



YOUNG
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**Interdisciplinary Study Day of the Young Network TransEurope:
Reclaiming Memory. Transnational and Marginalised Perspectives on World War II**

16th of Mai 2025

Organizers: Jana-Katharina Mende (Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg), Oleksandr Zabirko (Universität Regensburg), Denys Shatalov (Prisma Ukraïna fellow of the Gerda Henkel Foundation) in cooperation with the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities (BBAW) and the Junge Akademie

Venue: Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Jägerstraße 22–23, 10117 Berlin

9:45: Welcome and introduction (Jana Mende, Oleksandr Zabirko)

10.00–11.30: Panel 1: The Past on Replay: War Memory, Pop Culture, and Propaganda in Ukraine and Russia

This panel is dedicated to the critical analysis of how pop cultural forms of expression – including literature, film, music, and other mass media – both shape and challenge the collective memory of the Second World War. Particular attention is given to cultures of remembrance in the former Soviet republics (Ukraine and Russia) where the Soviet narrative of World War II is undergoing a profound transformation and being actively renegotiated.

The panel explores how the memory of the Second World War is used for propagandistic purposes (most notably to legitimise the ongoing Russian war of aggression against Ukraine) while at the same time being appropriated by opposition forces as a resource for counter-cultural narratives and political protest. It addresses the mechanisms of state control over war memory in Russia and Belarus, as well as the ambivalent and often contradictory ways in which the war is remembered in contemporary Ukraine.

A further focus lies on the interplay between the memory of World War II and its perceived re-enactment in the current war. The panel investigates how present experiences reshape the memory of the past – and conversely, how inherited memory influences perceptions of the present conflict.

Finally, the discussion turns to pop-cultural formats such as commercial cinema, mass-market literature, and popular music. These media are examined not only as

tools for reproducing dominant memory discourses, but also as potential spaces for critical engagement and the articulation of alternative perspectives.

Speakers: Oleksandr Zabirko (Universität Regensburg), Denys Shatalov (Prisma Ukraïna fellow of the Gerda Henkel Foundation, via Zoom).

Coffee break

12:00–13.30: Panel 2: Victims, Memory Laws and their possible weaponization

The legacy of World War II is not only a solemn tribute to its victims – it's a foundation for justice, reconciliation, and peace. Yet, when historical memory is manipulated or selectively erased, it can become a powerful political weapon.

This panel explores the role of *memory laws* – legal acts or policies that prescribe how historical events should be remembered, commemorated, or discussed in public. These laws may serve to honor victims and combat denial, but they can also be mis-used to distort history, suppress dissent, or justify authoritarian narratives.

Failure to hold Soviet regime accountable for its crimes and create a tribunal for the crimes of communist (totalitarian) regimes has deeply scarred collective memory of its victims and undermined their status. This has created a dangerous precedent and contributed to further conflicts, including war in Ukraine.

We will discuss how political actors, using the propaganda of the Soviet (communist, totalitarian) regime supporters, shaped a parallel reality, creating the basis for aggression and justifying aggressive policies. Distinctive perspective on victim rights protection is crucial in understanding and addressing these challenges, as well as for learning the lessons of war and the lack of justice for its instigators.

Speakers: Kateryna Latysh (Memory and Justice Centre of Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania), Mykhaylo Shepitko (Memory and Justice Centre of Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania; Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University, Ukraine).

Lunch break

14:30–16:00: Panel 3: Rivers of wars and peace in our memory

In this innovative panel, freshwater ecologist Oleksandra Shumilova will talk about rivers being natural barriers in armed conflicts and related social and environmental implications. Based on the example of the river Dnipro in Ukraine, we will consider the role of the river and its large dams in World War II and presently ongoing war. In addition, the panel will discuss a role of rivers in uniting representatives of different nations living along them and joint treatment of ecological heritage. Using the example of the river Oder, we will talk about how ecological disaster on the river happened in 2022 united German-Polish ecologists, historians, artists and local residents to rethink past and future of the river and the surrounding landscape. Overall, the panel demonstrates

how rivers and natural landscapes serve as enduring memorials to conflict, inviting a discussion on the intersection of environmental science and historical memory".

Speakers: Oleksandra Shumilova and Christian Wolter (both: Leibniz-Institut für Gewässerökologie und Binnenfischerei), Claudia van Hasselt and Nicolas Wiese (Frau-VonDa).

18:00–20:00: Podium discussion: Memory of World War II between History, Politics, and the Individual: Transnational perspectives

In the evening, a podium discussion offers a way for the general public to engage with the questions of the event:

Podium guests:

Sanja Bauer Mikulović (Leibniz-Institut für Neurobiologie, Magdeburg / Junge Akademie),

Viktoria Sereda (Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, VUIAS),

Corinna Kuhr-Korolev (Leibniz-Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung, Potsdam),

Sebastian Willert (Dubow-Institute, Leipzig).

Moderators:

Jana-Katharina Mende (Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg), Oleksandr Zabirko (Universität Regensburg)

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