

# **Scenarios of Demise and Visions for the Future in the Empires of Eastern Europe (1830-1920)**

Conference at the Herder Institute for Historical Research on East Central Europe, Marburg

11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> September 2013

## **Organising Institutions:**

- Herder Institute for Historical Research on East Central Europe – Institute of the Leibniz Community
- Otto-Friedrich-University of Bamberg, Professorship for the History of Central and Eastern Europe
- Leibniz Graduate School for Cultures of Knowledge in Central European Transnational Contexts
- Justus-Liebig-University Giessen, Giessen Centre for Eastern European Studies
- Leibniz-Research Group ‘Crises in a Globalised World’

## **Organisers:**

- Peter Haslinger (Herder Institute, University of Giessen)
- Malte Rolf (University of Bamberg)

## **Call for Papers**

In 1915, in his book ‘The Last Days of Mankind’, Karl Kraus sought to summarise the First World War as an apocalyptic drama; at almost the same time, in ‘National Borders and a Lasting Peace’, the Swiss writer George Montandon outlined a radical vision for the future, which advocated the population transfer of millions of people as a means of stabilising the European state landscape. Such extremes in thinking were brought about both by periods of crisis – such as the First World War – and also by seemingly insoluble systematic problems during times of peace: as soon as old certainties became questioned, prognostic debates almost inevitably arose which were oriented towards the future – both apocalyptic visions and also simulations of the future or utopian fantasies, calling for an extensive, even radical restructuring of societal and political relationships.

The conference at the Herder Institute will explore the parallel nature of such visions, the interactions between them and their consequences. In concrete terms, individual contributions should focus on the emergence and the impact of scenarios of demise and visions for the future in the major empires of Eastern Europe in the period between 1830 and 1920. Not only the ways in which visions of demise, loss and defeat were articulated should be investigated, but also the extent to which they were connected to or initiated far-reaching projects of reform, which often sought to resolve the whole plethora of existing problems and political crises of system in one ‘clean sweep’.

It is precisely this reciprocal conditionality and mutual interplay between visions of demise and visions of a new beginning which will stand at the centre of this conference. We will investigate the extent to which concepts of ‘backwardness’, ‘disease’ and a lack of legitimacy and political problem-solving competences interacted with conceptions of the future, and how political actors reacted to these with visions of stability, prosperity and unity which sought to conform to the existing system, or with programmes or fantasies which aimed at a radical restructuring of politics and society. The conference will therefore seek to identify what the

enabling space was for the application of radical visions, and how they impacted upon upheavals within the system. In certain time periods, and against this backdrop, opinion-makers sought to profit from visions of demise or visions of a new-beginning which, in their turn, were also dependent upon developments in the mass media, upon changes in the application of censorship, and upon the possibilities for – and obstacles to - self-portrayal in the media. Furthermore, the various discourses surrounding demise and new-beginnings can also be situated within the context of the development of respective political publics, since they spurred on debates about problem areas and about the potentials for development.

At the same time, periods of crisis and transformation were also periods of intensified cross-border transfer, of the close appraisal of one's neighbours, and of the drawing of comparisons with and between them; in part, they generated the development, on an intellectual level, of larger trans-imperial units which sought after common solutions to similar problems (e.g. to the nationalities issue). They also stimulated the mutual perception of major empires, and promoted both the exchange of concepts and the import of responsive strategies, thereby contributing to the creation of cross-border expert discourses. In this respect, the conference will seek to discuss the extent to which the exchange of ideas surrounding these various scenarios of demise and visions for the future contributed to the development of trans-imperial communication and encouraged the perception of the empires of Eastern Europe as constituting one comprehensive political region.

The majority of contributions to this conference should focus on the Habsburg monarchy and on the Russian Empire. Beyond this, however, these two states should also be placed in a broader comparative context through further presentations on other contemporary empires (e.g. the Ottoman Empire, Spain or China). This should be done from an interdisciplinary perspective, in which discourses on crises and on utopian visions will be illuminated from the perspective of the historical, social and literary sciences, and also from the perspective of the history of art and the history of architecture.

The working languages of this interdisciplinary conference will be German and English. A good passive understanding of the respective other language is therefore a condition of participation. Travel and accommodation costs will be covered by the organizers, and a conference publication is envisioned.

Please submit all proposals - in the form of a CV and an abstract (max. 1 page in length, in German or English) – by **February 15<sup>th</sup> 2013** at the latest, to the Herder Institute for Historical Research on East Central Europe ([forum@herder-institut.de](mailto:forum@herder-institut.de)). The contact person for this conference is Antje Coburger ([forum@herder-institut.de](mailto:forum@herder-institut.de)).