



Post-communist Political Systems

CEVRO University – Summer 2026

Fri 20.2. and Fri 27.3. 2026 (15:30-19:50)

Classrooms: j205, j106

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Course Description and Objectives:

The course provides a general overview of political systems in post-communist European countries, focusing on a central question: What does “post-communism” actually mean, and how has the communist past shaped, and how does it continue to shape, political institutions and public political attitudes across the former Soviet bloc?

Students will first become familiar with the political institutions of selected post-communist countries and discuss the extent to which the communist experience has influenced these institutions. At the same time, we will review key concepts in comparative politics and examine major challenges faced by post-communist democracies, such as corruption and democratic backsliding. In the second part, we will focus on the societal effects of communist legacies, with particular emphasis on intergenerational differences.

By the end of the course, students will not only have gained broader knowledge of politics across post-communist Europe but will also be able to assess whether the term “post-communist” refers merely to a geographic region or whether it carries a deeper meaning, remaining a significant factor shaping politics in countries that experienced communist rule.

Course Requirements:

Readings

There are **2 required texts** (both are available in an online form in the IS course materials repository, or for purchase through regular, albeit sometimes international rather than national, bookstores):

- **Stephen White et al., ed. (2013).** *Developments in Central and East European Politics* 5. Duke University Press. (referred as “SW”)

- **Grigore Pop-Eleches and Joshua A. Tucker (2017).** *Communism's Shadow: Historical Legacies and Contemporary Political Attitudes*. Princeton University Press. (referred as "PT")

In addition, the course includes **several specialized journal articles and other resources** that are **also compulsory**. These are all available to you in the IS course materials repository unless otherwise noted. It is highly recommended that you complete the readings in the exact order in which they are listed in the course schedule below.

It would be optimal if you could complete as many of the readings as possible prior to our first meeting, as this will allow for more informed participation.

Classroom Attendance and Activity

This class will only meet twice this semester. The attendance of the first class on 20.2.2026 is not mandatory, however, **it is strongly encouraged**. Students learn much more when they come to class and participate in the class discussions. Moreover, participation is part of your final grade and will be based *primarily* on your in-class performance (see below).

You are required to attend the second class on 27.3.2026 to fulfill your presentation assignment (see below). Absences are only excused in cases of a documented acute medical issue or another relevant, valid reason (in these cases, we will find an adequate replacement date solution).

Course Evaluation:

Participation (15%)

This course will require a great deal of discussion and active listening. **Simply showing up to class does not constitute participation.** Your participation grade will be evaluated based on your ability to draw upon insights from the readings, the depth of the thoughtfulness of your questions/comments, and your activeness in class. **If you do not attend, you cannot participate.**

Presentation (35%)

Each student is required to give **one short in-class presentation** during the second course meeting (**27.3.2026**). The presentation will focus on a **country** or a **group of countries** of your choice that has a communist past. You may select your case(s) based on the **suggestions from the assigned readings listed in the syllabus**, but you are also free to choose any other relevant case, provided it fits the thematic scope of the course. If you choose a **group of countries**, it is strongly recommended that you select them according to a clear comparative logic, ideally as either **most similar cases** or **most different cases** (see Przeworski and Teune 1970; *the text is provided in the IS course materials*), and/or according to one of the suggested **cases selection techniques** suggested by Seawright and Gerring (2008; *also provided in the IS course material*). This will be particularly useful for your final essay (see below).

The presentation should provide a clear and well-structured overview of the chosen case(s), with emphasis on the political system and the key topics discussed throughout the course (e.g., democratic transition, institutional development, party competition, corruption, democratic backsliding, political attitudes, and communist legacies). The goal is not to cover everything, but to identify and explain the most important developments and dynamics.

Each presentation is scheduled for **20 minutes total**, which should be used as follows:

- **10–15 minutes** for the presentation itself
- **5–10 minutes** for feedback and discussion

Importantly, the selected case(s) will also serve as the foundation for the final research paper. A well-prepared presentation can therefore significantly help you develop a strong and coherent final paper.

Final Essay (50%)

In the final essay (**2,500–3,000 words**), you are expected to **engage with the central questions** of the course: What is *post-communism*, and does a distinct post-communist political system meaningfully exist? Is the term “post-communist” today merely a convenient label for a specific geographical region, or does it still capture deeper political, institutional, and societal continuities linked to the communist past? Drawing on the concepts, theories, and empirical cases discussed throughout the course, you should critically assess **whether—and if so, how—communist legacies continue to shape political institutions, political behavior, and public attitudes in post-communist countries**.

Your essay should be analytically grounded and supported by **appropriate empirical evidence**. You may confirm, refine, or challenge your initial assumptions, but these must be clearly stated and systematically evaluated. **You are encouraged to build on the country or group of countries you selected for your presentation assignment, though you may also incorporate additional cases if they are relevant to your argument.** A well-developed presentation should therefore serve as a strong foundation for the final essay. The essay must be based on a sufficient number of reliable academic sources, which should be **properly cited** according to standard academic conventions. Late submissions will be penalized at a rate of **1% of the overall course grade per day**. **DUE: TBD**

Grading

A.	90 – 100 points	B.	80 – 89 points
C.	70 – 79 points	E.	50 – 59 points
D.	60 – 69 points	F.	less than 50 points

Course Policies:

Technology/ChatGPT & AI Tools

All **cell phones** etc. should be **shut off or set to silent** – NOT VIBRATE – before arriving to class. The use or interruption of these devices during regular class time will result in a reduction of your participation grade.

You may use AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT) to develop ideas, get started on a project, or improve your language and writing. However, you are **fully responsible** for any AI-generated material you incorporate into your course assignments. If you include AI-generated content, you must **cite it like any other source**. All information used in assignments must be **verified**, ideas must be properly attributed, and factual claims must be accurate.

You may NOT use AI to write your assignment for you. Submitting an assignment that is wholly or substantially AI-generated constitutes academic misconduct and will result in **FAILING the course.**

Disclaimer

The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary.

Class Schedule & Readings:

INTRO. DEFINING THE REGION

SW Chapter 1

PART I. INSTITUTIONS

STATE BUILDING; THE CZECH REPUBLIC, HUNGARY AND POLAND

Anna Grzymala-Busse and Pauline Jones Luong (2002). “Reconceptualizing the State: Lessons from Post-Communism”. *Politics & Society* 30 (4), 529-554.

SW Chapter 2

Sean Hanley and Milada Vachudova (2018) Understanding the illiberal turn: democratic backsliding in the Czech Republic. *East European Politics* 34(3), 276-296

OTHER CEE COUNTRIES AND CHALLENGES OF POST-COMUNISM

SW Chapter 3 and 4

Rasma Karklins (2015). *The System Made Me Do it: Corruption in Post-communist Societies*”, Routledge, New York. Chapter 2: “The Typology of Post-Communist Corruption”

Popova, Maria (2012). “Why Doesn’t the Bulgarian Judiciary Prosecute Corruption?”. *Problems of Post Communism* 59, 5: 35-49.

Videos:

“Struggling Romanian city symbolises post-communist era”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nhOWTssq-4Y>

EASTERN EUROPE, RUSSIA, AND CENTRAL ASIA

SW Chapter 5

Kathleen Collins (2002). “Clans, Pacts, and Politics in Central Asia”. *Journal of Democracy* 13 (3), 137-152

Videos:

“Nobody Visits This Country...Find Out Why”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wnDxHTaeNX0>

“Corruption Scandal That Shook the USSR”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zYwV9Ugk1uM>

“Russia After Communism” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m_h4zZaJov0

Optional: Movie “Beautiful Corruption” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iDLrgpFXc4I>

ELECTORAL SYSTEM AND ELECTIONS

SW Chapter 9 and pp. 265-70 “Quality as representation: are citizens actually ruling?”

Raymond M. Duch and Harvey D. Palmer (2002) “Strategic Voting in Post-Communist Democracy?”. *British Journal of Political Science* 32, 63–91

Sarah Engler (2016). “Corruption and Electoral Support for New Political Parties in Central and Eastern Europe.” *West European Politics* 39(2), 278–304.

POLITICAL PARTIES

SW Chapter 11

Fernando Casal Bértoa & Ingrid van Biezen (2014). “Party regulation and party politics in post-communist Europe”. *East European Politics* 30 (3), 295-314.

Lenka Bustikova and Herbert Kitschelt (2009): “The radical right in post-communist Europe. Comparative perspectives on legacies and party competition” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 42, 459-483

Lenka Bustikova and Petra Guasti (2019). “The State as a Firm: Understanding the Autocratic Roots of Technocratic Populism” *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures* 33 (2), 302–330.

Wondreys, Jakub. 2021. “The ‘Refugee Crisis’ and the Transformation of the Far Right and the Political Mainstream: The Extreme Case of the Czech Republic.” *East European Politics* 37 (4): 722–46.

Video: Interview with Cas Mudde <https://video.aktualne.cz/dvtv/expert-babisovym-volicum-jeho-skandaly-nevadi-zkorumpovani-j/r~7448ffd69bd111e993a6ac1f6b220ee8/>

ECONOMY AND WELFARE

SW Chapter 13

Video: “Russian Capitalism after Communism”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ui8p3MEWW78>

Stephen Crowley (2004) “Explaining Labor Weakness in Post-Communist Europe: Historical Legacies and Comparative Perspective”. *East European Politics and Societies* 18 (3), 394–429

Mitchell A. Orenstein (2008) “Poverty, Inequality, and Democracy: Postcommunist Welfare States”. *Journal of Democracy* 19 (4), 80-94

THE EU

SW Chapter 6

Milada A. Vachudova and Liesbet Hooghe (2009). “Postcommunist politics in a magnetic field: How transition and EU accession structure party competition on European integration”. *Comparative European Politics* 7, 179–212

Tomas Kostecky, “Political Transformation in East-Central Europe: Are There General Patterns of Development from Communism to EU Membership”, http://src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/sympo/03september/pdf/T_Kostecky.pdf

PART II: POST-COMMUNIST LEGACY AND POLITICAL ATTITUDES

COMMUNIST LEGACIES

PT pp. 1-27

Pop-Eleches, G. (2015). “Pre-Communist and Communist Developmental Legacies”. *East European Politics and Societies*, 29(2), 391–408

Mishler, W. and Rose, R. (2007). “Generation, Age, and Time: The Dynamics of Political Learning during Russia's Transformation”. *American Journal of Political Science* 51: 822-834

LIVING THROUGH COMMUNISM

PT pp. 33-62

Wayne Sandholtz & Rein Taagepera (2005). "Corruption, Culture, and Communism". *International Review of Sociology* 15 (1), 109-131.

Video: "A look back at Eastern Germany" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jeMullcWVfU>

DEMOCRACY

MILLER, A., HESLI, V., & REISINGER, W. (1997). "Conceptions of Democracy Among Mass and Elite in Post-Soviet Societies". *British Journal of Political Science* 27(2), 157-190.

SW 225-7, Chapter 15

PT Chapter 4

Pridham, G. (2002). "EU Enlargement and Consolidating Democracy in Post-Communist States — Formality and Reality". *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 40, 953-973.

Zsuzsanna Szelényi (2019) "I was once Orbán's ally. I despair at what he has done to Hungary". *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jun/26/viktor-orban-ally-hungary-courageous-democrat>

Podcast : "Hungary, populism and my Orbán-voting father"
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/audio/2019/feb/04/hungary-populism-and-a-road-trip-with-my-orban-voting-father-podcast>

Online article: "THE BIG QUESTION: WHAT IS THE ROOT CAUSE OF RISING ILLIBERALISM IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE?" <https://www.ned.org/the-big-question-what-is-the-root-cause-of-rising-illiberalism-in-central-and-eastern-europe/>

CIVIL SOCIETY

SW pp. 213-225

Howard, M. M. (2003). *The weakness of civil society in post-Communist Europe*. Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1

Pop-Eleches, G., & Tucker, J. A. (2013). "Associated with the Past?: Communist Legacies and Civic Participation in Post-Communist Countries". *East European Politics and Societies* 27(1), 45–68.

SOCIAL WELFARE AND GENDER EQUALITY

PT Chapter 6 and 7

Suzanne LaFont (2001). "One step forward, two steps back: women in the post-communist states". *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 34 (2). 203-220.

RESILIENCE AND NOSTALGIA

Joakim Ekman & Jonas Linde (2005). “Communist nostalgia and the consolidation of democracy in Central and Eastern Europe”. *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 21 (3), 354-374.

Velikonja, M. (2009). “Lost in Transition: Nostalgia for Socialism in Post-socialist Countries”. *East European Politics and Societies*, 23(4), 535–551.

Videos: “Germans miss the 'good old days' of the GDR”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rbbWIRhJbgc>

“Many Russians feeling nostalgic for communist past”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9BwsAk24N00>

Optional: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BTG4RKcUix0>

Movie: “Good bye Lenin!” (if you can find it somewhere...)

CONCLUSIONS: LEGACIES AND COMMUNISM, NEW GENERATION AND THE EU MEMBERSHIP

PT Chapter 9

Joshua A. Tucker, Alexander C. Pacek and Adam J. Berinsky (2002). “Transitional Winners and Losers: Attitudes toward EU Membership in Post-Communist Countries”. *American Journal of Political Science* 46 (3) 557-571

Rohrschneider, R., & Whitefield, S. (2006). “Political Parties, Public Opinion and European Integration in Post-Communist Countries: The State of the Art”. *European Union Politics*, 7(1), 141–160.

Videos:

“Children of German reunification” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_l0WF06bayw

“The EU's East-West Divide” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9GF6U7fn8Ro>