Czech Politics (Relearning Democracy)

POLI 3002 PRAG

Central European Studies, Communication, New Media, and Journalism

English

3.00

45.00

Fall 2020

This course examines crucial issues visible in politics on both sides of the Atlantic: the conflicts between identities and institutions, the impact of historical events and sociocultural developments on the political life of the society, the current challenges to liberal democracy in the era of social media, fake news and populist political mobilization, all of this focused on the particular case of the Czech Lands against a broader backdrop of Europe and the West in general. A historical summary of key developments that had an impact on the formation of modern Czech identity gives way to a look at the institutions of the interwar First Republic of Czechoslovakia as a peculiar incarnation of a nation state, the descent of Czechoslovakia’s democracy into two totalitarian regimes of the 20th century, the rebuilding of democracy and “return to Europe” after the 1989 revolution, and the issues, challenges and opportunities brought by political realignments and populist mobilization of the recent decade. Through this, the course hopes to help students answer their broader questions about democracy, its founding conditions and its current state around the world in general.

Learning Objectives

By completing this course, students will:

- Identify key moments in modern nation building in the Czech case, and draw basic comparisons with other European nations and the U.S.;
- Critically discuss the ways cultural and social conditions impact on the survival of a democratic system and the political life of a nation in general;
- Compare the constitutional setup and practical functioning of the parliamentary system in the Czech Republic (and, to some extent, in other European nations) to the presidential system of the U.S.;
- Discuss challenges posed by the recent rise in anti-establishment populism, and evaluate potential responses.

Course Prerequisites

None

Methods of Instruction

Lectures, class discussion, discussion of required readings, presentations.

Assessment and Final Grade

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<td>Current Events Presentations</td>
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<td>20%</td>
<td>Midterm Test</td>
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<td>30%</td>
<td>Final Paper</td>
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<td>Current Topics</td>
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<td>Class Participation</td>
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Course Requirements

Current Events Presentations
Students will prepare a presentation of the topic they have chosen for the final paper. The topic and findings will
be presented to class. Classmates are expected to provide constructive criticism in order to help the presenting
student to improve his/her work before submitting the Final Paper. Presentations will take place during week 10.

Midterm Test

Students will choose from 12 topics, answering 10 of them in the mid-term test. Understanding of the given
problem will be more important than memorizing data.

Final Paper

(2,500 words)

Students will write an essay on the topic of interest from the Czech or Slovak politics. They should show clear
understanding of given topic, independent critical thinking, and deeper analysis. Students will be able to choose a
topic upon discussion with the tutor in the class. The essay topic and a brief synopsis are due to be announced
by week 7, the final essay is due during finals week.

Current Topics

Two students will present news from a newspaper or other media to the entire class at the beginning of each
lecture. Class discussion will follow. Students will be evaluated for their performance.

Class Participation

Reading is assigned for each class and participation in class discussion is expected. The course exams will be
based on both the materials discussed in class and the reading assigned.

Note: The instructor reserves the right to give quizzes on the reading or past lecture content or ask for reading
presentation with little or no notification.

CIEE Prague Class Participation Policy

Assessment of students’ participation in class is an inherent component of the course grade. Participation is
valued as meaningful contribution in the digital and tangible classroom, utilizing the resources and materials
presented to students as part of the course. Students are required to actively, meaningfully and thoughtfully
contribute to class discussions and all types of in-class activities throughout the duration of the class.
Meaningful contribution requires students to be prepared, as directed, in advance of each class session. This
includes valued or informed engagement in, for example, small group discussions, online discussion boards, peer-
to-peer feedback (after presentations), interaction with guest speakers, and attentiveness on co-curricular and
outside-of-classroom activities.

Students are responsible for following the course content and are expected to ask clarification questions if they
cannot follow the instructor's or other students' line of thought or argumentation.

The use of electronic devices is only allowed for computer-based in-class tests, assignments and other tasks
specifically assigned by the course instructor. Students are expected to take notes by hand unless the student
is entitled to the use of computer due to his/her academic accommodations. In such cases the student is
required to submit an official letter issued by his/her home institution specifying the extent of academic
accommodations.

Class participation also includes students’ active participation in Canvas discussions and other additional tasks
related to the course content as specified by the instructor.

Students will receive a partial participation grade every three weeks.

Attendance

Regular class attendance is required throughout the program.

If you will miss a class for any reason, notify the Program Coordinator and your instructor beforehand via Canvas.
You are responsible for any materials covered in class during your absence, and except in the specific cases listed
below, credit will not be granted for missed assessments.

Excessive absences will result in a notification letter, and finally a warning letter, sent to you and your home
school, based on the following:
The notification letters are intended to ensure that you are well advised in advance of any potential for failure or dismissal, so that you can take steps to avoid this.

As the table shows, missing more than 20% of any class (e.g., due to undocumented illness, travel delays, flight cancellations, over-sleeping, etc.) results in automatic failure of the course.

If you miss an assessment in class due to an absence, you will be able to make it up in the following instances:

- You provide a relevant doctor's note from a local medical professional to your Program Coordinator within 24 hours of your absence (a scan or photograph sent via e-mail are acceptable)
- A CIEE staff member verifies that you were too ill to attend class.
- You provide evidence of a family emergency to your Program Coordinator.
- You have an approved absence related to the observance of a religious holiday from the Academic Director based on a request submitted before you arrived onsite.

Please note: Absences incurred due to documented illness, documented family emergency or the observance of a religious holiday approved before arrival onsite do not count towards the total of absences. Students may self-certify one absence due to illness without providing a doctor's note as long as they notify the Program Coordinator within 24 hours of their absence by e-mail or a text message.

Other attendance-related policies

If you transfer from one CIEE class to another during the Add/Drop period, you will not be considered absent from the first session(s) of the new class provided you were marked present for the first session(s) of the original class.

If you are over 15 minutes late for a class, the instructor is required to mark you absent.

In case of class conflicts (irregularities in the class schedule, including field trips and make-up classes), always contact the Academic Department to decide the appropriate course of action.

Please remember to track your attendance on the Canvas Course Sites and report any errors in the record to the Academic Department within one week of the discrepancy date, as later claims may not be considered.

These attendance rules also apply to any required co-curricular excursion, activity, or event, and to for-credit internships.

CIEE staff does not manage absences at partner institutions providing direct enrollment classes (FAMU, ECES and FSV), but they have similar attendance policies and attendance is monitored there. Grade penalties may result from excessive absences.

N.B. Course schedule is subject to change due to study tours, excursions, or local holidays. Final schedules will be included in the final syllabus provided to students on site.

Weekly Schedule

Week 1
Class: Introduction to the Czech Politics

Required reading: Čornej, Pokorný (2000)

Political theory behind voting; voting and elections; direct democracy (plebiscite, Swiss Union); lot – Athens; representative democracy, republic (Rousseau, Madison); rule of law; rule of majority; minority rights; usurpation, succession, ex officio, appointment, competition, acclamation, co-optation, plebiscite, lot, election; loose mandate, imperative mandate; majority system, STV, proportional system, mixed system.
Week 2
Class: History of elections in Bohemia and Moravia I

Parliamentarism of the estates (English Parliamentarism); Przemyslids and Luxembourgs; Hussite assembly, general assembly of the Czech crown (1327-1620), estate and absolute monarchy, elections in Austria (1848-1918), elections in Hungary (Slovakia).

Required reading: Krejčí, pp.1-128

History of elections in Bohemia and Moravia II; the first republic; WWII; the third republic.

Required reading:
Krejčí, pp.129-211; Civic Society and the State, Packet, Chapter 9, pp. 182-end (xerocopied handout - library)

Week 3
Class: The period of bureaucratic socialism

Required reading: Krejčí, pp. 213-223; Civic Society and the State, Packet, Part II, Chapter 6, pp. 114-end of chapter (xerox handout - library)

Democracy in transition

Required reading:
Krejčí, pp. 227-274; Magstadt, T. Flawed Democracies (xerox handout - library)

Week 4
Class: Elections after 1989; local elections; Magdeburg law.

Required reading:
Krejčí, pp. 345-348.

Current political system in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, USA; division of power; parliamentary democracy, presidential system, directly elected president (Slovakia), electoral college (USA), president elected by the parliament (Czech Republic).

Required reading:

Week 5
Class: Municipal level of government

Czech Republic, United States; proportionally elected city council; single-district elected city council; popularly elected mayor; council elected mayor.

Required reading:
Since local structure is very recent and not included in textbooks, a handout will be available at CIEE at least a week in advance.

Regional level of government; Czech Republic, EU, United States; division of power between country, state, region, municipalities.

Required reading: A handout on regional government structure will be available at CIEE one week in advance.

Week 6
Class: Midterm Test
Czech Republic in international institutions: EU, NATO, OECD, GATT, IMF etc.; Czech Republic and international treaties – an important part of the Czech legal structure.

Required reading:

Students will read basic information on EU, NATO, OECD, GATT, IMF from the organizations’ websites.

Week 7
Class: The role of media in Czech society.

Required reading: Students will follow the Czech media for a week and will write a one-page observational report and do a presentation for the class – English language transcripts can be viewed on HYPERLINK "http://www.praguemonitor.com"www.praguemonitor.com.

Role of media – continuation.

Week 8
Class: Courts; police; employee unions.

Right to know, right to participate, right to justice; from Helsinki conference to the Aarhus Convention.

Required reading: The Aarhus Convention (available at its website)

Week 9
Class: Conflict of interest

Corruption in the parliament, government, state-owned companies, private companies; accountability; transparency international; corruption index.

Required reading:

Transparency International website

Conflict of interest at the local level; municipal corruption; preventing corruption.

Week 10
Class: Work in Progress.

Students will present a paragraph on their final essay as a work in progress. Students must register their essay topic & synopsis in the CIEE essay database by this date!

Direct democracy; Ancient Greece; De Gaulle; Switzerland; California, EU, Referendum 2000, Tabor Road Referendum.

Week 11
Class: Environmental policy in the Czech Republic.


Environmental policy in Prague.

Week 12
Class: Civil society -- civic movements and NGOs throughout the Czech Republic.

Required reading:
- Fisher, Getting to yes – Chapter 4, pp. 56-80 - library;

Field trip: visit to a Town Hall or Parliament

Week 13
Class: Final Exam Week
Course Materials

Readings

Required:

- Čornej, Petr and Jiří Pokorný. *A Brief History of the Czech Lands to 2000*, Prague: Práh, 2000. **to be read before the course starts!**

Recommended:
