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Nationalizing and democratizing states: challenges and approaches

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Herder-Institut für historische Ostmitteleuropaforschung – Institut der Leibniz-Gemeinschaft, Nordost-Institut – Institut für Kultur und Geschichte der Deutschen in Nordosteuropa e.V. (IKGN)

Type of Event: Conference

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The years after the First World War were a time of state building in East Central Europe. States were restored or new ones founded from scratch. It was also a time when nation building reached a new level. National ideas that had been pursued by national elites and movements in 19th century became formative for the new states. However, they faced a number of obstacles. One was the ethnic heterogeneity in East Central Europe. Creating national we-groups always meant to likewise draw lines to groups defined as ethnically different. The challenge of national minorities became one of the central issues of the inter-war years. The second one was the fact, that many people were not inclined to perceive themselves as members of a nation but remained "national indifferent" (Tara Zahra). Accordingly, nation states were not merely products of ethnic thinking. They were also agents of promoting an ethnic group consciousness. Therefore, it seems apt to refer to these states as "nationalizing states" (Rogers Brubaker). How, and in which fields, did the new states further the national idea? Which instruments did they have at their disposal? And what were the limits of their nationalization efforts? Which influence did the imperial legacy exert? These and other questions are to be discussed at the Conference of Young Scholars.

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