

Understanding Russia: Insights into Contemporary Russian Culture and Politics

13 December – 17 December 2021

University of Tartu Office in Tallinn, Teatri väljak 3

The Russian Federation may often be perceived as the reincarnation of the Soviet Union, a country of authoritarian political culture single-handedly ruled by Vladimir Putin that continues to pursue an expansionist foreign policy agenda and engage in a new Cold War against the West. Whilst there is undoubtedly a grain of truth in some of these stereotypes, they hardly advance our understanding of the social, cultural and political developments that underlie current crises, drive Russia's domestic and foreign policy, and influence the daily lives and attitudes of millions of Russians.

This training programme invites you to go beyond clichés by looking at some of the key aspects of Russia's political, social and cultural developments, both in their own right and as foreign policy drivers. As the programme will be held in Russian it will also help attendees to freshen up their Russian skills.

Target group	EU diplomats, Estonian diplomats and civil servants, representatives from public sector.
Workload	30 classroom hours (lectures and seminars), 6 hours of independent study
Working language	Russian

Registration:

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Programme

Monday 13 December

09:00 – 10:30

Viacheslav Morozov. Empire as a mode of governance: a brief historical overview

Relying on a comparative perspective we will briefly trace back the key moments in the development and expansion of the Russian empire, with the particular emphasis on the way internal diversity was governed at different stages in history.

10:45 – 12:15

Viacheslav Morozov. Political system and governance

This class will focus on the constitutional design of the Russian political system and then discuss how formal structures and informal networks interact in the system of governance. We will also analyse various models used in describing the distribution of power. Special attention will be paid to the role played by the military and security services in Russian politics as well as to their organization and funding.

12:15–13:30 Lunch

13:30 – 15:00

Viacheslav Morozov. Recent political developments

Continuing from the previous session, we will discuss the constitutional reform, initiated by President Putin in February 2020, whose significance goes far beyond extending Putin's rule after 2024. The 'people's vote' will have profound consequences for the future elections, whereas the constitutional amendments affect the legitimacy of the current constitution. The final part of this class will be devoted to the most recent elections held in September 2021.

Tuesday 14 December

09:00 – 10:30

Elena Pavlova. Russia's modernity. National identity and Orthodox Church. Historical memory

There are many ways of defining the key problem of Russia's social development, but most of them focus on Russia's place in the modern world. Russia is one of the semi-peripheral countries whose modern development was driven by competition with more advanced Western countries. This class will provide a summary of the national identity debate, its history and its origins in the European Enlightenment. We will also discuss religious freedom in Russia and its regulation by the state, the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in domestic politics and foreign policy and the mutual influence of the church and the state. We will also focus on everyday religious practices in the Russian society. Special attention will be given to Victory Day as a cornerstone of contemporary Russian identity. We will also discuss both the official state policies related to history and memory (e.g. the 'Russia: My History' exhibitions) as well as the bottom-up commemorative practices (e.g. 'The Last Address', 'Immortal Regiment' and so on).

10:45 – 12:15

Elena Pavlova. Russia's alternative political spaces. Political repression

Despite the pressure from the state, Russia still has a vibrant civil society, which includes not only oppositional movements (liberal and nationalist), but also organisations oriented towards social support, environmental issues, humanitarian and many other concerns. This thematic bloc covers the most important developments beyond state's officialdom, including social movements, civil society initiatives, lifestyle groups and the public protest actions challenging Putin's regime. The 'white ribbon' movement in defence of fair elections in 2011-2012 was a crucially important case that illustrates many strengths and weaknesses of the liberal opposition movement. We will also cover the liberal opposition structures and personalities outside Russia: Mikhail Khodorkovsky and 'Open Russia', Garry Kasparov, Vladimir Kara-Murza and the 'Boris Nemtsov Foundation for Freedom', Free Russia House in Kyiv. The case of Alexey Navalny's poisoning and the defeat of the Anti-Corruption Foundation will be considered. The evolution of the 'foreign agent' law will be discussed via the example of persecution of Navalny's supporters, first of all the 'Smart Voting'.

12:15 – 13:30 Lunch

13:30 – 15:00

Elena Pavlova. Corruption and social inequality. Social hierarchies in contemporary Russia

Corruption is widely believed to be the most important obstacle on the way towards reforms and modernisation in Russia. We will discuss both the concept and specific practices, as they are reported by the media and researchers. Next, we will concentrate on the state's anti-corruption campaigns and discuss their controversial consequences. Economic inequality in Russia not just dramatically increased in the post-Soviet period, but also became more conspicuous as the new elites no longer had to conceal their wealth. There are also other types of social hierarchies, related to various forms of social capital. Authors like Simon Kordonsky have even written about 'new feudalism', a society divided into estates rather than classes. The groups that run political, diplomatic and economic affairs in contemporary Russia are rather diverse in terms of their origin and the forms of social capital that they rely upon.

Wednesday 15 December

09:00 – 10:30

Andrey Makarychev. Russia beyond Moscow: Governance and Resistance

In this class the participants are invited to get involved in a discussion of political developments in Russian subnational regions and non-central cities. One part of the discussion will concern the most recent trends in administrative and managerial practices unfolding on regional level; another part of the session looks at different forms of protest activities and anti-Kremlin / anti-Moscow mobilization in the provincial Russia.

10:45 – 12:15

Andrey Makarychev. Covid-19 and Crisis Management in Russia: Domestic Experiences of 2020-2021

The main argument discussed in this class claims that political dynamics in 2020 created some demands and correspondingly political niches for a medicalized type of public knowledge related to issues of health and sickness, and also of life and death. The Kremlin's regime therefore is using a new set of Covid-19-related narratives for legitimizing Putin's rule through a number of media personalities with medical background. By the same token, we shall discuss the public role of 'Doctors' Alliance', an independent trade union of medical workers which appeared as a harsh critic of the government's anti-pandemic policies, and a voice in other cases of politicization of medical knowledge.

12:15 – 13:30 Lunch

13:30 – 15:00

Andrey Makarychev. Russia's Vaccine Diplomacy: between Political Strategy and Business Project

This class aims to scrutinize a new form of Russia's foreign policy activity known as vaccine diplomacy, which in a broader sense might be discussed as a specific type of health diplomacy, or biodiplomacy. Participants will be familiarized with the promotion of the Sputnik V vaccine as a political and a business project.

Thursday 16 December

09:00 – 10:30

Viacheslav Morozov. Foreign policy. Relations with the West

This class will reconstruct the worldview behind the main official documents guiding foreign policy and discuss how they are adopted and implemented. It will also address the geopolitical views of the Russian elites and the security concerns, especially in relations with the US, the EU and NATO. Then, we will focus on Russia's relations with its most important neighbours: the EU and the Eastern Partnership countries. After considering the structural factors, interests and institutions that shape the relationship, we will focus on the main cases where Russia has been in conflict with its neighbours.

10:45 – 12:15

Andrey Makarychev. Russia in the post-Soviet world

This theme covers Russia's policies towards its post-Soviet neighbors, both EU / NATO-oriented and parts of the Eurasian integration project. Particular emphasis will be placed on Ukraine, Belarus and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

12:15 – 13:30 Lunch

13:30 – 15:00

Andrey Makarychev. Russia-Estonia Relations in a Broader European Context

In this class we discuss the general frame of Russia's policy towards Estonia, and particularly its new elements that shape the state of bilateral relations. We shall also look at how the Russian-Estonian relations can be approached from the broader European perspective.

Friday 17 December

09:00 – 10:30

Viacheslav Morozov. The economy

This part will discuss the key issues and concepts useful for the understanding of the Russian economic situation, such as state capitalism, old and new oligarchy, dependency and import substitution, corruption, organized crime and the quality of institutions. We will analyse the significance of defence industries and the energy sector for economic development and discuss state-of-the art research on the peripheral economic models and lifestyles of ordinary Russians both in the metropolitan areas and in more remote places. In this session, also we will discuss the problems usually associated with energy dependence (such as the Dutch disease) and assess Russia's attempts to deal with them. We will also look at the current state of the Russian energy sector and Russia's position on climate change.

10:45 – 12:15

Elena Pavlova. Family. Feminism and sexual minorities

This class will cover the question of gender in Russian popular and official discourse. We will start with the controversial legacy of the Soviet gender equality policy and its central figure of the working mother. Special attention will be paid to the contradictory dynamics of traditionalism and individualism characteristic of contemporary Russian family relations. Feminism is a wide political and ideological field and no longer a minority position, as illustrated by the recent high-profile cases. This class will focus on the events and their reception, in Russia and beyond. We will also look at the state policies in relation to sexual minorities (the law on 'gay propaganda') and at the problem of mass homophobia. As an example, the Protest actionism and feminist writing will be discussed.

12:15 – 13:30 Lunch

13:30 – 15:00

Elena Pavlova. Russia's changing cultural landscapes

After briefly reviewing the downturn in mass culture in the Perestroika time, we will discuss the transformation of the contemporary Russian popular culture and the practices of cultural consumption. The class will focus on the most important discussions about literature and cinema in Russian society, and provide a brief overview of the educational system and new educational projects. Special attention will be given to the change in the social role of education and science.

Lecturers



Elena Pavlova is a Researcher at the University of Tartu Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies. Her research areas include Russia's politics of memory and history, corruption, and social hierarchies.



Viacheslav Morozov is Professor of EU-Russia Studies at the University of Tartu Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, and Academic Director of CEURUS. His research interests include poststructuralism, postcolonial theory and critique, theory of democracy, ideology and discourses in Russia (including comparative aspects), and EU-Russia relations. He is a member of Academia Europaea, chair of the Program Committee of the Annual Tartu Conference on Russian and East European Studies, and country editor for USSR/Russia in the Making Identity Count project.



Andrey Makarychev is a Professor of Regional Political Studies at the University of Tartu Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies and a fellow of CEURUS. His research includes Russian foreign policy discourses, international security, and regionalism in the EU – Russia common neighbourhood. Professor Makarychev is also a blog moderator for PONARS-Eurasia website, columnist and political analyst of several journals.