

Concept Note

THE ROAD TO TOTALITARIANISM

Webinar Series
November- December

 Co-funded by
the European Union

 EuroClio
 Institute for the Study
of Totalitarian Regimes



EuroClio is pleased to announce our new webinar series on “The Road to Totalitarianism” taking place from November to December 2022.

As well as generally being suitable for anyone interested in the topic, the webinar series can serve as a great continuation for those having followed the earlier webinar series on the Fragility of Democracy.

On top of a compelling keynote lecture on the topic, participants can join workshops and discussion sessions in order to gain more in-depth knowledge on the topic itself and on ways to approach it in history education.

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About “The Road to Totalitarianism”

With the Russian invasion of Ukraine at the beginning of 2022, Europe has been reminded that peace on the continent is more fragile than sometimes assumed. This war has increased Russia’s totalitarian aspects, moving it closer to the Soviet Union Putin mourns.¹ Yet, totalitarianism nowadays is not just relevant in the case of Russia. Arguments for modern totalitarianism have further concerned states such as China, but equally non-state actors such as Islamists and far-right groups.² As such, it has become evident that totalitarianism is not only a thing of the 20th century but continues to affect our present, making the topic even more relevant for education.

In 1967, Hannah Arendt identified the fragility of truth in politics and connected it to totalitarian ideologies.³ In our age of communication, students are faced with mis- and disinformation on a daily basis. Schools are thus an important place for these students to learn critical thinking skills which prepare them to navigate the plethora of information available on the internet.

However, teaching totalitarianism is not as straightforward. It is more nuanced than deciding whether a state (or non-state actor) is totalitarian or not since case studies often exemplify only certain qualities of the concept.⁴ Thus, navigating the topic can be difficult, let alone teaching it to students. What further complicates the matter, are the oft-mentioned East-West discrepancies in remembrance culture as Western Europe has been less affected by totalitarianism rooted in the communist ideology.⁵ Teachers throughout Europe can thus face very different situations when discussing the subject.

This webinar series aims to discuss all these challenges of teaching totalitarianism and to provide educators with the necessary skills and resources to approach this topic in class.

Key questions

The key questions that will be addressed during the training activities are:

- How do we teach about totalitarianism in the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine?
- How can we approach the subject of European memory in education?

¹ Andrei Kolesnikov, “Putin’s War Has Moved Russia from Authoritarianism to Hybrid Totalitarianism,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April 19, 2022, <https://carnegiemoscow.org/2022/04/19/putin-s-war-has-moved-russia-from-authoritarianism-to-hybrid-totalitarianism-pub-86921>.

² Paul Jackson, “Totalitarianism in the Twentieth Century and Beyond,” openDemocracy, August 27, 2019, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/countering-radical-right/totalitarianism-twentieth-century-and-beyond/>; Jean-Philippe Béja. “Xi Jinping’s China: On the Road to Neo-Totalitarianism.” *Social Research* 86, no. 1 (Spring, 2019): 203-230. <http://server.proxy-ub.rug.nl/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/xi-jinpings-china-on-road-neo-totalitarianism/docview/2249726077/se-2>.

³ Hannah Arendt, “Truth and Politics,” *The New Yorker* (The New Yorker, February 18, 1967), <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1967/02/25/truth-and-politics>.

⁴ Paul Jackson, “Totalitarianism in the Twentieth Century and Beyond,” openDemocracy, August 27, 2019, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/countering-radical-right/totalitarianism-twentieth-century-and-beyond/>

⁵ Abbott Gleason, “Contextualizing ‘Totalitarianism’ in the Classroom,” *Perspectives on History* | AHA, April 1, 1997, <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/april-1997/contextualizing-totalitarianism-in-the-classroom>; Mano Toth, “Challenging the Notion of the East-West Memory Divide,” *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 57, no. 5 (2019): 1031–50, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12870>.

- How do we promote critical thinking among students in a time of dis- and misinformation?

The design of the webinar series

The webinar series will take place from October to November 2022. It will include a Keynote lecture as well as workshops and a final discussion and sharing session. As part of its wider thematic focus on totalitarianism, EuroClio will also produce relevant content for its general outreach work, including a recently released [podcast episode](#) on the subject. We are currently confirming the last elements of the programme, and more information on the series' design will be available soon!

Aims of the training

During the webinar series, participants will:

- Discuss the continuing importance of totalitarianism nowadays
- Learn how to teach students to recognize totalitarian qualities in different case studies
- Work together on how to approach European memory in education

Expected Outcomes

This webinar will result in:

- Increased knowledge of teaching strategies regarding totalitarianism in the past and present
- A certificate of attendance and active participation
- A booklet containing resources and practices on teaching totalitarianism collected in the course of the webinar series

Resources Consulted

Arendt, Hannah. "Truth and Politics." *The New Yorker*. The New Yorker, February 18, 1967. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1967/02/25/truth-and-politics>.

Béja, Jean-Philippe. "Xi Jinping's China: On the Road to Neo-Totalitarianism." *Social Research* 86, no. 1 (Spring, 2019): 203-230.

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