

Fall 2020

## HIST 235

### The Rise and Fall of Communism in Eastern Europe

**Prof. Malgorzata Fidelis**

**Class time: Tuesday, Thursday, 12:30-1:45 PM (for selected synchronous meetings on zoom)**

**Office Hours: Tuesday, 2:00- 4:00 PM or by appointment (via zoom)**

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**Office Hours: Thursday, 2 :00 – 4:00 PM CST**

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What was it like to live under communism in Eastern Europe? Was the party-state all powerful or did individuals and groups find places to assert autonomy and exercise agency? This course traces the history of state socialism in the former Eastern bloc and Yugoslavia from the establishment of communist regimes after World War II to their collapse in 1989 and the first years of transition. It explores the impact of World War II; the development of stalinism, which dominated the politics and society of the region from 1948 to 1956; the Soviet-Yugoslav split; the post-stalinist “national roads” to socialism; the reform movement, such as the Prague Spring of 1968; the role of consumption and popular culture; dissident movements, and Solidarity in Poland; the revolutions of 1989; the violent disintegration of the Yugoslav state in the 1990s; and the challenges of the transition to liberal democracy. In the process, we will explore diverse experiences of eastern Europeans with special attention paid to the relationship between everyday life and politics. Finally, the class will refer to the ways in which eastern European societies remember and make sense of the communist past.

The class is not designed to present fixed answers or models. Rather, the goal is to explore the contingent and ambiguous nature of historical developments as they were experienced by different people of diverse interests and backgrounds. When reading sources and historical interpretations, we will ask questions such as “who makes history?” and “how is historical knowledge produced?”

## Requirements:

### Participation

**This course is a combination of asynchronous lectures and synchronous meetings (optional, but strongly encouraged).** You are expected to read the assigned works, watch lectures, and participate in the discussions (either on the Discussion Board or on zoom, or both). Note that participation comprises 15 percent of your final grade. To receive credit for participation, you need to positively contribute to the learning environment. There are many ways of participating. Apart from obvious ways such as taking part in class discussions, participation also includes such activities as taking notes as you watch the pre-recorded lectures, asking questions in synchronous meetings and via email, completing the required readings on time, visiting the blackboard site on a regular basis to study outlines, images, and other materials. Participation can also be helped by going to office hours. I am open to many ways, in which you decide to show your engagement in this class. At the end of the semester, you will fill in a self-evaluation, in which you will have a chance to tell me about the specific ways in which you participated in this class.

### Discussion Sessions

Discussion sessions are marked on the syllabus. These sessions will come in two forms: 1) discussion fora posted under **Discussion Board** on blackboard; and 2) an **optional synchronous discussion on zoom**. The general rule will be to have a lecture on Tuesday and a discussion session on Thursday. But there will be occasional departures from that pattern (for example, we will have lectures on both Tuesday and Thursday during the first week of the class) so please monitor the syllabus and my communication closely to know the exact schedule for each week.

Each discussion forum will deal with the assigned readings for that particular session. Note that we will not be discussing the assigned portions of the textbook (Bottoni, *Long Awaited West*), but you need to read those portions to familiarize yourself with the historical context and meaningfully contribute to the discussions. The discussion forum will open on the day for which the reading is scheduled and will remain open for **6 days** (usually until the next discussion session). **Note that discussion fora are available not only for the designated discussion sessions, but also for other assigned readings not discussed during the synchronous sessions. In addition, the first discussion forum scheduled for August 25 asks you to introduce yourself to your classmates.**

All readings and films that have a discussion forum on Discussion Board are marked on the syllabus as DF. Most readings and films are accompanied by a short reading guide (usually in the form of questions/issues to focus while reading). **Participation in a synchronous discussion session is optional and is designed as one of the ways to fulfill the participation component of the class. Note that the synchronous meetings will NOT be recorded.** Instead, I may briefly summarize the points and questions raised during those sessions on the Discussion Board. The synchronous discussion session will take no more than 45 minutes each. **Please, be sure to listen**

**to the lecture, complete the assigned reading, and review the material prior to attending the zoom discussion and/or contributing to the Discussion Board.**

### Lectures

Pre-recorded lectures will be posted on bb at least 24 hours before the scheduled class session. The lectures will be approximately 40-50 minutes in length depending on the topic. You may watch the lecture prior to the class or during class on Tuesday.

### Historical Geography Quiz

During the first week of class, you should familiarize yourself with the Study Guide for the Historical Geography Quiz posted on blackboard. The study guide will consist of the following: 1) a list of states that comprised the Eastern bloc along with their capitals; 2) a map of eastern Europe featuring the location of the states in question and their capitals; 3) a blank map of eastern Europe for you to practice identifying the locations in question on your own; 4) a list of questions you should be able to answer based on the lectures and readings during the first three sessions of the class; a selection of questions from this list will appear on the actual quiz. You will be expected to take the timed quiz on blackboard by **Friday, Sept 4, prior to 11:59 PM.**

### Film Response

This class features a “movie week” in mid-September during which no lectures or discussions will take place. Instead, you will be expected to watch a feature film made in Yugoslavia in 1985 titled *When Father Was Away on Business*. You will then be expected to write a short film response **due on Sept 21 by 11:59 PM.** Please, see specific instructions on blackboard.

### Midterm Project

Instead of a midterm exam, you will complete a midterm project, in which you will represent a communist leadership (Politburo) of a selected country in Eastern Europe at the time of de-Stalinization. Your task will be to present possible reactions, concerns, and political plans as a response to the Secret Speech delivered by Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev, at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February 1956. In the speech, Khrushchev condemned Stalin and Stalinist policies. How would Eastern European leaders, all implicated in Stalinist policies and terror in their own countries, react to the speech? You will be expected to write a 2-3 page resolution proposing a plan of action for de-stalinizing your particular country based on class materials and discussions. A special discussion forum for your specific Politburo will be available on blackboard on **Thursday, Oct 8**, so you can discuss your ideas with other members (i.e. your classmates who represent the same country). Please, see the detailed instructions for the midterm project posted on blackboard. The written statement is due **on Thursday, Oct 15, by 11:59 PM.**

### Paper

You will be required to write a paper (5-7 pages) on one of the assigned readings. It will be up to you to develop an argument centered on **one** of the following texts: Milovan Djilas, *The New Class*; Slavenka Drakulić, *How We Survived Communism and Even*

*Laughed*; or Václav Havel, *The Power of the Powerless*. These texts are posted on blackboard. As you read them, think about what matters to you, and how and why you respond to the text as you do. What intrigues you in light of what you have learned in this class? What do you find puzzling or contradictory? **You can find the detailed paper instructions on blackboard.** The paper is due on **Tuesday, Dec 1, by 11:59 PM.**

#### Extra Credit: Optional Paper Draft

You will be given an opportunity to earn extra credit while working on your paper. You are encouraged to submit a draft of the paper approximately one week before the due date (to be determined upon your communication with the TA). You will be then expected to revise the paper alongside the feedback you receive from the Teaching Assistant. Specific instructions are included in the Paper Assignment posted on blackboard. If you submit a draft according to the instructions, we will add **5 extra points** to your final paper score.

#### Extra Credit: Writing Workshop

You are encouraged to attend a writing workshop conducted by the TA on zoom approximately two weeks prior to the due date for your paper. The specific date and time will be announced later in the semester. The workshop will be 1 hour long and will help you prepare to write the paper. I will add **5 extra points** to your participation score for attending the workshop.

#### Final Exam

The final exams will be a take home exam (posted on blackboard as SafeAssignment for a limited time) and will be based on materials from lectures and readings. The exam will cover the material from the entire semester. It will consist of an essay question and several identifications. The exam is due on **Thursday, Dec 10, by 11:59 PM.**

**All written assignments must be submitted via SafeAssign on blackboard.**

**STATEMENT ON PLAGIARISM:** If you take words from any source (including internet), you must use quotation marks and acknowledge the source with proper citation in your footnotes. Even when you use your own words but have borrowed an idea from another source, you must reference it. **Presenting someone else's work as your own can result in the disqualification of your paper and a failing grade for this class.**

#### Office Hours

I will hold student drop-in hours in my **zoom meeting room** on blackboard on **Tuesday, 2 – 4 PM (CST)**. You are welcome to visit with any questions or just to introduce yourself. If this time does not work for you, please **email me for an appointment.**

#### Disability Accomodation

The University is committed to make learning experiences as accessible as possible to all students. If you anticipate or experience difficulties based on your disability, please let me know as soon as possible so we can discuss your case in private. You may be

required to register with the Disability Resource Center (DRC). You may contact DRC at 312-413-2183 (v) or 773-649-4535 (VP/Relay) and consult the following: <http://drc.uic.edu/guide-to-accommodations>.

**IMPORTANT: Communication is essential to this class. The time of the global pandemic is challenging for all of us as we try to balance our anxieties and commitments. If you have concerns or need any adjustments regarding the class schedule or requirements, please contact Zukhra or myself. We are prepared to make reasonable accommodations to be determined on a case-by-case basis.**

### **Grading:**

Participation – 15%  
Historical Geography Quiz - 10%  
Film Response – 5%  
Midterm Project – 20%  
Paper – 25%  
Final Exam – 25%

### **Required Texts:**

Stefano Bottoni, *Long Awaited West: Eastern Europe since 1944* (Indiana, 2017)  
Milovan Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1963)  
Heda Kovály, *Under a Cruel Star: A Life in Prague, 1941-1968* (Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1997)  
Aleksandar Hemon, *The Book of My Lives* (Picador, 2014)  
Blackboard

**NOTE: Please, note that the textbook is available on blackboard, but not the other books (Djilas, Kovaly, and Hemon). Copies of these books are available for purchase at the UIC bookstore and amazon.**

## **CLASS SCHEDULE**

### **Week 1**

#### **Aug 25**

**Lecture 1: Introduction: What is Eastern Europe?**

#### **Aug 27**

**Lecture 2: Communism: The Short Course**

**Reading:** Bottoni, *Long Awaited West*, pp. 1-9.

Start preparing for the Historical Geography Quiz according to the study guide posted on blackboard.

## **Week 2**

**Sept 1**

### **Lecture 3: World War II in Eastern Europe**

**Reading:** Bottoni, pp. 10-23.

**Sept 3**

### **Discussion Session: War as Revolution**

### **Historical Geography quiz – due on Friday, Sept 4, by 11:59**

**Discussion:** Jan T. Gross, “Social Consequences of War: Preliminaries to the Study of Imposition of Communist Regimes in East Central Europe.” (BB, DF)

## **Week 3**

**Sept 8**

### **Lecture 4: People’s Democracies, 1945-1948: A “Third Way” for Eastern Europe?**

**Reading:** Bottoni, pp. 24-53.  
“The Percentages Agreement” (BB)

**Sept 10**

### **Discussion Session: The First Revisionist: Yugoslavia and the Tito-Stalin Split**

**Discussion:** Milovan Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin* (DF)

**Film:** Janja Glogovac, *TITO* (2001) (DF)

## **Week 4**

**Sept 15**

### **Early Titoism**

**Film:** *When Father Was Away on Business* (Yugoslavia, 1985), part I

**Sept 17**

### **Early Titoism, part II**

**Film:** *When Father Was Away on Business*, part II (DF)

**Film response due by Sept 21, 11:59 PM.**

## **Week 5**

**Sept 22**

### **Lecture 5: The Stalinist Takeover**

**Reading:** Bottoni, pp. 57-80.

**Sept 24**

### **Discussion Session: Purges**

**Discussion:** Heda Kovaly, *Under a Cruel Star* (DF)

## **Week 6**

**Sept 29**

### **Lecture 6: Everyday Stalinism**

#### **Readings:**

Musiałkowski, "The Warsaw Women-Masons Do Not Give in to Men," *Trybuna Ludu* (People's Tribune), 6 July, 1949 (BB, DF)

"The Report to the Head of the Labor Unions Regarding the Situation in the Home of the Young Woman Worker in Nowa Sol, (western Poland)," March 3, 1952 (BB, DF)

**Recommended:** Malgorzata Fidelis, "New Women for New Occupations" (BB, DF)

**Oct 1**

### **Lecture 7: De-Stalinization**

**Reading:** Bottoni, pp. 80-88.

Nikita Khrushchev, "Secret Speech" (BB, DF)

Rothschild, *Return to Diversity*, selections relevant to the country you represent (BB)

## **Week 7**

**Oct 6**

### **Lecture 8: East European Rebellions, 1953-1956**

**Reading:** Bottoni, pp. 89-111.

**Oct 8**

### **Discussion Session: After Stalin. What Is to Be Done?**

**Pre-midterm Discussion:** Look for your small group discussion forum under Discussion Board.

## **Week 8**

**Oct 13**

### **Lecture 9: National Roads to Socialism: The Case of Romania**

**Reading:** Bottoni, pp. 111-118.

**Film:** *The Lost World of Communism*, part 3: *Socialism in One Family* (BBC documentary, 2009)

**Oct 15**

### **Midterm Project: Eastern European Politburos deliberate on de-stalinization**

**No lecture. Submit your statement by 11:59 PM.**

## **Week 9**

**Oct 20**

### **Discussion Session: Cultures of Dissent: Marxist Humanism**

**Discussion:** Milovan Djilas, *The New Class*, pp. 37-69 (BB, DF)

**Oct 22**

### **Lecture 10: The Rise and Fall of Socialism with a Human Face: The Prague Spring and Soviet Invasion**

**Reading:** Bottoni, pp. 119-130.

## **Week 10**

**Oct 27**

### **Lecture 11: Socialist Modern: Material Culture, Consumption, and Leisure**

**Reading:** Bottoni, pp. 131-140.

**Oct 29**

### **Discussion Session: Getting By: Navigating the Economy of Shortage**

**Discussion:** Slavenka Drakulić, *How We Survived Communism and Even Laughed*, selections (BB, DF)

## **Week 11**

**Nov 3**

**Election Day Holiday**



**No class. VOTE!**

**Nov 5**

**Lecture 12: Cultures of Dissent: Human Rights**

**Reading:** Bottoni, pp. 140-158.

**Week 12**

**Nov 10**

**Discussion Session: The Politics of Antipolitics**

**Discussion:** Vaclav Havel, *The Power of the Powerless*, selections (BB, DF)

**Sign up for a writing workshop!**

**Nov 12**

**Lecture 13: The Polish Revolution: Solidarity**

**Reading:** The Gdańsk Agreement (BB)

**Week 13**

**Nov 17**

**Lecture 14: The Revolutions of 1989**

**Reading:** Bottoni, pp. 158-176.

**Nov 19**

**Lecture 15: Ambiguous Transitions**

**Readings:** Bottoni, pp. 177-197.

**Week 14**

**Nov 24**

**Lecture 16: The Fall of Yugoslavia**

**Readings:** Bottoni, pp. 197-216.

Norman Naimark, "The Wars of Yugoslav Succession" (BB, DF)

**Film:** *The Death of Yugoslavia*, part I, "Enter Nationalism" (BBC documentary, 1995)  
(DF)

**Nov 26**  
**Thanksgiving**

**No Class**

**Week 15**

**Dec 1**  
**Lecture 17: The Challenge of Globalization**

**Reading:** Bottoni, pp. 217-254

**Paper due by 11:59 PM!**

**Dec 3**  
**Discussion Session: Remembering Socialism**

**Discussion:** Aleksandar Hemon, *The Book of My Lives* (DF)

**Take-home final exam due on Thursday, Dec 10, 11:59**