Formation of European Political Order

Lecturer: Alexander Astrov  
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3 credits (6 ECTS)  
Fall Term, 2023/24  
Elective for 3rd year CPS students

Course objectives:

The course aims at providing students with an understanding of the formation of European political order from antiquity up to the dissolution of the ancien régime. Still, this is not a ‘history’ course. Rather, the objective is to familiarise students with the ways of theorising international political order, which, instead of focusing on some ahistorical, unchanging patterns, pay attention to the historically-acquired, contextually specific differences. This emphasis on differences and change also applies to the choice of approaches to the subject. Thus various conceptions of historiography - from materialist to the history of ideas - are presented. In the Winter Term, this course will be followed up with another one - Formation of Global Political Order - tracing the transformation of European political order into a global arrangement after the First World War. Students considering taking that course are not required, yet strongly encouraged, to take the current one.

Course-structure:

The course is organised into hour-long lectures followed later in the week by a two-hour seminar discussion. Lectures are not meant to discuss the texts assigned for the seminars. Their purpose is to provide context(s) for the texts. Although these texts are presented loosely chronologically, the main focus is not on chronology ('linear history'). In fact, it is not about history at all. Rather, it is about various questions (and various orders) arising from the intersection of different forms/structures - geographical, economic, ecological, biological, religious, linguistic, social or political - throughout history.
**Learning outcomes:**

Students are not expected to be equally interested in every kind of structures mentioned above or in every particular moment in history. Rather, they should acquire:

- an understanding of the mutually constitutive (and paradoxical) character of the relationship between ‘politics’, ‘public sphere’ and ‘freedom’: there is no human freedom outside of the public sphere; there is no public sphere without (or prior to) politics; there is no politics without (or prior to) public sphere; one possible meaning of politics is freedom (but it is not necessarily the kind of ‘freedom’ we understand and practice here and now)

- an understanding of the relationship between ‘politics’ and ‘power’: power acquired or maintained by means which are not ‘political’ is no longer ‘power’ but ‘force’ and force alone is never enough for the creation, protection or enlargement of the public sphere

- an understanding of the relation between political power and political order, especially on the European scale where a variety of differently construed public and private spheres coexist and interact with each other, often drawing on force in this coexistence and interaction

- an appreciation of the historical dynamics of the evolution of this coexistence and interaction leading to the formation(s) and dissolution(s) of a ‘European political order’

(It should be noted specifically that this course covers a period in history when most of the public thinking about these and similar questions was done by European white men and for European white men. The limitations of this kind of thinking and publicity would be discussed in detail in the follow-up course, *Formation of Global Political Order*, in the Winter Term.)

**Requirements:**

The exact requirements for each assignment will be discussed in detail in the first week of the course. This will allow not only for greater detail but also for an opportunity for students to raise questions. Such questions can also be raised individually at any time and in any form (online, in-person, etc.) during the course.

Active participation in the seminars - 15%
Presentation - 20%
Three position papers on the readings (circa 500 words) - 10% each
Final essay (circa 3,000 words) - 35%

Given the course's general emphasis on questions and questioning, ideally, students are encouraged to come up with questions of their own for the final essay. This is not easy. So, it is important to start thinking about possible questions well in advance and to discuss your ideas with the instructor. During these consultations, some solutions would be surely found. But it is crucially important to talk and to talk as early as possible. Do not hesitate to propose and discuss ideas that may seem wild or half-baked. All questions have to be finalised by the end of Week 9.
Week 1

Lecture 1
Introduction of the course

Seminar 1
Discussion and distribution of assignments

Week 2

Lecture 2
What is ‘formation’?

Seminar 2

Week 3

Lecture 3
What is ‘political’?

Seminar 3

Week 4

Lecture 4
What is ‘European/international’?

Seminar 4
Week 5

Lecture 5
The ‘other’ as a ‘crack’ in order. Political orders are difficult to assemble, so they are often valued and protected. But then, as Leonard Cohen once put it: ‘There is a crack, a crack in everything/That’s how the light gets in,’ elaborating further: ‘There is a crack in everything that you can put together: physical objects, mental objects, constructions of any kind. But that’s where the light gets in, and that’s where the resurrection is, and that’s where the return, that’s where the repentance is. It is with the confrontation, with the brokenness of things.’

Seminar 5

Week 6

Lecture 6
But then there is a particular ‘crack’ in political orders, especially when it comes to orders we today refer to as ‘international’: war… Or is it? Is war a breakdown of order or a peculiar instrument of ‘international’ ordering?..

Seminar 6
Jan Willem Honig, ‘Warfare in the Middle Ages’ in War, Peace and World Orders: 113-126.

Week 7

Lecture 7
… and what about conquest? Is this another form of war or another mode of political ordering?
Seminar 7


Week 8

Lecture 8

'The pacts and covenants by which the parts of this body politic were first made, set together, and united, resemble that fiat, or the let us make man, pronounced by God in the creation.' Isn’t it puzzling how seamlessly Hobbes moves between ‘body’ and language in this one passage from Leviathan? What remains concealed in this seamless transition may be important for understanding modern European sovereignty.

Seminar 8


Week 9

Lecture 9

‘Coin is the sinews of war’ (Rabelais) - another ‘bodily’ metaphor soon to be extended to the understanding of not just war but also government.

Seminar 9


Week 10

Lecture 10
There are many different ways of evaluating the impact of the French Revolution. In the context of this course, one particular remark is important. The staunch opponent of the revolution, Joseph de Maistre, pleaded while on diplomatic duty in St. Petersburg: ‘Before, this was an instinct, but today it is a science. You must love the sovereign as you love order, with all the forces of intelligence.’

Seminar 10

Week 11

Lecture 11
The Congress of Vienna and its aftermath

Seminar 11

Week 12

Lecture and Seminar 12
Concluding discussion and remarks on further readings and areas of research