The Politics and Sociology of Transition

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OUTLINE OF THE COURSE:

This course will focus on the transition to democracy and the market in the countries of the former Soviet bloc, with a special focus on the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland. It will begin with a brief exploration into the very nature of the communist system, principal differences between socialism and capitalism, and factors that led to the fall of communism. Then we will learn about fundamental aspects of democracy and democratic politics. The main portion of the course will deal with the system that has replaced communism. The focus here will be on the driving forces of the system change (i.e., democratization, privatization, the growth of inequality, the role of various forms of capital and assets in the formation of elites, “life-chances,” and the formation of social classes) and the main actors of the political transformation and democratic consolidation (i.e., the formation and role of elites and middle classes, and the winners and losers of the transformation). The course will also focus on the development of political attitudes, the formation of political spectrums and party systems, voting behavior, and the role of new institutions and policies in democratic stability and economic prosperity. The course will be built both on both theories of social change as well as empirical evidence from research projects and surveys carried out in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989. Students will take away from this course detailed knowledge of the political economy of the region, social and political aspects of transitions, specific knowledge of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, as well as the ability to analyze political events more generally.
**GRADING POLICY:**

**Classes and seminars:** Each topic will be covered by a lecture and a seminar. Lectures will be based on presentations of individual topics by the one of the instructors. We will discuss the readings and other material relevant to the topic covered in each session. Seminar discussions will be led by one of the students chosen at the preceding lecture.

The **midterm test** will assess students’ familiarity with key concepts and theories covered by lectures, seminars, and assigned readings preceding the midterm test. There will be no make-up midterm test. If a student misses the midterm test due to a documented illness or emergency, a new – and more difficult – test will be given one week before the the final paper is assigned.

Topics for the **final paper** will be announced at the lecture on May 3 and will be due the last day of the final exam week (May 13). Students will have to choose one of the assigned topics and write a research paper based on the required and recommended readings, as well as other literature and sources of their choice. The paper should be about 6,000 words (10 pages), not counting tables, figures and references. Use standard rules for citations. All source materials must be listed in the bibliography and footnotes/endnotes. Ideas, hypotheses and conclusions must be well supported by literature, facts, and/or other forms of evidence (secondary analysis is sufficient, primary analysis is not required).

**Criteria for evaluation:** (1) The ability to link theory to facts and available evidence (25 %); (2) The structure of the paper, as well as the clarity of the questions asked and problems discussed (25 %); (3) The clarity and strength of arguments presented (25%); (4) The use of literature and other information sources (25%).

**Grading:** Class and seminar participation (10%), midterm test (40%), final paper (50%).

**REQUIRED READING:**

3. Course Reader

**TOPICS:**

**Week 1:** **Principal attributes of the socialist system.**


**Required readings:**


Recommended readings:

Week 2: Transition or transformation? Principal theories of the post-communist transformation.

Transitions to democracy: universal and unique features. The second birth of capitalism and the dilemma of simultaneity. Privatization, implementation of the market, and building democracy. Path dependency. Compatibility or potential conflict between the transition to democracy and implementation of the market? Asymmetrical antagonism: what should get priority – the marker or democracy? Political capitalism and the role of elites. Phases and dilemmas of the transition. (Offe, Stark, Dahrendorf, Sztompka). Transformation as a process of rebuilding (restoring) vital relationships maintaining and balancing social system.

Required readings:

Recommended readings

Week 3: Circulation or reproduction of elites? Various forms of capital (Bourdieu) and their role in the formation of elites (Szelényi). Main segments of the power elite and their relationships. The role of dissidents, economic technocrats (monetarists) and post-socialist managers in power elite formation. The role of banks in maintaining power during the first stage of the transformation. Managerialism, its spirit and ideology.

Required readings:

Recommended readings:
Eyal, Gil, Ivan Szelenyi and Eleanor Townsley: Making Capitalism Without Capitalists. The
Week 4: What is democracy?

This session will focus on the basic questions from democratic theory which underlie any serious attempt to understand democracy and democratic political systems: What is democracy? Where did it come from? What are its main theoretical and empirical foundations? How is democracy different than “authoritarianism” or “totalitarianism”? Is democracy compatible with different histories, cultures and traditions? As we will see, understanding the collapse of communism and subsequent transitions to democracy in the former Marxist-Leninist states of Central and Eastern Europe, as well the structure and process of developed democratic systems, requires a firm grasp of the basic principles of democracy. Readings cover a broad range of national and regional experiences with democracy and political change. Please set aside enough time to read all of the assigned materials for this week. It is essential that you have a firm understanding of the topics we will cover during this session so you can get the most out of the rest of the course.

Required readings:

Recommended readings:

Week 5: Democratic transition and consolidation: Enabling conditions; causes; transition paths and dilemmas; the challenge of consolidation.

In this session we will look closely at democratic change. How and why do authoritarian or “totalitarian” regimes become democratic? Why do some democracies breakdown? What “caused” the most recent transitions to democracy in Central and Eastern Europe? How have “paths” to democracy differed, both in historical terms during the various “waves” of democratization and after the collapse of communism? How do we know if and when a new
democracy has “consolidated” into a stable and durable political system? Does stable democracy correlate with certain socioeconomic conditions, or can democracy exist in isolation from socioeconomic factors?

Required readings:
Huntington, Samuel, The Third Wave, ch. 2, pp. 31-46, 46-58 (skim), 59-72, 72-100 (skim); 100-108.

Recommended readings:

Week 6: Political institutions and institutional choice in democratic systems.

This session focuses on the bricks and mortar of democratic political systems. Deciding what “kind” of democracy is best for a given society is one of the key determinants of how stable and successful a democratic political system will be. Political institutions – including electoral systems, political parties and party systems, the structure of executive power, etc. – help shape the character, effectiveness and, ultimately, the legitimacy of democratic systems. Because of this they also play a critical role in the consolidation of democracy. We will focus in particular on the various dilemmas and tradeoffs of institutional choice and democratic design as they have affected former communist countries during and after transitions to democracy.

Required readings:

Recommended readings:
Week 7:  

Spring Break – No Class Meeting

Week 8:  

Civil society and interest representation.

The aggregation and representation of individual and group interests through democratic political parties – the formal realm of competitive democratic politics – is a necessary condition for the functioning of modern democracy. But is it not a sufficient one. Group and individual interests must also be permitted expression through informal means, i.e., interest groups and civic associations, which are not entitled to hold public power (although they may hold quasi-public power in democracies with so-called corporatist systems of interest representation). In this session we will examine in detail both theoretical and empirical aspects of informal democratic interest representation, while keeping in mind the relationship between civil society, formal democratic institutions (i.e., parties and parliaments), and the state, in particular as they exist in societies in transition. We will also explore how key politicians in the Czech Republic – namely the two Vaclavs, Havel and Klaus – have espoused different visions of civil society and the role of organized interests in the democratic policy-making process.

Required readings:  


Recommended readings:  


Week 9:  

Class structure formation and the role of the middle classes

The formation of class structure and crystallization of socio-economic interests. Class-party de-alignment or re-alignment? The specific role of middle classes. The notion of a middle class majority (Aristotle). Middle classes and the stability of democracy. The disintegration of the middle classes during socialism. Objective obstacles to the formation of middle classes during transformation. Consistency of socio-economic status and middle class crystallization.
Middle class problems in subjective identification with middle class. Do middle classes show specific values and political attitudes?

**Required readings:**

Večerník, Jiří and Matějů, Petr (eds.) *Ten Years of Rebuilding Capitalism. Czech Society after 1989*. Praha, Academia 1999. ch. 9 (The Renewal of the Middle Class)

Mikhalev, Vladimir: *Inequality and Social Structure during the Transition*. United Nations University, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2003. ch. 5 (Middle Classes in the Making)

**Week 10:** Democratic transition and consolidation: Enabling conditions; causes; transition paths and dilemmas; the challenge of consolidation.

In this session we will look closely at democratic change. How and why do authoritarian or “totalitarian” regimes become democratic? Why do some democracies breakdown? What “caused” the most recent transitions to democracy in Central and Eastern Europe? How have “paths” to democracy differed, both in historical terms during the various “waves” of democratization and after the collapse of communism? How do we know if and when a new democracy has “consolidated” into a stable and durable political system? Does stable democracy correlate with certain socioeconomic conditions, or can democracy exist in isolation from socioeconomic factors?

**Required readings:**

Huntington, Samuel, *The Third Wave*, ch. 2, pp. 31-46, 46-58 (skim), 59-72, 72-100 (skim); 100-108.


**Recommended readings:**


**Week 11:** Economic reform and postcommunist transformation: Can capitalism be built without capitalists? How quickly should reforms be implemented? Who wins? Who loses?

In contrast with earlier transitions to democracy where prior to regime change authoritarian countries generally had market-based or “mixed” economies with both state and market control, post-communist transitions are “dual,” since they involve the creation of both democratic political systems and free-market economies from scratch. While focusing on the
many theoretical dilemmas inherent in building capitalism and democracy simultaneously, we will also pay attention to specific problems which have faced various countries, notably the Czech Republic and Poland, on the long and difficult journey to democracy and the market. Who, for example, is supposed to create capitalism where no capitalist class exists? Who should decide which economic policies to follow, when the priority of building democracy clashes with the imperative of creating free markets? Should popular participation and policy input be limited when deciding the course of economic reform, lest negatively affected interest groups block important changes which are necessary to build free markets?

Required readings:

Recommended readings:

Week 12: Ideologies, parties and voters

What motivates electoral choice among citizens in democratic societies? Are choices determined primarily by ideology, or by more “practical” concerns? How do the behavior of political parties and the structure of party systems reflect these factors? Is it still possible to speak of traditional ideologies and policy platforms associated with the “left” and “right”? How have notions of the traditional postwar political spectrum been challenged and altered in postcommunist settings? Why do so many scholars speak of a “decline of political parties”? If a genuine decline has indeed taken place, do parties matter? How should we interpret the widely observed phenomenon of declining voter turnout and increasingly pessimistic views concerning parties and parliaments? What does declining confidence augur for the future of democracy?

Required readings:
Schmitter, Philippe C., "Parties Are Not What They Once Were," in Diamond and Gunther, Political Parties and Democracy, pp. 67-89.

**Recommended readings:**

Academic center and national research hub for scholarship on Russia, East Europe & Central Asia at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. UNC-Visegrad Studies. Integrated within the interdisciplinary BA track in Central European Studies, the program supports the study of the V4 countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia) at Carolina. Learn more. CSEEES Certificate. UNC-CH students working toward a graduate degree in any discipline can earn a Graduate Certificate in Russian, Eurasian, and East European Studies, thereby documenting their specialization in the region. Learn more. Carolina Seminar. Undergraduate Programs. Knowledge of Russian and East and Central European languages and cultures is a marketable and impressive skill, whether you are in academia, arts, law, medicine, governmental service, public interest, business, or politics. Russian is one of the five official languages of the UN and is recognized as a strategic language by the US government. Whether you plan to apply to medical or law school, the study of these topics will set you apart as an intellectually adventurous and serious student. In a more direct application of skills, Russian and East European majors and minors typically land jobs in a variety of settings. They go on to work in business as financial and policy analysts for American and foreign companies. Central European University is a Private University in Hungary, Europe. You can also apply to other Fully Funded European Scholarships by visiting 5000 Scholarships in Europe 2021. Hungarian institutions achieved a high position in many university rankings, and Hungarian degrees are of internationally recognized quality. Are You Ready? Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology. Nationalism Studies Program. School of Public Policy. For Master degree applications applicants must have the undergraduate/bachelor (16 years) degree/transcript or equivalent education for the admission requirement. Applicants must hold master and bachelor degree/transcript (total 18 years) or equivalent education for the Ph.D. admission requirements.