Democracy, Illiberalism, and Humanitarianism in 21st Century Europe
PEAC-3005 (3 credits)

Vienna, Budapest, and Belgrade: 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 from multiple regional perspectives. The course follows a comparative approach examining challenges to democratic institutions and values across Central Europe, Western Europe, and the Balkans. Through lectures, discussions, and field visits in Vienna and multi-day excursions in Budapest and Belgrade, students will develop critical insights into contemporary European political dynamics.

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 (West, Southeast, Central, EU, non-EU) approach challenges to democracy, illiberalism, and humanitarianism;
- Analyze the varied democratic trajectories of Austria, Hungary, Serbia, examining their historical contexts and contemporary challenges;
- 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

Sajó A, Uitz, R. and Holmes, S. (eds.). (2022). *Routledge Handbook of Illiberalism*. New York: Routledge. Selected chapters.

Flesher Fominaya, C. and R. Feenstra (eds.) (2020). *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary European Social Movements*. Routledge. Selected Chapters (2, 3, 10, 17, 19, 24, 26).

Lührmann, A. and Lindberg S. I. (2019). "A Third Wave of Autocratization is Here: What is New About It?". *Democratization* 26 (7): 1095–1113.

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
80-83%   B-
77-79%   C+
74-76%   C
70-73%   C-
67-69%   D+
64-66%   D
below 64   F

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](#), [Accessibility 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

Lührmann, A. and Lindberg, S. I. (2019). "A Third Wave of Autocratization is Here: What is New About It?". *Democratization* 26 (7): 1095–1113.

Glasius, M. (2018). "What Authoritarianism is ... and is not: A Practice Perspective." *International Affairs* 94 (3): 515–533.

Mudde, C. (2017). "Populism: an ideational approach." In Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, Paul Taggart, Paulina Ochoa Espejo and Pierre Ostiguy (Eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Populism.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Levitsky, S and Way, L. (2020). "The New Competitive Authoritarianism." *Journal of Democracy*, 31(1), pp. 51-65.

Recommended readings:

Müller, J-W. (2016). *What is Populism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Brubaker, R. (2017). Why populism?. *Theory and Society* 46: 357–385.

Brubaker, R. (2020). Populism and Nationalism. *Nations and Nationalism* 26(1): 44-66.

Module 2: **Democracy and the Future of Europe: the case of Austria**

This module explores Austria's position in contemporary European democratic politics, examining its historical background and current challenges. Students will investigate Austria's engagement with its past, its response to populist movements, and its approach to migration and social inclusion.

Sessions may include:

- Challenges to Western European democracies: populism in the 21st century
- Civil Society and democratic resilience in Austria
- Legacies of the past, revisionism and historical denial: WW2 and its contestations in Austria
- Islamophobia, antisemitism, and politics of inclusion/exclusion
- EU integration and Austrian perspectives on European democracy
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Required Readings:

Heinrisch, R. (2008). "Austria: The Structure and Agency of Austrian Populism" in Albatrazzi, D. and D. McDonnell (eds.). *Twenty-First Century Populism: The Spectre of Western European Democracy*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 67-84.

Krzyzanowski, M. (2013). "From Anti-Immigration and Nationalist Revisionism to Islamophobia: continuities and shifts in recent discourses and patterns of political communication of the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ)" in Wodak, R. KhosraviNik, M and Mral, B (eds)Right-Wing Populism in Europe Politics and Discourse. Bloomsbury.

Simsa, R. (2019). Civil Society Capture by Early Stage Autocrats in Well-Developed Democracies – The Case of Austria. *Nonprofit Policy Forum*, *10*(3).

Recommended Readings:
Simsa, R. (2022). Changing Civic Spaces in the Light of Authoritarian Elements of Politics and the Covid Crisis – The Case of Austria. *Nonprofit Policy Forum*, *13*(3), 211-228.

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:

Pirro, A. L. P. and Della Porta, D. (2021). On Corruption and State Capture: The Struggle of Anti-Corruption Activism in Hungary, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 73:3, 433-450.
Ágh, A. (2013). The triple crisis in Hungary: The "backsliding" of Hungarian democracy after twenty years. Romanian Journal of Political Science 13 (1): 25-51.
Bozóki, A. (2019). Beyond 'Illiberal Democracy': The Case of Hungary" in Beširević, V. (ed.). New Politics of Decisionism. The Hague: Eleven International Publishing, pp. 93-107.

Recommended Reading

Pappas, T.S. (2016). Distinguishing Liberal Democracy's Challengers. *The Journal of Democracy* 27 (4): 22-36.

Module 4: 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, exploring state policies and civic action from top-down and bottom-up perspectives. This module includes an excursion to Belgrade where students will directly observe these dynamics in Serbia's capital.

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

Bieber, Florian. (2017). "What is a stabilitocracy?" Balkan in Europe Policy Advising Group BiEPAG. May 5. https://biepag.eu/what-is-a-stabilitocracy/

Bieber, F. (2018). "Patterns of competitive authoritarianism in the Western Balkans", *East European Politics* 34(3): 337-354.

Stojanović Gajić, S. and Pavlović, D. (2021). "State capture, hybrid regimes and security sector reform". Journal of Regional Security, 16(2): 89-126.

Recommended Reading:

Karčić, H. (2022). *Far-Right Movements and Symbolism in The Western Balkans: A Handbook*. https://detektor.ba/Far-Right%20Movements%20and%20Symbolism%20in%20the%20Western%20Balkans%20-%20A%20Handbook.pdf

Castaldo, A. (2020). "Back to Competitive Authoritarianism? Democratic Backsliding in Vučić's Serbia", *Europe-Asia Studies* 72(10): 1617-1638.

Maliqi, A. (2020). *Transition to What? Western Balkans democracies in a state of illiberal equilibrium*, Prishtine: Sbunker.

Matković, A., & Ivković, M. (2018). Neoliberal instrumentalism and the fight against it: the "We Won't Let Belgrade D(r)own" movement. *East European Politics*, 34(1), pp. 27-38.

Shaw, J. and Štiks, I. (2012). 'Citizenship in the new states of South Eastern Europe', *Citizenship Studies* 16 (3-4): 309-21.

Spasojević, D. (2019). "Transforming Populism – From Protest Vote to Ruling Ideology: The Case of Serbia in Beširević, V. (ed.). New Politics of Decisionism. The Hague: Eleven International Publishing, pp. 125-141.

Vladisavljević N. and Krstić A. (2022). Competitive Authoritarianism and Populism in Serbia under Vučić in Political Cartoons. *Europe-Asia Studies,* forthcoming.

Recommended Podcast:

PODCAST: The Southeast Passage Podcast: A look at Vučić's Serbia and the emergence of new social movements available at: http://thesoutheastpassage.com/podcast/popovic-papovic-vucic-serbia-social-movements/

Module 5: Refugee Crisis and Humanitarianism

This module examines Europe's response to refugee crises, with a particular focus on the Balkan Route. The module analyzes comparative refugee policies across Austria, Serbia, and the Balkans, and the EU, investigating how different European regions address migration challenges and humanitarian responsibilities.

Sessions may include:

- The refugee crisis in Europe
- The refugee crisis on the Balkan Route
- Comparing Austrian and Balkan responses to the European refugee crisis.
- 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:

Greenberg, J. and I. Spasić (2017). Beyond East and West: Solidarity Politics and the Absent/Present State in the Balkans. *Slavic Review* 76(2): 315-326.

Obradovic-Wochnik, J., & Bird, G. (2019). The everyday at the border: Examining visual, material and spatial intersections of international politics along the 'Balkan Route'. *Cooperation and Conflict* 55(1): 41-65*.*

Kallius, A., Monterescu, D. And Rajaram, P.K. (2016). Immobilizing Mobility: Border Ethnography, Illiberal Democracy, and the Politics of the 'Refugee Crisis' In Hungary. *American Ethnologist*, 43: 25-37.

Recommended Readings:
Simsa, R. (2017) Leaving Emergency Management in the Refugee Crisis to Civil Society? The Case of Austria, Journal of Applied Security Research, 12:1, 78-95

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

This module explores how civil society organizations and social movements respond to democratic challenges across the three countries studied, examining their stratgies, achievements, and limitations.

- Social movements and protests in SEE
- Environmental protests in the Balkans and Central Europe
- LGBT rights movements across Europe
- Social movements and the political imaginary on European borders
- Social justice movements in Austria and the EU
- Movement Parties: A New Hybrid Form of Politics?
- Comparative perspectives on civic activism

Required Readings

Bieber, F. and D. Brentin, (eds.) (2019). *Social Movements in the Balkans*, Routledge, Introduction: social movements and protests in Southeast Europe – a new tragedy of the commons? 1-9.

Mujanović, J. (ed.) (2017). *The Democratic Potential of Emerging Social Movements in Southeastern Europe.* Sarajevo: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

Pudar Draško, G., I. Fiket and J. Vasiljević (2020): Big dreams and small steps: comparative perspectives on the social movement struggle for democracy in Serbia and North Macedonia, Southeast European and Black Sea Studies, 20 (1): 199-219.

Recommended Reading:

Monforte, P. (2020). „From 'Fortress Europe' to 'Refugees Welcome' Social movements and the political imaginary on European borders." In *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary European Social Movements*. Routledge.

Flesher Fominaya, C. and L. Cox (eds.) (2013). *Understanding European Movements: New Social Movements, Global Justice Struggles, Anti-Austerity Protest.* Routledge

Matković, A., & Ivković, M. (2018). Neoliberal instrumentalism and the fight against it: the "We Won't Let Belgrade D(r)own" movement. *East European Politics*, 34(1), 27-38.

Horvat, S. and I. Štiks. (2015). Introduction: Radical Politics in the Desert of Transition, in *Welcome to the Desert of Post-Socialism: Radical Politics after Yugoslavia*, London and New York: Verso.