

Call for Papers

Charter 77 at 50: Transnational Human Rights, Social Imagination, and Civic Resistance in the (Post-)Global Age

18–19 February 2027 | Vila Lanna, Prague

The Institute of Contemporary History and the Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences invite proposals for a two-day international conference bringing together historical scholarship and contemporary reflections on civic activism and democratic resistance.

Held on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of Charter 77, the conference does not seek merely to commemorate a landmark of Czech and Czechoslovak history. Rather, it aims to reassess Charter 77 as a historically situated yet internationally significant experiment in civic resistance, and to explore its changing meanings in an era marked by democratic backsliding, geopolitical fragmentation, and the transformation of the global human rights order. The conference seeks to foster dialogue across disciplinary, geographical, and generational boundaries between scholars and civic actors concerned with the past, present, and future of democracy and human rights.

Charter 77 emerged in 1977, during the normalization period in Czechoslovakia, as a culturally and politically distinctive act of civic resistance “from below” in defense of fundamental human rights. It soon became not merely a symbol but an enduring platform of democratic opposition to late communist dictatorship, whose language, practices, and moral authority resonated far beyond Czechoslovakia.

Recent scholarship has highlighted both Charter 77’s rootedness in the political and intellectual context of the late Cold War and its lasting significance as a distinctive experiment in civic resistance. Today, when the international order shaped by the Helsinki process is undergoing profound transformation, when global consensus on human rights is increasingly contested, and when democratic institutions face mounting pressure, Charter 77 offers an important historical perspective for rethinking questions of human dignity, civic responsibility, pluralism, and nonviolent resistance.

The notion of **social imagination**, understood as the capacity to envision alternative forms of political and civic life, lies at the heart of this conference. Likewise, the idea of the **(post-)global age** refers to an increasingly fragmented international landscape in which universal aspirations coexist with renewed geopolitical rivalry, regionalization, and competing visions of democracy, sovereignty, and human rights.

The conference will bring together scholars from history, philosophy, political science, legal studies, cultural anthropology, sociology, and related disciplines alongside contemporary civic actors. It aims to explore the intellectual and political legacy of dissent, its transformations after 1989, and the ways in which the Chartist ethos may illuminate current debates on democracy, human rights, civic engagement, and nonviolent resistance.

The program will move across three broad, interconnected registers: the historical legacy of Charter 77 itself, situated within Czech/Slovak, Central European, and global frames; the trajectories of contemporary anti-authoritarian and democratizing movements across Eastern Europe (from Serbia and Belarus to Russia and Georgia); and the wider global dimensions of present-day human rights and democratization struggles. Contributions are welcome that speak to any of these registers, or that move between them.

We invite proposals addressing, among others, the following themes – though contributions are by no means limited to this list:

- Charter 77 in comparative perspective: dissidence, opposition, and civic initiatives across socialist Europe.
- Eastern Europe and international human rights organizations: historical links between dissidence and its contemporary forms.
- Human rights and the transformation of the international system: the evolution of international norms from Helsinki to the present.
- Religion, ethics, and human rights in dissident thought.
- Social imagination and the language of resistance: how concepts of human dignity, solidarity, and civic responsibility continue to shape contemporary activism.
- Transnational solidarity across political regimes: historical dissident networks and contemporary forms of digital mobilization.
- Law, institutional independence, and civic oversight: dissident legalism, authoritarian legality, and contemporary legal resistance.
- The ethics of nonviolence and the limits of civil disobedience: theory and practice across different historical contexts.
- Cultural opposition and artistic imagination: forms of cultural dissent, past and present, and the question of creative freedom under conditions of digital surveillance and platform capitalism.
- The memory of dissent in public space: institutionalization, contested narratives, and the relationship between history, politics, and activism.
- Political order and civil resistance in the age of artificial intelligence: surveillance, disinformation, repression, and democratic resilience in historical perspective.
- Civic engagement after 1989: continuities, transformations, and forgotten traditions of democratic participation.

Submission Guidelines

Please submit:

- an abstract of **300–500 words** outlining the research question, methodology, sources (where appropriate), and principal argument;
- a brief biographical note.

Submission deadline: 6 September 2026

Please send submissions to: **Charter77Conference@usd.cas.cz**

Notification of acceptance: 30 September 2026

Practical Information

- **Conference language:** English
- **Presentation length:** 20 minutes
- **Format:** On-site
- **Travel and accommodation:** Covered by the organizers

Organizers

Institute of Contemporary History, Czech Academy of Sciences
Institute of Philosophy, Czech Academy of Sciences

Organizational and Media Partners

Institute for Human Sciences (IWM), Vienna
Democracy Institute, Central European University (Budapest)
Libri Prohibiti (Prague)
Czechoslovak Documentation Center, National Museum (Prague)

For inquiries, please contact **Klára Řiháková** or **Michal Kopeček** at
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We look forward to receiving your submissions.