaking communities in Central and Southeastern Europe across various eras.

Visions, concepts, and scenarios are treated as historical sources that offer insight into political positioning, cultural self-identification, key actors, networks, and social negotiation processes. The objective is to analyze alternative projections of the future from the past and to reflect on their significance for our understanding of the present.

Organizer: Institute for German Culture and History of Southeast Europe at LMU Munich in cooperation with Historisches Kolleg, Munich

Dates: October 22 and 23, 2026

Location: Historisches Kolleg, Munich

Conference languages: German and English

Deadline: May 31, 2026

Contact: kuehrer@ikgs.de

Abstracts (of approx. 300–500 words) and a short biographical note should be sent to kuehrer@ikgs.de by May 31, 2026. Notification of acceptance will be sent by the end of June 2026. Travel and accommodation expenses may be partially covered for a limited number of participants.

Visions, concepts, and scenarios reveal possibilities, respond to crises, and at the same time open specific historical perspectives on imagined futures. They articulate expectations, hopes, and fears, serving as instruments of political, social, or cultural orientation, and as such are invariably expressions of their time-bound contexts. Only a small proportion of these visions of the future are ever realized. However, it is precisely their non-fulfillment that makes them insightful sources for understanding our present by providing a nuanced image of the past.

This is particularly true for German or German-speaking groups and individuals within the transnational spaces of Central and Southeastern Europe. For centuries, their lives have been shaped by imperial orders, multicultural constellations, and processes of both voluntary and forced migration, as well as periods of economic and cultural prosperity, political upheaval, and violence. In this context, projections of the future often emerged under conditions of persistent uncertainty and threat—serving as hope, strategy, legitimation, or defense. They reflect promises of social advancement alongside processes of radicalization, discourses of integration and demarcation, and ideas of return, loss, and “new homelands” amidst competing concepts of order in times of profound change.

These ambivalences become particularly acute in the 19th and 20th centuries: Germans and German speakers were deeply affected by the rise of nationalism within the region's dominant empires, the collapse of these empires in the aftermath of the First World War, the subsequent reorganization of Europe, and the political radicalization of the interwar period – which culminated in the manifold upheavals of the Second World War. In these contexts, individuals acted as political agents, perpetrators, bystanders, and victims—often occupying multiple roles simultaneously.

The conference adopts a trans-epochal and interdisciplinary approach to these projections of the future. It treats visions, concepts, and scenarios not as mere forecasts, but as historical sources that offer insight into political positioning, cultural self-identification, actors and their networks, and processes of social negotiation. By focusing on German and German-speaking communities in Central and Southeastern Europe, the objective is to illuminate alternative projections of the future from the past and reflect on their significance for our understanding of the present.

The conference organizers invite contributions from the fields of history, cultural studies, literary studies, social sciences, and related disciplines. Proposals may address, but are not limited to, the following topics:

- Role attributions to Germans and other groups within imperial contexts; concepts of economic prosperity, modernization, and social order,
- Actors and networks involved in developing visions and scenarios for the future,
- Spatial visions and concepts of order including “Central Europe”/“Mitteleuropa”/“Zentraleuropa,” “Intermediate Europe”/“Zwischeneuropa,” “East-Central Europe”/“Ostmittleuropa,” and “Southeastern Europe”/“Südosteuropa,”
- Religious visions of the future and their socio-political implications,
- Literary and artistic visions of the future, literary utopias and dystopias,
- German as a language of social advancement and cultural distinction,
- German-Jewish narratives of emancipation and visions of the future,
- Ideological concepts, discourses of radicalization, and political scenarios,
- Alternative concepts of order and the “German element,”
- Ethnocentric and racist ideas and concepts,
- Concepts and scenarios of ethnic homogenization and “cleansing,”
- Visions of the future and ideological re-education in totalitarianism,
- Ideas of returning to areas of origin, loss, and the construction of „new homelands,”
- Expectations, narratives, and strategies of emigration and internal migration,
- Historical retro-projections as resources for contemporary political argumentation,
- Future plans and narratives within the discourses of memory culture,
- Reflective visions: disappointed expectations, shattered hopes, and unfulfilled dreams.