A. Russia and Poland Compared (Dr Harald Wydra) MT 2019

Introduction

This course introduces into central selected themes of Russian and Polish politics. It uses historical, political, and sociological methods in order to understand the problems of state-formation, nationalism and nationhood, ideological traditions, as well as regime-types and regime-transitions in these two countries. This course will develop conceptual tools that help understanding numerous family resemblances related to similar patterns of social development and state tradition but also highlight fundamental differences related to traditions of government, leadership, and commitments to different types of democracy.

Essential reading:


Laruelle, Marlene (2010) Russian Nationalism and the National reassertion of Russia (Routledge)

Plokhy, Serhii (2017) Lost Kingdom: A History of Russian Nationalism from Ivan the Great to vladimir Putin (New York: Basic books)


Lecture 1: State traditions and state formation

This lecture looks at problems of territorial sovereignty, the rationales of centralised rule, and the fluidity of borders, which were characteristic for the ‘Eastern’ type of state-formation. Whilst there are common patterns of state development, this lecture
also highlights the fundamentally different trajectories of state-building, in particular the imperial expansion of Russian statehood versus the statelessness and foreign domination in Poland.


**Lecture 2: Nationalism and Nation-Building**

This lecture explores paths of nation-building, variants of nationalism, and meanings of nationhood. It attempts to make sense of the paradoxical trajectories of Poland as a ‘nation without a state’ and the Russian empire as a ‘state without a nation’.


Lecture 3: Leadership and Ideological Traditions

This lecture examines key concepts of leadership and the attendant ideological traditions in both countries. Given the differences in state capacity, regime type, and religious-cultural traditions, the focus will on forms of political messianism, oriented towards the reconstitution of an independent state in Poland, and towards imperial expansion in the case of the Russian empire and the Soviet Union, as well as the renewed attempts to neo-imperialism under state-led nationalism in the Russian Federation.


Lecture 4: Communism: Revolution, Resistance, Dissidence

Whilst both Russia and Poland shared the experience of communism as a fundamental period of state modernisation during the twentieth century, this lecture identifies the different modalities of its implementation, key institutional characteristics, and modes of resistance against communist power.


Wydra, Harald, *Communism and the Emergence of Democracy*, chapters 3 and 5.

**Lecture 5: Post-Communism: Paths to Democracy**

This lecture explores different trajectories and meanings of democratisation in both countries. Whilst one focus will be on the similarities of regime transitions in the sense of producing republican governments with constitutional democratic systems this lecture is primarily concerned with the fundamental patterns of the modalities of regime transition and the reasons for why Poland created a parliamentary multi-party system, whilst the Russian Federation developed a super-presidential system supporting a managed state democracy.


**Lecture 6: Legacies of the Past**

Before the background of fundamental differences in the democratic credentials of both systems and, more importantly perhaps, the divergent international anchorage of each country in different geo-political alliances, this lecture is interested in the weight and continuing significance of legacies of the past.


**Supervision essay questions:**

*Is there an Eastern European model of nationalism?*

*How did communist legacies influence democratisation processes in Eastern Europe?*

*Do transition processes weaken or strengthen state power?*

*How has nationalism shaped state traditions in Eastern Europe?*

*Was authoritarian rule in Eastern Europe dependent on national particularities?*

*Can legacies of the past explain the evolution of post-communist democracies?*