

Online Lecture Series

Moldova (Moldau) – a divided and shared history

Winter Term 2022/23

LMU München and Universität Innsbruck
in cooperation with Moldova Institut Leipzig

www.ikgs.de/moldau

Introduction by Florian Kühner-Wielach

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,
dear students, dear guest auditors,
dear people interested in Moldova!

I am pleased to welcome you, also on behalf of my co-organizers, our cooperation partners and especially our lecturers, to our lecture series "Moldova. A Divided/Shared History".

My name is [Florian Kühner-Wielach](#), I am the director of the Institute for German Culture and History of Southeastern Europe, an institute associated with the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich ([IKGS](#)). At our institute we focus on all those areas of East-Central and Southeast Europe where German or German-speaking people lived and still live. Our interest, of course, goes far beyond the narrow context of these settlement groups - we always aim to survey and research the entire region and share its many facets with an academic as well as a generally interested audience.

It is always important for us to also look beyond our own institutional horizons, which is why my colleague [PD Dr. Tobias Weger](#) and I invited [Prof. Dr. Kurt Scharr](#) in Innsbruck to jointly develop a concept for this lecture series.

Therefore, we are happy that due to this cooperation this lecture series will not only be offered at the "Historicum" of the LMU Munich, but also at the University of Innsbruck. Furthermore, we were able to win the [Moldova Institute](#) in Leipzig as a cooperation partner, which makes me particularly happy. This institution is the competence center for the topic of Moldova in the Federal Republic of Germany par excellence – and thus also unique in the German-speaking world.

I am also pleased that we have received commitments from all – if you like – "sub-regions" of historic Moldova to promote this initiative at the universities there: from the Republic of Moldova, from Romanian Moldova, from Ukrainian Bukovina, which was once part of the Principality of Moldova, and where a large Romanian-speaking minority still lives today.

This reflects one of the basic ideas of this course: to bring together the regions and their discourses about, from, and in Moldova and to shift our usual, central European focus of observation a bit towards the East.

*

The war in Ukraine moves the whole world, but especially Europe. Almost every university that has expertise on Eastern Europe devotes events to Ukraine and the Ukrainians, their history and their present in the war, and also makes this knowledge available to non-university educational and outreach institutions.

In addition, there is a comprehensive, empathetic humanitarian commitment in large parts of civil society. One could say, somewhat simplistically, that the closer a country is to Ukraine, the more intensive the support for Ukraine or for people who have fled Ukraine. Belarus, of course, is an exception in this constellation and at the same time it is to be expected that Belarusian politics and/or civil society there could and possibly will be more than a tipping point in this geopolitical conflict.

Thus, the war also casts its shadow on other former Soviet republics that have often been overlooked and almost forgotten in recent years, even though their respective histories and current geopolitical situations make them highly vulnerable nations. Some, like the large country of Kazakhstan, try to take advantage of the current developments to emancipate themselves even more from the former center of gravity, Moscow.

Others, especially smaller countries such as Georgia or Armenia, are agonizing over their situation between the large and medium-sized powers, having to hope for one or the other protective power on which they are economically, politically, and militarily dependent, while at the same time asserting themselves as functioning societies in a mosaic of Soviet successor states and struggling for internal and external stability.

One such country that can be described as being between all fronts without slipping into mere rhetoric is the Republic of Moldova. We want to dedicate this lecture series to Moldova as a historical region and a modern republic.

*

For most people, even for experts on Eastern and Southeastern Europe, this country is *terra incognita*, difficult to classify between Slavia and Romania, between East and West. For some, Moldova is a remnant of the Soviet autolysis of the early 1990s, for others a strategic bridgehead, admittedly riddled with cracks, and for others a zone for the exchange of certain trade goods, including people. One might still think of Moldovan wine, which was sold mainly to the Soviet Union and Russia. (And which, by the way, is excellent).

One hears of transshipment points for various passports. One may vaguely know about the breakaway Transnistria/Pridnestrovie, which seems to be a Soviet museum by Russia's grace. A country that can only be understood through satire, which is used as a point of comparison when something is to be portrayed as particularly backward and poor. It is a place where you can never get to and do not want to get to, but also a place where Horst Köhler somehow comes from, and a place that occasionally sends some pretty good, or at least weird, show acts for the Eurovision Song Contest. It is also where our cleaning ladies and our construction workers come from.

Moldova seems like a stop where nobody wants to get off.

*

That is why we would like to propose this shift of focus towards the East, to and across the border of the European Union. To show that Moldova, in its historical depth, is an outstanding example of European distinctiveness.

Here, various influences from all directions, cultures, languages, and denominations intersect. What in other places only in theory exists is here reality: Here, the traditions of Constantinople, Moscow and Rome meet, here we find influences of Slavic, Romance, and Germanic languages, here smaller groups of people wanted to find their future, here, if we look at Bukovina, Austria had been present. Here, the various historical regions of Moldavia were almost completely reunited for two decades between the wars in the so-called "Greater Romania", from here tens of thousands of so-called "Volksdeutsche" ("ethnic Germans") were brought "Heim ins Reich", here, under Romanian administration, in the wasteland of Transnistria, between the rivers Dniester and Bug, hundreds of thousands of Jews and Roma died. Where once again there was war at the beginning of the 1990s, which to this day has not ended, but remains merely frozen. And today it is the Republic of Moldova, which, measured by the number of inhabitants, has taken in the most refugees from Ukraine and provides for them as best as it can.

It becomes clear: it is not always an advantage and certainly not particularly romantic to be on the threshold of several worlds. This is also shown to us by the current situation: Moldova is a region of migration, a nation of emigrants, a country of those left behind, a society that in some ways threatens to dissolve in its globalization.

*

We have systematized all these aspects and many more in the concept of this lecture series and brought in the most renowned experts to approach the main features of the history of Moldova on the basis of the current state of research. At the same time, we would like to take an in-depth, present-day look at Moldova in order to contribute to the understanding of this region, society and nation. Therefore, in addition to the lectures, several in-depth conversations with experts on the region will also be offered during the semester, which can be accessed in podcast format.

Our event page also offers the possibility to provide a wide variety of further information on Moldova. I would like to invite you to send us your own approaches to the region – be it enlightening journal articles, literature references, radio or television broadcasts, reports by international organizations, contributions to culture and art.

We look forward to a lively, productive exchange.

*

The lecture series will take place exclusively online. You will find the corresponding zoom link on the website of our course at <http://www.ikgs.de/moldau>. At a later date, we will make the recordings of the lectures available.

On December 14, the premiere of the short film "[Forgotten Holocaust – A journey to Transnistria](#)" will take place in Innsbruck. More information will be available on our website soon.

For those who want to take the exam as part of the LMU course, we will set up a Moodle course. There you will also find the exam modalities in a few weeks. There will be one question to answer for each of the lectures.

We will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

But now, also on behalf of the co-organizers and cooperation partners, I wish us all stimulating lectures and discussions about Moldova and its history, which is divided in two ways: that of a historical region separated by national borders. But also that of a common history, present and future, which Europe shares with Moldova. <>