

ČTVRTEČNÍ SOCIOLOGICKÉ SEMINÁŘE

30/11/2017 v 16:00 hodin
zasedací místnost 207, Jilská 1, Praha 1

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The Routledge Handbook of East European Politics (představení nové knihy)

As we rapidly approach a point at which the Central and East European states have been “post-communist” for as long as they were “communist”, is there really any merit in, or necessity to, study their distinctiveness beyond their having endured Soviet-style communism many years ago? Why are we still studying these countries as a group? Why are we still comparing them to each other, and framing our analysis in terms of their communist past? What has gone wrong, or failed to transpire? The simple answer, as illustrated throughout the chapters of the Routledge Handbook, is that we perhaps failed to appreciate the profound and deeply-entrenched variation between these states that existed prior to the transition to democracy. Consequently, we are now confronted with a region that displays a huge diversity of outcomes, both in terms of the regime types, as well as institutional arrangements within the countries’ political, economic and social systems, and even policy outcomes. Such diversity amongst a group of states that have followed not dissimilar political and economic trajectories certainly needs explaining.

To complicate things further, several countries that were considered the most stable, consolidated and prosperous of post-communist democracies have recently experienced the rise of populist politics and authoritarian tendencies of leaders like Viktor Órban in Hungary and Jaroslav Kaczynski in Poland, a phenomenon now commonly denoted under the term of ‘democratic backsliding’ and ‘illiberal consolidation’ (see e.g. Dawson and Hanley 2016).

Indeed, what is recorded in several of the contributions to the Handbook, and not simply those dealing with Russia, the Ukraine and the Balkans, is lingering and resurgent authoritarianism. Although the electoral success of the far-right in the region is far from impressive, the liberal revolution is incomplete, disrupted and in retreat if one looks at it from the perspective of LGBT rights, minority protection, or civil society and social movements in general, or the setback in the fight against the political corruption. As Císař concludes, the ‘thin liberal façade that national political cultures in countries such

as Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic erected in the EU accession process (have) withered away in the years since accession'. There is no consensus as to whether this democratic malaise amounts to a regime category of its own, or whether it should be analysed as a question of (varying degree of) democratic quality. However, it seems to be clear that classifying the regimes outcomes in the region as if they were a two-horse race between (consolidated) democracies on the one hand, and autocracies on the other hand, would be an oversimplification.

Adam Fagan is Professor of European Politics at Queen Mary University of London. His research interest is civil society and social movements, with a particular focus on the post-authoritarian politics of Central and Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans. Fagan has authored three monographs - Europeanization of the Western Balkans Environmental Governance in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia (Palgrave Macmillan 2015) co-authored with Indraneel Sircar; Europe's Balkan Dilemma: Paths to State building or Civil Society? (I B Tauris 2010); and Environment and Democracy in the Czech Republic: The Environmental Movement in the Transition Process (Elgar 2004). His most recent edited book is The Routledge Handbook of East European Politics (co-edited with Petr Kopecky). Fagan has published numerous research articles in leading academic journals, including Political Studies, Democratization, Cambridge Review of International Affairs, and Europe-Asia Studies. He is also the co-editor in chief of East European Politics.