Political Science 659:
Politics and Society of Contemporary Eastern Europe

Professor Boriana Nikolova
Spring 2017
Email: bnikolova@wisc.edu
Office Hours: Friday 11:30-12:30, Microbial Sciences Building 4478
Seminar: Mondays & Wednesdays 2:30 – 3:45, Sterling 1339

Overview:
When communism ended peacefully in Eastern Europe in 1989, the future suddenly looked hopeful again in a region that had gotten quite accustomed to perpetual economic and political stagnation. Propelled by a weakened and inward looking Russia to the East and a European Union willing to provide not only advice and money but also full membership, the region was embarking on the road to democracy in the most favorable of environments. What could possibly go wrong? A lot apparently, considering that by the early 2000’s Eastern Europe had become one of the regions of the world most skeptical about the merits of democracy. Today even some of the countries that once appeared best positioned to create well-functioning democracies seem to be sliding back.

What does the East European experience teach us about how we think about democracy and about creating and sustaining accountable governments? What were the main characteristics of the political and economic systems of the countries in the region during communism and how did they affect their post-communist trajectories? How do the East European transitions from a state-run to a market economy shine light on competing notions of equality, justice, and fairness? What do communist nostalgia and the way the communist past is remembered tell us about the present and the future of the democratic project in Eastern Europe? How did the prospect and realities of EU membership affect the transformation of East European societies? These are some of the questions that we will be addressing by looking at a variety of sources including memoirs, ethnography, and film.

Course Requirements
Readings and Film Comments – 10%
Preparation and participation in class discussion – 15%
In class presentation – 15%
Midterm – 30%
Final – 30%

Brief Comments on Course Readings
In order to facilitate in class discussion, prior to each class, you should post a brief comment on the day’s readings in the dropbox available on the course website at the Learn@UW site. In your comments you should highlight a positive or a negative aspect of the assigned readings or point to an argument, which you find particularly
compelling or faulty. To receive credit, comments must be around 200 words long. **Your comments are due by 10am each Monday and Wednesday.** The comments themselves are not graded – you get 10% of your grade just for writing them. Your grade will depend on the number of comments you sent. In addition to posting them online you should also bring your comments and questions to class.

**Film Comments**
There are several films that you will watch for the class through digital streaming. They will be marked with L@UW on the syllabus. You should watch the films before coming to class on the day they were assigned and post your comments **by 4 pm on Sunday.** To receive credit, comments must be around 100 words long and should highlight what struck you most about the film. The film comments themselves will not be graded. Your grade will be affected by how many comments you sent.

**In-class Presentations Connecting Countries and Concepts to a Current Event:**
At the end of the semester we will devote two classes to in-class presentations. You will each prepare a 15-20 minutes slide presentation on a topic or country of your choice connecting a central concept from the readings to a current event article.

- Current events articles can be chosen from any major English language newspaper or magazine in any country (e.g. *New York Times*, *The Economist*, *The Guardian of London*, *The International Herald Tribune*, *The Wall St. Journal*, *The Financial Times*).
- You should decide on the topic of your presentation no later than the week before you present and email me a link to the article you have selected with a short description of how it connects to the topic(s) covered in the readings.
- The current events article used in the presentation should be posted by the day before at noon on Learn@UW under the "communications"/"discussion" tabs.
- All students should read the current events article before class.

**Slides:**
There should be at least 4 slides (you may add one additional slide):
1. Title and name of student
2. Discussion points from the course readings in which the main arguments in the readings and how they connect to the article you have chosen should be highlighted;
3. Discussion points from the article;
4. 2-3 discussion questions; these questions should be orally posed to the class at some point during the presentation, and can also be included at the end of the earlier slides.

- Slides are due at least one hour before class (by 1:30 pm), posted also on Learn@UW

**Grading scheme for presentations:**
A = Current event discussion was well integrated with course material and audience was engaged in discussion of the presentation material.
B = Presentation demonstrated good command of course material and article.
C = Presentation included a current events article and topic from course material and consisted of 3-5 slides.
F = Did not attend or participate in a presentation.

• Presentations will be marked down one grade if the article is not posted by noon the day before class; 2 grades down if not posted before class.
• Presentations will be marked down one grade if the presentation slides are not posted by 1:30pm on class day.

Midterm and Final
The midterm and final exams will take place in class. You will be given a number of essay questions to choose from and will have to answer two questions. In your answers you should refer to relevant readings and build your argument in response to the arguments made in the readings and lectures.

Readings
Book chapters and articles that are available for electronic download on the Learn@UW course website are marked with (&).

There are also five books, which should be purchased and two, which are available online. All books will also be on reserve at the library. When chapters of these books are assigned they are marked with (#).

   http://digital.library.upenn.edu/ebooks-public/pdfs/0195119924.pdf


**Streaming Digital Films**

Links to the films will be posted on the course website. Use your NetID for the login/password. You can view the films anytime, anywhere, on any device.

**Class Schedule and Readings**

**Part I. Communist Eastern Europe**

**Jan 23: State and Economy under Communism I**

**Jan 25: State and Economy under Communism II**


Film: Man of Marble (Poland, 1976), dir. Andrzej Wajda L@UW

**Jan 30: The Return of Civil Society**

In class movie: “Oratorio for Prague” (Czechoslovakia, 1968), dir. Jan Nemec

Film: “Man of Iron” (Poland, 1981), dir. Andrzej Wajda L@UW

Recommended: “Cry Hungary: A Revolution Remembered” BBC documentary about the 1956 revolution in Hungary

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8FckhPmtE1A

**Feb 1: Antipolitics and The Power of the Powerless**
Václav Havel: “The Power of the Powerless.”
Feb 6: Everyday Life under Communism

Feb 8: The 1989 Revolutions: Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany

Feb 13: The Fall of the Berlin Wall and the Emergence of the Post-Cold War World

Feb 15: Why Communism Failed

Film: "Walesa" (Poland, 2013) dir. Andrzej Wajda L@UW

Part II. Making and Keeping Democracy

Feb 20: Democracy and Democratic Transitions


Feb 22: Regime Diversity: Why Some Succeed, Others Fail, and yet Others Backslide


Feb 27: Hungary and Poland: a Closer Look at Two Democracies in Trouble
Part III. Living in Post-Communism

March 1: Post-communism: an East German Perspective
# Jana Hensel: *After the Wall: Confessions from an East German Childhood and the Life that Came Next*, Perseus Books Group: 2004. BOOK DISCUSSION

Film: “Goodbye Lenin” (Germany, 2003), dir. Wolfgang Becker L@UW

March 6: Transitional Justice

Film: “The Lives of Others” (Germany, 2006), dir. Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck L@UW

Recommended: Tina Rosenberg: *Haunted Land*, Part II Poland, Part III Germany.

March 8 Communist nostalgia

March 13 The Political Economy of Reform


March 15: Party Politics


Spring Break: March 18–26

March 27: Democratization and Nationalism

March 29: In-class midterm
Part IV. The EU Context of East European Transformations

April 3: EU Accession

April 5: EU Integration and Quality of Democracy

Grzegorz Ekiert: “Dilemmas of Europeanisation: Eastern and Central Europe after the EU Enlargement” in Gora and Zielinska eds. *Democracy, State and Society: European Integration in Central and Eastern Europe*.

April 10: EU and Identity Transformations
André Liebich: “How Different is the “New Europe”? Perspectives on States and Minorities” in Gora and Zielinska eds. *Democracy, State and Society: European Integration in Central and Eastern Europe*.

Zdzisław Mach: “The Identity of Europeans after the EU Enlargement” in Gora and Zielinska eds. *Democracy, State and Society: European Integration in Central and Eastern Europe*.

April 12: Civil Society


April 17: Europeanization of International Relations


April 19: Student Presentations

April 24: Student Presentations
April 26: The Future of Democracy in Eastern Europe

May 1: Assessing the East European Transitions

May 3: Final Exam