



Joint URIS & CEES workshop

«How to React to Crisis, Secessionism and War – Protest, Peace Activism, or Emigration? South Caucasus & Ukraine in a Comparative Perspective»

Friday, 20 November 2020, 9:15 a.m. – 2:45 p.m. via Zoom

While the leaders of the self-declared Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics have been waging an armed conflict with Russian support for over five years, leading to the loss of more than 13 000 lives, Abkhazia became de facto independent after the Abkhaz-Georgian war of 1992-1993. These conflicts at Europe's geographical peripheries are still confronting the people in Eastern Ukraine and the South Caucasus with difficult decisions: should one join the secessionist movements, engage in peace solutions, cultural and social activities, or escape the zone of conflict by emigration? To address these questions, the academic programs Ukrainian Research in Switzerland (URIS) and Center for Eastern European Studies (CEES) jointly invite experts from Ukraine and the South Caucasus to an interdisciplinary workshop consisting of three roundtable discussions. Our guests will assess the situation in Eastern Ukraine and the South Caucasus in a comparative way and from a sociological, ethnological, historical and geographical perspective. In this context we want to shed light on topics such as the societal consequences of (internal) migration, interferences between tourism, culture and political (in)stability, and the question of how art and culture shape processes of social memory. Our workshop comprises three chaired panel discussions of 75 minutes each. Each speaker will be invited to briefly outline his/her current research and connect it to the overarching theme of the event, and this will be followed by a discussion with the audience.

09:15 Welcome address: Jeronim Perović, Introduction: Dunja Krempin & Anne Hasselmann

9.30-10.45 Roundtable 1: Beyond the politics of history and memory

Participants: Nataliya Borys (U Geneva), Elena Natenadze (U Bern), Bohdan Tokarskyi (URIS)

Chair: Benjamin Schenk (U Basel)

The political use of history and memory is key for the current conflicts in Ukraine and the South Caucasus. A closer look at artists or historians, who have been among those creating and shaping these narratives, can, however, reveal unexpected insights into the underlying ideas, concepts and imaginations of today's memory politics. Could the contact with fellow academics from abroad, or shared experiences of injustice, shape their perceptions and lead to narratives that emphasise similarities more than regional differences? How can we detect these hidden views in the collective memory, captured in the "selective blindness of conflict-supporting narratives"?

10.55-11.15 Coffee break in Breakout-rooms

11.15-12.30 Roundtable 2: Socioeconomic aspects of conflict

Participants: Gvantsa Salukvadze (CEES), Maria Shagina (CEES)

Chair: Jeronim Perović (U Zurich)

Infrastructures are the basis for the functioning of modern societies. Infrastructures of a national and transnational character – e.g. ports, streets, pipelines, logistical and postal distribution, sewerage, waste disposal – promise economic and social prosperity, but also bear great potential for conflict.

Similarly, political conflicts can severely affect (international) economic relations, e.g., through sanctions and by cutting off infrastructure. However, even without political crises, different economic sectors have great potential for conflict between stakeholders (e.g., the local population, officials, tourists, [incoming] employees), infrastructures and images created by and for these stakeholders. The tourism sector may have economic potential but can be the origin of severe problems in terms of land use and one-sided economic decisions as well as having consequences for social interaction.

13.10-13.30 Lunch in Breakout-rooms

13.30-14.45 Roundtable 3: How to deal with border conflicts

Participants:

Nasta Agrba (CEES), Tamar Demurishvili (U Bern), Oleksandra Tarkhanova (U St Gallen)

Chair: Ulrich Schmid (U St Gallen)

Border conflicts cause migration but also have severe consequences for those who stay. The roundtable focuses on different strategies for dealing with military conflict in Ukraine and the South Caucasus. How do people in these regions negotiate their interaction with the state's authorities? How do they exercise political rights and ensure their access to social services? Other ways of coping with conflict can be personal involvement in civil society movements (including arts, education or religious projects) or the decision to protest or migrate. What role does the 'contact line' play in these ambiguous positions vis-à-vis the state and the decision-making process in dealing with border conflicts?