

# RUSSIA

## A History of Ideas

### About the seminar

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- **Time:** Monday May 22 – Thursday 25 2017.
- **Venue:** The Norwegian University Center, Kalužskiy pereulok 3, St. Petersburg.
- The seminar is arranged by *Arr: The Norwegian Journal of the History of Ideas*.
- For updated information, please visit [www.russianideas.net](http://www.russianideas.net).

### Seminar programme

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#### Monday 22 May 2017

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| 9:00-09:45<br>SEMINAR ROOM      | Iver Neumann<br>Oslo/London              | Russian Nationalism<br>1991–2017: Fringe to Mainstream  |
| 09:45-10:00<br>CAFETERIA        | Coffee                                   |   |
| 10:00-10:45<br>SEMINAR ROOM     | Jeanne Kormina<br>Saint Petersburg       | 'The church should know its place': cultural heritage, social protests and the limits of desecularisation in Russia |
| 11:00-11:45<br>SEMINAR ROOM     | Ilya Kalinin<br>Saint Petersburg/Berlin  | Historical Imagination in Contemporary Russia. Russian Culture as a euphemism of Russian Empire                     |
| 12:00-13:30<br>CAFETERIA        | Lunch                                    |   |
| 13:30-14:15<br>SEMINAR ROOM     | Ingunn Lunde<br>Bergen                   | Eternal Past: The Role of History in Contemporary Russian Literature  |
| 14:30-19:00<br>SAINT PETERSBURG | Excursion:<br>Pushkin's Saint Petersburg |   |
| 19:00<br>BAKU RESTAURANT        | Dinner                                   |   |

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## Tuesday 23 May 2017

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| <b>09:00-09:45</b><br><b>SEMINAR ROOM</b>     | <b>Lillian Helle</b><br>Bergen                  | Quo vadis? Questions along the Russian Road from Peter the Great to Putin  |
| <b>09:45-10:00</b><br><b>CAFETERIA</b>        | <b>Coffee</b>                                   |  |
| <b>10:00-10:45</b><br><b>SEMINAR ROOM</b>     | <b>Kåre Johan Mjør</b><br>Uppsala               | Russian religious philosophy: religious, secular or post-secular?          |
| <b>11:00-11:45</b><br><b>SEMINAR ROOM</b>     | <b>Olga Malinova</b><br>Moscow                  | 'Liberals' and Liberalism in post-Soviet Russia: Images and Myths          |
| <b>12:00-13:30</b><br><b>CAFETERIA</b>        | <b>Lunch</b>                                    |  |
| <b>13:30-14:15</b><br><b>SEMINAR ROOM</b>     | <b>Maria Veits</b><br>Saint Petersburg/Tel Aviv | Becoming visible: Artists and public space in a changing political context |
| <b>14:30-19:00</b><br><b>SAINT PETERSBURG</b> | <b>Excursion:<br/>Artists and curators</b>      |  |
| <b>19:00</b><br><b>BRUXELLES</b>              | <b>Dinner</b>                                   |  |

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## Wednesday 24 May 2017

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| <b>09:00-09:45</b><br><b>SEMINAR ROOM</b>     | <b>Caroline Serck-Hanssen</b><br>Oslo           | Visions of 'Holy Russia' in 20th century Russian painting                  |
| <b>09:45-10:00</b><br><b>CAFETERIA</b>        | <b>Coffee</b>                                   |  |
| <b>10:00-10:45</b><br><b>SEMINAR ROOM</b>     | <b>Alexei Miller</b><br>St. Petersburg/Budapest | The concept of nation in 19th century Russia                               |
| <b>11:00-11:45</b><br><b>SEMINAR ROOM</b>     | <b>Maria Engström</b><br>Uppsala                | Cosmos as the Russian National Idea  |
| <b>12:00-13:30</b><br><b>CAFETERIA</b>        | <b>Lunch</b>                                    |  |
| <b>13:30-14:15</b><br><b>SEMINAR ROOM</b>     | <b>Lena Jonsson</b><br>Stockholm                | Forward Towards the Dark Past! The New Russian Zeitgeist and Its Opponents |
| <b>14:30-18:00</b><br><b>SAINT PETERSBURG</b> | <b>Excursion:<br/>The Russian Museum</b>        |  |
| <b>20:00</b><br><b>KROO CAFÉ</b>              | <b>Dinner</b>                                   |  |

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## Thursday 25 May 2017

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**9:00-14:00**      **Excursion:**  
**SAINT PETERSBURG**      **Kronstadt**

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**14:00**              **End of seminar**

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# Abstracts

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**Iver B. Neumann**

## **Russian Nationalism 1991–2017: Fringe to Mainstream**

Russia defines itself as a great power in relation to Europe and the West. Since 1991, a story about greatness centred on being part of contemporary European civilisation has given way to a story of how Russia is superior to a Europe now in decay. The former story spelled cooperation with the West, the latter spells confrontation. I argue that Russia's superiority complex is unsustainable in the face of the formative structural pressure of the state system. That is the case for a state not recognised as a great power by forcing its way and/or by being emulated by others. The costs of maintaining great-power status without radical political and economic change appears to escalate. To maintain it, an about-turn is needed. It may in itself be no solution, though, for if Russia does not do anything about the root causes of its perceived inferiority to Europe, the Russian cyclical shifting from a Westernising to a xenophobic stance will not be broken.

**Iver B. Neumann** is Montague Burton Professor in International Relations at the London School of Economics and an associate of the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs. He has published widely on social theory, diplomacy and Russian foreign policy.

**Jeanne Kormina**

## **“The church should know its place”: cultural heritage, social protests and the limits of desecularisation in Russia**

If secularization is seen as the vanishing of religion from public space, desecularisation appears as a process of religion moving from the peripheries of social life to its centers. In Russia this shift can be observed in different spheres, from textbooks to restaurant menus, from the city landscape to judicial practice. When St Peterburg's local newspaper in December 2016 reported about the city's plan to give St Isaac Cathedral over to the Russian Orthodox Church, it seemed uncontroversial. Yet it provoked highly emotional reactions through social protests and debates in social and mass media. The question of whether the cathedral should be given to the church or remain a state museum polarized the community to an extent comparable with the question of Russian annexation of Crimea. But the line of polarization was different: friends and relatives who were separated in the Crimea debate, now found themselves in the same camp. The paper offers explanations of what has made St Isaac Cathedral such an “affective place”.

**Jeanne Kormina** is Associate Professor of Anthropology and Religious Studies at the Higher School of Economics, St Petersburg.

**Ilya Kalinin**

## **Historical Imagination in Contemporary Russia. Russian Culture as a euphemism of Russian Empire**

Rapid developments in the historical imaginary are typical for periods of major historical transformation and the reconfiguration of sociocultural regimes. Processes relating to the formation of a new identity and the demand for discovery of a novel historical subjectivity appeal to the historical imagination, which maps out the fields of history and culture in its own special manner. In this historical and political frames the space of “Russian culture” (not in the sense of a multiplicity of actually existing practices and institutions, but rather as a construction of state patriotic discourse) began to function as a screen, of sorts, on which various complexes and desires were projected, including imperial desire. Therefore, we could say that “Russian culture” in the sense as noted above is transformed into a conceptual politically correct palliative or the unconscious euphemism of “Russian Empire”.

**Ilya Kalinin** is an Associate Professor at Department of Liberal Arts and Sciences at St. Petersburg State University and Visiting Professor at Freie Universität Berlin.

**Ingunn Lunde**

## **Eternal Past: The Role of History in Contemporary Russian Literature**

The sociopolitical events of the perestroika and early post-Soviet years led to significant changes affecting literature and literary institutions in Russia. While it was essential for the ‘new’ or ‘post-’ literature to liberate itself from the burdens of the past, the relationship to ‘what was before’ has continued to inform Russian post-Soviet literature. Some writers explore the genre of historical novels, others describe totalitarian experiences in a timeless, fictional universe, others again mix documentary genres with fictional devices in an attempt to convey the many voices of the past, there is the highly popular genre of dystopia/utopia, portraying a fictional future that often contains elements from a near or more distant past, and there are (semi-)/(auto-)biographical accounts that endeavour to cope with the past. The paper focuses on the various approaches emerging in these works to Vergangenheitsbewältigung – the coming to terms with the past with regard to historical events, disasters, terror or daily life.

**Ingunn Lunde** is professor of Russian at the University of Bergen and adjunct professor at the University of Tromsø. Her research interests include sociolinguistics, Slavic medieval culture and modern Russian literature.

**Lillian Jorunn Helle**

## Quo vadis? Questions along the Russian Road from Peter the Great to Putin

Contemporary Russia is characterized by a growing scepticism towards the Western world. Instead traditional Russian values are applauded, and in the new national narrative, the Russian nation is elevated as a defender of Christian civilization, a bulwark against moral breakdown and overall disintegration. The current tension between Russia and Europe is not new, however, but can easily be recognized at least from the time of Peter the Great and his Europeanizing reforms, manifested by the founding of his new Westernized capital, St. Petersburg, in 1703. This event, as it were, opened a gap in the post-petrine national consciousness, a splitting between a traditional Russian mentality and a more Western-oriented one. In the post-petrine Empire these clashing tendencies asserted themselves through a polarization in which the relative strength of the poles were in constant exchange. A variant of this (ideological) strife is the well-known controversy in the 1800s between slavophiles and “zapadniki” (Westernizers), yet also in classical Russian literature the nation’s complex relationship with the West (the great “other”) became a major or even a dominant theme. In my paper I will have a look at these oppositions and conflicting ideas to examine how they appear in new form in today’s political discourse.

**Lillian Jorunn Helle** is Professor of Russian Literature at the University of Bergen. She has published numerous articles on Russian literature, cultural history and literary theory.

**Kåre Johan Mjør**

## Russian religious philosophy: religious, secular or post-secular?

The term “Russian religious philosophy” refers to what has become the canon of Russian philosophy – the religious idealism that was created by Vladimir Soloviev (1853–1900) and then developed further by Sergei Bulgakov, Nikolai Berdyaev and others. Their writings actively involved traditional Orthodox theology, adapting it to the systems and concepts of Western, secular philosophy. Although deeply influenced by West-European thought, however, they understood themselves as representatives for a new, Russian-Orthodox philosophy. This paper discusses various ways of exploring this current. In addition to their own self-perception as “Russian” or “Orthodox,” it may be understood as an encounter between Orthodoxy and the West, resulting either in a genuine dialogue or in hybridity, or as an activation of a secular potential in Orthodoxy, analogous to how Western secularity has been shown (by for instance Max Weber, Hans Blumenberg and Charles Taylor) to be contingent on the development of Western Christian thought.

**Kåre Johan Mjør** is a researcher of Russian intellectual history at Uppsala Centre for Russian and Eurasian Studies. He is author of *Reformulating Russia: The Cultural and Intellectual Historiography of Russian First-Wave Émigré Writers* (2011).

**Olga Malinova**

## **'Liberals' and Liberalism in post-Soviet Russia: Images and Myths**

Liberalism took a new shape as it returned to Russian politics during and after perestroika. Pre-revolutionary liberal traditions were largely «forgotten»; liberalism had to be reinvented. After some success in the 1990s, liberalism was soon stigmatised as «pro-Western» and «anti-national». Malinova argues that its political marginalisation was caused not only by Putin's authoritarian reforms, but also by the particular way in which it was reintroduced.

Politicians considered «liberals» saw certain elements of liberal tradition as urgent, some as less relevant. Liberalism became associated with ideas such as «civilised capitalism», the minimal state, a refusal of imperial ambition and Westernism. And in spite of their belief in the rule of law, democracy and human rights, liberals proved unable to defend such values in practice. These features of post-Soviet liberalism contributed greatly to its negative image.

**Olga Malinova** is professor of political science at the National Research University Higher School of Economics. Her work explores political discourses, ideologies and the public sphere in Russia.

**Maria Veits**

## **Becoming visible: Artists and public space in a changing political context**

The paper aims to show that a new wave of political and socially engaged art has arisen in Russia, stimulated by a deteriorating economic situation, censorship and a harsh political climate. Focusing on the art scene in St Petersburg and Moscow, Veits will discuss how artists, curators and activists test the limits how public spaces can be used and how they engage audiences that usually distance themselves from politics.

She will discuss protest-based individual interventional tactics as collective projects by artists and activists, including feminist collectives and initiatives. Veits will also point to new strategies of collective work and so-called art placemaking that unite artists and curators who seek to develop their practices with little financial support. Furthermore she will give examples of educational projects aimed at evoking social and political interest among new generations of artists.

**Maria Veits** is an independent curator, researcher, and co-founder of The Creative Association of Curators TOK, an organisation working with projects at the intersection between contemporary art and social sciences.

**Caroline Serck-Hanssen**

## Visions of “Holy Russia” in 20th century Russian painting

The paper will show how ideas of Russia’s national religious identity is expressed in some widely known works of art. These cover the whole span of the 20th century, as the painters Michael Nesterov (1862–1942), Pavel Korin (1892–1967) and Ilya Glazunov (1930–) represent three generations. All have created monumental visions of “Holy Russia”, but their understanding of this notion differs widely.

Nesterov’s starting point was Russian realism, but he soon specialized in fin de siècle poetic renderings of pilgrims, monastics and saints. Korin, originally an icon painter, became Nesterov’s pupil. In the 1930s he portrayed representatives of the struggling Russian Orthodox Church with great sympathy. Later he produced monumental art for the Stalin regime where Christian symbols are openly displayed. Glazunov is probably Russia’s most famous living painter. National myths, Orthodox symbols and the dream of a regeneration of the Tsarist Empire are central in his works. He fully supports Putin and is honoured with his own museum close to Kremlin.

**Caroline Serck-Hanssen** is a Ph.D in art history, senior curator and writer specializing in the historical relations between Russia and Norway. Her new book about the heritage of St. Tryphon of Pechenga will be published in 2017.

**Alexei Miller**

## The concept of nation in 19th century Russia

The concept of nation was borrowed to Russia at the same time as the concept of empire, in the early 18th century. After the French revolution the concept acquired a new meaning and was part of the agenda of Russian reforms and political debates until 1830. After the Polish uprising of November 1830 the concept was marginalized, while the concept of narodnost (nationality) took its place. Nation comes back however in the 1850s, in the context of The Great Reforms. In 1870s liberals lost control of the concept in favour of conservatives. The paper covers these and other convolutions of the history of the concept of nation in Russia in the 19th century.

**Alexei Miller** is professor of history at The European University in Saint-Petersburg, and recurrent visiting professor at The Central European University in Budapest.

**Maria Engström**

## Cosmos as a Russian national idea

This paper traces Nikolai Fedorov's (1829–1903) ideas of human transformation and of overcoming death in contemporary neoconservative discourse and in the technological imagination of transhumanism. In the early 1990s, the Soviet space programme as an object of nostalgic desire and cosmos as a place of inconditionate opportunities became the fundamental myth of the radical-conservative circles. In the ideology of contemporary Russian conservatism, a new imperial utopia is directly related, on the one hand, to the philosophy of Russian and Soviet Cosmism, and on the other, to Russian Orthodoxy. I focus on the political ideas and activities of several neoconservative ideologists (Ivan Okhlobystin, Maksim Kalashnikov, Alexander Prokhanov, Dmitriy Itskov and his Russia 2045 movement), which single out the (Orthodox) Cosmos as the basis of Russian identity.

**Maria Engström** is Associate Professor of Russian, Department of Modern Languages at Uppsala University and School of Humanities and Media Studies at Dalarna University, Sweden.

**Lena Jonson**

## 'Forward towards the Dark Past!' The Russian Zeitgeist and its Opponents

The paper discusses how the conservative turn in Russian policy since 2012 has influenced cultural and intellectual life and transformed the Zeitgeist. In the regime's efforts to "reconfigure" the interpretation of reality along a conservative-patriotic-Orthodox paradigm, culture and cultural policy are prioritised. Conservatism is to be the new ideational, ethic and aesthetic platform. The paper traces this policy as it is realised in state exhibitions on art and history, and public monuments.

The policy of the regime can best be described in terms of authoritarian conservatism, and the Zeitgeist is under influence of a variety of rightist. The situation can be seen as a result of a conscious policy as the leadership exploited the popular reaction after the failed reforms of the 1990s. Against the background of a more or less crashed political opposition, the question arises: How and in what forms can resistance endure under these conditions?

**Lena Jonson** is an associate Professor in political science and former head of research for the Russia program at The Swedish Institute of International Affairs. Her most recent book is *Art and Protest in Putin's Russia* (2015).