

## Research Project

### Between Realpolitik and Utopia. A Century with the Balfour Declaration

#### **Project funded by own resources**

**Project title** Between Realpolitik and Utopia. A Century with the Balfour Declaration

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#### **Organisation / Research unit**

Departement Gesellschaftswissenschaften / Islamwissenschaft (Reinkowski)

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The 'Balfour Declaration' was a letter sent by the United Kingdom's Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour on 2 November 1917 to one of the leaders of the British Jewish community, Walter Rothschild. Few other documents of such minimal length have had in world history such important and long-term consequences. That the Balfour Declaration had consequences is shared opinion, yet the nature and effects of them are highly contested. The international conference "Between Realpolitik and Utopia: A Century with the Balfour-Declaration" in November 2017 in Basel is devoted to the historiographical, political and intellectual debate of what the Balfour Declaration has brought about and what it might imply today.

The Balfour Declaration is major stepping stone in the construction of new order of the Middle East after the demise of the Ottoman Empire, but it is also a notion of what Palestine, Europe and the Middle East might and or should – not – have been. The conference will address the various utopian and dystopian aspects and interpretations of the declaration. The Balfour Declaration has multiplied the projective dimensions of Palestine in the European imagination and has made it part of Europe's history of identity by embedding the Zionist vision into Western imperial 'Realpolitik'. A main rationale of the conference is to argue that the Balfour Declaration is emblematic for how convoluted the two entities are that we still conceive today as 'Europe' and the 'Middle East'.

The conference is organized by Alfred Bodenheimer and Erik Petry (Center for Jewish Studies) and Maurus Reinkowski (Seminar of Middle Eastern Studies), University of Basel, in cooperation with Hans-Lukas Kieser from The Centre for the History of Violence, University of Newcastle, Australia.

The conference is also part of the project cluster "Cataclysm" discussing the extremely violent period of transformation from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic: The demise of the Ottoman Empire and its complex ethnic, religious and social fabric in the 1910s is not only a defining event in the history of the Middle East and Europe and of global history. It is also a period of massive destruction, human suffering, and squandered opportunities for peace. The project cluster "Ottoman Cataclysm" is committed to contribute to an integrative narrative that aims to provide a critical and precise rendering of the traumatic events of past. As importantly, it seeks to propose a well-researched background for the politics and society of the Middle East, as it is experiencing convulsions that resonate with the events of the 1910s.

**Keywords** World War One, Palestine, Israel, Zionism, Great Britain, Israeli-Palestine conflict, Middle East, Europe

#### **Financed by**

Other funds

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