The Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies at the University of Tartu invites applications for a fully-funded PhD position in the academic year 2020/2021

Application deadline: 1 March 2020 (details here)
Duration (nominal study period): September 2020 – August 2024
Funding: A monthly stipend of 1,060€ (conditions stipulated here)

You are invited to submit your application along with a research proposal on the following topic:

Self-Determination of Peoples in Historical Perspective

A new research project entitled “Self-Determination of Peoples in Historical Perspective” is announcing a call for applications for a PhD position.

Self-determination of peoples is one of the key normative principles in contemporary politics. Yet its meaning and implications are notoriously difficult to pin down. The notion of the people is elusive and its relationship to those of the state and nation undetermined. There is also a tension between two common interpretations of this principle. On the one hand, e.g., in the UN Charter, ‘self-determination of peoples’ is understood as referring primarily to state peoples, thus adding a further layer of legitimacy to the state-centric international order. On the other hand, it is also widely believed that sub-state peoples have a right to determine their political status, which potentially challenges state sovereignty. The project rests on the thesis that uncovering the concept’s historical origins will help to illuminate these uncertainties, and the ways in which the latter are exploited in international politics. Experimenting with the approach of ‘serial contextualism’, the project seeks to offer a novel transnational intellectual history of self-determination from the Enlightenment to the end of the Cold War (including its links to related terms such as autonomy, popular sovereignty, principle of nationality, self-government). The project suggests that diverging understandings of self-determination are grounded in theories of radical, constitutional, and federal republicanism, proposing to reconstruct the ways in which these understandings were modified at different historical junctures related to the evolution of the modern state and international competition. The project’s main focus is on continental European political and international thought, while it also explores some of its global transformations.

The proposed PhD project linked to “Self-Determination of Peoples in Historical Perspective” may have a historical or a contemporary focus. Historical projects may propose to explore 1) debates about individual self-determination, popular sovereignty, and international relations in German Idealism, German Socialism, or French republicanism in the nineteenth century; 2) debates between Russian Bolsheviks, Austro-Marxists and German Socialists on national self-determination in the early twentieth century; 3) ideas about self-determination in Baltic projects of federalism during the WWI or in the Interwar period, or the ways in which the Baltic diaspora sought to link decolonisation debates and the nationalities-question within the Soviet Union in the post-WWII period. Projects proposing to explore self-determination of peoples from a contemporary perspective might focus on debates between neo-Kantians and liberal nationalists, or on the rights of indigenous peoples.
Interested candidates are invited to prepare a research proposal outlining the specific research project they would pursue under this general topic. Admission requirements, including guidelines for the research proposal, can be found here.

Main supervisor: Eva Piirimäe, Associate Professor of Political Theory, Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, eva.piirimae@ut.ee

Potential co-supervisor: Kaarel Piirimäe, Associate Professor of Contemporary History, Institute of History and Archaeology

Please contact Dr Eva Piirimäe for an approval of your proposal ahead of the application deadline!