

**ELITES  
IN CENTRAL-EASTERN EUROPE**

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## GYÖRGY LENGYEL

### NOTES ON THE “QUALITY OF ELITES”

I was asked to deliver an opening lecture at a workshop devoted to the problems of the “quality of elites”. An opening lecture in my opinion should be short, thought provoking and it must leave enough room for further debates, posing mostly questions instead of trying to find the final answers. Since I have always more questions than answers, this request shouldn’t be a real problem on my side. Furthermore I can promise that the presentation will be short. As for the triggering-effects, I know that the colleagues have already prepared their own lectures, therefore there is relatively little chance for provoking clarifying debates. Nevertheless I’ll try to be as provocative as possible, hoping to provoke more thoughts than passions, which isn’t always an easy task in the case of sensitive issues, like the problem of elites. I organize my questions and comments around five broad issues. First I’ll touch upon the problems of normative and descriptive elite approaches. Second, I contemplate about the possible contents of the quality in the case of the elites. Third, I mention a few conditions that circumscribed elite changes in the post-socialist societies. Fourth, I lament a bit about the reasons why have we avoided the question of the quality of elites up to now. Finally, I raise a few problems of operationalization and related questions.

#### *1. Normative and descriptive elite approaches*

Let me start with a less provoking idea, which nevertheless might have its far-reaching implications: there is an inherent ambiguity in the elite concept from the very origin, at Pareto. In his writings on the one hand he refers to those who are the best in their branch of activity, on the other hand to those who are in top decision-making positions owing residues of “combinations” or “persistence of aggregates” as he put it (Pareto 1966 [1916]). The latter view is closer to a descriptive approach, which is widely applied in contemporary elite research (Dogan–Higley 1998, Etzioni-Halevy 1997, Hoffman-Lange 1987, Eyal–Szelényi–Townsley 1998, Higley–Pakulski–Wesolowski 1998, Higley–Lengyel 2000, Scott 1990, Dogan 2003). As a contrast the former one has strong normative implications and if we rely on this first version we may immediately close the conference devoted to the issue of the quality of elites with the statement that elites are the best *per definitionem*. If they differ from each other country by country, it is so, because their societies are different. It follows that societies get elites they deserve, according to their own merits. It sounds familiar for many but makes us

forget that it might be applied only to a narrow set of contemporary societies. Except for rare historical moments people had little or no chance to influence the selection of their elites. The point is not that the “quality of elites” concept is misleading. The point is, that if one relies on the normative version of the Paretoian definition and envisages elite as the best quality – which is not far from the everyday connotation of the word and does coincide with the etymological sense of aristocracy, what Pareto frequently used as a synonym of elite – one may get into trouble while actually trying to evaluate the elites. In other words not the normative approach *per se*, but the normative definition of elites should be avoided in order to be able to discuss the problems of elites. Pareto himself recognized the problem and tried to solve it by introducing a dynamic element, the circulation, as well as special conditions for tutelage. But the circulation view – which is closer to reality – does not help to solve the problem of “elite is the best quality” type of definition. Actually it seems to undermine it, because if elite “flows like a river”, if it is in a state of constant change, and circulation occurs because governing elites accumulate decadent elements – as Pareto put it –, one may suspect it follows that elites don’t consist of the best quality people in every sequence of circulation.

I suggest here therefore to apply the second, descriptive approach and focus on those who are in top decision making positions in politics and economy – and perhaps also in other branches – irrespectively if they are the best in their capacity or not. In other words I suggest that the quality should not be a precondition but a condition to be investigated here. Even if we accept this

proposition, we still have to face serious problems.

## ***2. Possible contents of the “quality of elites”***

What does exactly “quality of elites” mean? Is it efficacy, performance or good governance? Or does it mean the public image of the elite? What are the proper concepts and measures to describe the quality? István Bibó, the 20<sup>th</sup> century Hungarian social thinker applied social sensitivity as a qualifying criteria (2004 [1942]). He meant social sensitivity not in the narrow sense of *caritas*, but in a wider sense of culture-creating, needs-refining sensibility.

What is important in the qualification of elites: words or deeds? What has been said sometimes disqualifies certain elites, but is not enough for qualification. What has been done seems to be a better measure, but perhaps it isn’t focused enough and it is not easy to decide who did what in a complex social process.

What sort of criteria qualify a political elite? Predictability is certainly important, but in itself it is a weak condition. One may remember that in certain respects dictators are quite predictable. Accountability, and replaceability, that is peaceful access to power seem to be important in international comparisons. But if we investigate within the same political culture and try to compare individual elite members or sub-groups, these qualifying criteria are less orienting. Some therefore counts among the criteria ability of cooperation and problem-solving as well.

What kind of conditions qualify the business elites? Are these due to the very nature of

the field slightly different from the ones of the political elites? Predictability and accountability are criteria in business as well, but success is an even stronger condition. However success is a slippery concept in itself: profit is success, and growth is success too. Some suggest that sustainability and social sensibility are necessary constraints of profit and should be considered among the qualifying criteria.

Even if we happen to agree upon that sustainable well-being of the population and social justice are among the final qualifying criteria of elites, there are several additional challenges for the elites in the transformation societies. Let me mention a few acute and actual problems for the contemporary elites of this region. How do elites handle economic recession and restructuring of capital? How do they handle unemployment and low employment? How do they intend to reform the health and pension systems? How do they handle the problem of poverty and social inequalities? What sort of minority problems, ethnic tensions and patterns of exclusion do they face and how do they try to solve them? What sort of guarantees do they provide for solving the problems of intra- and international security? What is their position with respect to supra-national identities and integration? Some of these problems are policy issues, others have to do with polity or politics. But here and now most of them certainly seem to be institutional frames, conditions *sine qua non* to be solved for consent on social justice and sustainable well-being. How do the elites solve these problems, or what sort of consent-based solutions do they provide for solving them? The more elaborate answer we can give to these questions the closer we are to the evaluation of the quality of elites. One

may argue that these are very region-specific temporary problems and if we focus exclusively on them, we may lose the points of comparison in a wider context. This is true. On the one hand we have to confront the elites with their own tasks and look how do they solve them. On the other hand we have to find general dimensions of comparison in order to be able to evaluate elites in a non period-dependent supra-regional international environment.

Two decades ago or so it seemed that for us in Central and Eastern Europe there is no alternative but a mixture of planned shortage economy, autocratic political regimes and forced uniformity of culture. Today the alternatives are manifold and the reversibility of changes toward the state socialist experiment is quite unlikely. Today the alternatives embody either the different forms of welfare capitalism or simulated capitalism – as Leopold put it almost a century ago –, where state influence and rent seeking predominate (Leopold 1988 [1917]), and where the appropriation of capital is misregulated (Walder 2003). Politically speaking the alternatives are the different forms of parliamentary multiparty democracies on the one hand and a form of Patomkin politics in facade democracies on the other hand where the number of parties is more than one but parties are toys of oligarchies. The alternatives are the different forms of transculturalism and multiple identities on the one hand, or cultures of anomy on the other.

### ***3. On circumstances of elite transformation***

Most of the participants of the workshop have done empirical elite research in the last

couple of years or even decades. We regularly deal with the changing criteria of recruitment into the elite, as well as the social composition and the attitudes of elites. Talking about the Hungarian experiences it has been revealed that elite changes started before the systemic change and the rate of fluctuation grew already in the late eighties (the proportion of newcomers was one and half times higher than at the beginning of the decade). This was a stabilizing factor of the peaceful transformation in the first period because newcomers in the cadre elite were more open toward the reforms and at the same time more uncertain in their new positions than the old fraction.

We have recognized that criteria of competencies and loyalties changed significantly. Among loyalty criteria ideological affiliation lost, while organizational and personal commitments gained importance. Among the criteria of competence in recruitment it was not the level of education, but the type of knowledge which became important. In essence we were witnessing a shift from technical studies toward business and legal education.

We have learned that most of the new elite members had step by step continuous and not jump-like careers. In spite of the fundamental systemic change, during the transformation period the typical career pattern was not the “last should be first” (Kolosi–Róna-Tas 1992), but that of “everyone steps ahead”. As it turned out soon a more precise conceptualization would have been “some get ahead”, because due to the recession and growing income differences many felt shrinking material positions.

At the beginning of the nineties ministries were relatively open. A large part of

newcomers among top administrators arrived from other segments, mostly from industry and research. Bankers typically were recruited from the bank sector, while managers of industrial enterprises not only from the same segment, but typically from the same enterprise.

What we were witnessing in the nineties, was the slowing down of changes and closing of the elites. The proportion of newcomers dropped to the level of the early eighties. The later the newcomers started, the greater part of them came from upper, or upper-middle class families. Ministries changed their recruitment strategy. They selected their top leaders from the staff of the ministry, not from outside anymore.

We have learned that the attitudes and opinions of the elite differ in many ways from the rest of the population's. They are more meritocratic, individualistic, use more elaborate codes, and form more consistent opinions than the rest of the society, including professionals themselves. They are less tolerant toward norm breaching behavior and they are more pro-European than the rest.

We have learned that there are significant differences and sometimes hidden tensions between the different segments of the elite (between politicians and business leaders) and we were witnessing that sometimes there were hidden agreements between different fractions of elites inside a segment.

#### ***4. The reasons for avoiding quality questions***

We were studying these criteria carefully but except for a few essayists up to now we didn't pose the question of the quality of



elites. Why was that so? For three reasons in my view. First of all, because we had our own exciting question stemming from the new elite paradigm. Let me provide just a few examples. Does class origin necessarily mean serving of the given class interest? Does a certain type of education predict values? Does network-membership necessarily mean shared interest? What does exactly the change of elite mean: changes of personal composition, or social composition? Changing attitudes, or changing logic of recruitment? What does unified elite formation mean in the given context? Unification of what: attitudes, social characteristics, common understanding of the rules of the game? How has the role of different forms of socialization – family, education, post-recruitment, *intra muros* – changed during the transformation?

This was certainly one of the reasons. On the other hand the core motive of avoiding this question was that the very term “quality of elite” has had an amateur – or in a worse version, ideological – flavor which could be easily misused for political purposes. Many could contribute with witty comments to a dispute about it, but few could imagine to build a serious research around the concept.

The third reason might have been that measuring quality is always difficult and slippery. In operational terms basically the question is to measure the quality of elites by macro indicators or by micro indices based on the elite-perception of the population. Both approaches have their own pros and cons. The greatest advantage of macro indicators is that they are widely comparable and available. The problems with them are at least threefold. They can be used, as I

mentioned previously, on the aggregate (mostly national) level they represent. Second, it is hard to check the validity and reliability of aggregate indicators. Finally, it is difficult to reconstruct the causal link between the elites’ behavior and the macro data as a result. As a more frequent version of the last one, even if the causal link is approvable because elites have an over-average influence on social events, the measurement of the relative strength of the elite impact as compared to the effect of other social forces seems to be a complicated task. The advantage of the micro indices is that they may reflect the evaluation of targeted elite communities. Their disadvantage is that they are not standardized yet and are rarely comparable. Moreover, the public evaluation of elites might be influenced by several factors – economic conditions, the media and many others – and to separate them seems to be difficult too.

### ***5. Problems of operationalization and further questions***

Human Development Theory convincingly suggests that the integrity of elites is an important and independent factor of development (Welzel–Inglehart–Klingemann 2001, Welzel–Inglehart 2001, Inglehart–Welzel 2005). The authors argue that the integrity of elites – operationalized by the lack of corruption – may influence the aspirations for liberty and resources of autonomy and may modify the structure of codified opportunities. These in turn may lead to the enforcement of the integrity of elites again.

That the lack of corruption is connected to the intentions of elites sounds logical,

since “corruption begins at the top”. But where and when does it end is unclear. It may depend on cultural roots, on everyday shortages or unsolved institutional arrangements as well. Conditions of transition where smuggling was a widespread source of living might strengthen corruption. The grey zone of party financing might be a hotbed of corruption in transformation societies – and perhaps not only in them – too. That the very phenomenon of corruption is complex and its connection with elites’ intention is far from being linear is exemplified by a contemporary Bulgarian research (Krastev-Ganev 2003). Some empirical evidences suggested that there was no connection between corruption-perception and corruption practice, that is between the opinion about the general spread of corruption and the personal experience of bribe. Perception of corruption might be influenced more by the media or campaigns. It follows however that it is not in the interest even of a non-corrupt governing elite to launch an anti-corruption campaign because it may enhance the perception of corruption and may weaken the position of the government at home and abroad.

To make it clear I don’t want to suggest that we have to drop the inverse of corruption as a sign of elite integrity. I just want to warn that corruption is heavily influenced by other institutional and social factors, therefore we have to look for other indices too if we want to measure the quality of elites properly.

Some suggest that the proportion of women in politics is a sign of the quality of elites. Again, taking into account the code of elite practice, it sounds logical (Welzel-Inglehart-Klingemann 2001). But to what

extent is it a precondition or a consequence of good governance, is unclear.

Just to improve the ratio of questions and answers let me raise a few unanswered and in my view burning questions that have to do with the quality of elites. Does higher level of education lead to better quality in terms of social sensitivity as Bibó suggested? How does closing of elites in inter- and intragenerational terms influence the quality of elites? Is there a connection? Is it a sign of consolidation or is it a sign of oligarchization?

Does the style of public debates and the image of elites matter? Is there a connection between the public perception of elites and the quality of life? Do ideologically oriented political debates help to reduce uncertainty? One may suggest that the responsibility of elites lies in the fact that they shape the law, public debates and behavioral patterns. How can we evaluate their performance in this respect?

I do think that one of the greatest problems of contemporary elites is the trap of short term interests. Business elites are interested in yearly or even quarterly balance sheets, political elites’ horizon is not longer than the election period. Who are the agents of the long term horizon? Do the long term aims really seem to be lost? Who are responsible for shaping and controlling supra-national developments? Are they elite groups or are they just anonymous amorphous forces? Shouldn’t we study them?

If national elites are in a “sandwich position” as Pakulski suggested (Machonin 2006) and their role is to mediate between international and local needs, how do they perform in this respect? Are they reactive or proactive? To what extent are the Central

and East European elites able to influence or even just take part in supranational debates and institution building.

As I have promised, the introduction was short and I had more questions than answers. What we are supposed to do during the workshop is to present some of the findings of our

elite researches and in the discussions confront them with qualifying criteria. While doing so we shall try to connect empirical and theoretical, descriptive and normative approaches. But we have to avoid the mistakes of ecological fallacy and “sounds logical so who cares the facts”-way of arguing.

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*JOHN HIGLEY*

## **ELITE AND LEADERSHIP CHANGE IN LIBERAL DEMOCRACIES**

In this lecture I discuss and assess the thesis that a shift in the character of governing elites and leaders has been occurring in several important liberal democracies during recent years. Ascendant elites are more leonine and top leaders are more pugnacious. I attribute the shift to strong centripetal pressures that now impinge on elites and leaders, and I ask about the shift's consequences for the operation of liberal democracies.

Starting with the ascendancies of Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan, and Helmut Kohl during the 1980s, a shift in the character and style of political leadership in liberal democracies has been perceptible. It involves the rise of leaders disinclined to engage in a politics of compromise and consensus and disposed toward peremptory actions backed by force or its threat. These leaders have been gaining executive power through steadily more plebiscitary electoral contests, in which their own ostensibly superior instincts are glorified and their competitors' alleged defects are savaged. Once ascendant, they concentrate government power in core executives at the expense of legislatures and bureaucracies, and they wield this power with relative impunity.

The shift is not uniform across all liberal democracies, and in the countries where it is

most noticeable the shift has not been linear – there are ebbs and flows. But a shift toward more determined and resolute leaders – or, at least, leaders widely perceived as such – is evident: George W. Bush and Tony Blair; Junichiro Koizumi in Japan; Silvio Berlusconi in Italy; Australia's John Howard and Denmark's Anders Fogh Rasmussen. José Zapatero in Spain, Stephen Harper in Canada, and Angela Merkel in Germany may prove to be further examples of the shift, while the aspirations of forceful individuals to national leadership elsewhere cannot be ignored – Nicolas Sarkozy and Jean-Marie Le Pen in France, Carl I. Hagen in Norway, for a time Jörg Haider in Austria, Pim Fortuyn in the Netherlands before his assassination. Although the label may be overly dramatic, 'Caesarist' leaders who gain power by plebiscitary means form a trend somewhat reminiscent of European politics during the interwar decades.

This shift in the character and style of political leaders is not the whole story. In complex liberal democracies leaders are embedded in, and their effectiveness depends significantly upon, political elites: tiny groups of strategic position-holders with the organized capacity to affect political outcomes regularly and substantially. Leaders with images of forcefulness are in

important degree creations of elites – horses elites ride to power. The image of Ronald Reagan as a decisive leader was initially the handiwork of a public relations firm in California, and from start to finish his presidential leadership was carefully choreographed and staged by power-holders who knew much more about politics and issues of the day than Reagan ever bothered to learn. This is transparently the case with the unworldly George W. Bush, who, possessing a household name, has been the puppet of a neo-conservative elite that plucked him from the politically innocuous Texas governorship in order to bull itself into executive power. In some situations a leader's aura of strength may stem primarily from disarray among an opposing elite. Margaret Thatcher, who never won a majority of votes, owed much of her leadership image to chaos in the Labour Party elite, just as Tony Blair's image has owed not a little to the Tory elite's wanderings in the political wilderness.

The ways in which leaders and elites affect each other is, of course, a knotty problem in political sociology. Few would deny that leaders galvanize and orient elites, but that without the power and influence of elites leaders can accomplish little. It is obvious that relations between leaders and elites display much variation. Like Reagan and Bush, some leaders appear to be little more than front men for well-formed elite groups. Like Tony Blair and John Howard, however, other leaders impose their wills on the elites around them. Everywhere, leaders act within the norms and structures of elite politics. In some cases elite norms allow leaders wide latitude; in other cases they constrain leaders sharply. At present in

the U.S., for example, a considerable part of the political elite is seeking to punish George W. Bush and his White House mandarins and cabinet secretaries for breaching norms about the scope of presidential power and the degree to which it can be exercised unilaterally. Beyond loose or tight norms, leaders must contend with elite structures that may be quite concentrated or fragmented. A fair amount of research shows that in liberal democracies elite structures consist of extended circles and networks of political influence and personal acquaintance that tie together several thousand of the uppermost figures in politics, government administration, business, trade unions, the media, a bevy of interest groups, and so on. Such complex and far-flung elite web-works usually stifle a leader's single-minded pursuit of his or her political aims.

These considerations suggest that if a shift toward more forceful leaders is occurring, then a comparable shift in elites is probably also occurring. I want to explore the thesis **that this is a time of increasingly forceful leaders embedded in more aggressive, tightly organized, and mutually antagonistic elites in some of the most important liberal democracies.** I conduct my exploration from the standpoints of Vilfredo Pareto and Max Weber. Specifically, I combine Pareto's discussion of how fox-like elites governing 'demagogic plutocracies' give way to leonine elites and more forceful rule with Weber's discussion of how 'leader democracy' (*Führerdemokratie*) needs charismatic leaders to be viable. Both Pareto and Weber viewed politics from an elite and leadership perspective; they observed and diagnosed the same political trends in Europe (and to a lesser extent

the U.S.) during the stormy early years of the twentieth century; they held unsentimental views of democracy and regarded effective elites (Pareto) and charismatic leaders (Weber) as crucial for its workings. In spite of different philosophical underpinnings – Pareto’s positivism and Weber’s neo-Kantianism – their political analyses were complementary. Pareto saw individual leaders as displaying all manner of foibles and stupidities, so he thought it more profitable to concentrate on the overall psychosocial physiognomies and dispositions of elites. Weber, as his concept of ‘leader democracy’ implies, regarded charismatic and statesmen-like leaders as vital, and he paid little attention to the characteristics of elites as wholes. Pareto largely ignored the social-historical and institutional contexts in which elites act, while Weber paid close attention to such contexts. When combined, the visions of Pareto and Weber dissect the vertical aspects of democracies. Pareto attacked the shortcomings and failures of their elites; Weber worried about the quality of their leaders in the era of parliamentary and mass party politics; both outlined elite and leadership changes that would or should occur.

### *Elites and leaders after World War II*

Pareto and Weber lived in countries and at a time when elite conflicts and rivalries between leaders were – and had always been – largely unchecked. Following national unification in Italy and Germany, deep ideological chasms and mutual distrusts separated opposing elite camps. Those camps

disagreed fundamentally about the political institutions on which their new national states rested and they strove to defend or destroy governments of the day according to their conflicting stances and bases of support. The elites that Pareto and Weber knew best were, in a word, deeply disunited. In Italy, to be sure, right-wing monarchical and left-wing republican elite camps fused in the famous *trasformismo* of 1876, but this proved too narrow to accommodate spreading popular mobilizations of peasants and workers suffering the harshness of industrialization and led by emerging Catholic and socialist elites who had no place in the fused elite and thus no stake in the regime. Exacerbated by foreign misadventures such as the Libyan War in 1912, Italian elite power struggles became steadily more explosive during the years before and after World War I, and they led to fascist dictatorship after the assassination of Socialist leader Giacomo Matteotti in June 1924 and the withdrawal of Socialist deputies from Parliament. In the German Reich authoritarian rule by Bismarck and his successors and by elites associated with them kept the lid on a boiling political pot. But the Imperial regime was reviled by elites leading bourgeois and working-class organizations and movements, and the lid finally came off in the ‘leaderless’ Weimar Republic, the inception of which Weber witnessed.

The disunited condition of Italian and German elites was mirrored in nearly all other European countries (and in all countries of Latin America) before and after World War I. The exceptions were Britain, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Switzerland where, in much earlier and highly contingent circumstances, basic ‘consensual’ uni-

fications of previously disunited elites had occurred – England’s ‘Glorious Revolution’ in 1688-89; elites in the Dutch Provinces banding together to free themselves from Spanish colonial rule in the late sixteenth century; Sweden’s elite-instigated constitutional revolution in 1809; the unification effected by elites in the aftermath of Switzerland’s short civil war during 1847-48. Politically, those four countries, with stable liberal oligarchies governing them, constituted marked deviations in a European landscape suffused by unbridged elite divisions and unstable, mainly authoritarian, regimes Pareto and Weber thus drew their lessons primarily from a particular pattern of elite relations – disunited – and from the capricious leaders and regimes to which it gives rise.

It is interesting to speculate about how their analyses might have differed if Pareto and Weber had had greater personal experience of the consensually united elite pattern. In this pattern extensive communication and influence networks integrate competing factions and leaders who share an underlying consensus about most norms of political conduct and the worth of most existing political institutions. Elite factions and leaders accord each other significant trust, cooperate tacitly to contain explosive conflicts, and compete for political power in comparatively restrained ways. Power sharing is the hallmark of a consensually united elite, and the periodic, peaceful alternations in executive power that mark liberal democracies are its principal manifestation. Pareto’s grudging admiration for the politics practiced by Swiss elites and Weber’s praise for William Gladstone’s leadership role in British politics suggested a fleeting

awareness that elites are not always and everywhere as blinkered as Pareto found them in Italy and that ‘leader democracies’ are not always as bereft of capable leaders as Weber observed in Germany.

In ways and for reasons too varied to recount here, between about 1950 and 1980 consensually united elites and the liberal democracies they create formed in all West European countries where elites had long been disunited. Political practices by fox-like elites and clever leaders came to prevail. Tripartite deals were cut by government, business, and trade union elites to create neo-corporatist condominiums, and state power was used as a regulatory-welfare tool to expand social rights, a practice that was endorsed, more tacitly than explicitly, by all main elite camps. Elites and leaders of nearly all stripes professed to believe that with minor exceptions the activities of each social grouping contributed to the well being of all groupings. Accordingly, each had an interest in securing the cooperation of others in the common operation of social and political institutions. This sense of social interests meshing in some broad common interest, leaving special interests so limited as to be easily negotiable, was widespread among elites and leaders, so much so that it was for a while fashionable to talk about ideology having ‘ended’. A period of Tweedledum and Tweedledee political contests undergirded by economic expansion unfolded – the ‘halcyon years’ that lasted until the oil shocks and stagflation of the late 1970s. Had they witnessed this, Pareto would have proclaimed his analysis of demagogic plutocracy vindicated, but Weber might have had second thoughts about the viability of democracies with leaders lacking charisma if he had



observed West Germany under Konrad Adenauer, Ludwig Erhard and Georg Kiessinger; Italy in the time of Fanfani, Moro, and the raft of manipulators who followed them; Norway and Sweden under father figures like Einar Gerhardsen and Tage Erlander; a U.K. led by the uninspiring but devious ‘two Harolds’ – Macmillan and Wilson; the U.S. during the grey Eisenhower and conniving Johnson and Nixon presidencies; the game of musical chairs being played in Japan by interchangeable LDP leaders – the list could be made much longer. On the other hand, Weber might have found his analysis of leader democracy strikingly illustrated by the charismatic Charles de Gaulle’s rescue of France from its leaderless Fourth Republic.

During the twentieth century’s third quarter, building consensus through deals among major sectors, quieting the less well-off with welfare subsidies, paying off disgruntled special interests with tax breaks, and managing public opinion through increasingly powerful mass media triumphed to such an extent that these practices came to be seen as the normal form of politics in liberal democracies. In those years hardly anyone wondered if the combination of modern organization and advancing technology might be creating a social order in which it would be difficult to keep a reasonable proportion of the population engaged in activities that others could accept as contributing to the common benefit. Starting in the late 1970s, however, the practices of fox-like elites and sly if largely grey leaders were gradually undermined by problems or, as Pareto would say, ‘disequilibria’: the inability of welfare policies to stanch the growth of an impoverished and

socially disorganized underclass; structural unemployment impervious to economic growth; high rates of inflation induced by the deficit-financed Vietnam War and OPEC oil shocks; declining state fiscal and regulatory capacities; a proliferation of single-issue parties and volatile voters contributing to the collapse of some of the elite coalitions cemented in neo-corporatist pacts.

These problems-*cum*-disequilibria were highly publicized in the media and in critical analyses questioning the effectiveness, even the legitimacy, of ascendant leaders and elites – in particular, Jimmy Carter and his administration, the premiership of ‘Sunny Jim’ Callaghan in the U.K., Helmut Schmidt’s chancellorship in West Germany. A backlash gathered force and champions of tougher practices captured public support. Economic rationalist and neo-laissez-faire principles that leave people to sink or swim on their own became fashionable guides to policy, and previously marginal elite factions and leaders espousing those principles came to the fore. Thatcher, Reagan, and Kohl signified the first wave of more tough-minded governance. Thatcher launched a bold military expedition against Argentina in the Falkland Islands and faced down the previously invincible mineworkers’ union. The elite around Reagan did the same to a union of air traffic controllers, undertook a massive military build-up, armed and bankrolled *mujhaddin* insurgents against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and anti-Sandinist ‘freedom fighters’ in Nicaragua, and voiced unremitting hostility toward the Soviet Union’s ‘evil empire’. Kohl acted decisively to reunify Germany, he led the EU’s Maastricht Treaty effort, his govern-

ment precipitously legitimated Yugoslavia's break-up and it unshackled German military forces for previously forbidden foreign deployments.

Because the collapse of Soviet communism between 1989-1991 could plausibly be portrayed, *whatever the reality*, as a Reagan-Thatcher-Kohl victory, it enhanced the shift toward more forceful elites and leaders. In the U.S. demands for tough market rationalism and 'getting government off people's backs' became drumbeats that in 1994 delivered control of Congress to Republicans under the self-proclaimed 'revolutionary' leadership of Newt Gingrich. The alleged folly of decreased US military spending in the wake of the Soviet collapse became the rallying cry of an aggressive neo-conservative elite that was now fully formed. This elite's no-holds-barred tactics were soon evident in the Clinton impeachment proceedings. When the elite, astride George W. Bush, failed to win the 2000 presidential election outright, it ruthlessly exploited an electoral standoff in Florida to obtain the keys to the White House from a friendly Supreme Court majority. Donald Rumsfeld and other top members of the elite immediately began talking, albeit in secret, about the need to eliminate the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq; the Vice President, Dick Cheney, quietly concentrated executive power in his office beyond any US historical precedent; and a symbiosis of the elite's congressional leaders and Washington 'K Street' business lobbyists began a thorough de-regulation of the energy, communications, financial, and other main economic sectors. In the course of 2001, especially after 9/11, it dawned on observers of American politics that an

uncompromising elite had taken over. Coinciding with this US change, Junichiro Koizumi was installed as Japan's prime minister that April; in May Silvio Berlusconi swept into power in Rome; Tony Blair won a second term, nearly by acclamation, a month later; and in November John Howard played the fear cards of asylum-seeking migrant hordes and terrorism to win a third and crushing election victory in Australia.

### *Current elites and leaders assessed*

Elite alignments and alliances during these early years of the twenty-first century are much more complex than during the twentieth century's 'halcyon' period. They involve international elite cartels – economic, political, military, and intelligence – whose national components support each other's positions and policies. Elite positioning in these cartels is as important as positioning in the various national power games. Leaders of the cartels' national components consult frequently with each other, borrow freely from each other's policy repertoires, and shore each other up in crises and election campaigns. Non-stop electronic media promote political competitions that are much more stylistic than substantive. Appeals for support focus on personalities and leadership images rather than policy platforms, and they aim at gaining short-term public approval instead of long-term support. But because these changes have occurred gradually, taking place largely within the elite stratum, they are difficult to assess.

More leonine elites and forceful leaders are, nonetheless, evident in some of the most important liberal democracies. Exhibit A is the assertion of America's geo-political hegemony by the Bush elite. With its inner core of force-oriented 'Vulcans,' its Spartan élan, executive power concentration, and peremptory actions, the Bush elite has clear leonine features. Efforts by ruling elites and leaders in Japan and several European countries to ameliorate economic stagnation and unemployment are also more aggressive and forceful. In Japan, for example, Koizumi and his associates have ended fifteen years of deflation, stoked nationalism and military strength, and broken the hold that the 'iron triangle' of bureaucrats, businessmen, and LDP placemen long had on economic policy. Merkel in Germany and de Villepin and his shadow, Sarkozy, in France seek to act in tough ways to dispel high unemployment, especially among young people. Nearly everywhere in the face of post-9/11 security fears, governing elites deploy expanded intelligence-security apparatuses to put mass publics, especially immigrant Muslim communities, under close surveillance. Consider, for example, the Bush administration's secret and warrantless monitoring of phone calls and e-mails among what is guessed to be 45 million US residents, as well as its secret inspection of international transfers of bank funds by many residents. Or consider the Blair government's elaborate monitoring and tracking of two score UK residents intent on blowing up airplanes bound for the U.S. this past August. Add to these examples the complicity of European governments in the CIA's secret transport of what is said to be several thousand abducted ter-

rorist suspects through airports and air spaces in order to imprison or 'rendition' them.

A leonine ascendancy is apparent in other respects. Acting forcefully against long Labour Party proclivities, Tony Blair and his entourage have given the UK core executive expanded resources and a streamlined capacity to impose policies. They trade peerages and honours for campaign contributions and provide business firms with lucrative opportunities to invest in the public sector. Like members of the Bush elite, most of those in the core executive elite around Blair have not served party and parliamentary apprenticeships but have instead parachuted into power positions from think tanks, public relations firms, business, and other locations. Blair and his lieutenants took the grave step of participating in the invasion of Iraq despite two cabinet resignations and vociferous opposition in parliament, the Labour Party, and the British public. In Australia John Howard and a surrounding staff elite similar in its extra-parliamentary origins to Blair's joined the 'coalition of the willing' in Iraq despite intense parliamentary and public opposition. The Howard elite has twice launched risky military peacekeeping missions in East Timor, intervened with force in the Solomon Islands, threatened pre-emptive attacks on terrorist redoubts in Southeast Asia, and won three re-elections through bare-knuckled campaigns that whipped up voters' fears. In Italy for four years, Silvio Berlusconi and the elite around him played fast and loose with parliamentary and judicial practices, exerted near monopoly control of television, and followed the Bush, Blair, and Howard elites into Iraq in the

teeth of public opposition. In Denmark, where public anxieties about immigration have tended to override foreign affairs, Anders Fogh Rasmussen's government has cut the number of asylum seekers by half, paid Afghan asylum seekers to return home, and restricted the entry of Muslim clerics, without as yet stanching growth of the anti-immigrant People's Party and its demands for even more stringent measures. As illustrated by Donald Rumsfeld's six-year tenure at the Pentagon, top elite figures responsible for policy disasters cannot be controlled by parliaments or parties and can be ousted only by the paramount political leader.

Yet it must be asked if the rise of more leonine elites and forceful leaders is really just a blip on the radar screens of liberal democracies. Do I mistake fairly normal alternations in power, perhaps made sharper by the magnitudes of today's centripetal pressures, for a basic and lasting change in elite and leader modes? There are many indications, after all, that the Bush elite has in its hubris and miscalculations disastrously over-extended US military power and destroyed the US claim to geo-political hegemony. Signs are numerous that the US political elite as a whole is deeply disillusioned by the course of events in Iraq and Afghanistan, by gross administration incompetence when responding to Hurricane Katrina's devastation of New Orleans, and by corrupt and craven deals between Bush elite allies and their clients. If Democrats regain control of Congress in the mid-term elections next month the elite's political paralysis will probably follow, and in any event Bush, Cheney and their top associates will exit power at the

end of 2008. Extensive military repairs and yawning fiscal deficits will be crippling bills that their successors will then have to pay. The departure of Tony Blair and his entourage from power in London will precede the Bush elite's exit. Silvio Berlusconi is gone from power in Rome, perhaps permanently; Junichiro Koizumi has been replaced by Shinzo Abe, who is a somewhat unknown quantity; Australia's 2007 federal election is certain to be John Howard's last. In short, the pattern I have been exploring is ambiguous; it may be more ephemeral than lasting. Nevertheless, it deserves one or two concluding reflections.

### *Conclusions*

For a start, today's more leonine elites and forceful leaders are still quite timid when compared with forebears in interwar Europe. The shift that I have been exploring bears little substantive resemblance to the revolutionary changes that then took place. This difference is at least partly anticipated by Pareto's thesis that deep and violent elite circulations occur only as the result of wars or other truly explosive crises. Although it is conceivable that the Iraq and Afghanistan military quagmires may produce a major crisis in the U.S., the shift in elites and leaders there and everywhere else has to date occurred more or less gradually within each country's elite stratum and in conformance, by and large, with established institutions. There has been no clear rupturing of liberal democracy. But although timid by historical measure, the current elites and leaders whom I have discussed dress their actions in nationalist and populist garbs and present

themselves as champions of the morally upright 'heartland'. They portray terrorist threats to established ways of life as being so dire that harsh and peremptory actions, many of which cannot 'safely' be made public, are imperative. In a plebiscitary way, they enlist mass support by daily and carefully orchestrated appearances in the mass media where opponents are portrayed as dubiously patriotic cowards.

Second, the extent to which the shift is a by-product of US developments nags my exploration. Because of US influence – 'hegemony' if one prefers – the Bush elite's aggressive actions promote comparable actions elsewhere. Thus governments led by Blair, Berlusconi, Howard, Rasmussen, and by José María Aznar in Spain joined the Bush elite's military interventions in Afghanistan and then Iraq, as did governing elites and leaders in most countries of Eastern Europe. They did this for reasons having as much to do with maintaining their alliances and trading relations with the all-important U.S. as with assessments that their own security interests dictated the costly interventions. Likewise, clampdowns on migrant communities that might be harbouring terrorist cells appear to be instigated, at least in part, by the demands of US intelligence agencies. It can be asked, in short, whether the shift I outline is mostly a reverberation of what has been occurring in the U.S.

Another question is whether the US developments – the Bush elite's ascendancy and actions – are themselves an aberration or fluke that will soon disappear. Despite a mountainous literature examining the Bush elite, there is no agreed understanding of it. In particular, the decision to attack Iraq baffles those who are outside the elite's inner

sanctum. After all, the 9/11 terrorist attacks, which have been the main public rationale for the Iraq venture, did not change the international situation of the U.S. one iota. Like the air raid on Tokyo led by Jimmy Doolittle in early 1942, the 9/11 takeovers of passenger planes for use as guided missiles were almost certainly non-repeatable, and, dramatic though they were, they exacted a cost in lives far fewer than the 17,000 homicides and 40,000 car accident fatalities each year in the U.S. While retaliating against Al Quida and its Taliban hosts in Afghanistan was clearly warranted and politically essential, the decision to invade Iraq was either a blunder born of hubris and historic miscalculation about the ability of the U.S. to implant 'freedom and democracy' where it has never existed, or it was part of a much larger, though equally dubious, secret strategy to establish in Iraq a military platform from which the Middle East could be made safe for petroleum supplies and for Israel. The consequence, in any event, has been an evisceration of the Bush elite's political credibility, even its legitimacy, so that it serves decreasingly as a beacon for elites and leaders in other liberal democracies. In this respect, a US stoking of the shift to more leonine elites and forceful leaders may be ending.

Strong centripetal pressures on liberal democracies remain, however, and they are likely to increase. Elites and leaders sense that these pressures require bolder and more forceful responses. With leaders who may be less than genuinely charismatic, liberal democracies will nevertheless have strong plebiscitary features. Appeals for support utilizing emotional and irrational rhetoric and the careful management of leader

images are here to stay. Behind their trappings are likely to be more leonine elites that benefit politically from alliances with large and propertied plutocratic strata. What remains to be seen is how strong and vigorous these elites will be, how much they will

value loyalty over expertise and intellectual advice, how sharply they will centralize executive power in a few hands, and, therefore, how prone they will be to errors, overstretching, and to a new penetration by foxes.

*HEINRICH BEST*

**STABILIZING DEMOCRACY  
IN EASTERN EUROPE UNDER THE CONDITION  
OF HIGHLY VOLATILE POLITICAL ELITES**

This contribution addresses the subject of political elites' circulation and consolidation after regime change. It hereby refers to a classical topic of theoretical and empirical investigation into elites since Vilfredo Pareto (1916, 2178–2227) introduced the idea that, whilst the presence of elites is a constant and universal feature of all societies, membership in this elite is fluctuating and time-limited: Members of an elite are mortal gods, they can never feel safe in their position nor have they full control over their succession. 'Lions' are harassed by 'foxes' and incumbents are ousted by challengers. Established elites, for a while, slow down or even stop this process of renewal and gain far reaching control over the replacement of those who leave the elite *via naturalis*. However, the established elite cannot enjoy this happy state of things for long, since stability usually comes at the price of decadence and estrangement from the rest of society. Sooner or later, counter-elites will successfully challenge the established elites and supersede them or even eradicate them if they feel the need or have the means to do so. "History is a graveyard of elites" Pareto told us, which evokes the picture of happy challengers having a party between the tombstones of their predecessors.

According to the early writers of elite theory, the circulation and consolidation of

elites takes place in cyclical sequences and can be little influenced by any planful human intervention. There are iron laws at work that relentlessly shape and fashion the stratificatory structure of societies and polities. Robert Michels (1915, 408) translated this thought into an imaginative and fearsome picture:

"The democratic currents of history resemble successive waves. They break ever on the same shoal. They are ever renewed. This enduring spectacle is simultaneously encouraging and depressing. When democracies have gained a certain stage of development, they undergo a gradual transformation, adopting the aristocratic spirit, and in many cases also the aristocratic forms, against which at the outset they struggled so fiercely. Now new accusers arise to enounce the traitors; after an era of glorious combats and of inglorious power, they end by fusing with the old dominant class; whereupon once more they are in their turn attacked by fresh opponents who appeal to the name of democracy. It is probable that this cruel game will continue without end."

The ‘aristocratic spirit’ evoked by Robert Michels is in fact a tendency towards a social closure of political elites that accompanies the tendency towards an opening and widening of recruitment channels generally associated with democratisation like a shadow. The inclination towards social closure, the creation or emergence of an insider-outsider gap, incumbency, career protection and the accumulation of privileges are core elements of what is conventionally and somewhat euphemistically called political professionalisation (Best 2003, 370-71).

Like every other sociological law, the “iron laws” of the classical authors of elite theory have to stand the test of history, i.e. the confrontation with empirical evidence accumulated in the course of social and political development. The end of communism in Central and Eastern Europe provides us with new insights into the mechanisms and paths of political developments around 15 years after the (re)establishments of competitive elections and representative political institutions in this region. The question is here whether the cycle of elite replacement – elite consolidation – elite replacement is as deterministic as it was postulated by the classical authors of elite theory or whether we may find “impossible” or at least paradoxical configurations like regime stability without elite consolidation. The research opportunity to get new insights into the dynamics of regime transitions and transformations is supported by the existence of the most comprehensive database on representative elites, which has been built up by the EurElite project (Best and Edinger 2005).

The EurElite project and its various forerunners have extended our understand-

ing of long term developments of European Parliamentary recruitment and representative careers in two essential aspects. First: We are now able to reconstruct the development of European Representative Elites during the past 150 years as a result of two interactive or rather counteractive- processes: professionalisation and democratisation. Second: the changes in the composition of European Representative Elites can be best understood as a sequence of responses to the various challenges confronting polities in their passage through the processes of demonstration and professionalisation. In today’s contribution I will discuss to what extent and in which ways the emergence and subsequential transformation of representative elites in post-communist settings fits into this developmental and explanatory scheme. However, before entering into this discussion I should introduce these schemes more thoroughly and link them to some of the main empirical findings of our study into *Western* European parliamentary elites.

The results of our long term study into European legislative recruitment have shown that trends in our data can hardly be fitted into a linear conception of political development. Even if we apply the most general notion of this concept which asserts that the broad direction of this development “must be that of an opening of political societies” (Blondel 1997, 96) and an “expansion of choice opportunities” (Apter 1973, 6) we see at least a contradictory picture: While European parliaments have for long ceased to be exclusive clubs for the wealthy and high born, while women increasingly find their ways into the assembly halls, we have seen other barriers rise, replacing those of class and gender. These new barriers and fil-



ters are no longer translating status hierarchies and value systems which prevail in societies at large into modes of recruitment, but they are now located within the narrower realm of political systems. The gradual exclusion from the ranks of MPs of those who have a background in productive or distributive economic activities (like entrepreneurs, managers, workers, and agriculturists), the corresponding increase of public servants and (for some time) of officials of pressure group organisations and parties, the growing accumulation (sequential and simultaneous) of local and regional offices, and the increasing embeddedness of contenders into the higher ranks of party hierarchies point into this direction. The abolition of formal barriers of access to European parliaments was thus complemented by the establishment of an informal insider-outsider differential, firmly guarded and perpetuated by selectorates and party organisations. Today, those who are available (in terms of their time budget and the security of their jobs) for elective public offices, whose qualifications and skills are useful for a political career (preferably certificated by an academic degree of some kind), and who are willing and able to implant themselves in local or party offices, stand a preference chance to penetrate the filters and overcome the barriers on their way to a parliamentary seat.

The establishment of an insider-outsider differential combined with an (informal) careerisation of access to parliamentary recruitment forms the basis of political professionalisation. However, the political profession resulting from this process still bears some unusual traits: The taking over of a fully paid elective office and the transforma-

tion into a full-time politician takes place at an average age between 40 and 45, normally preceded by a professional career in non-political occupations. Not much has changed in this regard during the period under investigation, recruitment from "political" occupations like those provided by parties and pressure group organisations has even declined between the 1970s and mid-1990s (although it has slightly risen since). As a rule, the political professional has started and for a long time pursued his or her career as a political amateur. A fully paid elective office is a late reward, although a fairly safe one since turn-over is normally low or moderate after elections. This career pattern, in addition to the before-mentioned entry criteria, favours clearly contenders from the public service, which has become the modal professional category in European parliaments after the Second World War, superseding the self-employed, those in distributive or productive economic functions and even competing successfully with party and pressure group functionaries (Best 2003).

The re-rise of the public service (after its early heydays in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and its decline between the World Wars) as the preferred supplier of European representatives can be associated with the emergence of the cartel party which relies "increasingly for [its] resources on the subventions and other benefits and privileges afforded by the state". With the goals of politics becoming more self-referential and politics becoming a profession in itself (Katz and Mair 1995, 19–20), representatives with a background in the public service incarnate the fusion between party and state: while their stately employer sponsored them when they were amateur or half-amateur politicians through

generous exemptions, he offers a safe haven when their political career gets into trouble. On the other hand, their background and actual interest disposes them to act as “agents of the state” in their representational role (Katz and Mair 1995, 18). Contenders from other professional backgrounds do not enjoy the same privileges and have to face a disproportionately unfavourable risk-benefit relationship when they pursue their political careers. Full-time party functionaries who might offer an alternative to public servants with regard to the compatibility between public office and “private” occupation are a costly option for their employers and are probably harder to “sell” to the voters as suitable representatives than state officials who can still capitalize on the (somewhat faded) aura of impartiality and competence attributed to the public service. However, the rise of the public service to become the main societal sector for parliamentary recruitment does not only reflect the cost-benefit calculations of selectorates and contenders but can also be linked to the main challenge Western European polities faced in the bipolar world after World War II: the establishment of consensually unified polities and societies as a condition for the containment of communism. The mediation of conflicts and the integration of societies was the order of the day, corporate interest mediation and particularly the extension of welfare state benefits were the most important consensus creating politics. The “consensus challenge” found a response in parliamentary recruitment: redistribution specialists, who are predominantly found in the public sector, prevail since this time.

We propose to extend the challenge-response model to become a general ex-

planatory scheme for the long term transformation of European legislative recruitment. Rather than a linear development, following the transformation of social structure in general, we see a pattern of change in parliamentary leadership groups which reflects the sequence of main challenges for polities and societies since (Western) Europe entered the era of democratisation and industrialisation. Thus, the first period of public service dominance in many national parliaments during the 19<sup>th</sup> century coincides with the era of state and nation-building. During this period, “symbol specialists” and specialists in the application of executive power, both of which were to be found in the higher ranks of the public sector, had a dominant role. The second challenge had to be taken up in the period of accelerated economic change when most European societies faced the full impact of industrialisation. In this period specialists in the creation and appropriation of wealth, such as entrepreneurs and landowners, prevailed in parliament. The third challenge was the development of mass democracy and the accumulation of organisational power outside the state apparatus (like parties and pressure groups). This period saw the rise of specialists in mass mobilisation and the running of intermediary organisations. Again we can establish here a link to Katz and Mair’s typology of parties, with the ‘Elite party’ providing a political arena for high ranking state officials and the economic elites (like entrepreneurs and large landowners), the ‘Mass party’ providing the career opportunities for party and pressure group officials of the Michelsian type and the Catch-all party, forming the seedbed for the ‘redistribution specialist’ from public service stock,

who finally takes over in the Cartel party. The convergence of legislative recruitment and career patterns across (Western) Europe after the Second World War can therefore be attributed to a growing synchronisation of developments in party systems and of the main policy alternatives faced by European polities, while the impacts of changes in the formal structures of opportunities (like electoral laws and eligibility rules) or societal change at large have lost momentum.

It should be mentioned here that the key concepts of our long term study into European Parliamentary recruitment and careers can be easily translated into the theoretical frameworks of methodological individualism: professionalisation can be thus conceptualized as a process being driven by the self-interests of established representative elites who wish to erect and safeguard a dividing line between themselves and “unprofessional” competitors who are eager to access the inner realm of power and privilege. The professionalisation of pretenders for office can be seen as a means to streamline and to legitimize future newcomers in a process of “reproductive circulation”. On the other hand “democratisation” can be used as a banner of counter-elites under which they rally for their strife for power the support of those who are excluded from the constituency. It is a strong legitimising and mobilising cause which helps those who lead it to move into the centre of power and privilege of a polity.

The question is here whether, to what extent and in which way the political elite change following the regime change in communist Eastern Europe can be understood in terms of an interaction and counteraction between democratisation and professionalisa-

tion (Best 2005)? In discussing these matters we have first to consider that the regime changes in Eastern Europe were exceptional, if not unique compared to earlier political revolutions in Europe. Whereas the latter would regularly lead to an extension of franchise whereby we include here the Revolution of the Coronations in Portugal and the peaceful overthrow of Francism in Spain when the female vote was introduced in both countries, the overthrow of communism in Eastern Europe took place in countries with fully enfranchised populations. Voting was even a de facto obligation of the adult population, controlled and enforced by regimes which used elections as rituals to legitimise their power structure. Political mobilisation of the whole population (with the exception of some very few “enemies of the people”) is considered to be a distinctive feature of totalitarian regimes of the communist/socialist type – whereas Nazism formally excluded unwanted racial (and political) categories from the electorate and Fascism tied the electoral process to the quota system of a corporate state.

Post-communist “democratisation” can therefore *not* be conceptualised as an extension of franchise and eligibility, as we did previously in our long term studies of European parliamentary recruitment. Instead we should conceptualise post-communist democratisation as an act of empowerment of civil society and as a transfer of political efficacy from some remote locus of political control to the electorates which acquire formally and factually the entitlement to choose between political and candidates who represent them. As a consequence of the distinct character of post-communist democratisation indicators of the democratisation of political elites which have been used in our previous studies can not be

applied here, at least not as indicators for democratisation. A similar diagnosis can be applied to political professionalisation. Right from the beginning of working class parties they were pioneers and promoters of political professionalisation – a phenomenon which was thoroughly described by Robert Michels in the case of pre First World War German Social Democracy. The socialist party “functionary” became actually a role model which was adapted by bourgeois parties, as well as a good example for Duverger’s law of an “infection from the left”.

Although the communists criticised the process of political professionalisation in the Socialist parties from which they had split away, and although they sometimes even justified their schism with the corruption and distance to the working class caused by the socialist parties’ inclination towards political professionalisation, they became themselves masters of political professionalisation. The creation of an insider-outsider differential, a specific *esprit de corps* and – naturally – the allocation of privileges to those who are inside the realm of power – all these criteria are structural features of the communist cadre party (Michels 1915). To some extent full time communist party functionaries were more professional than political professionals in today’s representative democracies of the West, since their careers started earlier, their cross-over into a full-time party function typically took place in their mid twenties and was accompanied by a kind of an “off the job training” in various party academies (Best and Mestrup 2003). For the rest of their active lives they could expect to stay in the apparatus of the party and its affiliated mass organisations, pursuing a career which was for most of the func-

tionaries continuous and predestined from an early stage onwards. Insofar they were much more professional than the professional politicians of representative democracies who normally cross-over into fully paid political functions in their early forties, get only a kind of an on the job training after their election and can in no way count on being on the safe side while pursuing a political career. Insofar post-communist political democratisation was accompanied by political deprofessionalisation which left the new political leaders and would be leaders exposed to the uncertainties of highly volatile electoral fortunes and without organised support-structures – like parties – which could stabilise their careers. Insofar is the post-communist setting unique and exceptional in the history of European representative democracies: democratisation without an extension of suffrage (but with an empowerment of the electorate) combines here with a deprofessionalisation to the political elite.

We maintain that the empowerment of the electorate can be plausibly linked to the volatility of electoral behaviour insofar as post-communist voters, following the long-term regulation of their voting by communist regimes, prefer to attribute their votes freely to competing political parties and avoid commitments to singular parties. This includes non-voting since after decades of enforced conformist participation voters have now the option to stay at home at polling day and watch the political game from a distance. We also suggest that post-socialist democratisation links plausibly with the deprofessionalisation of post-communist political elites since political professionalism, in the sense of a self-empower-

ment of the political elite, would mean a dis-empowerment of the electorate. Seen from such an angle the volatility of voting behaviour is a kind of a self-defence mechanism of the electorate to prevent the emergence of self-perpetuating elite cartels. With some metaphorical latitude one could describe the process of post-communist democratisation as a kind of a struggle between civil-society and the political elite whereby civil society denies the political elite the status of full professionalisation by voting it out of office at each possible occasion.

The workings of this continuous ostracism can be seen in the perpetually high turnover rates which, 15 years after the start of post-communist democratisation, have only once (in the fourth democratic election in Hungary) sunk under the critical threshold of 40% and have – after some initial decline – regained momentum in countries like Slovakia, Bulgaria and Poland (*Table 1*). A comparative analysis of 13 post-communist polities showed that after an initial decrease between the second and third democratic election the average turnover-rates of national MPs remained continuously at a high level of around 55%. This is considerably more than in Western Europe, where since the 1860s average turnover rates never exceeded 50% and fluctuated between around 20% and 35% since the beginning of the 1950s (Best and Cotta, 2000, 504). The sharp increase of turnover in Western Europe from 20% in the late 1980s to 35% in the late 1990s still remained within this band. If one accepts the traditional view that democratic regime stability is linked to that of its political personnel, thereby allowing for consensus generating

mechanisms and practices to emerge, these results should be reason for concern about the future development of post-communist democracies. There are, however, three reasons to see the future of East-European polities in a less gloomy light.

**1.** The standard deviation of turnover between post-communist parliaments increased from 5.6% (second democratic election) to 11.2% (fifth democratic election), which indicates a growing differentiation in political career stability. We have countries like Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovenia which show a continuous and significant decrease of turnover-rates, although only Hungary has to date reached the average West-European level. A larger group, comprising Estonia, Latvia, Russia and Romania displays a continuous decrease of turnover-levels since the beginning of competitive elections without, however, falling significantly below the 50% threshold. Here we can speak of “stabilization of career-instability”. In Poland, Lithuania, Croatia and Slovakia we see an intermittent pattern with an initial decrease and an ensuing increase of turnover rates, which has been sometimes reversed in recent elections. Finally we have the extreme cases of Bulgaria and Moldova, where turnover increases to, or remains at a very high level above 70%, which was previously found only in situations of regime discontinuity.

There are no simple reasons for the differentiation of turnover rates and the according clustering of countries. It seems, however, that lower turnover is supported by a polarized political culture with a bipolar pattern of party-competition, the absence of a strong constitutional position of a president,

a culturally homogeneous electorate and a relatively stable party system. We should, however, not forget that, with the exception of Hungary, even in the presence of these factors, turnover in post-communist polities is consistently higher than in western democracies.

2. This does not mean – and here we come to the second reason for cautious optimism – that post-communist political elites have resigned into themselves to the unfavourable situation of career instability and the permanent threat of being expelled from the realm of power, and even of being denied further participation in the competition for power. They seem to apply the strategy of creating at least a nucleus of career politicians, making up between a sixth and a quarter of MPs of the whole legislative who are granted a preference chance to be re-elected and thus to transmit procedural knowledge – both formal and informal – in other words, the social capital of political friendships and acquaintances, and the legislative skills that are indispensable for running a parliamentary democracy (Ilonszki and Edinger 2006). They are the cadres of representative democracy. The other MPs who do not belong to the core group of survivors compensate for political career insecurity by maintaining useful links to societal forces and powers outside parliament and parties. For example, the share of MPs with formal and informal ties to the world of business is higher in Central and Eastern Europe than in the West. For them the parliamentary mandate is a useful episode in a career to be continued outside the institutional framework of the political system but in close operational contact with it. Thus, the iron law of oligarchy works

despite the erratic unpredictability of Central and Eastern European electorates – shifting the weight of power from the electors to the elected.

3. Another factor, somewhat relieving the strain on post-communist democracies in Eastern and Central Eastern Europe, is the way in which voters' turnout and politicians' turnover are correlated. Low turnout and high turnover are commonly seen to indicate a threat to the stability of representative democracy, with low turnout having a delegitimizing effect on the outcomes of the democratic process and high turnover eroding the social and cognitive bases for competent policy making. A correlation analysis show, however, that turnover and turnout are positively correlated (*Diagram 1*). Although the correlation coefficient is low ( $r = 0.29$ ;  $r^2 = 0.09$ ), results show that, at least with regard to these two indicators, strains on the performance and legitimacy of East European democracies are not accumulating systematically.

On the other hand, it is quite obvious that the oligarchs of post communist democracies thrive in a less benevolent environment than western politicians did in the era of mass parties and cartel parties, when the support markets within the electorates were neatly defined and fairly stable, and while turnover was limited and controlled by party organisations as well as organised selectorates. These halcyon days of old European representative democracy may too be coming to an end: Since the early 1990s we observe a fall in incumbency and a rise of turnover in these regions can also be seen too (Best and Cotta 2000). Insofar, Eastern and Central Europe pro-

vides the West with an image of its own future, including the corrupting consequences of political career insecurity, such as a tendency towards to a “grab and run” mentality. This image might also depict a common challenge to be faced by Eastern and Western European Democracies alike, a threat that originates from inside the institutions of representative democracy. We call this the “legitimacy challenge”, which refers to the public’s declining belief in the integrity and authority of political elites in general and parliamentary representatives in particular. Secularisation has finally reached the sphere of the civic religion of representative democracy and may undermine the transcendental basis of its working.

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Table 1

**Percentage of Newcomers in Selected CEE Parliaments  
in Post-Communist Democratic Elections (DE)**

	<b>1. DE</b>	<b>2. DV</b>	<b>3. DV</b>	<b>4. DV</b>	<b>5. DV</b>
Poland	100/75.7*	68.7/64.8*	50.7/50.2*	55.2/54.6*	
Slovakia		62.0	48.7	58.7	68.7
Czech Republic		67.5**	46.0	43.5	43.0
Hungary	96.4	63.7	48.7	31.3	
Estonia	100	65.6	51.5	49.4	
Latvia	100	68.0	57.0	57.0	52.0
Lithuania	100	71.6	54.7	69.1	49.7
Slovenia	100	73.3	63.3	46.7	46.7
Croatia	100	83.3	52.0	62.9	57.9
Bulgaria	100	66.3	60.0	70.3	75.8
Romania	99.2	71.8	64.1	60.9	58.4
Moldova	70.2	74.3	76.2	58.4	
Russia***	79.1/100	66.5/65.1	60.6/61.1	/51.8	
Mean		69.3	56.5	54.7	56.5
Sdv		5.6	8.4	10.6	11.2

Source: EurElite DATA CUBE (unless other sources mentioned)

\* Second figure is correct if semi-democratic Sejm of 1989 is included

\*\* Czech Republic: Elections 1992 (94.9% if 1990 parliament not considered); 1996; 1998; 2002

\*\*\* Source for figures left of slash: von Steinsdorff 2003: 160



Table 2

**Electoral Turnout in Selected CEE Countries in Post-Communist Democratic Elections (DE)**

(First chamber and – whenever relevant – first round of elections)

	1. DE	2. DV	3. DV	4. DV	5. DV
Poland	43.2	52.1	47.9	46.2	40.6
Slovakia	(95.4)	84.2	75.7	84.2	70.0
Czech Republic	(96.8)	85.1	76.3	73.9	58.0
Hungary	65.1*	68.9	56.3	70.5	
Estonia	78.0	67.8	68.9	57.4	58.2
Latvia	81.3	91.2	72.7	71.0	71.5
Lithuania	71.7	75.3	52.9	58.6	45.9
Slovenia	83.1	85.6	73.7	70.1	60.5
Croatia	84.5	75.6	68.8	76.5	61.7
Bulgaria	90.8	83.9	75.2	58.9	66.8
Romania	86.2	76.3	76.0	65.3	58.5
Moldova	79.3	69.1	67.5	64.8	
Russia	54.8	64.7/64.4**	61.7	55.8	
Ukraine	75.8	70.8	69.4		
Means	77.6	75.0	67.4	65.6	59.2
Sdv	15.0	10.4	9.2	10.2	9.8

\* <http://valtor.valasztas.hu/valtort/jsp/index.jsp//>

\*\* for explanation of differences comp. [http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/2568/e\\_rde95r.html](http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/2568/e_rde95r.html)

Election years:

Poland: Sejm	= 1991; 1993; 1997; 2001; 2005
Slovakia: National Council	= 1990; 1992; 1994; 1998; 2002
Czech Republic: National Council. then Chamber	= 1990; 1992; 1996; 1998; 2002
Hungary: Országgyűlés	= 1990; 1994; 1998; 2002
Estonia: Riigikogu; 1990 Supreme Soviet	= 1990; 1992; 1995; 1999; 2003
Latvia: 1990 still Supreme Soviet	= 1990; 1993; 1995; 1998; 2002
Lithuania: 1990 still Supreme Soviet	= 1990; 1992; 1996; 2000; 2004
Slovenia: Chamber of Deputies	= 1990; 1992; 1996; 2000; 2004
Croatia: Chamber of Deputies of the Sabor	= 1990; 1992; 1995; 2000; 2003
Bulgaria: National Assembly	= 1990; 1994; 1995; 1997; 2001
Romania: Chamber of Deputies	= 1990; 1992; 1996; 2000; 2004
Moldova	= 1994; 1998; 2001; 2005
Russia: Duma	= 1993; 1995; 1999; 2003
Ukraine	= 1994; 1998; 2002

Sources: all data were double-checked except for Lithuania 2004

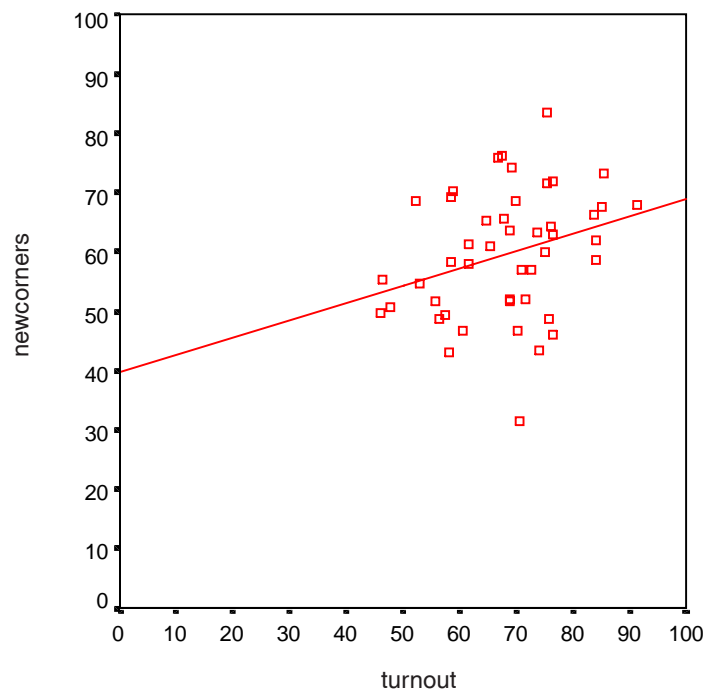
➤ Ziemer 2003

➤ <http://www.parties-and-elections.de>

- <http://www.electionworld.org/> (supplementary for SK 2002. EE 2003; HR 2003)
- University of Essex (for Baltic states and Moldova) <http://www2.essex.ac.uk/elect/database/election.asp>
- <http://www.cspp.strath.ac.uk/slovelec.html> (for Slovenia)
- Electoral Turnout Estonia: <http://www.vvk.ee/english/overview.html>

*Diagram 1*

**Correlation between Turnover and Turnout in Post-Communist East European Countries\***



$r^2 = 0.09$ ; sig. = 0.047

\* Values for turnout and turnout are taken from Tables 1 and 2.

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PETR HARTOŠ–MARTIN NEKOLA*

**CZECH ECONOMIC  
AND POLITICAL ELITES AFTER 15 YEARS  
OF POSTSOCIALIST TRANSFORMATION**

*1. The Postsocialist  
Transformation as a Change in the  
Societal System*

Most European postsocialist transformations 1989–2005 represent a new type of non-violent qualitative societal change, the main exception being the war events accompanying postsocialist changes in former Yugoslavia. Thanks to the new balance of power in the world and in European politics and economics these transformations differ from most of the social and political revolutions that have occurred before. This applies especially to the transformations observed in the East-Central-European type of societies and it is a characteristic that more or less certainly refers to the postsocialist countries that are new members of the EU. The background of these countries was in a state socialist (totalitarian, or also authoritarian, egalitarian and non-market) system with extensively developed (semi-modern) and undercapitalized society, which in the postsocialist period progressed with significantly high probability of success towards democratic, market and more or less meritocratic or class social systems characteristic of the early stages of post-industrial (late modern) society.

This historical process has been so far realized in two phases, roughly determined

by changing geo-political contexts. In the first phase (in roughly the first half or first two thirds of the 1990s) the transition to a democratic parliamentary political system took place along with rapid radical economic and social changes, all of which occurred under the key influence of the neo-liberal stream in world politics and economics and in many cases with the application of so-called shock-therapy or at least of some of its elements. The increasing economic difficulties and social tensions that ensued in the last third of the 1990s heralded the start of the second phase, which is still currently under way, and which has been strongly influenced by the EU accession process and the rapidly developing economic cooperation with advanced European countries. This phase is characterized by the fact that the modernization aspects of transformation and the necessity to somehow strengthen social cohesion have moved to the fore. However, in individual countries that signs indicating a possible new turn to the right, mainly as a result of some of the flaws and failures of left-centrist governments, including corruption, continuing economic and social difficulties, and a certain disillusion with developments in both world politics, after the outbreak of the war in Iraq, and in the European Union, after the affair with the

European Constitution. This turn has moreover recently begun to be manifested in the results of the parliamentary elections in Poland 2005. This description of the two historical phases is not, however, fully valid for all the countries in question. For example, the temporal pacing of Slovakia's course differs slightly from this general scheme. But the crucial element behind the difference between this country and the others, i.e. the period that featured a temporary but prevailing influence of nationalist and populist forces, has some analogies in the other societies, including the Polish case. The changes in the Baltic republics have also been shown some specificity.<sup>1</sup> But the problems typical for each of the two phases nonetheless had to be solved in all the countries of the East-Central European type.

The current social and cultural-civilizational structures of the societies in question can for the most part be described as a hybrid combination of the surviving bureaucratic and egalitarian relationships and the new meritocratic and class relationships. The young democratic systems are still just developing the requisite political culture and trying to obtain a balance between administrative regulation and civil society. Also, the political party system seems to be far from the relative stability that is typical of countries with a long history of parliamentary democracy. Only some professionals (mainly those active in the entrepreneurial sector of the economy) have attained economic and social statuses that correspond to their qualifications and achievements, while others (mainly those working in the public sphere) are still suffering from the consequences of inherited egalitarianism. This makes the influence of the new middle-strata rather

weak. Simultaneously, some clear contours of a new class structure have emerged. In addition to the revival of a petty bourgeoisie class and a class of mid-level entrepreneurs, a managerial class and a top capital ownership class have also emerged (in many cases in illegal and/or immoral ways of attaining the new positions), along with elements of a political and bureaucratic class both of which enjoy some privileges. On the other hand, a relatively high unemployment rate and a significant amount of poverty and other forms of social exclusion show that a clear-cut social polarization between the top and bottom rungs of the social ladder has occurred. Such relationships form the social framework in which complex, deep and controversial civilizational and cultural modernization changes are taking place.

The complex and continually changing external and internal conditions of the developments in the European postsocialist countries facilitate the application of various social models. One such model resembles the neo-conservative and neoliberal US concept. But there are also a variety of European types of social arrangements that come into consideration (e.g. democratic-socialist, social democratic, social liberal, Christian conservative or the centralist of Russian type). In all the above-mentioned European models the liberal and democratic concepts are combined with some respect for social rights and protection. Of course, the application of nationalist and populist models appears not yet to have been completely ruled out, though the return to the principles of state socialism does appear – at least among the countries of the Central-European type – to be very unlikely. There is also the possibility of hybrid combinations of features from several of these models<sup>2</sup>.

In any case, the future of the postsocialist countries is in no way pre-determined and there remains a broad field for relatively free choice. As membership in the European Union provides some guarantee that these choices will be democratic in character, and the pre-agreed and codified rules of the game in this community lead the member countries towards modernization goals and the maintenance of social cohesion, the manifold differences between the possible future developmental trends in most of the European postsocialist countries can be reduced to the main difference of those that strengthen the European Union and those that weaken it. This does not mean that the current state of the EU should be in any way idealized or that automatic support should be given to the bureaucratic and centralist tendencies that exist in this European organization. However, European and world history do not allow the postsocialist countries in Central and South-Eastern Europe any other general choice than joining the advanced European countries and cooperating with them or opting not to do so.

## ***2. The Role of the Elites in the Postsocialist Central-European-Type Transformation***

According to the “sandwich” concept outlined some years ago by J. Pakulski in an elite workshop held in Prague, the role of national elites in the postsocialist transformation processes lies mainly in the intermediation of external (international) and internal (nationally specific social) influences and pressures that express corresponding

social needs and interests. However the postsocialist political and partly also economic elites are still more fragmented or even divided than unified.

Each of the various inner components of the society’s elites is bound to one or more of the international forces influencing the course of transformation. The majority of these forces are of a geopolitical nature. The first such sphere of forces can be specified as the combined influence of international economic institutions and international corporations, North American capital and the US administration, and the international organizations controlled by them. These are usually referred to as the leading forces of globalization. The second factor is clearly the EU, with its broad network of economic, political, social and cultural institutions, and the European economy. Though there are differences in the interests specific for individual old EU members and in their specific relationships to the postsocialist countries – both as a whole and individually – thus far the relatively united influence of the European community on the postsocialist societies has prevailed. The specific influence of Germany on most of the European postsocialist countries must of course not be neglected. Despite the defeat of the Soviet block in the last wave of the Cold War, and despite the tensions that continue to exist between the successor states in the former Soviet Union and the other postsocialist countries, no one can deny Russia’s continued political and military influence and its economic weight in some aspects in international and European affairs. This makes the influence of Russia the third geopolitical factor, perhaps weaker than the first two, but certainly still one that affects events in

postsocialist countries and the behavior of some segments of the economic and political elites. In comparison with these three powerful geopolitical streams of influence, other sources, including, for instance, the influence of the United Nations or the Asian great powers, are still of only secondary significance.

The individual segments of the elites in the societies of the European postsocialist countries tend to be also tied to some internal social grouping of class, strata, ethnicity, sector, region, settlement, religion, generation and vice versa. This is a result of tradition, ideology, the social composition of the grouping's members and supporters, and basic program goals. However, those whose harbor the ambitions of attaining one of the leading positions in the political system must to transcend to some degree their a priori ideological positions and traditional social anchoring in order to gain broader than the traditional mass support. Other phenomena leading to such behavior may also be the somewhat more elastic program positions of the centrist (including the left- and right-centrist) parties, and often also endeavors to employ the specifics of certain historical situations to give some parties or movements the chance at the crucial moment to acquire far broader support than what corresponds to their ideology and program. This last phenomenon occurs frequently in the less stable context of radical, or even "revolutionary" changes, as occurred over the course of the "velvet revolutions" in favor of the dissent movements or, after the interval of their temporary triumphs, instead in favor of the neoliberal parties, with their imported programs promising rapid economic growth and improved living standards in exchange for

popular consent to, or at least patience with, the immediate implementation of shock therapy. The other possible means whereby parties and movements suddenly acquire broad support without being deeply anchored in tradition and ideological influence is through the public's disappointment with objective failures or the thorough discrediting of the traditional parties that had ruled to that point. In this case, the sudden rise of a radically or extremist populist movement is even possible in a normally functioning democratic system. One might object to the amount of emphasis laid on such phenomena in connection with the specifics of the postsocialist transformations alone. It is indeed true that these phenomena can also occur in stable democratic systems, especially in times of radically changing international or domestic circumstances and the consequent need for strategic responses. But it is also true that in the postsocialist countries events of this character are substantially more frequent than in the advanced European countries. This is partly owing to the instability of democratic systems that stems a. o. from the spread of a false, extremely liberal-anarchist concept of democracy, and partly owing to the strength of the changing external influences after the fall of the Soviet empire, and it is partly also owing to the imposed radicalism of the first reform steps and the extraordinary complexity of the simultaneous solutions implemented to address the enormous political, economic and cultural problems, as mentioned in Chapter 1 of this paper.

These explanations for the unstable behavior of many political subjects, and especially the representative political elites, are certainly all valid to some extent. On the other hand, the confused political, economic

and social developments in the European postsocialist countries can be expressed as follows: for serious political subjects and their leaders it does not pay to deviate much or at length from promoting the needs and interests of their basic social supporters or from their own traditions, their own ideology and their historical programs. If changes in this direction are necessary, the only way in which to minimize the loss of social support is for the political elites to be fully open and sincere and for the political leaders to explain in easily comprehensible terms the reasons and likely consequences of the eventual strategic turns and to make and stick to the guarantee that the strategic changes will not lead to substantial damage but rather to improvements in the quality of life of society as a whole. (Something like this occurred at the moment when left-centrist political parties after seizing governmental positions in the mid 1990s had to explain their support for import of foreign, mainly European economic capital.)

In any case, today the fragmentation of political elites in the European postsocialist societies varies considerably from one country to the next according to both basic and relatively stable characteristics and to the flexible modifications made to them. The relationships between the individual parts of the elites, the degree to which they cooperate, make compromises, lose or win, and compete or fight, and, of course, the strength of their influence on the population, as derived from both their program strategy and tactical qualities and from the personal qualities of their leaders, are the factors that determine for periods of varying length (depending, as a rule, on the results of elections) what kind of strategy is asserted in

individual countries and has the chance to shape the societal systems either for, or against the assumed, and thus far likely, complex transformation goals. For the time being, in most postsocialist countries the prevailing situation is one of a socially and politically “divided ship that cannot sail”: the principal social and political subjects only barely show an ability and willingness to together search for and implement optimal or at least compromise solutions. This is also one of the causes of the sudden and sometimes nearly haphazard changes in the developmental trends in individual countries. No one could say that in such a situation the countries in question do not need their elites in the role of intermediating between the incentives coming from advanced Europe and the cultural and social handicaps typical for the mass of society and in the role of maintaining social cohesion in favor of further modernization.<sup>3</sup> However, the model of elites behavior ought probably to resemble more a rationally argued tendency towards promoting consensus and pragmatism, including the promotion of compromise in important issues of European and national significance – something that S. Szomolányi [2002] calls the “gradual convergence of elites”.

EU membership was assumed to be and to some degree still is one of the main unifying and stabilizing factors that assists the progress of transformation processes. However, the increasing differences among individual member countries and various political streams within the EU in connection with the European Constitution and the interpretation of the Lisbon strategy have significantly weakened this unifying and stabilizing influence.

### ***3. The Birth, Development and Current Structure of Economic and Political Elites in the Czech Republic***

#### ***3.1. The Economic Elite***

A series of analyses of economic, historical and sociological data produced by a group of Czech sociologists in the years 1994–2005<sup>4</sup> indicate that the shaping of the new economic elite had deep roots in the composition, behavior and attitudes of the absolute majority of the state socialist management elites in Czechoslovakia and in the Czech Lands. It was Ivo Možný [1993] who formulated the idea that a large proportion of Czech managers had in the 1980s already become interested in making substantial changes to the Czech economic system. In our opinion this means that they were aware of *a)* the weakness of the Czech economy in comparison with the economies in the countries with rapid economic developments, *b)* the disadvantages arising from their limited right to make decisions in the system of the command economy, and some role was even played by the fact that *c)* there were evident limits to their incomes in comparison with the salaries of western managers, not to mention the incomes and wealth of capital owners. Particularly the younger and middle aged and better educated managers in mid-ranking positions in the economic hierarchy, regardless of whether they were members of the Communist Party or not, were dissatisfied with their status and the prospects for mobility into higher positions occupied by the group of old and faithful communist cadres.

#### THE HISTORICAL PHASES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ECONOMIC ELITES

In the first phase of the transformation the large majority of the postsocialist economic elites – made up of the continued presence and active engagement of the non-discredited (and therefore less influential under state socialism and more influential after 1989) part of the top and mid-level state socialist management – played a key role in the privatization process and profited maximally from the prevailing national character of it. According to the Elite research 1994<sup>5</sup> two-fifths of the economic elites in 1994 had also been members of the state socialist elites, though not necessarily in the same positions. We call them the old-new economic elites. As for the other three-fifths, which we refer to as the new economic elites: 30% of them were in 1989 managing several departments in an enterprise or in some other organizational unit, which means that they were close to an elite position, 55% belonged to the mid-level management, and only 15% were real newcomers to the management or capital-ownership structure after 1989. [Tuček 1996: 157–161]

These findings falsify the general validity of the hypothesis of elite circulation [Szelényi and Treiman 1991, Szelényi 1995]. The exceptions to this falsification can be found only among new owners, who reached their positions in the process of restitution. Although there was a substantial amount of privatization carried out using this method in Czechoslovakia, relatively more so than in other postsocialist countries, the number of restituted who carried on in their



own or their parents entrepreneurial activities was limited, and the number of among them who became members of the economic elites was almost negligible. Either, the assumption that there was a tendency towards a kind of conversion of old political capital into new economic capital has not been confirmed as a widely valid rule, though a number of such cases did indeed take place. In 1994 the proportion of former communists among the members of the old economic elites amounted to 95%, among the old-new 83%, and among the new 53%. [Tuček 1996: 157–161] Some data collected in our 1999 survey<sup>6</sup> testify to a decline in these percentages to approximately 25%, while the age composition of the current elites indicates the high probability that this tendency is continuing.<sup>7</sup>

Serious economic and social difficulties and an increase in the level of popular dissatisfaction in the years 1995–1998; the apparent existence of many illegal and/or immoral activities among a not negligible part of the old/new economic elite; corresponding changes in the composition of the government (1997, 1998) and in economic and social strategy; a series of bankruptcies of privatized banks, big industrial enterprises and other firms; the increasing inflow of foreign, particularly European, capital with corresponding personnel changes; the start of serious negotiations for EU membership; the gradual generational change in favor of younger and, in terms of education and/or fresh experience, better qualified cadres – all this, plus some other factors,<sup>8</sup> resulted in the final years of the 20th century in the relatively radical downfall of an important part of the economic old/new elites recently discredited in the new conditions of society. At

the same time as the fall of prominent right-wing politicians engaged in the field of economic policy (or shortly thereafter it) a significant portion of top managers belonging to the old-new political elite had to leave their positions, despite the fact that the criminal character of their privatization activities in most cases could not be proved owing to the absence of the relevant necessary legislation at the time these activities were realized. (There is a strong suspicion that the well-known delay in the introduction of the relevant legal provisions only after the actual privatization process was an intentional element that formed part of the neoliberal privatization strategy, like the element of shock therapy.) However, gradually the activities of the police and the justice system became more effective and contributed to foiling several cases of fraudulent behavior, this time mainly among the *nouveaux riches* that had emerged out of the privatization process.

In the ensuing years the natural process of the ageing of managers gradually excluded from economic activities those managers who had been engaged in the reform processes of the 1960s and assisted in the realization of the economic strategy of the minority social democratic government led by Mr. M. Zeman. At the same time the rise of the successful privatizers continued. Some of them even became members of the really top elite.

#### THE 50 RICHEST CZECHS

Some interesting information relating to this issue was provided in an overview of the 50 richest Czechs that was published at the end

of 2002 in the magazine supplement of one of the major national daily newspapers [Magazin Lidové noviny 2002]. It showed that 23 of them were younger than 40 years of age (6 of them in this age group were professional sportsmen approaching the end of their active career), 15 were in the age group 40–49, and only 10 were in the age group 50–59. There were only 2 people from the older generation in this list, both of them restituted and at the same time dissidents. In addition to them there was also one relatively younger heir to the family enterprise on the list. (It is not surprising that there was only one woman on the list of the richest people.) Only one man on the list belonged to the old and the old-new political elite and used his social and political capital to acquire a good deal of economic capital as a lawyer. Another young man benefited his career by using his position in the fund dealing with the confiscated fortunes of the state socialist youth organization. And 4 on the list had returned to Czechoslovakia after 1989 with some amount of disposable capital.

This means that the overwhelming majority of the current Czech economic elites (managers and capital owners with other than Czech or Slovak nationality were not included in the overview) can be described as *nouveaux riches*.<sup>9</sup> However, this does not mean that these and the many other people close to them in the highest ranking economic positions were involved in the phenomenon Ivan Szelényi et al. called “making capitalism without capitalists” [Eyal, Szelényi and Townsley 1998, 2003]. In the process of liberalization and privatization which took place in the course of the second half of the 1990s and at the beginning of the new century and the continued functioning of old-new or

new companies these people became real capitalists operating quite normally in both the domestic and international markets, regardless of their rather heterogeneous career backgrounds, though somewhat limited in their activities by certain factors that will be mentioned below. Leaving aside the athletes, most of whom likely only will become part of the business elite, there remain 14 newcomers who started as mostly mid-level managers in industry, construction, transport, commerce etc., 12 in the banking sector, privatization funds, stocks, betting shops, financial companies and real estate business, 2 in foreign trade, 1 in agriculture, 1 in the spa business, 2 in the media and show business, 2 in state offices and 2 as real self-made-men. But their current standing among the economic elites, the amounts of their disposable capital, and their forms of behavior place them, and others with similar statuses, unquestionably at the core of the developing capitalist class. In this regard we cannot find any features that distinguish them from the capitalist classes *in statu nascendi* that developed in bourgeois revolutions. In the Czech case, as in many other postsocialist transformations, the opportunities and significance of this group are limited by two factors. The first is the apparent hegemony of foreign capital, which is represented among the contemporary economic elites primarily (but not exclusively) by managers of Czech origin, whose economic influence, based on their mandates from abroad, is probably even stronger than that of the richest Czech capital owners and managers. The second limitation to the class positions of top Czech businessmen is the considerable amount of state intervention based on the “rules of the game” established by the legislation that dates from the past

decade, with two election victories by the social democrats. On the other hand, the position and influence of strong economic subjects has significantly increased in the past several years, and their interests are often asserted by lobbying, and in some cases even by corruption, which has not been sufficiently tackled by the state administration.

The increasing accent laid both objectively and subjectively on the competitive force and modernization of economy together with the increasing pressure of EU on the Czech economic legislation and policy further and increasing influence of foreign capital in the national economy accelerated the generational exchange, changes in qualification and attitudes of economic elite.

#### A COMPARISON BETWEEN 1994 AND 2002

We have some means of comparing the description of economic elites at two different points in time – in 1994 and 2003–4.<sup>10</sup> The sampling in the case of economic elites

by means of a list of big and important firms and selection of their high representatives was in the two surveys in question quite alike what makes the comparison possible. Leaving aside some questionability of full representativity of any way of sample selection in any elite survey the results obtained on these two bases roughly correspond to the known historical facts and sociological data concerning developments both of society as a whole and especially of Czech economy and political system and enabled rational interpretations presented in this paper.

The first piece of information to come out of the comparison is that the proportion of males in the economic elites decreased from 90% in 1994 to 80%. This corresponds to the known fact that there has been some increase in the amount of private economic activity among women. However, the education and qualification potential of women is far from being fully applied, and one may expect that this tendency will progress further.

Also, the data on the age structure are important and very interesting.

*Table 1*

**Age structure of the Czech economic elite 1994 and 2003/2004**

Year	Type of elites	Age groups						
		60+	55–59	50–54	45–49	40–44	35–39	–35
1994	Old-new+new	6.4	11.1	21.1	22.3	17.9	12.3	8.9
2003–2004	Contemporary	12.8	14.0	10.5	12.8	16.3	18.6	15.1

[Data 1994, 2003/4]

Though the average age of the two compared historical sections of Czech economic

elite remained nearly equal (around 46 years) shows the table quite clearly the dif-

ferences. For the economic elite in the first phase of transformation was characteristic the dominance of the middle aged, only beginning start of the younger and some decline of the share of the oldest members caused by the departure of the old discredited part of the state socialist elite. The middle aged from 1994 became old in 2004 and the

share of younger people increased in the meantime substantially. The natural exchange of leading businessmen became a regular pattern of changes in structure of the business elite.

We can also compare the educational structure of the economic elites in the course of the transformation.

*Table 2*

**Highest attained education of the Czech economic elite  
1994 and 2003/2004**

Year	Type of elite	Apprenticeship	Full secondary	Tertiary or postgraduate
1994	Old	2.4	22.6	75.0
1994	Old-new+new	0.8	13.8	85.4
2003–2004	Total	0.7	17.3	82.0

[Data 1994, 2003/4]

In 1989 only the system of “working-class directors” typical of the 1950s had survived, but the influence of the political approach to the nomination of cadres still resulted in an insufficient percentage of people with tertiary education and of course in the insufficient (onesided, not corresponding to the new conditions) qualification of all managers. This clearly improved in 1994. In the sample of representatives of the selected large firms it is possible to observe only a slight decline in the percentage of tertiary educated by 2003/2004, a decline that is much more visible in broader samples including mid-level managers. This kind of decline indicates the existence of upward mobility among new capital owners and managers with lower education resulting from the liberalization of the labor-force

market. This has opened up the possibility of applying other aspects of qualifications than just education, e.g. entrepreneurial skills and/or a willingness to take risks, that is, qualifications not necessarily tied to education.

QUALITATIVE  
IN-DEPTH SURVEY

The contemporary economic elites mostly share a (neo)liberal<sup>11</sup> outlook and support EU membership and its positive influence on the Czech economy. In the last quarter of 2004 and at the beginning of 2005<sup>12</sup> Petr Hartoš from the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences carried out a brief qualitative in-depth-survey of the views of 17 members of the business elite and eco-

conomic experts on the impacts of the accession of the Czech Republic to the EU. The participants in this research gave a highly positive evaluation of the results of EU membership and various aspects of it. Most frequently they positively evaluated the country's inclusion in a broad European economic space with a market character, the economic contributions from structural and other EU funds, the close cooperation with European firms and their investment activities in the Czech Republic, the growth in the Czech economy and exports and in the competitive force of the economy, some increases in wages and the standard of living, the broader assortment of goods and services, and the fact that the expected rapid rise in prices did not occur, etc. All these expected or already partially realized shifts were viewed as leading to an increase in the authority of the Czech Republic in the international stage and an increase in the country's attractiveness. At least one-half of the participants in the research supplemented their views of the straightforward economic impacts with a positive evaluation of even more profound consequences, either already under way or expected, which one of the respondents called "civilization impacts". The country's alignment with the more advanced part of Europe, where many countries, in many regards, represent ideal models for the Czech future, and the systematic pressure exerted by EU institutions were regarded as powerful impulses for improving above all educational and technological level of Czech society. The positive influence of the EU was also seen in the pressure it exerts in the areas of improving legislation, asserting rule of law, in the entrepreneurial milieu, and in democratic

political culture. Only exceptionally was mention also made of the positive impacts in the areas of welfare state policy and participative democracy.

Although very Euro-skeptic views, stressing the limits on national sovereignty, appeared only exceptionally, about one-third of the participating business actors and/or experts expressed some skepticism about the functioning of the EU to date and its overly optimistic outlook and pointed out some general characteristics of the EU that they considered to be negative. In the eyes of the critics two of these objections seem to be primary problems:

- a) the bureaucratic and overly complicated juridical and administrative approach of EU institutions to the problems of individual member states (especially the new ones), social realities, and needs and interests;
- b) the exaggerated pressure on regulative and redistributive activities within national economies. Many respondents cited the negative consequences of EU accession and the pre-accession preparation activities already in effect in the country as the following: the competitive pressure from the more advanced countries in the market, both from firms and in the labor force, an increase in unemployment, the restrictions on the activity of the Czech labor force in other countries, the threat posed to typically domestic branches of the economy, the overtaking of domestic firms by foreign capital, insufficient agricultural subsidies, the overrunning of small business, the extension of immigration, the intensification of

freight transport through the country, the brain-drain, the excessive expansion of the welfare state, the agricultural policy, etc.

The participating businessmen and experts were also asked about their views on the social consequences of the Czech Republic's EU accession. Approximately one-third of them did not answer this question or chose a neutral response (e.g. by evaluating the immediate consequences as somewhat negative and the long-term consequences as positive). Some responses laid stress on the positive social impact of economic growth, the increase in wages, the strengthening of the Czech crown, and the decrease in unemployment, etc. Another group expressed the opinion that – in spite of the growth in the average standard of living – the main social consequence will be an increase in social differences and social and political tensions. One of the respondents thought that there is a need to choose between mass poverty and the growth of middle class. Some of the respondents were afraid of exaggerated redistribution, of the inappropriate tendency to apply the welfare state model and of an increase in the national debt. The respondents formulated various possible solutions to these issues: the consolidation of public finance, and reforms of the health and pension systems.

The third question asked respondents to formulate their own recommendations to the Czech government on how to solve the problems that emerged in the accession process. One trend observed in this point could be characterized as a warning against the dominance of globalizing pressures exerted in two directions:

- a) the defense of national sovereignty against egalitarianism and unification, and
- b) resistance to regulation and redistribution. Here one of the respondents formulated an extremely skeptical view of the Czech government's ability to elaborate and assert its own concept for addressing the complex task of defending national interests amidst the circumstances of the country's adaptation in European integration. At the same time the opposite recommendations were expressed suggesting the country make use of European integration to advance liberalism and individualism and to suppress collectivism. Fortunately most of the participants in the research came up with actually significant and conceptual suggestions directed at concentrating the government's endeavors towards supporting the advancement of a knowledge-based economy, the reconstruction of the system of education, reform of the justice system, the acquisition of foreign languages, addressing the country's demographic situation, and other issues of key significance for continuing modernization.

A brief reproduction of the views of a small group of people well acquainted with the problems of Czech society showed that the Czech economic elites actually harbor a primarily positive attitude towards European integration and support prevailing liberal concepts of further strategy. At the same time some significant critical views con-

cerning in part the policy of the EU and especially the policy of the Czech government were also detected in the responses.

#### THE ECONOMIC ELITE IN 2002

Thanks to the willingness of the above-mentioned research team at CESES [Frič, Nekola and Prudký 2005] we have an opportunity to supplement this information with data collected from a broader sample of members of the economic elites. The first interesting piece of information concerns the intensity of the feelings of membership in Europe among members of the business elites. 20.5% of respondents declared they had very strong feelings of being a member of Europe, and 45.6% had strong feelings, but 25.8% had only a weak sense of this belonging and 7.9% had none at all. Two-thirds with a positive stance would appear to be satisfactory. However, this feeling is significantly higher among members of the cultural and political elites. Maybe the specific problems of competition from abroad and the EU's regulatory tendencies are the reasons for this slight difference. The respondents also answered a question about the expected contributions of the Czech Republic to the EU, and these responses also offer some information that characterizes the Czech business elites. 27% see this contribution as lying in education, 18.4% in the creativity, skill and flexibility of the work force, 11.2% in culture and the spiritual sphere, 2.6% in historical experience, 9.9% in strategic behavior, 8.6% in the quality of production and services, while 22.4% chose various other kinds of response. This does not sound like any overestimation of the possible role of Czech national business in

the European economy. On the other hand, Czech elites on the whole (including both businessmen and politicians plus cultural and mass-media professionals) are sufficiently self-confident where its role in a national dimension is concerned. 80.5% of Czech elites are sure that they are capable of mobilizing people into taking an interest in achieving a better future, 59.4% of them think that the elites possess sufficient will to modernize the country. However, when asked about the internal features of the elites, they were more skeptical. This goes particularly for the business elites, 49% of whom characterized the Czech elites as primarily focused on defending and securing their own interests in 49%, while 41.7% admitted that members of the elites have to thank their acquaintances and connections for their positions, and a full 74.2% indicated that it is too closely bound to networks of acquaintances and mutual services. It is no surprise that even the members of the economic elite – though not the same extent as the political elites – express the opinion that there is growing tension between the elites and the population; 14% definitely agree with this statement, and a further 39% somewhat agree.

Some important information on the ideological outlook of the business elites is provided by data on the differentiation of business elites by their sympathies for the main political parties: 40.3% of its members declare support for the leading opposition right-wing Civic Democratic Party, another 5.4% for the small right-wing coalition party the Union of Freedom. The Social Democrats gained only 11.4% of their sympathies. The influence of the Christian Democratic Party and the Communists is

quite marginal. 29.5% do not support any of the political subjects in the domestic political arena. This structure of political orientations reveals the business elites to be the most right-wing oriented part of the elites, resembling in this regard only the top media professionals. This is a definite corroboration of the statement above in the introduction about the prevalingly liberal orientation of the Czech economic elites. One could now add that the liberalism of this group in the Czech Republic in principle signifies a prevalence of neoliberal approach to the solution of the country's economic problems. In so far as another of the introductory statements is concerned, namely the opinion that a positive view of the European Union dominates among the business elites, other additional findings from the survey we are dealing with provide more evidence: 56% of the sample of the business elite members declared the European Union to be a highly important institution for further societal development. This percentage is significantly higher than it is among the other segments of the Czech elites.

#### SURVEY ON ELITES 2004/2005

We have another more data sample at our disposal. Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences, Czech Republic (project leader M. Tuček) carried out at the break of the years 2004 and 2005 a survey on Czech business elite encompassing 470 respondents. The basic sample was defined as directors or deputy directors of enterprises with more than 20 employees. From this it is clear that the results of this survey char-

acterizing the sample as a whole cannot be used for comparison with the data from 1994 or 2003/2004 applied in the analysis above. To use some interesting identifications close to the concept of business elite as described in our paper we had to focus only on one subsample defined as owners or managers leading several economic units or departments. 85% of this group were males, 75% tertiary educated, 74% working in professions corresponding to the major and grade of their education. They declared themselves to belong to upper middle or upper stratum of population. 75% of them are highly or medium interested in politics, 32% identified their political orientation as left-wing or left-centrist, 20% as neutral, 48% as right-centrist or right wing.

The EU accession was evaluated as useful for their enterprises by 57% respondents and as neutral by 35%. Full 75% evaluated foreign investments as positive for their enterprises. 82% thought that economy has significant influence on political sphere, 76% acknowledged the influence of politics on economy. One half appreciated the significance of the economic policy of the government on economy, while other 43% expressed the opinion that the governmental policy has no influence on economic activities. Only 40% thought that the business elite is more or less cohesive while the remaining 60% declared such a cohesion as minimal or non-existing. These completing data information is in principle in accordance with the knowledge developed from the so far applied data sources.

The composition, situation and attitudes of the Czech business elite as described by the complex of our data sources corresponds to the stable and remarkable progress of the



Czech economy since 1999, and to the extremal wealth, strong profits, and high salaries of its top members and the enhancement of their role in the European economy. There is a certain problem in the fact that some of the economic elites have not reached the tertiary level of education and are not sufficiently prepared for solving difficult tasks relating to modernization and European integration. Also, the fact that some contemporary entrepreneurs and managers reached their positions by means of questionable activity makes them somewhat less reliable actors in the new circumstances. Nor can one disregard the manifest phenomenon of corrupt behavior among a part of the economic and even the political elites.

### 3.2. *The Political Elite*

The circulation hypothesis in its original sense – if meant in the sense of the return of former politicians and high bureaucrats, or their descendants, from the pre-socialist period to positions of power - has not been verified as generally valid for the political elites either. The radical character of the social and political changes since 1938 and the considerable amount of time that has elapsed have made the realization of such processes mostly impossible. Some exceptions are the case of the relatively small group of people who returned from the post-1948 exile and the case of the not too large – though not numerically insignificant – group of the descendants of politicians from the pre-war and early post-war periods. On the other hand, the “velvet revolution” proved to be a real revolution with regard to

the composition of the power elites, as the large majority of power elites since then have been recruited from newcomers to politics and the composition of members has evolved out of this base mostly through normal democratic procedures. In principle, no mass reproduction of the old communist power elites from the “normalization” period (1970–1989) occurred. (Some reform communists linked to the Prague Spring movement did return to politics for a time through their participation in forming Civic Forum and other individual political parties and movements, mainly the Social Democrats. However, these are figures that had left from the old power elites already by 1970 as part of the process of party purges.) During the first period in which the new political system was formed the exceptional cases of ongoing direct political participation by contemporary communists, i.e. those who were still members up to 1989, played a role of some significance in the peaceful take-over of power and in the functioning of state administration during the first (1990) and partly also the second (1992) parliamentary elections. Over the further course of transformation, especially after the second elections and the separation of country into the Czech and Slovak Republics at the beginning of 1993, the cases of the participation of former, pre-1989 communists in power became less frequent and somewhat isolated, and mainly concerned people who had been in low or even just rank-and-file political positions before 1989. They still are present, of course, in all the influential political parties and in most branches of the state administration, including the army, security and justice. They are relatively more numerous among the Social Democrats than in other parties,

but in general this party and its historical tradition – unlike the situation in most other countries with similar historical fates – does not represent any continuation of the Czech part of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. (A specific case of the continuity of cadres is the Christian Democratic Party – which forms part of the current ruling coalition – as a continuation of the former Czechoslovak People’s party, one of the member parties of the state socialist National Front.)

The re-birth of pre-war social democracy enabled the communists (and at the same time compelled them) to preserve their institutional base in the form of the newly constituted Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia. This party lost its former constitutionally ensured influence as the “leading force” that it had as the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, but it was not excluded from political life, and it managed to preserve and gradually even expand its position in the democratically formed (elected) part of the national political (but not power) elites (attained in the elections 1990) and to continue to occupy a significant amount of power positions among local power elites. At this point in time it has certainly come to represent one of the influential sections of parliamentary, regional and local opposition<sup>13</sup>, and its ranks basically recruit from and/or are ideologically and socially shaped by the power elites of the former regime’s cadre reserve. A small proportion of relatively younger communist politicians (Ransdorf, Dolejš) have demonstrated an ability to reflect in a more realistic way the new political situation and are trying to formulate and put through more contemporary ideas and political strategies,

especially in relation to the EU. It would by no means be a useful or good idea for the new democracy to exclude this relatively influential radical left-wing party from the political system. There is only one way in which to limit its influence, namely by means of the existence of left-wing democratic political forces pursuing a policy that protects rank-and-file employees, the poor and the socially excluded.

The new people that emerged at the beginning of the “velvet revolution” and entered into the power system and the political elites came from three main sources. The first source was and continues to be people active in the dissent movement – including their exile allies – internally divided into former reform communists and those with rather liberal or social democratic orientations, or in some cases only a radical anti-communist orientation. The number of dissidents has not been too large, but in the time just before November 1989 they were able to mobilize a broad base composed of relatively active supporters mainly from among the intelligentsia and students. Some of these people also joined the new political structures. The second source has been people (or their descendants) who had been persecuted under communism either after February 1948 or – in most surviving cases – after the occupation in August 1968. The third – and most numerous – source of new people in the political elites could be defined as socially active people, mostly middle aged, whose ambitions of upward mobility, for the most part justified by their education and professional qualification, were blocked by the system of totalitarian politics and the command economy. With the exception of a portion of dissidents, most of the newcomers

were inexperienced in politics and uneducated in political activity. For some of them participation in politics was mainly a platform for reaching a better economic position. Though most of the new members of the political elites were at least middle aged, some of them – as always in the time of radical political shifts – were young people with very little life experience. As demonstrated in a comparison of the second and third rows in Table 3 below, most of them have maintained their positions among the political elites to the present. Over time the new composition of power and political elites gradually changed though both upward and downward mobility based on a natural generational turnover and, especially, through an expansion of the democratic political and administrative (bureaucratic) systems at the national, local and newly established regional level, and through new

elections and the alternation of political parties and movements participating in power or fighting it from the rows of the opposition.

A COMPARISON BETWEEN 1994  
AND 2003/2004

The major changes in the structure of the political elites can be illustrated using the data sources mentioned above in connection with the economic elites. We will focus here on data concerning gender, age and education. The percentage of females among members of the political elites increased from 10% in both the old and the new top political actors in 1994 to 23% in 2003/2004. The issue of women's participation in the political system continues to be one of the most important questions for the future.

*Table 3*

**Age structure of the Czech political elite  
1994 and 2003/2004**

Year	Type of elite							
		60+	55-59	50-54	45-49	40-44	35-39	-35
1994	Old*	27.3	15.2	21.2	24.2	12.1		
1994	New	6.1	4.6	17.6	24.3	15.3	13.0	19.1
2003-2004	Contemporary	13.6	21.6	16.2	20.3	12.2	8.1	8.2

[Data 1994, 2003/4]

\* state socialist

A comparison of the first two rows in the table produces one quite clear result: The old political elites, with the overcrowded category of old people representing the “hard core” of the communist cadres who seized the leadership in the country after the invasion of

Warsaw Pact troops, the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia and the subsequent Party purges, has been replaced by more younger people. (The average age decreased from cca 54 to 46 years of age.) The numbers in the third row are rather a product of the ensuing

gradual and in a sense natural exchange of generations in the leadership of the country. However, the decline in the percentage of young people overall is certainly not positive information, especially when compared with the much higher proportion of young people participating in top business activities, as was indicated above. (Therefore the average age increased to 48.8 years with dangerous prevalence of older and older middle generation and the political elite became three years older in average than the economic one while in 1994 it was the other way round.) This signals some aversion of young people to politics as it is carried out at present, quite

possibly having deeper roots in social problems of a part of young people and in cultural changes in the lifestyle and attitudes of the young generation as a whole. The emergence of this phenomenon has certainly been somewhat influenced by the indisputably low level of political culture, including the inability of political leaders to clearly explain their true strategic goals, very likely also the unwillingness of the newcomers to political elite from the first phase of transformation to make place for younger people and, last but not least, the widespread feelings of suspicion about politicians' corrupt behavior.

*Table 4*

**Highest attained education of the Czech political elite  
1994 and 2003/2004**

Year	Type of elite	Apprenticeship	Full secondary	Tertiary or postgradual
1994	Old*	1.0	5.0	94.0
1994	New	2.3	14.5	83.5
2003–2004	Contemporary	0.7	17.3	82.0

[Data 1994, 2003/4]

\* state socialist

The apparent decline in the level of education between 1989 and 1994 is easy to explain. Only 27% of the members of the old political elites attained their education by means of the standard forms of study – most of them had graduated from the communist party schools or had studied externally, not to mention the fact that being a member of the political elites (nomenklatura) was in the normalization period unambiguously determined by manifested ideo-

logical and political attitudes even in the case of people with solid education. Nevertheless, even this testifies to the fact that the normalization regime was aware of the significance of at least the formal education of cadres – unlike during the period of the “proletarian dictatorship” in the 1950s. The percentages of secondary school graduates in 1994 and 2004 appear to be quite normal for political elites, a major portion of which reached their positions through

elections. The educational structure of the contemporary political and power elites represents substantial progress in comparison with the situation in the 1950s, when working-class members played a very important role, and even in comparison with the composition of the 1989 elites when we take into consideration the explanation above.

#### POLITICAL ELITES 2003/2004

There is also another way of describing the contemporary political elites – a manner analogous to that used in the case of the economic elites, namely from the attitudes the elites expressed in the CESES survey. With regard to feelings of membership or identification with Europe, we mentioned above that these feelings are considerably stronger among the political elites than among the economic elites: 29.4% of them claim these feelings to be definitely strong, another 43.1% indicate them as strong, and only 16.8% indicate a weak sense of belonging in Europe. Members of the political elites see the possible contribution of the Czech Republic to Europe somewhat differently than the businessmen. They put more emphasis on education, qualifications and science, and much more on the cultural sphere and historical experience, while they do not give a very strong evaluation of possible contributions in the areas of creativity and skill and the quality of services and production. On the other hand, they are not as skeptical about the internal characteristics of the Czech elites on the whole as the business elites are. Significantly fewer of them expressed the opinion that the Czech elites

are primarily focused on defending their own interests, that the elite members have their acquaintances and connections to thank for their positions, and that they are too closely linked to networks of acquaintances and mutual services – though in this last case a full 67% do nonetheless also maintain this critical view. With regard to the issue of increasing social tension between the elite and the masses the political elites are more pessimistic than the economic elites: 15.5% agree with this statement strongly and 46% somewhat agree.

The substantial differences between the economic and political actors are also indicated in the latter group's sympathies for the main political parties. The support for the Civil Democratic Party and the Czech Social Democrats is nearly equal (25.9%, or 24.5%). The other three parliamentary parties (Christian Democrats, Communists and the Union of Freedom) each enjoy around ten percent of support, while only 7.7% of respondents active in the political sphere declared no sympathies for any political subject. These numbers actually reflect the political attitudes of the current political elites (especially if we take into account that in this case the regional elites are also involved). What appears more important is the discrepancy between the political positions of the Social Democrats and the very low support for this party among the ranks of businessmen. The data collection took place at a time when the public support for this party was also rapidly declining. It is true that since that time things have somewhat changed, but it is questionable whether the popularity of the Social Democrats among the top economic actors has actually increased. It may be that this discrepancy has its deeper roots in the

“division of labor” between these two parts of the elites. Something similar can be said about the surprising fact that only 39.1% of the politicians required further strengthening of the influence of the European Union on the further development of the country. (Remember that in the case of the business elites the figure was a full 56%.) This signals that either euro-skepticism or indifference to European integration is more widespread than one would expect and that for the future position of the Czech Republic on this issue is not quite sure.

Unlike the economic elites, the contemporary political elites are far more internally differentiated or even fragmented in terms of the outlooks or views they harbor that are relevant for determining future behavior, and especially in terms of the very important potential ideological cleavages that divide Czech society: liberalism vs. solidarity, the role of the state vs. civil society, nationalism vs. a pro-European orientation, various evaluations of the pasts of state socialism and privatization, and also over the prevalence of the Social Democrats in the political system since 1998. It is questionable to what extent these differentiations in ideology can be explained by the impact of increasing social differentiation in Czech society. Many historical and even present-day facts seem to indicate that the cleavages among the political elite fractions have become so sharp and acute that they are not due so much to the pressure of latent class conflicts (which have not yet achieved a corresponding weight in social relations) but are rather due to the logic of a political struggle between controversial political subjects for power. The following paragraphs in this text will offer some material

capable of providing arguments in favor of this hypothesis.

#### THE HISTORICAL PHASES OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE POLITICAL ELITES

The empirical data presented above can provide the reader with only superficial information about some characteristics the political elites at the starting and finishing points of their development after 1989 and somewhat more up to date information on its contemporary attitudes. The real development of the structure and the social and political strategies of the Czech postsocialist national political elites was much more complex and dramatic. This development can be described in three phases.

The first phase started in November and December 1989 with the legal (though forced by mass protest) handing over of power by the communists into the hands of Civic Forum and its Slovak variant Public against Violence, and after the elections in 1990 into the hands of the democratic political parties into which these broad political movements had disintegrated. The end of this phase was marked by the victory of the right-wing political forces in the middle of 1992 in the Czech Republic and the victory of the national populist forces in the Slovak Republic and the subsequent split of the federation of Czechoslovakia into two separate republics at the beginning of 1993. In the course of these two years the communists were compelled to abandon their power positions. Within Civic Forum first the reform communists and later the social liberals leaning on civil society and its initia-

tives<sup>14</sup> were marginalized. The latter, in the person of Václav Havel, managed to retain only the position of the President of the Czechoslovak Republic and later the President of the Czech Republic, and the limited powers associated with these positions. The neoliberal method of economic reform was asserted; the civil right-wing political forces gained hegemony and reached an agreement with the Slovak national populists on the split of Czechoslovakia, and consequently they acquired nearly total, centralized control over the western two-thirds of Czechoslovakia.<sup>15</sup> During the break-up of the Czech and Slovak Republic there first occurred a generational shift in the political elites as the federal cadres were replaced with the younger republican elites.

The second phase began with the creation of the sovereign Czech state, followed by the long period of its institutionalization in accordance with the new constitution, and terminating in the defeat of the neoliberal right by the social liberals, christian democrats and oppositional forces within Civic Democratic Party (1997)<sup>16</sup> and shortly afterwards by the Social Democrats (in 1998). During this time a radical neoliberal economic reform<sup>17</sup> that prioritized national privatizers was carried out, at first with some immediate economic success. Its further drastic social consequences, together with the increase of the influence of a rebuilt Social Democratic Party, contributed to the development of a new section of opposition political elites with a pro-European and social democratic orientation. In this way this party reaped the fruits of its systematic criticism of the Czech neoliberal economic reform and its social consequences. On the

other hand, many other less significant groups of political activists, including those belonging to the radical right-wing (nationalist and populist) Republican Party, became marginalized.<sup>18</sup> The influence of the communists remained relatively limited. Thus a relatively firm structure with only a few main fractions became stabilized within the political elites, which is one of the important specific features of the Czech political situation in comparison with some other European postsocialist countries.

The third and final phase began with the installment of a minority Social Democratic government supported in a pre-agreed amount of affairs by the decisive political subject on the Czech right – the Civil Democratic Party. This constellation fought off a series of civil and political initiatives from small political parties and movements led mostly by intellectuals and did not allow them to come to power. It was responsible for the highly significant move of turning Czech society in a pro-European direction. This trend was characterized by the import of European capital, the advancement of modernization, serious preparation for and ultimately the successful achievement of EU accession, and the moderating of social tensions (in spite of the appearance of not negligible structural unemployment). These successes helped the Czech Social Democratic Party to win in 2002 the elections for the second time. This time its new leadership – which emerged out of a second generational shift that affected nearly all the significant political subjects – decided to cooperate exclusively with two small centrist political parties. This weak political majority succeeded in seeing through the formal EU accession. However, because of inner con-

flicts within the Social Democratic Party, it lost the chance to fill the office of the President of Republic and left it to the Civil Democratic Party. After that, for the next two years the government was unable to elaborate, declare and understandably defend any such conception aimed at implementing further steps of economic and social reforms that would be effective in terms of modernization, increasing competitive power and adaptation to the new conditions in the EU, but at the same time would also be understandable and acceptable for a broad strata of the population. This led to numerous defeats of Social Democrats in regional, Senate and European elections. The Social Democrats' second attempt, with new leadership and a new young prime minister, failed after several months owing to its continued vagueness, repeated embarrassments and overall weakness. This situation helped the Civil Democratic Party to win a good deal of political support among the population. This was achieved through their tactics of populist and euro-skeptic demagoguery, and partly also through their criticism of the obvious failures of the ruling power elites, and also by means of the popularization of the party's first – though not sufficiently transparent – outlines for its neoliberal program visions, mainly the introduction of equal taxation. The Civic Democrats, supported by their Honorary Chair, the President of the Republic Václav Klaus, took control of Senate and all the regions as well as of the representative bodies in an overwhelming majority of large towns and cities. It was in this way that a numerous, vertically structured, right-wing section of political elites was formed, which is now prepared to fight and is craving for a new political victory.

In spite of the partial success that the euro-skeptic right-wing forces had in mobilizing some voters, the major problem that had been dominating the political scene since the 2002 elections was the radical decline in the level of public participation in the elections in particular and the public's interest in politics and political activity in general. See [Machonin 2005]. This phenomenon is bound to an obvious decrease of confidence of the population to political elite as a whole – to some measure to economic elite, too – as documented in the analysis of results of the public opinion research by Mišovič and Tuček [2003]. (Similar complex of factors operated in the recent Polish parliamentary election as well and seems to be typical for the situation in many European postsocialist countries.)

In recent months, the coalition government, under another (the fourth) social democratic prime minister, has been trying to take back the initiative by formulating and pursuing a more lucid, understandable and popular strategy, corresponding to the significant improvement in the economic situation in the Czech Republic and the average standard of living among the population. Though it remains questionable whether all its initiatives will be useful and acceptable in the long run, this new factor already has already brought about a certain increase in the amount of authority and popularity that the left-centrist coalition government and the Czech Social Democratic Party enjoy. It is quite interesting that amidst these conditions there have emerged some signs of willingness for cooperation between various political subjects over questions of national interest such as the reform of the pension system.



On the other hand, in the circumstances of approaching Parliamentary elections new and renewed attacks against the government are appearing in the mass media and on the political stage. Most recently there were some signs of a renewed oppositional initiative started up by young people and a group of intellectuals in connection with a response to police intervention in the Czech-Techno Party. New attempts also appeared aimed at provoking a response to the assumed corruption in recent privatization acts. Massive protests of private physicians took place over back payments from the health insurance institutions, which were aimed at the destruction of the present shape of the health-care system. Similar events can also be expected in the future. Thus the “divided ship” persists, and the threat to the chances of the social democratic remaining in power comes mainly from the right. As for the radical left – the communists – they gained a temporary increase in support in tandem with the rise of right-wing oppositional forces during the two governmental crises. The re-strengthening of the social democrats means that they are compelled to find a common language with the democratic left over social issues. Also, some change in the communists stance on the issue of membership in the European Union is not out of the question. The new leadership of the Social Democratic Party and current prime minister are very likely inclined to use to some limited degree the assistance of the communist club in Parliament in order to push through certain measures that are important for re-gaining the trust of employees and the socially at-risk strata of the population. In any case the political situation in the Czech Republic

remains open, and it is not easy to predict its future direction.

#### ***4. The Role of the Economic and Political Elites in the Process of Adapting to the EU: the Problems of Modernization and the Maintenance of Social Cohesion***

From what has been said in Part 2 above, it seems clear that one of the most important preconditions for changes in the composition, attitudes and behavior of the Czech political and economic elites, corresponding to the requirements of the new phase of developments, is some recovery of the EU from the shock it suffered after the French and Dutch “no” votes on the European Constitution and from the conflict concerning the outlooks of financial budget. From both populations – in France from the rather leftist and in the Netherlands from both rightist and leftists positions – there came a warning: that excessively rapid and ill-prepared (i.e. the absence of dialogue with the people of all the countries in question) institutionalization of social and political strategies of an expanded EU and the onset of the eventual changes they bring about can easily disturb the strategic balance between modernization and social cohesion that has been managed thus far. If this balance is renewed and incorporated into EU policies, then conditions favorable to the solution of principally the same issue on the national level could arise: the constant balance between ongoing modernization and an adapted social cohesion within the country.

The role of political and economic elites in the Czech Republic towards achieving this type of strategy can be defined as:

- a) to support modernization changes (coming from the EU, and eventually also from its more advanced part stimuli) as much as possible and contribute in this way to strengthening the European competitive force on the one hand, and
- b) to put through the kind of economic, cultural and social reforms that are acceptable to the people as a contribution to the improvement of the standard of living and the culture of a broad strata of the population on the other hand. The ongoing economic growth and relative progress in the process of modernization in the Czech Republic since 1999 renders the creation, application, and fulfillment of such a strategy a real possibility. But there are two significant obstacles to this. The first one consists in the current fragmentation of mainly the political elites. The second one – thus far more latent than openly manifest – is a tension between the current power elite and the more neoliberally oriented economic elite, particularly of its top representatives leading the large companies. The Czech societal elite can contribute to the further adaptation of society to the new conditions and tasks arising from the country's membership in the EU if the internal structure of the elites would engage in a process of cultivating consensus.

In this regard a desirable move would be to solve the many internal cleavages and con-

flicts that exist within the elites. These cleavages are not too sharp within the economic elites. Ongoing generation shifts and much more intensive support for research and development, education, the spread of information, international cooperation and counter-corruption measurements should improve this aspect of the problem. Experience acquired thus far suggests that even the problem of need for the economic elites to adapt to the changing power elites should not be unsolvable, but they can be addressed on the condition that internal contradictions within the political elite are regulated to a socially acceptable degree. Some difficulties in the economy and in social life can be caused by the exclusive and biased practical application of the doctrine of maximum state non-intervention in the economic and the related or consequent social affairs.

The key issue of potential progress is the strengthening of tendencies to reach some degree of consensus (strategic compromises over the main issues of national interests) among the different parts of the political elites, each with different programs and strategies. In the Czech Republic the solution will in any case be extraordinarily difficult, as both the radical (communist) left and the Civil Democratic Party are strongly Euro-skeptical, if not actually outright nationalist. As some recent events have shown, some political parties are preparing to put emphasis on the generation issue, objective reasons for which of course are tied to the systematic neglect of the needs and interests of youth and the deepening differences in the living standards of the economically active people and a portion of pensioners. Finally, the decision of people to take part in democratic elections and the

rational and sober judgment of the voters hinges very much on the willingness of political parties to negotiate and seek sincere and substantiated compromises, which lead to the further progress of the societal transformation. It is by no means guaranteed beforehand that the recent positive developments will continue in the future.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> From the empirically well based writing by A. Steen [1997] one can see that all the three Baltic republics differ from the other postsocialist societies of Central European type by the historical destinies that connected them with the Soviet totalitarian system in the past much more closely and influenced therefore more distinctly the composition and behavior even of the postsocialist elites. In two of these societies – Estonia and Lithuania – the conflict of elites representing the ethnic majorities with those created by the Russian population has an extraordinary strong impact on the behavior of elites.

<sup>2</sup> The statements in the preceding text are a condensed representation of broader reflections presented in the author's recently published new book [Machonin 2005] devoted to the Czech historical experience and its relation to sociological thought.

<sup>3</sup> The very need to strengthen the rationally conceived role of the elites in the specific circumstances of the postsocialist transformations distances us from the severe general criticism of elites for their nearly total isolation from society and for their betrayal of democracy argued in the book by C. Lasch [1995]. Some tendency towards isolation, towards "elitarianism", probably do exist in all modern societies, including the postsocialist countries. However, in the current situation the elites are confronted with serious problems that have yet to be solved and in some aspects are similar to those which elites were obliged to cope with in the period when the Central and Eastern European nation states were forming in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Therefore, neither we, nor the elites can afford to adopt a position of nihilist skepticism towards the role of elites in society; instead it would be more useful to replace this skepticism with rational and realistic criticism and a motivation emphasis on improving how they perform their role.

<sup>4</sup> See mainly [Machonin 2005; Machonin and Tuček 1994, 1996, 2000, 2002; Machonin, Tuček and Gatnar 1995; Machonin, Šťastnová et al. 1996; Tuček et al. 2005]. The guiding line of this series is study of elites as a part of the stratification and mobility research. Many of the ideas expressed in these studies mostly written by Machonin and M. Tuček or with the participation of them are used in this paper without special quotations. Something similar goes also for the considerations concerning some general concepts concerning the characteristics and roles of elites in the process of postsocialist transformations as elaborated on the base of activities of the international team on elites in the spirit of new "elitism" and their application to postsocialist transformations formulated mainly by John Higley, J. Pakulski, G. Lengyel, W. Wesolowski and others. See e. g. [Best and 1997; Dogan and Higley 1998; Frentzel-Zagórska and Wasilewski 2000; Higley 1997; Higley and Lengyel 2000; Higley, Pakulski and Wesolowski 1998; Steen 1997]. Most of the referred both domestic Czech and foreign works are leaning upon data on elites collected in the first half of the 1990s. This paper aims to grasp the results of the changes in structure, attitudes and behavior of elites in the second half of the 1990s and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>5</sup> The International Elite Research in the European postsocialist countries in 1994 was led by I. Szelényi and D. Treiman, in the Czech Republic by P. Matějů and M. Tuček. For details see [Szelényi and Treiman 1991; Szelényi, Treiman and Wnuk-Lipiński 1995; Tuček 1996; Matějů 1997].

<sup>6</sup> The survey on "A Decade of Postsocialist Transformation in the Czech Republic" in 1999 was led by M. Tuček. For details see [Tuček et al. 2003].

<sup>7</sup> That there was a relatively high percentage of former communists among the economic elites in 1994 does not mean that they were advocates of communist ideology. For most of them – especially the

younger ones, but also the middle aged – membership in the Communist Party began during the period of “normalization” and was the only way in which they could make a career. Therefore, we must reject the exaggerated generalization (based on a limited amount of qualitative data) suggested by Mink and Szurek [1998: 34–36], according to which the “Czech model” of new business elites could be described as “entrepreneurs and still communists”. After the changes that occurred towards the end of the 1990s this description simply lost any validity for the business elite as a whole.

<sup>8</sup> All these processes started gradually in the years 1995–1996. Their beginnings were described in the Czech report from the international business elite survey, which encompassed Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic in 1997 led by Pál Tamás. See [Tuček et al. 1997, 2005]. In qualitative interviews 23 top managers active in the Czech economy evaluated the Czech economic privatization process and other reform steps as necessary. On the other hand, they criticized the numerous mistakes made in the economic policy of the second Czech government led by Mr. Klaus. They did not mention, of course, the evident mistakes made by the top management of the firms they represented. Shortly after the interviews some large Czech firms, whose top figures had been involved in the survey, collapsed, and most of them had to undergo substantial reorganization, including reorganization of the ownership structure, and corresponding personnel changes. This mainly occurred during etwa three years after the data sampling in 1997, i.e. the year of the fall of the second, unsuccessful government headed by the main protagonist of neoliberal reform in the Czech Republic, Mr. Václav Klaus.

<sup>9</sup> This goes to some measure also for the economic elite as a whole. According to the survey on elites 2003/2004, which will be described below [Frič, Nekola and Prudký 2005], 78.6% of the members of the present economic elite situate the event that was decisive for their professional careers in the year 1989 or later, and a full 47.6% after 1989. This means that for the current composition of the economic elites the link to the old economic elites, caused by the prevalence of reproduction processes at the outset of the transformation, is no longer fully valid.

<sup>10</sup> The data from 1994 come from the already mentioned Czech elite survey 1994. The sample in this case involved 1509 respondents. For the break of the years 2003/2004 we can – thanks to the kind willingness of the CESES (Center for strategic studies, Charles University, Faculty of Social Sciences), namely of project director Pavol Frič, corresponding data from a survey on elites the results of which are going to be published in an official report [Frič, Nekola and Prudký 2005]. In this survey the amount of the sample was 826 respondents.

<sup>11</sup> Quite sure seems to be the general liberal orientation. As for the neoliberal (and neoconservative) inclinations stressing the principles of monetarism and state non-intervention, they prevailed in the qualitative in-depth survey, however not so clearly in the CESES survey where the respondents relatively often mentioned necessity of some state regulation.

<sup>12</sup> The in-depth-survey was carried out several months after the successful accession of the Czech Republic to the EU. On the other hand, the two Czech coalition governments that operated over the course of this period were exceptionally weak and gradually lost support from both the public and even more so from professionals. Though the Czech economy was showing quite positive developments at the time, the trend was not that obvious and was not sufficiently stable. This situation certainly had an influence on the results of the survey in question.

<sup>13</sup> In some of villages and relatively small towns communists have been elected to be councilors or even chairmen of local administrative bodies, while in most larger towns and in the cities they have remained in the opposition.

<sup>14</sup> By the social liberals we mean the Civic Movement, which represented the members of Civic Forum that remained after the departure of several new or renewed political parties, including the Civic Democratic Party, the Social Democratic Party, the Christian Democratic Party and the Civil Democratic Alliance (a small party with only loose ties to the original Civic Forum program, which however soon lost its influence and disappeared from the political scene). Civic Movement did not reach the 5% quorum in the 1992 elections necessary for to gain entry into Parliament. As for President Havel, his position in the course of velvet revolution can indeed be roughly characterized as social liberal, though some of his later activities were strongly influenced by his close relations to the US govern-

ments. G. Eyal in his analysis of the events between 1990–1992 elections in the Czech Republic underlines some other characteristics of Civic Movement and its allies in other political formations calling them liberal dissidents, intellectuals, friends of V. Havel etc., while Civil Democratic Party under the leadership of V. Klaus and its allies are characterized as neoliberals and technocrats bound to the “grey zone” (= people not connected with neither the communists nor the dissent). However he at the same time turns attention that many of these people after their political defeat looked for asylum in Social Democracy. (Compare [Eyal 2003: 137–169].)

<sup>15</sup> Compare this with the theory about the failure of the political elites as the main reason of the dissociation at a time when the majority of the citizens in both republics still supported a common state. [Kubín 2002]

<sup>16</sup> The resignation of the government led by Mr. Václav Klaus was heavily influenced not only by bad economic and social results but also by the active engagement of President Havel and his supporters in the governing coalition of right-wing parties.

<sup>17</sup> As has been proved in economic literature, see e. g. [Mlčoch 2000], the Czech privatization concept was calculated in favor of Czech national economic subjects, with the exception of some projects that the Czech national government organized involving, among other examples, the case of the Škoda automobile manufacturers in Mladá Boleslav, which was sold to Volkswagen. One of the government’s aims was apparently to create as rapidly as possible a new Czech bourgeoisie and in this way satisfy the wishes of those social forces that were interested in making new careers on the base of private entrepreneurship.

<sup>18</sup> This marginalization is one of significant merits of the Czech Social Democratic Party and its leader at that time Mr. Miloš Zeman. Through their program they managed to satisfy the needs of the lower strata in the regions where the republicans held positions and thus eliminated their nationalist and radical right-wing influence.

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