

VILNIUS UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE
UKRAINIAN STUDIES



State flag of Ukraine behind a wall of anonymous protesters in Kyiv, Ukraine. Events of February 18, 2014 By [Mstyslav Chernov](#)

2026 Spring semester

SYLLABUS

Course lecturers:

Dr. Mariusz Antonowicz, email: marijus.antonovic@tspmi.vu.lt

Dr. Gražina Bielousova, email: grazina.bielousova@tspmi.vu.lt

Course objectives:

Upon successfully completing the course requirements, the students will be able to:

- name and analyze the most important Ukrainian political, social and international events and critical points, and to explain their significance for contemporary realities;

- understand and analyze Ukrainian domestic politics, institutions, structures and social transformations as well as foreign policy, with a special attention given to international relations that set the course for the country's geopolitical orientation;
- engage with the most important academic literature, theoretical frameworks and interdisciplinary analytical approaches and utilize them to form their own arguments and analytical insights about the development of Ukraine in their final project, discussions after lectures, during the seminars, and in their homework assignments;
- continue deepening their understanding of Ukraine's domestic and foreign policy, history and contemporary events.

Course requirements:

- **Attendance and participation: 30%**

Missing more than 3 lectures or seminars without a substantial reason will lead to a reduction in the student's grade. Students are encouraged to actively participate in the seminars and lectures, provide constructive comments and critique, reflect on their own and their colleagues' thoughts, and relate the course material to the wider context. Reading seminar literature is compulsory; it is expected that students will read the readings for lectures as much as they can, and will fill their knowledge gaps at the end of the semester, while preparing for the final assignments.

- **Research paper: 35%**

The research paper will address a topic of students' choice, elaborating on a topic or a question that the student wishes would have been explored in this course or would have been elaborated further. The research paper needs to be written adhering to the academic essay standards, approximately 3000 words (+/- 10%) in length, with no fewer than 10 academic sources, including academic articles and books. A paper abstract and preliminary bibliography will be due 4 weeks before the due date of the final paper, and the students can proceed with their work after receiving feedback and guidance from the instructors.

- **Final exam: 35%**

The students will prepare a brief on a chosen topic that is related to the contemporary situation in Ukraine. In this brief they will analyze the chosen question and discuss its historical roots as well as potential or real consequences. The brief will have to consider socioeconomics, domestic and foreign policy, and social transformations as relevant to the topic. When preparing the brief, the students will need to use generative AI for finding information and producing the brief. Then they will critically evaluate the information produced by their chosen AI model, verify it in academic sources, and assess potential biases and assumptions embedded in it. The students will submit for evaluation not only their brief, but also their AI transcripts, and a short reflection in which they will consider the utility and dangers of using AI for political analysis. The students will have 48 hours to complete the exam

Seminars and lectures

Classes take place each Wednesday, at 16:45-18:15 at VU TSPMI, room 303.

You can read firsthand news from Ukraine on these websites. All of them have versions in English as well:

- <https://www.pravda.com.ua/>
- <https://nv.ua/>
- <https://lb.ua/>
- <https://hromadske.ua/>
- <https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/>

Analytical journalism

- <https://commons.com.ua/en/>

1. Course Introduction. The origins of Ukrainian statehood, part 1 (Gražina).

Readings:

For those with no orientation to Ukraine's history:

Timothy Snyder, The Marking of Modern Ukraine. Yale Courses, YouTube, 2023.
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLh9mgdi4rNewfxO7LhBoz_1Mx1MaO6sw

I highly recommend you watch the entire series over the course of the semester as it will provide you with basic historical background for understanding social and political events discussed in this course. While we will aim to provide as much context as possible, and assume no prior knowledge of Ukrainian history and society, Snyder's lectures will be a valuable resource.

- Serhii Plokhy. *The Gates of Europe: A History of Ukraine*. Hachette Book Group USA, 2021 (or any other edition).

Additional reading and material:

- Serhii Plokhy. *The Origins of the Slavic Nations: Premodern Identities in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus*. Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Glenn Dynner, „Early Jews of Modern Ukraine.”
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bp495Uz_Cq4&list=PLh9mgdi4rNewfxO7LhBoz_1Mx1MaO6sw_&index=8
- Charles King. *The Black Sea: A History*. Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Von Hagen, Mark. "Does Ukraine have a history?." *Slavic Review* 54.3 (1995): 658-673.

2. The Origins of Ukrainian Statehood, part 2, 2026-02-11 (Gražina)

Reading:

- Serhii Yekelchik. *Ukraine: The Birth of a Modern Nation*. Harvard University Press, 2006.
https://ia803204.us.archive.org/0/items/4107_20220507/Serhy%20Yekelchik.%20Ukraine%20Birth%20of%20a%20Modern%20Nation.pdf

Additional reading and material:

- Vitalii Borymskyi; The Polish-Ukrainian Alliance of 1920 and “White” Russia. *The Polish Review* 1 July 2022; 67 (2): 64–85. doi: <https://doi.org/10.5406/23300841.67.2.04>
- Yaroslav Hrytsak. *Ukraine: The Forging of a Nation*. Sphere, 2024.

3. State structures (Mariusz), 2026-02-18

Reading:

- Minakov, Mikhail. "Republic of Clans: The evolution of the Ukrainian political system". *Stubborn Structures: Reconceptualizing Post-Communist Regimes*, edited by Bálint Magyar, Budapest, Hungary: Central European University Press, 2019, pp. 217-246. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9789633862155-009>
- Sedelius, T., Mashtaler, O., & Raunio, T. (2024). Semi-presidentialism and war: executive leadership models in Ukraine during Zelenskyi’s presidency. *East European Politics*, 40(4), 658–683. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2024.2369978>
- Tadeusz A. Olszański, *A Quarter-Century of Independent Ukraine*, Centre for Eastern Studies, Warsaw, 2017, pp. 20-29.
- Alexander Rodnyansky, “Ukraine must change how it is governed, writes a former adviser,” *The Economist*, <https://www.economist.com/by-invitation/2025/11/25/ukraine-must-change-how-it-is-governed-writes-a-former-adviser>

Additional reading:

- Rabinovych, M., Brik, T., Darkovich, A., Hatsko, V., & Savisko, M. (2025). Ukrainian decentralization under martial law: challenges for regional and local self-governance. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 41(5), 411–435. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2025.2520167>
- Keudel, O., & Huss, O. (2025). Polycentric crisis response and societal resilience: how local communities address internal displacement in Ukraine due to the Russian full-scale invasion. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 41(5), 436–458. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2025.2480529>
- Schmäing, S. (2025). From reconfiguring the urban space to resisting Russia’s war: local civic engagement in Ukraine since 2014. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 41(5), 478–497. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2025.2491969>
- Romanova, V. (2025). Does decentralization boost Ukrainian resilience? The role of local authorities in supporting internally displaced persons. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 41(5), 459–477. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2025.2547336>
- Shyrokykh, K. (2018). The Evolution of the Foreign Policy of Ukraine: External Actors and Domestic Factors. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 70(5), 832–850. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2018.1479734>

4. Ukrainian economics (Mariusz), 2026-02-25

Reading:

- Ukraine's Energy Sovereignty in Time of War: Russia Lost Influence, but the Oligarchs Did Not Dmytro Tuzhanskyi in: *Ukraine's Patronal Democracy and the Russian Invasion : The Russia-Ukraine War, Volume One*, edited by Bálint Madlovics, and Bálint Magyar, Amsterdam University Press, 2023. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/viluniv-ebooks/detail.action?docID=30592792>.
- Elina Ribakova, "Ukraine, Europe and the new economics of war," *Financial Times*, <https://www.ft.com/content/98640358-c166-4f1b-a1da-b37170aabf99>
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Additional reading:

- Simone Papale, Emanuele Castelli, Russia, Ukraine and food warfare, *International Affairs*, Volume 102, Issue 1, January 2026, Pages 23–42, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiaf230>
5. Informality and the role of oligarchs in Ukrainian political processes, 2026-03-04 (Mariusz).

Reading:

- *Ukraine's Patronal Democracy and the Russian Invasion : The Russia-Ukraine War, Volume One*, edited by Bálint Madlovics, and Bálint Magyar, Amsterdam University Press, 2023. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/viluniv-ebooks/detail.action?docID=30592792>. p. 204-230
- Dalton, David. *The Ukrainian Oligarchy after the Euromaidan : How Ukraine's Political Economy Regime Survived the Crisis*, Ibidem Verlag, 2023. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/viluniv-ebooks/detail.action?docID=7385854>., chapter 3

Additional reading:

- Yurchenko, Yuliya. "Ukraine and the (Dis) integrating "Empire of Capital"." In *The Political Economy of Eastern Europe 30 years into the 'Transition' New Left Perspectives from the Region*, pp. 97-113. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021.
- Korostelina, Karina V. "Identity and power in Ukraine." *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 4, no. 1 (2013): 34-46. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1879366512000218>
- Polese, Abel. *Limits of a Post-Soviet state: How informality replaces, renegotiates, and reshapes governance in contemporary Ukraine*. Columbia University Press, 2016. (Introduction) https://books.google.lt/books?hl=en&lr=&id=bdZ1CwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA5&dq=Informality+Ukraine&ots=Nst6sQuL1h&sig=Kmgk84VyTQD9SuMyf3C7iI892wU&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=Informality%20Ukraine&f=false

6. Ukrainian response to Russian “friendship” (Mariusz), 2026-03-18

Reading:

- Sherr, James. *Hard Diplomacy and Soft Coercion: Russia's Influence Abroad*. Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2013, p. 19-41
- Muradov, I. (2025). Disrupting the Narrative: Ukrainian Agency in Resisting Russia and Winning Western Support. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 77(3), 341–364. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2025.2465569>

Additional reading:

- Propaganda and Ideology in the Russian–Ukrainian War: Jon Roozenbeek, Cambridge & New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2024.
- Russia and Ukraine. Entangled Histories, Diverging States: Maria Popova & Oxana Shevel, Cambridge & Hoboken, NJ: Polity Press, 2023

7. Russian-Ukrainian war (Mariusz), 2026-03-25

Reading:

- Kudelia, Serhiy, 'How Was Donbas Occupied?', *Seize the City, Undo the State: The Inception of Russia's War on Ukraine* (New York, NY, 2025; online edn, Oxford Academic, 6 Jan. 2025), <https://doi.org/10.1093/9780197795576.003.0002>
- Andriy Zagorodnyuk, Ukraine's New Theory of Victory Should be Strategic Neutralization, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2025/06/ukraines-new-theory-of-victory-should-be-strategic-neutralization?lang=en>
- James Sherr, Igor Gretskey, *Why Russia Went to War: A Three-Dimensional Perspective*, International Centre for Defence and Security, 2023, <https://icds.ee/en/why-russia-went-to-war-a-three-dimensional-perspective/>

Additional reading:

- Lysenko, A., & Gunitsky, S. (2025). The invisible front: Ukraine's IT army and the evolution of cyber resistance. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 41(4), 263–288. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2025.2503658>
- Sofie Rose, Duty and choice: unpacking ambiguous perceptions of Ukrainian men fleeing the war, *International Affairs*, Volume 102, Issue 1, January 2026, Pages 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiaf235>
- Simone Papale, Emanuele Castelli, Russia, Ukraine and food warfare, *International Affairs*, Volume 102, Issue 1, January 2026, Pages 23–42, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiaf230>

- Shaun Walker, "A war foretold: how the CIA and MI6 got hold of Putin's Ukraine plans and why nobody believed them", The Guardian, 20 February 2026, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2026/feb/20/a-war-foretold-cia-mi6-putin-ukraine-plans-russia>

8. Ukraine and Poland: strategic partners? (Mariusz), 2026-04-01

Reading:

- Stryjek, T. (2024). 'An Unexploded Mine': Explaining the Sources of the Contemporary Memory Conflict between Poland and Ukraine. *Studia Polityczne*, 52(3), 257–287. <https://doi.org/10.35757/STP.2024.52.3.11>
- Andrzej Szeptycki, *Contemporary Relations between Poland and Ukraine. „The Strategic Partnership” and the Limits Thereof*, series “*Studies in Politics, Security and Society*”, vol. 23, Peter Lang, Berlin 2019, chapter 2

Additional reading:

- Paulina Pospieszna, Patrice C. McMahon; Forging Democracy in the Flames: Strategies of Polish NGOs during the Full-Scale War in Ukraine. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 1 June 2025; 58 (2): 103–126. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1525/cpcs.2024.2122433>

9. Ukrainian road to the West: relations with the US and the EU (Mariusz), 2026-04-15

Reading:

- SAROTTE, M. E. *Not One Inch: America, Russia, and the Making of Post-Cold War Stalemate*. Yale University Press, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv22fqbtq>, chapter 10
- Bosse, G. (2020, June 30). Ukraine and the European Union. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. Retrieved 8 Feb. 2026, from <https://oxfordre.com/politics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-1137>.
- The Munk Debate - The Russia Ukraine War, Toronto, 12.05.2022 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ivcSVG5eCeQ&t=3099s>

Additional reading:

10. Ukraine in the Black Sea region (Mariusz), 2026-04-22

Reading:

- Stepan Yakymyak, "Maritime security of Ukraine: Problems and Prospects," *Black Sea Security Journal* 1 (44) 2026, 7-28. URL: <https://geostrategy.org.ua/en/black-sea-security/chornomorska-bezpeka-1-44-2026>
- Sergii Glebov, "Annexation of Crimea: Legal and Security Perturbations", in *Black Sea Region in World Policy: Actors, Factors, and Scenarios of the Future* / (eds.) Brusilovska O., Dubovyk V., and Koval I. Odesa: Odessa Mechnikov National University Press, 2020. http://cis-onu.com/images/pdf/2020_Black_Sea_Region.pdf
- Gaber, Yevgeniya. *A New Security Reality: Strategic Approaches for the Wider Black Sea Region*, George Marshall Center, 2024, <https://www.marshallcenter.org/en/publications/clock-tower-series/new-security-reality-strategic-approaches-wider-black-sea-region/new-security-reality-strategic-approaches-wider>

Additional reading:

- Piotr Oleksy (ed.), *A sea of strategies. Strategic outlooks of Black Sea states amid Russia's aggression against Ukraine*, IEŚ Policy Papers 6/2025, Lublin: Institute of Central Europe, 2025. URL: <https://ies.lublin.pl/en/policy-papers/a-sea-of-strategies-strategic-outlooks-of-black-sea-states-amid-russias-aggression-against-ukraine/>

11. Ukraine and the Global South, 2026-04-29 (Gražina)

Reading:

- Mottaleb, Khondoker Abdul, and Velu Govindan. "How the ongoing armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine can affect the global wheat food security?." *Frontiers in Food Science and Technology* 3 (2023): 1072872.
- Kurnyshova, Yuliia. "Ukraine and the global south: The ambiguities of a postcolonial perspective." *New Perspectives* 32, no. 3 (2024): 272-289.
- Hendl, Tereza. "Towards accounting for Russian imperialism and building meaningful transnational feminist solidarity with Ukraine." *Gender studies* 26, no. 1 (2022): 62-90.

Additional reading:

- Seegel, Steven. "Geopolitical Frames, Bold Lines: Online Global Solidarity and Mapping Russia's War against Ukraine." *On_Culture* 18 (2025).
- Ajala, Olayinka. "The case for neutrality: understanding African stances on the Russia-Ukraine conflict." *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 22, no. 2 (2022).
- Staeger, Ueli. "The war in Ukraine, the African union, and African agency." *African Affairs* 122, no. 489 (2023): 559-586.
- Castro Alegría, Rafael F., and Viviana García Pinzón. "Peripheral Autonomy in a Multipolar Order: Latin American Reactions to the War in Ukraine." *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 43, no. 4 (2024): 315-321.
- Verma, Raj. "Russia-Ukraine war and India's quest for leading power status." *Global Policy* 15, no. 4 (2024): 778-782.

- Helbig, Adriana N. *Hip hop Ukraine: music, race, and African migration*. Indiana University Press, 2014.

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12. Social movements and social transformations, 2026-05-06 (Gražina)

Reading:

- Channell-Justice, Emily S. "We're Not Just Sandwiches": Europe, Nation, and Feminist (Im)Possibilities on Ukraine's Maidan." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 42, no. 3 (2017): 717-741.
- Nikolayenko, Olena. "The significance of human dignity for social movements: Mass mobilisation in Ukraine." *East European Politics* 36, no. 3 (2020): 445-462.
- Matveieva, Olga. "Social mobilization in wartime Ukraine: the connection between gender identity, national unity, and societal transformation." *Journal of Gender Studies* (2025): 1-30.

Additional reading:

13. Demographic shifts and social stratification, 2026-05-13, (Gražina)

Reading:

- Yurchenko, Yuliya, Pavlo Kutuev, Maksym Yenin, and Hennadii Korzhov. "Class Divisions and Social Inequality in Independent Ukraine." *From "the Ukraine" to Ukraine* 95 (2021).
- Simonchuk, O. "Social structure of Ukrainian society under the influence of full-scale war: conceptual and empirical research." *Sociology: theory, methods, marketing* 1 (2024): 26.
- Kulu, Hill, Sarah Christison, Chia Liu, and Júlia Mikolai. "The war, refugees, and the future of Ukraine's population." *Population, Space and Place* 29, no. 4 (2023): e2656.

Additional reading:

14. Ukrainian language and memory politics, 2026-05-20, (Gražina)

Reading:

- Törnquist-Plewa, Barbara, and Yuliya Yurchuk. "Memory politics in contemporary Ukraine: Reflections from the postcolonial perspective." *Memory Studies* 12, no. 6 (2019): 699-720.
- Shevel, O. (2016). The battle for historical memory in postrevolutionary Ukraine. *Current History*, 115(783), 258-263.
- Zhurzhenko, Tatiana. "Memory wars and reconciliation in the Ukrainian–Polish borderlands: Geopolitics of memory from a local perspective." In *History, memory and*

politics in central and eastern Europe: Memory games, pp. 173-192. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2013.

- Kulyk, Volodymyr. "Language shift in time of war: The abandonment of Russian in Ukraine." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 40, no. 3 (2024): 159-174.

Additional reading:

15. Pop culture, traditional and social media in Ukrainian social and political processes, 2026-05-27, (Gražina)

Reading:

- Nyquist, Lauren, Mary Neuburger, Maya Patel, Oksana Lutsyshyna, Matthew Orr, Matt Maldonado, Milena Djordjevic-Kisacanin, and Abigail Kuchek. "The Zelensky phenomenon: Youth, social media and political engagement in Ukraine." (2020).
- Onuch, Olga. "EuroMaidan protests in Ukraine: Social media versus social networks." *Problems of Post-Communism* 62, no. 4 (2015): 217-235.
- Ardan, Michal. "The media system of Ukraine and its transformation in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian War." (2024).

16. Conclusions.