

The Twentieth Century: Europe in Three Wars



Syllabus 2026
Utrecht Summer School
Dr. Esther Baakman

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Image Front Page

Berliners from both the communist eastern part and the capitalist western part of the city meeting at and tearing down the wall that separated their city for almost fifty years.

1. Formal Information

Reading materials

Materials will include digital editions of relevant monographies, sections of textbooks, and several primary sources. All literature will be made available through the Teams environment of the course. Please check the Summer School website and contact the course coordinator for updates.

Course Duration

August 3-August 14 2026

Credits

You will obtain 4.0 ECTS and a Certificate of Attendance after completion of the course.

Faculty

Dr. Esther Baakman

Course Coordinator

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Contact Utrecht Summer School

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2. Course Description

Introduction

When asked about the twentieth century, most people in Europe associate it with the Second World War. Yet during the twentieth century, Europe experienced not just one, but multiple wars. These include the First World or Great War, the Second World War, and the Cold War that followed in its wake. These major conflicts were often accompanied or sparked by smaller, regional conflicts, like the Balkan wars, the Spanish Civil War, and the Yugoslav wars. For this reason, the twentieth century has sometimes been labelled “The Era of Violence” – and perhaps rightfully so. But this century might as well be regarded as an age of rebuilding, decolonization, ideological struggle, and global connections, therefore making the twentieth century much more diverse.

Europe in Three Wars will introduce you to a variety of questions relating to these three European and global conflicts. Why did these wars occur and what caused them to happen? What were the consequences on a human, political, and geopolitical level? Which postwar circumstances caused the Cold War and what were the repercussions of this era for the global European empires?

You will study these questions pertaining directly to these three wars, but also gain insight into major changes that took place in other areas of society. These changes included the way people lived, new political ideas and ideologies, key economic developments, and profound alterations of the world map.

You will receive lectures on, read sources from, and watch documentaries on a variety of historical topics. These will span the narratives of the three wars but also topics such as international cooperation and multilateralism, ideology, and the rise of welfare states.

Finally, you will also go on a number of excursions, for example to the Nazi concentration camp near the Dutch town of Amersfoort and to the International Court of Justice in the Peace Palace in The Hague.

Course Objectives

At the end of this course, the students will be able to:

- Recognize the most important historical developments that characterized the twentieth century, with a special focus on the three wars.
- Analyze how the three wars of the twentieth century continue to influence Europe and the world today.
- Put European history in a global perspective and recognize the changing position of Europe in the world.

3. Academic Program

Week 1

Monday: August 3, 2026

10:00-11:00: Introduction: Welcome to the Course!

Lecturer: Dr. Esther Baakman

Location:

11:00-12:30: Seminar 1: What were the causes of the First World War?

Lecturer: Dr. Esther Baakman

Location:

13:30-15:00: Lecture 1: The First World War and its Aftermath

Lecturer: Dr. Esther Baakman

Location:

Literature:

- Christopher Clark, "Conclusion," in: *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe went to War in 1914* (2012), 555-562.
- P. Morgan, "The First World War and the Challenge to Democracy in Europe", in: M. Spiering and M. Wintle (eds), *Ideas of Europe since 1914* (Palgrave Macmillan, London 2002) 69-88.

Tuesday: August 4, 2026

10:00-12:00: Lecture 2: Nation- and state-building in Europe after WWI

Lecturer:

Location:

13:00-15:00: Seminar 2: The Crises of the interwar years and the Fall of the Weimar Republic

Lecturer:

Location:

Literature:

- Shelley Baranowski, "The Collapse of the Weimar Parliamentary System", in: idem et al. (eds.), *A Companion to Nazi Germany* (Hoboken 2018) 109-127.
- TBA

Wednesday: August 5, 2026

10:00-12:00: Seminar 3: Research Workshop for Written Assignment

Lecturer: dr. Esther Baakman

Location:

13:00-15:00: Lecture 3: Antisemitism, the Holocaust, and the Netherlands

Lecturer:

Location:

Literature:

- Jan Grabowski, "Poland: The Blue Police," in: *How was it possible?: A Holocaust Reader* (2015), 562-574.
- J. Blom, "The Persecution of the Jews in the Netherlands: A Comparative Western European Perspective", *European History Quarterly* 19:3 (1989) 333-351.

Thursday: August 6, 2026

Excursion 1: TBA

Program:

Friday: August 7, 2026

10:00-12:00: Lecture 4: The Second World War and the Rise of International Organizations

Lecturer:

Location:

13:00-15:00: Seminar 4: The Cold War

Lecturer:

Location:

Literature:

- Mario Del Pero, "Incompatible universalisms: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the beginning of the Cold War," in: *The Routledge Handbook of the Cold War* (2014) 3-16.
- Peter Malcontent, "Introduction", in: idem, (ed.), *Facing the Past. Amending Historical Injustices through Instruments of Transitional Justice* part II (Cambridge: Intersentia 2016) pp. 59-81.

Week 2

Monday: August 10, 2026

10:00-12:00: Lecture 5: Decolonization

Lecturer:

Location:

13:00-15:00: Lecture 6: European post-war Democracy

Lecturer:

Location:

Literature:

- Martin Conway, "The Rise and Fall of Western Europe's Democratic Age, 1945-1973," *Contemporary European History* 13 (2004): 1, 67-88.
- Jan Jansen, and Jürgen Osterhammel, *Decolonization: A Short History* (Princeton University Press 2017) 1-34.

18:00: Deadline assignment

Tuesday: August 11, 2026

Excursion 2: Full-day excursion to TBD

Wednesday: August 12, 2026

10:00-12:00: Seminar 5: Fall of the USSR: The End of History?

Lecturer:

Location:

13:00-15:00: Seminar 6: Self-study for exam (coordinator available for advice)

Lecturer: Dr. Esther Baakman

Location:

Literature:

- Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History," *The National Interest* 16 (1989), 3-18.
- John Mearsheimer, "Why we will soon miss the Cold War", in: Richard Betts (ed.), *Conflict after the cold war*. (Routledge, 2015) 28-44.

Thursday: August 13, 2026

11:00-13:00: Final Exam

Location:

Friday: August 14, 2026

10:30-11:30 Climbing the Dom tower

Location: Dom square

13:00-14:00: Final Ceremony: Presentation of Certificates and Drinks

Location: TBA

4. Lecturers

Dr. Esther Baakman (course coordinator) is a lecturer in the Political History section of Utrecht University. Her research deals with colonialism and its portrayal in early-modern Europe, focusing on colonial news in the periodical press, colonial citizenship, and the development of various discourses of slavery in early modern Europe.

Excursions

During the course, we will make two full-day excursions, where we will see the traces and effects of European history in the Dutch landscape. For both excursions, transportation (by bus) will be arranged by the Summer School. You are, however, required to arrange your own lunch. Details on where and when the bus will pick you up will follow.

TBD

Wednesday: August 6, 2026

TBD

Tuesday: August 11, 2026

5. Attendance, Assessment, Grading

Attendance

You are required to attend all lectures, seminar sessions, and excursions. Students who are absent due to factors beyond their fault (illness, accident, etc.) should submit a medical attest of this to the course coordinator (dr Esther Baakman) as soon as possible. A compensatory assignment is expected for each absence and each uncompensated absence will result in a 10% subtraction of the final grade.

Assessment

Your grade for this course will be based on two different assignments:

- Essay 40 %
- Exam 60 %

Essay

To complete this course successfully, you will have to write an essay (1000 words max.). The aim of this assignment is to research the way in which Western news media covered historical events elsewhere on the globe by picking a case study and analysing contemporary newspaper coverage of it in a 1000-word paper. The historical timeframe in which to select your case study is 1900-1960.

The template research question is 'how was [research subject] portrayed in [source] in/during [timeframe], and how can we explain that portrayal/its development?' Please tailor this question to your specific topic and research. Example: how was the outbreak of the Russian Revolution in 1917 portrayed in *The Times*, and how can we explain that portrayal?

This paper will use newspaper articles. A wonderful resource to use is the news archive of the British newspaper *The Times* as part of Gale Literary Sources to which you have entrance via your UU Library Account. *The Times* was one of the most highly regarded resources for eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and twentieth-century news coverage. An alternative is *Trove* by the Australian National Library. We will access and research these sources together during seminar 3.

Depending on your case study and what you are able to find in the newspaper databases, you might need more or less newspaper articles. About ten articles would be good. Editorials and op-eds offer more and richer text for analysis than factual news reporting.

- Your paper should include 1.000 words, excluding references and bibliography (10% less or more is permitted);
- It should have an introduction, a main body, and a conclusion;
- Include a justification of your research (method, keywords used in search, etc.);
- The paper should be centred on the primary source material (± 10 newspaper articles) and your analysis of these newspaper articles;
- Don't just discuss *how* your case was described in the newspapers, but also try to explain *why* your case was described that way. What were the underlying factors?;

- Explain the *why* question with the help of the course literature, and optionally additional, relevant scientific publications on your topic, which you may search yourself.
- Make use of proper (academic) language. Clear, error-free writing and logical reasoning is an important part of academic communication;
- It does not matter which annotation system you use, but use it correctly and consistently.

Deadline: The essay should be handed in on Monday August 10 (18:00). You can e-mail it to the course coordinator at e.j.baakman@uu.nl

Exam

The course ends with a final exam of all course material (lectures, seminars, and literature) on Thursday August 13 (11:00-13:00).

Grading

Your grades will be numerical grades, following the Dutch grading system. Dutch grades range from 0 (very bad) to 10 (excellent). At Utrecht University, a 5.5 is considered the lowest passing grade. Please note that grade inflation has not affected the Dutch grading system as much as it has some American institutions. Grades of 9 and higher are rarely given, the most common grades awarded being between 6 and 8. The Utrecht University student registration system (Osiris) that will produce your transcript will round off all grades to whole numerals for 5 and lower, and half numbers for 5.5 and higher. Hence, ... 4 — 5 — 5.5 — 6 — 6.5 — 7 — 7.5, etc. On course work and examinations, however, it is customary to receive a grade that has not been rounded off. Plusses and minuses are sometimes used, and count for one-fourth of a point, for instance: 8- = 7,75. The meaning of the final numerical grades is as follows:

9.00-10.00	Excellent
8.00-8.99	Very good
7.50-7.99	Good
7.00-7.49	Very satisfactory
6.50-6.99	Satisfactory
6.00-6.49	Sufficient
5.50-5.99	Acceptable; minimum pass
5.00-5.49	Insufficient; fail
4.00-4.99	Unsatisfactory
3.00-3.99	Very unsatisfactory
2.00-2.99	Bad

0.00-1.99

Very bad

* Note that the conversion of grades that you have received in the Netherlands to grades at your home institution is the responsibility of your home institution, not Utrecht University. This chart should be used as an indication; no rights can be drawn from it.

* Any case of plagiarism, including the use of text-generating AI, will be reported to the home institution and result in a course failure, meaning 1.00 as the final grade for this course.

6. Summer School Information

Utrecht University Facilities

During the course, you can use several of Utrecht University's computer and printing facilities. You have received your computer login code (SOLIS ID) from the Summer School administration.

You are recommended to use one of the main computer rooms of the Faculty of Humanities in Kromme Nieuwegracht 80 (KNG 80). The computer rooms are opened from Mondays through Fridays from 08:00 to 19:00. The computer rooms are closed on Saturdays and Sundays.

Another option is to use the computers at the University Library (UB) Innercity (Drift 27). The library is open from Monday through Fridays from 08:00 to 18:00. It is closed on Saturdays and Sundays. Again, use your login code (SOLIS ID) to log in at any of the library computers.

Social Program

Utrecht Summer School not only offers you a fine selection of interesting courses in all kinds of disciplines, it also aims at giving the participants an unforgettable stay. Therefore, we invite all students during the months July and August to an attractive social program, including excursions, sport activities and social gatherings. The activities will provide the perfect setting for you to get to know your classmates better and to meet international students from other Summer School courses!

Information on the Summer School Social Programme can be found on the website https://utrechtsummerschool.nl/social_programme.