

ZOIS Conference 2017

A New Research Agenda on Eastern Europe

28 March 2017

Panel 1: Conflict Dynamics in the Post-Soviet Region

Gwendolyn Sasse and Alice Lackner (ZOIS)

“The Impact of the War on Political Identities in Ukraine”

> ZOIS project

With about 1.8 million internally displaced people Ukraine is now among the ten countries with the largest internally displaced populations worldwide. Additionally, an estimated 1 million Ukrainian citizens have fled to Russia. Through their displacement, these individuals have disappeared from view. They fall outside standard opinion polls, they hardly figure in media reports, and in policy circles they are primarily seen as a social policy or humanitarian issue. However, the displaced as the group hardest hit by the war are an important test group for the analysis of attitude and identity change through conflict. This paper is based on a recent ZOIS survey which may well be the first of its kind, as it covers the displaced in both Ukraine and Russia. It is supplemented by two further ZOIS surveys conducted in the whole of Donbas (including the government-controlled and the occupied territories). Here the coverage of the whole region allows for a comparison of attitudes and identities across the lines of conflict. A comparison with the data on the displaced marks a step towards a systematic analysis of the variation in the effects of the war on the populations of Donetsk and Luhansk oblast.

Oleg Zhuravlev (Public Sociology Laboratory, St. Petersburg and European University Institute, Florence) and Natalia Savelyeva (Public Sociology Laboratory, St. Petersburg)

“Getting Involved: Motives, Identities, and Mobilisation Channels of Donbas Rebels in Eastern Ukraine”

In our presentation we will touch upon social background, motivations and channels of mobilisation of insurgents fighting on the pro-Russian separatist side in Eastern Ukraine. We will use the data collected by the Public Sociology Laboratory team in 2016-2017, namely in-depth interviews with armed groups' participants in Luhansk, Donetsk, and some other Donbas's cities as well as in Russia. Combatants, especially those from the pro-separatists' side, are often depicted as criminals or "miserables" who took part in the conflict to get money or access to upward mobility. Our analysis of the interviews with various categories of individuals – locals who created or joined the armed groups, "volunteers" from Russia and Russian military officers – provides a more complex picture.

Stefan Wolff (University of Birmingham) and Nadja Douglas (ZOIS)

“Big or Small Bridges? Confidence-Building Measures and Conflict Settlement in the Case of Transdnestria”

The lack of progress towards a settlement of protracted conflicts on the territory of the former Soviet Union is variously attributed to local intransigence and geopolitical blockage. This has given rise to the idea that a meaningful settlement process needs to address both of these issues by building bridges across local divides in the protracted conflicts and across the deepening divide between Russia and the West. In our paper, we examine the dynamic between these two arenas in the case of the Transdnestrian Conflict Settlement Process. We will do this by 1) reviewing past confidence-building measures (CBM) in the field of security and trade; 2) assessing whether it is reasonable to expect decreasing geopolitical blockage, and ultimately progress towards a sustainable settlement, as a result of local confidence-building. An analysis of recent statements by the negotiators in the 5+2 format will serve as a basis for identifying areas in which CBMs can be more efficiently deployed.

Panel 2: Politics from Below

Dmitriy Ostapchuk (VoxUkraine), Pavlo Myronov (Centre UA/Chesno), Viktor Pashchenko (Pridneprovsk International Research and Cooperation Centre) and Yevgen Popov (International Renaissance Foundation)

“Democratisation from Below? Local Politics in Ukraine”

> ZOIS project

This paper presents the findings of a ZOIS pilot study on the current dynamics of local politics in Ukraine. In particular, in the south-eastern regions the political landscape has changed with the local elections of 2015 both in terms of individuals and political parties represented in local councils. The ongoing decentralisation reform increases the political salience of these developments. This paper is a first attempt to systematically map the extent and implications of these changes. It does so by tracing variation in local council composition, voting patterns in local councils, the issue areas of the bills adopted by local councils across seven western, central and south-eastern regions as well as local media discourse in four south-eastern regions. Local and national-level politics are always interconnected but they may follow their own dynamics. As this paper shows, they can be complementary but there can also be tensions between the two levels of politics.

Kerstin Jacobsson (University of Gothenburg)

“Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe: Lessons for Theory and Research”

What can we learn about civic activism and collective action by focusing on activism within urban spaces in Central and Eastern Europe? It is argued that the field of urban activism is illustrative of a new phase in the development of post-socialist civil societies characterised by grassroots activism and mobilisation from below. Integrating findings from recent studies of urban grassroots mobilisations and activism across this region, this paper draws empirical and theoretical lessons for research on collective action in the post-socialist context as well as discussing the relevance that the experiences of urban activism in this region bring to the theorisation of civic activism more generally. Among other things it is suggested that studying urban activism in the CEE offers insights that are useful for theory building on issues such as agency-formation and processes of becoming active in

the public sphere (here conceptualised as "political becoming"), the role of "uneventful politics" and "low-visibility politics" as well as relational and process-based conceptions of civil society.

Olga Onuch (University of Manchester)

"Post-Protest Polarisation in the Post-Communist Region: Poland, Russia, and Ukraine"

Although scholars identify mass mobilisation as a critical juncture with great potential for democratisation, several cases (Poland, Russia and Ukraine) have experienced electoral polarisation, significant democratic "back sliding", and even ethno-linguistic or sectarian conflict. We hypothesise that the "us" versus "them" discourse employed by activists and politico-economic elite (during periods of mass mobilisation) can activate, reproduce or even create ethno-linguistic, national or sectarian divisions. We argue that protest master frames (used to bridge social network ties and create a sense of collective identity among the protesters) employ an "us" versus "them" discourse. Our hypothesis is that this discourse does not dissipate once routine politics is restored and instead fuels the rise of greater polarisation in society. Employing quantitative textual analysis, we trace the discourse used by politicians and activists before, during, and after protest events in Poland, Russia and Ukraine. We connect patterns in political discourse to electoral campaign rhetoric, electoral outcomes and public opinion in each case. We argue that mobilisational frames deployed during protest events correlate to shifts in political discourse, political preferences as well as electoral polarisation.

The Study of Authoritarian Regimes: Methodological Challenges and Innovations

Room 1: Understanding Authoritarian Regimes from Within

Rebecca Fradkin (University of Oxford)

"Strategy and Access in the Field: Kazakhstan and Russia"

My research examines how authoritarian regimes co-opt majority religious groups as a process of nation building and how citizens respond to these efforts. Using a mixed methods research approach, I carried out fieldwork over the course of six months in Kazakhstan and Tatarstan, Russia. In this presentation I will discuss difficulties related to restricted access in post-Soviet authoritarian regimes and strategies employed to overcome these barriers in order to interview elites and "ordinary" citizens. I will also discuss how the triangulation of data can aid in overcoming these constraints.

Mariya Rohava (University of Oslo)

"Overcoming Research Obstacles in Belarus: Data Availability and Research Strategies"

The presentation discusses the pitfalls of organising and conducting a qualitative research on political topics in authoritarian regimes from the perspective of an insider. Depending on the sort of research questions posed, political research in authoritarian contexts requires greater flexibility and experimentation. The first step in finding an appropriate research strategy is to recognise the need for deeper contextualisation of the field according to the contingencies of everyday life in an authoritarian state. Building on my fieldwork experience in Belarus, this presentation showcases a strategy of how to make use of easily accessible materials and open data in the field. It also discusses advantages of shifting the research focus on informal realms of politics and the domestic sphere for

an in-depth country analysis. I aim to clarify how studying everyday perspectives and practices of people in an authoritarian state contributes to the discussions on regime survival and stability.

Room 2: How to Study Economic Policy in Russia?

Ewa Dabrowska (University of Amsterdam)

“Ideas and Interests in the Russian Industrial Policy”

Conflicts in the Russian elite are not always about power and direct material interests; some of them concern identities, ideas and more abstract interests. One question has been particularly hotly debated in the Russian policy-making during the whole Putin era: Can abundant oil revenues be effectively invested in the domestic economy or would such investments merely provoke inflation in the view of inefficient governance institutions? Putin's initial understanding of "financial sovereignty", according to which oil revenues should be kept intact in the Reserve Fund and in the Fund for National Welfare, contrasted with the views of conservative administration and business elites. The latter deemed investing of those revenues essential for modernising the economy and for obtaining authentic economic and political sovereignty. Thus, this debate exposed a clash of political and economic ideas-cum-interests in Russia. Moreover, it revealed the paradox of Putin's politics of ideas: While the Russian president's political ideas became increasingly illiberal, conservative and anti-Western, his economic policy was a pragmatic combination of orthodox-liberal and statist measures. Putin's "liberal" approach towards oil revenues was therefore not consistent with his political quasi-ideology of sovereignty vis-à-vis the liberal West, which caused a tension in Russia's governance. In the presentation, the case of the Russian debate over oil revenues is used to show how to examine political and economic ideas and related interests and how to theorise the role of ideas in authoritarian politics and policy-making.

Janis Kluge (Witten/Herdecke University and German Institute for International and Security Affairs)

“Sticks or Carrots? Comparing Effectiveness of Government Shadow Economy Policies in Russia”

How can economic policy and its success be measured? In our study, we compare the taxi market of 76 Russian regions to explain the effectiveness of different policy approaches to formalising the shadow economy in Russia. We try to find out if harsher punishments ("sticks") motivate entrepreneurs to formalise or if positive incentives ("carrots") such as subsidies for small firms are more effective. All regions are subject to the same federal laws, which means that – formally – there is no variation in punishment that we could use to analyse the effectiveness of “sticks”. We solve this problem by focusing on the enforcement of the laws: Courts have discretion in applying the laws and they use it differently across regions. For our "sticks" indicator, we measure how many of the prison sentences that are given in a region are unsuspended. We model “carrots” as the amount of government subsidies that are paid to small and medium-sized firms in each region. We find that stricter courts, *ceteris paribus*, have a strong positive impact on the number of official taxi licenses in a region, indicating a smaller shadow economy, while subsidies are insignificant. We explain this result with interest group capture of subsidies and low trust in the state by entrepreneurs in the shadow economy.