

Call for Papers

International Conference 2025

Ideas, Concepts and Policies of Sovereignty in the Age of the Cold War, 1945-1990

Philipps University Marburg (Germany)

March 27–28, 2025

Deadline for paper submission is September 15, 2024

Conference Topic

Notions and policies of sovereignty have (re-)gained importance, both at the international and the domestic level. Against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine, the appeal to Ukraine's state sovereignty, which is being called into question by Russian aggression, is omnipresent, while “sovereigntist” movements within many states and societies place the idea of “national” sovereignty at the centre of their political agenda.

Not least against this current background, dealing with notions and policies of sovereignty from a historical perspective becomes increasingly important. While ideas and concepts of sovereignty shaped the rise of the modern (European) territorial state and the age of the nation-state, this conference will focus on the historicization and the historical analysis of ideas, concepts and policies of sovereignty in the age of the Cold War.

After 1945, the establishment of competing alliances and bloc structures around the two superpowers USA and USSR resulted in multiple political, economic and military dependencies limiting the political scope of action for many states. State sovereignty, however, was not only restricted factually, but also challenged politically and ideologically, for example by the Brezhnev doctrine of the “Limited Sovereignty of Socialist States” in 1968. Under the conditions of the bloc confrontation, ideas and concepts of sovereignty were also competitively charged and functioned as political arguments in diplomacy as well as international debates.

Despite bloc confrontation, the level of cooperation and integration between states increased significantly after World War II as numerous international organisations emerged. Within the

United Nations state sovereignty was globally manifested as a key concept of international relations and it remained a basic assumption of international law. At the same time sovereignty as well as the predominance of the nation state were questioned and at least partially restricted, for example by the general prohibition against the use of force in the UN Charter. As part of European integration after 1945, a number of states even transferred national sovereignty rights to supranational institutions, leading to the emergence of complex multi-level systems in the European context (with profound effects on concepts, policies and politics of sovereignty). Changing forms of statehood, especially since the 1970s, also contributed to the rise of new concepts of sovereignty, such as de-centered, disaggregated or even post-sovereignty). Despite these or even because of these developments and structures in the Cold War, there were attempts to assert national sovereignty under the conditions of the Cold War (e.g. in nuclear politics or in the process of decolonization). Besides that, traditional ideas and manifestations of (national) state sovereignty were challenged by non-state actors (e.g. the environmental or the peace movement)

The conference assumes that ideas, concepts and manifestations of sovereignty are subject to historical change and are closely linked to dynamics of security/insecurity and power (nationally, internationally, transnationally and globally). The question “Whose sovereignty?” is of particular importance in this regard since sovereignty is not only a contested concept, but is also related to diverging interests (and the ability to express and pursue these interests).

Topics of papers presented at the conference may include, but are not limited to discussions/reflections on sovereignty, manifestations and politics of sovereignty in the following contexts:

- International Organisations such as the United Nations or the European Community
- Military alliances such as the NATO and the Warsaw Pact
- Nuclear history (nuclear armament, strategy, proliferation)
- The process of decolonisation and the north south conflict
- Dimensions of sovereignty (political, economic, financial, cultural; including emerging policy areas such as energy policy)
- Sovereignty discourses in domestic politics and national societies as well as (transnational) social movements

The conference is organized by the Collaborative Research Center “Dynamics of Security”, Subproject C01 “Extended Security - Changes of Statehood after 1970” (Prof. Dr. Eckart Conze, Dr. Benjamin Brendel, Sarah Wilder-Fehl, Marcel Spannenberger). We invite contributions from scholars of all career stages in the realm of contemporary history and neighbouring fields.

The costs for travel and accommodation can be supported depending on the available funding.

Please submit your proposals (no more than 1 page) and a short bio by September 15, 2024 via email to: ng2@mail.uni-marburg.de

In case of questions, do not hesitate to message us.