

The Tenth Anniversary of CEFRES in Prague

The French Centre for Research in the Social Sciences (CEFRES) of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs was established in Prague ten years ago (www.cefres.cz). The centre has two main missions: the representation of the French social sciences in the Czech Republic (and more widely in Central Europe) and the constitution of an observatory of the transformations that have taken place since the end of the Soviet-type system. Successively, under the direction of Marie-Elizabeth Ducreux, Françoise Mayer, Antoine Marès, and most recently Georges Mink, CEFRES has organised approximately 23 international conferences, 50 round table meetings, and more than 200 conferences, and it has hosted 58 PhD students (21 supported theses, several about to be completed). CEFRES has also published 29 studies in its collection '*Cahiers du CEFRES*' (mostly in French and Czech), and 20 working papers ('*Documents de travail*', in French). In addition, two members of CEFRES have produced documentary films.

In honour of its tenth anniversary, in March 2002 CEFRES organised a conference on the topic 'social sciences in the face of post-communism', in which French, Czech, Slovak, Hungarian and Polish researchers from various fields (history, sociology, political science, geography, demography and economy) participated. They assessed the consequences the post-communist period has held for their fields, the development of subjects, and the use of sources and theoretical tools.

The conference opened with inaugural statements by three personalities of Central Europe active in dissent before 1989. Jan Sokol (philosopher and currently Dean of the Faculty of Human Studies, University Charles) presented a kind of warning addressed at the younger generation, which arguably lacks an appreciation of the value of freedom. Elemér Hankiss (sociologist, member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences) added a rather nostalgic assessment of the emergence of the 'ideas of the past' (implying those of the former dissidents). He drew a picture of the evolution of the social identity of the intellectuals engaged in sharp debates on politics and society before 1989 and

now entrenched in the role of experts. Adam Michnik (historian and currently head of the daily newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza*) had no regrets about the type of sociological research conducted during the time of the 'totalitarian constraint'; but underlined the fact that the social sciences had left 'heroic' endeavours behind them and that they are now working in normal conditions which should enable them to be considered equal to 'Western' social sciences.

The current director of CEFRES, George S. Mink (CNRS-LASP), who opened the conference, initiated a discussion about the role of researchers during times of change. He recalled the principal attitudes that social science students adopted with regard to the change in 1989. First, researchers are victims of the 'complex of preaching' amidst the sudden breakdown of communism. Second, this phenomenon was accompanied by distress vis-à-vis the event itself. Third, if communism had caused a questioning of sociology of action, in the sense of Alain Touraine, post-communism was accompanied by the strong reintroduction of Bourdieu's theory of capitals. Though East European researchers do not miss the debate on paradigms, it should be recalled that Włodimierz Wesolowski from Poland and Ivan Szelényi from Hungary were at the source of the development of a sociology of the elites, while the application of the theory of path dependency to institutional actors was developed in particular by Laszlo Bruszt, a Hungarian sociologist. In these terms, Mink began the debate on the function of researchers during this time of change.

The conference continued with seven meetings, most of which were chaired by the former directors (Marie-Elizabeth Ducreux, EHESS, Françoise Mayer, University of Montpellier, Antoine Marès, INALCO). The contributions were oriented around three main discussion points: first, post-communism did not cause 'trauma' (we are referring to the title of Miloslav Petrussek's contribution, 'The Traumatism of Czech Sociology') in the social sciences from the point of view of the development of the discipline; second, it did not cause a paradigmatic revolution; and third, it implies a fine analysis of diversity and ambivalence towards the legacies of the past.

From the point of view of the disciplines, the Czech historian Oldřich Tůma (director of the Institute of Contemporary History, Academy of Sciences) stressed the consequences (deontological in particular) that historians could encounter with the opening of the Communist archives, and the possible political uses of history, thus initiating a wide-ranging and animated debate. The Czech sociologist Miloslav Petrušek, and the Hungarian politologist Peter Kende met in the analysis of their respective disciplines. They showed that sociology, like political science, had particularly been marked by the rupture that the imposition of Marxism-Leninism in the social sciences had signified in general. For Petrušek it is moreover here that the principal trauma of Czech sociology is found, in particular since 1970 and the policy of 'normalisation'. Nevertheless, he specified that the normalisation of sciences did not lead to the institutional disappearance of this discipline – in contrast to Peter Kende's report on political science – but to an impoverishment of the discipline through the ousting of the best sociologists. He mentioned the isolation of Czech sociology in both the Eastern and the Western countries, whereas Peter Kende underlined the way in which Western social sciences fed 'the intellectual challenge to communism during the two last decades of the regime of János Kádár'.

The situation of these two disciplines was thus distinct in 1990: Hungary could be characterised as having experienced a revival of political science, both from the point of view of teaching and research, while in the Czech lands institutional structures were preserved and the 'velvet revolution' prevented 'sociologists-normalisers from being traumatised'. Finally, the two speakers converged towards the idea that their disciplines treated the new social 'traumas' in the Czech case (unemployment, reduction of privileges for certain categories, particular use of privatisation, rising criminality and the appearance of new forms of social deviances), and the 'singularities of the Hungarian policy' (an ideological cleavage between a nationalism strong in discourse but intellectually weak and the current liberal-universalist dominating, strong abstentionism, the volatility of the electorate and governmental clientelism). The Slovak politologist Miroslav Kusý (Faculty of Letters of Komenský

University in Bratislava) mentioned the delay of his discipline in this country and its re-depreciation, owing in particular to the fact that journalists are usurping the legitimacy of the politologists.

From a theoretical point of view, the period of post-communism did not bring about the creation of new paradigms or new schools of thought. On the other hand, it carried out a re-evaluation of those existing in the perspective of the processes of transformation or the absence of phenomena that were expected, such as the consolidation of 'new social movements' (Michel Wieviorka) and 'the emergence of a civil society' (Dominique Colas). The economist Bernard Chavance (University of Paris VII), and the geographer Marie-Claude Maurel (EHESS, Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales) presented the two principal theoretical currents, which were mobilised in the analysis of the transformations post-socialists take into consideration in their subject of study. Their problems in common related to the manner of apprehending the legacies of the past. Marie-Claude Maurel concluded with the fact that 'the post-socialist transformation would be accompanied by a re-arrangement of the regional structure through the modification of relative positions'. According to Bernard Chavance, there was no uniform evolution of the economic situations. The economist criticised the doctrine of transition and its theory of convergence and indicated also some evolutionist approaches, which in his view seem to neglect the importance of 'futurity' i.e. the weight of the actors' anticipations in a context of 'systemic uncertainty' and their role in 'path shaping'.

Another issue came up in several contributions. This concerned the way of restoring at the same time the heterogeneity of the socialist past and its effects on the current period. The politologist Dominique Colas (IEP, Paris), the sociologist Michel Wieviorka (EHESS), and the demographer Alain Blum (EHESS-INED) dealt with this topic. Indeed, Dominique Colas recalled the way in which two contemporary intellectuals, the Polish philosopher Leszek Kolakowski and the anthropologist Ernest Gellner, approached the Soviet-type system through the concept of 'civil society'. While for Kolakowski civil society relates to the part of society that

Marxist theory melted into the political society, thus providing totalitarianism with legitimation, for Gellner it indicates a specific type of society. Dominique Colas showed that for Gellner civil society was the type of society in which the economy is at the same time separate from the remainder of society but maintains a position of high priority, and in addition where coercion is practised by a Weberian type of state. It nonetheless seems to Dominique Colas that the post-communist situations are turning more to the opposition pointed out by the politologists Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato, between the political civil society and the non-political civil society.

Michel Wieviorka, who attempted to draw up an assessment of the theories on the new social movements, beginning with the communist and post-communist experiments, also treated this articulation between the social and the political. He in fact defended the thesis of the attenuation of social movements following the end of communism as a result of the disappearance of a single political adversary. Focusing in particular on the Russian case, he presented the assumption of the 'rejection of any project of change through collective action', i.e. a kind of 'exhaustion of the political'. He believes that this phenomenon marks the failure of the theories of resource mobilisation whereby authors can link social and political spheres. In addition he underlined the limits of 'Tourainian sociology'. Alain Blum, while also analysing Russia, arrived at the 'significant synchronism in the Soviet space from the point of view of social dynamics', thus demonstrating the shift between Russia and Central and Eastern Europe. His approach, cutting across sociology and history, tends toward an understanding of how the 'ascribing identities', particularly according to the categories of Soviet administration, are integrated and re-evaluated in the construction of individual biographical identities. Distinct from statutes, positions or social classes, they in fact translate the heterogeneity of practices and trajectories that could exist under this type of system.

The conference allowed a connection to be made between different disciplines in the social sciences and a synthesis of the contributions to the understanding of post-communism. This prospect was also dealt with in the two round tables which began and ended the conference

and which discussed, respectively, the creation of a European research space and the contribution of the research centres to training in the social sciences. The following individuals spoke about these topics: the geographer Violette Rey (École normale supérieure de Fontenay), the politologist Jacques Rupnik (CERI-Paris), Lenka Rovná (titular of the Jean Monnet Chair), Jean-Yves Potel, cultural adviser of the Embassy from France in Warsaw, previous and current doctoral students affiliated with various research centres (Catherine Perron, CEFRES, Dorota Dakowska, Centre Marc Bloch of Berlin, Jérôme Heurtaux, Atelier of Social Sciences of Warsaw, EHES), the director of the Centre Marc Bloch of Berlin, Catherine Colliot-Thélène, the vice-rector of the College of Europe of Natolin, Piotr Nowinka-Konopka. Also contributing were individuals in charge of French institutions with which partnerships have been established: Christian Lequesne, director of CERI, and Gérard Wild, a researcher at CEPPI (Centre d'études prospectives et d'informations internationales).

The conference also made it possible to draw up an assessment of the field of social sciences as it stands more than ten years after the fall of the Soviet-type systems. It gave rise to the idea that researchers in various disciplines confronted similar problems and had recourse to many common theoretical referents. It also indicated the interest in comparative settings and empirical research, in order to grasp the entire complexity of post-communism. Finally through this international conference, CEFRES demonstrated that it plays an experimental role in the area, 'synergising' with other centres. It contributes in particular to the co-operation between French researchers and researchers from other countries of the EU or applicant countries from the point of view of the establishment of a European research space.

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