

The quality of democracy, 25 years later

Time: 2nd of June 2014

Venue: Central European University, Budapest, Nador 9, Popper Room, 09:00

Keywords: Enlargement, 25 years, Democracy, Human rights, Minorities, Freedoms and liberties, benefits of EU accession, Euro-skepticism, future of the EU

Rationale of the event:

2014 is the 25-year anniversary of the fall of the communist regimes of Eastern and Central Europe, and it also marks the 10-year anniversary of European Union membership for the Visegrád 4. For this reason, an evaluation of the progress made by these states in certain sectors is opportune. Generally, the histories of V4 countries over the last quarter of century are interpreted as a narrative of direct and total progress, emerging from the East and merging with Europe. The European Union, the 2004 enlargement and eventual membership were seen as the most important factor in the building of democracy and a pluralistic society in the East. The adoption of European norms in the areas of public liberties and human rights were taken as a proof of the efficacy of the “soft power” exercised by the Union. However, a decade after achieving full EU membership, there are still issues in some sectors which can be regarded as affecting the quality of democracy. The new constitution and media law in Hungary, the language laws of Slovakia, the treatment of the Roma community in some areas of the same country are but a few of the concrete examples. Therefore, a synthetic overview of the quality of democracy and pluralism is in order, in the form of an academic conference.

Panel I: Liberties and Human Rights

The issue of human rights is one of the most important indicators of the quality of democracy in a state, and was one of the areas in which post-communist countries had to adopt the most reforms. These were manifested in legislative measures, but also through setting up certain institutions meant to safeguard the maintenance of human rights and civil liberties at acceptable levels. The present state of matters in these areas is the result of a highly centralized process, one which is directly tied to the European integration of the Visegrad countries. The panel shall explore the legal regimes governing human rights in the area, highlighting the various common trends, but also describe the differences due to national specificities. The panel shall also analyze the impact which the EU integration had on the adoption of measures, and also how the post-accession situation developed, when the pressure



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of compliance with EU norms became less stringent. This shall work toward showing how the situation in certain countries arrived at the present configuration.

Freedom of speech was one of the most important issues during the regime changes in 1989, and is an important symbol of democratic state and society. Reform in this area happened very quickly after 1989, being supported by a quick change in the legislative and institutional frameworks. However, in the last 25 years, the nature of information supply and mass media has changed drastically. One of the areas in which this change is most apparent is patronage and sponsorship. Because of this, most mainstream media outlets have also become highly politicized, which in turn affects the quality of the access to unbiased information. Also, in certain countries, such as Hungary, state control and censorship over the press has also become an issue during the post-accession period. The panel seeks to analyze the means and measure of control over information and media in the Visegrad 4 states, and explore the relationship between politics and media. New issues, such as hate speech, shall also be addressed.

Confirmed speakers:

Panel I. Liberties

Miklós Haraszti, (UN Rapporteur, CEU visiting Researcher)

Title: Media Landscape and Media Governance in the Third Decade

Abstract:

After the 1991 collapse of European communism, in its former territories, media governance seemed just as united under liberal democratic norms as a decade earlier it still had been under a strict state monopoly of all means of communications. On surface, today, pluralism at least in terms of ownership remained the professed doctrine. In fact however, the three Europes have powerfully reemerged, with, roughly speaking, a liberal West, a Weimarian Central Europe, and an illiberal Eastern Europe. In the last decade, in the wake of Vladimir Putin's counter-color revolution drive, neo-Authoritarian media governance has made inroads even in Central Europe, and the media landscape followed suit.

Henry Loeser (Masaryk University)

Title: Alternative Broadcasting for the Czech Republic – Does Anyone Really Care?

Abstract:

Alternative media in the Czech Republic can trace its roots back to the age of modernity in Europe and Habermas' development of the "public sphere" in early mass media forms. In this century, as a post-Communist emerging democracy, the Czech Republic has seen a transformation of its society to embrace the recognition and legitimacy of erstwhile



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independent broadcast media. Those media include the government-funded public service broadcasters and of course, the advertising-supported commercial broadcasting sector. What we have yet to see emerge is a truly alternative, or “free” broadcast media sector - a third sector recognized as a legitimate counterpart to the aforementioned public service and commercial operators, fully legal with access to licenses and support from the regulator. The process of recognition of the community media concept from community idea, to organized interest, to political policy somehow has not taken hold in the Czech Republic, resulting in a bipolar broadcast media landscape without an alternative community broadcasting component.

While advocates of alternative broadcasting and non-governmental organizations might disagree, there appears to be no substantial movement towards implementing such a sector in the Czech Republic. As commercial media consolidation continues at the expense of local ownership and programming service to local communities, coupled with an upcoming battle for spectrum access in new digital technologies, a window of opportunity may develop. The citizens, regulators and political elites of the Czech Republic may then have the opportunity to take steps towards testing a triad system perhaps using the effective models of their European Union counterparts as a roadmap. In any case, a vibrant alternative sector has the potential to greatly contribute to Czech society and help to address a myriad of political, social and economic issues therein. Hundreds of nations across Europe and the globe recognize, legalize and support alternative community broadcasting, benefitting their people, communities and societies. The Czech Republic might similarly benefit, but the question still remains: does anyone really care?

Péter Molnár, CEU Center for Media and Communications Studies

Title: Twelve Points on Freedom of Speech and of the Press in Europe

Abstract:

This lecture will focus on the failure in common European media policy to require sufficient safeguards for the selection of the members of media bodies that supervise the media systems in EU Member States. This failure made it possible for the Hungarian government to create a Media Council that it totally controls, although the Constitutional Court in Hungary lay down a constitutional principle that no political, economic, or any other social group can have decisive influence over the media, not to mention exclusive influence that the Media Council

embodies. This principle provides a good option for the necessary common European rule. Thus, this talk will shed some new light on the debate about freedom of the press in the EU and in Hungary, and on the responsibility for the current situation.

Panel II: Equalities, Pluralism and the value of citizenship

Minorities, be they ethnic, religious or sexual in nature, have always been an active part of the societies of Visegrad states. This is the result of the rich, contiguous history of the states, which has always been conducive to a pluralistic society, in which minorities have always played an important role. On the other hand, due to the traditionally centralist structure of the national states in the area, the question of these minorities was and is also an important political issue. The debate around them was traditionally bound up with pro-Western, modernist political discourses, which were indirectly supported by the pro-European turn that the states had taken in the post-1989 period. Before, during and since integration, however, there has always been a trend which sought to deny minorities their rights. The panel shall explore the legal measures that govern the situation of minorities in the area, showing how they evolved from 1989 up to the present. It shall also show the importance of the activity of non-governmental organizations in the area, and the external support of EU structures. Finally, the panel shall discuss the manner in which the issue of minorities and minority rights is treated by the majority, especially how it is debated in the political sphere, and how the distribution of political forces has affected and affects their situation.

Another important point is the idea of citizenship and participatory government at the grassroots level. How much does the average citizen feel themselves involved in the political and decision-making processes? Has the interaction between the political class and the citizen in the communist period led to a development of an attitude of active involvement in the political process. Or does the leadership-mass binomial still exist largely intact in East Central Europe? These are only a few question and topics that the second panel engages with.

Confirmed Speakers:

ViziBalázs(Institute for Minority Studies, Hungarian Academy of Sciences)

Title: Minority issues in the EU: is there a new era after enlargement?



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Abstract:

Since the Lisbon Treaty entered into force in 2009, the “rights of persons belonging to minorities” is included in the acquis as a fundamental value of European integration. There are still competing interpretations of “minority protection” under the different domains of EU policies. The lecture will focus on how the Commission’s approach to minority issues has changed in the enlargement process since 2004 and what are the new developments within the EU in this field. There will be a special focus on situation of Roma and the Framework Strategy of Roma Inclusion.

Andrea Pető (CEU Department of Gender Studies)

Title: Equality Redefined

Abstract:

The 25-year anniversary of the fall of the communist regimes of Eastern and Central Europe, and it also marks the 10-year anniversary of European Union membership for the Visegrád4 invite for a reevaluation of European level equality policies. The most developed gender equality policy mechanism has been implemented as a result of European Union’s normative power. The talk not only assesses these policies but also analyses how gender equality policies are constitutive part of this European project but also how different anti-modernist emancipation and the “Europe of Nations” will redefine European equality policies in the future.

Bartha Attila (CEU Center for Policy Studies)

Title: "European Experts versus Populist National Elites? Reinventing the European Project with Active Citizens"

Abstract:



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