West European Comparative Politics  
Spring 2012

Lecturer: Prof. PhDr. Lenka Rovná, CSc.,  
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Mondays & Wednesdays 10:30 – 11:50

Course description:

The course West European Comparative Politics will concentrate on the analysis of the pursuits of democracy in Western Europe. Firstly, the conception of Europe will be explored in its historical perspective and different perceptions: territorial, political, spiritual, cultural etc. Secondly, the characterizing social cleavages of Europe will be introduced: territorial, economic, religious, national, ethnic etc. Furthermore, we will discuss how these cleavages get expressed in the formation of different social interests and lead to the organization of interests groups, political parties and NGOs. Thirdly, turning towards the institutional structures of West European parliamentary democracies, we will address the existence of political party systems, as well as the executive and legislative powers represented by government and parliament. Fourthly, we will explore the rules and outcomes of different electoral systems, which ensure regular rotation of political elites at power – however, under different principles. Finally, we will assess the enrichment of the classical models of government in Western Europe, which have in the last 20 years been supplemented by additional players participating in the decision making processes on different levels (local, regional, national and European) – leading to new political conceptualization of ‘governance’.

Also, while European states remain core units of European integration, they are also influenced by the EU, leading to their Europeanization. The political systems of Great Britain, France and Germany as case studies will be examined. Special attention will be devoted to the emergence of the political system of the Czech Republic as a representative of new member states of the EU. The new challenges facing Western Europe, such as globalization, financial crisis, continuing European integration, regionalization, restructuring of social welfare systems and the issues of identity, will be discussed.

Every student will be responsible for:

1) Class Participation
Each student will prepare for class by doing the designated readings and actively participating in class discussions. Two unexcused absences can be tolerated.

2) Midterm exam (April 2)
The midterm exam will cover material up to the exam and will consist of a mixture of short identification questions and essays.
3) **Paper (May 10)**
Each student will write an 8-page (double-spaced) comparative research paper. Each student will select two political parties belonging to the same party family (social-democratic, conservative, liberal, green etc.), however, from a different Western European country (you may for example compare British Labour and Swedish SAP). The paper will then compare the parties’ political views. How are the visions and policy prescriptions of these two parties similar or different? Why? How do their views fit the general values of their party family? You may narrow your comparison to a specific policy area. Quotations and the complete list of sources are compulsory.

4) **Final exam (May 21)**
The final exam will be cumulative and will consist of short answer identification questions and essay questions.

**Requirements for the class:**
- Midterm exam          20 %
- Paper (8 pages)       30%
- Final exam            20%
- Participation in the class 30%

**February 13**        Introduction

**February 22**        Cleavages in Western Europe, religious, ethnic, economic, social…., in: Jan Eric Lane and Svante Ersson, Politics and Society in Western Europe, Sage Publication, London, 1999, pp. 37 – 75

**February 27**        Political Parties, in: Jan Eric Lane and Svante Ersson, Politics and Society in Western Europe, Sage Publication, London, 1999, pp. 76 - 108


in: Edited by Paul Heywood, Erik Jones and Martin Rhodes, Developments in West European Politics 2, Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2002, pp. 94 – 114


March 12  From Government to Governance, in: Edited by Paul Heywood, Erik Jones and Martin Rhodes, Developments in West European Politics 2, Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2002, pp. 151 - 183


March 28  Revision of the subject of the course

April 2  Midterm Exam


April 30, May 2, 7  Political System of the Czech Republic in comparative perspective, East or West? Home is best., in: Readings will be given by the instructor

May 9  New Challenges for Europe, Towards a post-national polity? in: Dennis Smith and Sue Wright, Whose Europe? The turn towards democracy, Blackwell publisher, Oxford, 1999, pp. 173 – 206 + additional readings given by the instructor

May 14  Western Europe and the USA, mutual challenges, The Economist + additional readings given by the instructor

May 17  Revision of the subject of the course

May 21  Final Exam