

Shaping the Modern World: European politics since the 19th century

The legacies of European political thinking dominate so many aspects of contemporary international politics and the way the world works. From the founding idea of “The State” that is so important in defining people’s identity, and which is the basic building block of trade and of diplomacy, to the very lines drawn on maps defining nations (take a look at a map of Africa – all those straight lines defining borders that ignore rivers, mountains, traditional tribal heartlands) – and Europe’s legacy is writ large. Yet given the dominance of Europe started to ebb away after the First World War, a trend that accelerated after the Second – have international politics and the founding ideas that created today’s world changed or kept pace with time and advances in education, thinking and technology?

This course will look at the ideas that lie behind the concept of the State and explore this European legacy. It will consider how and why war has shaped so much of our thinking, and explore whether the State can – indeed, should – remain our starting point for international politics – and what might be the alternative? In this rapidly changing, and arguably ever-less stable world, such questions deserve vital consideration.

Course structure

Session 1: The role of War and the development of the Nation State

Session 2: The legacy of Empire – how Europe shaped the modern world

Session 3: Two World Wars and one Cold War – or just three European-centric wars?

Session 4: Is it a State or is it not a State? The State of yesterday, today and tomorrow

Session 5: The end of the European dream? A look into the future

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