Engaging the Law in Eurasia and Eastern Europe

On May 14-15, 2013 students and scholars convened in Washington, D.C. for the culmination of a collaborative workshop series entitled “Engaging the Law in Eurasia and Eastern Europe.” This workshop series was a partnership between the Kennan Institute at the Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars, the Russian, East European and Eurasian Center at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, the Harriman Institute at Columbia University, and the University of Wisconsin Law School. Funded with generous support from the Department of State Title VIII program, the Department of Education Title VI Program, and the Illinois College of Law, the workshop series encouraged cross-disciplinary exchanges among a cohort of young scholars focusing on legal reform in Eurasia (the former states of the Soviet Union) and Eastern Europe.

This initiative was developed by Dr. Kathryn Hendley (University of Wisconsin), Dr. Peter Maggs (University of Illinois), and Dr. William Pomeranz (Kennan Institute), who served as the faculty mentors for the program. The passage of two decades since the disintegration of the Soviet bloc provides an opportunity for assessment of the role of law in the region and this workshop series sought to explore the extent to which societal experience has impacted the distinct legal cultures in East Europe and Eurasia. Participants were selected on the basis of a national competition open to graduate students (MA, JD, PhD) and Post-Docs currently working on projects related to the workshop theme. The participants convened for a preliminary workshop to present and receive feedback from the early version of their work in January 2013. Then they had three months to revise and resubmit their papers and prepare presentations for two public events in May.

When the workshop attendees returned to Washington in May, their presentations were part of a day-long, public symposium. Divided into thematic panels with a chair and discussant, the day’s conversations centered on the following topics:

- Russian Legal Reform in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Period
- Public Perceptions of Law
- Fighting Crime and Corruption
- Law and the Pursuit of Rights in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe

Participants in the series were also able to the ways in which policymakers and practitioners can find mutually beneficial dialogue with academics. On May 15, 2013 a meeting was convened at the U.S. Department of State for workshop participants to present their research findings and answer questions presented by analysts and members of the intelligence community. Some participant papers are already under review for publication. Abstracts and policy statements can be found on the REEEEC website: http://www.reeec.illinois.edu/events/law.html.

Organizational efforts for these workshops were managed by REEEEC and the Kennan Institute and both events were hosted by the Kennan Institute at the Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C. The presentation at the Department of State was organized by the staff of the Bureau for Intelligence and Research and the Title VIII program.