

Call for papers:

Firms, Wars, and Ethics in the Business History of Central and Eastern Europe and Russia

Place: Università Ca' Foscari, Venice

Date: October 21-22, 2022

For this 4th Workshop on Business History in Central and Eastern Europe, the organizers invite scholars, including Ph.D. students of any relevant discipline to submit paper proposals on a broad range of topics related to business actors & corporate behavior in (and after) armed conflicts during the 20th century.

The workshop will particularly draw on historical research on the two World Wars and their aftermaths to provide tentative answers to several questions evoked by the Russia-Ukraine war of 2022. The aim is to explore the relationship between business and geopolitics from a long-term historical perspective focusing on the economic and social consequences of the war, including (de)globalization processes.

On February 24, 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine, causing thousands of deaths among civilians, colossal damage in the infrastructure, and forcing over 10 million people to leave their homes. In response, democratic states have demonstrated unprecedented unity and imposed extensive economic sanctions on Russia. The combination of military conflict, economic warfare, and humanitarian crisis has had an enormous impact on the economic environment, including the disruption of global supply chains, commodity price shock, increased market volatility, and making the world's economic development, already hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, even more unpredictable.

As a result, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has affected both the multinational companies as well as the domestic firms operating in Central-Eastern Europe. Within just a few weeks, companies running in CEE faced challenges rarely dealt with at business schools. Companies face ethical dilemmas and feel strong pressure from their shareholders and stakeholders, forcing them to make decisions that go well beyond usual business thinking and strategizing. Thousands of companies have decided to divest, withdraw, or scale down their operations in Russia. In contrast, others justify their decision to stay with their responsibility towards their employees in Russia and their unwillingness to deprive Russia's population of essential goods such as food and medical supplies.

The events unfolding in the last weeks in Ukraine and CEE have presented business historians with serious questions concerning:

The role of business in military conflicts and post-war development. What are the various roles firms play in armed conflicts? How is the role of companies decided in conflicts? How and why can some companies benefit from war while others suffer disruption and destruction in their production and distribution networks? Why do some companies embrace the role of humanitarian actors providing welfare and assistance, while others that of political actors using their activities to build bridges for peace? Which role can business enterprises play in post-war development? How fast do companies return to the countries affected by war, and how do their previous decisions impact the post-war future? How does organizational resilience manifest itself in the aftermath of war? What can we learn from the experience of the First and the Second World Wars?

Business ethics vs. unethical corporate behavior. What does (business) history teach us about ethical behavior in times of war? How does public pressure affect corporate behavior and reputation? To what extent can ethical leadership and corporate social responsibility contribute to solving the humanitarian crisis? How do firms/managers decide what they perceive (un)ethical? Who are the main actors in this process?

Corporate lessons from uncomfortable pasts. Most historians do not embrace the naïve view of “learning from history” as history does not repeat itself. However, is there something that we can learn from corporate entanglement in wars and corporate strategies after armed conflicts? Are there implications after the war for companies operating in belligerent countries who perceive their activities as neutral? What are the advantages of staying or leaving for firms trying to rebuild their business abroad after a war? What role, if any, does corporate memory and corporal forgetting play in facilitating conflicts? Who decides and who should decide what to remember and forget, especially in the case of uncomfortable or dark heritage?

We invite fellow scholars to discuss corporate behavior during past wars and humanitarian crises to contribute to our understanding of the Russia-Ukraine war and its possible consequences for business in Central and Eastern Europe from a historical perspective. The workshop is aimed to engage in a debate about the behavior of business actors and to understand whether and how firms' behavior during and after wars has changed over time and across regions. The call is open to all topics that fit the general scope of the workshop. Although our focus is Central Eastern Europe, we welcome studies concerning other regions if they contribute to deepening our understanding of the topic.

To apply, please, send an abstract of 500 words presenting the subject, the conceptual framework, the analytical approach, and the controversial issue(s) to tackle within the discussion, along with a maximum two-page-long CV by April 28, 2022, to Valentina Fava

valentina.fava@unive.it. Papers for presentation will be selected following a peer-review procedure.

The format of the workshops is designed to support a comprehensive discussion on selected topics. We welcome both panel proposals dealing with conceptual and methodological questions and brief contributions. Participants are invited to submit a written paper (not exceeding 6,000 words) three weeks before the workshop. We will distribute these texts among the workshop participants prior to the workshop.

The organizers are currently applying to foundations for financial support to cover the costs of workshop participants. Colleagues from Central and Eastern Europe will be prioritized.

Organizers: Ulf Brunnbauer (Leibniz Institute for East and Southeast European Studies (IOS), Regensburg), Valentina Fava (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia), Alfred Reckendrees (Copenhagen Business School), Tomasz Olejniczak (Kozminski University, Warsaw), Volodymyr Kulikov (The Ukrainian Catholic University).

The workshop series is supported by the European Business History Association