Democracy, Illiberalism, and Humanitarianism in 21st Century Europe

PEAC-3005 (3 credits)

Serbia, Austria, and Hungary: Comparative European Perspectives on Conflict and Democracy

This syllabus is representative of a typical semester. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from semester to semester.

Course Description

Recent years have seen political developments across old and new democracies, ranging from the rise of populist leaders and diminishing support for democratic rule to the growing polarization of public opinion. In Europe, more than three decades since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the socio-political and economic transitions in Eastern Europe and Southeast Europe, challenges have been raised to the future of democracy. The illiberal turn is forcing many societies across Europe to face their pasts as well as present and future trajectories as internal divisions grow deeper. This course allows students to explore current debates in Europe regarding the future of democracy. It will trace those comparatively, with a focus on Central and Southeast European societies.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Evaluate critically the current state of democracy in Europe as related to the rise of populism, authoritarianism, and illiberal growing trends globally;
- Compare the ways in which regions of Europe (Southeast, Central, EU, non-EU) approach challenges to democracy, illiberalism, and humanitarianism;
- Critique the state of democracy in Serbia and Hungary;
- Explain the current geopolitics of European trends in relation to migration and refugee crisis;
- Apply comparative methods to assess humanitarian approaches and policies in Europe;

Language of Instruction

This course is taught in English.
Instructional Methods

SIT’s teaching and learning philosophy is grounded in the experiential learning theory developed by Kolb (1984; 2015) and informed by various scholars, such as Dewey, Piaget, Lewin, among others. Experiential learning theory recognizes that learning is an active process that is not confined to the formal curriculum; “knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 2015, p. 49). Learning involves both content and process. Learning is holistic and happens through various life experiences upon which students draw to generate new ways of knowing and being. Learning involves a community and is a lifelong endeavor. Learning is transformational. The suggested four step-cycle of a concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation embedded in the experiential learning model is not linear and might not always happen in that specific order, as any learning is highly context dependent. These stages of taking part in a shared experience; reflecting on that experience by describing and interpreting it; challenging their own assumptions and beliefs to generate new knowledge; and ultimately applying new knowledge, awareness, skills, and attitudes in a variety of situations and contexts are important for students to engage in to become empowered lifelong learners. The methodological approach will be participatory, and experiential, and will aim to help the student develop a multidimensional understanding of, political and social expressions of regional independence movements, regional identities, institutional and societal adaptation to autonomies, and the ongoing interpellation to XX century consensus such as representative democracy.

Required Texts

Kapidžić. D. (2020). The rise of illiberal politics in Southeast Europe, Southeast European and Black Sea Studies, 20:1, 1-17


Recommended Podcasts

Democracy in Question: https://www.ceu.edu/democracy-in-question
In each episode of Democracy in Question, renowned social anthropologist and CEU President and Rector Shalini Randeria invites a leading scholar or public figure to explore the challenges and dilemmas facing democracies around the world.
Assignments and Evaluation
Timely completion of all assignments is expected. Late hand-ins will be penalized. All assignments are evaluated according to organization, analytical quality, depth, and argumentation, presentation of evidence, and use of comparative perspective.

Assignment Descriptions and Grading Criteria

1) Text Analysis (30%)

Students choose two texts from the list of their course required readings and engage with the main argument in each text. The text analysis should demonstrate the student’s capacity to synthesize arguments, integrate data collected through class lectures and field visits, and provide critical insights into how issues dealt with in the two texts could be approached from a policy or legal perspective. The paper should be 3-5 pages long and should also demonstrate the student’s familiarity with current discourse as related to the questions of democracy in Europe.

2) Oral Presentation (20%)

Students will present orally and creatively at the end of the excursions to Hungary and Austria highlighting the most relevant and important issues discussed and experienced. Student presentations will focus on comparative aspects in regard to present processes of challenges to democracy, rise of authoritarianism, and humanitarianism. Students will elaborate on how course lectures, readings, and field visits have helped (or not) map viable approaches to the issue at hand.

3) Reflection Essay (40%)

The reflection essay will consist of a 5 to 8 page essay which should demonstrate the student’s capacity to synthesize and engage critically with the question of social movements and action from below. Focus on one contested issue and activism, student will analyze the work of one civil society group as addressed through lectures, readings, or field visits throughout the course. Students will be provided with two essay questions to choose from.

4) Class Attendance and Participation (10%)

Attendance during the thematic seminar is mandatory and your grade will reflect your involvement in class and during other activities and excursions. This includes active involvement in lectures, readings, discussions, and excursions using the following criteria:

- Attendance - promptness to class and positive presence in class.
- Active Listening - paying attention in class and during field excursions, asking appropriate questions, showing interest and enthusiasm (this includes body language), entertaining contradictory perspectives, taking notes.
• Involvement in Class Discussions - either in small or large groups, sharing knowledge. This means challenging yourself to speak up if you usually don’t, and also means allowing others to speak if you are a person who tends to dominate class discussions.
• Group Accountability – positive participation in the group during field excursions and classes; not keeping others waiting.
• Displaying Respect – culturally appropriate interaction with hosts, SIT program staff, SIT lecturers and communities.

Assessment
Text analysis 30%
Oral presentation 20%
Reflection Essay 40%
Class Attendance and Participation 10%

Attendance and Participation
Due to the nature of SIT Study Abroad programs, and the importance of student and instructor contributions in each and every class session, attendance at all classes and for all program excursions is required. Criteria for evaluation of student performance include attendance and participation in program activities. Students must fully participate in all program components and courses. Students may not voluntarily opt out of required program activities. Valid reasons for absence – such as illness – must be discussed with the academic director or other designated staff person. Absences impact academic performance, may impact grades, and could result in dismissal from the program.

Late Assignments
SIT Study Abroad programs integrate traditional classroom lectures and discussion with field-based experiences, site visits and debriefs. The curriculum is designed to build on itself and progress to the culmination (projects, ISP, case studies, internship, etc.). It is critical that students complete assignments in a timely manner to continue to benefit from the sequences in assignments, reflections and experiences throughout the program. Example: Students may request a justified extension for one paper/assignment during the semester. Requests must be made in writing and at least 12 hours before the posted due date and time. If reason for request is accepted, an extension of up to one week may be granted at that time. Any further requests for extensions will not be granted. Students who fail to submit the assignment within the extension period will receive an ‘F’ for the assignment.

Grading Scale
94-100% A
90-93% A-
87-89% B+
84-86% B
Program Expectations

- Show up prepared. Be on time, have your readings completed and points in mind for discussion or clarification. Complying with these elements raises the level of class discussion for everyone.
- Have assignments completed on schedule, printed, and done accordingly to the specified requirements. This will help ensure that your assignments are returned in a timely manner.
- Ask questions in class. Engage the lecturer. These are often very busy professionals who are doing us an honor by coming to speak.
- Comply with academic integrity policies (no plagiarism or cheating, nothing unethical).
- Respect differences of opinion (classmates’, lecturers, local constituents engaged with on the visits). You are not expected to agree with everything you hear, but you are expected to listen across difference and consider other perspectives with respect.
- Storing Your Work: Keep several copies of your work as back up and keep one copy accessible to you through an online forum, such as an attachment in your email, the course learning management system, or cloud-based storage. This way your work will always be available to despite technical issues. Lost files, deleted drives, or computer crashes are not excuses for late, missing work.
- Personal Technology Use: Cell phones and other personal electronics can be used for taking notes and other class activities. Off-task usage is not acceptable. You may be marked as absent for habitually using them for something other than classroom activities.
- Content Considerations: Some texts and activities you will encounter in this course delve into sensitive topics that may be emotionally and intellectually challenging. Our classroom is a space where we can engage with challenging ideas, question assumptions, and navigate difficult topics with respect and maturity. As possible, I will flag content and activities that are especially graphic or intense, so we are prepared to address them soberly and sensitively. If you are struggling to keep up with the work or participate in the course because of the nature of the content and activities, you should speak with me and/or seek help from counseling services.
- Classroom recording policy: To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion and/or activities without the advance written permission of the instructor, and any such recording properly approved in advance can be used solely for the student’s own private use.

SIT Policies and Resources
Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad Handbook and the Policies section of the SIT website for all academic and student affairs policies. Students are accountable for complying with all published policies. Of particular relevance to this course are the policies regarding: academic integrity, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), research and ethics in field study and internships, late assignments, academic status, academic appeals, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and misconduct, and the student code of conduct.

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad Handbook and SIT website for information on important resources and services provided through our central administration in Vermont, such as Library resources and research support, Disability Services, Counseling Services, Title IX information, and Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion resources.

Course Schedule
Please be aware that topics and excursions may vary to take advantage of any emerging events, to accommodate changes in our lectures’ availability, and to respect any changes that would affect student safety. Students will be notified if this occurs.

Module 1: Concepts and Terms: Democracy, Illiberalism, and Humanitarianism

This module introduces students to theoretical frameworks and main concepts and frames which will guide the sessions and explorations throughout the semester. The module will equip students with analytical frameworks to critically and comparatively investigate processes of continuation and change in Europe with the rise of populism and growing divisions internally and globally.

Sessions may include:
- Democratization processes: continuation and change
- New authoritarianism
- What is populism?
- Illiberalism
- Humanitarianism in crisis

Required Readings


Recommended readings:


**Module 2: Authoritarianism and Stabilitocracy: The Case of Serbia and Southeast Europe**

This module introduces students to trajectories of change as related to Southeast Europe and Serbia in particular. From exploring top-down state policies, to social movements and civic action from below, students will explore the debates, actions and demands, from above, and below.

Sessions may include:

- Old and new competitive authoritarianism in Serbia
- State-building in Western Balkans and the EU
- Russian and Chinese presence influence in Serbia and SEE
- Environment and Civic Activism: A Visit to Ne Davimo Beograd
- Socio-economic struggles in SEE
- Far right movements in the Balkans
- Citizenship in the post-Yugoslav states

**Required Readings**


**Recommended Reading:**


Recommended Podcast:


Module 3: Populism and Democracy Challenges within the EU: The Case of Hungary
This module introduces students to the case of Hungary, and other post-communist societies and explores the challenges of democratization, authoritarianism, and populism. During an excursion to Budapest, students will meet with activists, political actors, and policy makers.

Sessions may include:

- LGBT rights
- The EU crisis: Brexit and rise of populism in Europe
- Democracy in Europe
- Nationalism and the far-right movements in Europe
- History and revisionism: WW2 contested
- The War on Ukraine

Required Readings:


Recommended Reading


Module 4: Refugee Crisis and Humanitarianism

Sessions may include:

- The refugee crisis in Europe
- The refugee crisis on the Balkan Route
- Humanitarian aid and local civic engagement with the refugee crisis in Europe
- Policies on refugees in Serbia and the Balkans
- EU policies on refugees

Required Readings:


Recommended Readings:

Module 5: Democracy and the Future of Europe: the case of Austria

Sessions may include:

- Challenges to Western European democracies: populism in the 21st century
- Legacies of the past, revisionism and historical denial: WW2 and its contestations in Austria
- Islamophobia, antisemitism, and politics of inclusion/exclusion
- Civil society

Required Readings:


Recommended Readings:


Module 6: Action from Below: Civil Society and a Civic Engagement

- Social movements and protests in SEE
- Environmental protests in the Balkans
- LGBT rights
- Social movements and the political imaginary on European borders
- Social justice movements in Europe
- Movement Parties: A New Hybrid Form of Politics?

Required Readings


Recommended Reading:

