

The European Construction from an East Central European Angle

Course Description

Academic Year: 2009/2010
Lecturer: Ferenc Miszlivetz, Jean Monnet Chair, ISES Foundation
Credits: 5
Content:
<p>The course will focus on social and political change and the construction and de-construction of social trust in East Central Europe before and after 1989. The introduction to the course clarifies the conceptual framework of analysis and provides the historical background of social and political change in East Central Europe from the early 1980s to the present.</p> <p>By the second half of the 1980s, in some of the East Central European countries – like in Poland and Hungary – democratic movements of workers and intellectuals such as Solidarnosc or Charter '77 were able to accumulate not only political solidarity, but also a significant amount of social trust based on country participation. Trust in democratic transition, as well as public actors and in democratic institutions, reached its peak by the time of the Velvet Revolutions. Civil society throughout the region became a key concept for nonviolent and democratic social and political change. The need for a “new social contract” became manifest as a metaphor of the accumulating social trust.</p> <p>The new democratic institutions, however, became dominated and controlled by the old/new political classes, often referring to themselves as the “political elite.”</p> <p>Most of the civil society initiatives turned to profesonal NGOs and/or became marginalized, coopted or controlled by the political parties and governments. As a consequence, vibrant and democratic civil societies evaporated to a large extent by the mid-1990s.</p> <p>Social as well as public and institutional trust in democratic governments and institutions started to receed and reached a dangerously low level by the turn of the new millenium.</p> <p>One of the paradoxes of transition is that the price of freedom in former Soviet bloc countries is the loss of public, social and institutional trust. Many of the countries of the region again find themselves in a social trap.</p> <p>Against all of their known differences, individual countries of East Central Europe share common characteristics and trends. This became most visible after the 2004 enlargement</p>

which led to:

- Political instability,
- A low level of predictability of political actors,
- Emerging populist movements, the politics of “values”,
- Scapegoating,
- Legitimizing xenophobia.

Erosion of trust in democratic institutions is one of the most fundamental common denominators.

This course will try to analyse and understand these complex and interrelated trends and seek to identify alternatives for deeply divided societies characterized by the lack of trust.

It will try to identify the necessary conditions for possible escapes from social and political traps in order to “reinvent” the countries and the region of East Central Europe.

During lectures and seminars, the bottom-up approach of civil society, and the top-down approach of institution-building will be used, keeping in mind Jean Monnet’s warning that “everything starts with the people but ends up with institutions.”

Students will study the history of transition in East Central Europe, as well as theories of transition and civil society, and social trust as is indicated in the bibliography.

Bibliography:

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Dahrendor, Ralf (1997): After 1989: Morals, Revolution and Civil Society. London: Macmillan, Oxford: St Antony’s College.

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Fukuyama, F. (1995): Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity. London: Hamish Hamilton.

Hankiss, Elemér (1990): East European Alternatives. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Hanley, E. et al., (1996): The Making of Post-Communist Elites in Eastern Europe: A Comparison of Political and Economic Elites in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland.

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Konoridos. S.M. (2005): Networks, Trust and Social Capital: Theoretical and empirical investigations from Europe. Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited

Lagerspetz, M., Trummal, A., Ruutsoo, R., Rikmann, E. (2004): Non-profit sector and the consolidation of Democracy. Studies on the development of Civil Society in Estonia. Tallinn: Kunst.

Miszlivetz, Ferenc (1999): Illusions and Realities: The Metamorphosis of Civil Society in a New European Space. Szombathely: Savaria University Press.

Seligman, A.B. (1997): The Problem of Trust. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Staniszki, Jadwiga (1999): Post-Communism. The Emerging Enigma. Warsaw.

Wolchik, Sharon L. and Jane Curry, eds. (2008): Central and East European Politics from Communism to Democracy. Lanham, Boulder, New York, Plymouth, UK: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.

Didactic method: lecture, seminar, group discussion

Examination method: academic essay

Didactic support tools: power point presentations

Teaching language: English