

Civilizational Identity and Politics in Europe and Eurasia. 2-day Workshop at the Institute for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Uppsala University.

Dates: 2-3 Dec. 2021

Format: Hybrid – zoom and travelling guests

Organisers: Matthew Blackburn and Mark Bassin

Over the last two decades, a new type of identity, civilizational, that transcends the narrower focus of the nation-state, is being promoted on the state level in a variety of countries. There is evidence that civilizational imaginaries have been changing political and social realities in and between a number of rising and re-emerging powers. In the current period, this ‘civilizationalism’ is also visible in European populist-nationalist movements, and can be detected in countries such as Turkey and China. What is unclear is how fundamentally new this 21st century ‘civilizationalism’ is and what relationship it has to nationalism.

With its attempts to ‘protect’ liberal values, curb globalism and control migration, ‘Civilizationalism’ in Western Europe has been interpreted as simultaneously a new form of nationalism and an alternative to it (Brubaker 2017). In Central Europe, the illiberalism of Poland and Hungary looks more to stop further imitation of Western models, which are held to threaten the survival of the nation (Krastev, Holmes 2018). While the degree to which these movements in Western and Central Europe warrant the labels ‘populist’, ‘nationalist’ or ‘radical/far right’ remain a key issue of scholarly debate; the transnational interactions linking these countries is not in question (Bob 2019). Yet, the target of inquiry requires refining: is it ‘conservatism’, ‘populism’ ‘illiberalism’ or the ‘far right’?

Moving further east, the Russian case shows important similarities with Central Europe in advocating traditional values and the “silent majority” and rejecting the normative superiority of the West. What sets Russia apart from Central Europe is its great power nationalism, far clearer pretensions to hold together a distinct “civilizational space” across Eurasia’s multi-ethnic population and its anti-Western geopolitical alignment, factors that give Russia more in common with other former non-Western empires such as Turkey, Iran and China. The ‘civilization-state’ model of nationhood legitimises autocratic great powers with ethnically diverse populations who imagine themselves to be struggling against hostile forces in “the West” intent on inflicting state collapse or regime change.

This two-day workshop approaches the question of civilizational identity in the 21st century in an interdisciplinary fashion, bringing together specialists in the History of Ideas, International Relations, Political Sociology, Cultural Studies and Political Science. It is funded by the Uppsala Forum for Peace and Democracy.

Day 1 (Dec 2nd)

9.15

Introductory remarks

Prof. Mark Bassin (Baltic Sea Professor, CBEES (Södertörn University))

9.30-11.00

Panel 1: Civilizational Identity in the 20th and 21st Century

Viacheslav Morozov (Tartu University)

Was there a Soviet Civilisational Identity?

Manni Crone (Danish Institute for International Studies)

Towards Great Ethno-civilizations and Spiritual Empires?

Kåre Johan Mjør (University of Bergen)

Civilizationalism as an Ideology in 21st Century Russia

11.15-12.45

Panel 2: Civilizationalism in International Relations

Gregorio Bettiza (University of Exeter)

Civilizationism as Counter-Hegemonic Ideology

Alicja Curanovic (University of Warsaw)

Civilization, Empire and Mission. Russia's Post-imperial, Post-colonial Condition

Andrey Makarychev (University of Tartu)

Russian Civilizational Identity: a Biopolitical Perspective

14.00-15.30

Panel 3: Civilizationalism in Russia

Mikhail Suslov (University of Copenhagen)

Civilizational Loneliness or Greater Eurasia? Towards a New Regime Ideology of Putinism

Katerina Bluhm (Freie Universität Berlin)

Conservative Ideologues and Activists in Central Europe and Russia

Matthew Blackburn (Uppsala University)

Civilizational Identity as both Umbrella Term and 'Solution' to Russian post-Soviet identity Crisis?

Day 2 (3rd December)

9.30-11.00

Panel 4: Civilizational identity in Central Europe

Peter Balogh (ELTE, Budapest)

Visions of Europe in Hungary and Transcarpathia: How Being Inside and Outside the EU Makes a Difference

Mihai Varga (Freie Universität Berlin)

The West's Eastern Defenders: An Intellectual Network and its Notion of Western Civilisation in Poland and Hungary

Aliaksei Kazharski (Charles University, Prague)

Civilizational Discourses in the Visegrád Four: Commonalities and Divergences

Piret Ehin (Tartu University)

Populist Civilizationalism Transcending Post-Soviet Cleavages: Evidence from Estonia

11.15-12.45

Panel 5: Civilizational fault-lines and competing narratives

Pål Kolstø (University of Oslo)

Creating a Yawning Gap between Neighbours: Civilization Rhetoric among Ukrainians and Belarusians vis-à-vis Russia

Aliaksei Lastouski (Polotsk State University, Belarus)

The Ideological Reload of the Belarusian State: A New Wave of Eurasianism

Vasile Rotaru (National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest, Romania)

An Alternative Civilizational Identity? Russian Narratives in Moldova