

REE335/EUS348/GOV355M
Past & Present Politics in Central Europe – From Democratization to Democratic Backsliding

Course meets in Budapest, Hungary, 6-21 June, 2024

Ten class sessions that meet 9:30-noon, with additional excursions and programming as per the syllabus below

Instructor: Dr. Lorinc Redei

Introduction:

This course explores the democratic transitions of Central and Eastern Europe in 1989, and the more recent turn toward illiberalism and authoritarianism—the so-called “democratic backsliding”—that has affected several countries in the region over the past decade. Given the location of the study abroad program, a particular attention is paid to the experience of Hungary, although developments in Poland, the former Czechoslovakia, and other Central and Eastern European countries also feature in the readings.

The course first sets up the historical background for the course, reviewing the region’s experience with World War II and communism. The following section covers the democratic transition of 1989—the so-called Velvet Revolutions that quickly replaced communism with democratic capitalist states in the region. The last half of the course focuses on our current period—the past decade during which anti-liberal populist parties have dismantled some of the democratic political structures in Hungary and a few other Central and Eastern European countries.

Trips and excursions:

The afternoons of class days entail small excursions around Budapest. Beyond these trips, the class will take a Friday day-trip (to Visegrád, on June 7) and a three-day overnight trip (to Vienna, on June 14-16). All these trips and excursions are included in the study abroad program fee, and are mandatory to attend.

Course meetings and readings:

The course meets ten times in a classroom setting (always 9:30am-noon) in Budapest, from 6-21 June. Each of the ten class days features additional afternoon visits to sites in and around Budapest that relate to that week’s material—these are described in the syllabus below. There is a moderate amount of reading (maximum 30 pages) assigned for each class day. Students are expected to complete readings ahead of each class session—all readings are uploaded to the course’s Canvas site. There are no books to purchase for the class, but all students must bring a functioning laptop to Budapest to be able to complete readings and course assignments. Students are highly encouraged to complete the readings for the course before they travel to Budapest.

Assignments and grading:

Students will be evaluated on the following assignments during the course: course participation, daily journal entries, a group presentation on a Budapest landmark, a short paper on democratic backsliding, and a final reflection paper.

Detailed assignment prompts, grade weighting, and due dates can be found on the course schedule below and on Canvas. The grading scale is as follows: A: >94%, A-: 90-93%, B+: 87-89%, B: 84-86%, B-: 80-83%, C+: 77-79%, C: 74-76%; C-: 70-73%; D+: 67-69%; D: 64-66%; D-: 60-63%; F: <60%.

Academic integrity, late penalties, communication:

I expect students to be familiar with UT’s [policies on academic integrity](#), and to abide by them. I penalize late assignments as follows: up to 24 hours late: 10% grade reduction, 24-48 hours late: 20% grade reduction, 48-72 hours late: 30% grade reduction. Any assignment turned in more than three days late will not be accepted, and will automatically result in a grade of 0. All communications regarding the class will be made via Canvas: students must ensure that they have an email address that they check regularly linked to their Canvas profile.

Disabilities statement:

Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the [Division of Diversity and Community Engagement](#), at its Disability and Access [website](#), or by calling 512-471-6259.

Assignment details:

Class Participation (25%):

Your class participation grade will depend on both the quantity and quality of your participation in the course. I expect you to come to class (and excursions) on time, and having prepared for the sessions by completing and thinking about the assigned readings. You will only earn full credit if you participate actively in class discussions and outings.

Daily Journal Entries (15%):

You will submit daily journal entries on Canvas at the end of every class day, connecting the readings and class discussions with the site visits, guest speakers, and other on-the-ground experiences that the program provides. Some guiding questions and prompts are provided on Canvas for each journal entry. Each entry should be ~500 words.

Group Presentation on a Budapest Landmark (25%):

Each student will be assigned to a small (4-5 person) group. Each group will pick a Budapest landmark from the list below. Students will research its history, visit it in person, and prepare a group presentation on its historical and political significance. The presentation should cover the basic history and claim to fame of the chosen landmark but also connect it to the overall topic of the course: democratization and democratic backsliding. I will provide each group with guidance on how the landmark connects to those themes, but they are briefly mentioned below.

In week three of the program, each group will take the entire class to their chosen location and present (as a group) their findings, in the style of a historical guided tour. The group will also submit their “script” for this tour via Canvas. Each student’s grade will be an average of the overall group presentation’s grade, and the average grade reflecting their contributions to the project—assigned anonymously by their teammates.

Budapest landmarks to choose from:

- Hősök tere (Heroes’ Square)
 - 1989 reburial of Imre Nagy
- Hungarian Parliament building and National TV building (Szabadság tér)
 - 2006 protests and storming of the national TV station
- Budai Vár (Buda Castle)
 - 2015-present project to refurbish the castle as a government district
- Central European University
 - 2018 departure of the university to Vienna, due to Hungarian government pressure

Paper on Democratic Backsliding or Creeping Authoritarianism in Central and Eastern Europe (25%):

Each student will write a short (1000-word, +/-10%) paper on some aspect of democratic backsliding in Central or Eastern Europe (note: you may pick a country other than Hungary for this project). The paper should be based primarily on news articles easily accessible online, and should not require extensive academic research. I will meet individually with each student on June 17 to discuss your projects and make suggestions for improving them. You should arrive to that consultation with an outline of your paper, in order to receive substantive feedback.

Final Reflection Paper (10%):

At the end of the three-week course, you will submit a short (500-750 word) essay on Canvas. This essay will ask you to review all of your prior daily journal entries, and to reflect on your overall study abroad experience so far. The goal is to explain what you have learned about democracy and democratic backsliding, how being in Hungary has given you specific insight into that topic, and how you believe this knowledge will serve you in the future.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Tuesday, June 4:

Arrival in Budapest

Airport pickup:

- AIFS staff provides bus transport to anyone arriving on June 4 by their pick-up times.
- Any student choosing not to wait for the bus or arriving outside these windows can take a taxi to the residence:

Walking tour of student residence neighborhood (meet downstairs at student residence at 6:00pm)

Wednesday, June 5:

Orientation Day

In-class activity: (meet staff downstairs at student residence at 8:30am—orientation goes until noon)

- Staff walks students over to Central European University where courses are held
- Staff and Dr. Redei brief you on things to know about Budapest, rules of the study abroad program, etc.

Afternoon activity:

- Free time for students to go shopping, explore surroundings, prepare for following day's class.

Evening activity: Welcome dinner

Thursday, June 6: Class 1:

World War II and the Holocaust in Central Europe

Readings:

- This syllabus
- István Rév: "Liberty Square, Budapest: How Hungary Won the Second World War," *Journal of Genocide Research*, Vol. 20, No. 4, 2018, pp. 607-623.

In-class activity:

- Intro to class, overview of syllabus & next two weeks, division into groups for Budapest landmark assignment
- Lecture on World War II and the Holocaust in Hungary
- Visit to [Szabadság Tér](#) to discuss “duelling” monuments, based on reading for today

Afternoon activity:

- Visit to [Dohány utca Synagogue](#) and the [Jewish Museum](#)

Assignment:

- Daily journal entry about class readings and trip to Szabadság Tér and Synagogue
- With your group, pick your Budapest landmark for your group assignment

Friday, June 7:

Day Trip to Visegrád

Meet staff at student residence at 9:30am.

Return is by boat in the early evening.

Saturday and Sunday, June 8-9:

Free Time

[NOTE: June 9: local & European Parliament elections!]

Assignment:

- Start work on your group assignment about a Budapest landmark

Monday, June 10: Class 2:

Communism in Hungary and Central Europe

Reading:

- Sharon L. Wolchik & Jane L. Curry: "Twenty-Five Years after 1989: Issues in Postcommunist Europe," in Sharon L. Wolchik & Jane L. Curry (Eds.): [*Central and Eastern European Politics: From Communism to Democracy*](#), Rowman & Littlefield, 2015, pp. 3-40.

In-class activity:

- Lecture on communism in Central Europe with a focus on Hungary
- *Potential guest lecture by a historian of Hungary in the communist period (TBC)*
- Discussion of reading

Afternoon activity:

- Visit to [Memento Park](#) to view discarded communist statues and monuments

Assignment:

- Daily journal entry about class readings and trip to Memento Park
- Continue working on your group assignment about a Budapest landmark for next week

Tuesday, June 11: Class 3:

The Velvet Revolutions: The Transition to Democracy

Reading:

- Federigo Argentieri: "Hungary: From Postcommunism to Populist Nationalism," in Sharon L. Wolchik & Jane L. Curry (Eds.): [*Central and Eastern European Politics: From Communism to Democracy*](#), Rowman & Littlefield, 2015, pp. 293-315.

In-class activity:

- Lecture on 1989 revolutions
- Guest lecture by a liberal opposition politician who participated in roundtable negotiations in Hungary in 1989
- Discussion of reading

Afternoon activity:

- Visit to Budapest [Retro Museum](#)

Assignment:

- Daily journal entry about class readings, guest lecture, and visit to Retro Museum
- Continue working on your group assignment about a Budapest landmark for next week
- Pick topic for final paper

Wednesday, June 12: Class 4:

The "Return to Europe": Accession to the European Union

Reading:

- Viktor Orbán: [Speech on the Occasion of Hungary Joining NATO](#), Brussels, Belgium, 16 March 1999.

In-class activity:

- Lecture on the growth of democracy in the 1990s in Central Europe and Hungary
- Discussion of reading

Afternoon activity:

- Visit to the [European Commission Representation in Hungary](#) to speak with EU officials

Assignment:

- Daily journal entry about class readings and visit to European Commission Offices
- Continue working on your group assignment about a Budapest landmark for next week

Thursday, June 13: Class 5:

"Ostalgie": Communist Nostalgia and Memory in Today's Hungary

Reading:

- Maya Nadkarni: "But it's Ours": Nostalgia and the Politics of Authenticity in Post-Socialist Hungary," in Maria Todorova & Zsuzsa Gille (Eds.): *Post-Communist Nostalgia*, Berghahn Books, pp. 190-214.

In-class activity:

- Watch the movie *Good Bye, Lenin!* in class
- Discussion of movie and reading

Afternoon activity:

- Visit to the [Terror Háza](#) (controversial museum on victims of Nazism and Communism)

Assignment:

- Daily journal entry about movie and visit to Terror Háza
- Finish working on your group assignment about a Budapest landmark for next week

Friday-Sunday, June 14-16:

Overnight Trip to Vienna

Friday:

Meet staff downstairs at student residence at 8:40am.

Meet downstairs at student hostel for walking tour of Vienna at 4:00pm.

Group dinner at 6:30pm.

Saturday:

Meet staff and Dr. Redei at student hostel at 9:15am to go to Belvedere Museum—visit starts at 9:45am.

FREE AFTERNOON AND EVENING TO EXPLORE VIENNA

Sunday:

FREE MORNING TO EXPLORE VIENNA

Train returns to Budapest in early evening.

Monday, June 17: Class 6:

Liberal Backsliding and Democratic Authoritarianism

Reading:

- Kim Lane Schepppele: "Autocratic Legalism," *University of Chicago Law Review*, Vol. 85, No. 2, 2018, pp. 545-584.

In-class activity:

- Lecture on the concept of democratic backsliding
- *Potential guest speaker from the Democracy Institute (TBC)*
- Discussion of reading

Afternoon activity:

- Individual consultations about final paper projects

Assignment:

- Daily journal entry about class readings and guest speaker, connecting them to your final paper project
- Finalize group assignment about a Budapest landmark

Readings:

- Paul Lendvai: "[The Transformer: Orbán's Evolution and Hungary's Demise](#)," Foreign Affairs, Vol. 98, No. 5, 2018 (11 pages).
- Viktor Orbán: [Speech at Bálványos Summer Free University and Student Camp](#), Tusványos, Romania, 26 July 2014.

In-class activity:

- Lecture on FIDESZ government actions in Hungary
- Guest lecture by Hungarian academic expert on democratic backsliding
- Discussion of readings

Afternoon activity:

- Student-led group presentations on communism/democratic transition in Hungary (Part 1)
 - Heroes' Square
 - Parliament and National TV Building

Assignments:

- Daily journal entry about class readings and guest speaker, connecting them to your final paper project
- Work on your final paper

Readings:

- Viktor Orbán: [Speech at Conservative Political Action Conference](#), Dallas, Texas, 4 August 2022 [VIDEO].
 - Transcript is available [here](#).
- Keith Self (Republican US Congressman for Texas's 3rd District): [Speech at Conservative Political Action Conference Hungary](#), Budapest, Hungary, 3 May 2024 [VIDEO].

In-class activity:

- Lecture on the global spread of illiberalism, with a specific focus on its effects on US politics
- Discussion of readings

Afternoon activity:

- Student-led group presentations on communism/democratic transition in Hungary (Part 2)
 - Buda Castle
 - Central European University

Assignments:

- Daily journal entry about class readings and guest speakers, connecting them to your final paper project
- Work on your final paper

Thursday, June 20: Class 9:

Defending Democracy : The Role of the EU and Civil Society

Readings:

- Nicolas Camut & Barbara Moens: "[Hungary's rule of law disputes with Brussels explained](#)," *Politico.eu*, 11 December 2023.
- European Parliament [Resolution on Ongoing Hearings under Article 7\(1\) TEU regarding Hungary to strengthen Rule of Law and its budgetary implications](#), 24 April 2024.

In-class activity:

- Lecture on democratic forces opposing liberal backsliding, especially the role of the European Union
- Guest lecture by a liberal journalist and civil society activist
- Discussion of readings

Afternoon activity:

- Visit to the [European Parliament Information Office in Budapest](#) to talk with EU officials

Assignments:

- Daily journal entry about class readings and guest speakers, connecting them to your final paper project
- Work on your final paper

Friday, June 21: Class 10:

Course Wrap-Up

Reading:

- One news article based on current events to be assigned a few days before class—TBD.

In-class activity:

- Discussion of current event article
- Discussion of the course experience
- Student evaluations
- Last questions on final paper projects

Afternoon activity: none—free time in Budapest

Assignments:

- Finish and submit your final paper on democratic backsliding
- Write and submit your final reflection paper

Saturday-Monday, June 22-24:

Free Time

[NOTE: Next course starts on Tuesday, June 25]