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## **Republicanism in Western Europe and Russia, the Case of Comparative Studies of Medieval City Communes**

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The workshop is intended as a meeting place for researchers of city communes in Russia and Western Europe. By "republicanism," we understand the classical tradition of thinking about Res Publica, which – after the works of Skinner, Pettit, Pocock, van Gelderen etc. – has become in political theory the main (but also freedom-asserting) alternative to liberalism. The workshop will concentrate, however, on comparisons between two clearly "republican" cases of Russian medieval city communes – those of Novgorod and Pskov – and will try to use them as a mirror to illuminate the general European dynamics of city- and state-building at the time.

If one looks at Novgorod and Pskov, one understands that traditional opposition of Western European and Russian political cultures may seem quite superficial. Of course, mainstream interpretations in political and historical thought take Russia as embodying a steady and long tendency towards absolute vertical power, towards crushing individuals' right to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness. However, Russia has also known examples of genuine republican spirit at various times and in various stages of its development.

The role of the urban commune in the formation of early modern societies has been well studied. The political institutions of Northern Italian and German cities, their systems of checks and balances, horizontal relations between their citizens and their direct participation in political life, and more – all this is an important chapter in the history of European republicanism. But in medieval Novgorod and Pskov during the period before their subordination to Muscovite rule (late 15<sup>th</sup>- early 16<sup>th</sup> c.) - as in Western European communes - inhabitants also participated actively in political life, developed republican institutions, codified rights. The image of "rebellious" Novgorod always remained in Russian culture as an alternative, albeit unrealized, to Muscovite authoritarianism.

We see the primary objective of this workshop as the ambitious attempt to understand to what extent manifestations of republicanism in Russia and Western Europe are comparable, where their similarities and differences lie, and which features can be explained by mutual influence, common destiny, and cultural proximity. Approaches to answering the above questions may be split into two categories of research:

1. The medieval city commune and its institutions. Can we take Weber's model of the Occidental city as adequately representing the Italian, Hanseatic and Russian communes, or are there different models of city communes? Can we treat Novgorod and Pskov as a variety of Western European city communes? What new details of republican or communal life can a scholar of West European communes notice while looking at the Russian city communes?
2. Unlike Europe, Russia produced virtually no political theory or political theology until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. However, this absence does not indicate lack of political thought or republican practice. How then did it manifest itself, to what extent it was characterized by republican ideas, can it be compared to its European counterparts?

The workshop will aim at comparing the two sets of political institutions – Novgorod and Italian republics like Venice, on the one hand, and Pskov and a broader European context, on the other. Two articles (by Pavel Lukin and Alexei Vovin) on respectively Novgorod and Pskov will be pre-circulated as a background reading. It is expected that workshop participants will help Pavel and Alexei in their research and work on the forthcoming books, giving advice on archival and other sources.