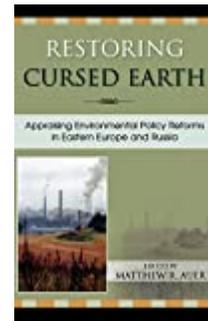




**Matthew R. Auer, ed.** *Restoring Cursed Earth: Appraising Environmental Policy Reforms in Eastern Europe and Russia*. Lanham and Boulder: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004. viii + 192 pp. \$70.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7425-2915-1.



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## **Post-Communist States of Eastern Europe and Problems with Improving their Environmental Policy: The Role of the Introduction of European Union Standards**

The fall of communism in Eastern Europe, facilitated by its collapse in the Soviet Union, caused fundamental societal changes that led from a rigidly directed economy to a modern approach to capitalism and a market economy. The process of transition from communism to capitalism is, in Czech literature, more precisely referred to as the “transformation.” However, it also deeply affected the sphere of environmental policy inherited from the preceding system. Identifying and characterizing these changes in connection and contradiction with the preparation for the enlargement of the European Union with Eastern European countries, which had just occurred in the year the reviewed book was released, is the main focus of the work. From the perspective of geographical delimitation of the studied region, the book’s subtitle proves to be rather imprecise. In fact, the book does not deal with all the countries of Eastern Europe (while “eastern” is understood here as a political term), but with only some of them, namely with two Central and East European states: the Czech Republic, (it has also an official geographical–i.e., short name, Czechia, which I highly

recommend to use) and Hungary (politically known as the Republic of Hungary). The Central Eastern Europe (hereafter “CEE”) region, however, furthermore consists of Poland, Slovenia, and Austria. The book then deals with one country from each of the following regions: Southeast Europe: Romania; Northeastern Europe: Estonia, and, finally, post-Soviet Russia.

The regionalization of Eastern Europe, I suggest, is not a merely formal geographical delineation. In (European) geography, the entire area of Central Europe as a rule also includes Austria, Germany, and Switzerland. Each of the East European sub-regions mentioned here distinguishes itself with particular historical, economic, and cultural development, with specific socio-economic and physical-geographical characteristics as well as different geopolitical and geo-economic positions. All of these positions have been changing over time and space, constituting an enormously important factor in the regional development. The forty-year-long activity of the Soviet mode of communism, however, erased certain dif-

ferences between the countries, or, to be more precise, left behind traces that are common to all states of the former Soviet block. With regard to studying the given topic in the context of the development of the European Union (EU), the book would be more methodically unified if it focused on those of CEE countries that joined the EU in 2004, i.e., Czechia, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and Slovenia. For the purpose of comparison it would be valuable to add Estonia, and as a model of a non-EU country, Russia. The key country of Central East Europe, Poland, is not covered in the book as it has already been sufficiently addressed (p. 30). However, it would be worthwhile to add a brief chapter containing an overview of crucial knowledge and compare Poland especially with Czechia, a country whose industry was, in terms of energy production, based on coal-generated electricity and heavy industry, as in Poland. The agriculture of the two countries did however differ fundamentally, as collectivization barely happened in Poland, where instead a system of very small farms was preserved, similar to the French model. The already controversial agricultural policy of the EU, subordinated to French interests, has been exposed to yet greater demands for subsidies after Poland joined the Union. The evident deficiency of the authors may also be indicated by the fact that of the book's seven chapters the editor Matthew Auer is the author of three and the co-author of another three chapters. Thus what we have here is nearly a monograph.

The chief research method applied by all the authors is institutional analysis, by means of which they attempt to explain environmental policy changes conditioned mainly by EU accession processes and the policy's outputs and debits for the period since 1989. A considerable deal of attention is paid to analyzing the rapid development of interactions between domestic and international environmental institutions, which in particular involves international assistance programs following the year 1989. The third theme is monitoring both the persistence and transformation of social institutions active in this sphere before 1989. The book documents that in the studied countries international cooperation and environmental agreements played a key role in the case of every transformation and formation of new environmental policy, and in the case of all new environmental institutions and organizations (state bodies, NGOs, etc.) aiming to serve environmental protection. Not all the chapters deal with all the above-mentioned fields, notably that of environmental reforms, though it is a focus of the chapters devoted to Czechia (chapter 2, by co-authors Susan Legro and M. Auer) and Estonia (chapter

5, by Matthew Auer). Chapter 3 on Hungary by Ruth G. Bell looks at the development of institutions whose task it is to support environmental protection. Chapter 4 by M. Cristina Novac and M. Auer deals with Romania and the use of forestry resources during the transformation era. All chapters have notes and bibliographies, which are a welcome source of information for readers. The editors should not be blamed for such a divided topical structure. A complex treatise on each of the states would require much more extensive articles if not a monograph. The editor has hinted here at the vastness of these fields that have as yet been left untouched by American historiography.

Joshua E. Abrams and Mathew Auer focus on post-Soviet Russia (chapter 6) and the particularly surprising development of interest of the Russian public in environmental issues, dating back to the Glasnost era. In my opinion, that corresponds with the devastated political culture of Russia's underdeveloped civic society and the continuing low living standard of the majority of the population, who seem to have, as the authors note, other worries—mainly survival. The methods of Western donors, which the book regards as wrong, did not force Russian environmental NGOs to deepen their mutual cooperation, but, on the contrary, to compete for those donations, detaching themselves from the real interests of common citizens. Auer states that, “With a weak civil society, along with little pressure being put on elected leaders to pay attention to environmental quality and politicians who are instinctively autocratic, prospects for meaningful environmental protection are perhaps more bleak in Russia than in any country in CEE” (p. 29). As regards Russia, I surprisingly did not find citation of a synthesis dealing with the history of nature protection there in the decades before fall of communism.[1]

The opening chapter by Auer deserves particular appraisal because such approach is not usually taken in our writings. It also contains a summary and generalization of knowledge and analytical conclusions from particular chapters, as well as facts from other published analyses regarding Poland and Ukraine (the reader misses relevant chapters on these themes). Taking into account the peculiarities of individual countries, the author assesses their environmental reforms in a chapter accurately titled, “Lessons from Leaders and Laggards”. In particular, he mentions three main issues the work raises: 1) What are the accomplishments and shortcomings of environmental reforms? 2) To what extent have external forces helped or hindered these reforms in Central and Eastern Europe? 3) Does accession of CEE countries to

the EU promise better environmental conditions in CEE and in Europe? (p. 1). Auer offers answers to these questions here. The structure of the analytical chapters, whose contents are briefly characterized in the conclusion of the opening chapter, have considerably helped him in achieving this (see pp. 28-30). Individual chapters, in addition, possess both analogical and atypical introductions, which readers would normally find at the end of the text. I believe that this unusual approach makes working with this book a lot easier.

Chapters are structured in topically delineated sub-sections, whose titles fittingly characterize the given themes, along with the inclusion of undoubtedly attractive sub-sections such as "Corruption," that should be welcomed by the readers. This dangerous societal phenomenon, massively developed in the early time of the transformation characteristically called "wild capitalism," penetrating the state administration like a cancer, at least in Czechia, discredits the whole transformation of the society in the minds of ordinary citizens. It warps the progress of the economic and social processes and the creation of new environmental legislation even if the conflict of interest, mentioned in the book, of today's President and former Prime Minister Václav Klaus and his wife, who in 1994 was appointed to the supervisory board of a state-owned monopoly that was producing and distributing electricity (see p. 56), need not necessarily influence the cabinet policy in the case of the Temelín nuclear power plant, as insisted here (see below). In the case of Czechia, other scandalous affairs are mentioned. Due to an ineffective (perhaps intentional?) act it was possible to declare imported diesel oil as the less heavily taxed light fuel oil, and subsequently sell the diesel oil on the Czech market as fuel oil, thus evading higher taxes. The tax difference, which totaled approximately three billion dollars ended up in the pockets of "oil dealers." This clearly criminal case has been dragging on until now and has even resulted in murders. It is symptomatic that after leaving his post, a minister, who is left unnamed in the book, was rewarded with a high position in today's largest, formerly state-owned, private insurance company.

In regards to primary sources, the authors, to a considerable extent, depended on assistants from the given countries, which proved adequate to meet the purpose of this work. Future potential research will, nonetheless, require personal involvement of on-the-spot research, primarily in archives and the vastness of literature published in national languages. An example of this is given in the chapter regarding Czechia, which strangely opens

with a sub-section about the least urgent local problem, the so-called light pollution. As in other chapters, this is supplemented with a relatively extensive bibliography, in which we will, however, find few works by Czech authors. I miss the book written in English by the renowned Czech human geographer active in the United States, Petr PavlÁnek,[2] or a book by Petr Jehlicka, published in the United Kingdom.[3] Some valuable data regarding environmental changes in Czechia after 1989 until 2000 has provided the basis for a rather statistical book published by Charles University Center for Environmental Studies.[4]

The sub-chapter of this Czechia chapter, "Nuclear Power and Accession Politics", omits the roots and causes of the acute need for the Temelin nuclear power plant (located in Southern Bohemia at a distance of about 90 kilometers from the frontier with Austria). It also neglects to discuss the necessity to change the energetic strategy of state to the benefit of nuclear energy, like the urgent need to improve the quality of air in Czechia, and consequently to reduce considerably soft coal mining and electricity production in coal burning power plants. In this case, the political and mainly economic interest of neighboring Austria (and of Austrian power utilities) was unified with the goals of radical ecologists, particularly of so-called direct action organizations. Therefore this issue as a whole should be approached in a broader context in order to encompass it more fully. Austria produces around 60 percent of electricity from rich water sources in mountain rivers of the Alps and Danube, and thus has not had many problems like those of Czechia described above. Czechia (a country situated on a low section of Europe's major watershed, with short upper streams of rivers), on the contrary, has to acquire an equal volume of electricity from thermal power plants that burn low-quality soft coal with high contents of sulfur. These are localized near deposits of such coal along northwestern Czechia's border with eastern Germany (Saxony).

In the 1980s, approximately eighty million tons of this type of coal were annually extracted, while on the German side the volume reached up to two hundred million tons a year, most of which was burnt in power plants located in that coal region. Air pollution in this area became unbearable, as there was a similar concentration of such power stations also in southwestern Poland. Thus, a region called "The Black Triangle" originated as one of Europe's most polluted regions. In Germany, the majority of these power plants were shut down after 1989; in contrast to Czechia, which exports surplus electricity. Despite the general de-sulphurization carried out in

the 1990s, Czech power stations participate in damaging the environment mostly by emitting carbon dioxide and powder particles. This occurs regardless of the fact that as a consequence of the structural transformation of the Czech industry, which was in the past strongly deformed “by the Stalinist steel concept of socialist economy,” coal mining volumes lowered by one-half.

I appreciate that in the case of Czechia, the authors did not forget to emphasize one important historical paradox. Before the year 1989, there were both official environmental organizations (directly controlled by the regime) and unofficial ones, often critical about the Communist regime and its environmental policy. Many of the latter organizations frequently belonged to the “grey zone” of political dissent. From 1989 onward, the new democratic regime, a conservative political establishment to be more precise, is ostracizing them again. That is quite logical in a state whose current president (Klaus) about a decade ago told the media that the greenhouse effect was the coinage of charlatans. He, moreover, insisted that natural resources become resources only when man needs them. He also went on to deduce that “natural resources by themselves do not exist and are, therefore, inexhaustible.” These and other bizarre and statements hostile to environmentalists was not only a discredit to ecology as a science, but also to the “struggle of environmental NGOs to repair environment damaged under communism” (p. 41). I suppose it is not only in the case of Czechia, but also in other countries studied, that the first stage following 1989 improved by merit of restructuring and modernization of industry (in the first half of the 1990s, it was also due to lower industrial production). Subsequent improvements occurred through the creation and application of more demanding environmental legislation prepared in cooperation with relevant EU bodies in order to made them compatible to EU environmental legislation, and, last but not least, by the activities of environmentally oriented NGOs.

I hope that the reader will forgive me that in this review I paid more attention to the chapter on the Czech Republic. In the book’s closing chapter, titled “Lessons Learned for the Road Forward,” Auer states that, “there are many elements common to the environmental reform

experiences of post-Communist CEE countries and Russia” (p. 175). He then, above all, refers to “the profound influence of external factors in shaping domestic environmental institutions.” Furthermore he argues that “external factors are key enablers of environmental reforms through environment-oriented aid” (p. 175). Here, the reader will find a valuable treatise on the preparedness of EU accession candidate countries in the area of environmental legislation and management, in which the author sounds rather skeptical. The reviewed collective publication is a good tool to at least partially learn about the development of an environmental policy in some countries of Central and Eastern Europe and Russia after 1989 under the influence of processes related to their preparation for accessing to the EU.

#### Notes

[1]. Douglas R. Weiner, *A Little Corner of Freedom: Russian Nature Protection from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1999).

[2]. Peter PavlÁnek, *Transition and the Environment in the Czech Republic* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1995).

[3]. Susan Baker and Petr Jehlicka, eds, *Dilemmas of Transition: The Environment, Democracy and Economic Reform in East Central Europe* (London: Frank Cass, 1998). Appearing in the same year as the book under review, Jehlicka published an article which should be of value to Auer et al.: Petr Jehlicka and A. Tickle, “The Environmental Implications of Eastern Enlargement of the European Union: The End of Progressive EU Environmental Policy?” *Environmental Politics* 13, no. 1 (2004): pp. 77- 95. Five years ago, Jehlicka also published “The Development of Czech Environmental Policy 1990-1995: A Sociological Account,” *Czech Sociological Review* 7, no. 1 (1999): pp. 37-50.

[4]. Bedrich Moldan and Tomas HÁjk, *Czech Republic Ten Years On: Environment and Quality of Life after Ten Years of Transition* (Prague: Charles University, 2000). Full text in pdf format is available at <http://www.czp.cuni.cz/knihovna/Publikace/CR2000/default.htm>.

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