

## **Call for Papers**

### **Asymmetry and Emotions**

#### **Germany, Austria and Post-Communist Central Europe since 1989**

**Charles University, Prague (Faculty of Social Sciences)**

**22 March 2022**

Torn between the East and the West for decades by the Cold War after 1945, Central Europe once more became a geographical unit after the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989. The former communist bloc countries of Central Europe, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland found themselves in a specific situation, situated on the European seam between Western wealth, success and power and Eastern post-communist failure, misery and helplessness. The asymmetry was enormous, not only in terms of 'hard' macroeconomic and sociological statistics, but also in the cultural interpretation of it. As direct neighbours of Germany and Austria, the citizens of the post-communist states experienced the economic gap between their societies and the developed Western capitalist democracies virtually on a daily basis. Conversely, tourists, businessmen, and politicians from these Western countries were able to acquire new experience of the hitherto rather mysterious and backward 'East'. Encompassing former communist states and capitalist democracies, the wider region of Central Europe became a European laboratory of convergence, as a space of deep and frequently experienced asymmetry.

However, historiography has paid relatively little attention to this feature of Central Europe since 1989, looking instead for more homogeneous spatial forms, such as the Visegrad Group and East-Central/Eastern Europe, or embedding Central Europe into a broader European or global context. By contrast, scholars have focused heavily on interior conflicts between West Germany and the former German Democratic Republic within the unified Germany, interpreting the partially divergent character of the society in terms of the unprocessed historical baggage of long dictatorial rule and also the persistent power asymmetry and discursive 'othering' between West and East Germany. Here, the two sides of the East-West border that had divided one nation were expected to grow together 'naturally' once the border disappeared. But what if we redirect this debate towards Central Europe, which consists of more nations and states across the former Iron Curtain? The weight and wealth of Germany and Austria and the weakness and shortages in their immediate vicinity of the transforming post-communist societies also elicited a number of interactions and reactions, some of which were rational and win-win, whereas some were emotional, conflicting and centrifugal. While a growing pool of literature has focused on the diplomatic relations and politics of reconciliation between post-communist states such as Poland, Czechoslovakia (Czech and Slovak Republics) and Hungary on the one side, and (West) Germany and Austria on the other, there has been little research into the role of emotions in the recent history of this region.

Therefore, our aim is to scrutinize this uneven relationship between the states and societies of post-communist Central Europe and Germany and Austria, not from the perspective of classical history of international relations, or political or economic history, but rather to examine the role of emotions in reflecting, constructing and offsetting this asymmetry in Central Europe since 1989. Admiration and contempt, hopes and fears, satisfaction and privation were but a few of the constitutive emotions produced by these relations. Historical stereotypes and traumas constituted another dimension. Moreover, while the different discursive environments and state sovereignties make the situation distinct from that of unified Germany, European integration has worked towards a shared framework, reducing some asymmetries, but also reinforcing others.

Some suggested possible themes in the study of asymmetry and emotions in Central Europe across the former East-West divide since 1989 are listed below:

Asymmetry and emotions in people-to-people relations

Perception, stereotypization and medialization of asymmetry

Political practices of and narratives on asymmetry

Reflection of asymmetry in arts and cultural representations

Practices of asymmetry in economic relations

Asymmetry and constructions of sovereignty

The workshop is organized by Assoc. Prof. Ota Konrád and Dr. Václav Šmidrkal (Department of German and Austrian Studies, Institute of International Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University, Prague) in cooperation with the Research Centre for the History of Transformations (RECET) at the University of Vienna. It will either take place in Prague or will be a hybrid event, depending on the COVID-19 situation. The working language is English. Limited funds are available for travel costs and accommodation.

**The keynote lecture will be given by Prof. Dr. Philipp Ther (University of Vienna).**

Please send proposals of a maximum of 300 words and a short biographical statement by **31 December 2021** to [vaclav.smidrkal@fsv.cuni.cz](mailto:vaclav.smidrkal@fsv.cuni.cz). Successful applicants will be notified shortly after the submission deadline.