

Alex Almquist

As I reflect on my experiences, whether they involve exploring cities like Prague and Budapest or attending lectures in Maastricht, I have learned several major lessons, with each experience contributing or enhancing the lessons. Before I arrived in Maastricht weeks ago, I was a staunch fiscal conservative whose beliefs revolved around the idea that less government involvement in the national economy meant greater growth and prosperity for the respective nation. I was a firm believer that solely market forces should guide an economy. The massive failure of the Soviet Union's command economy was my primary source of evidence against government economic involvement, albeit an extreme example. When I was lectured on and read about the transition of Eastern European economies, I soon realize that a partnership between government and economics is sometimes not only necessary, but beneficial. The radical transformation required to transition from communism to capitalism produced major economic instability, and I saw that government intervention could be the best solution to such instability, rather than the unrestricted procession of market forces. Although I still believe that minimal government interference is best in an established and stable market economy, I now see government as potentially necessary economic actor in times of instability. This new view may alter my future opinions on the United States government's involvement in its economy in times of potential crisis and instability. My belief in capitalism as the best economic system in human history was also reinforced as I learned about the readiness with which Russia and Eastern Europe wished to discard any remnants of communism and embrace capitalist ideals. Even China, with a ruling communist party, embraced capitalism, albeit much more gradually. A transition lecture in Prague best embodies my new viewpoint, when the lecturer told us about Francis Fukuyama's belief that the Eastern Europe revolutions of 1989 marked the beginning of the "end of history" in which the world, one nation at a time, will inevitably progress to becoming capitalist democracies, and that will indisputably be the best vehicle for further human progress, thereby ending conflict over political and economic systems, thereby "ending" history.