

# PUTIN, POWER, POPULISM: RUSSIA AND EURASIA IN GLOBAL POLITICS



3rd year undergraduate option  
module convenor: Dr Stefanie Ortmann

[s.ortmann@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:s.ortmann@sussex.ac.uk) contact me for any questions about this module!

# THE WORLD IS CHANGING

**...and Eurasia is (once again) at the centre of these developments.**

After the Soviet collapse, the region was supposed to symbolize the triumph of Western democracy and capitalism. A few decades later, the Kremlin meddles in Western elections, and Russia and China are challenging the Western-centric liberal international order. Regional dynamics underpin all of this.



# YOU SHOULD TAKE THIS MODULE IF...

- You want a topical module that deals with current global shifts. Eurasia and Russia illustrate both the crisis of Westernization and what may come in its place.
- You want to learn about the messy 'new geopolitics' (of identities, economic and political entanglements, etc.) that shape the region and the world.
- You want to understand how the legacies of non-Western empires and the alternative modernity of the Soviet Union shape the region and world politics.
- You want to explore your interest in particular issues (security, development or international politics) in a specific regional context.



# Overview of the module

We will explore the role of Russia and Eurasia in global politics, with particular attention to the current 'crisis of the liberal West'. You'll learn about geopolitical assumptions that have long shaped Western understandings of Russia and of global politics – and how Eurasia's new 'messy geopolitics' force us to rethink some of these assumptions.

First we learn about post-Soviet patterns of state formation, their implications for international politics, and how they are shaped by the legacies of empire and Soviet modernity. What is the 'Putin system', what role is played by transnational oligarchic networks, and why is there a new 'geopolitics of identity'? Have Russia and the West returned to a 'new Cold War'? What is the role of democratic protests across the region in all of this?

We'll then turn to some of the most important current issues in the region – 'frozen' conflicts (from the Caucasus to Ukraine), the Russian-Chinese relationship, and the geopolitics of oil and gas. Finally, we'll explore Russia's role as 'illiberal beacon' and 'authoritarian Great Power' and the new tools it's using to promote this agenda. How is this contributing to the crisis of the liberal West, and how is Russia's new role and its alignment with China changing global dynamics?



# SESSION PLAN

1. What is Eurasia? Orientalism, Eurocentrism and the post-Soviet
2. Post-imperial and/or post-Soviet? Historical legacies, the end of the Soviet Union and the emergence of a region
3. Domestic-external linkages I: state-building and the international politics of the Russian network state
4. Domestic-external linkages II: political imaginaries and the geopolitics of identity
5. Russia, Europe and the West: replaying the Cold War?
6. Wrecks of empire: frozen conflicts and de facto states
7. Russian neo-imperialism, Chinese hegemony? The changing geopolitics of Eurasia
8. The geopolitics of energy in Eurasia
9. Russia and the crisis of the liberal West
10. essay workshop
11. 1-1 supervisions

## Module organization and prerequisites

There are no particular prerequisites for this module - if you liked Politics of Foreign Policy, you'll enjoy this module and recognize some themes, but we'll cover concepts and theories as well as historical background in class.

Teaching will take place in a weekly 3-hour interactive seminar format, involving student presentations, discussion of the readings and group work. This includes everything from working with primary sources to small simulation games.

I will introduce the week's topic and will often give short background lectures to put issues into context, but there is no formal lecture element. The focus is very much on student activities, which requires reading in preparation for class.

The module covers the post-Soviet period – the emphasis will be very much on current issues, though we will often look at this through the lens of historical legacies (Soviet and imperial).



# ASSESSMENT

- The module is formally assessed by a final essay of 3500w and a mid-term exercise in week 6, on which you will receive written feedback.
- There will also be assessed presentations, with topics reflecting current policy problems in the region and asking you to advise various political actors to find a solution.
- For the final essay, you have a choice between a list of essay questions or developing your own topic and question based on your personal interests (with the tutor's help). We will discuss research techniques specific to this module and how to find a topic in class.

# Me and my research



I'm a lecturer in international relations, and many of you may know me from my 2<sup>nd</sup> year module, Politics of Foreign Policy. I study the current 'de-westernization' of global politics, which is partly expressed in the return of geopolitical concepts such as 'Great Power' and the figure of the 'strongman', now a global phenomenon but anticipated by the rise of Putin. I'm also interested in how this intersects with the transformation of state power in a world where boundaries between domestic/external are blurred and core domains of sovereign statehood are privatized. I have explored this in my research on the production of sovereignty in Kyrgyzstan, the role of conspiracy theories in the post-Soviet space, and the Russian network state as Great Power.

# ...if you want to explore more!

- Peter Pomerantsev, *Nothing is True and Everything is Possible*
- Daniel S. Markey, *China's Western Horizon: Beijing and the New Geopolitics of Eurasia*
- Viktor Pelevin, *Generation Babylon* (a great novel that captures post-Soviet 'virtual politics')
- Charles Clover, *Black Wind, White Snow: the Rise of Russia's new Nationalism*
- (TV series available on Netflix): *Servant of the People* (Ukraine), *Silver Spoon* (Russia)



If you have any questions, I'm happy to tell you more!

[s.ortmann.sussex.ac.uk](mailto:s.ortmann.sussex.ac.uk)

