

**Charles University, Faculty of Arts
East and Central European Studies**

**Comparative Politics: Transformation of Czechoslovakia and the
Czech Republic**

CUFA POL 315

Instructor: Jiří Koubek

Email: ji.koubek@gmail.com

Class Days/Time: Monday, Wednesday 9:10 – 10:40

Classroom: Na Příkopě 112

Course Description

More than ever before, Europe is standing at the crossroads. Multiple crises in the EU and beyond (financial crisis, refugee crisis, Russia-Ukraine geopolitical crisis, Brexit crisis) have had vast impact on Central Europe which is a “natural mirror” of the above-mentioned European crossroads, reflecting both West-East and North-South structural divisions. Sharing the same geopolitical position within the East Bloc, the individual cases - i.e. Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary and others - differed significantly, however, in their respective points of departure, as well as in political institutional solutions chosen in course of their transitions. This comparative aspect will be studied with special focus. Students will be also encouraged to challenge the mainstream understanding of “transition” as a predictable, gradual and irreversible progress towards the standard “Western” model. The course is designed as a seminar based on a guided discussion about carefully selected texts collected in a reader; active participation of the students is essential.

Course Goals and Student Learning Objectives

Liberal democracy is facing enormous challenges in the Central European region. Is its weakness a part of the “Communist past legacy”? Or, does it reflect some older, pre-Communist political-cultural patterns? The aim of the course is to facilitate the understanding of Czechoslovakia’s transformation in broader Central European context. Specifically, students should be able to think comparatively about the specifics and particularities of some Central and East European communist regimes and about the ways they ceased to exist in 1989-1990. This should be mastered in the first part of the course. In the second part, students should develop a solid and in-depth understanding of both the formal and informal rules of functioning of the contemporary Czech political system.

Required Readings

Holy, Ladislav. *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation. National identity and the post-communist transformation of society.* Cambridge University Press, 1996. (Chpt.1 – part I)

Linz, Juan, Stepan, Alfred. *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation. Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*. Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1996 (chapters 21, 16, 17)

Agnew, Hugh. *The Czechs and the Lands of the Bohemian Crown*. Hoover Institution Press, 2004 (Chapter 15).

Žák, Václav. "The Velvet Divorce – Institutional Foundations," in Jiří Musil (ed.) *The End of Czechoslovakia*, Budapest: Central European University Press, 1995

Rupnik, Jacques. "The International Context," in Jiří Musil (ed.) *The End of Czechoslovakia*, Budapest: Central European University Press, 1995.

Appel, Hilary. "Anti-Communist Justice and Founding the Post-Communist Order: Lustration and Restitution in Central Europe," *East European Politics and Society* 19, n. 3 (2005), 379-405.

Havelková, Hana. "Women in and after a 'classless' society," in: *Women and Social Class – International Feminist Perspectives*, eds. C. Zmroczek and P. Mahony, London: Taylor and Francis/UCL, pp. 69-82

Mudde, Cas. "Racist Extremism in Central and Eastern Europe," *East European Politics and Society* 19, n.2 (2005), 161-184.

Constitution of the Czech Republic

Suda, Zdeněk. "Is The Right-Left Polarity Nation-Specific? Glimpses into The Czech Case," in Jiří Musil and Zdeněk Suda (eds) *The European Left after 1989 – West and East*. Prague: Central European University, 2000.

Hanley, Seán. "From Neo-Liberalism to National Interests: Ideology, Strategy, and Party Development in the Euroscepticism of the Czech Right," *East European Politics and Society* 18, n. 3 (2004), 513-548

The Manifesto of Czech Eurorealism. Document from the ODS (Civic Democratic Party) conference on party principles and ideology. April 2001.

Mair, Peter. *Party System Change. Approaches and Interpretations*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997 (part IV, chapter 8)

The reader will be available at the office of the Foreign Department, room nr. 128 (the main building of the Faculty of Philosophy and Arts - Namesti Jana Palacha 2, 116 38 Praha 1).

Recommended Readings

Hanley, S., Szczerbiak, A., Haughton, T., Fowler, B.: *Sticking Together. Explaining Comparative Centre—Right Party Success in Post-Communist Central and Eastern Europe*

Kopecky, P.: Developing Party Organizations in East-Central Europe

Lijphart, A.: Democratization and Constitutional Choices in Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland, 1989-91

Roberts, A.: Demythologising the Czech Opposition Agreement

Classroom Procedures

Students are expected to participate actively in the classes.

Assignments and Grading Policy

Grades based on letters A through F will be given. ECES does not provide courses with pass/fail grades.

Class attendance and active participation (30%), Paper (30%), Exams (each 20%).

The main task of the students is to actively contribute to the discussion during the entire length of the course. Students are required to be familiar with the core reading of the respective session. It is crucial for the students to approach the texts in a critical way.

These are some of the questions student should be asking when approaching the texts:

- 1) What is the problem or question that the author is dealing with?
- 2) Why is the problem or question significant either theoretically, or politically, or both?
- 3) What is the answer that the author proposes to the question, and how does that answer differ from answers that others have proposed
- 4) What kinds of evidence does the author present in support of the argument?

Knowledge of these texts will be tested in two in-class tests consisting of two parts: a) multiple-choice questions testing knowledge of the most important historical facts that had profound impact on the development of the Czech society, b) free-response questions testing the ability to analyze and contextualize the main issues of the Czech past.

Each student will write a research paper of 2000-2500 words. All the students can choose a topic from the list below or something else that falls within the range of the subject matter of the course (please check with me about the topic).

Each student will prepare a 10-minute presentation of the future paper, which will be a work in progress report outlining the main points of the paper, the sources used (at least 3 academic sources), unresolved issues and questions. The paper is due on the last Sunday before the end of the course (to be sent electronically).

Active class participation will be assessed. As a part of this, each student will prepare a short presentation (max. 20 minutes) of one of the texts included in the reader.

LIST OF PAPER TOPICS

1. Was the Velvet Revolution a revolution? Compare it with other radical changes of the recent past.
2. Why was communism followed by a revival of nationalism?
3. Why is the past still present in Central Europe?
4. What are the specific gender issues in Central Europe in comparison with the situation in the USA?
5. What are the fundamental differences between the Czech and the American constitution?
6. What are the reasons for Euro-skepticism of the Czech Right?
7. What is left of the Left? (Is the social democratic program still relevant in the global world?)
8. "The state is discriminating against the Roma minority." Right or wrong?

Attendance

Regular and punctual class attendance is mandatory for all students. Absence of 180 minutes is allowed. Three or more absences (90 minutes each) lower the grade automatically (A to A-, A to B+ in case of 4 absences etc.)

Presentation Policy: Missing the presentation will result in an F (when applicable). If the student wants to switch the date, he/she must find someone to do it and both students must confirm the change in e-mails to the professor at least 10 days in advance. If the student is sick and has a medical note, then the professor must agree with the student on how the work will be made up for.

Final Test or Paper Policy: Completing the final test or paper is required. Failure to submit the final test or paper according to the deadline will result in a letter grade F for the entire course.

For further details, please see the Attendance Policy at the ECES website under "*Academic Policies and Procedures*" : <http://eces.ff.cuni.cz/>

Student Responsibility and Code of Conduct

Students are subject to the general standards and requirements of Charles University in regard to attendance, examinations, and conduct, as well as to the specific requirements of the program. The student is expected to assume the initiative in completing all requirements at the time specified.

Weekly Schedule

1 - INTRODUCTORY CLASS

Mutual introduction of the teacher and students ? Outline of the course ? Explanation of requirements ?

2 –ORIGINS OF MODERN CZECH POLITICS

Introduction to pre-communist Czech history ? Austria-Hungary as liberal autocracy ?

3 – FIRST CZECHOSLOVAK REPUBLIC: THE “ISLAND” OF DEMOCRACY IN CENTRAL EUROPE

4 –POST-WAR DECADES IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA: COMMUNIST REGIME OR REGIMES?

Communist takeover. Periodization of the communist period ? Characteristics of the communist political system in CEE comparison Reading: Holy, Ladislav. *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation. National identity and the post-communist transformation of society.* Cambridge University Press, 1996. (Chpt.1 – part I)

5 - REGIME CHANGE 1989 IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Differences between CEE non-democratic regimes ? Post-totalitarian regime ? Various types of regime change Reading: Linz, Juan, Stepan, Alfred. *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation. Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe.* Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1996 (chapters 21, 16, 17) Agnew, Hugh. *The Czechs and the Lands of the Bohemian Crown.* Hoover Institution Press, 2004 (Chapter 15).

6 - VELVET DIVORCE AND DEALING WITH THE PAST

Institutional weaknesses of Czechoslovak federalism ? Cultural and perceptual causes of the split of Czechoslovakia ? Different approaches to dealing with past Reading: Žák, Václav. “The Velvet Divorce – Institutional Foundations,” in Jiří Musil (ed.) *The End of Czechoslovakia*, Budapest: Central European University Press, 1995; Rupnik, Jacques. “The International Context,” in Jiří Musil (ed.) *The End of Czechoslovakia*, Budapest: Central European University Press, 1995. Appel, Hilary. “Anti-Communist Justice and Founding the Post-Communist Order: Lustration and Restitution in Central Europe,” *East European Politics and Society* 19, n. 3 (2005), 379-405.

7 - GENDER ISSUES IN CZECH SOCIETY

Ambiguities (paradoxes) of women’s position in Czechoslovak socialist society ? Gender consequences of 1989 regime change Reading: Havelková, Hana. “Women in and after a ‘classless’ society,” in: *Women and Social Class – International Feminist Perspectives*, eds. C. Zmroczek and P. Mahony, London: Taylor and Francis/UCL, pp. 69-82

8 - ROMA MINORITY AND DISCRIMINATION

Complexity of the Roma issue in the Czech Republic ? Patterns of rightist extremism in the West and East Reading: Mudde, Cas. “Racist Extremism in Central and Eastern Europe,” *East European Politics and Society* 19, n.2 (2005), 161-184.

9 - CONSTITUTION AND KEY POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

Comparison of parliamentarism and presidentialism ? Federal and unitary government ? Patterns of bicameralism Reading: Text of the Constitution of the Czech Republic

10 - POLITICAL PARTIES: LEFT AND RIGHT

Variety of meanings of Right and Left across the CEE region ? Contemporary Czech party system and its stability ? Reading: Suda, Zdeněk. "Is The Right-Left Polarity Nation-Specific? Glimpses into The Czech Case," in Jiří Musil and Zdeněk Suda (eds) *The European Left after 1989 – West and East*. Prague: Central European University, 2000. Hanley, Seán. "From Neo-Liberalism to National Interests: Ideology, Strategy, and Party Development in the Euroscepticism of the Czech Right," *East European Politics and Society* 18, n. 3 (2004), 513-548; *The Manifesto of Czech Eurorealism*. Document from the ODS (Civic Democratic Party) conference on party principles and ideology. April 2001.

11 - THE PARLIAMENT, GOVERNMENT AND THE PRESIDENT

Electoral systems used in the Czech Republic ? Power relation between the two chambers of Czech Parliament Visit to the Chamber of Deputies (Lower Chamber of the Parliament) with a lecture.

12 - STUDENT PAPER PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSION

13 - FINAL EXAM; FINAL DISCUSSION, COMMENTS