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Charles University

Department of Oral History – Contemporary History

Final State Exam Requirements

Final exam is composed from three parts: 1) defense of thesis; 2) oral exam specialized in contemporary history; 3) oral exam in methodology (oral history, historiography and qualitative research).

1) Thesis Defense

Students begin with introduction of their thesis (approx. 10 minutes), then the word is given to supervisor and reviewer and their reviews. After that students can defend their thesis and open discussion among all participants of the Final State Exam follows.

After the Thesis Defence and other two parts of the Final State Exam the committee asks student to leave the room and decides on results, which are then announced to student.

2) Contemporary History Research: Theory and Practice

Methodological part of the exam tests student's ability to present in an appropriate way and to apply in broader context knowledge necessary for contemporary history research which he/she gained primarily in various courses of oral history, qualitative research, historiography, and other methodological subjects. Questions to this part of the exam are formulated relatively widely with regard to an interdisciplinary character of methods, usually with respect to the student's thesis topic. Here the evaluation focuses on knowledge of current trends of research and research literature.

3) Contemporary History in the Czech and International Context

This part of the final exam checks depth and range of knowledge in the contemporary history branch. The Committee asks one question from each part of the list stated below (history; methodology). When answering the question, student should consider not only the topic, but also social and political developments in the domestic or international context. Finally, members of the Committee ask complementary questions. In the evaluation the impact is placed

José Martího 31, Prague 6 - Veleslavín
telephone: (+420) 220 172 429
e-mail: Jana.Markupova@fhs.cuni.cz
<http://ohsd.fhs.cuni.cz/>



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not only to factual knowledge but also to basic orientation in a historiographical production to the topic.

To prepare for an oral examination each student will be provided with a preparation time of at least 30 minutes. Each part of the final exam is evaluated separately. Based on the assessment of individual exam parts the chairman of the Commission assesses the score of the final exam.



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Contemporary History Research: Theory and Practice

1. Research institutions and archives relevant for contemporary history topics
2. Typology of scientific literature and sources on issues of contemporary history
3. Professionalization of historical studies (classical historicism)
4. French school Annales
5. Historiography and the postmodern challenge
6. Qualitative research and its characteristics (basic concepts, methods, their application)
7. Emic and ethnic perspective in qualitative research
8. Design of a qualitative research; its phases
9. Biographical and narrative research
10. Memory studies: collective memory and identity
11. Development of oral history at home and abroad (institutions, projects, countries, leading persons)
12. Oral history pros and cons; specifics of the oral history method
13. Interview method in oral history
14. Oral history analysis and interpretation
15. Oral history research – its ethical and legislative questions



Contemporary History in the Czech and International Context

- 1. Cold War as a global phenomenon of the period** (definition; historiographical points of view – traditionalism, revisionism, post-revisionism; chronology; crucial milestones and epicenters; Cold War impact on international as well as internal relationships; consequences for the Czech Republic)
- 2. Formation of “people’s democracy” regimes in the Central Europe 1945–1948** (definition and characteristics of the so called people’s democracy; assessment of the situation in Central European countries after the World War II – political, socio-economic and cultural conditions; specific example of development in a selected country; historical alternatives – e.g. reflection on the question “Was it inevitable for Czechoslovakia to end up in the rank of the Eastern Bloc?”)
- 3. The Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc regimes in last years of the Stalin era 1947–1953** (Stalin and his position within the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc after 1945; summary of the principles of his policy towards the countries of the Eastern Bloc: pacts, contracts, economy, military and security forces, processes, culture, communist party; reasons for ruptures with selected countries of the Eastern Bloc; matter and role of Stalin’s legacy)
- 4. Forms of de-Stalinization and crisis of the communist regimes in 1950s and 1960s** (summary of Stalin’s succession issues; basic features of de-Stalinization and its most prominent landmarks; why did occur a crisis of communist regimes; a brief comparison of examples of de-Stalinization of the countries – Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia; matter and role of Stalin’s legacy)
- 5. Countries of the West in the Cold War era and in the first phase of the so called welfare society 1945–1960** (listing the Western countries examples; summary of the situation after the World War II; characteristics of changes in relationships between the USA and Western Europe; convergence reasons, new organizational structures, e.g. UN, UNRRA, the Marshall Plan, NATO, the European Community...; brief characteristics of development in a selected country and its “welfare society”)



6. **Countries of the West in the 1960s** (what are the countries of the West; what are they 1960s flying together; characteristics of their relations toward the countries of the East; the most significant events and processes; summary of the development on the example of a selected country; 1960s in memories and the “myth of 1960s”)
7. **Domestic and international social context of the Hungarian Revolution (1956) and the Prague Spring** (Hungary in 1950s as a part of the Eastern Bloc – a brief political, economic and social characteristics; cause of the revolution, its process and outcome; Czechoslovakia in 1960s as a part of the Eastern Bloc – a brief social, economic and social characteristics; causes of “warming” its course and outcome; comparison of the two revolutions (common and different features); discussion: “What would happen if they were successful revolutions...?”)
8. **„Hot“ crisis of the Cold War** (Cold War definition; which crisis can be considered as „hot“ and why; the most important geopolitical epicenters of these crises; a selected „hot“ crisis – brief description of its causes, course and outcome, comparison with other „hot“ crises; discussion – „What had happened if the crisis would have run in another way“?)
9. **Life of the young generation in 1940s** (characteristics of the 1940s young generation, terms “baby boomers”, “teenager generation”; education, hobbies, experiences, possibilities of employment and career development; influence of courses of thought, their impact on social engagement; targets of criticism, responses of authorities and regimes; the most important youth performances; common characteristics and specifics between East and West)
10. **The year 1968 in an international comparison** (the most significant events and processes; representation of a selected event or process; global impact of these events and differences in their perception between East and West; memory of the year 1968 and its impact on the following decades)
11. **Czechoslovak “normalization” as a research topic of contemporary history** (explanation of the concept of “normalization”: is it a specific period or the second period of the totalitarian regime?; can be years 1948–1986 and 1969–1989 interpreted



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as establishment – failure – decline; and the period after the year 1968, after the military intervention of the Warsaw Pact armies for mere survival mode of the regime?; how to define the time of the so called normalization?)

- 12. The period of “détente” – 1970s** (relations between the USA and the USSR in 1970s – basic outlines; radicalization and terrorism in Europe as new phenomena – Ireland, the Red Brigades, RAF, etc.; Brandt’s Eastern politics, its impact on Czechoslovakia; peace conference in Helsinki in 1975 and its impact on Czechoslovakia)
- 13. The purges in the Czechoslovak Communist Party and in the society at the beginning of 1970s** (political and economic emigration; range of purges – can it be compared with other periods of the Czechoslovak Communist Party existence? purges in other social organizations)
- 14. Opposition in “normalized” Czechoslovakia in the early 1970s** (from the petition “Deset bodů” (Ten Points) to the Charter 77; specifics of the opposition at the turn of 1960s and 1970s; the Charter 77 dissidents and the “apolitical politics” of Vaclav Havel; assignment of criminal penalties to Chartists; criticism from within the Charter 77, the Charter 77 and East European opposition)
- 15. Czechoslovak society in 1970s** (social policy in the real socialism period, Husak’s children and economic situation in Czechoslovakia compared to situation in neighboring states of the Eastern Bloc; the so called socio-pathological phenomena in the society as a phenomena caused by the “normalization”: cottage subculture, corruption and the gray economy)
- 16. Since the end of “détente” to the onset of Gorbachev in the USSR** (relations between the USA and the USSR in the early 1980s; the war in Afghanistan; election of John Paul II as Pope; deployment of intermediate range missiles in Europe; Reagan’s and Thatcher’s politics toward the USSR)
- 17. Gorbatshev’s perestroika and its impact on the Czechoslovak Communist Party’s policy** (the Czechoslovak Communist Party (CPC) in the late 1980s: monolith or groups of competing handles? Gorbatshev’s visit to Prague in 1987 – expectations and reality; election of the CPC Secretary General Jakeš – search for Gorbachev in



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Czechoslovak conditions; emancipation of the state administration towards the CPC Central Committee: Adamec, pragmatists–Stepan versus “idealists- Marxist believers” –Jakes)

- 18. „Islands of freedom“ and phenomenon of the youth generation in Czechoslovakia** (lives of young people in 1980s; opposition in the official state structures – examples of SSM (Socialist Union of Youth/Socialistický svaz mládeže), Rockfest, folk festival Porta, Brontosaurus; unofficial independent organization of youth – comparison with neighboring countries, compare for example Polish WiP or with Pomerančová alternativa/Orange alternative)
- 19. Year of miracles – 1989** (development in Czechoslovakia compared to other countries of the former Eastern Bloc; especially: Hungarian development in 1989, negotiations with the opposition MSDS; Solidarity in Poland – from independent trade unions to the first non-communist government; exodus of East Germans to the West; impact of international events on the Czechoslovak public)
- 20. Manifestations and demonstrations in Czechoslovakia in 1989** (from the Palach week till the Velvet Revolution 1989; radicalization of the Czech society – illusion or reality?; how to evaluate the change in attitude to demonstrations of some independent civic initiatives? Several Sentences (Několik vět) petition and ecological demonstration for improving the environment in Czechoslovakia)
- 21. Split of Czechoslovakia: causes and actors** (emphasis on policy and requirements of Meciar and Carnogursky; development and major frictions between the two national units; break up of federation after the 1992 elections; characteristics of differences between the Czech and Slovak political representations; comparison of economic structures in both countries of federation in the early 1990s)
- 22. „Coping with communism“: way of transformation of the Czechoslovak Communist Party** (comparison with transformation of former ruling parties in neighboring Central European countries – Poland, Hungary, East Germany; Jiri Svoboda’s policy, causes of his failure plus “coping” on a society-wide level, i.e. lustration law, Act



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of lawlessness of the communist regime, Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, disputes about the third resistance etc.)

- 23. Disintegration of Yugoslavia** (characteristics of main causes of the conflict; frictions between Serbs and other nationalities, mainly Croats; characteristics of main actors; detail description of the conflict and its outcome in one of the countries of the former federation – Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina; way of involving of international forces into the conflict)
- 24. Civic Forum (Občanské fórum): formation, evolution and extinction** (characteristics of Civic Forum (OF) internal structure – vertical or horizontal axis?; differentiation: a political movement vs. political party; origins of contradictions – characteristics of MKDP and Liberal Club; description of the Civic Forum transformation promoted by Klaus, description of main events that culminated in OF extinction)
- 25. Post-Cold War world** (different ideas about the post-Cold War world among social scientists – Huntington, Fukuyama, Zakaria etc.; based on student's own choice he/she will describe the main differences, appreciate different approaches, and methods of conflict resolutions in 1990s and in “zero” years in terms of the international law: the Gulf War, the bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999, Afghanistan and Iraq – the role of the USA)
- 26. Economic transformation of Czechoslovakia after 1989** (characteristics of principles of the so-called small privatization and the so called big privatization; description of different scenarios – Vlasak's and Klaus's, Slovak way, Komarek's concept; legal ensuring; question of the state bank sector; the issue of funds and restitutions)
- 27. The Middle East region: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict** (main problems of the region; Israeli settlements in the West Bank, the questions of Jerusalem; refugees; international dimension of the conflict – Palestine's status and Israel's dissenting opinion, mediation attempts by the USA, e.g. Camp David negotiations; student, in the case of interest, can reflect in a detail domestic or international political development in some of the countries in the region – Iran, Lebanon, Syria, etc.)



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- 28. The disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics** (Gorbachev's policy and reasons for dissatisfaction within the USSR; genesis of becoming independent of individual union republics; characteristics of causes of the attempted coup in August 1991; Yeltsin and characteristics of his power base and policy; chronology of the USSR collapse)
- 29. Political and constitutional development in the Czech Republic after the breakup of the Czechoslovak federation** (characteristics of the 1992 Constitution – structure of legislative bodies, characteristics of presidential powers, powers of the Prime Minister, differences between the Czech and Slovak Constitutions etc.; student, according to his/her own choice, characterizes in more detail some political event in 1990s – the so called opposition agreement, the economic crisis culminating in the fall of the Vaclav Klaus's government in 1997 etc.)
- 30. November revolution (Velvet Revolution) in Czechoslovakia** (immediate course of November and December days; OF (Civil Forum/Občanské fórum) and VPN (Public against Violence/Verejnost' proti násiliu) negotiations with Prime Minister Adamec; formation of Calfa's government; extraordinary congress of the Czechoslovak Communist Party; the presidential election and its background; approval of the first democratic laws; cooptation and election campaign for elections in 1990)