



Political science in Central and Eastern Europe: integration with limited convergence in Czechia

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Abstract

This article discusses the integration of scholars from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) into the broader field of European political science. Evaluating data from 2000 to 2020, we ask whether CEE scholars managed to “close the gap” stemming from the initially underdeveloped state of post-communist political science. We contend that the results are rather mixed: CEE scholars have been increasingly present, yet achieved only very limited access to the top levels and mostly remain in a position of dependency. Using the case of Czechia, we discuss the factors that have likely contributed to the perpetuation of this state of integration with limited convergence.

Keywords Central and Eastern Europe · Czechia · Political science · Research · Semi-periphery

Introduction

One of the major developments in European political science has been its gradual opening up to scholars from the post-communist East. Without any doubt, CEE political science is now much more internationalised and Europeanised, which, in turn, makes the broader field of European political science more plural and inclusive

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than had been the case when the first issue of this journal came out in 2001. In this article, we probe the exact shape of CEE's integration into the European political science community, thereby contributing to broader questions of diversity and inclusiveness of the latter. Specifically, we ask the following two questions: Has CEE political science managed to "close the gap" stemming from its initially underdeveloped state and achieve a more equal position within the European political science community? More generally, how can we understand this process of integration into an international scientific community and explain its results?

Our principal aim is to evaluate the results of the integration process of CEE political science into the broader European field over the last twenty years, using data from 2000 to 2020. This period not only coincides with the theme of this Special Issue but also has an inner logic of its own. While the 1990s were a period of setting up the discipline after its marginalisation under communism (for the Czech case, see Holzer and Pšeja 2002; Šanc 2009), all the key institutions of the field were already in place at the turn of the millennium. All leading departments were set up, and a new generation of scholars educated after 1990 started entering the field, making it younger and more diverse (Holzer et al. 2009). Simultaneously, the last twenty years were also a period of institutionally supported Europeanisation of research and higher education, which was supposed to benefit also the CEE region. These factors notwithstanding, previous studies have shown only a limited degree of convergence of both Czech and CEE political science (Kouba et al. 2015; Jurajda et al. 2015). We build upon these studies, yet reach beyond them by evaluating additional and more recent empirical evidence and linking the analysis to the empirically rather loosely grounded theoretical debates about the state of Czech and CEE political science (Drulák 2009; Kratochvíl 2016; two special issues of the Czech Journal of International Relations from 2009 and 2016).

Following Wæver (2007), we define political science as a field that is held together by formal *social* structures (e.g. professional associations, departments and research centres, publication venues) as well as less formal *intellectual* structures (e.g. theories, methods, styles of writing). While both aspects are important in the definition and inner functioning of the discipline, we will predominantly focus on the former, defining "national" political science communities based on institutional membership and evaluating their outputs according to database categories. This structural approach allows us to capture the intimate embedding of political science within broader social, political and economic dynamics, something that we consider essential for explaining questions related to the incorporation of CEE political science into the broader European field. After all, what was happening within political science paralleled with the general societal transformation of the region via its integration into the EU. Just as societies understood their task in terms of a "return to Europe" via the adoption of already existing norms and institutions (liberal democracy, market capitalism, *acquis communautaire*; see, for example, Appel and Orenstein 2018, p. 63), the political science community also believed that accepting the practices dominant in existing Western centres would lead to its development (Drulák 2009; Šanc 2009; Kratochvíl 2016). The structural approach also allows us to travel between the levels of CEE as a region (defined as Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia) and the more specific case of Czechia. As all CEE countries share



a similar structural position within Europe and their political science communities perform similarly in this respect, we believe that even the part of our analysis where we focus on the Czech case can provide us with insights relevant across the region, if not without national specifics.

The article proceeds as follows. In the first section, we outline two competing paradigms of how the integration of CEE political science was supposed to proceed, which we call convergence and dependency. The former expects seamless incorporation of CEE to the European core, while the latter anticipates that structural barriers would lock the region in a position of durable subordination (what we will define as semi-periphery). Second, we evaluate the performance of CEE countries in terms of their publishing success, European Research Council (ERC) grants and membership in editorial boards of leading European journals. Drawing comparisons with similar size countries from other European regions, we contend that the results are rather mixed: CEE scholars have been increasingly present in the broader field, yet achieved only very limited access to its top levels. While steady growth can be recorded, there still appears to be a strong “glass ceiling” in place. In the third section, we interpret and discuss the likely factors behind this limited integration on a case study of Czechia, based on secondary literature as well as our own participant observation from three leading institutions in the country. The conclusion then wraps up the key points and outlines the broader implications of our argument.

Catching up or lagging behind? Theorising CEE integration into European political science

Most academic reflections on the state of Czech political science begin from the shared assumption that the field started from a disadvantaged and underdeveloped position in the 1990s and “need[ed] to be ‘modernised’ by approximating it to the Western ideal” (Kratochvíl 2016, p. 17). As Drulák (2009, p. 95) argues, this was part and parcel of the broader societal dynamics of “returning to Europe”, which makes this debate relevant also for the broader CEE region, as it started from an analogous structural position and underwent a very similar historical trajectory (see, for example, Kuus 2007). According to this logic, it was by adopting Western norms and practices that the region would achieve development and, ultimately, integration with the “old” Europe, to which it understood itself as belonging culturally and which it hoped to join politically. Political science was tightly embedded in this process of social, economic and political transformation via emulation of “the West”. From this shared starting point, however, there are two fundamentally different paradigms providing different analyses with respect to the possibility of Czech and CEE science closing the gap and converging with the European core. We will refer to them as the *convergence* and *dependency* paradigms, taking inspiration above all from Kratochvíl’s (2016) analysis of the more particular subfield of International Relations.

The *convergence* paradigm is the first, more optimistic as well as more prominent of the two (for example, see Drulák 2001; Kofroň and Krontorádová 2015; Kouba et al. 2015; Šanc 2009; for a critique, see Kratochvíl 2016). It is based on



the assumption that the underdevelopment of political science in Czechia and CEE more broadly is largely a result of the historical legacy of communism and the need to re-establish the discipline in its aftermath. By this logic, closing the gap and “catching up” with European political science is merely a question of time and effort invested into the process of adopting Western ways. In this sense, the paradigm is heavily flavoured by a range of liberal discourses, including liberal theories of European integration based on the ideas of convergence through norm diffusion or social learning (Börzel and Risse 2012; Schimmelfennig 2003). According to this paradigm, the “process of the approximation of Czech political science to the Western (global) political science” was supposed to be “constant” and “natural” (Šanc 2009, p. 265), leading to a seamless closing of the gap between European and CEE political science.

More specifically, the convergence reading understands the causes of the original lag as predominantly “ideational and individualistic” (Kratochvíl 2016, p. 19) and, therefore, in principle not so difficult to overcome. Political scientists in Czechia and CEE lack, above all, theoretical and methodological skills, experience with the best practices in the field, and developed international networks. In this reading, all of this can be gained through increased contacts with the best international institutions and practices, a process that should be naturally sped up also by generational change (Drulák 2001; Kofroň and Kruntorádová 2015; Kratochvíl 2016). The nature of the European/international scientific field is seen as basically meritocratic, neutral and “flat”, that is without inherent structural asymmetries. In the end, it is only the quality of research that decides what gets selected by the “‘invisible hand’ of the political science market” (Šanc 2009, p. 266), while broader structural factors seem not to matter.

While the most optimistic voices within this paradigm predicted a smooth “flowing into the international environment” for the Czech political science community (Šanc 2009, p. 266), more recent contributions are clear that this has not happened so far (Kofroň and Kruntorádová 2015; Kouba et al. 2015). Yet, even for them, this is largely due to factors that can be overcome via more internationalisation and more time. The solution is still seen as emulation and adoption of practices from the Western core, e.g. by inviting Western scholars to spend a few years in the region to disseminate their methodological expertise (Kofroň and Kruntorádová 2015, p. 43–44) or by attracting “staff members with a foreign-earned PhD” (Kouba et al. 2015, p. 82). While the pace of catching up may be slower than previously hoped, the key factors can be overcome with more training, more effort and more contact with leading international scholars.

Importantly, the convergence paradigm imprinted itself heavily also on Czechia’s official government policy. The national policy for research evaluation, adopted only a few weeks after CEE’s EU accession in 2004 and whose main tenets remain valid until now, incorporates all the key aspects of this paradigm. The critical problem is posed in terms of underperformance in relation to the “old” EU members, while the central ambition is defined as “integrating into the EU in a competitive manner” (Government of the Czech Republic 2004, p. 8). Most importantly, internationalisation via the adoption of best practices from the Western core is the central response, as the document envisages “taking over of indicators and tools of evaluation used in



the EU” (Government of the Czech Republic 2004, p. 8). This led to an explicit shift towards bibliometric modes of evaluation, which, in its heavy reliance on Web of Science (WoS) impact-factored articles, entrenched international recognition as the benchmark of the type of science that deserves financial support.

The second paradigm is that of *dependency*, in which asymmetries and hierarchies that are present equally in the political, economic and scientific fields pose a strong structural limit to the possibility of closing the gap. In this reading, the international system of knowledge production is hierarchically ordered and differentiated between the Anglo-Saxon and West European core(s) that host the key institutions (research centres, journals, publication houses, associations) and define the trends of the discipline, while the rest of the world is dependent on accepting and following these trends (see Kratochvíl 2016 for a study of Czech IR; Wallerstein 1979 for a classical formulation of the concepts). Convergence is unlikely, as the dependent regions can rival the core neither in material factors (e.g. investment, remuneration) nor in social and cultural capital (e.g. networking with and recognition by leading scholars and the opportunities this provides). Nevertheless, there are hierarchies also among the dependent subunits of the global knowledge production system, not only between the core and the rest. In this context, just like in the global economy, CEE is usually conceptualised as a “semi-periphery” (Ditrych 2020; Kratochvíl 2016), which is lagging behind the core, yet still much less so than the much more underdeveloped countries of the periphery.

According to Tickner (2013, p. 632), an entrenched core–periphery structure characterises not only the global economic and political system, but also social science knowledge production (see also, for example, Alatas 2003; Collyer 2018). Paradoxically, (semi-)peripheral scholars themselves reproduce asymmetries between the core and the dependent regions by citing predominantly core literatures (Tickner 2013, p. 632). This relates to the growing pressures on the integration of (semi-)peripheral scholars into the core arenas of social science, over whose functioning they have no influence (Blagojević and Yair 2010). Academia remains quite inwardly focused (Collyer 2018; Maliniak et al. 2018), with top journals publishing predominantly works by core authors (Lohaus and Wemheuer-Vogelaaar 2020) on topics of interest to the audiences in the core, specifically on their very countries (Das et al. 2013). Therefore, semi-peripheral authors, increasingly incentivised to publish internationally, often reorientate their research agendas, approaches and ambitions, sometimes at odds with their initial research interests, e.g. in local issues (Blagojević and Yair 2010).

The dependency paradigm is much more critical and sceptical towards the possibility of convergence, not least because it sees CEE political science as embedded within economic and political macro-structures that perpetuate its subordination to the core. The economic side of the argument is grounded above all in a certain reading of the economic dimension of CEE’s “return to Europe” as a neoliberal hyper-integration (Medve-Bálint and Šćepanović 2020) of the region into the capitalist world economy through fast upgrading of the domestic economy by a massive inflow of FDIs in combination with fundamental market reforms. The result was the rapid development of a strong internationally competitive position in complex industrial goods, produced using up-to-date technologies and managerial skills imported



from the West. However, the foreign ownership of most of the key manufacturing industry and almost the entire finance sector resulted in the creation of dependent market economies (Nölke and Vliegenthart 2009) with a subordinate position in global value chains and minimal agency in the world economy. That, of course, does not mean that those integrated into successful international business structures were not rewarded. However, the key economic questions how, where and which goods and services will be produced are not solved by residents or within the territory of the region but by their owners in the core. By the logic of the dependency paradigm, similar structural relations also permeate into the scientific field. To give one example, it is usually academic institutions (such as international associations or Anglo-Saxon universities) and/or for-profit companies (publishing conglomerates) from the core who own and operate a large majority of journals and publishing houses, having control of both their intellectual standards and material aspects (e.g. subscription or open-access pricing).

Besides structural asymmetries, worse material conditions in the semi-periphery present another obstacle in the convergence of scientific performance (Kratochvíl 2016). Despite the overall level of economic development, governments can to a large extent decide on allocation of resources in order to move to the innovation-driven stage of economic development. Following the best practice of the West, the CEE countries heavily invested into research, science and higher education. Thus, while lagging significantly behind innovation leaders, Czechia spends more on research and development than countries of the “old” European semi-periphery in Southern Europe. However, this dynamism does not completely translate into academic performance, as our data below show. This may be attributed to deeply rooted path dependencies stemming from the historical affiliation of the current Southern semi-periphery to the former core of wider European knowledge and culture. In contrast, CEE countries have never experienced a similarly privileged position.

Apart from the economic and material dimension, the structural dependency of the semi-periphery on the core is also reflected in political, cultural and ideational terms. The reforms of constitutions, legal systems, business regulations and rules for the political process were adopted following the templates of the West, as they were considered not only the best practices but also requirements in order to be accepted into the club. The instrumental character of the political and reform processes in CEE countries, combined with the preference of de-politicisation and stressing the need for efficiency maximisation management of the reform and accession processes by EU institutions, played an important role in triggering the reaction of large segments of CEE societies discussed today as democratic backsliding and the rise of populism (Ágh 2019). The issues of the one-sided flow of ideas, institutional designs and regulations due to asymmetric hierarchical relations and slow economic convergence in the last decade play a major role in these developments.

This also leads to the creation of two opposing camps within CEE countries. Those able to succeed in globalised arenas promote further integration into international networks while accepting their junior position as an acceptable cost for the vast improvement of economic conditions and status within society. Those who believe they will fare better on the national level if shielded from international competition argue in favour of national or local specifics and the indispensability of



such regulation for the survival of national culture and identity (Havlík and Hloušek 2020). Again, the questions of where and by whom rules are created, whose ideas are accepted as universal, and what is the direction of their flow directly apply to (political) science. In this reading, convergence is unlikely also because the “intellectual structures” (Wæver 2007), which is theories, methods, trends and standards of “good” science, are predominantly created within the core, whereas semi-peripheries are, yet again, expected to adapt and “catch up”.

New EU semi-periphery, old EU semi-periphery and EU core compared

This section presents and evaluates data that would help us assess the precise nature of CEE’s integration within the European political science community. We rely on three factors: publications in Web of Science (WoS) journals, results of ERC grant competitions, and membership in editorial boards of selected journals. The reliance on WoS follows the political choices regarding the evaluation of social science. The Czech system mainly relies on Journal Impact Factor (JIF) or similar metrics and so do institutions when assessing outputs of individual scholars, who, in turn, are specifically incentivised to publish in WoS journals. The ability to win ERC grants is seen as the top prize indicating the presence of brilliant researchers in the country. Membership in managing and editorial bodies of renowned journals serves as a rough proxy for international recognition of academic excellence within the field defined by the scope of the journal.

Getting published, receiving research grants and becoming a member in editorial boards signify great career progression, while membership in editorial and advisory boards can also be seen as an indicator of recognition within a given field. All three processes are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. An award of a generous international grant bolsters ambitious research which may result in publications in top journals. Publications in top journals on the CV boost applicants’ chances in grant competitions. Prolific authors with prestigious grants receive invitations to editorial boards of influential journals. Becoming a member of an editorial board generally increases chances for publication success as it allows one to observe how top journals work, provides space for networking, and builds unique know-how on what factors determine eventual acceptance of article submissions. Membership in an editorial board also enriches a scholar’s CV when applying for grants.

According to the convergence paradigm, after adopting successful Western templates the process of catching up should progress linearly as CEE scientists should publish more and in higher-ranked WoS journals, increasingly succeed in ERC competitions, and join editorial boards in larger numbers. The dependency paradigm warns against such overly optimistic expectations because power hierarchies tend to be sticky and, despite emulation of the core’s way of doing things, the countries outside the core might hit a glass ceiling. Our results are mixed but lend support rather to the dependency paradigm—authors from CEE countries increasingly publish more and in higher-ranked journals according to JIF, but have not made it to the top of the field. They do not obtain as many ERC grants as scholars from the core,



their publications are not among the most cited, and they do not receive recognition by the international political science community as indicated by a lack of invitations to managing and editorial positions in JIF journals. This translates to a structurally weaker position from which scholars from CEE institutions do not have a voice in determining what constitutes excellent science (see, for example, Tickner 2013). In other words, they play the game, but without influence over its rules.

First of all, we demonstrate that authors from CEE institutions¹ recorded a remarkable increase in the number of international publications. We show WoS data, specifically, articles in the fields of political science, area studies and international relations published between 2000 and 2019. We chose WoS articles because they provide us not only with easily measurable comparative indicators but also arguably give the most telling picture of publishing performance. The WoS database arguably includes only journals with standard review processes (those found in Journal Citation Reports, i.e. JIF journals), and articles published here are likely to be of higher quality (Kouba et al. 2015). To illustrate the publishing productivity of CEE political science, we include two countries from the EU core (Sweden and Austria) and two countries from the “old” EU semi-periphery (Greece and Portugal), all of which have similar populations as Czechia and Hungary.²

Similarly to publication output, we also compare how often scholars from the EU core and the “old” and “new” semi-peripheries win ERC grants (as the most prestigious individual research grants in the EU) and receive invitations to managing and editorial boards of selected JIF journals.

As regards publishing in JIF journals, purely from the aggregate quantitative perspective the new EU semi-periphery managed to outperform the old EU semi-periphery, and Czechia even overtook Austria, one of the EU core countries (see Fig. 1). However, a closer look at the structure of the data offers a more nuanced story. The authors from CEE targeted JIF journals indiscriminately,³ while scholars from Swedish and Austrian institutions focused more on the best publishing outlets in the field.

The differences between the core and the old and new semi-peripheries come to the fore when looking at the quality of publishing outputs. As a rough measure of quality, we use the ranking of JIF journals according to impact factor, which captures how often articles in a given journal are cited in a two-year period. Sweden clearly stands out, but also authors from Austrian, Greek and Portuguese institutions publish in the first quartile (Q1) journals more often than in the fourth quartile (Q4). The scholars from CEE institutions exhibit the opposite tendency (see Fig. 2), which

¹ The seat of the author’s institution represents the main criterion for ascribing the publication, e.g. an article written by a German at a Czech institution counts as a Czech article. This corresponds to our structural definition of political science, as outlined in the introduction.

² A more sophisticated way of comparing countries would be by using exact coefficients to adjust the data for population, GDP or other indicators (with often conflicting adjustments for even these two measures; see Jurajda et al. 2015). For the purposes of our argument, a rough comparison without the use of statistical methods is sufficient.

³ For example, Czechia leads the whole sample of eight countries in number of publications in the fourth quartile of JIF journals with 460 articles. Austria came second with 268 articles.



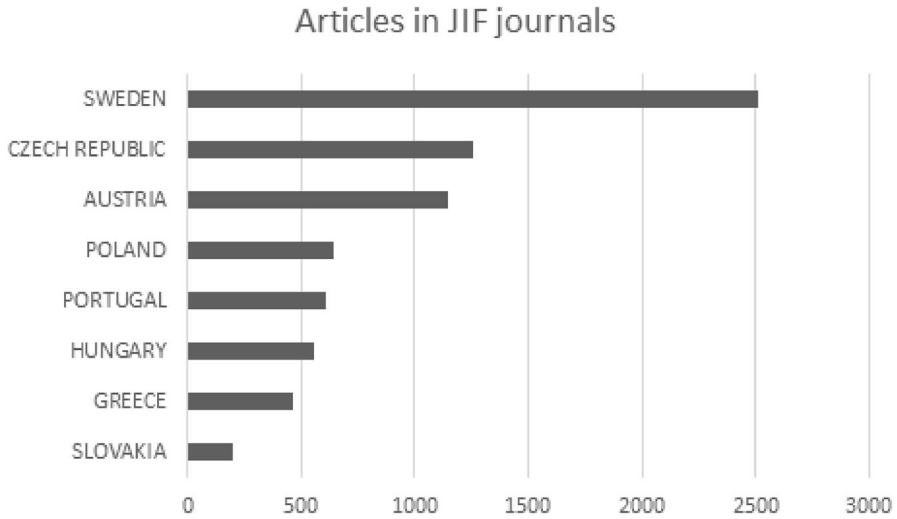


Fig. 1 Number of articles in political science, area studies and international relations published in journals found in Journal Citation Reports, 2000–2019. Source: Authors, based on WoS (2020)

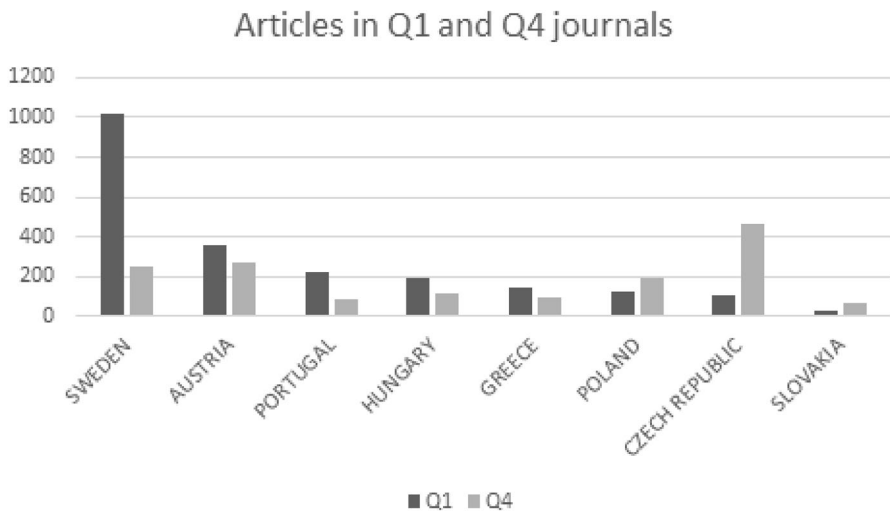


Fig. 2 Number of articles in political science, area studies and international relations published in Q1 and Q4 JIF journals, 2000–2019. Source: Authors, based on WoS (2020)

is the most pronounced in the case of Czechia (only 108 articles in Q1 compared to 460 in Q4 journals). The very good result of Hungary warrants a word of caution. Until recently, Budapest has hosted the Central European University (CEU), an American-style institution funded by George Soros which has attracted many productive scholars to Hungary. However, CEU may be seen rather as an outlier which has always stood out with its unique position within Hungarian academia. Recently,



it has been forced to move to Vienna. The Hungarian data look much weaker without CEU (total 230 articles in JIF journals, 61 in Q1 and 78 in Q4) than with it (total 559, 189 in Q1 and 115 in Q4).

An even more telling picture emerges when looking only at the category “highly cited papers” (top 1%). The core clearly surpasses the old semi-periphery and especially the new semi-periphery. Scholars from Swedish institutions authored twenty-nine highly cited papers and those from Austrian fifteen, followed by academics in Greece and Portugal (five each). The CEE countries stand comparatively much worse—Czech and Slovak institutions recorded no highly cited paper at all, while Hungary three and Poland one, respectively. Yet again, a closer look beyond the nominal data reveals even worse results. All three Hungarian papers were (co-)written by only one author who worked at CEU (Uwe Puetter), i.e. a university which stands somewhat outside the Hungarian science and education system. Similarly, Poland scored one highly cited paper because one of its 15 co-authors was employed by a private consultancy with a seat in Poland. Otherwise, the author (Kristina M. Gjerde) worked mostly at US universities. Therefore, neither the Hungarian nor Polish success is a genuine result of domestic academia.

Figure 3 further exposes the issue of publishing vs publishing in top-ranked journals. The number of publications in Q1 journals by authors from the EU core institutions has steadily increased, while the old EU semi-periphery records lower dynamics both in total and in Q1 articles. The new semi-periphery either exhibits a slow rise (Slovakia) or much steeper increase in the total number of articles than in Q1 articles (Hungary,⁴ Czechia and Poland).

In order to get a better grasp of the development in publishing records of authors from CEE institutions, Fig. 4 presents data for authors from Czech institutions and their success in publishing in below and above median JIF journals. Clearly, an increasing number of articles by Czech authors gets published in Q1 and Q2 journals. This suggests that although CEE authors still do not make it to the top (Q1) journals in great numbers (as Fig. 3 documents), they increasingly succeed in very high-quality journals (Q2). The ratio between the number of publications in the upper and lower half of the rankings has consistently improved. While in the first decade of the twenty-first-century authors from Czech institutions appeared in Q1 or Q2 journals only rarely (see also Kouba et al. 2015), nowadays the yearly number of articles in the upper half of JIF journals approaches fifty.⁵

The previous paragraphs outlined basic data supporting our claims on political science publishing in the new EU semi-periphery. CEE countries accomplished a remarkable achievement when they reoriented towards international publishing in the last two decades. Especially since 2010, the numbers of articles published in JIF journals, i.e. journals which should guarantee standard peer-review process, have

⁴ The graph includes data with CEU. If CEU was excluded, the curve would resemble Slovakia.

⁵ There is a simple explanation why the years 2012 and 2015 show such irregularities. In those years, the journal *Politická ekonomie* (Political Economy) made it to Q2 despite its being a Czech journal publishing mainly articles in Czech by Czech authors. In 2012, *Politická ekonomie* published 35 articles (out of total 51 in Q2) and in 2015 41 (out of total 65 in Q2), which largely inflated the numbers in the category Q1 and Q2.





Fig. 3 Trend in total number of articles and Q1 articles published in JIF journals in political science, area studies and international relations, 2000–2019 [due to a large number of published articles, the graph on Sweden has different values on the y-axis (0–400) than the rest of the countries in the sample (0–200)]. Source: Authors, based on WoS (2020)

steeply increased. However, in contrast to the EU core and partially also the old EU semi-periphery, the new EU semi-periphery publications usually do not make it into the most prestigious political science journals (Q1). A similar situation also applies to the connected phenomena of highly regarded international research grants and membership in editorial boards of reputable journals.

The difference in winning ERC grants between the core and both semi-peripheries remains huge. Both Sweden and Austria received over forty social



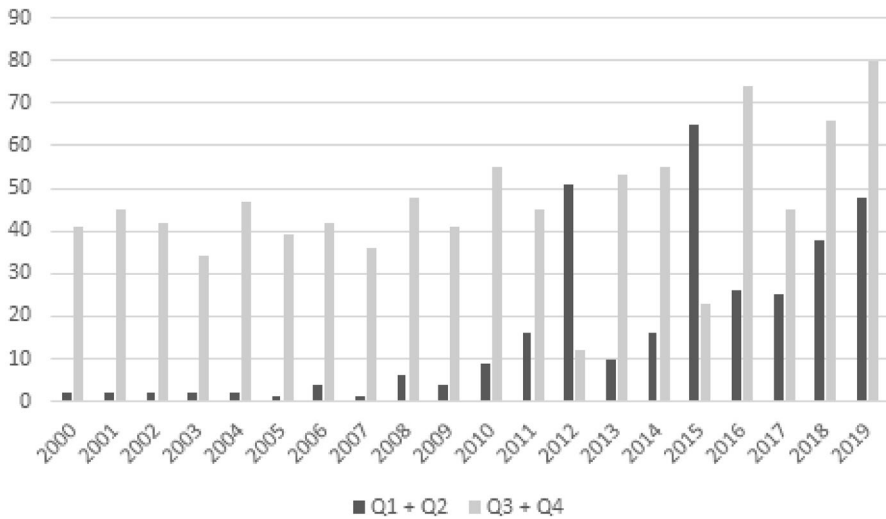


Fig. 4 Trend in number of articles by authors from Czech institutions published in JIF journals in political science, area studies and international relations, 2000–2019. Source: Authors, based on WoS (2020)

science and humanities grants (SH) in the period 2007–2020,⁶ while CEE countries mostly received less than ten.⁷ We browsed through all projects awarded in the SH category and listed all those that could possibly be understood as belonging to political science in its broad meaning. Again, the EU core dominates the sample, with Sweden receiving nine ERC political science projects and Austria five. The old EU semi-periphery performed quite well too (Portugal four, Greece two), while three countries of the new EU semi-periphery received only one ERC political science project each and Slovakia none (Fig. 5).

The managing and editorial bodies of JIF journals serve as international publishing gatekeepers and an indicator of recognition of authors as renowned experts in the field. JIF journal bodies have generally not acknowledged the rise of scholars from CEE institutions and have remained closed for them. Take, for example, ECPR journals. Despite sizable institutional membership in ECPR (twenty-three CEE institutions are members of the ECPR out of total 320), scholars from CEE institutions do not currently⁸ participate on boards of ECPR journals. None of the four ECPR JIF journals (European Journal of International Relations [EJIR], European Journal of Political Research, European Political Science Review and European Political Science) has a CEE-based scholar in a senior position. EJIR, one of the leading world journals in the field of international relations, has 68 people in its managing and executive bodies, but none comes from the four CEE countries in our sample.

⁶ Until January 2021.

⁷ CEU distorts the picture again. Hungary received a total of 14 grants, with CEU accounting for 12 of these 14.

⁸ As of 1 December 2020.



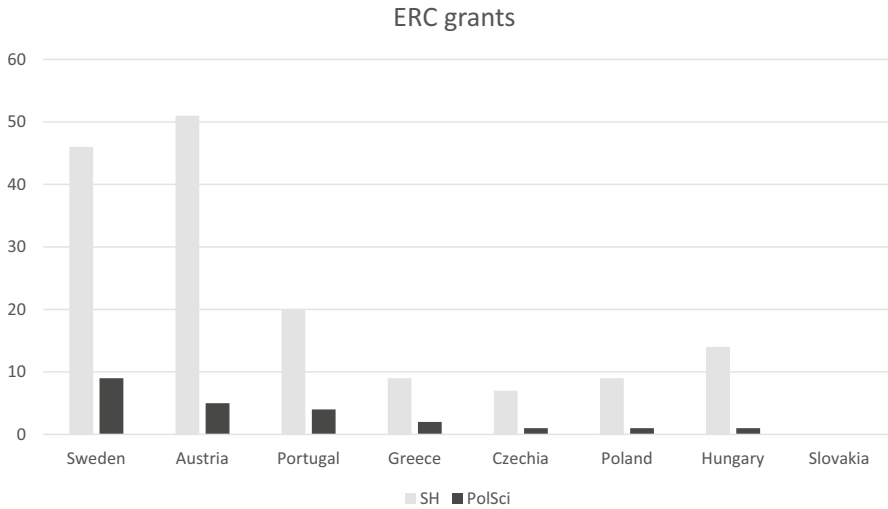


Fig. 5 ERC grants in Social Sciences and Humanities (SH) and specifically in political science. Source: Authors, based on ERC (2020)

The remaining three ECPR JIF journals are more inclusive, and each has one scholar from a CEE institution in its editorial board. Academics from Greek institutions are similarly unsuccessful in achieving seats in prestigious journals' bodies. In contrast, Swedish and Austrian institutions typically have one person in editorial boards of ECPR JIF journals, and Portugal has also achieved some success in this regard, with one scholar in managing and two in editorial bodies.

We also explored the most likely cases for having a scholar from a CEE institution among a JIF journal's managerial positions or at least on the editorial board: journals dealing with post-communist countries. Among five such journals,⁹ nobody from a CEE university acts as an Editor-in-Chief or a Managing Editor. Editorial boards, which have thirty-one individuals on average, typically include just two persons from CEE universities. Polish institutions dominate the pool (four scholars out of a total five from CEE universities), while Czech and Hungarian institutions are not represented at all.¹⁰ The Journal of International Relations and Development (JIRD), the official journal of the Central European International Studies Association, stands as a notable exception among highly reputed journals. Two scholars from Hungarian universities (one of those from CEU) serve as coordinating editors and five academics from CEE institutions sit on the advisory board. However, except for JIRD, CEE scholars generally neither occupy managing positions in JIF journals nor enjoy wider international recognition by being frequently named into

⁹ Problems of Post-Communism, Communist and Post-Communist Studies, Europe-Asia Studies, Slavic Review, and East European Politics and Societies: and Cultures.

¹⁰ The counts would change if we included CEU among CEE universities. CEU alone has two Associate Editors and four members of editorial boards, therefore more than the whole CEE combined.



Table 1 Membership in managing and editorial bodies of relevant journals. Source: Authors, based on websites of the journals

	ECPR journals	CEE-focused journals
CEE		
Czechia	0/0	0/2
Hungary ^a	0/2	3/5
Slovakia	0/1	0/2
Poland	0/1	0/5
Other		
Austria	0/4	0/2
Sweden	0/3	0/4
Greece	0/0	0/0
Portugal	1/2	0/0

The data in cells indicate: the number of scholars in a managing/editorial body

^aIncl. CEU; without CEU, Hungary: 0/1 ECPR journals, 1/0 CEE-focused journals. ECPR journals in the sample include European Journal of International Relations, European Journal of Political Research, European Political Science Review and European Political Science. CEE-focused journals in the sample include Problems of Post-Communism, Communist and Post-Communist Studies, Europe-Asia Studies, Slavic Review, East European Politics and Societies: and Cultures and Journal of International Relations and Development

advisory boards of CEE-focused journals. Table 1 shows that scholars from Swedish institutions sit on editorial boards of CEE-focused journals more often than academics from Czech, Hungarian (excluding CEU) or Slovak institutions.

To sum up, the data show that CEE authors have integrated into the Western publishing scene, but the ambitious goal of convergence in excellence and international recognition has not materialised. Scholars from CEE institutions do not regularly publish in the most prestigious disciplinary journals and do not receive major EU grants. Even the most successful of them have not made it to the position of gatekeepers and internationally acknowledged experts—into managing positions and editorial boards of relevant journals. CEE scholars thus remain outside closed, invitation-only venues (Tickner 2013) determining criteria of academic excellence and which kinds of inquiries are worth of publishing.

Discussion and interpretation: limited convergence in Czechia

The results are more mixed than either of the two paradigms would expect, yet tilting closer to the dependency paradigm. CEE scholars seem to be converging with the European field in terms of lower-tier WoS publications, yet remain in a subordinate position with respect to top publications, ERC grants and editorial board membership. In this section, we discuss and interpret this state of integration with



limited convergence with respect to Czechia based on both secondary literature and our participant observation at the three best-performing institutions in terms of WoS publications in the political science category in the country.¹¹ We argue that neither the “ideational and individualistic” (Kratochvíl 2016, p. 19) elements emphasised in the convergence paradigm nor the structural and materialistic aspects highlighted in the dependency paradigm alone can explain the current situation. Instead, we argue that all of these elements are closely entangled in the build-up of Czech institutions and individual publication strategies. We will now discuss them in turn.

Institutions: reluctant internationalisation

On the level of institutions, it is the accumulation of power in the hands of less internationally oriented scholars, hierarchical and closed structures, as well as limited support of young scholars that lead to an often reluctant response to external incentives to internationalise. Our key observation, building also upon the insights of Drulák (2009) and Kouba et al. (2015), is that Czech political science is split between two ideal typical camps established during the 2010s, just as the dependency paradigm expects. We will call them “nationalists” and “internationalists”. The current senior cadres gained their tenure and status very early on in their careers throughout the 2000s and based on publishing predominantly in Czech, which is why we refer to them as “nationalists”. In combination with inbreeding as the key recruitment strategy, this resulted in the formation of closed and hierarchical organisational structures (see Kouba et al. 2015). In parallel, the diffusion of academic and research practices from the core through mobility flows, international conferences and general digitisation processes substantially influenced an important fraction of the younger generation of scholars who (often uncritically) adopted a new understanding of academic capital defined by the ability to publish in English-language WoS-listed journals and publishing houses (whom we call “internationalists”).

In general, the two groups differ with respect to their access to institutional power. The common pattern is that the “nationalists” combine academic and managerial functions, while the “internationalists” focus predominantly on teaching and research and are tasked with administrative duties.¹² Such arrangement creates tensions, as the “internationalists” see increased integration in the European field as a strategic priority, while the “nationalists” are primarily concerned with the overall financial stability of the institutions and often prioritise national academic and reputational communities over international research. This leads to only reluctant support for internationalisation strategies, as these are seen rather as an externally imposed necessity than as a genuinely valuable enterprise by many of the “nationalists”.

¹¹ These are Charles University in Prague, Masaryk University in Brno and the Institute of International Relations Prague. For comparison of publication performance in 2017–2019, see the web app of the Economics Institute of the National Academy of Sciences at <https://ideaapps.cerge-ei.cz/Performance2019/>.

¹² The most important exceptions to this pattern are multiple Prague-based International Relations departments and research institutions.



Moreover, in the context of closed institutional structures, some junior cadres tend to replicate “nationalist” career strategies through early involvement in faculty politics and cultivation of personal ties with the incumbents. This problematises the optimistic view that the arrival of new generations will “naturally” lead to increased convergence (e.g. Šanc 2009). Lack of employment opportunities on the domestic academic market strengthens the dependency on relations with senior scholars (for a feminist perspective, see Nyklová et al. 2019). As documented by Muller-Camen and Salzberger (2005) for Germany, such socialisation is further intensified by the habilitation procedure, where internal faculty politics, informal networks and relationships play a central role. The “internationalists”, in contrast, are usually unwilling or unable to even attempt to challenge the institutional path dependency, as they often fail to coordinate their efforts or strive for managerial positions and thus have a lower influence on the strategic development of the discipline.

The hierarchical structuring of Czech universities, which is closer to the German than the Anglo-Saxon model, requires a division of labour that relies on loyal cooperation of junior cadres and PhD students. Instead of having sufficient time for the high-effort development of internationally competitive research, young scholars spend their time on maintaining the day-to-day functioning of universities (teaching assistance, administration), for which they receive meagre (if any) remuneration. The basic PhD scholarship is currently below the level of the national minimum wage. At the same time, their involvement in research programmes is unsystematic and heavily dependent on the willingness and abilities of individual supervisors to provide job opportunities, financial top-up to the basic scholarship, funding for research and conference attendance, and mentoring. Although there has been some improvement in terms of a growing number of regular contact courses and occasional research methods workshops (see Kofroň and Kruntorádová 2015; Záhora 2016), PhD curricula are still comparatively unstructured. Overall, this leaves young researchers in a weaker position to develop an internationally competitive research profile, especially in comparison to the graduates of leading universities from the European core. Therefore, they often choose to contribute to the perpetuation of the “nationalist” orthodoxy, as this can lead to the guarantee of a job in academia.

Individual publishing strategies: limits to convergence

However, the limited success of Czech scholars cannot be explained only by the “nationalist” obstacles and path dependencies, but also in the very ways integration is pursued by the “internationalists” themselves. Facing the double bind of financial pressures and a disadvantaged position in European hierarchies of knowledge, Czech scholars usually pursue low-risk low-gain publication strategies, which result in the documented abundance of publications in the bottom quartile of WoS. Ironically, by internalising these strategies, many Czech “internationalists” end up replicating the very factors that hamper a more equal integration with the European core. Therefore, even the increasing role of “internationalists” within the Czech political science community is unlikely to lead to faster convergence alone. We contend



that this is due to the interplay of issues related to remuneration, emulation and individualisation.

Starting with *remuneration*, the salaries of Czech academics are heavily performance-dependent. Based on our experience, the difference between the basic salary (which is usually well below the national average—more than 30% below it at some institutions) and the actual number on the payroll can very often be more than 100% due to publication bonuses and external funding that is used as a top-up. This makes Czech scholars dependent on producing a steady flow of publications to sustain a decent living standard, especially when faced with rapidly growing housing costs that are now even less affordable than almost anywhere in Western Europe (Busta 2020). This creates strong incentives for maintaining a continuous stream of publications in lower-ranking journals and applying for more achievable sources of funding. However, it discourages high-risk high-gain strategies, as few scholars would—or can afford to—risk betting a substantial part of their income on the uncertain prospects of publishing in top journals or applying for ERC grants.

These material incentives go hand in hand with intellectual strategies. As noticed by scholars siding with the dependency paradigm, Czech political science is heavily oriented on the *emulation* of the theoretical, methodological and topical “fashions” of the Western core, rather than challenging them and providing path-breaking contributions (see Drulák 2009; Kratochvíl 2016). This is a logical consequence of low-risk publication strategies, as conformity with existing intellectual structures is more likely to lead to publications in average or below average journals. Yet, it also replicates the semi-peripheral position in which Czech scholars marginalise themselves as skilled emulators rather than gaining an equal position within the European field. By internalising the low-risk strategy of emulation, even the “internationalists” end up reproducing the subordinate position of Czech academia, albeit one that is more convergent than the dependency paradigm alone would expect.

Publication success in top journals, when achieved, results from strongly *individualistic* strategies, which have very little effect on existing structures. Given the institutional path dependencies and remuneration structures, the rational strategy pursued by many of the most successful researchers in the country is to put all their energy into writing. This bears fruit in the increased number of publications, including higher-ranked ones, as academics learn their craft and gain name recognition that facilitates further publications. However, this also means that they are not motivated to take the next step and become research leaders. Instead, they are stuck in the comfortable cocoon of their own research, cashing in on the undisputedly high amount of hard work they have invested in their individual research careers. The time and energy spent on reaching this individual integration and perhaps even convergence in the case of the most successful researchers is then lacking when it comes to creating research groups or programmes, applying for major international grants, mentoring younger colleagues or developing institutional strategies. Therefore, even the individual convergence of the few highly successful “internationalists” has not really managed to alter the structural configuration of Czech institutions, let alone the position of Czech academia within the European field.



Conclusion

The article provides mixed evidence of CEE political science's convergence with the European core. Although there has been a marked shift towards Western European standards, full-fledged convergence and graduation to the core remains unlikely in the foreseeable future. CEE has caught up only with regard to the overall volume of research output, while it continues to lag markedly in terms of research excellence (highly cited papers), funding (major EU grants), as well as recognition (membership in editorial boards of prestigious journals). This indicates that the officially adopted development model has not been able to overcome the historical patterns of the European division of labour and rather reconfirms CEE (political) science's *semi-peripherality* through the gradually increasing production of low impact research and continuing dependency on developments in the core.

The diffusion of core-defined academic practices, as codified in national research evaluation policies, has facilitated the emergence of a domestic *institutional cleavage* between “nationalists” and “internationalists”. While the “internationalists”, mostly younger cadres without managerial authorities, tend to be “genuine believers” in convergence striving for international recognition through networking and publication activities, the “nationalists”, usually older cadres in managerial positions, are primarily engaged with national audiences and often lack the motivation and/or abilities to build internationally competitive research teams. Considering the low turnover of academic employees and the relatively young age profile of the institutions (Kouba et al. 2015), only a slow and punctuated transition from the “nationalist”-dominated organisational structures and cultures (a “reluctant internationalisation”) can be expected.

The semi-peripheral position is internalised and further reproduced mostly by “internationalists” also at the level of *individual strategies*. The *remuneration* strategy is a utilitarian response to the performance-dependent salary incentives which favour emulation-based research ensuring steady publication and cash flows and discourage high-risk high-gain approaches. While *emulation* refers to copying the core-defined academic practices based on their affordances, *individualisation* refers to single-handed efforts for an international breakthrough which lack the ambition to form research teams. The resulting peculiar psycho-social dynamics of recognition then determine the worth of the subjectivities and practices at the semi-periphery by constantly regaining the approval of the core (Eberle 2018). For Czech and CEE academics, this means that the value and quality of their work depend on its acceptance in Western journals and publishing houses, over which they have little control, as they are virtually absent from the top editorial boards and severely underrepresented in other positions of epistemic and disciplinary power.

Considering the above, this article does not seek to propose an alternative to overcome the naive reliance on the catch-up convergence paradigm or to escape the fatalist logic of the dependency paradigm but rather highlights the (often unreflected) roots of the current unsatisfactory state in an effort to initiate a much-needed discussion.



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