

International Call

Illiberal Tendencies and Populism in East-Central Europe. Political Present – Cultural Forms – Historical Causes

Populist and illiberal authoritarian tendencies have been part of the global political and social landscape for a number of years. They are also virulent in East-Central Europe, notably so in Hungary and Poland. The Summer School of the Eastern European Studies program based at the Universities of Bern and Fribourg aims to examine the historical, political, cultural and social causes and emerging conditions of these trends from an interdisciplinary perspective. To this end, we will test theoretical and analytical concepts to describe these phenomena, discuss specific developments using concrete examples and place them in pan-European and global contexts.

Dates: September 5-9, 2022

Location: Münchenwiler Castle, Canton Bern, Switzerland

Topic and Aims:

The decline and collapse of the communist regimes led from 1989 to 1991 to comprehensive upheavals in East and East-Central Europe. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the establishment of liberal democracies seemed to be inevitable.

The process of transition from state socialism to new political systems was often accompanied by an attempt to develop national self-images and images of the other, to seek distance from Soviet hegemony and to search for new (and old) patterns of identification. At the same time, the economic effects of the transition, such as unemployment, poverty and social conflicts, presented a major challenge. In 2004 and 2007 two rounds of the Eastern Enlargement expanded the membership of the European Union. For other countries in Eastern Europe, the "Eastern Partnership" was created.

But Western orientation and democratization did not automatically go hand in hand, nor have they proven to be irreversible processes: in Hungary and Poland, populist parties have come to power pursuing a national-conservative and EU-critical policy. In many cases, the principles of the liberal rule of law-based state have been undermined, and the freedom of the press has been restricted. Today, parties and personalities which outspokenly oppose diversity and propagate ethnonationalism with a traditionalist view of society achieve electoral success. Their central reference points are the Church and/or the 'nation', while ethnic or social minorities are increasingly villainized and discriminated against. The image of the 'primordial' nation and a constituent, ethnically homogeneous people is promoted to the population through targeted cultural, historical and education policies.

From a pan-European and global perspective, these developments do not necessarily represent a specific or unique Eastern and East-Central European case. Similar tendencies can be observed in many countries around the world (the U.S., the Philippines, Brazil, etc.). The question therefore arises as to how these illiberal tendencies in East-Central Europe differ from those in other world regions (but also

in comparison to each other) and in which aspects do overlaps exist. What role does the heritage of socialism and authoritarianism play in states like Hungary and Poland? With which political and ideological policies do parties such as Fidesz or PiS attract voters?

The Summer School aims to formulate answers to these questions. In doing so, the dynamics that have developed around populist-national conservative parties in East-Central Europe will be analyzed in detail and the thematic field of populism and illiberal tendencies in the East-Central European countries will be approached in a multi-perspective and interdisciplinary manner. To this end, we will bring approaches from political science, historiography, and cultural studies into our discussions.

Our debates will focus on the following questions:

1. Conceptual level and historical background:

- How are populism, illiberal tendencies, conservatism and nationalism defined and understood? How do political actors or groups describe their own programs?
- Where do we find the historical, cultural, socio-economic and political causes for populism, conservatism and for illiberal tendencies?
- Which historical reference points are used? Which historical actors / thinkers / writings / model conditions are referred to?
- Which analytical categories and theories offer an appropriate conceptual approach (e.g., nation/nationalism, community/society, authoritarianism, identity, anti-modernism)?
- How can the developments in East-Central Europe be described in a larger historical and international context (see conservatism, traditionalism, (right) populism in Russia, in Europe, in the U.S., etc.)?

2. Specific contemporary developments:

- Processes, actors, interdependencies and receptions; which developments are specific to East-Central Europe?
- Analysis of the effects of the "power grab" by populist parties; the attempt to reshape politics, law, economics, and other areas of society such as the media, etc., in line with a conservative agenda.
- Populist movements strive for discursive hegemony in order to be able to implement their policies effectively. Which counter-reactions and opposition at the local, national and international level can we identify? Do counter-discourses exist, and what are their prospects of success?
- What consequences and effects do illiberal tendencies have on a transnational level? How does the EU deal with these developments?

The following specific topics will be taken into account during the Summer School:

- Education & Science
- Press freedom & media landscape
- The rule of the law based state
- Historical and intellectual basics
- Antimodern tendencies & religion
- The role of the opposition

The Summer School is organized by the Eastern European Studies program based at the Universities of Bern and Fribourg, which specializes in interdisciplinary historical and contemporary issues of

Eastern and East-Central Europe. The Summer School will be held in English. Active participation is expected of all attendees.

Keynote speeches by renowned experts will delimit the guiding principles of the discussion. Joint debates on the subject matter take place in rotation between working groups and plenary discussions. For preparation purposes, a reading list will be sent in advance as a basis for discussion to all participants. As an outcome of the Summer School, participants will create an independent podcast, video, blog, or interview contribution on a predefined topic in working groups. These will be made available to a broader interested public on the website of the Summer School.

Participants can expect the opportunity to intensively exchange with experts from the field of research and young researchers from different countries, and they will also be able to expand their own international network.

When successfully completing the Summer School, participants will receive a confirmation for their studies of 3 ECTS. How these ECTS points will be credited to the individual participants study records will be decided by the respective 'home' university of each participant.

Advanced students of Eastern European studies, specifically the historical or social sciences, as well as doctoral students who focus on Eastern (and East-Central) Europe and at least on one of the following topics, are invited to apply:

- Populism
- Illiberal tendencies
- Authoritarian developments
- Nation and nationalism
- Identity politics
- Social movements
- Political Extremism
- Minorities
- Concepts of freedom
- Forms of protest
- Civil society
- Personalism

The organizers would especially encourage interested early stage researchers from East-Central Europe and Switzerland to apply. The Summer School will take place in Münchenwiler Castle, if the pandemic situation allows. The costs of travel (2nd class), accommodation and meals will be covered by the Summer School.

To apply for the Summer School, please send a short CV, a letter of motivation (about 300 words) and a certificate of study / MA diploma in a single PDF file by **March 31, 2022**, to the following email: osteuropa-studien.hist@unibe.ch. Applicants will be informed about the status of their application by May 14, 2022.

Organisers:

Eastern European Studies Bern-Fribourg, Centre for Global Studies, University of Bern / Swiss Library of Eastern Europe, University of Bern / Department of European and Slavic Studies, University of Fribourg