

International Conference

Measuring Democracy: What are we measuring and how does CEE fit in?

Prague, 21–22 September 2017
(Preliminary version 06/06/2017)

1. Organizational Information

The conference is organised in the frame of the long-term interdisciplinary Research Program of the Czech Academy of Sciences “Strategy AV21”, project Global Conflicts and Local Interactions: Cultural and Social Challenges.

Travel arrangements: The travel and accommodation costs for paper givers are covered by the organisers.

Timing: Arrival and welcome dinner 21/9/2017, conference 22/9/2017, 9.00–16.30

Location: Academic Conference Centre – the Czech Academy of Sciences, Husova 4a, Prague 1

2. Motivation

The research on Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) still struggles to become an integral part of mainstream comparative politics. Quite often research on various facets of post-communism limits itself to comparisons between countries in the region or other democratising regimes in the neighbourhood, and research output remains isolated to area journals. In a longitudinal perspective, one of the fundamental problems lies in the framing of research questions along three paradigms that may have exhausted their explanatory power: the post-communist transformation, communist legacy and the democratisation process.

This international conference seeks to open a dialogue about the assessment of democracy and the ways in which democracies in Central and Eastern Europe can be integrated into a standard comparative framework. It brings together experts in various models of democracy assessments used in international comparative research on democracy and governance, to open up the discussion on the extent to which our conceptual and methodological approaches, as well as cases we study shape the outcomes. The aim is to ask the question, how CEE countries fit in the various comparative studies.

There are three dominant paradigms in the study of CEE politics, which differ in their focus and comparative scope. The first paradigm focused on the multifaceted process of the triple transition, the trajectories of change, outcomes of transition, and the stability of the newly established regimes. The post-communist states were compared to each other within the ‘third wave’ as well as to previous transformation countries. A second paradigm focused on the path-dependence of communist legacies. The strength of this paradigm is the ability to explain variation in the cases, but it limits the scope of comparison (used to justify restricting the comparison to post-communist countries). The third paradigm is democratisation, which acknowledged the distinct character of communist regimes but offset these by the commitment of elites to ‘return to democracy’, thus creating the ground for cross-regional comparison. It offers the largest

comparative scope, opening up the possibility to compare post-communism with other post-authoritarian regimes around the world. One subset of this paradigm is Europeanisation, which focused on the effects of external actors – most importantly the EU on the latter stages of democratisation. The weakness of this approach is the concentration on similarities and thus need to underplay the variation among CEE countries, and limit of the scope to CEE accession (and potentially accession) countries.

A fourth, newly emerging paradigm emphasises the need to focus on contextualising CEE democracy in broader cross-national comparison. It looks at the diversion of transitional trajectories over time, and illiberal turn. Both communism and post-communism are viewed as temporary stages in a wider historical development. The focus here is on elite and public preferences, nature of political competition, behavioural patterns and emerging (and transforming political culture). Within this approach, the importance and influence of communism and post-communism might vary across topics.

This conference follows the fourth paradigm and aims to bring together scholars of democracy and scholars of CEE politics, to provide a platform for an open dialogue on the future of democracy in the CEE and beyond. We seek a mix of theoretical papers with solid arguments and contributions bringing evidence on the quality of democracy from post-transformation regions (preferably in a comparative manner).

3. Preliminary program

- **Keynote: Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Merkel, Social Science Center Berlin (confirmed)**
- **Block I. Varieties of Democracy & varieties of approaches to democratic governance**
- **Prof. Dr. Brigitte Geissel, Goethe University Frankfurt)**
- **Block II. Varieties of democracy in CEE – consolidated, defective, illiberal and beyond**
- **Prof. Dr. Radek Markowski, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Warsaw,**
- **Prof. Dr. Darina Malová, Comenius University Bratislava**
- **Dr. Petra Guasti and Dr. Zdenka Mansfeldová, IS CAS,**
- **Dr. Martin Brusis, Babes Bolyai University, Cluj,**
- **Round Table: The Future of Democracy in the CEE and Beyond**