

Conference: Citizenship and National Socialist Persecution

University of Fribourg, 11 – 12 June 2026

MIS 03, Room 3117

Av. de l'Europe 20

1700 Fribourg

Following the Nazi seizure of power in January 1933, foreign nationals residing in Germany, as well as their countries of origin, were confronted with laws, decrees, and practices that violated customary international law on aliens and bilateral settlement and legal protection treaties. Based on the principle of "racial inequality," the Nazi regime targeted all "alien" and "racially inferior" persons, regardless of whether they held German or foreign citizenship, and reduced their legal status below the minimum standard of international law. Furthermore, the unequal treatment of Jewish and non-Jewish people violated the treaty-based equal treatment clauses enshrined in bilateral settlement agreements, according to which the contracting states were obligated to treat the nationals of the other party equally regarding certain legal positions as their own citizens. Nazi Germany justified the inhumane and discriminatory treatment of foreign Jews by claiming that it ensured they were treated equally to German Jews (but not to non-Jewish Germans).

To protect their own citizens, the respective countries of origin had consular and diplomatic protection at their disposal. However, as the Swiss legal scholar and diplomat Peter Anton Feldscher explained as early as 1930, Switzerland had no "obligation to grant protection [...] and responsibility for the proper fulfillment of the protective task exists only towards the people as a whole and not towards the Swiss citizen as an individual." Thus, according to the understanding at the time, it was "ultimately a matter of political consideration" how "the representation of Swiss interests vis-à-vis foreign countries could best be carried out."¹

In practice, the question of diplomatic protection ultimately took place within the tension between "higher national interests," such as maintaining proper diplomatic relations, and the defense of the sense of justice recognized in international law on aliens as well as in the respective legal system.

The conference "Citizenship and National Socialist Persecution", which will take place on 11 and 12 June 2026, at the University of Fribourg (Switzerland), addresses questions that have received remarkably little attention in research to date. It mainly focuses on the analysis of state interventions to protect foreign citizens in Germany and the territories occupied by Germany during the Second World War. Furthermore, it examines the reactions of the German bureaucracy as well as collaborationist governments to foreign interventions and the resulting conflict between "pragmatic foreign policy", the goals of National Socialist ideology, and the willingness to collaborate.

¹ Feldscher, Peter Anton: Über die Rechtsnatur des diplomatischen und konsularischen Schutzes, ZBJV 1930, 189-307, here: 293 and 307.

Programme

Thursday, 11 June 2026

- 08.30: *Coffee*
- 09.00: Welcome Remarks**
- 09.30 – 11.30: Panel: General Considerations on Nazi Persecution**
- 09.30 – 10.00: Kim Wunschmann: «Enemy Aliens» in Nazi Germany: The Treatment of Foreign Civilians between Convention and Ideology
- 10.00 – 10.30: Raphael Schäfer: Margins of Manoeuvre: Diplomatic Protection and the Limits of International Law in the Shadow of the German Reich
- 10.30 – 11.00: Corry Guttstadt: The persecution of Jews in line with foreign policy
- 11.00 – 11.30: Discussion (Discussant: Alexa Stiller)
- 11.30 – 13.30: *Lunch Break*
- 13.30 – 15.30: Panel: Persecution of Foreign Citizens**
- 13.30 – 14.00: Niels Pohl-Schneeberger: «Problem Management» between Race Ideology and Diplomacy. The National Socialist Persecution of Jews with Foreign Citizenship in the Holocaust
- 14.00 – 14.30: Bernd Rother: Who is a Spaniard? Citizenship and Persecution of Spanish Jews in Nazi-Europe
- 14.30 – 15.00: Fabienne Meyer: The repatriation of Swiss Jews from France as a last resort before deportation
- 15.00 – 15.30: Discussion (Discussant: Karlo Ruzicic-Kessler)
- 15.30 – 16.00: *Break*

- 16.00 – 18.00: Panel: Areas of Intervention for Foreign States**
- 16.00 – 16.30: Pontus Rudberg: Between Political Considerations and Humanitarian Action: Sweden’s Response to Jewish Refugees, 1933–1947
- 16.30 – 17.00: Beate Meyer: Foreign Jews in Nazi Germany: Between Deportation, Internment, and Rescue. Negotiations, Arguments, and Decisions as Reflected in the Records of the German Foreign Office.
- 17.00 – 17.30: Karlo Ruzicic-Kessler: The Swiss representation in Vienna and the Handling of Persecution Cases
- 17.30 – 18.00: Discussion (Discussant: Christina Späti)

Friday, 12 June 2026

- 08.30 – 10.30 Panel: Foreigners in Neutral, Collaborating and Occupied States**
- 08.30 – 09.00: Michael Mayer: Bargaining with Citizenship: How Denaturalization Shaped Persecution in Vichy France
- 09.00 – 09.30: Maria Fragkou: The Sovereignty of Exception in French Consular Jurisdiction: The Legal and Political Framework of Subject Protection Amidst Bilateral Diplomatic Frictions (1942-1943)
- 09.30 – 10.00: Jan Daniluk: A Swiss Journalist in the Gears of the German Machinery of Terror – The Case of Arthur Wyss (1940-1942)
- 10.00 – 10.30: Susanne Bennewitz: Negotiating the effect of the Nuremberg Laws on Swiss citizens
- 10.30 – 11.00: *Break*
- 11.00 – 12.00: Final Discussion and Closing Remarks**

Participants

Susanne Bennewitz, Historian, since 2018 Professor for Social and Cultural Studies, School for Design, University for Applied Science, Trier (Germany). M.A. Freie Universität Berlin (1995) in German Literature, Computer Science and Jewish Studies. Dr. phil. Universität Basel, Switzerland, (2005) in Jewish Studies. 2014-2018, Academic Staff, History, Heidelberg University of Jewish Studies. Researcher, Editor, Public History in Switzerland and Canada. Migration studies, Gender Studies, Swiss History.

Jan Daniluk – PhD, historian, lecturer at the University of Gdańsk, and senior researcher in the research department of the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk. An enthusiast of regional history, primarily focusing on Gdańsk 19th–20th centuries. He also studies general history from 1890 to 1945, with particular emphasis on the WW2 (POWs in German captivity, the German occupation of Europe) and the history of the German Reich. He also researches the history of gambling.

Maria Fragkou is a PhD candidate at University of Geneva, researching the intersection of Diplomatic History and International Law regarding the League of Nations and the refugee crisis (1933–1939). A former excellence fellow of the Hans Böckler Foundation, she has explored international organizations and refugee relief programs in the post-WWII era. She has also served as a visiting researcher at the University of Vienna and the University of Bonn.

Corry Guttstadt received her masters in Turkology and history from Hamburg University and her Ph.D. in history from the same University. She has been teaching at the department of Turkology of Hamburg University and worked as a researcher at the “Verein Aktives Museum” in Berlin (2019-2021) and as a project manager and researcher at the Anne-Frank-Zentrum, Berlin (2010-2012). She earned numerous fellowships (USHMM, Yad Vashem, Fondation pour le mémoire de la Shoah, Vienna Wiesenthal Institute). Her main fields of research are Turkey’s minority policies, especially towards Jews and anti-Semitism in Turkey. She is currently working on an edited volume on Anti-Semitism in and from Turkey.

Dr. Michael Mayer is a historian specializing in contemporary history. He earned a joint Franco-German PhD from LMU Munich and the EHESS Paris, focusing on antisemitism in Nazi Germany and Vichy France. Previously a researcher at the Institute of Contemporary History (Munich–Berlin), he is now Head of the Department of Contemporary History at the Political Academy, Tutzing. He also teaches at the Bundeswehr University Munich and held a fellowship at Arizona State University. His research covers the Holocaust, asylum policy, and German postwar foreign policy.

Fabienne Meyer is a PhD student at the Department of Contemporary History at the University of Fribourg, researching the topic of official practices and diplomatic protection for Swiss victims of National Socialism. She received her Master of Arts in History at the University of Zürich in 2015 and specializes in Holocaust and war memorials in Switzerland. She is involved in the development and establishment of the *Swiss Memorial for the Victims of National Socialism*.

Beate Meyer, Ph.D., a long-time historian at the Institute for the History of German Jews in Hamburg, remains still affiliated with the institute after her retirement. She earned her Ph.D. from the University of Hamburg in 1998 with a dissertation on the persecution of so-called Jewish “Mischlinge”. For her work, which focused primarily on the persecution of German Jews, she received several awards and fellowships from Yad Vashem, the USHMM, and the Center for Holocaust Studies at the IFZ in Munich.

Niels Pohl-Schneeberger studied History and Educational Sciences (B.A.) and Holocaust Studies and Jewish Studies (M.A.) in Berlin. Before taking up his position as a research associate and doctoral candidate at the Center for Holocaust Studies at the Leibniz Institute for Contemporary History in Munich in 2023, he worked as a specialist advisor for the Remembrance and Reappraisal of the National Socialism at the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media.

Dr. Bernd Rother, born 1954, studied History and Political Sciences at the TU Braunschweig. From 1999 – 2020 he was Research Fellow and Deputy Director at the Bundeskanzler-Willy-Brandt-Stiftung, Berlin. Selected Publications: *Global Social Democracy. Willy Brandt and the Socialist International in Latin America*, Lanham (Lexington Books) 2022. *Spanien und der Holocaust*, Tübingen (Niemeyer) 2001.

Pontus Rudberg is Associate Professor of History at Södertörn University. His research focuses on Sweden’s policies and actions during the Second World War, as well as Jewish responses to the Holocaust. He is the author of *The Swedish Jews and the Holocaust* (2017) and co-editor of *Early Holocaust Memory in Sweden: Archives, Testimonies, Reflections* (2021) and the forthcoming *Advances in Holocaust History and Education* (2026). Rudberg is also editor of the journal *Scandinavian Jewish Studies*.

Karlo Ruzicic-Kessler, PhD, is Senior Researcher at the Department of Contemporary History at the University of Fribourg. He has worked as a Researcher at the Science and Research Centre Koper, Slovenia, the Free University of Bolzano, Italy, the University of Vienna, Austria, and the Austrian Academy of Sciences. He specializes in international relations in the 20th century, the history of Italian fascism, as well as regional and transnational history during the Cold War.

Raphael Schäfer, PhD in Law, works at the Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law. Main areas of research: history and foundations of international law; international dispute resolution; international humanitarian law; constitutional law; comparative public law; legal theory; law and literature

Christina Späti is a professor of contemporary history at the University of Freiburg and the UniDistance Suisse (Brig). She obtained her PhD in 2003 at the University of Freiburg. Her research focuses on the Holocaust and its aftermath, anti-Zionism, anti-Semitism and Orientalism, comparative language policy in multilingual countries, and the 1968 movement. She has been a visiting scholar at the Centre for Research on Anti-Semitism at the Technical University of Berlin (2001/02), at the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada in Montréal (2008/09), and at the Centre for Jewish Studies at Harvard University (2017/18). Since 2019, she is affiliated member of the Arnold and Leona Finkler Institute of Holocaust Research at Bar-Ilan University (Ramat Gan, Israel).

Alexa Stiller's current research project is entitled "Visions of Accountability: Global Transformation of Human Rights Activism, International Criminal Law Practice, and Humanitarian Interventions in the Post-Cold War Era." Her major publications include *Völkische Politik: Praktiken der Exklusion und Inklusion in polnischen, französischen und slowenischen Annexionsgebieten, 1939–1945*, 2 Bde. (Wallstein: Göttingen, 2022); *NMT. Die Nürnberger Militärtribunale zwischen Geschichte, Gerechtigkeit und Rechtschöpfung* (co-edited; 2nd edition; Hamburger Edition, 2018); and *Reassessing the Nuremberg Military Tribunals: Transitional Justice, Trial Narratives, and Historiography* (co-edited; Berghahn Books, New York/Oxford, 2012).

Kim Wünschmann is Director of the Institute for the History of the German Jews in Hamburg. She obtained her Ph.D. from Birkbeck, University of London. Her research centers on German-Jewish history, Holocaust Studies and legal history. She held fellowships at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the International Institute for Holocaust Research at Yad Vashem. She was DAAD Lecturer at the University of Sussex and Research Associate at LMU Munich. Publications include *Before Auschwitz: Jewish Prisoners in the Prewar Concentration Camps* (HUP, 2015) and *Oberbrechen: A German Village Confronts Its Nazi Past. A Graphic History* (OUP, 2024).