



Call for Expression of Interest

ESIL Interest Group on the History of International Law

Agora Panel Proposal for the ESIL Annual Conference 2026

Conflict, Crisis and Continuity – Historical Perspectives

Málaga, 03 to 05 September 2026

Submission deadline: 19 January 2026

The ESIL Interest Group on the History of International Law is preparing an Agora panel proposal on ‘Conflict, Crisis and Continuity – Historical Perspectives’. The outcome of the Agora proposal is uncertain, but the panel speakers will be invited to present at the interest group pre-conference workshop, if the Agora proposal is not selected by the conference organizers.

Themes

This panel invites contributions that explore the long history of how international law has been shaped by, responded to, and coexisted with conflict. Contemporary debates frequently describe international law as being in crisis, particularly in light of escalating global conflicts and challenges to normative authority. Yet neither crises nor the tensions between law and conflict are new. Historically, moments of upheaval—whether triggered by war, shifting power structures, or ideological extremism—have repeatedly redefined the international legal order. We seek papers that illuminate how such crises emerged, how they were experienced, overcome and to what extent they represent recurring patterns within the history of international law’s engagement with conflict.

There were seismic conflicts regarding previous orders, such as the Spanish encounter with the American peoples, the Great Turkish War of the 17th century, the rise of the Dutch and the British East India Companies, the earlier Portuguese settlement in Macau from 1557, or the Chinese encounter with Russia in the 1680s. The late nineteenth century is often portrayed as the “golden age” of international law, followed by profound disappointment among scholars and pacifist activists at the outbreak of the First World War. Still, the interwar period also saw significant normative innovations, including the outlawing of war in the Briand–Kellogg Pact—an experiment that was the result of states, scientific cooperation, activism, and broader societal mobilization. How are the prevention of wars and the condemnation and prevention of war crimes historically

linked? The rise of fascism exposed the sharp limits of the interwar legal order. Questions concerning the treatment of Nazi crimes and criminals generated transformative impulses for modern international criminal law through the work of opponents and those persecuted under National Socialism.

We welcome papers that assess the resilience of international law across shifting political conditions. Are there successes in conflict prevention that have been obscured by history? Are there ideas for conflict avoidance that have been forgotten today? How did a system grounded largely in customary norms until well into the twentieth century respond to pressures of war, empire, and changing power hierarchies? Did the relative informality of customary law render it more crisis-resistant, or did it merely expose its dependence on state cooperation?

Contributors may also address the deep entanglements of international law with capitalism and colonialism, or revisit assumptions about the novelty of asymmetric conflict in light of recent work by Lauren Benton. The IG particularly encourages interdisciplinary research engaging with historical methods, such as the use of archives and other historical sources, to apply. Perspectives from underrepresented regions and critical scholars are particularly welcomed.

Submission procedure

Members of the HIL IG and other ESIL Members working on related topics are invited to express their interest in participating by sending to prior to the deadline the following documents to esilighistory@gmail.com:

- An Abstract of no more than 400 words
- Your curriculum vitae
- A short biography about yourself, indicating whether you're an ESIL member and whether you are applying for the ESIL Early-Career Scholar Prize

Timeline

The deadline for expressing interest in the Agora panel proposal is **19 January 2026**. We expect to inform successful applicants **before 31 January 2026** if they will be part of the panel proposal submitted to the ESIL. However, even if the applicants were not selected as the Agora, strong applicants will be invited to present in the ESIL pre-conference workshop.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact us: esilighistory@gmail.com

Please note that the Interest Group is prioritizing those who could present their papers **in person**. However, the Interest Group is unable to provide funding for travel and accommodation. Selected speakers will be expected to bear the costs of their own travel and accommodation. Some ESIL travel grants and ESIL carers' grants will be available to offer partial financial support to speakers who have exhausted other potential funding sources.

Please see the ESIL website for all relevant information about the conference.

Conveners

Monica Garcia-Salmones Rovira - Anastasia Hammerschmied – Florenz Volkaert – Sze
Hong Lam (Ocean)