

ECON 0230A, *The Economies of Post-Communist Europe*

Spring 2024

Tuesday and Thursday, 8:15 – 9:30 a.m., Warner 101

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Subject: We explore the economies of communist and post-communist Europe, giving particular attention to their transformation and performance over the past half century. Although economics provides our primary disciplinary lens, we inevitably attend to matters of history, politics, and even culture.

The course is organized more-or-less temporally. We first address the nature and consequences of the communist economic model adopted by the Soviet Union and imposed on its satellite states in Eastern Europe. We then chronicle the liberalizing reforms that set the region on a bumpy path of expanding economic freedom and deepening global integration, as well as increasing economic inequality and intra-regional tensions. Along the way, we deal with a multiplicity of topics, including the changing role of government in managing economic activity, the economic divide between states that acceded to the European Union and those that did not, startling developments in demography and public opinion, and the economic consequences of military conflict. Though our subject draws attention to the organization and performance of national economies, we also reflect on how periods of massive structural change play out in the lives of individuals.

Our subject is daunting in size and complexity. Post-communist Europe spans a diverse set of some two dozen countries, each a moving target. Largely because of transformative reforms introduced two to three decades ago, the region's youngest generation is coming of age in economies shaped by institutions dramatically different from those that shaped those in which their parents and grandparents grew up. History's hand, nevertheless, can still be observed acting in surprising ways.

To make sense of the region's economies and the changes they have undergone, we draw on a range of sources. Our syllabus includes the work of journalists, film producers, documentarians, and academics representing multiple disciplines. Guest experts of various stripes will join us in person as well. Furthermore, many of you have studied, traveled, and/or even grown up in our region of study; your perspectives can enrich our collective experience as well!

Class time: On Tuesday and Thursday mornings, I generally lecture, often stopping to reference and/or ask questions about the assigned reading and viewing. Periodically, we also engage in more free-flowing class-wide and/or small group discussions. Regular attendance and readiness to engage with the required material is important to the overall learning experience. If you collectively fall short in preparedness, low-stakes quizzes can be used to incentivize a behavioral change.

Outside of class time: You are encouraged to come see me outside of regular class hours, whether to ask specific questions about class assignments or content, engage with the subject matter more broadly, or anything else. One small contributor to your class participation grade is a "required" visit to introduce yourself and/or shoot the breeze for ten-or-so minutes sometime before spring break. You can find me at "open hours" on Thursday and Friday afternoons, 3:00 – 4:30, or you can make an [appointment](https://calendly.com/wpyle/) at calendly.com/wpyle/, the available times for which vary weekly.

Required Reading and Viewing: Ours is a reading and viewing intensive class. There are three books available for purchase at the College Bookstore, each of which is also available through the Davis Library. Both Stephen Kotkin's *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970-2000* (2001) and David Hoffman's *The Oligarchs: Wealth and Power in the New Russia* (2011) are available as eBooks. A copy of Kristen Ghodsee's and Mitchell Orenstein's *Taking Stock of Shock* (2020) is on reserve at the Davis Library Circulation Desk.

All other assigned reading and viewing materials can be accessed electronically through our class Canvas page via [CourseHub](#) or via links embedded in this document.

Noteworthy Dates: Please note the following dates for (1) turning in assignments on time, (2) attending required lectures by visiting experts, and (3) class tests. The lectures will be held in the RAJ House Seminar Room.

Friday, March 8 th , 11:59 p.m.	Movie Review (option 1) due
Tuesday, March 12 th , 4:30 p.m.	Fritz Bartel lecture, "The End of the Cold War and the Rise of Neo-Liberalism"
Thursday, March 16 th , in class	Mid-term test
Friday, March 29 th , 4:30 p.m.	Kristy Ironside lecture, "McDonald's and the Opening and Closing of Russia"
Wednesday, April 3 rd , 7:30 p.m.	Yevgenia Albats lecture, "Putin's Wars"
Friday, April 12 th , 11:59 p.m.	Movie Review (option 2) due
Friday, April 26 th , 11:59 p.m.	Collaborative Digital Essay due
Monday, May 13 th , 11:59 p.m.	Structured Academic Controversy response due
Friday, May 17 th , 2:00 p.m.	Final test

Grades and policies related to grading: Your final grade will be a function of your performance on a Movie Review (15%), a Collaborative Digital Essay (15%), your participation in and reaction to a Structured Academic Controversy (15%), mid-term and final tests (15% each), and class attendance and participation (25%).

Assignments that are turned in late will be docked one-third of a grade for each non-vacation weekday that they come in past the deadline.

For the assignments, you may use AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT), but be aware that their output may be inaccurate, incomplete, or otherwise problematic. Moreover, use of AI may limit your own independent thinking and creativity. Do not submit any work generated by an AI tool as your own. If you include material generated by an AI tool, it should be cited like any other reference material. Uncited use of AI tools will be treated as a violation of the Honor Code.

Laptop and electronic resources policy: Because the class works best when you are fully engaged, and because the internet is a potential source of distraction, I request that you take notes by hand. If there are extenuating circumstances that make it much easier for you to type your notes, please see me to discuss an exception to this rule.

CLASS CALENDAR

February 13

Introductions

February 15

The old system's fundamentals, I

Read for class

- Kornai, J., 1992. *The Socialist System: The Political Economy of Communism*, chapters 2-4.

Watch for class

- *Cold War*, 1998. [Episode 14](#).

February 20

The old system's fundamentals, II

Read for class

- Berliner, J., 1952. "Informal Organization of the Soviet firm," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 66.
- Kornai, J., 2010. "Innovation and Dynamism: Interaction between Systems and Technical Progress," *Economics of Transition* 18, only pp. 629-648.
- Smith, H., 1983. *The Russians*, chapter 9.

February 22

The old system's fundamentals, III

Read for class

- Smith, H., 1983. *The Russians*, chapters 1-3, and 5.

February 27

The old system's lifecycle, I

Read for class

- Applebaum, A., 2012. *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe*, chapter 15.

Watch for class

- *Cold War*, 1998. [Episode 19](#).
- Wajda, A., 1976. *Man of Marble*.

February 29

The old system's lifecycle, II

Read for class

- Hoffman, S., 2011. *The Oligarchs: Wealth and Power in the New Russia*, chapter 1.
- Kotkin, S., 2008. *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970-2000*, chapters 1 and 2.

March 5***The old system's expiration, I***

Read for class

- Hoffman, S., 2011. *The Oligarchs: Wealth and Power in the New Russia*, chapters 3-6.
- Kotkin, S., 2008. *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970-2000*, chapter 3.

March 7***The system's expiration, II***

Read for class

- Kotkin, S., 2008. *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970-2000*, chapter 4.

Watch for class

- *Cold War*, 1998. Episode [23](#).
- Lance, N., *Russia for Sale: The Rough Road to Capitalism*, 1992.

March 12***A conversation with Fritz Bartel***

Read for class

- Bartel, F., 2022. *The Triumph of Broken Promises: The End of the Cold War and the Rise of Neoliberalism*, "Introduction."

Watch for class

- *Cold War*, 1998. Episode [24](#).

March 14***Mid-term test*****March 26*****Shock Therapy, I***

Read for class

- Fischer, S. and A. Gelb, 1991. "The Process of Socialist Economic Transformation," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 5, 91-105.

March 28***Shock Therapy, II***

Read for class

- Weschler, L., 1990. "A Reporter at Large: Shock," *The New Yorker*, 86-136.
- Weschler, L., 1992. "A Reporter at Large: Deficit," *The New Yorker*, 41-77.

Watch for class

- Weidlinger, T., 1993. *After the Velvet Revolution* (four sections on Vimeo: [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), and [4](#))

April 2**Russia in the 1990s, I**

Read for class

- Hoffman, S., 2011. *The Oligarchs: Wealth and Power in the New Russia*, chapters 8 and 9.
- Kotkin, S., 2008. *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970-2000*, chapters 5 and 6.

Watch for class

- Jones, S., 1994. *Struggle for Russia*.

April 4**Russia in the 1990s, II**

Read for class

- Hoffman, D, 2011. *The Oligarchs*, chapters 11-13, “The Club on Sparrow Hills,” “The Embrace of Wealth and Power,” “Saving Boris Yeltsin.”
- Shleifer, A. and D. Treisman, 2005. “A Normal Country: Russia after Communism,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 19.

Watch for class

- Zvyagintsev, A., 2014. *Leviathan*.

April 9**Beyond the Page, I**

Read for class

- Alexievich, S., 2015. *Secondhand Time*. Selections.
- Ghodsee, K. and M. Orenstein, 2021. *Taking Stock of Shock: Social Consequences of the 1989 Revolution*, Part IV: The Ethnographic Evidence,” 155-182.

April 11**Beyond the Page, II****April 16****Cross-country comparisons, I**

Read for class

- Ghodsee, K. and M. Orenstein, 2021. *Taking Stock of Shock: Social Consequences of the 1989 Revolution*, “Introduction” and “Part I: The Economic Evidence.”
- Hellman, J. 1998. “Winners Take All: The Politics of Partial Reform in the Postcommunist Transition,” *World Politics* 50, 203-234.
- Shleifer, A. and D. Treisman, 2014. “Normal Countries: The East 25 Years after Communism,” *Foreign Affairs* November/December.

April 18**Cross-country comparisons, II**

Read for class

- Ghodsee, K. and M. Orenstein, 2021. *Taking Stock of Shock: Social Consequences of the 1989 Revolution*, “Part II: The Demographic Evidence” and “Part III: The Public Opinion Evidence.”

April 23

European Union

Read for class

- Berend, I., 2009. *From the Soviet Bloc to the European Union*, chapter 3, “Toward Better Times: The European Union and Its Policy of Eastward Enlargement.”
- Gros, D. 2014. “From Transition to Integration: The Role of Trade and Investment” in eds. A. Aslund and S. Djankov *Great Rebirth: Lessons from the Victory of Capitalism over Communism*.

April 25

Energy

Read for class

- Rutland, P., 2018. “The Political Economy of Energy in Russia” in S. Raszewski, *The International Political Economy of Oil and Gas*.
- Stulberg, A., 2015. “Out of Gas: Russia, Ukraine, Europe and the Changing Politics of Natural Gas,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 62.
- Treisman, D., 2010. “Is Russia Cursed by Oil?” *Journal of International Affairs* 63.

April 30

Legacies

Read for class

- Becker, S., Mergele, L., and L. Woessman, 2020. “The Separation and Reunification of Germany: Rethinking a Natural Experiment Interpretation of the Enduring Effects of Communism.” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 34.
- Fuchs-Schundeln, N. and M. Schundeln, 2020. “The Long-Term Effects of Communism in Eastern Europe.” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 34.

May 2

Cross-country comparisons, III

- de Menil, G., 2003. “History, Policy, and Performance in Two Transition Economies: Poland and Romania,” in D. Rodrik ed., *In Search of Prosperity: Analytic Narratives on Economic Growth*.
- Gylfason, T., E. Hochreiter, and T. Kowalski, 2022. “Different Choices, Divergent Paths: Poland and Ukraine.” Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies Research Report 465.

May 7

Structured Academic Controversy, I

May 9

Structured Academic Controversy, II

Movie Review Assignment**due Friday, March 8th, 11:59 pm**

Please write a 4-page (roughly 1200-word) movie review of *Man of Marble* that (1) makes clear what you feel to be the director's intended message about how and why Polish society changed in the generation between the 1950s and the 1970s and (2) backs up that conclusion by referencing specific plot elements and/or character behaviors.

You have a great deal of discretion in terms of how to structure your review. It should, however, be clearly written and thoughtfully organized, and it should give your reader (who, you should assume, has not seen the movie) a sense of the movie's overall plot. (However, following the lead of many reviews written today, you may choose not to include "spoilers.")

Your review should be stylistically interesting and easy to read. This is not a traditional essay in the sense of needing an introduction and conclusion or even formal references to secondary material. Be creative. You are encouraged to incorporate ideas from class readings and/or discussions. But avoid jargon and references to specific authors. Your assignment, that is, should read like a movie review rather than an academic essay.

You will be graded based on the quality of your writing as well as your review's organization, originality, and style. I will ask myself whether your writing flows smoothly, and whether it is free of grammatical, punctuation, and spelling mistakes. I will ask myself whether you have provided a creative and thoughtful interpretation of the movie, and whether you have chosen your evidence – *i.e.*, references to plot elements and/or character behaviors – judiciously in support of your main point(s).

You can look at other reviews of the film. Your writing and ideas, however, should be yours. Passing off the work of others, including the output of AI tools, as your own is plagiarism and a violation of our Honor Code. If you do draw directly on either the work of others or AI tools, it should be clearly cited on a separate "bibliography" page or "sources used" list.

Please upload an electronic copy of your review through our course's Canvas page by Friday, March 8th at 11:59 p.m. Lateness will be penalized at the rate of 1/3 of a grade for each non-vacation weekday that the review comes in past the deadline.

YOU DO NOT HAVE TO COMPLETE THIS ASSIGNMENT. Instead, you can substitute a review of similar length for a movie we will watch after spring break. You may also complete both movie reviews, counting exclusively the higher of your two grades, or choosing to count both as 10% each of your final grade, with the difference coming from a corresponding down-weighting of class participation.

Please write a 4-page (roughly 1200-word) movie review of Andrey Zvyagintsev's *Leviathan* that (1) makes clear what you feel to be the director's intended message about the socio-economic challenges confronting Russia in the years after communism's collapse and (2) backs up that conclusion by referencing specific plot elements and/or character behaviors.

You have a great deal of discretion in terms of how to structure your review. It should, however, be clearly written and thoughtfully organized, and it should give your reader (who, you should assume, has not seen the movie) a sense of the movie's overall plot. (However, following the lead of many reviews written today, you may choose not to include "spoilers.")

Your review should be stylistically interesting and easy to read. This is not a traditional essay in the sense of needing an introduction and conclusion or even formal references to secondary material. Be creative. You are encouraged to incorporate ideas from class readings and/or discussions. But avoid jargon and references to specific authors. Your assignment, that is, should read like a movie review rather than an academic essay.

You will be graded based on the quality of your writing as well as your review's organization, originality, and style. I will ask myself whether your writing flows smoothly, and whether it is free of grammatical, punctuation, and spelling mistakes. I will ask myself whether you have provided a creative and thoughtful interpretation of the movie, and whether you have chosen your evidence – *i.e.*, references to plot elements and/or character behaviors – judiciously in support of your main point(s).

You can look at other reviews of the film. Your writing and ideas, however, should be yours. Passing off the work of others, including the output of AI tools, as your own is plagiarism and a violation of our Honor Code. If you do draw directly on either the work of others or AI tools, it should be clearly cited on a separate "bibliography" page or "sources used" list.

Please upload an electronic copy of your review through our course's Canvas page by Tuesday, April 16th at 11:59 p.m. Lateness will be penalized at the rate of 1/3 of a grade for each non-vacation weekday that the review comes in past the deadline.

IF YOU ALREADY COMPLETED THE FIRST REVIEW, YOU DO NOT HAVE TO COMPLETE THIS ASSIGNMENT. You may, however, complete both movie reviews, counting exclusively the higher of your two grades, or choosing to count both as 10% each of your final grade, with the difference coming from a corresponding down-weighting of class participation.

It's great that our class topic is a big one! But since our time together is limited, we're only able to scratch its surface. This assignment gives you an opportunity to explore in a creative way a particular sub-topic in greater depth.

In paired groups of your own choosing, produce a five-minute "digital essay" (slide show) to summarize a research article related to our course content that has been recently published in an economics journal. Your digital essay should "translate" the article's academic prose into a presentation that's interesting for a well-educated person who may not have your background in the study of either communist and former communist economies or statistical methods and analysis.

Your digital essay should incorporate textual, audio, and visual elements. It should be clear, dynamic, and engaging. It should convey enough information to tell a coherent story, but not so much that it overwhelms your audience. In integrating text and/or voiceovers, use your own words in a manner that will be accessible to and interesting for your audience. And in presenting any numbers and/or text, be judicious; only display what can be easily absorbed.

At a minimum, your digital essay should have the following elements: it should clarify the article's topic and why it is interesting and/or important; it should acknowledge the broader research literature to which the article contributes; it should clarify the evidence that the authors assemble to make their main points; and if you feel it important to your audience's understanding of and appreciation for the article's contribution, it should clarify the methodological approach undertaken to analyze the evidence..

Your grade will be a function of the digital story's clarity, its adherence to your article's main points, its creativity, and its style. As I watch it, I will ask myself whether it flows seamlessly, whether its presentation is original, and whether it makes clear, accurate, and memorable points about the article.

Here's a roadmap toward completion:

- read your article carefully, multiple times, noting its important elements;
- consult me if you have questions about its methods;
- storyboard the overall flow and transitions;
- collect multi-media elements – *e.g.*, audio files, still photos, maps, and/or video clips;
- draft script to be included as text and/or voiceover;
- integrate media elements and script into editing platform;
- refine and edit, reflecting on clarity, presentational flow, and degree of engagement; and
- include credits at end, listing supplemental secondary sources and/or creators of media elements.

Quick Guide to Recording and Editing Videos

The technology you select will depend on what types of sources you use and how much editing your project requires. In many cases, you will need to use one tool to record and a separate tool to edit. If your project requires minimal editing or does not integrate a wide variety of multimedia, you may be able to use a single tool to record and edit.

Here is a [table listing recording and editing tools](#) with a breakdown of their functionality and use cases. You are encouraged to use tools you're familiar with. If you're new to recording and editing, here are some recommendations:

Recording:

Panopto

Best for: all types of recording (voice only, voice narration over slides, screen capture).

Drawbacks: Editing is very limited. If you need to integrate a variety of sources or go beyond just trimming a video, you'll need to upload the recording to a better editing tool such as Adobe Rush.

Get Started: Navigate to the [Panopto homepage](#) and sign in with your Middlebury credentials.

Get Help: Ask a classmate, check the [Panopto support guide](#), or [schedule a consultation](#) with a DLINQ intern.

Editing:

Adobe Rush

Best for: Combining multiple videos, adding soundtrack, incorporating other media

Drawbacks: Recording options are limited (you can do voice over, but no screen capture). It is possible to build your entire project in Rush if your recording is limited to voiceover.

Get Started: Install [Adobe Creative Cloud](#) on your desktop and download the Adobe Rush app.

Get Help: Ask a classmate, check the [Adobe Rush support guide](#), or [schedule a consultation](#) with a DLINQ intern.