Human Rights in Modern Europe

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| **Credit level:** 5 |
| **Length:** semester 2 |
| **ECTS credit value:** 8  |
| **College and School:** Lazarski University in Warsaw, Faculty of Economics and Management  |
| **Module Leader:** Jerzy Zarzycki-Siek |
| **Host Course:** BA International Relations  |
| **Pre-requisites:** N/A |
| **Co-requisites:** N/A |
| **Special features:** N/A |
| **Access restrictions:** N/A |
| **Summary of module content:** The aim of this module is to provide students with knowledge and understanding of principal questions related to human rights, standards of their protection and problems involved with their implementation. The module covers philosophy, doctrine, and history of human rights. It also reviews selected problems of human rights and analyses legal cases and controversies. It approaches the topic from a multidisciplinary perspective (political, philosophical, legal, and historical) with a particular emphasis on the impact of the communist legacy in Central and Eastern Europe on the one hand, and on post-World War II developments in Western Europe on the other. |

**Assessment Methods**

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| Rank | Assessment type | Assessment name | Weighting | Qualifying set (where the minimum mark required applies across multiple assessments) |
| 1 | Portfolio | Portfolio (human rights in general) | 50% |  |
| 2 | Essay | Research paper (human rights in post-Soviet space) | 50% |

**Synoptic assessment**

N/A

**Learning outcomes**

By the end of the module the successful student will be able to:

* Explain the key principles of the idea of human rights and standards of their protection in the regions under discussion.
* Evaluated the impact of historical, political, and cultural developments on different current stance of state towards human rights and civic responsibility.
* Analyse the main problems of human rights in the area under discussion, with reference to the political culture, traditions and history of the relevant countries.
* Critically examine regulations of the protection of human rights and international law by means of interpreting cases, treaties and legal doctrine.
* Critically evaluate recent developments in human rights (including the right to a clean environment) in Europe as well as in other regions of the world.
* Apply gained knowledge and skills to support and advocate for human rights in both local and international contexts, including through collaborative and work-based settings.

**Course outcomes the module contributes to:**

* L5.2 An awareness of the key traditions in international political theory and an ability to differentiate between specific thinkers and debates within the various traditions of International Relations.
* L5.5 An understanding of the varieties of approaches to understanding, constructing and interpreting the international system, especially through concepts and theories derived from the social sciences.
* L5.7 An understanding of the responsibilities of global citizenship, especially as it relates to conceptions of civic responsibility and global engagement through cross-cultural and cross- national perspectives.
* L5.8 An ability to successfully complete tasks that are transferrable to an appropriate professional employment setting.
* L5.9 Develop the skills to work collaboratively as well as individually in a learning and research environment.

**Indicative syllabus content**

* Origins of Human Rights-philosophy, history and politics
* Historical roots of doctrines
* Aspects of Human Rights and their evolution, different approaches and interpretations of human rights
* Individual and collective rights
* Progressive human rights agenda and its implementation
* Right to clean environment and transhumanism
* Human Rights in Western Europe after World War II, as well as in other parts of the world
* Impact of Soviet Union and its satellites on human rights norms in those regions including political and religious repression as well as issues regarding the deficit of and development of civic responsibility
* New tendencies in human rights in post-Soviet space and CEE and the ‘illiberal backlash’
* Human Rights in international public law
* Protection of Human Rights in the UN system. Regional protections systems, with particular example of Europe.
* Human Rights cases in courts and tribunals

**Teaching and learning methods.**

The module is conducted in the form of seminars, which covers the indicative content. Additionally, students will receive supplementary reading materials for self-study and for preparing short reflective reports presenting their thoughts on the subject discussed in the class. Additionally, in-class debates between groups of students discussing contentious issues in Human Rights with teacher as a moderator will be conducted. One out of five reflective reports will be completed by each student in response to such an in-class debate .In the section of the module devoted to human rights in the post-Soviet space and CEE students will write an paper . The topic list will be presented to students at the start of semester. Students can also propose their own topic however it needs to be approved by the teacher before a student can proceed with work on it.

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| Activity type | Category | Student learning and teaching hours\* |
| Lecture | Scheduled |  |
| Seminar | Scheduled | 60 |
| Tutorial | Scheduled |  |
| Project supervisor | Scheduled |  |
| Demonstration | Scheduled |  |
| Practical classes and workshops | Scheduled |  |
| Supervised time in studio/workshop | Scheduled |  |
| Fieldwork | Scheduled |  |
| External visits | Scheduled |  |
| Work based learning | Scheduled |  |
| Scheduled online learning | Scheduled |  |
| Other learning | Scheduled |  |
| Total scheduled |  | 60 |
| Placement | Placement |  |
| Independent study | Independent | 140 |
| Total student learning and teaching hours |  | 200 |

\*hours per activity type are indicative and subject to change.

**Assessment rationale: why has this assessment been used for this module?**

**Portfolio**: it consists of 5 reflective reports, each 500 words long. One report will be based on an in-class debate on contentious human rights issues, moderated by the teacher.

The reports explore various aspects of human rights, encouraging students to engage with the material, participate in discussions, and develop critical thinking skills. They also promote effective communication and problem-solving, both essential in the job market. By reflecting on readings and debate outcomes, students enhance their ability to evaluate ideas, self-assess performance, and distill key issues. This process supports self-improvement and strengthens analytical skills—valuable in any knowledge-driven, problem-solving profession.

The reflective reports are submitted collectively as a single portfolio assessment, which constitutes 50% of the total module grade. Students are required to complete these reports regularly, following the schedule provided by the instructor at the beginning of the semester. This ongoing process enables students to receive continuous feedback and remain actively engaged throughout the module. Each individual report carries equal weight within the overall portfolio mark. The portfolio assesses LOs 1, 2, 3, and 4.

**The 2,500 Research Paper** (50% of the final grade): the research paper on an aspect of human rights in the post-Soviet space and Central Eastern Europe is a substantial academic work that allows students to engage deeply with module material and demonstrate their progress by the end of the module. This traditional essay format helps to develop essential skills in articulating ideas clearly under time constraints, integrating multiple sources, and combining analytical and synthetic thinking. Each topic is framed as a problem requiring a solution, fostering competencies in reporting, problem analysis, and problem-solving. The paper will address LOs 5 and 6.

Students will be informed about the ethical considerations of AI usage in paper and portfolio preparation and may use it for preliminary research, literature inquiry, brainstorming ideas, improving language and writing style, fact-checking and cross-referencing sources.

**Assessment criteria: what criteria will be used to assess my work on this module?**

**The Portfolio** will be evaluated on their content, logic and academic standards with feedback provided to help students to identify both strengths and weaknesses, especially in independent thinking. Formal criteria will guide the assessment: 20% for each of (1) Accuracy and understanding; (2) Relevance; (3) Background knowledge; (4) Clarity and coherence; (5) Quality of analysis. The reflective report on debate will be based on prior reading on the given topic and evaluate the experience of debating the opposing side. It will assess strengths, weaknesses, and any shifts in perception in relation to one’s own position and the established criteria.

**The Research Paper** will be evaluated based on five equally weighted criteria, each worth 20% of the final mark: the quality of writing, the use of evidence, the quality of argument and analysis, the understanding of context and factual accuracy, and the use of references and citations.

In general, the assessments will examine to what extent the student has demonstrated the ability to:

* Explain human rights principles and regional variations in protection standards, noting historical influences.
* Evaluate how historical developments shape countries’ current human rights policies and attitudes.
* Analyse current human rights trends and challenges in the regions studied, considering political and historical contexts.
* Critically assess international human rights law, interpreting cases, treaties, and doctrines.
* Evaluate recent global and regional human rights developments, including emerging rights like environmental protection.
* Apply knowledge to support human rights advocacy, considering regional and international challenges.

**Sources**

The sources below are a taster of what students will be expected to engage with over the module, more literature will be provided during the module itself.

Atapattu S., Schapper A., *Human Rights and the Environment: Key Issues*, Routledge, 2019.

Blokker, P., ‘Building democracy by legal means? The contestation of human rights and constitutionalism in East-Central Europe’, *Journal of Modern European History,* 2020.

Donnelly J., Whelan D. J., *International Human Rights 6th ed,* Routledge, 2020.

Freeman, M., *Human Rights: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, Polity Press, 2011).

Gerber, T. P., ‘Public opinion on human rights in Putin-era Russia: Continuities, changes, and sources of variation’, *Journal of Human Rights*, 2015.

Guasti, P., Bustikova, L., ‘Varieties of Illiberal Backlash in Central Europe’, *Problems of Post-Communism*, 2023.

Hunt, L., *Inventing Human Rights*: *a History*, W.W. Norton Company, 2008.

Khaliq, U., (ed.), *International human rights law documents*, Cambridge University Press, 2018.

Juviler, P., *Freedom's Ordeal: The Struggle for Human Rights and Democracy in Post-Soviet States*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011.

Massino, J., *Ambiguous Transitions: Gender, the State, and Everyday Life in Socialist and Postsocialist Romania*, Berghahn Books, 2019.

Orzeszyna, M., Skwarzyński, M., Tabaszewski, R., *International Human Rights Law*, C. H. Beck, 2023.

Wouters J., Nowak M., Chané A-L., Hachez N., (eds.), *The European Union and Human Rights. Law and Policy*