



Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe (Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej)

Publication details, including instructions for authors:
<http://www.iesw.lublin.pl/rocznik/index.php>

ISSN 1732-1395

Querying Central Europe in 2018: Between the Shadow of Communism and a New Normalcy

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Published online: 10 Dec 2018

To cite this article: Anna Visvizi, 'Querying Central Europe in 2018: Between the Shadow of Communism and a New Normalcy', *Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe*, Vol. 16, No. 5, 2018, pp. 7-13.

Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe (Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej) is a quarterly, published in Polish and in English, listed in the European Reference Index for the Humanities and Social Sciences (ERIH PLUS), Central and Eastern European Online Library (CEEOL), BazEkon and IC Journal Master List (Index Copernicus International). In the most recent Ministry of Science and Higher Education ranking of journals published on the Polish market the Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe received one of the highest scores, i.e. 14 points.

Anna Visvizi

Querying Central Europe in 2018: Between the Shadow of Communism and a New Normalcy

May you live in interesting times¹

Nearly thirty years since the collapse of communism, the societies in the region of East-Central Europe are exposed to risks and challenges of unprecedented scale and nature. Binary dichotomies that defined the struggle for freedom and democracy in the communist period, have been replaced by chasms filled with all possible shades of grey. The relatively simple dual choices of the past gave way to a myriad of alternatives as to which way to go, which stance to adopt, and how to account of the possible future cost of today's action or inaction. In this view, as the imperatives of ethical, moral and responsible citizenship and service² are tested these days, citizens' agency requires more moral courage, more ethical resolve, more commitment to action, and greater openness to dialogue. The picture of the context in which societies in the region operate today cannot be drawn easily as the pace of developments increases and the weight of factors influencing

1 Chinese proverb.

2 B. E. Gates, 'Where is the moral in Citizenship Education?', *Journal of Moral Education*, vol. 35, no. 4, 2006, pp. 437-441, DOI: 10.1080/03057240601025636.

them cannot be accurately established. Shadows of communism obscure the view, and new factors add to its perplexity. In this context, the role of research and, indeed, the very purpose of academic debate is to identify emerging trends, to diagnose the situation, to communicate the complex and contentious nature of nascent challenges, to suggest ways of bypassing problems as they arise, to build-bridges, and to bring all stakeholders together.

The papers included in this issue of the Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe (#YIESW) address several topics ranging electoral politics in Hungary, through the process of democracy building in Ukraine to the evolution of the media sector in the region. The papers included in this issue of #YIESW offer a solid insight into the fragile fabric of socio-political developments in the region and shed light on the plethora of alternatives that emerge on the political and economic horizons across the region.

The discussion in this volume opens with a paper by Hanna Bazhenova, titled *Liberal Democracy vs. Autocracy: the Case of Ukraine*. The objective of this paper is to determine what kind of state is being built in Ukraine: a liberal-democratic or an authoritarian one. This article gives a brief overview of the concepts of the 'rule of law', 'liberal democracy', and 'hybrid regimes'. It shows general trends in the status and development of democracy in East-Central Europe and identifies the main risks for democracy development in Ukraine. The paper closely examines the public administration and the judicial system of Ukraine, the work of its Central Election Commission (CEC), and the functioning of mass media and social media. The article shows that the powers of the presidential office have been expanded since 2016 while at the same time undermining democratic institutions established in the aftermath of the Euromaidan revolution.

Focusing on questions of democracy and state-building, Krisztina Arató offers an in-depth analysis of the 2018 electoral campaign in Hungary. In her paper, titled 'Constructing the Reality: The Perception of the European Union in the 2018 Hungarian Electoral Campaign', Arató queries the discursive uses of the European Union. As the author argues, even if the European Union (EU), a *sui generis* political entity, has had its political myths ever since, today, perhaps more than ever before new myths and countermyths are deployed in politics. Indeed, by examining the use of these competing views on the EU in the

2018 Hungarian electoral campaign, Arató argues that while FIDESZ and its leader Viktor Orbán applied all countermyths of the EU in his speeches, opposition parties did not talk at all about the EU, thus leaving the positive myths about the EU unheard during the campaign.

Michael Dobbins and Rafał Riedel, in their paper titled 'The New Research Agenda of Examining Organized Interests in Post-communist Policy-Making', present new research agenda focused on organised interests in selected policy areas in the post-communist countries. As the authors argue, over the past years, political scientists have made significant advancements in comparatively analysing the influence of organized interests in the political process. However, the post-communist region has been largely neglected. Instead, large bodies of research have focussed on formal political institutions, party systems and the Europeanization of public administrations in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). The research agenda the authors introduce bypasses that gap in research by exploring the structures, democratic-participative incorporation and impact of organized interests on policy-making in four post-communist EU members: Poland, Czech Republic, Slovenia and Hungary.

Following this path of conceptually-driven research, Andrzej Zybala, explores public policy in Poland in context of tendencies unfolding in Central Europe. As the author highlights, a specific feature of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe is the absence of the tradition of creating public policies using methods similar to those applied in mature democracies. The consequences of the lack of that tradition remain visible today, notwithstanding the fact that communism collapsed well over 25 years ago now. For the potential for programming actions (policy capacity), as well as for implementing policies effectively and evaluating them, remains limited. Accordingly, the author presents the results of one of the few studies that while devoted to public policy have been conducted in Poland. The aim of that study was to test a research hypothesis pertaining to the circumstances in which public policy is formulated. The creation of such a policy was in fact found to depend on a constellation of three factors: a significant threat to stability under a given policy, decision-makers who think that legislative tools for action are enough to achieve the desired result, and an emergent dominant stakeholder who achieves a decisive influence over the decision-making process.

As the author of the next paper, Adriana Mutu, explains, the role played by National Regulatory Authorities (NRAs) as key institutional actors in the governance of various sectors of a country's economy has attracted substantial scholarly interest. Much of the literature examines why governments allow the creation of independent regulatory authorities, and how these bodies retain their independence. In contrast to the rich literature on the regulation of utility sectors, the number of studies dealing with the audiovisual media sector is rather limited. Accordingly, in her paper titled 'The Institutional Design of Audiovisual Media Regulators: Evidence from Central and Eastern Europe', the author offers a comparative analysis of the institutional design of national media regulators in 12 Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries. The analysis focuses on scrutinising the organisational design, funding, accountability mechanisms and regulatory competencies.

Andrzej J. Żuk, in the paper titled 'European Cross-Border Cooperation Programmes on Polish Borders: Determinants of Cross-Border Effects, Weaknesses and Necessary Changes' discusses European cross-border cooperation programmes (ECCPs) implemented on Polish borders during two completed programming periods (2004-2006 and 2007-2013). The objective of the paper is to show the most important weaknesses of the programmes and to propose ways to overcome them. The first way to do so is to analyse the main determinants of the so-called 'cross-border effects' (CBEs). The second idea is to characterise and evaluate the institutional system of the ECCPs. The third way is to propose a systemic solution to the problems with the ECCPs. It is proposed in the form of a strategic approach to borderlands development. Finally, the weaknesses of the ECCPs are divided into 'technical' and 'chronic' ones, with outlining the appropriate measures for limiting both categories.

Katarzyna Górak-Sosnowska and Irina Molodikova explore discourses on Muslims and refugee crisis as they unfold in Poland and in Hungary. The paper analyses how the similar historical development in both countries and ethnic interests shaped their domestic and international policy towards symbolic and real benefits from the crisis even though the refugees in Hungary left at the beginning of 2016 and Poland had not even been touched by it. For that purpose, the political and social discourse on Muslims and the refugee crisis in Hunga-

ry and Poland were compared. Interestingly, both countries lack any significant Muslim or refugee communities and so their anti-Muslim and anti-refugee sentiments have to be framed around an EU narrative. Thus, Hungarian and Polish membership in the EU seems to be modulated in relation to the refugee crisis and European Muslim communities and used to further the national political agenda.

In the following paper, Witold Nowak and Michał Nowosielski examine the relations between immigrant organizations and the institutions of their state of origin as well as the influence of those relations on situation of such organizations. The paper focuses specifically on the case of Poland over the period 1989-2015 in which significant changes with regards to diaspora policy were introduced. In other words, a shift from a model based on capacity building policies to a model focused on extracting obligations from the diaspora has taken place. These changes have had considerable impact on the role and capacity of Polish immigrant organizations as well as their relations with the Polish state.

Retaining the focus on migration, in her paper, Karolina Sobczak-Szelc discusses the notion of environmental migrants. By addressing the case of Poland, the author argues that environmental migrants in the destination country are a hard-to-survey population, as they comprise a group that is hard to sample, identify, find or contact, get to cooperate, and to interview. Moreover, limited knowledge regarding their father's and grandfathers' migration history and motivations affects the possibility to analyse how environment influenced the migration decisions of previous generations. The migration decision of the investigated migrants was influenced by other factors, such as education, marriage, or looking for a job.

The discussion in this volume concludes with two book reviews. *Dylematy polityki rozwojowej Unii Europejskiej wobec Afryki Subsaharyjskiej w latach 2000-2015* [Dilemmas in the development policy of the European Union towards Sub-Saharan Africa 2000-2015]³ have been reviewed by Professor Ewa Latoszek. Tacitly, this very interest-

3 F. Kaczmarek, *Dylematy polityki rozwojowej Unii Europejskiej wobec Afryki Subsaharyjskiej w latach 2000-2015* [Dilemmas in the development policy of the European Union towards Sub-Saharan Africa 2000-2015], Poznań: UEP, 2018, 324 pp., ISBN 9788374179591 (pbk).

ing and timely book suggests that more research and policy-analysis need to be invested in topics pertinent to Sub-Saharan Africa. The second book review included in this issue of #YIESW looks at the state of higher education management, especially through the lens of the dean's offices' work and role at higher education institutions (HEI). *Dziekanaty na wyższych uczelniach: funkcjonowanie, wyzwania, dobre praktyki* [Dean's offices at universities: functioning, challenges, best practices]⁴ reviewed by Diana Krysińska, offer a captivating insight into the largely unknown world of managing student affairs at HEI.

That being said, it is necessary to say 'thank you' to all reviewers for their hard and speedy work, and to authors who followed the reviewers' suggestions and recommendations. #YIESW follows very strict editing and publishing standards consistent with double-blind review and – the resulting – several rounds of the revision process. As of this year, #YIESW started issuing certificates for reviewers, thus further adding to transparency and accountability of the review process. The Editors of #YIESW are grateful for the financial assistance provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland that made the publication of the journal possible. As a result, the papers included in this volume are available both in print and online (open access). Overall, the papers included in this volume, the quality of the argument they entail, and accessibility serve the purpose of nurturing discussion on Central Europe and Poland's role in it.

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4 K. Górak-Sosnowska and J. Brdulak, M. Matusiewicz, I. Senator (eds), *Dziekanaty na wyższych uczelniach: funkcjonowanie, wyzwania, dobre praktyki* [Dean's offices at universities: functioning, challenges, best practices], Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza SGH, 2018, 218 pp., ISBN 978-83-8030-219-8 (pbk).