

Minor in:

Political Transformations (Transformations in Politics, Political Regimes, and Public Policies)

Programme type Professional upskilling programme with ECTS credits

Scientific (Social Sciences)

Workload (ECTS) 30

Programme duration One semester

Programme holder Center for Peace and Conflict Studies (CSMK) and Center for Advanced Studies Southeast Europe (CAS SEE), University of Rijeka

Programme implementer(s) Center for Peace and Conflict Studies (CSMK) and Center for Advanced Studies Southeast Europe (CAS SEE), University of Rijeka

Programme director Dr. Tena Prelec

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Rationale for launching the programme

The microqualification on political transformations complements and enriches the existing teaching and research portfolio in the social sciences and humanities at the University of Rijeka as the first programme explicitly grounded in Political Science and International Relations, led by a team of specialists in these fields. It critically examines transformations in politics, political regimes, and public policies, emphasising the global–local nexus and offering participants a comprehensive understanding of the dynamic processes shaping society.

Participants will gain key knowledge of power dynamics, governance, and policy-making. The programme is designed to enable critical appraisal of contemporary challenges such as migration, corruption, democratic change and other societal transformations. It focuses on analysing and understanding global processes and equips participants with tools to take an active role in addressing challenges in their communities and beyond. We cover topical themes including populism, inequality, and geopolitical shifts, and explore the broader context of transformations—from the struggle for democracy to adaptation under conditions of polycrises.

The programme empowers participants to be more active in analysing social processes, gaining the knowledge and skills needed for civic engagement, understanding rights and responsibilities, and influencing change locally and more broadly. Participants will also deepen their understanding of global issues and the roles of international institutions in shaping political outcomes. By reflecting on questions of justice, equality and human rights, they will be prepared to make responsible decisions and advocate for the common good. For those interested in further academic study in political science, careers in public administration, NGOs, international organisations, or political consulting, the microqualification provides a strong foundation. It develops skills relevant to roles requiring policy analysis, negotiation, public engagement, and strategic planning.

An integral component of the programme is the Challenge, which connects theory with practice. The Challenge for this edition is entitled **“Undoing Autocracy: Designing Policies and Pathways for Democratic Transitions.”** It enables participants to apply their knowledge to real, complex problems through an interdisciplinary lens across the programme’s core subjects. Priority in the introductory seminar will be given to public policy research techniques (problem framing, data collection tools, writing policy proposals, etc.). Alongside policy analysis and drafting, the programme also uses methods such as simulations of representation within public bodies at national or international level (e.g., in the course on International Organisations), scenario-building and strategic games (e.g., the EU enlargement or Critical Geopolitics courses), and table-top exercises in the course on Emergencies.

The final output arising from continuous work on the Challenge will be presented at the end of the programme before the teaching team.

1.2. Other important information

The programme represents a key step towards the development of a full Master’s degree in Political Science and International Relations at the University of Rijeka. It serves both as a taster for prospective students and as a trial platform for the teaching team to refine pedagogy, content, and delivery.

There is strong synergy between this programme and ongoing research activities at the University. Recently, UniRi secured its first Horizon Europe grant in Political Science/International Relations, the three-year collaborative project on geopolitics and EU enlargement titled GEO-POWER-EU. The UniRi team – led by Dr. Tena Prelec – coordinates an extensive, research-intensive work package comprising six tasks, including database development, three indices, case studies on corruption and disinformation, research on security, and strategic futures scenarios relating to the EU, the Western Balkans, the Eastern Trio (Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova), and a range of geopolitical actors in the EU’s wider neighbourhood. This synergy ensures the microqualification’s teaching is research-led and innovative, equipping participants with state-of-the-art knowledge and skills.

PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

2.1. Programme learning outcomes

Foundational knowledge specific to Political Science and International Relations – participants will be able to:

- Explain in their own words theoretical foundations of power and governance dynamics, and how political discourses and policies are formulated and implemented across political traditions.
- Apply theories of International Relations and Political Science to analyse complex processes in Southeast Europe.
- Use basic qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods research in rigorous analysis and independent inquiry, and formulate purposeful recommendations.

Specific knowledge across the core modules of Political Economy and Global Politics:

- Recognise EU integration mechanisms, rule of law and social economy, political sociology, critical geopolitics, international organisations, emergencies, international relations and social theories, international interventions and development policies.
- Identify similarities and differences across political regimes and strategies for democratic resilience, populism, and engaged democracy.
- Analyse effectiveness of governance structures and strategies to counter corruption.
- Critically assess geopolitical factors affecting regional stability and development.
- Explain complexities of migration, refugee issues, and minority rights.
- Identify and analyse policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation in Southeast European contexts.
- Argue positions on controversies of international politics in the Anthropocene using IR theory.

Research skills:

- Identify, analyse, and address research questions using appropriate methods, theory, information technology, data analysis/interpretation, and writing for the presentation of findings.
- Apply fundamentals of policy analysis, diplomatic negotiation, and effective communication through simulations, case studies, and collaborative projects.

Transversal skills:

- Communicate ideas clearly and respectfully, in writing and orally, using appropriate language and referencing.
- Demonstrate flexibility and collaboration in international/intercultural contexts, peer-to-peer learning, and respect for diverse perspectives and needs.

- Work independently, meet deadlines, manage time and workload, and show initiative.
- Reflect on learning, seek and use feedback, recognise when additional knowledge is needed, and undertake necessary research.

2.2. Admission requirements

The minor forms part of the University of Rijeka's Lifelong Learning provision and is open to a broad audience of various ages, educational backgrounds, and professional experience. Candidates should demonstrate English at B2 level (CEFR) and comprehension of Croatian. Following regional, European and global current affairs is desirable. A higher education degree is preferred but not mandatory. We particularly welcome an interest in social sciences and humanities—especially Political Science and International Relations—also from candidates whose prior degrees are from other disciplines.

2.3. List of modules/courses and ECTS

The programme comprises three modules: Political Economy, Global Politics and Social Change. Each module features a compulsory course (4x3 = 12 ECTS). The Challenge, which is integrated across modules, is also compulsory (6 ECTS). Students should choose three more elective courses from whichever module (4x3 = 12 ECTS) – for a total of 30 ECTS.

Module	Course	Instructor(s)	ECTS
Political Economy	Rule of Law and Transnational Corruption (compulsory)	Tena Prelec; Sonja Stojanović-Gajić	4
	EU Policy: Integration, Enlargement, Conditionality	Tena Prelec; Sonja Stojanović-Gajić	4
	Political Sociology	Marko Kovačić	4
Global Politics	International Relations and Social Theory (compulsory)	Katarina Kušić	4
	International Organisations	Dejan Stjepanović; Tena Prelec	4
	Emergencies: Conflict and Territory	Dejan Stjepanović; Galina Oustinova Stjepanović	4
	Critical Geopolitics	Tena Prelec; Sonja Stojanović-Gajić	4
	International Interventions and Development Policies	Katarina Kušić	4

Social Change	Engaged Democracy (compulsory)	Tena Prelec; Vedran Džihic; Sonja Stojanović-Gajić	4
	Nationalism and Populism	Dejan Stjepanović; Vedran Džihic	4
	International Politics of the Anthropocene	Katarina Kušić	4
Integrated across modules	Challenge: Undoing Autocracy – Designing Policies and Pathways for Democratic Transitions	Challenge leads and module instructors	6

Note: For each course, a detailed description is provided below.

2.4. Programme structure, pacing, and participant obligations

The programme consists of three modules, each with one compulsory (core) course and additional electives chosen by participants to allow niche profiling. An integrated Challenge runs across modules and carries 6 ECTS in total.

After initial online meetings, the programme begins with an immersive opening weekend in Cres (Moise Palace) covering orientation, the first two core courses in intensive format, and practical tools for following and evaluating the programme. Teaching continues in hybrid form during the semester and concludes with a final intensive weekend in Rijeka.

The integrated Challenge is cumulative and builds on the content of the modules, enabling participants to focus on a theme of their choice within the overall Challenge topic and develop it through research with mentor support. Mentors are assigned according to participants' interests.

Scheduling: Modules are delivered during selected weeks in an intensive format (lectures, seminars, Challenge workshops) with a flexible timetable. The microqualification runs from February to late May 2026. The Challenge component runs for one month within the academic year, with a flexible start window (preferably 1 April–1 May 2026), thus ensuring adequate preparation before and follow-up after the Challenge.

Participant obligations include active engagement in all programme activities, preparation for classes (reading), regular attendance, participation in discussions, and contribution to project and team work.

2.5. Multidisciplinarity / interdisciplinarity

The programme integrates Political Science, International Relations, political economy, social change, and public policy. Through each module, participants encounter diverse perspectives and theoretical frameworks, enabling them to grasp the interrelations among

political, social, and economic processes. Practical elements such as op-eds and the final Challenge output help participants develop focused expertise while keeping the overall workload feasible.

2.6. Mode of delivery

Hybrid delivery (opening and closing weekends in person; predominantly online/hybrid in between).

2.6.1. Rationale for online/hybrid delivery

Hybrid delivery supports innovative learning and flexibility, allows participation from different geographies, and builds team dynamics through concentrated sessions and Challenge consultations.

2.6.2. Conditions for online/hybrid delivery

Distance-learning infrastructure is available (MS Teams, Zoom, Merlin).

2.7. Language of delivery

English

2.8. Completion requirements

Completion requires active participation across programme activities: class preparation (reading), regular attendance, discussion and Q&A engagement, and participation in project and teamwork. The Challenge output reflects accumulated knowledge, including methodological choices and data analysis. Team projects are encouraged but not mandatory.

2.9. Quality assurance

Quality is monitored according to University of Rijeka standards via participant and staff surveys, staff self-evaluation, periodic programme reviews, and group/individual consultations. Participant presentations also provide opportunities for assessment and feedback.

COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

Challenge (Integrated Across Modules): Undoing Autocracy – Designing Policies and Pathways for Democratic Transitions (6 ECTS)

Instructors Challenge leads and module instructors

Semester/Timing Continuous across the microqualification

Aim

To apply interdisciplinary and intersectional knowledge and skills gained across the programme to design concrete, evidence-based policy proposals for democratic transitions after authoritarian rule, focusing on cases such as Hungary, Turkey, and Serbia.

Intended learning outcomes

- Distinguish and apply relevant theories to address Challenge questions spanning civil society, rule of law/anti-corruption, and international strategy.
- Formulate clear, logical arguments for constructive debate and policy communication.
- Select and adapt research methodologies to context; demonstrate independence and openness to diverse ideas/perspectives.

Content linked to learning outcomes

The integrated Challenge draws on the compulsory and elective courses to develop an interdisciplinary research question and deliverables aligned to three guiding questions: (1) Engaged democracy and the roles of social movements/civil society post-transition; (2) Institutional/legal reforms to dismantle state capture, restore the rule of law, and ensure checks and balances; (3) Geopolitical strategy to secure external support and resist destabilising pressures.

Student obligations

Active participation; timely submission of deliverables; collaboration with mentors and peers; presentation to stakeholders.

Assessment and evaluation

Graded (numeric/letter grade):

- 20% – Participation and preparation (seminar engagement, interim feedback rounds)
- 30% – Problem Statement & Research Memo (5–10 pages)
- 50% – Integrated Final Report (15–20 pages) + Presentation to stakeholders

Rule of Law and Transnational Corruption (compulsory) (4 ECTS)

Instructors Tena Prelec; Sonja Stojanović-Gajić

Aim

Provide a critical understanding of corruption and the rule of law from a transnational perspective and develop practical skills for case analysis and application of concepts to current events.

Intended learning outcomes

- Critically analyse rule-of-law and corruption questions from a transnational perspective.
- Identify, research, and present relevant case studies using course concepts.
- Track and interpret current events on corruption and their global–local interactions.

Content linked to learning outcomes

- Key concepts in corruption studies since the 1990s.
- Corruption, illiberalism, and state capture in Southeast Europe.
- Transnational corruption, offshore services, and the roles of ‘enablers’; accountability via civil society and media.

Student obligations

Active attendance, preparation (reading), contribution to discussions, and participation in learning activities.

Assessment and evaluation

Pass/Fail: 100% based on active participation, preparation, and contribution to discussions.

EU Policy: Integration, Enlargement, Conditionality (4 ECTS)

Instructors Tena Prelec; Sonja Stojanović-Gajić

Aim

Develop critical understanding of EU foreign policy and enlargement, with emphasis on transformative effects and policy conditionality.

Intended learning outcomes

- Describe institutions responsible for EU external policy and enlargement and their decision-making processes.
- Critically analyse transformative effects of EU external policy and enlargement on members and candidates.
- Build practical briefing skills via simulated presentations to an EP committee.

Content linked to learning outcomes

- Institutions and processes shaping EU external policy and enlargement; roles of citizens and civil society.
- Evolution of enlargement policy since 2022, including the impact of Russia's war against Ukraine and methodology shifts.

Student obligations

Active attendance, preparation (reading), contribution to discussions, and participation in learning activities.

Assessment and evaluation

Pass/Fail: 100% based on active participation, preparation, and contribution to discussions.

Political Sociology (4 ECTS)

Instructors Marko Kovačić

Aim

Introduce the relationships among politics, state and society and equip participants to interpret canonical and contemporary texts and debates in political sociology.

Intended learning outcomes

- Master the core conceptual toolkit of political sociology.
- Explain the subject, method, and position of political sociology in contemporary social science.
- Apply concepts and theories to analyse political phenomena and critically appraise texts.

Content linked to learning outcomes

- Discipline foundations; power and the state; democracy and elites; participation and social movements.
- Themes including (post)colonialism, globalisation, and transnationalisation.

Student obligations

Active attendance, preparation (reading), contribution to discussions, and participation in learning activities.

Assessment and evaluation

Pass/Fail: 100% based on active participation, preparation, and contribution to discussions.

International Relations and Social Theory (compulsory) (4 ECTS)

Instructors Katarina Kušić

Aim

Show how social theory can be used to understand and explain international political life and prepare students for reflexive theoretical and empirical work.

Intended learning outcomes

- Master core IR theory concepts and locate them within intellectual traditions.
- Understand the history and development of IR as a discipline.
- Develop critical thinking for future independent work on international politics.

Content linked to learning outcomes

- Meta-theoretical assumptions; main IR schools (realism, liberalism, constructivism, post-structuralism, postcolonial).
- Themes such as gender, religion/secularity, race/ethnicity, class/capitalism.

Student obligations

Active attendance, preparation (reading), contribution to discussions, and participation in learning activities.

Assessment and evaluation

Pass/Fail: 100% based on active participation, preparation, and contribution to discussions.

International Organisations (4 ECTS)

Instructors: Dejan Stjepanović, Tena Prelec

Aim

Introduce the origins, development, and functioning of international organisations (with focus on the UN) and equip students for practice-oriented engagement.

Intended learning outcomes

- Explain principles and functioning of global (UN, WTO) vs regional (EU, ASEAN) organisations via case studies.
- Outline historical development and current debates around IOs.
- Develop critical thinking for further research on political, legal, and economic implications of IOs.

Content linked to learning outcomes

- Theories of IOs (functionalist, realist, constructivist).
- Functioning and legal personality of IOs; roles in international law.
- Case-based exploration of global and regional IOs and their futures.

Student obligations

Active attendance, preparation (reading), contribution to discussions, and participation in learning activities.

Assessment and evaluation

Pass/Fail: 100% based on active participation, preparation, and contribution to discussions.

Emergencies: Conflict and Territory (4 ECTS)

Instructors Dejan Stjepanović; Galina Oustanova Stjepanović

Aim

Introduce theoretical approaches to conflict, typologies, and institutional responses; compare policy choices and their implications in divided societies.

Intended learning outcomes

- Critically understand key concepts and dominant theories of conflict and territorial politics.
- Analyse the genesis and dynamics of conflict and identify causes and management approaches.
- Assess institutional responses including autonomy, consociation, decentralisation, and constitutional change.

Content linked to learning outcomes

- Classical and contemporary approaches to territorial politics and conflict management.
- Institutional responses and case studies with attention to domestic politics and decentralisation.

Student obligations

Active attendance, preparation (reading), contribution to discussions, and participation in learning activities.

Assessment and evaluation

Pass/Fail: 100% based on active participation, preparation, and contribution to discussions.

Critical Geopolitics (4 ECTS)

Instructors Tena Prelec; Sonja Stojanović-Gajić

Aim

Provide a deep understanding of current geopolitical dynamics through a critical lens, with focus on Southeast Europe and the roles of transnational networks.

Intended learning outcomes

- Analyse impacts of global trends, local actors, and transnational networks in SEE.
- Critically assess roles of internal/external actors and networks sustaining or contesting illiberal practices.
- Develop practical policy-presentation skills via simulated briefings.

Content linked to learning outcomes

- Global trends, regional dynamics, and transnational networks (energy policy, foreign investment, diplomacy).
- Interactions of local authorities with external actors (e.g., China, Russia) and the networked nature of influence.

Student obligations

Active attendance, preparation (reading), contribution to discussions, and participation in learning activities.

Assessment and evaluation

Pass/Fail: 100% based on active participation, preparation, and contribution to discussions.

International Interventions and Development Policies: State-building, Peace-building, and Economic Progress (4 ECTS)

Instructors Katarina Kušić

Aim

Survey scholarly and policy debates on international intervention and development policies and explore liberal, post-liberal, and decolonial perspectives.

Intended learning outcomes

- Understand key concepts and approaches in international interventions and development policies.
- Critically analyse roles and dynamics among international, local, and transnational actors.
- Develop capacity for independent research and for writing across academic, policy, advocacy, and media genres.

Content linked to learning outcomes

- Definitions and historical development of development policy, state-building, and peace-building.
- Themes and trends: local ownership, democratic peace, post-conflict contexts.
- Reformist and alternative practices; exploring radical approaches.

Student obligations

Active attendance, preparation (reading), contribution to discussions, and participation in learning activities.

Assessment and evaluation

Pass/Fail: 100% based on active participation, preparation, and contribution to discussions.

Engaged Democracy (compulsory) (4 ECTS)

Instructors Tena Prelec; Vedran Džihčić; Sonja Stojanović-Gajić

Aim

Provide a comprehensive introduction to debates on engaged democracy, exploring alternative forms of participation and resistance in response to the crisis of representation.

Intended learning outcomes

- Critically analyse the concept, its historical roots, and current forms.
- Research, present, and analyse initiatives, movements, and activism promoting engaged democracy.
- Apply course frameworks to Southeast European cases, including EDI (Engaged Democracy Initiative).

Content linked to learning outcomes

- Conceptual distinctions (participation, protest, alternative engagement, resistance).
- Trends in Europe/SEE; case-based interaction with movement representatives.

Student obligations

Active attendance, preparation (reading), contribution to discussions, and participation in learning activities.

Assessment and evaluation

Pass/Fail: 100% based on active participation, preparation, and contribution to discussions.

Nationalism and Populism (4 ECTS)

Instructors Dejan Stjepanović; Vedran Džihic

Aim

Explore the interconnected phenomena of nationalism and populism and their roles in contemporary politics across identity, migration, political economy, sovereignty, and citizenship.

Intended learning outcomes

- Master key concepts and dominant theories of nationalism and populism.
- Analyse historical and contemporary cases using appropriate frameworks.
- Develop critical thinking and independence in related research tasks.

Content linked to learning outcomes

- Theories of nationalism (primordialism, constructivism, ethno-symbolism) and of populism.
- Themes and contexts (migration, citizenship, sovereignty) through contemporary cases.

Student obligations

Active attendance, preparation (reading), contribution to discussions, and participation in learning activities.

Assessment and evaluation

Pass/Fail: 100% based on active participation, preparation, and contribution to discussions.

International Politics of the Anthropocene (4 ECTS)

Instructors Katarina Kušić

Aim

Introduce the nature of the climate crisis and its challenges to international politics; present the Anthropocene concept within IR theory and explore impacts on inequality, democracy, conflict, and migration.

Intended learning outcomes

- Gain foundational understanding of international climate politics and governance actors.
- Critically analyse policy responses to the climate crisis in light of global inequalities and political change.
- Develop skills for independent work on climate-related international policy topics.

Content linked to learning outcomes

- Definitions and interdisciplinary approaches to the climate crisis.
- Anthropocene and IR theory; re-framing of global politics.
- Application to migration, inequality, conflict, democracy; roles of transnational networks and actors.

Student obligations

Active attendance, preparation (reading), contribution to discussions, and participation in learning activities.

Assessment and evaluation

Pass/Fail: 100% based on active participation, preparation, and contribution to discussions.