



„RECALL: A Study of Central European Places of Memory for Collective Remembrance”

2023-1-HU01-KA220-HED-000154286

Module Title: Dreaming About Democracy – Remembering the Struggle for Freedom in Central Europe (*Topic 8*)

Target Duration: 35 minutes (video) + 15-20 minutes (e-learning tasks)

Target Audience: University students, researchers, and history enthusiasts

This module looks at how the people of Central Europe, including Czechs, Poles, and Hungarians, dreamed of and fought for democracy during the Cold War. It traces their long battle against communist rule, starting with the uprisings of the 1950s and leading up to the peaceful revolutions of 1989. It also asks how these events still influence the region’s memory and democratic values today.

Presented by Łukasz Kamiński, Zsuzsanna Varga, and Jiří Hanuš, the module follows a chronological and comparative format, connecting national stories into a shared narrative of courage, oppression, and renewal.

The module begins with Łukasz Kamiński’s introduction, *From Resistance to Democracy*, which discusses dreaming of democracy as a moral and social act. For many people in the Eastern Bloc, democracy involved not just political choices and free elections, but also basic freedoms: speech, conscience, travel, and work. The memory of anti-communist resistance is essential to modern Central Europe. It serves as a living heritage that supports the region’s role in today’s European Union and its commitment to democratic values.

Kamiński sets the Cold War timeline within a common Central European experience. Important events include the Sovietization from 1945 to 1948, the workers’ uprisings in 1953, the Poznań protests and the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, the Prague Spring in 1968, the rise of Solidarity from 1980 to 1981, and the Autumn of Nations in 1989. With rare archival footage and eyewitness accounts, this section shows how each act of resistance inspired the next, creating a chain reaction of hope that led to the fall of the Iron Curtain.

The Hungarian viewpoint, presented by Zsuzsanna Varga, centers on the 1956 Revolution as both a national movement and a symbol of universal resistance. It highlights Imre Nagy’s reformist ideas, the harsh Soviet intervention, and the long silence that followed. Nagy’s reburial in 1989 marked the nation’s moral revival and set the stage for the first free elections in 1990.

The Czech viewpoint, shared by Jiří Hanuš, explores the lasting impact of 1968 and the period of “Normalization.” It contrasts the hopeful promises of socialism with the ideas of dissidents, such as those in Charter 77 and exiled writers like Josef Škvorecký and Jan Koblása. Through their works, art, and underground movements, these individuals kept a culture of truth and conscience alive, maintaining the democratic dream during the bleakest times.



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The Polish viewpoint, again from Łukasz Kamiński, examines the rise of Solidarity, the imposition of martial law, and the revival of democratic activity in the late 1980s. It highlights important sites such as the Gdańsk Shipyard, the Round Table Talks, and the partially free elections of June 1989 as key memories in modern Poland. Competing organizations like the European Solidarity Centre and the Solidarity Heritage Institute demonstrate how collective memory is active, debated, and essential to civic identity.

The module wraps up with Kamiński’s reflection, Historic Resistance and Contemporary Relevance. It explains how remembering 1956, 1968, 1980, and 1989 creates a shared democratic tradition in Central Europe. This tradition is still meaningful today, especially in light of new geopolitical challenges, such as Russian aggression against Ukraine. Remembering these events is not mere nostalgia; it is a civic responsibility. It reinforces the idea that freedom, justice, and human dignity must be defended continuously.

Primary Goals of the Module:

- **Contextualize** anti-communist resistance as a shared Central European movement linking Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary.
- **Examine** how post-1989 societies commemorate resistance through monuments, museums, and contested memories.
- **Explore** the moral and cultural meanings of “dreaming about democracy” as both personal faith and collective action.
- **Highlight** key uprisings (1953, 1956, 1968, 1980–81, 1989) as milestones in the long road from oppression to freedom.
- **Foster** reflection on democracy’s fragility and the ongoing need for civic responsibility and historical awareness.

EU Key Competences Addressed in This Module:

- **Cultural awareness and expression** – Understanding how remembrance of resistance and repression shapes modern European identity.
- **Critical thinking and digital literacy** – Analyzing propaganda, eyewitness accounts, and historical documents to discern truth in complex narratives.
- **Social and civic competence** – Recognizing the relationship between historical memory, democratic values, and active citizenship.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of the session, learners will be able to:

- Identify the political, social, and moral dimensions of anti-communist resistance in Central Europe.
- Describe key events (Poznań 1956, Hungary 1956, Prague 1968, Poland 1980–89) and their interconnections.





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- Analyze the role of individual courage and collective solidarity in undermining totalitarian regimes.
- Explain how memory of resistance contributes to post-1989 nation-building and European integration.
- Compare Czech, Polish, and Hungarian experiences of repression, reform, and renewal.
- Evaluate the use of monuments, museums, and anniversaries in shaping public understanding of the past.
- Reflect on the moral legacy of figures such as Imre Nagy, Václav Havel, and Lech Wałęsa.
- Assess how current geopolitical conflicts renew the relevance of anti-Soviet and democratic traditions.
- Discuss the continuing importance of civic courage, solidarity, and memory in sustaining democracy.
- Apply insights from historical case studies to contemporary debates on freedom, pluralism, and European unity.

Dreaming about democracy goes beyond recalling the fall of communism. It involves remembering how ordinary citizens transformed their memories, faith, and courage into the foundations of freedom. In this module, learners connect with the people, ideals, and memories that turned the “return to Europe” into more than a political event; it became a moral triumph for all of Central Europe.
