

# CALL for PAPERS

## Authority and Medical Expertise: Health as a Social Good and Political Argument in Eastern Europe, Russia and beyond

**International Historical Conference of the German Association for East European Studies  
in cooperation with the Herder-Institute for Historical Research on East Central Europe  
and the German-Polish Society for the History of Medicine**

**Venue: Marburg or virtual meeting (depending on travel restrictions)**

**October 20-21, 2021**

Healers have always held privileged, sometimes prominent positions in human communities, just as it has always been one of the tasks of political leaders to protect the life and limb of their subjects. Medical expertise in the broadest sense can thus be defined as social capital, which in turn must be harnessed by rulers, especially in 'health crises', in order to maintain their legitimacy. This close relationship between rulership and medical expertise - however it may be recognized - has been clearly evident at least since the "Black Death" in the mid-14th century. The fight against epidemics has, in particular, become a political issue worldwide. In line with the authorization of university medicine in the modern era, a discourse began in Western and Central Europe around the "medical police" and the "medicus politicus," whose concepts and practices were adapted in Eastern Europe. Since numerous epidemics (plague, cholera, and not least corona) have been carried from the "East" to the "West," the Western and Central European view has, in turn, been shaped in a special way.

The COVID-19 pandemic - as an incentive for this conference - has not only refocused questions around the health of individuals, but it has also brought into focus the question of the public, and thus political, approach to health. We are currently experiencing for example the precarious difference between scientifically testing and politically licensing vaccines, and finally the acceptance of vaccination in general and special vaccines in particular in the population. The awareness of these issues has never been greater than it is now. From an historical perspective, however, the politicization of health issues and of health expert knowledge does not seem unusual: Health issues have always been used as an important tool to legitimize rulers and have, therefore,

tended to be politicized. In addition, health policy, for example, around the construction and support of hospitals and doctors, has also played an important role in domestic politics; these measures clarify the relationship of those in power to the population. What measures are taken for disease prevention? What supportive, social regulations are put in place?

In light of these exemplary questions, the aim of the conference is to provide the opportunity to discuss, with an historicizing perspective, the social relevance of health politics and the interdependencies between political authorities, agency and medical expertise in Eastern Europe and Russia as well as the neighbouring regions such as the Caucasus.

Possible topics therefore include:

- ) relation of political authority and expertise (e.g. authoritarianism and expertise);
- ) health as a political argument and political strategies of (medical) experts;
- ) relation of health politics and individual rights;
- ) political handling of disease/health, effects on social groups;
- ) its impact of on ethnic, religious, and other minorities
- ) knowledge transfer and adaptation as a political strategy;
- ) health policies and social change; the role of prevention and social policy as indicators of societal values, but also of legitimacy deficits.
- ) the interpretation of the "East" as a source of epidemics

Participants will be selected by the end of June, 2021. The conference language will be English.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic situation we will decide by the end of August 2021 if we can meet in Marburg or if the conference will be held online.

Interested scholars are invited to submit topic proposals in digital form to [forum@herder-institut.de](mailto:forum@herder-institut.de) by June 15, 2021.

An abstract of about 400-500 characters and an informative CV are requested.

# DGO

► Deutsche Gesellschaft für Osteuropakunde e.V.

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