

(Political) Leadership in Central Europe

Lecturer: Juraj HVORECKY, PhD

Time and Location: once a week, CERGE,

Office hours: after the class, any other time by appointment

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Course description

Qualities of any leader are to be tested under difficult external circumstances. Everyday choices made in mundane scenarios can tell us something about one's persistence, consistency and skills, but it is when a situation gets out of ordinary that essential leadership qualities of any individual are unveiled. When it comes to political leadership, Central Europe during the 20th century witnessed some of the most difficult conditions for management possible. With economic and social circumstances for common people and elites were scarcely bearable during the century (just remind yourself of the fate of minorities, the period of the Great Depression, World Wars, labor camps and other pathetic episodes of the last 100 years), the space for actual independent decisions was often very limited and personal responsibility questionably applicable. Despite difficult circumstances, leaders of their respective countries, important opposition figures and other central figures had to rule and guide their society through the years of hardship. When it comes to making lives better for the citizens, conditions were everything but easy. Squeezed between nationalistic expectations of their people, historical grievances, unstable borders, intervening dominant neighbors and escalating global situation, leaders still had to execute their policies with best intentions in mind.

The course will analyze and put into comparative perspective characteristics of leadership and governance during the interwar period in selected Central European (namely Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland) with the situation in the second half of the 20th century. The first two decades after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire have brought in fights over newly emerging country borders, loud expressions of concern for minorities living outside of their newly created home countries, economic hardship and large sociocultural changes. This already demanding situation further escalated in the 1930s with the onset of the Great Depression and the rise of Fascism throughout the continent. Treatment of minority groups has gotten from bad to worse, blackmail and other dirty tricks became a regular part of the international politics, fanaticism arose in all areas of life and all this messiness culminated in the worst conflict the world has ever witnessed. Tasks of defending integrity of one's own country and caring for its citizens, including those of Jewish heritage, became the most challenging task of the day. With countries falling apart and people disappearing in large numbers, the role of many politicians often moved from active participation to passive observation of ever more dramatic events. The question of their conscience, responsibility and duty under the most difficult conditions will be one of the hallmarks of the course.

After the war, the establishment of the Communist rule has presented a new challenge for the elites. Active politics and resistance during the harshest years of Stalinism became largely impossible, yet with the eventual thaw of the late 50s and 60s, leadership skills could once again be utilized. This time, however, two confronting types of leaders emerge. On one hand, we have ever more pragmatic leadership of Communist parties that walks a fine line between orchestrated oppression and assurance of a comfortable life of its people. On the other hand, we have leaders of various dissent movements and underground political activists who show unconditional bravery when confronting the regime, but the question is whether they present a real alternative to the current and are able to govern their respective countries. These and related issues will present the backdrop of the course.

When it comes to the desirable course outcomes, students will learn about leadership in Central Europe through a triple prism. Each class session and its content will look at three different layers of the personalities and periods under discussion.

On the first layer, we will learn quite a bit about the history of Central Europe during the difficult 20th century. The class is chronologically organized, so the student will gain an insight into the developments that shaped this part of the continent over the last century.

On the second layer, we will look at variety of leadership strategies and some fundamentals from the leadership theory in order to evaluate performance and results of selected leaders from the region. Students will learn about behavioral and trait theories of leadership that judge one's abilities according to one's character and outcomes, as well as more broad base theories, such as the cognitive resource theories and contingency theories. All theoretical approaches will be discussed on examples of historical cases studies of actual leading figures from the region.

On the third layer the class will have a bit of a literary spin, with a specific look at the nature of autobiographies. While looking at performance of individual actors and their leadership skills and comparing those with standard theoretical approaches, we will confront leader's autobiographical sources with third-person accounts. We will concentrate on self-justificatory approaches of actor's most difficult decisions, as well as omissions and neglected parts of their self-produced narratives. It is an amazing observation to read through diaries and interviews of great 20th century figures who skim over greatest atrocities that took place in their countries under their leadership and instead boast about horses from their stable or children's successes a paragraph later. As we will repeatedly see, a greater leader is recognized not only by her highest accomplishments but also by her lowest points.

Assessment and Grading

Students' final grades consists of the following components:

1. Class participation– 15%
2. Midterm – 30%
3. Research paper – 30%
4. Final paper – 25%
5. Additional quizzes – 10% (2x5%)

The midterm (in-class essay) takes places in week 7, which is also the time your research paper topic is due. The full paper is due the week 13 (min. 12 double spaced pages, APA style – if you need a tutorial, look at the www.apastyle.org), as is the surprise final exam. Quizzes present a possibility to improve your grade.

At the end of the term, cumulative percentage points will be converted into grades.

Attendance Policy

Students are expected to attend **every** class and they have to comply with the attendance policy of the UPCES program. One excused nonattendance is tolerated, more than one has significant consequences for your grade. Students are responsible for catching up with the material they have missed.

Academic Honesty

Needless to say, plagiarism and other forms of cheating are not tolerated.

UPCES Non-Discrimination/Harassment Policy

The UPCES program in Prague promotes a diverse learning environment where the dignity, worth, and differences of each individual are valued and respected. Discrimination and harassment, whether based on a person's race, gender, sexual orientation, color, religion, national origin, age, disability, or other legally protected characteristic, are repugnant and completely inconsistent with our objectives. Retaliation against individuals for raising good faith claims of harassment and/or discrimination is prohibited.

UPCES Diversity Policy

UPCES fully embraces diversity and strives to create a safe and welcoming environment for students from all backgrounds. Prague is a wonderfully diverse community and UPCES is no different. All students should feel at home while studying abroad and UPCES will do its utmost to make sure that becomes a reality. Although unique challenges may arise, we believe that students from all walks of life will encounter wonderful opportunities for enrichment as they explore a new culture while studying abroad.

Course Outline and Reading Assignments

Week 1

Academic Orientation

Week 2

What is leadership, what is Central Europe?

Introductory remarks on the coursework, the course content, principles of evaluation and the schedule of readings

Week 3

Can social science and politics ever become compatible? And how can one be prepared for an emergence of a new country?

These are some of the questions that we will concentrate on while discussing the theoretical work of the first Czechoslovak president.

Reading:

Tomas G. Masaryk (1850-1937): Nationality and Internationalism, Democracy and Humanity

Karel Čapek: Talks with Masaryk

Week 4

Poland in the interwar period was a place of dramatic changes.

Its very existence challenged by the Soviet Russia, its internal stability constantly under question by quarrying political parties and its policies toward its minorities highly reprehensible. In these difficult times, Pilsudski moves from a top military rank into politics, by staging coup d'état. We will investigate his motivations as well as his legacy.

Reading:

Jozef Pilsudski (1867 – 1935): A life for Poland, selected chapters

Stachura: The Battle of Warsaw

Wandycz: Polish Diplomacy 1914-1941,

M. K. Dziewanowski: Joseph Pilsudski, Bolsheviks and Eastern Europe.

Week 5

After the end of the World War, Hungarian state was in ruins.

The country lost significant part of its territory and population, it officially remained a kingdom, but the king was in the exile and Admiral Horthy has taken a supreme position of a Regent. He has opposed democracy, had unfriendly relations to most neighboring states and his role during the Second World War requires a special scrutiny. His autobiography remains one of the most peculiar documents of the times.

Reading:

Miklos Horthy (1868 – 1957): Chapters 12, 15, 20 of his Autobiography

Dreiszingler: The long shadow of Trianon.

Week 6

Faithful to Moscow at all times, Gottwald is a vile Stalinist and person who envision Czechoslovakia firmly in the Communist camp.

However, at the same time, he enjoys popular support and faces little opposition within the party structure. Responsible for the purges within Czechoslovakia, we will attempt to assess his personal appeal and responsibilities.

Reading:

Klement Gottwald (1896-1953): Concerning Certain Measures to Be Taken in the Liberated Territory of the Republic

Six Weeks of the Government's Work

Speech by the President Gottwald at the National Conference of the Communist party of Czechoslovakia, December 1952

Skilling: Gottwald and the Bolshevization of the Communist Party

Week 7

By confronting independent scholarship and Communist propaganda, we will examine the role of female politician in the patriarchal world of politics.

What are the sign of true heroism and how does one confront a regime that is ready to execute its opponents without any remorse? And are female victims particularly vulnerable? These uneasy questions will be at the core of discussing Horakova's heritage.

Reading:

Milada Horakova (1901 – 1950): Memories of Milada Horakova, War Conspirators before the Court of the Czechoslovak people

Viewing the movie Milada

Week 8

Midterm exam, research paper topic due and the Museum visit

Week 9

Kadar enters Hungarian politics at the time of collapse of the anti-Soviet revolution and he is offering his country an unusual compromise.

He tries to accommodate needs of everyone, but at times the costs are just too high. One of the longest serving Communist leader is up till now a controversial figure that we will try to have a balanced view of.

Reading:

Janos Kadar (1912 – 1989): Roger Gough: Good comrade

For socialist Hungary: selected speeches and interviews by Janos Kadar

Vali: 20 years after

Week 10

Can one person change the world?

Many have argued so, picking Walesa example as proving their case. We will see to what degree the fall of Communism in Poland (and throughout the Central Europe) is indeed his deed and to what degree does it depend on other factors, including his collaborators, his family and even his enemies.

Reading:

Lech Walesa (1943 -): Struggle and the triumph: autobiography

Jaroslav Kurski: Walesa: democrat or dictator?

Lussier – From Solidarity to Division

Viewing the movie Walesa

Week 11

Can one rule a country for decades and still be an uninspiring character?

Normalized Czechoslovakia after the Soviet military suppression of the Prague Spring has received such a ruler. Husak's biography reads like a textbook on the drama of Central Europe in the 20th century, but his political activities present the times of stagnation and despair. We will observe his decline and his role in suppressing any changes in the country.

Reading:

Gustav Husak (1913 – 1991): Speeches and writings, Czechoslovakia: Defeat for reformers?

Michal Machacek: The Strange Unity

Week 12

Often seen as the most important dissent voice of the region, Havel is very profound in his criticism of inner workings of Communist states as well as a great illustrator of inner misery that living under Communism brings in.

Yet can his moral critique and skepticism about party politics in general withstand the test of actual situation after the collapse of the old regime. We will assess Havel as an intellectual, as well as Havel as a politician and see whether a unity of careful social observation that has started with Masaryk, found its realization in Havel.

Reading:

Vaclav Havel (1936 – 2011): Vaclav Havel Letter to Dr. Husak,

Slavoj Zizek: Attempts to escape the logic of Capitalism, Viewing the movie Citizen Havel

Week 13

final exam, research paper due and good bye.