Title of the Course: Central and Eastern Europe from 1917 to the Present

Code of the Course: 1679

Number of credits: 3

Any pre-/co-requisites: No

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Course Description

The course examines Central and Eastern Europe from the collapse of empires during the First World War to the present, treating the region as a space shaped by repeated rupture, experimentation, and reinvention. It explores how new states emerged from the ruins of empire, how the region functioned as an ideological laboratory for competing political, social, and cultural models, and how war returned with devastating force during the Second World War. Alongside politics, diplomacy, and economic transformation, the course considers science, culture, sport, and everyday life, including the development of mass football as a precursor to later European competitions and the global presence of Central Europeans beyond Europe.

Through thematic and country-based case studies—including the collapse of empires after 1918, interwar ideological experimentation, World War II and its global dimensions such as the Battle of Hong Kong, the division of Europe during the Cold War, and post-1989 transformations—the course highlights both the political and cultural histories of the region. Particular attention is given to Poland, Germany, Austria, Czechia and Slovakia, and Hungary, illustrating how shared historical processes produced diverse national trajectories and enduring legacies in contemporary Europe.

Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

1. Analyse the political, social, and cultural transformations of Central and Eastern Europe from the collapse of empires after the First World War to the post-1989 era, with attention to rupture, experimentation, and reinvention.
2. Evaluate how new states and competing ideological models emerged from imperial collapse and shaped the region's experiences of interwar politics, the Second World War, and the Cold War.
3. Compare selected country case studies (including Poland, Germany, Austria, Czechia and Slovakia, and Hungary) to assess how shared historical processes produced diverse national trajectories and lasting legacies in contemporary Europe.

Assessment and Grading

This course will be assessed using criterion-referencing and grades will not be assigned using a curve. Detailed rubrics for each assignment are provided below, outlining the criteria used for evaluation.

Assessments:

[List specific assessed tasks, exams, quizzes, their weightage, and due dates; perhaps, add a summary table as below, to precede the details for each assessment.]

Assessment Task	Contribution to Overall Course grade (%)	Due date
Attendance and Active Participation	20%	Throughout the Course
First Assignment: Images and imagination of Central and Eastern Europe (Poster) – (+ 100-200 words of annotation)	20%	28/02/2026
Midterm Assignment: "Voice from/to Cetral and Eastern Europe:" (Podcast) – (10-12 mins)	30%	17/04/2026
Final Assignment: Video Presentation – (14-16 mins)	30%	08/05/2026

* Assessment marks for individual assessed tasks will be released within two weeks of the due date.

Mapping of Course ILOs to Assessment Tasks

Assessed Task	Mapped ILOs	Explanation
Attendance and Active Participation	ILO1, ILO3	This component assesses students' ongoing engagement with the political, social, and cultural transformations of Central and Eastern Europe (ILO1) and their ability to compare different national and thematic case studies through informed discussion and collaborative analysis (ILO3).
First Assignment: Images and Imagination of Central and Eastern Europe (Poster + 100–200-word annotation)	ILO1, ILO2	This assignment assesses students' ability to analyse representations and imaginaries of Central and Eastern Europe in historical and cultural contexts (ILO1), and to evaluate how imperial collapse, ideological experimentation, and historical legacies shaped external and internal perceptions of the region (ILO2).
Midterm Assignment: "Voice from/to Central and Eastern Europe" (Podcast, 10–12 minutes)	ILO2, ILO3	This task evaluates students' ability to evaluate competing ideological, political, and cultural perspectives emerging from Central and Eastern Europe (ILO2) and to compare experiences and narratives across different national or transnational contexts (ILO3).
Final Assignment: Video Presentation (14–16 minutes)	ILO1, ILO2, ILO3	The final video presentation assesses students' ability to synthesise analysis of long-term regional transformations

		(ILO1), evaluate key historical processes and ideological frameworks across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (ILO2), and compare country-based case studies to assess divergent trajectories and enduring legacies in contemporary Europe (ILO3).

Grading Rubrics

Assignment	A+, A, A- (Excellent)	B+, B, B- (Very Good)	C+, C, C- (Satisfactory)	D/F (Limited & Failure)
Attendance and Active Participation	Attends almost all sessions and participates consistently with well-prepared, analytically informed contributions that engage course themes and peer discussion.	Attends most sessions and participates regularly with relevant and informed contributions.	Attends regularly and participates occasionally, demonstrating basic understanding of course material.	Attendance and participation are inconsistent or minimal, with little evidence of preparation or meaningful engagement.
Poster: Images of Central and Eastern Europe (Visual poster + 100–200-word annotation)	Poster communicates a clear, original, and well-chosen message related to Central and Eastern Europe from 1917 to the present; strong and appropriate use of symbols, colour, and slogans; annotation clearly explains the theme, context, and student	Poster communicates a clear message with some originality; visual design generally effective; annotation explains the theme and intent but may lack clarity or depth in places; minor issues with historical accuracy or presentation.	Poster shows a basic idea, but message is unclear or overly general; visual elements or annotation are mostly descriptive; limited understanding of the region or theme; instructions partly followed.	Poster lacks a clear message or relevance to the course; visual design confusing or inappropriate; annotation missing, extremely weak, or inaccurate; instructions not followed.

Assignment	A+, A, A- (Excellent)	B+, B, B- (Very Good)	C+, C, C- (Satisfactory)	D/F (Limited & Failure)
	choices; historical references (if used) are accurate; all instructions followed.			
Podcast: Voices from Central and Eastern Europe (10–12 minutes)	Podcast tells a clear, engaging, and well-organised historical story; perspective is consistent and easy to follow; effectively connects personal experience to larger historical themes; content is historically grounded and evidence-based; appropriate pacing and clear audio.	Podcast is mostly clear and organised; perspective generally consistent; makes some connections between personal experience and historical context; minor factual or structural issues.	Podcast has a basic storyline but lacks focus or clarity; perspective may shift or feel underdeveloped; limited connection to historical themes; content largely descriptive.	Podcast is confusing, inaccurate, or incomplete; perspective unclear or inconsistent; little connection to course themes; minimal evidence of research or historical understanding.
Video Presentation (Final Assignment) (14–16 minutes)	Presents a clear and focused argument related to Central and Eastern Europe from 1917 to the present; demonstrates understanding of key themes; **confident and engaging**	Presents a clear topic with some argument and explanation; delivery mostly effective; visuals and sources generally relevant but not always well integrated.	Presentation is mainly descriptive with limited analysis or argument; delivery uneven or unclear; visuals and sources basic or loosely connected.	No clear argument or structure; poor delivery or presenter not visible; visuals and sources absent, inappropriate, or unrelated.

Assignment	A+, A, A- (Excellent)	B+, B, B- (Very Good)	C+, C, C- (Satisfactory)	D/F (Limited & Failure)
	on-camera presentation; visuals clearly support the argument; sources appropriately used and integrated			

Final Grade Descriptors:

Grades	Short Description	Elaboration on subject grading description
A	Excellent Performance	[Example: Demonstrates a comprehensive grasp of subject matter, expertise in problem-solving, and significant creativity in thinking. Exhibits a high capacity for scholarship and collaboration, going beyond core requirements to achieve learning goals.]
B	Good Performance	[Example: Shows good knowledge and understanding of the main subject matter, competence in problem-solving, and the ability to analyze and evaluate issues. Displays high motivation to learn and the ability to work effectively with others.]
C	Satisfactory Performance	[Example: Possesses adequate knowledge of core subject matter, competence in dealing with familiar problems, and some capacity for analysis and critical thinking. Shows persistence and effort to achieve broadly defined learning goals.]
D	Marginal Pass	[Example: Has threshold knowledge of core subject matter, potential to achieve key professional skills, and the ability to make basic judgments. Benefits from the course and has the potential to develop in the discipline.]
F	Fail	[Example: Demonstrates insufficient understanding of the subject matter and lacks the necessary problem-solving skills. Shows limited ability to think critically or analytically and exhibits minimal effort towards achieving learning goals. Does not meet the threshold requirements for professional practice or development in the discipline.]

Course AI Policy

The use of generative artificial intelligence tools (including text-, image-, audio-, and video-generating systems) is permitted only for limited support purposes, such as brainstorming, preliminary research, language editing, or technical assistance. Students must not use such tools to generate substantive content for assessment tasks unless explicit permission is granted by the instructor, and all submitted work must represent the student's own intellectual effort and comply with institutional academic integrity policies.

Communication and Feedback

Assessment marks for individual assessed tasks will be communicated via Canvas within two weeks of submission. Feedback on assignments will include [specific details, e.g., strengths, areas for improvement]. Students who have further questions about the feedback including marks should consult the instructor within five working days after the feedback is received.

Required Texts and Materials

The course follows some of the chapters of John Connelly's *From Peoples into Nations. A History of Eastern Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020) as a textbook.

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to adhere to the university's academic integrity policy. Students are expected to uphold HKUST's Academic Honor Code and to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. The University has zero tolerance of academic misconduct. Please refer to Academic Integrity | HKUST – Academic Registry for the University's definition of plagiarism and ways to avoid cheating and plagiarism.

Details on Assignments

1) <u>First Assignment (Poster)</u>
   Students will create an **original visual poster** inspired by themes from **Central and Eastern Europe from 1917 to the present**. The poster may address topics such as ideological conflict, security and war, economic development, social cohesion, peaceful coexistence, or calls for cooperation and stability across the region.
   Posters may also explore **representations or imaginaries of Central and Eastern Europe from an Asian perspective**, either historically or in contemporary contexts. Students are encouraged to conduct **preliminary background research** in order to familiarise themselves with the region, its historical experiences, and its symbolic vocabulary.
   The poster must use **visual symbols, colour, and short slogans** to communicate a clear and coherent message. Accompanying the poster, students must submit a **brief annotation (100–200 words, excluding any list of AI prompts)** explaining the choice of theme, historical or conceptual context, and the intended message of the visual design.
   The poster and annotation must be submitted **together as a single PDF file**.
   Students **may, but are not required to, use AI-based tools** (such as image generators or design assistants) in the creation of the poster. Regardless of the tools used, students remain fully responsible for the **historical accuracy** (where applicable), clarity of message, and appropriate use of imagery. If AI tools are used, students must include an **appendix listing all prompts** used in the creation of the poster.
   The source log submission should be done in a **PDF format**. **Template for this exercise is available on Canvas.**

2) **Source-Based Podcast (Second Assignment): "Voices from/to Central and Eastern Europe"**

   In this assignment, you will create a **10–12-minute podcast** that tells a **historical story from Central and Eastern Europe between 1917 and the present**.

   Your podcast should be told from the point of view of a **real person or a historically realistic individual** who lived through an important moment in the region's history. This person could be, for example, a civilian, soldier, student, worker, intellectual, athlete, scientist, politician, or activist. You

may choose a setting such as the interwar period, the Second World War, life under socialism, the Cold War, the changes around 1989, or the post-socialist era.

As an alternative option, you may tell the story from the perspective of a **traveller from Asia** visiting Central and Eastern Europe for the first time, either in the past or today. This approach should still be based on real historical or social contexts and informed observations, not fiction.

You may tell your story:

- in the **first person** (using "I"), or
- in the **third person** (telling the story of someone else)

Whichever approach you choose, your podcast should connect **personal experience** to **larger historical themes**, such as war and peace, ideology, everyday life, social change, culture, sport, or encounters between different regions of the world.

Because this is an audio assignment, you do not need to include spoken citations in the podcast. However, you must submit a **written source log and bibliography** (800–1,200 words) that explains where your information comes from and how you used it in your podcast.

You must use:

- **At least three different sources** (for example, newspapers, diaries, maps, speeches, memoirs, or, posters, propaganda)

All sources must be listed and explained in the written source log. Every historical claim in your podcast must be supported by evidence in this written submission.

3) **Video Presentation (Final Assignment)**
The video essay is the main assignment for this course. In this assignment, you will create a 14–16-minute recorded video presentation that explains and analyses a topic related to the Central and Eastern Europe between 1917 and the present. Your video should either present a clear historical argument or reflect the current affairs through research of local realities.

You may choose to:
- Build on your CEE poster assignment, using the theme, sources, or historical questions you explored there, or/and
- Build on your "Voices from/to Central and Eastern Europe" podcast, or
- Choose a new topic, as long as it fits the course themes.
If you build on an earlier assignment, your video must go beyond description and show deeper analysis. Possible topics include:
- Life in CEE
- Ideology and propaganda
- Protest movements and peaceful coexistence
- State power, control, and resistance
- Wars, Alliances, Organisations
- Sport, culture, gastronomy

Because this is a presentation, you will be assessed on how clearly you communicate your ideas.

Your video should have:
- A clear structure (introduction, main points, conclusion)
- A focused argument

- Clear speech and effective use of visuals (slides, images, maps, or short clips)

You must appear on camera during the presentation. Videos in which the presenter is not visible will be graded one grade band lower.
Along with your video, you must submit a short sources list as a separate file. This list should include:
- All books, articles, websites, or other materials you used
- A link to your video

An example of format and delivery (shared with the author's consent) is available here:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AwSEJwqAUUQ&ab_channel=ShermanLeung

Course Outline and Schedule

Week of Teaching	Date	Lectures	Remarks
1	04 February 2026	**Introduction of the Course and the Lecturer + What is Central and Eastern Europe?**	
2	11 February 2026	**Born Out of Ashes. WWI and collapse of Empires**	
	18 February 2026	**NO TEACHING**	**Lunar New Year (public holiday)**
3	25 February 2026	**CEE as Ideological Laboratory: Communism, Fascism, Nazism (First Assignment Due: CEE Poster; 28 February 2026, 23.59)**	
4	04 March 2026	**Central European Cup: Precursor of the Champions League**	
5	11 March 2026	**In the Fire Again. Second World War in CEE. Central and Eastern Europeans in the Battle of Hong Kong**	
6	18 March 2026	**Iron Curtain and Divided CEE**	
7	25 March 2026	**Cold War & Espionage**	**Movie Screening: Bridge of Spies (2015)**
8	01 April 2026	**Collapse of Communism in CEE**	
	8 April 2026	**NO TEACHING**	**Easter Break**

9	15 April 2026	**Tour D'horizon around CEE:** **Austria** **Second Assignment Due: Podcast "Voices from/to CEE";** **17 April 2026, 23.59**	
10	22 April 2026	**Tour D'horizon around CEE:** **Czechia & Slovakia & Hungary**	
11	29 April 2026	**Tour D'horizon around CEE:** **Poland** **Final Assignment Due: Video Presentation** **8 May, 23.59**	
12	06 May 2026	*Goodbye Lenin* (2003)	**Movie Screening: Bridge of Spies (2015)**