

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

Will Pyle

Fall 2025

Warner Hall 312

Monday and Wednesday, 2:15 – 3:30 p.m., Axinn 219

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Warner 312 walk-in hours: Tuesday, 2:00 – 3:30 pm, and Thursday, 10:30 am – 12:00 pm, 3:00 – 4:00 pm

Appointments via [Calendly](https://calendly.com/wpyle/meeting): hours vary by week (<https://calendly.com/wpyle/meeting>)

Subject: Welcome! In this course we will explore the economies of communist and post-communist Europe, with particular attention to governance, structural transformation, and performance over the past half century. Economics will provide our primary disciplinary lens, and we will review and build upon fundamental principles of macro- and microeconomics. But because this is very much a course about the real world, we will also engage with history, politics, and culture. In short, this is an interdisciplinary course, hopefully in the best spirit of a liberal arts education.

The course is organized roughly chronologically. We begin by examining the nature and consequences of the communist economic model adopted by the Soviet Union and imposed on its Eastern European neighbors. We then trace the liberalizing reforms that placed the region on a bumpy path toward greater economic freedom, deeper global integration, rising inequality, and new intra-regional tensions. Along the way, we consider topics such as the changing role of government in managing economic activity, the economic divide between European Union members and non-members, shifts in demography and public opinion, and the economic consequences of military conflict. While our focus is often on national and regional economies, we will also reflect on how a period of such massive structural change plays out in the lives of ordinary people—as workers, consumers, and citizens.

Our subject is vast and complex. Post-communist Europe encompasses roughly two dozen diverse countries, each undergoing continual change. Today's younger generations are coming of age in economies shaped by institutions dramatically different from those that influenced their elders. Yet the imprint of history can still be seen in surprising ways.

To make sense of the region's economies and their transformations, we will draw on a wide range of sources. The syllabus includes work by journalists, filmmakers, documentarians, and scholars from multiple disciplines. Guest experts from diverse fields will join us as well. Finally, many of you have studied, traveled, or even grown up in this part of the world; your perspectives will be an invaluable addition to our collective learning.

Class time: On Monday and Wednesday afternoons, I will often lecture, pausing to highlight and ask questions about the assigned readings and viewings. At other times, we will shift to more free-flowing discussion, sometimes as a whole class, other times in small groups. Your regular attendance and active engagement with the material are essential to our collective learning. If it becomes clear that preparation is lagging, I may introduce short, low-stakes quizzes to help everyone stay on track.

Because our class works best when everyone is fully engaged—and because laptops, phones, and other electronic devices can be distracting—I ask that you take notes by hand or with a stylus and tablet. Please

keep laptops and phones put away once class begins. If you have circumstances that make typing your notes significantly easier, please talk with me about arranging an exception.

Outside of class time: I encourage you to come see me outside of class, whether to ask questions about course material, discuss assignments, or engage more broadly with the subject. As part of your participation, you are strongly encouraged to stop by sometime before Midterm Recess on October 10th for a brief introduction and informal conversation.

My walk-in hours in Warner 312 are Tuesdays from 2:00–3:30 pm and Thursdays from 10:30 am–12:00 pm or 3:00–4:00 pm. You can also make an appointment at other hours via [Calendly](#). With a few exceptions, I will keep my walk-in hours consistent week in and week out. The times that I will be available for appointments via [Calendly](#), however, will change from week to week; I will post these on Sunday evening for the coming week.

Required Reading and Viewing: Ours is a reading and viewing intensive class. Assigned reading and viewing materials can be accessed electronically through our class [Canvas](#) page on [CourseHub](#), via links embedded in this document, or via this [WordPress](#) site on [CourseHub](#).

Noteworthy Date

Friday, September 26 th , 11:59 pm	Movie Review (option 1) due
Wednesday, October 8 th , in class	Mid-term, in-class test
Tuesday, October 28 th , 4:30 pm	Paul Hockenos public lecture, RAJ Seminar Room
Friday, October 31 st , 11:59 pm	Movie Review (option 2) due
Monday, November 3 rd , 11:59 pm	Structured Academic Controversy #1 op-ed due (non-debaters)
Friday, November 7 th , 11:59 pm	Structured Academic Controversy #1 reflection essay due
Wednesday, November 19 th , 11:59 pm	Collaborative Digital Essay due
Monday, December 1 st , 2:00 pm	Structured Academic Controversy #2 op-ed due (non-debaters)
Sunday, December 7 th , 11:59 pm	Structured Academic Controversy #2 reflection essay due
Monday, December 8 th , TBD	Make-up class to watch Collaborative Digital Essays
Monday, December 15 th , 2:00 pm	Final test

Grades and policies related to grading and AI: Your final grade will be a function of your performance on a Movie Review (10%), a Collaborative Digital Essay (15%), two Structured Academic Controversies (20%), a mid-term (15%) a final test (20%), and class attendance and participation (20%).

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.

There is no extra credit.

For the assignments, you may use AI tools so long as you cite them in line with the instructions. Be aware that their output may be inaccurate, incomplete, or otherwise problematic. Moreover, use of AI may limit your own independent thinking and creativity.

CLASS CALENDAR

September 10

Read for class

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

September 15

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.

September 17

Read for class

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

September 22

Read for class

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

Watch for class

- Wajda, A., 1976. [Man of Marble](#).

September 24

Read for class

- Kotkin, S., 2008. [Armageddon Averted](#): *The Soviet Collapse, 1970-2000*, chapters 1-3.

Watch for class

- *Cold War*, 1998. [Episode 14](#), and [Episode 19](#).

September 29

Read for class

- Kotkin, S., 2008. [Armageddon Averted](#): *The Soviet Collapse, 1970-2000*, chapter 4.

Watch for class

- *Cold War*, 1998. Episode [23](#).

October 1

Watch for class

- *Cold War*, 1998. Episode [24](#).
- Lance, N., [Russia for Sale: The Rough Road to Capitalism](#), 1992.

October 6

Read for class

- Ericson, R., 1991. "The Classical Soviet-Type Economy: Nature of the System and Implications for Reform," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 5.

October 8

Mid-term test

October 13

Read for class

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

October 15

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](#))

October 20

Read for class

- Alexievich, S., 2015. *Secondhand Time: The Last of the Soviets*, 91-106.
- Kotkin, S., 2008. [Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970-2000](#), chapters 5 and 6.

Watch for class

- Jones, S., 1994. [Struggle for Russia](#).

October 22

Read for class

- Hellman, J. 1998. "Winners Take All: The Politics of Partial Reform in the Postcommunist Transition," *World Politics* 50, 203-234.

October 27

Read for class

- Shleifer, A. and D. Treisman, 2005. “A Normal Country: Russia after Communism,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 19.

Watch for class

- Zvyagintsev, A., 2014. [Leviathan](#).

October 29

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.”

November 3

Structure Academic Controversy I, debate

November 5

Structure Academic Controversy I, focus group

November 10

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.

November 12

Read for class

- International Monetary Fund, 2024. “Accelerating Europe’s Income Convergence through Integration.”

November 17

visiting speaker

Read for class

- TBD

November 19

no class

December 1

Structured Academic Controversy II, focus group

December 3

Structured Academic Controversy II, debate

Assignment: Movie Review of *Against the Tides*

Length: 900 words

Due: Friday, April 24, at 11:59 p.m. (Canvas upload)

Write a movie review of *Jia Z Man of Marble*. Your review should:

1. Explain what you believe the director's intended message is about how and why Polish society changed between the 1950s and the 1970s.
2. Support your interpretation with specific plot elements and/or character behaviors.

Style & Structure

- You have wide discretion in how to organize your review.
- Aim for clarity, flow, and thoughtful organization. Remember: your readers are people who haven't seen the film, so provide enough of the plot to orient them.
- Your review should be engaging and easy to read. It is not a traditional academic essay in the sense of needing a formal introduction, conclusion, or citations. Be creative.
- You may draw on ideas from our readings and class discussions, but avoid jargon and direct references to specific authors. The piece should read like a review, not a scholarly paper.

Evaluation

I will grade your work based on:

- Writing quality: clarity, flow, grammar, spelling, and punctuation
- Organization: logical structure and coherence
- Interpretation: originality and creativity in your reading of the film
- Evidence: well-chosen references to plot and character that support your argument
- Style: does it read like a review and is it lively and accessible, not academic?

Sources & Academic Integrity

You may consult published reviews or other sources, but your writing and ideas must be your own.

Plagiarism, including uncredited use of AI output, is a violation of the Honor Code.

If you draw directly on others' work or use AI, you must include a separate "Sources Used" page that clearly explains:

- What sources or tools you used
- How you used them (e.g., to check grammar, get editing suggestions, or spark ideas)

Important: You should not use AI to generate substantive content. Doing so will undermine your own development as a creative and critical thinker. Think of this review as an exercise in working out your own ideas.

Assignment: Movie Review of *Leviathan*

Length: 1000–1200 words

Due: Saturday, November 1, at 11:59 p.m. (Canvas upload)

Write a movie review of Andrey Zvyagintsev's *Leviathan*. Your review should:

3. Explain what you believe the director's intended message is about the socio-economic challenges confronting Russia in the years after communism's collapse.
4. Support your interpretation with specific plot elements and/or character behaviors.

Style & Structure

- You have wide discretion in how to organize your review.
- Aim for clarity, flow, and thoughtful organization. Remember: your readers are people who haven't seen the film, so provide enough of the plot to orient them.
- Your review should be engaging and easy to read. It is not a traditional academic essay in the sense of needing a formal introduction, conclusion, or citations. Be creative.
- You may draw on ideas from our readings and class discussions, but avoid jargon and direct references to specific authors. The piece should read like a review, not a scholarly paper.

Evaluation

I will grade your work based on:

- Writing quality: clarity, flow, grammar, spelling, and punctuation
- Organization: logical structure and coherence
- Interpretation: originality and creativity in your reading of the film
- Evidence: well-chosen references to plot and character that support your argument
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