Professor Alexander Kamenskii

Professor Igor Khristoforov

History is probably the most popular subject among Russian politicians and public figures today, and certainly the one that provokes the hottest public disputes. What are the causes of this «obsession with history»? Is it the uniqueness of Russia’s historical trajectory, or rather its normality? Can we trace the problems of contemporary Russia back to the times of the Muscovite Tsardom, Russian Empire of Peter the Great, Stalin’s Soviet Union, Eltsin’s Russian Federation? How can we explain the persistence of some of Russia’s basic political, social and cultural forms through ages?

This course will discuss these and other issues in connection with the perception of historical events and figures in public opinion today. It will focus mostly on the most important period, from Peter the Great’s “revolution from above” to the emergence of contemporary Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union. We will discuss such topics as the causes and consequences of Russia's enormous territorial growth and its multiethnic composition; the peculiarities of governing this enormous and heterogeneous territory spread over European and Asiatic continents; Russia’s economic backwardness and geopolitical challenges of imperial rivalries. We will pay special attention to the most widespread myths and stereotypes concerning the country and its people and will try to confront it with the empirical evidence.

The course does not require prior knowledge of Russian history or language.