



scuola di studi superiori **giacomo leopardi** università di macerata

62100 Macerata  
Piazza Cesare Battisti, 1

T 0733 258 5803-5804  
F 0733 258 5808

scuolastudisuperiori@unimc.it  
www.scuolastudisuperiori.unimc.it

## **From Russia with Love? Spreading of Illiberal Ideas in Central Asia** **Lecturer: Dr. Peter Plenta**

**25-26 October 2018**

### **Overview of the seminar**

The Russian Federation has become more authoritarian, and it has returned to former positions in the Post-soviet space. The return can be measured in terms of military, political and economic power, but it can be evaluated by the growing influence on shaping politics and values in these countries as well. Russian ideas and norms diffuse to other regions and countries through learning and localization successfully challenges western ideas and “liberal order.”

The seminar concentrates on three main topics:

- a) The idea of norms spreading and contestation;
- b) Russian challenge to the “European values and liberal order;”
- c) Spreading Russian illiberal ideas into post-soviet countries, particularly Central Asia.

The academic debate focuses mainly on “intentional strategies” of spreading norms and values such as media influence, election observation missions, financial and ideological support for various groups and political parties. Surprisingly little attention has been devoted to the analysis of the unintentional spreading (without active involvement). How and why are norms, ideas, and values spread from one country to another?

Norms and values represent by Moscow attract conservative, nationalist and anti-European/ anti-western groups around the world. Spreading of conservative values together with distrust towards international institutions is shaping Russian foreign policy as well. The country gained influence and recognition by opposing the EU not only regarding interests but also with regard to norms and values. Though many Europeans and EU policymakers believe that the European Union is the “force of the good” that (should) provide a model for other societies, states, and regions. This narrative is challenged by many inside and outside of the EU, especially when Russia provides an alternative base on conservatism and traditional values.

During the seminar, we are going to discuss the spreading of two illiberal-laws in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. The first one, so-called “foreign agent” law targets non-government sector and so-called “anti-homopropaganda” law targets sexual minorities. These legislative efforts were explicitly based on Russian laws. Interestingly, proposals were not approved despite support from a majority of political spectrum and society. Another fascinating fact is, that these ideas spread without active support from Moscow (what it says about Russian soft power)? On the contrary, European Union



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institutions, as well as international organizations directly (and loudly), opposed to the proposals regarding influencing decision makers as well as public opinion.

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