



CALL FOR PAPERS

Party, Security Services, and Government Archives in International Perspective: Perceptions of Society at the Top in East Central Europe, 1945–1981

1-2 December 2016, Prague

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Deadline: 31.05.2016

Studies of GDR and Soviet communism have amply demonstrated that a permanent negotiation process was at play between rulers and ruled. Communist authorities were keen on legitimizing their domination and on keeping the political and social situation under control. They were deeply concerned with the approbation, or lack thereof, that the “public”, “citizens”, “ordinary people” or “workers” might have conferred to its policies. The violent protests that periodically emerged (1953 in the GDR, 1956 in Hungary, 1956, 1968, 1970, 1976 or 1980-81 in Poland, for instance) confirmed that stability was the most desirable state for regimes that maintained themselves by force – or by the threat to use force. Discussions at the top and decisions to ensure a certain well-being of the population are thus easy to trace and analyze.

On the other hand, people accepted this rule at conditions which they negotiated to some extent (“I sign this paper, but you let my child go to university”; “I write reports on this colleague but you promote me to the position which I deserve”; “I join the party but you let me buy this plot of land to build my house”, etc.) and sometimes even participated themselves to the repression policy (denunciations, membership in the Militia, etc.), so much so that the border between the ruler and the ruled ran through each individual. A “tacit minimum consensus” (Thomas Lindenberger) was established between both parties and to study the very notion of “popular opinion” (Paul Corner) becomes indispensable if we are to understand what happened under communism - and beyond.

By studying the degree of interest from the regime concerning its own popularity on the basis of Party (Politburo, but also Central Committee and even regional and local archives), Security Services or other types of archives (national institutes of public opinion, ministries, etc.), this workshop’s aim is to reflect on the exercise of power and popular opinion under the communist regimes. Our approach is centred around the notions of social history of domination, everyday life, Herrschaft (domination), Eigen-Sinn (agency), sociology of actors, practices of domination, etc. It is by nature interdisciplinary and is combining a historical approach “from below” (i.e. centred on the population in all aspects of everyday life) with a study of decision-making by the elites.

This international workshop is the first of three conferences to be held in the frame of the research project *Rulers and Ruled in Poland and Czechoslovakia (1945–1968): Practical and Methodological Challenges in the Historicization of a Complex Relationship* financed by the Grant Academy of the Czech Republic. While the project is expressly dedicated to Poland and Czechoslovakia and to the period 1945–1968, we encourage for comparative purposes the submission of papers dealing with other countries of East Central Europe and with post-1968 period. Selected texts from this workshop will be included in the final, eponymous collective publication of the project. We invite interested scholars to send a 300 to 500 words abstract and a short bio to Muriel Blaive and Nicolas Maslowski at muriel.blaive@gmail.com and nicolas.maslowski@gmail.com. Advanced PhD students and fresh post-docs will also be considered. Travel and accomodation, as well as part of the meals, will be provided.