

Prague in Context: Politics in East Central Europe

Summer 2019 -- June 25 – August 1, 2019

3 credits

POLS 3235 East European Political Systems

Instructor: Magda Giurcanu (magiurm@gmail.com) or giurcanum16@ecu.edu

Course Meetings:

- T/TH 10-12.00pm; ROOM 2.03.
- Wed – reserved for Prague visits (mandatory, part of course content)

Office hours

- Available before and after class.



Stalin monument unveiled on Letná
Sculptor commits suicide, 1955



Monument destroyed
Cult of personality officially over, 1962



Michael Jackson on
"HIStory" tour, 1996

Course description

This course will contextualize our immediate environment—selected Prague sites--vis-à-vis ever-changing notions of geography, history, and politics in Czech Republic and East Central Europe more generally. It provides an understanding of the culture and politics of the East Central European region from the end of WWI to the communist regimes and later to the NATO and EU memberships.

- The first part of the course surveys Czechoslovak cultural history from the end of World War I to the Velvet Revolution. We explore the "golden years" of the First Czechoslovak Republic up to the "betrayal" at Munich; we examine the subsequent Nazi occupation, Jewish deportations, and moments of resistance; we then examine the contours of communist culture as it develops from the 1948 to 1989.
- The second part of the course positions the experience of Czech Republic in a broader context of East Central Europe looking for broader trends shared by other East Central states as well. It will therefore discuss the 'hated regimes' of communism, the 1989 revolutionary moment, and the difficult economic and democratic transitions. It will conclude by focusing on the recent security challenges the region experiences created by the NATO membership and a more assertive Russian state in the East.

We will use Prague (and some nearby locales) as our classroom as we observe these transitions through the prism of literature, film, and the physical environment.

Pre-requisites: None. Course taught in English.

Course format: Lecture, discussion, student presentations. Two 120-minute classes per week, divided into smaller sessions. Note that there are some mandatory excursions related to this course.

ALL readings will be available electronically on our course website on Blackboard. Excerpts from the following books will be used (provided to students in electronic format).

- Maria Dowling. 2002. *Czechoslovakia*, New York, Oxford University Press
- Roger Kanet and Remi Piet (eds) 2014. *Shifting Priorities in Russian Foreign and Security Policy*, Ashgate
- Michael Roskin. 2002. *The Rebirth of Eastern Europe*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 4th edition
- Gale Stokes. 1993. *The Walls came tumbling down. The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe* (Oxford University Press)
- Marci Shore. 2013. *The Taste of Ashes: The Afterlife of Totalitarianism in Eastern Europe* (Crown)

Course requirements

- 2 tests (one in-class, one take-home) (60% of the final grade--30% each)
- Journal submissions related to the Wednesday's visits (20% of the final grade)
- One student presentation based on a list of articles provided by the instructor (10% of the final grade)
- Class attendance and participation (10% of the final grade).

Grading scale, based on ECU policies:

A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	E
93-100	90-92.99	87-89.99	83-86.99	80-82.99	77-79.99	73-76.99	70-72.99	67-69.99	63-66.99	60-62.99	< 59.99

Tests 60%:

There will be 2 **tests**—**one in-class and one take-home**--each worth 30% of the final grade.

- The first **test** will consist of short answer, multiple choice, identification, true/false and fill-in the blank questions, in addition to 1-2 very short essay questions.
- ***The final take-home exam.*** Students will be provided with set essay topics (some choice among topics may be provided) and will be expected to write two (2) essays of approximately 1,500 words each. **These essays must be typed.** Students will receive the essay topics on the last day of class. Ample citations from in class reading and other sources (including newspapers and other electronic journals) should be used. More details on the take home final exam will be provided in class.

Journal Visits 20%

In addition to lectures, the course has scheduled several visits to Prague sites related to the course content: the Jewish Quarter, Terezin, Museum of Communism, Yalta Bunker, Chamber of Deputies, Czech Senate, Radio Free Europe, and the American Center US Embassy.

Each visit should be documented in a journal format addressing the following questions: What was the main purpose of the visit? Summarize the main points/content presented during the visit. Did you find the event useful? In what way? Did the visit surprise you in any way? What impressed you most that day? Make sure you provide enough content learned and not just mere impressions. This reflection essay should

be about 300 words per visit. The reflections are due at the beginning of the following week – see the dates in the syllabus. Visits take place on W and the summaries will be due the following T.

Class Attendance and Participation 10%: There are only 12 days of class (each two periods long). As a result, students are allowed only one unexcused absence. Each additional unexcused absence will result in 5 points being deducted from the student's final grade (100-point scale). Students are required to engage in classroom discussions and be active participants in all class activities to receive full credit for participation; simple attendance is not enough.

Student presentation 10%. Students will team up in teams of 2 to present and discuss a research article from a list of possible articles posted on the website. The articles have set dates attached. Each student should play both roles during this course: presenter and discussion facilitator.

- One student will play the role of presenter – he/she will introduce the main research question, the evidence to support the question, and will critically assess the argument – is it convincing, what additional evidence would be needed;
- A second student will play the role of discussion facilitator by generating discussion questions related to the article. These questions should help the class engage in critically assessing the quality of the research presented.

Policies

Assignments: All assignments must be submitted on line by the deadline and handed in to the instructor at the beginning of the class.

Read: Read the assigned materials for the week-- The success of this course depends upon your active participation in class. Therefore, having read all the material before each class and having thought about the readings is crucial to having a meaningful conversation.

Academic Integrity: The standard plagiarism and academic integrity rules apply, i.e. all the materials you submit in paper or online must be the results of your own individual work. Any signs of plagiarism will be taken very seriously. The university code of academic integrity will be strictly enforced in this course. According to the East Carolina University Honor Code, violations of academic integrity include the following: Cheating. Unauthorized aid or assistance or the giving or receiving of unfair advantage on any form of academic work. Plagiarism. Copying the language, structure, ideas, and/or thoughts of another and adopting same as one's own original work. Falsification. Statement of any untruth, either spoken or written, regarding any circumstances relative to academic work. Attempts. Attempting any act that if completed would constitute an academic integrity violation as defined herein.

For more information about university policies concerning academic Integrity, please visit the web at http://issuu.com/ecustudentaffairs/docs/at_the_helm/111.htm If you violate the Honor Code you will be reported to the Academic Integrity Board for disciplinary action. The penalties for violating the university code of academic integrity range from having assigned an F for that particular assignment to more stringent measures such as failure in the course and/or expulsion from the university.

Courtesy: Don't come late and have your US cell-phones on silent or vibrate. Any disruptive behavior (reading newspapers or materials related to other courses, talking outside of class discussions) will not be tolerated and you will be asked to leave the class.

Special Needs: East Carolina University seeks to comply fully with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Students requesting accommodations based on a disability must be registered with the Department for Disability

Support Services located in Slay 138 ((252) 737-1016 (Voice/TTY)). <http://www.ecu.edu/accessibility/>. Contact me within the first week of class. Every effort will be made to accommodate those with registered disabilities.

Libraries: AAUNI, our host university, has an English-language library. Not far from our classroom is both the Czech national library and the Prague city library. If you are interested in using these collections, please let me know, and we can assist you.

Below is a *tentative* course schedule for the summer. Pending time constraints, we may deviate from this schedule somewhat. Readings are to be completed prior to the day on which they are listed below.

Course Schedule

WEEK I: June 25- June 27: The First Republic (the "Golden Years" between WWI and WWII)

Class 1: Intro to course & background on East Europe;

Class 2: Czech Democracy & diversity in the interwar era

Readings: Dowling. 2002. Czechoslovakia (chapter 2).

Class 3: The Fate of Central Europe

Readings: Dowling. 2002. Czechoslovakia (chapter 3).

Class 4: Nazi occupation & Jewish Deportation

Article for student presentation: Michal Frankl, "The Sheep of Lidice" (1-29p)

☞ **JUNE 26 (W): VISIT TO THE JEWISH QUARTER IN PRAGUE (TIME TBA); PART OF JOURNAL**

☞ **JUNE 28 (FRIDAY): EXCURSION TO KONOPISTE (OPTIONAL)**

WEEK II: July 2-4: The End of an Era: Nazi Occupation, Communist Putsch

Class 5 & 6: The Communists come to Power

Readings: Dowling. 2002. Czechoslovakia (chapter 5).

Class 7: Prague Spring

Readings: Dowling. 2002. Czechoslovakia (chapter 6).

Class 8: Normalization & "Living with Lies"

Dowling. 2002. Czechoslovakia (chapter 7).

Article for student presentation: Václav Havel, excerpt from *Power of the Powerless*

☞ **JULY 3 (W): RADIO FREE EUROPE @ 13:30 --PART OF JOURNAL** Students will be introduced to the history of Radio Free Europe and to its current activities. Student will have the opportunity to visit the News Room, observing journalists working on various topics. They will be provided with a brief overview on communist regimes, presentation provided by local experts and active journalists at Radio Free Europe. During these conversations with journalists, our students will have the opportunity to ask questions and raise various points for discussion. These hands-on experiences help students understand some of the challenges the region has been through as well as the ones faced now. For instance, the very tight security when accessing the building is a reminder of how life-threatening some of the activities these Radio Free Europe journalists engage in are in the end.

☞ **JULY 5 AND 6 ARE CZECH NATIONAL HOLIDAYS AND ALL CLASSES ARE CANCELED.**

WEEK III: July 9- 11: The Fall of Communism: Differences across the Region

Class 9-10 The problems with socialism and post-socialism

Readings: Roskin, “We pretend to work”: The Decay of Communism” (pp99-119) in *The Rebirth of East Europe*

Article for student presentation: Stokes “Gorbachev”

Class 11-12: The Glorious Revolutions of 1989

Readings: Gale Stokes. 2012. “The Glorious Revolutions of 1989” (chapter 5)

Article for student presentation: Michnik “Reflections on the Collapse of Communism”

☞ **JULY 10: THE MUSEUM OF COMMUNISM & YALTA BUNKER PART OF JOURNAL** Students will have the chance to visit diverse scenes and scenarios from everyday life in the 1950s and later decades of communist rule. Installations showcase party propaganda, censorship, surveillance, show trials, lack of consumer goods, restricted travel options, and more). Also highlighted are key reform efforts and outcomes.

☞ **WEEKEND EXCURSION: ČESKÝ KRUMLOV. DEPART JULY 12. RETURN JULY 14**

WEEK IV: July 16-18: Transitions

Class 13: In class test 1.

Class 14: The Political Transition

Readings: Grzegorz Ekiert, Jan Kubik and Milada Anna Vachudova (2007) “Democracy in the Postcommunist World,” *East European Politics and Societies* 21, 1 (Winter):

Andrew Janos, "From Eastern Empire to Western Hegemony: East Central Europe under Two International Regimes" *East European Politics and Societies* 15(2001): 221-250.

Class 15& 16: The Economic Transition

Readings: Joel Hellman, "Winners Take All: The Politics of Partial Reform in Postcommunist Transitions" *World Politics* 50(1998): 203-234

Andrew Barnes, "Comparative Theft: Context and Choice in the Hungarian, Czech, and Russian Transformations, 1989-2000," *EEPS* 17 (2003): 533–565.

JULY 17 DAY TRIP TO TEREZIN (PART OF JOURNAL). Students will visit both the Small Fortress, where the political prisoners were held, and the Large Fortress, which served as a Jewish ghetto and transit camp-- although the latter function was not known at the time since the death camps to the East had not been discovered. Although Czech citizens have resettled in Terezin today, certain areas have been preserved and are curated for visitors, so we will see the barracks (mentioned in Lustig's "Rose Street") and many examples of art created by ghetto denizens as described in Rovit and Goldfarb above.

WEEK V: July 23-July 25: EU memberships and After

Class 17 &18: EU Accession and After

Readings: *J Rupnick “Explaining Eastern Europe: The crisis of illiberalism”*

Sean Hanley and James Dawson. 2017. "Poland was never as democratic as it looked",
Foreign Policy, Jan 3

<https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/01/03/poland-was-never-as-democratic-as-it-looked-law-and-justice-hungary-orban/>

Article for student presentation 2019 European Parliament Elections viewed from Central Europe

http://www.publicseminar.org/2019/06/european-parliament-elections-viewed-from-central-and-eastern-europe/?fbclid=IwAR304nUCSq77lws_qPbJWQPv8RqKWt-nlusgKXX_Poz-fQe6qakLtwZyb48

Class 19 &20: Frontrunners

Readings: Krastev and Holmes "Imitation and its Discontents"

Hanley and Vachudova "Understanding the Illiberal Turn: Democratic Backsliding in Czech Republic"

Articles for student presentation 1) "Can Poland's backsliding be stopped"

2) "Czech Democracy under Pressure"

3) "Explaining Orban's Illiberalism"

☞ JULY 24: VISIT THE US EMBASSY TO PRAGUE /THE AMERICAN CENTER PRAGUE @ 10AM.

(PART OF JOURNAL). The visit at the US Embassy/American Center will allow students to interact with Foreign Service Officers. We will use the opportunity to inquire on the challenges one experiences when working abroad. Most importantly, we are interested in understanding the changes an embassy goes through when a new US administration is welcomed in Washington DC. This visit will allow students to reflect on opportunities and challenges when working in Foreign Service and they will also benefit from a brief presentation on US – Czech foreign relations.

☞ JULY 24: VISIT THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES TENTATIVELY SCHEDULED FOR 13.30PM.

☞ JULY 20 (FRIDAY) ☞ EXCURSION: THE SENATE (STILL TBA). The two visits at the Czech parliament represent a unique opportunity to learn about the history of the legislative chambers in this country. Both visits are accompanied by a short documentary film as well as lectures provided by local experts on the history of the state, the history of the institution, as well as the history of the buildings housing the bicameral legislature. Students have again the opportunity to interact with local experts and raise discussion points or seek clarifications on the points presented. I found these presentations very informative as the presenters are very informative and always eager to charm their US visitors with less-known details on the institutions in question. If the parliament is in session, students will also could watch the parliament at work (in Czech).

WEEK VI: July 30-August 1: Laggards, US and Russia

Class 21: Russian Influence

Readings: Conley, "Kremlin Playbook"

Class 22: Laggards

Articles for student presentation 1) Bulgaria

2) Romania

3) Slovakia

Class 23: US

Articles for student presentation 1) Letters to US Presidents

2) Wess Mitchel at the Prague Summit in 2018

<https://ge.usembassy.gov/assistant-secretary-mitchells-remarks-at-the-prague-european-summit-june-20/>

Class 24: Overview of Take Home

🔑 **TOPICS FOR THE TAKE-HOME HANDED IN ON T; DUE BACK BY FRIDAY NOON.**