

Call for Participation: International Conference on the 40th Anniversary of the Chernobyl Disaster

International Conference on the 40th Anniversary of the Chernobyl Disaster

The Radioactive Decay of the Iron Curtain: Re-Examination of the Chernobyl Catastrophe in Comparative Perspective

17-19 April 2026, New Bulgarian University, Sofia

Description

As we approach the 40th anniversary of the Chernobyl explosion, the conference organizers seek to revisit the broader political, social, psychological, and ecological implications of the disaster from a comparative perspective. The explosion, with its immediate health, technological, social, and environmental effects, stands as a symbolic tipping point, revealing an imminent legitimacy crisis within communist states and societies and signaling many of the changes that unfolded in 1989. By comparing the experiences of different countries in Europe, we aim to uncover both the unique and shared aspects of this transformative period on both sides of the Iron Curtain and across various European contexts.

A comprehensive reevaluation of the (mis)management of the disaster in different European countries is crucial for understanding the nature of the political regimes in Europe at that time and the similar/divergent paths each nation has taken over the past 40 years. While the Iron Curtain fell universally, political, institutional, and social trajectories varied. Persistent divisions and shared anxieties are evident between not only different nations but also across various social groups, generations and communities within any given country.

Student Creative Workshop

In parallel with the academic conference, we will host a hands-on creative workshop designed for MA students in creative writing, journalism, scriptwriting, media studies, and marketing from within the ERUA network and beyond. Guided by 2-3 experienced tutors, participating students will observe selected conference panels and work collaboratively on scripts, storyboards, or short media concepts that translate the scholarly debates on Chernobyl's political, social, and ecological legacy into accessible narrative and visual forms.

The workshop aims to bridge academic research and creative communication by encouraging students to explore how catastrophes - and their memory - shape public understanding, democratic engagement, and environmental awareness. Through interdisciplinary exchange and experimentation with diverse media formats, participants will strengthen their skills in societal storytelling, science communication, and cross-cultural collaboration.

Students may apply either **independently for the workshop** or **in combination with a paper proposal**.

Results

The proposed international forum is an in-depth interdisciplinary attempt (1) to fill in a considerable gap in our knowledge about the aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster in Bulgaria and position it among the broader pan-European expertise, and (2) to discuss its long-term effects among scholars with different disciplinary background.

By deploying various research methods and disciplinary competences the conference aims to reconstruct (historicize) the authorities' (none)response to the disaster in different European countries; to map and correlate the stemming health hazards; to scale the moral and legal dimensions of the disaster and its social/political relevance.

Application

Eligible applications

We will consider paper proposals from MA students, PhD students, and post-doctoral researchers with interests and a record of accomplishment in the thematic scope of the conference.

MA students in creative fields (creative writing, journalism, scriptwriting, media, communication, marketing) may apply for the **Creative Workshop**.

Who can apply?

We solicit application from scholars of the social sciences and the humanities who are interest in the following themes:

- State and society reactions to the news of the Chernobyl explosion; reconstruction of institutional chains of command as well as the history of (miss)management - decisions to take or not to take measures to protect the population from detected radiation;
- Collection of data and its interpretation - different expertise and registers of knowledge on radiation, institutional and disciplinary approaches/divisions; Systematization, dissemination and communication of gathered data;
- Ecological mindsets - various regimes of thinking about environmental risks on different levels of state and society (back then and now);
- Media and popular reaction - official policies, informal means of communication, trans-border media and everyday knowledge;
- Political and social relevance of the disaster - a threat, a failure, a precursor of collapse...;
- Long term effects, health hazards and their (im)possible evaluation;
- Transitional justice - judicial prosecution, public condemnation and culprits; Perpetrators and victims - is there a clear boundary?
- Arts and the representations of Chernobyl in institutional and popular culture, education, nowadays politics;
- Remembering Chernobyl and its relevance to contemporary crises.

How to apply

Send your academic CV and topic proposal/abstract to chernobylbg.project@gmail.com no later than 15 February 2026.

If applying for the *Creative Workshop only*, please include a brief motivation letter (max. 300 words) outlining your interests and relevant experience.

How to reach us

Organizers:

Prof. Dimitar Vatsov (New Bulgarian University, Department of Philosophy and Sociology),
Prof. Momchil Metodiev (Institute for Studies of the Recent Past / New Bulgarian University).

Contact point:

Dimiter Dimov
Sofia 1618, Montevideo Str. 21
New Bulgarian University, Campus 3, fl. 4
phone: +359 2 8110442
email: chernobylbg.project@gmail.com