

CESTA through the History of Central Europe

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Course description & objectives

“Central Europe” is an elusive concept that has been subjected to frequent changes. What is Central Europe and how it relates to Western and Eastern Europe? Should Central Europe be confined to the Visegrad Group countries only (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia) or should other countries, such as Germany or Romania, be also considered Central European? And is it important at all?

Central Europe, no matter how defined, has over the past one thousand years shared with the rest of Europe most of the history’s ups and downs. The region usually reacted to economic, social, political and cultural developments originating further west, but sometimes it also actively contributed, such as when it comes to the 19th and 20th century philosophy, music, arts and science.

The main purpose of the course is to provide the Central European history since circa AD 900 with a proper context and to help students understand the most important factors, trends and developments that have been influencing the lives of Central Europeans and the changing designs of their states and governments. This may ultimately lead to a stimulating debate on whether there is actually any tangible ground for carving up a region called “Central Europe” and contrasting it to both Western and Eastern Europe.

Rather than simply narrating Central European history in the usual chronological fashion, the course will focus on important concepts, ideas and phenomena that formed the history of the region. The course will thus deal with such issues as nationalism and self-determination, medieval Christianity and state-building, reformation and counter-reformation, modernisation and radical ideologies, and 20th century geopolitics.

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What is Central Europe? Central Europe as an “imagined region” and the many 20th century concepts of Central Europe

Session 2

The arrival of Christianity and the formation of early-medieval monarchies in Central Europe

Session 3

Medieval modernisation: The Grand Colonization of the 12th to 14th centuries

Session 4

Imperium Christianum and Central Europe: Ideas and practice of medieval society and statehood

Session 5

The medieval and early modern “Golden Eras” of Central European states and their role in the 19th century nationalist mythmaking

Session 6

Reformation and counter-reformation in Central Europe: The power of faith and the faith of power

Session 7

Defending the West/Europe/Christianity/Civilisation: The sources of Central European Messianism

Session 8

From “land patriotism” to modern nationalism: What does a “nation” mean in Central Europe and how the modern Central European nations were formed

Session 9

The 19th century modernisation in Central Europe: Politics, society, economy

Session 10

The Wilsonian laboratory: The principle of national self-determination and its application in Central Europe

Session 11

Radical modernism: The 20th century political ideologies in Central Europe

Session 12

The curse of geography (?): Central Europe in the 20th century European politics