

**Astrid Lorenz – Hana Formanková: The puzzling democratisation in Czechia.
Empirical findings and the need for theoretical rearrangements**

The research on the political systems and institutions in East Central Europe changed recently from an optimistic to a crisis narrative. Considering the case of the Czech Republic, there was a consensus until around the early 2010s that the country's democratic political system largely consolidated, symbolised not least by the Czech EU accession in 2004 (Merkel 2007). This interpretation was based on conventional democratisation and Europeanisation theories that both tend to conceptualise system development as a rather linear phenomenon and focus mainly on the government system.

Under the crisis narrative, problematic features of Czech politics are identified, such as low quality of governance, inefficient state administration, fragmented political parties and government instability. However, we claim that not these features have changed so much but mostly their interpretation. Politics in the Czech Republic (and other East Central European countries) reveals that the widespread additive checklist understanding of the quality of democracy is flawed and the effect of factors like European integration was overestimated. Hence, we plead for a more complex and differentiated concept, that draws attention also to informal power structures and the causal links between politics, society and economy.

Our paper relies on the findings from our edited volume "The political system of the Czech Republic" which comprises systematic analyses on several aspects of Czech system change, politics and policies. The paper first distillates their main findings concerning the Czech political system, society, political parties and media as well as selected policy fields in the past 20 years thus stretching the analytical focus beyond the governmental system. It then demonstrates the mismatch between the empirical findings and the standard analytical approaches and makes theoretical and conceptual suggestions for future research.

András Szántó: Schumpeterian and epistemic democracy in ECE countries

My speech will examine epistemic democracy. It does by introducing the main pillars of Schumpeterian democratic theory which contains numerous thought-provoking elements: common good does not exist, democracy is only a formal procedure and the absence of citizens' knowledge is further downplayed by leaders' arbitrary manipulation. First of all, it is crucial to understand what role the common good plays in epistemic democracy. Secondly, in order to understand the epistemic value of democracy, it is crucial to concretise the characteristics of epistemic democracy, whether predominantly formal or substantive elements constitute epistemic democracy. Thirdly, it is necessary to investigate what cognitive abilities leaders and citizens need to possess to track the common good – this highlights through what tools the epistemic values of democracy can be approximated. The Schumpeterian conception of democracy undermines the epistemic value of democracy because it is an elitist conception that fundamentally contradicts the self-reflective nature of epistemological self-rule. In other words, according to my main assumption, epistemic democracy is a learning process. Finally, the article relates its analytical framework to epistocracy, to ascertain whether the appreciation of experts encourages to get to know to the common good and develop the epistemic value of democracy or actually leads to the devaluation of epistemic self-rule. The theoretical framework of the Schumpeterian and the epistemic democracy helps to find the relevant empirical questions of the ECE region regarding both electorship and leadership.

Gergely Rajnai: Consolidation of power in post-socialist Central European countries

This presentation describes the different kinds of consolidation of power in Central and Eastern Europe after the fall of Communism. It first introduces the concept of consolidation of power by drawing a parallel with the well-established frameworks of democratic consolidation and embeddedness, then it cites examples for each defined type of consolidation. The incomplete

list of examples demonstrate that the 1990s and the 2010s have provided fundamentally different opportunities for consolidation of power to the various countries of the region. While during the early transitional period, reversal of democratic and economic reforms and regression into (Communist) authoritarian rule were the main challenges, nowadays, main consolidating actors are not post-communist parties but “illiberal” politicians who are trying to consolidate their power by altering the ways liberal democracy has been functioning in the region without reversing market reforms. These attempts have come in different forms and have enjoyed different levels of success, but in general, the first wave of attempts proved to be unsuccessful, and current attempts at consolidation have been more effective at achieving the goals of the consolidating actors.

Vilmos Frigyes Nagy: Does financial sovereignty pay? Weighing national sovereignty against financial conditionality

Being able to decide one’s fate is not only important for individuals but also for countries. The concept of sovereignty formed and was present throughout the centuries enabling an increasing number of states to decide freely about their moves. New or newly freed states might’ve been facing challenges which required financial assets. The post-WWII era provided the Bretton Woods system with obligations for its participants regarding monetary policy, and the creation of the International Monetary Fund to provide help in case of balance of payments difficulties. However for the favourably priced loans of the IMF there were also conditions attached. Such (pre)requisites limited the borrower’s sovereignty in exchange for the cheaper-than-market deals. The 2008 financial crisis hit EU Member States particularly hard. By being a member countries have already had their respective sovereignty limited so additional conditions left them with less freedom. In the EU, the Central European Hungary was the first to apply for an IMF-bailout from this group to avoid bankruptcy. In 2010 there was a change in government and the cabinet valued much freedom and the ability to do things their way. When financial difficulties have arisen again, the new political leadership managed to avoid a consecutive IMF-deal at end-2011 beginning-2012. It was not a simple turn down but a prolonged process of negotiations with the initially declared mutual intentions to reach an agreement. This paper aims to give, together with a historical development angle the characteristics of political and financial sovereignty, a definition about the hybrid expression “financial sovereignty”. It will be backed with the case study of Hungary, regarding how financial sovereignty can be defined, its importance in each case in the development of the market’s approach, in the political positions and in the stance of the IMF. The concept will be checked against the case of Poland, another autonomous Member State which was in a similar position. As there is still ongoing IMF-deal in the EU, and future agreements cannot be ruled out, my definition of financial sovereignty and its characteristics might provide a good source for European policymakers when considering IMF-deals or other agreements limiting their sovereignty.

Zoltán Balázs: FIDESZ: A Case Study in Political Ontology

The study of parties and party systems is a major issue in political science. Mostly, and especially in comparative studies, they are considered to be simple agents. If it comes to an analysis of particular parties, the focus is mostly on internal struggles over leadership, ideology, and policies. What is missing, however, is a robust description of the "thing" we are analysing. What I intend to do is offering such a description of the FIDESZ, the dominant agent in Hungarian politics since almost a decade. What kind of an agent is it? I shall argue that it is not or no more a party, comparable to any other parties in Hungary, but a political machine or holding, consisting and comprising of several parts, departments, organizations, allowing it to act in a wide variety of ways. This, in turn, is a probably a major explanatory factor in explaining its astonishing success.