The Commonwealth of Nations :

From Empire Management to International and Transnational Cooperation

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Summary :

This course enquires into the evolution of the Commonwealth of Nations from an association within the British Empire and imperial management tool into an independent international organisation. The Commonwealth of Nations, first called the British Commonwealth, was a key instrument in the British decolonisation process. After the decolonisation of Africa at the beginning of the 1960s, the Commonwealth had to work out objectives for itself and find a new role on the international scene. From 1990 on, in addition to its economic commitments, the Commonwealth has focused on the promotion of common political values (democracy, human rights, good governance).

The Commonwealth of Nations is an international association of 53 states but it would be better defined as a network, as it has always put non-state actors and informal proceedings at the heart of its particular identity. With both an international and a transnational dimension, the Commonwealth offers an opportunity to reflect on the legacy of former imperial links in today's international relations, on multilateralism and the circulation of ideas, values, standards in a globalised world, and on the evolution of international relations in the 21st century, and particularly the intervention of new agencies and different forms of diplomacy.

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Assignment :

- Final test during the last class
- A short factsheet (c. 600-800 words) on a Commonwealth-related subject or on a particular
  Commonwealth state (assessing the legacy of imperial history and/or its relations with the
  Commonwealth today)

Optional, on a voluntary basis:

- Oral presentation before the class (solo or groups of 2 to 4 students) Regular participation will
also be taken into account in the final grade.

Outline :

I- **From imperial policy to international organisation (1776-1971)**

1) **Looking for a new way of managing the Empire (1776-1867)**
a) The American revolution and the emergence of the "liberal empire"
b) Building the empire on new bases: the Durham Report on Canada
c) Extending the Canadian model to other settlement territories

2) **Transforming the Empire into a "British Commonwealth of Nations" (1887-1945)**
a) Unifying the self-governing empire: the ideal of a great imperial federation
b) The impact of WW1 and of the Irish issue
c) The Balfour report, the Statute of Westminster and the Ottawa agreements
d) Towards a unified imperial policy? The evolution of the empire in non-settlement colonies

3) **Institutionalising the Commonwealth as a fully-fledged international organisation (1949-1971)**
a) A less British Commonwealth? Decolonisation and the London declaration
b) Less British but still little institutionalised: the ambiguous status of the Commonwealth
c) The Commonwealth against Britain? The impact of the Rhodesian crisis
d) The Commonwealth in search of a new role: The Singapore declaration of 1971

II- **The Commonwealth as an international organisation (since 1971)**

1) **A bridge between the North and the South**
a) Developing Commonwealth multilateral economic cooperation
b) Helping the world to negotiate: Commonwealth contribution to international relations
c) Transnational outlook: a Commonwealth of peoples?

2) **The promotion of human rights and democratic principles**
a) A new agenda in the Post-Cold war world: democracy as a priority
b) Empire redux? The Zimbabwean issue and the crisis of the Commonwealth
c) Back to basics? The Commonwealth Charter (2013)

3) **Is the Commonwealth still relevant?**
a) Supporting "small states" as the Commonwealth main mission
b) Is there a "Commonwealth factor" in the relations among Commonwealth members?

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