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TOWARDS A NEW ELITE MODEL

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Higley, John and Lengyel, György (eds.): *Elites after State Socialism: Theories and Analysis.* Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000.

Elites after State Socialism is clearly a book which is likely to receive a lot of praise and elicit numerous references in the field of elite research. The editors are *John Higley,* head of the Center for Governmental Studies at the University of Texas, and *György Lengyel,* head of the Department of Sociology and Social Policy at the Budapest University of Economic Sciences and Public Administration (BUESPA). The volume comprises 13 studies, including an introduction presenting the theoretical framework, six articles discussing the change of the political elites in Eastern Europe and five pieces dealing with the changes which took place in the economic elite of each country included. The closing chapter, contrary to general practice, is not a summary of the empirical chapters, but it outlines the development of elite theory in the twentieth century. This review starts with the latter study, then I give a detailed summary of Higley and Lengyel's introductory paper, in which the authors draft a model that can be usefully exploited in further elite research. Afterwards I sum up the main message of the studies discussing the changes in the political and economic elites in the individual countries.

In the epilogue John Higley and *Jan Pakulski* point out that the revival of elite theory at the end of the twentieth century is due to the fact that, compared with Marxist class theory, it had a good deal stronger explanatory power in interpreting three concrete series of historical-political events: economic development and political democratisation of the East-Asian "little tigers"; the extremely slow change of communist regimes; and, finally, the collapse of the East-European communist regimes. Higley and Pakulski are convinced that all the three series of events can be better understood by studying the values, goals, political strategies and concrete acts of elite social actors, rather than based on the activities of the social classes or other collectives.

Scientific popularity of the elite-centred explanations of political changes (Weber, Pareto, Mosca, Michels), following an upswing at the beginning of the century, showed a decline primarily because of the increased spread of Marxist explanations of social changes. Most historians of social theories believe that considerable masses of the public opinion-making intellectuals turned "left", i.e. towards the various trends and schools of Marxism at about the time of the "great depression" of

1929–1933. This change in intellectual climate certainly had its impact on the popularity of the explanatory models competing with Marxism: the number of supporters and practitioners of the elite paradigm fell remarkably, their influence on science practically ceased, and, following the fall of Nazism, representatives of elite theory were even unfairly accused of being fascists. After World War II, critics of the Western liberal democracies also expressed their social criticism on the basis of different Marxist theories, claiming that elite paradigm was a conservative, simplified and anti-democratic approach. But even the new elites of the "third world" and those researching the changes taking place there applied Marxist approaches in explaining political changes instead of the elite-centred examination which would have been obvious at first glance. Higley and Pakulski argue that a turning away from Marxism in the intellectual climate was a precondition to making the study of elites a preferred field of social research again at the turn of the new millennium.

In the introduction John Higley and György Lengyel, following the Weberian tradition, put forward theoretical clues for current elite research by elaborating ideal-types of socio-political regimes based on how the structure and circulation of elites correspond to various political systems. Both the static and the dynamic parts of the model are two-dimensional, and the static submodel (the structure of elites) includes four ideal-types: that of a *consensual elite* (characteristic of established democracies), a *scattered elite* (occurring in not yet established democracies), an *ideocratic elite* (typical of totalitarian and post-totalitarian systems) and finally the ideal-type of a *divided elite* (typical of authoritarian systems). Higley and Lengyel distinguish the four types according to two aspects: on the basis of the *differentiation* of the national elites in terms of the social subsystems and on the basis of the cohesion or *unity* of the elite groups. Differentiation can be measured by social heterogeneity among elite groups, by their organisational heterogeneity and by their independence from the state and from one another. With respect to unity, two dimensions are distinguished: a normative dimension including views and values commonly shared and the mostly informal rules of political action as well as an interactive dimension referring to the nature of the channels and networks of connections through which elite actors are being able to influence decision-making processes.

A consensual elite is found where the differentiation among the national elite groups is wide, and the unity of elites is strong. In the case of a scattered elite, elite groups are also significantly separated from each other, but their internal networks are weak. Ideocratic and divided elites feature countries which are relatively lagging behind in social modernisation, and where differentiation of elites has not yet progressed sufficiently. In the case of ideocratic elites unity of elite groups is strong, while in divided elites it is rather weak.

The dynamic element of Higley and Lengyel's model outlines ideal-types of the circulation of elites. Like in the static part, here too, the ideal-types are distinguished along two dimensions: the *scope of circulation* and according to the *mode of circulation.* Scope of elite circulation is meant how wide the circle of positions concerned by the change of the elites is and how far incoming elite actors replacing outgoing ones had been from elite positions before they moved to the forefront. Modes of elite circulation are of two types: gradual and peaceful or sudden and coerced.

Along these dimensions Higley and Lengyel put forward four ideal-types of elite circulation: *classic* circulation, which is a comprehensive and peaceful process; *reproductive* circulation, that is also gradual but affects only a narrow scale; *replacement* circulation, which affects most of those in elite positions and occurs suddenly, sometimes accompanied by a degree of violence; and finally *quasi circulation,* where rapid change affects only a fraction of those in elite positions.

The authors link the static and the dynamic parts by using the hypothesis that to each of the political systems one specific type of elite circulation may be connected: evolution and survival of consensual elites is made possible by the classic type of elite circulation; in scattered elites, circulation has a reproductive character, ideocratic elites can develop through the replacement of previous elites; while divided elites come into being as a result of quasi circulation within a narrower circle of elite positions.

In the second part of their study Higley and Pakulski apply these ideal-types to the post-communist transformation in East-European societies. They divide post-communist transformations into two parts: the collapse of communism (1988–1994), and the period since then. In the first period of transformation classic circulation as an ideal-type was approximated by the Polish, the Hungarian and, partly, the Czech tranformations. The Bulgarian, and, after 1992, the Slovak elite circulation could be classified as reproductive, while Croatia exemplified the replacement of an ideocratic elite by an another elite group of strongly ideological nature, and the Serb example is closest to the ideal-type of quasi circulation. Russian elites, the authors claim, had been scattered well before the transformation, and they continued to be so after communism collapsed in the USSR.

The years after 1994 have shown that of elite circulation having taken place in the period of regime change and the resulting elite structure had a serious impact on the transformation of each country. Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic have shown a strengthening of consensual elites and a consolidation of democratic structure, while in Slovakia (at least until 1998), Bulgaria and Russia, the scattered character of elites continued, and the democratic consensus remained poor.

The first paper in the row of country case studies is by *Pavel Machonin* and *Milan Tucek* from the Czech Republic. They claim that the Czech Republic, until the mid-1990s, had been led by moderately conservative elites supported by businessmen and young and middle-aged generations with high levels of education. Dominant positions within the elites were occupied by the owners of large corporations, professional politicians and high-ranking civil servants. However, elites of the particular subsystems were characterised by remarkable differences: Czech political elite showed deep divisions between the right and the left wing, within the economic elite the struggle for dominance was still unsettled and on-going, and in the cultural elite there were also sharp antagonisms between the younger and the older members and between professional groups. According to empirical elite studies conducted between 1994–97, after 1996 the deep division of political elites was replaced by a regulated competition for leading positions. Contrary to the political elite, circulation of Czech economic elites was characterised rather by reproduction, while in the case of the cultural elite both circulation and reproduction had taken place.

John A. Gould's and *Sona Szomolányi's* study on Slovakia provides deep insights into how Vladimir Meciar's political system operated. The authors argue that Meciar based his success on a discoursive strategy: he succeeded in dividing Slovak voters into two groups, one of "good Slovaks" and of the opponents of Slovak self-determination. Gould and Szomolányi claim that, through achieving Slovak independence, Meciar and his movement attained a unique, charismatic legitimacy among the Slovak people whose majority respected Meciar and his close followers as the Founding Fathers of the independent Slovak Republic. Meciar's patriotic narrative gained immense popularity primarily among rural electorates and, peculiarly, among managers of large industrial corporations. Many of this latter group had just recently become stakeholders in their firms by taking advantage of their connections to obtain corporate stakes through privatisation. The wide anti-Meciar coalition that came to power after the 1998 elections has taken many steps towards elite unity and elites were developing a stronger normative consensus on democratic values, institutions, and procedures.

Rudolf Tőkés' main conclusion on Hungarian elite transformation is that the process of democratic institution-building has basically had positive outcomes, and it has been successful in making the voters accept the new political system. Tőkés termed this kind of acceptance as tolerance, which means that citizens still do not think of the political system quite as their own.

Bogdan Mach and *Wlodzimierz Weselowki,* publishing the findings of a survey conducted among the Polish political elite in 1996, made efforts to answer the question how, for all the organisational and ideological disunity of the Polish political elite, the country was able to handle the transition to a market economy and to democracy in a way that can be considered successful even in international comparison. In answering this question the two authors come to the conclusion that the satisfactory operation of the new system must have been due to the fact that the Polish political elite, divided in many respects, agreed on the answers to the fundamental questions of transition. So, for example, all influential actors of the political scene agreed with the transition to a market economy and with the establishment of parliamentary democracy. The authors referred to this as "transitional correctness" and found that the hypothesis by members of the political elite, who claim that there are serious philosophical and ideological controversies among the various party groupings, did not prove to be true, because politicians think similarly about a lot more things than they are aware of.

The question whether the democratic political system has already been consolidated in the countries of post-communist Europe has been subject of serious scientific and political disputes in the past few years. Experts usually regard a parliamentary democracy as consolidated if elite groups of a given country support the democratic system, and the agreement between elites is shared by the broader masses of society. Political science literature distinguishes two models for the accomplishment of democratic consolidation. One of them, and the more popular of the two, is where the first step of democratic consolidation is the establishment of democratic rules of the game, which is made possible by a tactical agreement between elite groups. Normative support of these rules comes only as a result of a longer

process, first among the elite, then among the public at large. Democracy gains solid support in the given country as a consequence of this process of acquisition and internalisation. *Christian Welzel,* who discusses the political aspects of the East-German transformation, claims that in the ex-GDR democratic institutions consolidated much faster and at the same time differently, notably, complying with the *instant success* model. In this model a democratic system can claim the normative support of national elites as well as the population, so its consolidation does not require the habituation process presupposed by the previous model. In his study, Welzel first elaborates the ideal-type of the instant success model, then he provides evidence that in East-Germany the democratic system of institutions had already been consolidated before reunification, so the population of the ex-GDR became members of the new federal state already prepared for democracy. The author believes that this consolidation could not have been made possible by anything other than the decisive social influence and democratic attitudes of the East-German service class.

Mladen Lazic focuses on the transformation of Serbian elites. His key argument is as follows: in socialism elite circulation was part of ruling-class circulation, in post-socialism elite reproduction is part of the making of a new ruling class. Lazic argues that Szelényi's question about the measure of elite circulation or elite reproduction is directing research into an inappropriate direction, and we should instead concentrate on class formation. In Lazic's analysis the Serbian socialist ruling class successfully decelerated the economic and democratic transition with the aim of creating the conditions to convert its economic and political resources. During the blocked transformation, members of the old ruling class successfully transformed the social monopoly of the communist party into political and economic dominance based on the power of elite actors interwoven and inter-locked amongst each other through a large number of economic and political connections. Lazic quotes evidence that in 1993, sixty percent of the members of the new Serbian entrepreneurial elite was attached to the communist ruling class either they themselves were members, or through their parents or spouses. All evidence quoted by the author seems to prove that the special Serbian political system, unique in Eastern Europe, created favourable conditions for nothing but the conversion of the power of the old ruling class.

The first of the studies on the transformation of Eastern European economic elites is the Croatian paper by *Dusko Sekulic* and *Zeljka Sporer.* The openness and the reformist orientation of communist Yugoslavia was favourable for the formation of a managerial technocracy, similar to that of Hungary, which maintained its leading economic positions throughout the fight for independence and the transition to a market economy. All that supported the reproduction of elites in the economy. There were also factors, however, that favoured the circulation of elites in Croatia, first of all the flow of Serbs and "Yugoslavs" out of the leading positions, which, in conditions of warfare, was often caused by violence. Their positions were taken by CEOs appointed by President Tudjman's political movement, and the authors are convinced that political links with the Croat Democratic Union (HDZ) were the most valuable resources that could be utilised to get in or to stay in the new economic elite. The authors present the findings of two surveys conducted in 1989 and 1996, which prove that 46.2 percent of corporate executives in 1996 had already occupied elite

positions in 1989, and the measure of elite circulation showed only a slight increase after 1989. The new executives, compared with the old ones, have lower levels of education, which is due to the fact that they are "self-made-man"-type entrepreneurs. Furthermore, the ratio of executives who had returned from abroad and obtained elite positions was also high. The authors claim that those who repatriated constitute one of the most influential groups of Tudjman's government party.

Attila Bartha and *György Lengyel* present the findings of a survey conducted in 1990 and 1993 at the Budapest University of Economics, trying to test the hypothesis about the dominance of managerial capitalism and of financial institutions (especially banks) in the economic life of Hungary. As is known, the notion of managerial capitalism is associated with the name of Iván Szelényi, while the assumption about the decisive economic role of bankers is an old argument of political circles with a critical attitude towards capitalism. In this study the authors compare the newly acquired and inherited economic, cultural and social resources of different segments of the economic elite (managers, bankers, politicians) as well as their views on the economic transition. They conclude that it is not justified to assume the dominance of any elite group over the others, but that the competing groups mutually control each other. At the same time data prove that bankers possess the highest amount of acquired and inherited resources within the economic elite, which suggests that the social mechanisms active in the selection of bank managers favour high economic qualifications, western-type market expertise and an urban middle-class background.

The study on the Russian economic elite, and, among them, the executives of the oil industry, is perhaps one of the most exciting pieces for a non-Russian reader. *Davis Lane,* a reputed expert on the Russian transition, in his comprehensive study based on multiple sources presents the history of the Russian oil industry's privatisation, how Lukoil and other oil industry conglomerates of this size came into being, the way these companies obtained stakes in different branches (including the media) of the Russian economy and the networks of banks and oil industry corporations. Lane points out that, unlike bankers, the executives of the oil industry companies did not arrive from the state- and the party apparatus but typically climbed up the corporate ladder in their oil companies until, as a result of the privatisation and restructuring, they obtained top decision-making positions. Analysing the broader aspects of transformation, Lane discusses the Russian economy as a chaotic economic formation lacking any harmonious co-ordination between the economic and the social sub-systems, where the elite is deeply split, the state, which is weak anyway, is kept together only by crime, and where the appropriate articulation of political interests is missing and market institutions basically do not work. All this leads to a situation in which commercial exchange is carried out in social networks permeated with, and actually operated by, corruption.

The study by *Dobrinka Kostova* on the Bulgarian economic elites gives insights into the transformation of an Eastern European country which usually falls beyond the scope of social researchers, although the Bulgarian development shows much similarity with the Hungarian, the Polish or the Czech cases. Kostova presents the findings of three elite surveys, the first being carried out in 1990, while the last in the spring of 1998. Between the two time points, the Bulgarian economic elite got

steadily younger and younger and, gradually, well-educated persons with substantial cultural and social resources replaced the old economic nomenclature. The political "rotation system" had its impact on the circulation of the Bulgarian economic elite as well: between 1990–94 and after 1997, when the anti-communist Union of Democratic Forces was in power, the circulation accelerated, and between 1994–97, when the post-communist Bulgarian Socialist Party was in government, reproduction was stronger.

Ákos Róna-Tas and *József Böröcz* present the findings of the 1993 elite survey led by Iván Szelényi. They explore what mechanisms played a decisive part in the selection of the Bulgarian, Czech, Hungarian and Polish business elites.

As a summary, let us return to elite model by Higley and Lengyel of which main merit is that it shows a new direction for Eastern European elite research by moving beyond the question of elite circulation and reproduction. Through the study of differentiation and unity of elites cross-country comparisons may gain new dimensions, and differences in economic performance, international acceptance and election results may get new explanations. The studies included in this volume show that, though with a remarkable time lag (if 5–7 years can be considered remarkable from a historical point of view), through the increase of the normative and interactive unity of elite groups and through their differentiation and organisation, individual countries are getting ever closer to the elite structure and circulation patterns of consolidated democracies.