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Project network "Institutions and Institutional Change in Postsocialism"

# Back to the Future? Ideas and Strategies of Retrograde Modernization in Russia and the Post-Soviet Region

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*Program, as of 22 October 2015*

A cross-disciplinary conference organized by KomPost and DGO

23-24 October 2015, Europäische Akademie Berlin, Bismarckallee 46/48, 14193 Berlin

GEFÖRDERT VOM



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## Back to the Future?

Levels of economic development, income and education provide a firm structural basis for democracy in Russia. However, an authoritarian model of government has prevailed and has even taken stronger hold of society in recent years. This trend is all the more puzzling since the political leadership has been less able to rely on economic growth to legitimize its rule. Governing elites are essentially confined to symbolic resources of legitimacy, such as historical grievances, threat perceptions, notions of exceptionalism and imperial identity.

In employing these resources, incumbent elites evoke ghosts of a past that appears to be more present now than during Russia's departure for democracy in the 1990s or during the prosperous 2000s. Reviving the territorial thinking of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, Crimea's incorporation is used to demonstrate Russia's reconstitution as a great power. Novorossiia, a historical region annexed by Tsarist Russia, serves to establish a Russian claim on Ukrainian territory. Russia is framed as subject to Western "containment" strategies, borrowing from the terminological arsenal of the Cold War. In a romanticizing fashion, political representatives assume Russian culture to harbor and cherish traditional values that are deemed to be threatened by neglect and relativism in the West. The official rhetoric of economic reform resuscitates the idea of "import substitution" from the economic development agenda of the 1960s. Contemporary notions of "conservatory modernization" and "innovatization" are reminiscent of pseudo-reform discourses shaping the Brezhnev era.

The conference seeks to analyze how political actors use references of the past to interpret and justify their policies. How do these references and quotations fit into the official frame of Russia as a non-Western civilization and an alternative to Western moral permissiveness? Can elements of what may be termed "retro-modernization" provide a viable ideology for authoritarian rule? What do we know about their appeal among Russian elites and in Russian society? How do critics of official discourses and policies relate to the appropriation and reactivation of traditions? How do neotraditionalist ideas resonate in other post-Soviet countries?

Drawing on work from the research network 'Institutions and institutional change in Postsocialism', the conference panels will discuss ideas and strategies of retro-grade modernization in discourses about the role of the state, economic policy and Russian culture.

# Draft Program

Friday, 23 October 2015

- 13.00 Arrival and registration of participants, coffee and tea
- 14.00 Welcome  
Martin Schulze Wessel, University of Munich, KomPost  
Alfred Sproede, University of Münster, DGO
- 14.15- **Images of a strong state and dissonant realities**  
16.15 Mikhail Antonov, St. Petersburg Higher School of Economics  
Greg Yudin, Higher School of Economics, Moscow  
Caroline von Gall, University of Cologne  
*Chaired by Benjamin Reeve, University of Cologne*
- 16.15 Break
- 17.00- Public event: **How to engage Russia? Mindsets of Russian elites and**  
19.00 **Russia's role in a European security regime**  
Introduction: Martin Schulze Wessel, University of Munich
- Panelists:  
Sabine Fischer, German Institute for International and Security Affairs  
Wolfgang Ischinger, Munich Security Conference  
Michael Kofman, Wilson Center, Washington DC  
Ivan Timofeev, Russian International Affairs Council, Moscow  
*Chaired by Martin Brusis, University of Munich*
- 19.00 Reception

Saturday, 24 October 2015

9.00- **Retro-modernization in economic discourses**

11.00

Alexei Levinson, Levada Center, Moscow

Ivan Boldyrev, University of Witten/Herdecke

Joachim Zweynert, University of Witten/Herdecke

*chaired by Joachim Zweynert, University of Witten/Herdecke*

11.00 Break

11.30- **Archaic trends, retro-modernization, and the anti-European revival in literature, legal Culture, and the media (Ukraine and Russia)**

13.30

Mykhailo Minakov (University Kyiv - "Mohyla Academy"): «Modernity and Tradition in Post-Soviet Societies»

Nikolaj Plotnikov (Ruhr-Universität Bochum): „The Problem of Justice in Post-Soviet Russia“ (in Russian)

Oleksandr Zabirko / Alfred Sproede (WWU Münster): „Retro-Modernity, or The Past in the Future: Recent Trends in Russian Fiction and Legal Theory“

*chaired by Alfred Sproede, University of Münster*

13.30 Lunch

Lunch meeting of KomPost project directors