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TOM VI

ELITES OF POST- TRANSFORMATION

The Cases of Central
and Eastern European Countries

Edited by
Piotr Kulas
Kamil M. Wielecki



Elites of Post-Transformation

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ELITES OF POST-TRANSFORMATION: FROM POST-COMMUNIST ELITES TO POPULIST ELITES

7

ABSTRACT

This chapter draws attention to the problem of the elite's change in Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries after 1989 and underlines its importance nowadays. The authors point out that the systemic transformation was an elite-driven process. Elites were significant agents of control. The text describes different models of elite exchange in CEE countries. In some of them, post-communist elites remained influential. In others, opposition elites seemed to play a dominant role. However, even in the latter case, tensions between different factions of the democratic elite could not have been avoided. They influence the public spheres and policies in each country. It is clear that the process of replacement at the time seemed imperfect and incomplete. The authors posit the question (which is also the main theme of the volume) whether we are dealing with circulation or reproduction when it comes to populist elites. The populists' effort lay in presenting their road to power as circulation. At least in some cases, however, this can be understood as reproduction since the current members of the elite were already in power. These efforts are accompanied by a strong anti-elitism that aims to blur or even conceal the elitist positions of the contemporary power elites. The final sections of the chapter outline the aim and content of the presented volume.

KEYWORDS: elites, Central and Eastern Europe, systemic transformations, circulation and reproduction of elites, populism

8 The 1990s brought a transformational breakthrough in Central and Eastern European (CEE) societies, ushering in a wave of democratization and freedom. It is widely agreed among scholars that transitions to democracy were elite-driven processes. Social and political sciences have long recognized the importance of elite groups for democratic transition and political change before 1989 (Burton, Higley 1987). It was believed that the path to a stable democracy was through elite settlements and consensual agreements that would guarantee a peaceful transition of power without social revolution. In other words, transitions¹ to democracy were often viewed as an “elite game” or even “elitist democracy.” During this process, elites held power in key positions within the state and legitimized the system by influencing the collective imagination. Elites were seen as the primary agent of change, i.e. groups in leading roles making important decisions in areas such as politics. Many studies have favoured a positional definition of elites. It was chosen because of its good arguments. Political elites were

¹ We accept and follow the distinction between transition and transformation proposed by Jacek Wasilewski (2001). He distinguished three phases of socio-political shift in the region: 1) transition, 2) transformation, and 3) consolidation. Each phase requires different elites. Transition is about strategic choices; it is “a relatively brief period between two regimes, during which new rules of the political game are established.” In turn, transformation encompasses implementing decisions that have already been made, i.e. the practical processes of crafting democracy and market economy. Finally, consolidation is understood as a stable phase with new rules and patterns (Wasilewski 2001: 134). At the same time, we are aware of the criticism faced by the term “transition” and the paradigm of *transitology* (e.g. Buchowski 2001: 9–20; Burawoy 2001).

considered to be easily identifiable as powerful figures such as prime ministers, politicians, governors, and bureaucrats; to a lesser extent, managers. However, there are also groups that have influence and informal power without holding formal political posts.

For a long time, the general consensus was that successful transitions to democracy occurred in countries where elites had reached a form of compromise in a peaceful manner. This opinion was formulated primarily in reference to Poland (the Round Table Talks), Czechoslovakia (the Velvet Revolution), Hungary, and, to some extent, East Germany. In these countries, the transition to democracy was based on compromise and mutual understanding between the old and new elites. Both groups perceived it as wise and prudent in order to transfer power. Therefore, these countries were shown as examples for those undergoing transformation. It should be noted that this approach followed the minimalist definition of democracy. On the one hand, the elites represented the will of the people. On the other hand, the decisions of these elites—composed of politicians, professionals, specialists, the educated, and those “who know things”—were not to be disrupted by the masses.

This introductory chapter aims therefore to outline the role of elites in the social transformations across CEE, as well as to provide an overview of the most popular stances that were expressed in the scholarly literature on the subject. We consider both issues crucial to understanding the current political conditions in the region. In the following sections, we also convey the idea underlying the entire book. For it is now clear that

elites can be crucial in both democratization and democracy backsliding and populism. Illiberal elites even claim to represent the will of the people, which according to them is true democracy. To understand the current state of democracy, it is necessary to examine the role of the elites in this process. It is also pertinent to address the question about the origins of the contemporary elites, who threaten liberal democracy and undermine the hitherto consensus.

ELITE TRANSFORMATION BETWEEN CIRCULATION AND REPRODUCTION

10

In countries undergoing transition and transformation, the crucial problem concerned the replacement of elites. Scholars related this problem mainly to political elites, in line with the common belief that democratic positions of power correspond more closely to the official hierarchy. As we mentioned, there was also a certain pragmatism in it—political elites are easier to capture and operationalize. Since we do not have space here for a detailed description, we only briefly mention this problem. There were two main approaches competing at the time: reproduction vs circulation (replacement). According to the elite reproduction approach, “revolutionary changes in Eastern Europe did not affect the social composition of elites. This is because the old nomenklatura elite has managed to survive at the top of the class structure and is now becoming the new propertied bourgeoisie.” According to the elite circulation stance, “transition to post-communism resulted in a structural change

at the top of the class hierarchy: new people are recruited for command positions on the basis of new principles” (Szelényi, Szelényi 1995: 616).²

However, this binary approach did not fully reflect the complexity of the situation at the time. Therefore, some researchers of elites argued for the implementation of a more nuanced perspective (Burton, Higley 1987: 295; Higley, Pakulski 1999). The partially free or free elections and subsequent transformations reshuffled the parliamentary constellation and in most cases gave way to free political competition and peaceful transformation of governments. Yet, the process was uneven across CEE countries. As a result, according to Higley and Pakulski (1999), who studied this issue at the beginning of the systemic changes, two overlapping matrixes can be distinguished among the patterns of elite games in post-communist countries. The first matrix refers to (1) elite circulation. It can run along the lines of classic circulation or replacement vs reproduction of elites. In the latter case, “existing elites change their ideocratic colors and positional locations in order to survive, or where there is a ‘revolution of the deputies,’ in which second-echelon persons ascend to the top positions” (Higley, Pakulski 2012: 299).

² There is still contention among various scholars over the usage of the terms “communism” and “socialism,” and consequently “post-communism” and “post-socialism” (or “postcommunism” and “postsocialism”). Communism as envisioned by Karl Marx was never achieved. However, there were—and still are—communist parties. Hence, one can speak of post-communist elites. Socialism, in turn, was achieved at least declaratively (Leonid Brezhnev announced its realization in the preamble to the 1977 Soviet constitution, for instance) and certainly existed in its *real* form. The contention also seems to run along disciplinary boundaries. Whereas in political studies and sociology, scholars tend to focus on communism (e.g. the journal *Problems of Post-Communism*), anthropologists prefer to describe socialism (e.g. Hann 2002; Verdery 1996). Since the authors who contributed to this volume use these terms rather interchangeably, we have not imposed any guidelines in this respect.

The second matrix refers to (2) elite unity (strong or weak) vs elite differentiation (wide or narrow). An example of strong elite unity and wide elite differentiation is a *consensual elite* in a consolidated democracy. An example of weak elite unity and narrow elite differentiation is a *divided elite* characteristic of an authoritarian regime. Higley and Pakulski (2012) also mention a *fragmented elite* (weak unity and wide differentiation) in an unconsolidated democracy or a short-lived authoritarian regime and an *ideocratic elite* (strong unity and narrow differentiation) in (post-)totalitarian regimes.

This theoretical framework aims to encompass all the changes of the CEE elites in post-communist regimes and illustrate the differences between them in the countries of the region. Circulation was the classic pattern observed primarily in Poland, Hungary, Slovenia, and the Czech Republic during the first years of transformation, wherein the Polish, Hungarian, and Czech elites were also consensual. As such, those countries were set as models of success for others. In contrast, Russian elite circulation during the post-Soviet era showed a strong reproduction pattern, which was also evident in Ukraine. Elites in those countries were also fragmented since former apparatchiks and technocrats formed “parties of power.” Fragmented elites and reproduction of circulation characterized Bulgaria and Slovakia, while Romania, Serbia, and Croatia saw the emergence of divided elites involving quasi-replacements. It has also been observed in Romania, Serbia-Montenegro, and, with some reservations, in Belarus or generally in those countries that came into being after the collapse of the Soviet Union. How can this

be explained? “Reproductive circulation” or “quasi-replacement circulation” is typical when one clique in the old communist party displaces the dominant clique and thus greatly truncates the democratization process. In these countries, the communist party-state was solid and entrenched in every sphere of social life and there was no dissident opposition.

As already mentioned, that was not the case in Poland, the Czech Republic, or Hungary. The democratization processes in Budapest, Prague, and especially in Warsaw were driven by the opposition elites. Researchers have claimed that the elites took the path of “classic circulation” in countries where the communist party-state was always incomplete (Poland) or had gradually eroded (Hungary, Slovenia, and, with reservations, the former Czechoslovakia). It is worth adding that the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland encountered an incomplete “classic circulation” that gradually gave way to the old elites rooted in the previous system. It also goes without saying that in some countries, post-communist leaders tried to present themselves as the new elite, as if the circulation pattern had taken place. Meanwhile, the fact that they still maintained or had regained power had more to do with elite reproduction. Sometimes, the new-old elite consisted of the same faces, and other times, the new faces were recruited from the same milieus (as in the case of the former communist parties). In the latter case, a second echelon or a new generation of the same faction came to power.

THE DOMINATED FRACTION OF THE DOMINANT CLASS

The above picture becomes even more complex when we examine the various forms of power in relation to the capital available. If we accept Bourdieu's (1986) thesis on the forms of capital, we may notice that the nature of a true elite lies in its ability to convert different forms of capital. Through conversion, elites are able to maintain power and influence over the social transformation they create or use to their advantage. Therefore, some scholars believed that the conversion of political (social) capital into an economic one was an important social process after 1989, despite (or independently of) circulation. One researcher put it bluntly: "To present the major finding, as an East Central European pattern, in a nutshell: There was an elite circulation in politics, but elite reproduction in the economy" (Bozóki 2003; see also Szelényi, Szelényi, Kovách 1995).

Variants of this mechanism have been observed among elites in some countries. They shared (or were forced to share) power with oppositional elites to retain influence and private wealth. Above all, it was a case of "political capitalism" created by the former nomenklatura, who did not oppose the process of systemic transition but used their political power to gain wealth and power as well (Staniszki 1991). Researchers of elites have also paid attention to the various elite fractions, such as lobbies, families, and (in)formal relationships between economic and political actors. Others have tried to track informal networks or detect corrupt activities and connections of the elites

(e.g. shadow elites). The political transformation contributed to the emergence of such groups operating at the intersection of politics and economics. According to another view, the communist elite had to come to terms with the collapse of the *ancien régime* and the loss of power. However, the effect was to a certain degree the same, as they were able to convert their power into another sphere. It was a shift from politics to the economy—an example of the successful conversion of political capital into economic capital (Hankiss 1990). Yet another perspective assumes that transformation was a process in which the winners comprised different types of elites united by a common cultural capital. The main argument put forward by Eyal, Szelényi, and Townsley (1998) posits that the most influential elite group—the “dominated fraction of the dominant class”—was a coalition of class fractions and the elites ruling them; it consisted of former communist technocrats and members of the dissident intelligentsia. They exercised “power principally on the basis of knowledge, expertise and the capacity to manipulate symbols, in short, ‘cultural capital’” (Eyal, Szelényi, Townsley 1998: 61). Their position enabled them to convert one capital into another, according to the prescribed purpose. This has been named the theory of post-communist managerialism because the managers embedded in cultural capital (i.e. the managerial elite rooted in both communist technocrats and the former intelligentsia) became the new power elite.

This shows that the role of democratic elites was not limited to the exercising of political power. In some countries, it was members of the intelligentsia who held political and managerial

positions after 1989. More importantly, the intelligentsia elites played the role of authority, understood as a hegemony. Their influence and importance went beyond the immediate holders of power in any political sense. Therefore, research in CEE countries has also focused on intellectuals, cultural elites, or the intelligentsia, and their role in the transformation.

This helps to understand why, in former communist countries, the power elites either facilitated or at least did not oppose the coming changes. It may be argued that the more cultural capital they had, the more open they were to circulation and consensus with oppositional elites. Their cultural capital helped them find a common language and brought them closer to the oppositional elites than to their older colleagues from the party (Eyal, Szelényi, Townsley 1998). Moreover, younger generations of party members were often recipients of Western scholarships (such as Fulbright). They shared, or at least tried to present themselves as if they did, the same values and orientations as the liberal opposition. Aleksander Kwaśniewski famously said that before 1989, he had been a reader of the Paris-based *Kultura*, edited by Jerzy Giedroyc, a magazine forbidden in communist Poland and smuggled by dissidents into the country. These factors facilitated elite roundtable negotiations, aided democratic changes, and eased the reconstruction of political regimes. As a result, consensual elites emerged and partially replaced (or were co-opted to share responsibility, according to a more critical view) the previous ones in a relatively broad and peaceful (“velvet”) manner. In general, the transformations across CEE were negotiated.

Even if the former elites only pretended to share the same values, they had to behave as if they did. In so doing, they were reflecting the transformational consensus. According to the theoretical perspective formulated mainly by Higley et al., “elite unity in diversity” is a prerequisite of democracy and a prosperous market economy (Field, Higley 1980; Higley, Pakulski 1992; Higley, Lengyel 2000). Elite unity should not be confused with homogeneity since it co-exists with wide elite differentiation. Unity, therefore, means first and foremost a consensus on the basic democratic rules of the game. Elites are rational, consensual, and adhere to democratic values and procedures, “most of them informal and uncoded, about political access, competition, and restrained partisanship” (Higley, Pakulski 2012: 295). They refrain from taking sides and are more likely to find a middle ground. Higley and Pakulski (2012: 294) argued that, in essence, elites in Eastern and Central Europe in the 1990s shared similar values and were playing rational power games. In their final point, the authors put forward the idea (which is even more applicable to the current times) that the rivalry between elites in a consensual system is different from that in a divided one. The former is stable and not constrained by an idealistic notion of transformation. Meanwhile, in the latter, the elites are in constant conflict, hostile towards each other, and strive to annihilate one another (Higley, Pakulski 2012: 296).

POPULIST CIRCULATION OR REPRODUCTION?

Yet, today's elites in the countries that once served as an example to the rest of the world are different. The example has begun to crumble. Despite its tremendous success, Hungary is now experiencing democratic backsliding, with Poland following suit. This is accompanied by an evident backlash against the former elites and a populist challenge to elitist democracy in the name of the people (Kulas 2018). In Poland, a significant part of the elites has faced criticism from right-wing factions and populists. This criticism mainly targets the left-liberal intelligentsia, cosmopolitan elites, current oppositional politicians, representatives of institutions (including those meant to uphold liberal democracy, such as judges), and members of certain professions (doctors, lawyers, journalists, teachers). Liberal democracy is no longer the only game in town. The consensual elites in Poland and Hungary have become a thing of the past. Contemporary anti-elitism is now being championed by the very same elites who were once in opposition but now hold the power. A pertinent question to ask is whether democracy is still the only option for the elites. And if so, what kind of democracy are we talking about?³ Many scholars agree that, despite the differences, there is a resurgence of populism in both countries. However, other countries in the region are also prone to populism (Szomolányi, Gál 2016). How did the

³ We do not determine whether the aspiring populist elites are proposing any form of democracy.

once liberal and even dissident elites transform into autocratic nationalists and populists?

Although populism is based on similar schemas everywhere, it is supported by different experiences. Poland and Hungary provide interesting, if somewhat different, examples (Lengyel, Ilonszki 2016; Magyar 2016). Unlike in Hungary, the current Polish political elite did not hold direct power prior to 2005. Certain factions of the Polish political right have long been critical of the consensus between post-communists and dissidents, deeming it a kind of collusion or even treason. As a result, they advocated for a strong decommunization of Poland. It is worth considering whether countries have experienced democratic backsliding on the basis of elite circulation or replacement. The change of power in Poland was carried out by a peripheral counter-elite that replaced the previous consensus-driven elites.⁴ However, in other countries of the region, we are now seeing more of a quasi-replacement. The ruling elites are not new—they come from the same milieus as former dissident movements. Once liberal, these elites now form a conservative or even populist, anti-elitist camp. This is even more stark in the case of the current ruling elite in Hungary. In Poland, for example, the elites associated with the Law and Justice party had already participated in the exercise of power prior to 2005, although they did not hold the most prestigious posts.

⁴ According to the theory, “Replacement occurs mainly where elites have been deeply divided and where their mutually destructive struggles have opened the door to a seizure of power by a small, doctrinaire, but previously quite peripheral counterelite” (Higley, Pakulski 2012: 299).

Nonetheless, the classic question of circulation vs reproduction requires further examination in this new context.

Anti-elitism was a project of competing elites on their way to power, which now serves to legitimize the position of the power holder. This phenomenon can be observed not only in the countries of the region but also elsewhere. Who, then, are the Eastern European anti-elitists? In Poland, it is mainly an elite faction drawn from the intelligentsia, whose members have long claimed to have been subjugated. This faction either criticizes others and the intelligentsia itself or is convinced that it represents the true essence of its vocation. This alone shows the fallacy of binary approaches, such as the division between elites and the people, the antagonism between the ethos of the intelligentsia and that of the populists, or between modernizers and traditionalists. Anti-elitism as a research topic has also attracted the academic world. There are many works on elite transformation, and political elites have been studied extensively. This issue resonates more strongly in political science circles and largely pertains to the political elite. This likely stems from the fact that the political elite is relatively easy to define. However, the political elite is only a part of the broadly understood power elite, which includes local social circles, well-known figures, corporate executives, managers, and high-ranking military officers. In some CEE countries, it also includes part of the intelligentsia. Only by analysing the entire field can one realize the network of elites and their influence on the exercise of power (Mills 1956).

AIM OF THE BOOK

The book aims to present several case studies of how elites across CEE have been changing. The question of elite reproduction was particularly important in the transition from communism to democracy. Today, with regard to post-communist elites, the problem of reproduction seems of lesser importance in most countries, although it still plays a role in Russia. The issue of reproduction and circulation also continues to be relevant in relation to the emergence of a new form of elites. We accept the concepts regarding circulation vs reproduction and fragmented vs consensual elites that were presented briefly above. However, we want to point out that they should be re-examined in the current political and social context. Many questions may arise. Are we dealing with a new circulation or reproduction? Who are the populists and even the authoritarian elites that rule in some countries? What are their origins, and how does this relate to the ongoing conflicts over democracy, fundamental laws, etc.? Or maybe the circulation vs reproduction approach does not make sense anymore? These were the questions we had in mind while initiating this book and inviting the contributing authors to address them.

We cannot unequivocally answer these questions with regard to all elites in the analysed countries. However, as the volume editors, we put forward the thesis that some countries in our region are facing reproduction. This is the case with Poland and Hungary, where—as mentioned in the previous section—the very same elites that were once in opposition are now

in power. If we consider the people at the very top, the highest level of the elite, the thesis about “reproductive circulation” seems accurate. During “reproductive circulation,” one group displaces the ascendant one. In the Polish case, the elites of the United Right (or, more precisely, the Law and Justice party) are of the same origin (mainly the intelligentsia) as the opposition. Moreover, they have held power before, from 2005 to 2007. They present themselves as the new elite, and yet they have long been active in public and political life. Thus, the populist elites that govern in Poland and Hungary recruit themselves from the former oppositional elites (and the intelligentsia in the Polish case) who once supported liberal democracy. Moreover, we also argue that, depending on the country in the region, we can speak of a *fragmented elite* (characterized by weak unity and wide differentiation) and an *ideocratic elite* (described by strong unity and narrow differentiation) in (post-)totalitarian regimes. The first case applies to Poland and Hungary, and the second to Belarus and Russia. Accordingly, we are experiencing democratic backsliding since the beginnings of transformation in many countries in the region saw the emergence of consensual elites that ultimately favoured consolidated democracy.

Before describing the scope of the book, we want to point out two main stances towards elites in contemporary social sciences and humanities that we wanted to avoid. The first is distance, the second is exaggeration. Let us start with distance. Although power and authority remain the central problem in social sciences, our disciplines (sociology and anthropology) usually refer to elites with a certain distance. Popular sociological

encyclopaedias lack even a discussion of the concept of an elite. However, the term appears in other definitions. Therefore, the social sciences cannot do without it. There is a prevailing belief that dealing with elites means elitism and that researchers of elites are essentially elitists. The anti-elitist turn of the modern humanities and social sciences seems surprising because the classic theoretical framework of elites was provided by sociology. The second problematic approach is exaggeration. We agree that some researchers of elites ascribe to them all agency. Thus, they share the elitist point of view. Elitism is a theory of power distribution and the consequences of the division along the ruler/ruled axis. Scholars adopting an elitist perspective seem to exaggerate the role of the elites in the transformation, seeing it solely as a consequence of their actions. We take a middle ground and assume that both approaches are wrong and based on moral principles rather than scientific premises.

We assume that the role of elites matters and at the same time argue that it is possible to analyse them without adopting an elitist approach. With this book, we want to emphasize the importance of such analysis; without it, we risk neglecting the analysis of a group of social actors, regardless of whether their role is causal in shaping social processes or not. On the other hand, we aim to follow a critical approach and have encouraged our authors to do the same. Following Pierre Bourdieu, we understand the term “elite” as a social group that is able to accumulate various types of capital, in particular possessing symbolic capital that allows the conversion of one form of capital to another (e.g. from cultural to economic

and vice versa). Symbolic capital offers the highest form of authority, enabling the exercise of power in the Weberian sense, i.e. exerting social influence. The fraction of the dominant class depends on various factors and differs across societies. In the Polish cultural context, the social group with the greatest ability to mobilize the resources of symbolic capital is still the intelligentsia, which has also accumulated the greatest authority. However, according to recent studies on young generations of intellectuals, this role is not dominant today (Kulas 2017). The elite also encompasses key politicians, specialists, and experts (especially those in prominent, influential positions).

THE CONTENT OF THE BOOK

The volume is divided into three thematic parts. The first one, entitled *Elites, Democracy, and Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe*, opens with an overview article by Elena Semenova, who presents a descriptive study of 77 parliamentary elections in 11 CEE countries between 1990 and 2022. She shows that the turnover rate, operationalized as the percentage of parliamentarians elected to parliament for the first time, was approximately 50% in each election. Such a high turnover rate says a lot about the replacement of political elites, democratic accountability, and the representativeness of political systems in CEE. It also strongly affects the policy-making processes in the region.

Pavol Frič also addresses the issue of elite replacement, examining the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in the process of elite replacement in post-socialist Central Europe.

He analyses the historical example of Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia and more recent elite replacements in Slovakia, Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic in the light of Antonio Gramsci's concept of competing hegemonic and counter-hegemonic alliances. CSOs are often called the watchdogs of democracy because throughout history they have often helped pro-democracy counter-elites overthrow non-democratic elites, which, in turn, made their leaders part of the new ruling elite. Sometimes, however, CSOs can contribute to the maintenance of the ruling elite, even if it is a part of a non-liberal democratic regime rather than a liberal one.

Unlike Frič, Jan Pakulski takes an approach focused not on civil society but on elites. In his article, he discusses the rise of populist nationalism in CEE. He defines populism as a political style of campaigning that opposes both the conventional style of political competition and the liberal political elites, who are allegedly corrupt and unpatriotic. While the emergence of populist nationalism has been a global phenomenon in recent decades, it has been particularly prominent in Poland and Hungary. Using these countries as examples, Pakulski argues that populist nationalism not only threatens democratic pluralism but also negatively affects the quality of governance.

Similarly to Pakulski, Jerzy Bartkowski also takes a critical look at the political elites currently ruling in Poland. He discusses the reasons for the generally negative image of the elites in public opinion and describes the paradoxes of the political appeal of the Law and Justice party. On the one hand, it involves populism and anti-elitism directed at the previous

governments and the political opposition. On a historical level, it also questions the political order negotiated in the Round Table agreement. On the other hand, it comprises the tacit process of building new elites, both political and economic. Bartkowski argues that this type of populism destabilizes the Polish political scene and undermines the state's democratic procedures.

The two following studies address the question of elite replacement and maintenance, as well. Moreover, both apply the theoretical framework introduced by Bourdieu, albeit in two different political contexts of Ukraine and Russia. Oleksandra Iwaniuk describes the case of pre-full scale-war Ukraine, focusing on the period of Volodymyr Zelenskyy's rule. In line with Semenova's findings, Iwaniuk shows that the very high parliamentary turnover—which reached 64% after the Maidan revolution—does not necessarily lead to a substantial change in practices among the political elites. Even though both Petro Poroshenko and Zelenskyy came to power by promising to fight corruption and even deoligarchize Ukrainian politics, their rule has not brought significant changes in this respect, as the high turnover of MPs has not changed persisting codes of political behaviour.

Katarzyna Chawryło, in turn, takes up the challenge of delineating a strict field of power in the Russian political system. As she argues, the official position in Russia only narrowly reflects one's ability to influence decision-making processes. For instance, the Security Council means more than the State Duma. Informal, rather than formal, ties to President Vladimir Putin are most important since his personal trust is the key

factor in determining whether someone can become and remain a member of the elite. Chawryło selects 40 representatives of Russia's narrow political elite as of 2022 and proves that they form a homogeneous group in terms of age, gender, and level of education.

Part II, *The Elites of Polish Systemic Transformation*, begins with the article by Piotr Kulas, who presents a socio-historical study of the formation and evolution of the Polish intelligentsia from the second half of the 19th century until today. As he argues, the social identity of the intelligentsia has undergone major changes during the period of post-socialist systemic transformation. Even though it had played a leading role in the Polish nation-building processes and been a part of the hegemonic stratum for more than a century, in a capitalist class society, the group has lost much of its influence and social prestige. Moreover, it only loosely recalls its earlier ethos. That is why Kulas suggests calling it *post-intelligentsia* rather than *intelligentsia*.

Jan Śpiewak also takes a historical approach. He reaches back to the ideological beginnings of the Polish systemic transformation: the Gdańsk Liberal Congress held in December 1988. Śpiewak describes the milieu of Gdańsk intelligentsia liberals—including figures who later became highly influential, such as Donald Tusk, Jan Krzysztof Bielecki, and Janusz Lewandowski—and highlights its plan of political and economic reforms. Paradoxically, it involved combining authoritarianism with capitalism and implementing changes through sometimes non-democratic methods. This was, as Śpiewak argues,

a conscious strategy of the liberals to conduct a revolutionary social engineering project.

Unlike Kulas and Śpiewak, Kamil Lipiński deals with Poland's economic elites. Drawing on ethnographic in-depth interviews with leading Polish businessmen, he examines the ways in which they accumulated their wealth, power, and social position—thus being able to make multiple capital conversions. More specifically, Lipiński provides a detailed analysis of the biographies of his two interviewees and shows how they were able to navigate the dynamic social changes, starting from the 1980s to the present day. All in all, he gives insight into the formation process of the business elite, which is one of the most symbolic aspects of Poland's transition to capitalism.

Alexandra Dunwill, in turn, also tackles the question of the formation of elites but at an early stage of the process. Namely, she takes up the issue of the elite schools that were established in Poland after 1989. She divides them into four categories: international, social, Catholic, and government ones. By analysing the contents of the schools' websites, she uncovers the ideologically differentiated discourses that each school uses to project its ethos and identity. The websites serve, on the one hand, to construct the elite status of the institutions and, on the other, to appeal to different groups of clients seeking different educational models for their children. All the schools explicitly or implicitly stress that they are raising future leaders.

Somewhat polemicizing with the other authors of this volume, Jan Kieniewicz argues that the post-socialist elites in Poland have not yet formed. Even though the Transition—i.e.,

in Kieniewicz's terminology, the change of government and state to a new system—has already taken place, the transformation of Polish society—understood as adopting a new identity—is not yet complete. The situation in which the old elites no longer exist and new ones have not yet emerged results in an inability to create a new pattern of existence and development for Poland. Thus, Poland has retained its peripheral status in the capitalist world-system.

Finally, the third part of the volume contains a transcript of the debate on, as we have titled it, *Elites of Post-Transformation: The Cases of Central and Eastern European Countries*. The debate took place at the Faculty of “Artes Liberales” of the University of Warsaw on February 23, 2022—just a day before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Symbolically enough, the debate brought together speakers from Poland, Ukraine, and Russia: Konstantin Gaaze, Mikhail Minakov, Ivan Peshkov, Anastasia Sergeeva, and Tomasz Zarycki. Given the current extreme political tensions between the countries, it is difficult to imagine that the debate could have taken place today. Therefore, we cherish in our memory the moment when scholars and activists from the now-divided nations met and exchanged their thoughts, hoping for the possibility of at least intellectual understanding. Moreover, we appreciate the fact that also scholars from outside the aforementioned countries contributed to this project, which has resulted in a quite unique volume.

Warsaw, March 2023

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PART I

**ELITES, DEMOCRACY, AND
CIVIL SOCIETY IN CENTRAL
AND EASTERN EUROPE**

THE DETERMINANTS OF PARLIAMENTARY TURNOVER IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES, 1990–2022

ABSTRACT

In this study, I examined the level of turnover, operationalized as a proportion of parliamentarians elected to a parliament for the first time, in the parliaments of eleven Eastern and Central European countries over the period from 1990 (or a country's first democratic election) to 2022. A descriptive analysis showed that the average level of turnover in post-communist countries was approximately 50% for each election, although this proportion declined over the observation period. A beta regression analysis of the determinants of turnover revealed that it tends to be higher in systems with a popularly elected president, during the period of democratic transition (the 1990s), and under proportional electoral systems. Conversely, legislated gender quotas had a negative effect on turnover. The paper concludes with a discussion of the theoretical and practical implications of these results.

KEYWORDS: parliament, legislature, newcomer, parliamentarian, post-communist, Eastern Europe, turnover

INTRODUCTION

Parliamentary turnover, which can be defined as the proportion of parliamentarians who take office for the *first* time after an election, is a fundamental concern of political scientists (Matland, Studlar 2004: 87). In particular, the nature and extent of parliamentary turnover provides a basis for drawing inferences about changes in power relations within a society, democratic accountability, the representativeness of political systems, and the scope of policy changes (e.g., Best, Cotta 2000; Matland, Studlar 2004; Gouglas, Maddens, Brans 2018; Verzichelli 2019). Studies of political elites connect turnover to elite circulation (Putnam 1976). Thus, circulation (or turnover) is considered a natural process in societies when one group replaces another. For example, a leading theoretician of elite studies, Vilfredo Pareto (1935: 1515), argues that, over the course of history, elites “lions” replace elites “foxes,” who are then, in turn, replaced by another set of “lions,” and so on. For scholars of elites, the significant consideration is the scope of elite circulation, with, on one hand, large-scale circulation being associated with crises and revolutions (Putnam 1976: 65), while, on the other hand, limited elite circulation indicates dysfunction in the form of stagnation and decay (Pareto 1935).

The issue of turnover is also an important question in democratic theory, according to which, in democracies, the people exercise control over their government by electing and removing their representatives to hold them accountable (Pitkin 1967; Powell Jr 2004). Thus, the conditions that curtail the ability

of the people to elect and remove their representatives effectively reduce their ability to control their government. For the representatives, the instrument of elections limits their opportunities to pursue particularistic interests (Manin 1997).

Turnover is also a crucial indicator of the representativeness of political systems. By examining how well representatives match those whom they represent in terms of their significant characteristics (e.g., socio-economic status, education, ethnicity, and religious orientation), researchers can determine whether the full range of opinions in a country is presented in its parliament (e.g., Pitkin 1967; Mansbridge 1999). Studies of political elites have shown, however, that parliamentarians are generally better educated and have, on average, a higher socio-economic status than the voters in their country (Best, Cotta 2000; Semenova, Edinger, Best 2014). Some modern theories of representation hold, therefore, that it is less important to bring disadvantaged groups into politics than to reduce the representation of privileged groups (Dovi 2009). Despite being a highly controversial theoretical issue, descriptive representation has important practical implications. For example, it was shown that the election of a “critical mass” of female representatives often results in an increase in the passage of bills related to women’s issues (i.e., leads to a better substantive representation) (Bratton 2005; Childs, Krook 2008).

The issue of turnover is an essential aspect of the study of policy change, for an important consideration in research on policymaking is the planning horizon for reforms and its effect on parliamentarians. For instance, researchers argue

that a high level of turnover is detrimental to policy reforms because politicians are reluctant to pursue innovative but risky policies that could decrease their performance in upcoming elections (Putnam 1976; Bartle, Avellaneda, McGann 2019). Recent research has confirmed the negative correlation between high turnover, fiscal policy, and even economic growth (Uppal, Glazer 2015). Therefore, the studies of turnover can provide important insights into a country's policy changes.

However, despite the importance of turnover in political science, the topic has received relatively little attention, with a particularly conspicuous lack of comparative controlled studies (Matland, Studlar 2004: 87). Thus, most of the research on turnover has focused on either the United States (e.g., Moncrief, Niemi, Powell 2004; Squire 1988; 2007; Woods, Baranowski 2006), individual Western European countries (Manow 2007; Heinsohn, Freitag 2012; Kountouri 2018; Salvati, Vercesi 2018), or individual countries outside Europe (Altman, Chasquetti 2005; Kerby, Blidook 2011; Pereira, Rennó 2013; Buehler, Nataatmadja 2019). The few previous comparative controlled studies have considered either Western European and other advanced democracies (Somit et al. 1994; Matland, Studlar 2004; Gouglass, Maddens, Brans 2018; Verzichtelli 2019), or some of the Latin American countries (Marengo dos Santos 2006; Botero, Rennó 2007). Only a handful of such studies have taken into account East European countries (Crowther, Matonyte 2007; Kuklys 2013; Verzichtelli 2019).

Using an original dataset consisting of eleven Central and Eastern European (CEE) democracies over the period from 1990

(or a country's first democratic elections) to 2022, I conducted a comparative controlled study of the determinants of legislative turnover in national parliaments (or the lower chambers in the case of bicameral systems). The focus of this research was on the effects of the institutional choices at the macro-level (e.g., the choice of the political system) and meso-level (e.g., the choice of the electoral system) as well as on the impact of political factors on parliamentary turnover. The results presented here contribute to the existing literature in two ways. First, I tested the effects of various macro-level institutional determinants on turnover in new democracies longitudinally, which few previous researchers have done. Second, I introduce the most extensive dataset on parliamentary turnover in new democracies currently available. This dataset is novel in its systematic inclusion of eleven CEE countries, whereas the broadest previous comparative study, by Verzichelli (2019), looked at four CEE countries.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

Most previous comparative studies of parliamentary turnover have used a supply-and-demand model (Norris 1997; Best, Cotta 2000) according to which institutional and political frameworks shape the supply of candidates and the demand for representatives expressed by the voters and political parties. Among the factors affecting this supply and demand, researchers distinguish between the structure of opportunities for political

careers, the recruitment strategies of political parties, the supply of contenders, and the preferences of the voters.

The determinants of turnover, operationalized within the supply-and-demand framework, are often treated as an aggregate result of individual decisions within a specific institutional framework (e.g., Schlesinger 1966). Matland and Studlar (2004), for example, identified a set of variables that can serve as proxies for distinguishing between the voluntary exits from parliament (e.g., to pursue occupational opportunities outside politics) and involuntary exits (e.g., party deselection). Gouglas, Maddens, and Brans (2018) also examined the effect of electoral and party-specific determinants on legislative turnover (e.g., the remuneration of MPs or gender quotas) from the perspective of individual parliamentarians.

The aforementioned operationalization has analytical merits, but it also has one important shortcoming in that it places institutional settings (i.e., the structure of opportunities) at the meso-level of the political system, which is the level of parliaments. Macro-level factors affecting political development (e.g., the selection of a political system) are expected to influence parliamentary turnover as well (Putnam 1976: 68). Some researchers have indeed mentioned these effects in their work on turnover (e.g., Matland, Studlar 2004: 94–95) without empirically examining their effects. The present study helps to fill this gap in the literature.

From a macro-level perspective, the collapse of communism in the late 1980s and early 1990s marked the end of the third wave of democracy (Huntington 1991). Despite differences

in the manner and pace of democratization, all of the post-communist countries faced similar challenges in terms of engineering constitutions, restructuring party systems, and opening channels for political participation (Lijphart 2012). All of these challenges had implications for parliamentary turnover in the CEE countries.

Starting with constitutional engineering, an essential choice for democratized countries is the selection of a political system and definition of the scope of competencies for the office of president (Shugart, Carey 1992). In particular, researchers have argued that the selection of a presidential system is detrimental to democratization since such systems have been associated with intra-executive conflict, policy instability, and even democratic decay (Linz 1990; Mainwaring 1993). In fact, none of the East European countries opted for a purely presidential system, but many adopted a semi-presidential system with a popularly elected president and a cabinet responsible to the president and the parliament (Elgie 1999). These systems are also characterized by considerable intra-executive conflict, which sometimes leads to early elections (Shugart, Carey 1992; Protsyk 2006; Sedelius, Mashtaler 2013). Therefore, I expected that parliamentary turnover would be higher in systems with popularly elected presidents than in systems without such constitutional design (*Hypothesis 1*).

The democratization of post-communist countries was accompanied by an increase in inclusiveness through the holding of regular, free, and secret elections (Dahl 1971; Manin 1997: 6). The regularity of elections is a crucial factor for both voters

and their representatives (Pitkin 1967). Regular elections allow the former to express their opinions about their representatives' activities, either re-electing incumbents to perpetuate ongoing policies or choosing newcomers to pursue new policies (Manin 1997: 177). For representatives, regular elections have a corrective effect on their behavior and provide incentives to take the voters' opinions into account in political decision-making (Manin 1997: 176, 178). For political parties as the major selectorate for parliamentarians (Best, Cotta 2000), regular elections establish a crucial planning horizon for selecting the best candidates. Irregular elections, by contrast, are indicative of political conflict and do not provide parties sufficient time to search for new representatives. Therefore, I expected that regular parliamentary elections would increase the level of parliamentary turnover more than early (snap) elections (*Hypothesis 2*).

A common assumption in the literature on democratization is that the transformation of authoritarian societies into democratic ones proceeds through two stages. During the first stage, enormous changes in all societal spheres occur, while during the second stage, the newly built democratic institutions consolidate (Linz, Stepan 1996). If these assumptions are valid, these stages should also be visible in the development of parliamentary turnover in post-communist countries. Researchers have noted that during the early 1990s, post-communist parliaments were full of newcomers as new parties emerged and adopted more inclusive recruitment strategies (Crowther, Matonyte 2007; Kuklys 2013; Best, Semenova 2015). Following the democratization literature, I expected that the proportion of newcomers

in post-communist parliaments would peak during the first stage (i.e., the transition to democracy in the 1990s) and decline over time with the consolidation of democratic institutions during the second stage (*Hypothesis 3*).

With the demise of the dominant communist parties in Eastern Europe after 1990, the post-communist countries witnessed growing political contestation (McAllister, White 2007) that was shaped by the major institutional choices of electoral systems (Lijphart 2012) and of female quotas. Both of these choices have practical implications for the level of parliamentary turnover. Thus, when selecting an electoral system, politicians decide not only how the votes translate into parliamentary seats but also the amount of control that political parties exercise over the selection of candidates (Gallagher, Mitchell 2005; Manow 2007; Verzichelli 2019). In proportional systems, in which all of the candidates must run on a party list, the parties' control over selection is greatest; in majoritarian systems, by contrast, political parties tend to exercise the least amount of control because, in such systems, the candidates' personal appeal to the voters is the crucial factor in determining the outcome of elections (Gallagher, Mitchell 2005; Matland, Studlar 2004). Based on these assumptions, I expected that the level of turnover in a proportional system would be higher than in mixed or majoritarian systems (*Hypothesis 4*).

When adopting quotas, politicians also intervene in the parties' candidate selection strategies (Dahlerup 2006). Legislated quotas are considered more effective than voluntary quotas adopted by individual parties in increasing female representation,

for instance, because failure to comply results in sanctions (Hughes et al. 2019: 223). In Eastern Europe, there are no reserved parliamentary seats for women, but a few countries have recently adopted legislated quotas (IDEA 2022).¹ The effects of these quotas on parliamentary turnover may be twofold. On the one hand, the political parties are expected to place more females in better list positions (Darcy, Choike 1986; Thames 2017); on the other hand, the voters shall have more choices (Dahlerup 2006; Gouglas, Maddens, and Brans 2018). Therefore, I assumed that, in the countries that have adopted legislated quotas for female parliamentarians, the turnover should be greater than in the countries without such quotas (*Hypothesis 5*).

Lastly, the extension of political participation also increases the inclusiveness of a party system by providing more opportunities for newly organized parties to run candidates in parliamentary elections (cf., Lijphart 2012). Some researchers argue that high fragmentation (measured as the effective number of parties; Laakso, Taagepera 1979) diminishes the voters' choice clarity and increases the polarization in nascent party systems (Kuenzi, Lambright 2005: 424), but I find persuasive Lijphart's (2012) argument that a high degree of fractionalization in party systems is an indicator of party-system inclusiveness. Accordingly, I expected a high fractionalization of party systems to be positively associated with the level of parliamentary turnover (*Hypothesis 6*).

¹ Legislated quotas for the lower chamber of the national parliament (if bicameral) were adopted in Slovenia in 2006, Croatia in 2008, and Poland in 2011.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

To test these hypotheses, I used a unique data set consisting of both novel data collected by me and secondary data that I analyzed (Gouglas, Maddens, and Brans 2018; Verzichelli 2019). The sample includes eleven Central and Eastern European democracies that are members of the European Union, namely Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Romania, and Croatia. I collected the data for the determinants of parliamentary turnover from various primary and secondary sources (Table 1).

The unit of analysis is the 80 legislative elections in these eleven countries. The observation period is from 1990 (or the country's first democratic elections during the 1990s) to 2022. For Croatia, the starting date is 2000, when the presidency of Franjo Tuđman ended, and the country transitioned to democracy.

Regarding the selection of elections for the analysis, I excluded all first democratic elections from the analysis because they were used as a baseline for further estimations of the level of parliamentary turnover (cf., Kuklys 2013). For some parliaments, no personal information of the parliamentarians was available, which made it difficult to estimate whether they were elected for the first time or had been members of the parliament before. The total number of missing cases was 15 elections (most of which were in Slovakia; Table 2).

TABLE 1. THE HYPOTHESES AND VARIABLE SPECIFICATION

Hypothesis	The determinant is expected to ... turnover	Variable specification	Source
Popularly elected president (H 1)	increase	There is a popularly elected president (at the time of elections) (1 if yes, 0 – otherwise)	Author
Regular elections (H 2)	increase	Elections take place regularly (1 if yes, 0 – early elections)	Döring, Huber, Manow 2022
Democratic transition (H 3)	increase	Elections took place during the 1990s (1 if yes, 0 – otherwise)	Author
Proportional electoral system (H 4)	increase	Proportional system used at the elections (1 if yes, 0 – otherwise)	Nohlen, Stöver 2010; author
Gender quotas (H 5)	increase	Legislated gender quotas applied (1 if yes, 0 – otherwise)	IDEA 2022
Party-system fractionalization (H 6)	increase	Effective number of parties (at the time of elections)	Casal Bértoa 2022

In this study, the *dependent* variable is the proportion of parliamentarians elected for the first time in each election in each country. As such, the dependent variable is continuous and restricted to the interval [0, 1]. Under these conditions, a linear regression is not suitable because it may yield values for the dependent variable that exceed the lower and upper bounds. Thus, the analysis of such dependent variables, which are beta-distributed, requires a specific type of regression, that is, a beta regression (Ferrari, Cribari-Neto 2004).

The specification of a beta model involves consideration of two parameters, i.e., the link function used to specify the conditional mean, and the slink function to specify the conditional scale. STATA (17th version) allows for the use of four link functions (logit, probit, cloglog, or loglog) and three slink functions (log, root, or identity). As recommended in the statistics literature (e.g., Smithson, Verkuilen 2006), the selection of a beta regression model should include testing with various link and slink functions to identify the model with the lowest Bayesian information criterion (BIC). Therefore, I tested various combinations of link and slink functions, and found that the model with logit link function and log slink function produced the lowest BIC, i.e., it has the best fit to the data. I then selected this model for further analysis.

PARLIAMENTARY TURNOVER IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN DEMOCRACIES

Over the observation period, the average turnover in the post-communist democratic parliaments was around 52%, with a standard deviation of approximately 16% (Table 2). Especially given that turnover in the first democratic parliament served as a baseline and was dropped from the analysis, turnover of 50% is very high. A cross-regional analysis revealed that the average level of turnover in Bulgaria, Slovenia, and Romania was substantially higher than the average of all CEE democracies. By contrast, the parliamentary turnover in Hungary fell below the average of the new democracies.

TABLE 2. THE DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF THE AVERAGE LEVEL OF PARLIAMENTARY TURNOVER IN THE SAMPLE COUNTRIES (WITH THE STANDARD DEVIATION)

Country	Average level	Standard deviation	N of elections considered
Slovenia	60.6	18.8	8
Bulgaria	58.5	8.4	7
Romania	57.3	21.6	9
Poland	55.8	20.9	10
Estonia	52.7	15.3	7
Croatia	51.7	13.8	5
Czech Republic	51.3	10.0	8
Latvia	50.3	10.9	8
Lithuania	49.5	14.5	8
Hungary	38.0	14.9	8
Slovakia	37.5	24.7	2
<i>Average proportion of newcomers</i>	<i>52.3</i>	<i>16.4</i>	<i>80</i>

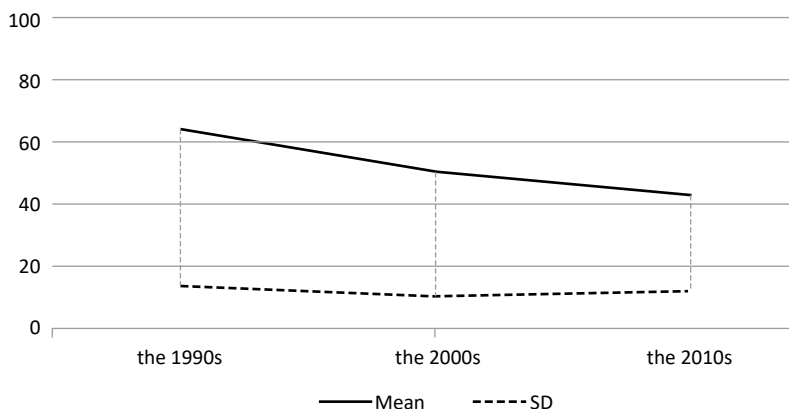
Source: author's own calculations.

In addition to the substantial cross-regional variation in the level of turnover, I observed significant time-dependent variation within new democracies (Figure 1). As expected, the level of turnover was the highest after the collapse of communism in these countries. Over the next 30 years, the average turnover declined to roughly 40%, a level still higher than that of Western European countries, in which turnover often averages around 30% (Best, Semenova 2015).

An additional analysis of these temporal effects in the individual countries, then, made clear that, in most of them, turnover has declined over the past 30 years (Figure 2). Only in Bulgaria

THE DETERMINANTS OF PARLIAMENTARY TURNOVER...

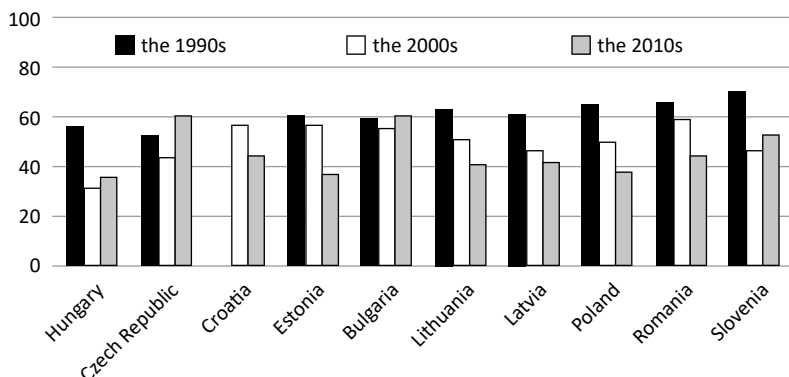
FIGURE 1. THE AVERAGE LEVEL (= MEAN) AND THE STANDARD DEVIATION (= SD) OF PARLIAMENTARY TURNOVER IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN DEMOCRACIES BY A DECADE (IN %)



Source: author's own calculations.

49

FIGURE 2. THE AVERAGE LEVEL OF PARLIAMENTARY TURNOVER IN INDIVIDUAL POST-COMMUNIST COUNTRIES BY DECADE (IN %)



Source: author's own calculations.

did the level of turnover remain roughly the same, while that in the Czech Republic actually increased over the last decade, mainly because newly established parties (e.g., Andrej Babiš's

ANO – Action of Dissatisfied Citizens) won a substantial number of parliamentary mandates.

Table 3 presents the results of the beta regressions in the form of regression coefficients. I calculated robust standard errors clustered by country (shown in parentheses) because I assumed that the level of parliamentary turnover may be affected by conditions that differ across countries. In Model I, I tested the effects of the macro-institutional and temporal factors on parliamentary turnover. The results confirmed hypothesis 1, showing that the level of parliamentary turnover tended to be higher in countries with a popularly elected president than in countries with a different constitutional design. Regular elections also tended to be associated with higher levels of turnover, as hypothesis 2 predicts, but this effect was not statistically significant. Further, the results confirmed the temporal effect stated in hypothesis 3; thus, during the 1990s, parliamentary turnover was significantly higher than it was later in the observation period.

The determinants at the level of parliaments and parties (Model II) partly explain parliamentary turnover in post-communist countries. For example, proportional electoral systems increase the level of turnover in CEE countries, a result consistent with hypothesis 4. Hypothesis 5 was, however, not confirmed; for the introduction of legislated gender quotas tended to decrease the level of turnover, although the effect size of this determinant is small. Party-system fractionalization tends to have a positive effect on the level of parliamentary turnover, thus, consistent with hypothesis 6. However, the effect failed to reach the level of statistical significance.

Model III, which included all of the factors, showed that the positive effects of a popularly elected president and democratic transition, and a negative effect of gender quotas on parliamentary turnover remained stable. Also, the direction of the effects of regular elections and proportional electoral systems remained positive, albeit insignificant (Table 3).²

TABLE 3. THE EFFECTS OF VARIOUS DETERMINANTS ON THE LEVEL OF PARLIAMENTARY TURNOVER IN POST-COMMUNIST COUNTRIES (REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS AND ROBUST CLUSTERED STANDARD ERRORS)

Determinants	Model I	Model II	Model III
<i>H 1</i> : Popularly elected president (= yes)	0.41** (0.16)		0.32** (0.06)
<i>H 2</i> : Regular elections (= yes)	0.02 (0.13)		0.03 (0.11)
<i>H 3</i> : Democratic transition (= the 1990s)	1.53*** (0.29)		1.27*** (0.31)
<i>H 4</i> : Proportional electoral system (= yes)		0.34* (0.14)	0.19 (0.14)
<i>H 5</i> : Gender quotas (= yes)		-0.39** (0.08)	-0.30* (0.14)
<i>H 6</i> : Party-system fractionalization		0.08 (0.07)	0.04 (0.04)
N of observations (elections)	80	78	78
N of clusters (countries)	11	11	11
Log pseudolikelihood	49.31	30.58	52.23

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$; robust standard errors clustered by country are in parentheses.

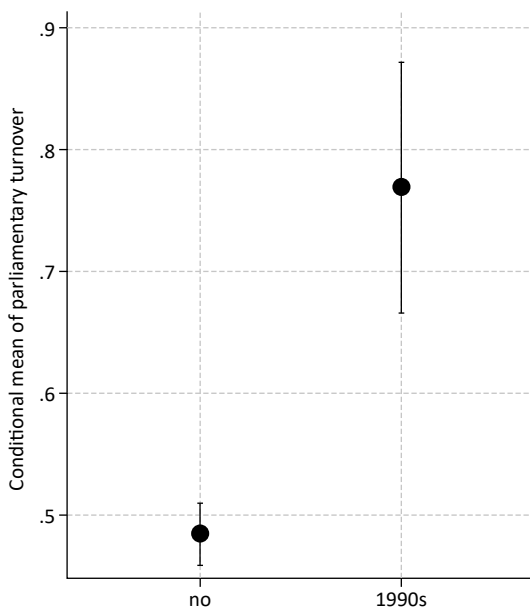
Link function: logit, slink function: log.

Source: author's own calculations.

² I also tested the effects of country-specific features such as the Index of Electoral Democracy (Teorell et al. 2016), ethnic fractionalization, and communist legacies (Kitschelt 1999). None of these had a significant effect on the level of parliamentary turnover. I assume that the primary reason for this is the small number of units of analysis under consideration. This hypothesis should be examined in the future using a larger European sample.

Based on Model III, I calculated the conditional marginal effects of the initial transition period on parliamentary turnover (Figure 3). It shows that the effect is very strong, with a small standard error.

**FIGURE 3. CONDITIONAL MARGINAL EFFECT
OF THE INITIAL TRANSITION PERIOD (THE 1990S) ON THE LEVEL
OF PARLIAMENTARY TURNOVER**



Note: based on Model III.

Source: author's own calculations.

DISCUSSION

The findings presented here contribute to the understanding of parliamentary turnover in post-communist countries, to begin with, by showing that turnover tends to be higher

in countries with popularly elected presidents than in countries with an indirectly elected president. Often, countries with popularly elected presidents suffer from government instability, intra-executive conflicts, cohabitation, and policy deadlock (Elgie 1999; Protsyk 2006; Tavits 2009). This instability is even greater when a country's constitution gives its president the power to dissolve the parliament and dismiss the cabinet (Shugart, Carey 1992). In none of the post-communist countries have the presidents had such extensive competencies, however (Semenova, Dowding 2021). Therefore, I posit that it is not the mere constitutional existence of a popularly elected president that matters. It is rather a potentially conflictual environment associated with this constitutional design that is unfavorable to the stability of the parliament as a body.

As Matland and Studlar (2004) observed, parliamentary turnover is affected by the frequency with which incumbents must stand for reelections. Early elections have been less common in the post-communist countries than in Western European countries because in the former, neither the prime ministers nor the presidents have the discretion to dissolve parliament (Semenova, Dowding 2021). The early elections that have occurred in the former countries have been attributable to the breakdown of coalitions and various scandals, for instance, in the elections in Poland in 2007, and in Slovenia in 2011 and 2014. Though the direction of the effect of regular elections on parliamentary turnover confirms my hypothesis, the effect is rather small and failed to reach the level of statistical significance. This result suggests that, in the post-communist

countries, parliamentarians have faced substantial obstacles to winning re-election irrespective of the type of elections in which they have participated.

The democratic transition effect appears to be very strong and significant. Thus, the parliaments of the new democracies were particularly volatile during the 1990s. However, these parliaments then showed a general tendency toward stabilization and consolidation, resulting in a decline in the average proportion of newcomers by the 2010s.

Among the factors operationalized at the level of parliaments and parties, the effect of a proportional electoral system on parliamentary turnover was in the expected direction. To disentangle this effect, I conducted an additional analysis using other types of electoral systems—proportional, mixed, and majoritarian—that have been used in elections since the early 1990s (not reported in Table 3). The analysis confirmed the finding that the level of turnover under a proportional system did not differ from that under a mixed system. However, turnover was significantly higher under majoritarian systems, and the effect had a strong time-dependent component. All of the majoritarian systems were in place in these countries during the early 1990s, when parliaments were reorganized following the collapse of the communist government. When the elections under majoritarian systems were excluded from the analysis, the effect of the proportional systems became small.

The effect of party-system fractionalization on turnover is in the expected direction, although it failed to meet the level of statistical significance. The party systems in the

post-communist countries have been characterized by high levels of permissiveness, with many newly founded parties participating in elections and even assuming roles in government (Casal Bértoa, Enyedi 2021). Therefore, one explanation of the positive (but small) effect of fractionalization on turnover is the low threshold for the candidates of new parties to enter the parliament. The existence of party-specific rotation rules may also encourage turnover, with parties intentionally nominating newcomers in order to introduce innovation and increase representativeness. For example, Sikk and Köker (2018) showed that some parties in the post-communist countries have actively used rotation mechanisms.

Lastly, the observation of a negative effect of quotas on parliamentary turnover is inconsistent with the findings known from Western European countries, where quotas increase turnover (e.g., Gouglas, Maddens, Brans 2018).³ Compared with their post-communist counterparts, more Western European countries have introduced legislative quotas and kept them in place longer (IDEA 2022). This temporal aspect of the introduction of quotas does not, however, fully explain the negative direction of the quota effect in post-communist countries. I suggest that this finding is a result of regional specificity since it confirmed previous findings regarding the post-communist parliaments. For example, Górecki and Kukołowicz (2014) showed that the introduction of quotas in Poland in 2011 led to a sharp increase in the number of female candidates but a massive decline in their

³ However, these scholars (Gouglas, Maddens, Brans 2018: 645) used a broader definition of quotas in their work (i.e., one including voluntary quotas introduced by individual parties).

electoral performance, at least in a short term. It may be the case that the voters maintain their voting bias against female candidates longer, and parties prefer not to risk and nominate few women.

CONCLUSION

Using a sample of eleven Central and Eastern European democracies over the period from 1990 to 2022, I examined the determinants of turnover in national parliaments. This is the first comparative controlled study to analyze the effects of macro-level changes experienced by new democracies since the collapse of communism, including their democratization, increased contestation, and increased participation, on parliamentary turnover. The findings presented here support some of those from previous comparative and country-level research on turnover, such as the finding of an increase in turnover during the 1990s and the effect of proportional electoral systems (Kuklys 2013; Verzichelli 2019). However, my results do not support previous findings of an effect of gender quotas on legislative turnover (Matland, Studlar 2004; Gouglas, Maddens, Brans 2018).

My major finding that the level of turnover averaged approximately 50% across the parliaments of the CEE countries is significant from a theoretical perspective. This high rate indicates the regular large-scale circulation of elites. However, this rate is suggestive of dysfunction in that each election eliminated half of the competence, knowledge, and parliamentary experience

from the institution by replacing experienced parliamentarians with newcomers. Once elected, newcomers need time to learn parliamentary rules, build networks, acquire legal expertise, and put in the time required to develop new policy proposals and perform constituency service. Similarly, high levels of uncertainty regarding their chances for re-election discourage parliamentarians from introducing innovative and risky policies as their planning horizon shrinks to only the next election.

The high turnover in the CEE parliaments is also a strong indicator of the permissiveness and flexibility of the party systems in these new democracies. New parties frequently emerge and find success gaining not only parliamentary seats but also cabinet representation. The voters also play a role in extreme turnover, willingly supporting the new parties created by political entrepreneurs and, thereby, introducing an additional element of uncertainty into political career strategies. A permissive party system and electoral volatility did not, however, increase the representativeness of the CEE parliaments, which, since the early 1990s, have been dominated by well-educated parliamentarians of high socio-economic status drawn from a few occupations (Best, Semenova 2015).

The practical implications of the findings presented here include the potentially detrimental effect of turnover on policy innovation, political representation, and parliamentary activities. Moreover, regular large-scale turnover of parliamentarians weakens the link between the representatives and the represented and, in turn, the legitimacy of the political system in general. Studies of the parliaments in new democracies

should, accordingly, take into account their evolving nature, not only politically but also in terms of personnel.

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ELITE REPLACEMENT AND CIVIL SOCIETY

ABSTRACT

Classical elite theory considers elite change as a law of nature. The old elites are continuously replaced by new ones that are no better than the old ones. It does not distinguish whether the elites are democratic or not. However, the democratic aspect of elite replacement has recently played an increasingly important role. This is especially so in the context of the rise to power of populist elites almost throughout the democratic world. The season of victorious authoritarian populist leaders has also brought into the replacement of old elites by new ones the question of the role of civil society in this process. This question is particularly urgent in the post-communist countries of Central Europe, where civil society played a significant role in replacing the populist communist elites of more than 30 years ago. The new wave of populism in these countries is associated in the academic literature with the process of democratic backsliding and with expectations that civil society, together with democratic political parties, will counter this process of replacing democratic elites with authoritarian ones. Against the backdrop of Gramsci's concept of competing (counter)hegemonic historical blocs, this chapter seeks to show that the alliance between elites and civil society is an important factor in the process of elite replacement and that the replacement of elites in post-communist countries is not only an "elite game" but also depends on the ability of civil society organizations to mobilize the general public in support of one part of the elites. It also demonstrates the involvement of civil society organizations in building illiberal, conservative alliances and replacing liberal democratic elites with populist ones, using examples of elite replacement in the four Central European countries.

KEYWORDS: elite, civil society, alliance, elite replacement

THE ALLIANCE OF ELITES AND NON-ELITES AS A FACTOR OF ELITE REPLACEMENT

The Central European region has been quite rich in events of elite replacement lately. The diverse stream of these events was triggered by the era of Velvet Revolutions in the late 1980s and the subsequent process of democratization of formerly totalitarian regimes. In this study, the term “elite replacement” is not necessarily tied to regime change. On the other hand, the inspiration of Samuel Huntington’s (1991) notion of “regime replacement” is evident. Elite replacement, as an event of the relatively rapid collapse of the old elite and the subsequent occupation of top positions of power by a new elite, can take the form of both a revolution and an electoral act. The authors Mattei Dogan and John Higley (2012), who have also studied the phenomenon of regime replacement, bring an emphasis on regime type into their analysis. By analogy with their approach, in the case of “elite replacement,” its attribute can be seen as the fundamental replacement of one type of elite by another type of elite. It is thus neither a gradual change nor a revitalization of the same type of elites. An example of this is Vilfredo Pareto’s substitution of a fox-like elite type for a leonine elite type. Another example closer to the Central European context may be the three types of elites identified by Jacek Wasilewski (2001) according to their functional interconnectedness with the three stages of transition to democracy and market economy: 1. Elite of transition, 2. Elite of transformation, and 3. Elite of consolidation. Current political developments in Central

Europe also offer the possibility of distinguishing between liberal and illiberal (authoritarian) types of elites or between liberal and populist elites. The replacement of the latter two types will be explored in our study, which does not, however, aim to examine the depth or extent of these replacements. Rather, it will seek answers to questions about the role of civil society and its organizations in the process of elite replacement in the conditions of post-communist countries in Central Europe. How do different types of elite form alliances with civil society and how are they able to benefit from them in their efforts to replace the ruling elites or to maintain their ruling positions?

Historically, until relatively recently, Marxist scholars interpreted the historical changes in Central Europe primarily as the work of the revolutionary masses. They may have been led by revolutionary leaders, but the main emphasis was on the masses. Today, we seem to be falling into the opposite extreme, with elite scholars tending to interpret historical events purely as an “elite game” and ascribing at best a minor role to the masses. This approach is particularly evident in the case of the analysis of the processes of transitions to democracy in post-communist countries in Central Europe (Bozóki 2003). Paradoxically, we are thus going back a century, when the founders of classical elite theory (Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca, Robert Michels) considered the masses as mere tools in the manipulative hands of the elites. For them, the masses without the leadership of the elites were just a wild crowd.

On the other hand, the classics of elite theory have already reflected the fact that the manipulated masses often help the

emerging counter-elite to replace the old ruling one, or on the contrary, help the old elite to stay in power. Thus, they suggested that the purpose of elite manipulation is to create an alliance between the elites and the masses that either defends the old elite or supports its replacement. The ruling elite tries to give the impression that it represents the interests of the masses. It disseminates in society a specific “political formula” that contains “complexes of beliefs and sentiments which have the sanction of the ages, that succeed in making their way into the lowest strata of human societies” (Mosca 1939: 107). It is around this political formula, in Mosca’s view, that the ruling class seeks to unite the masses and thus create the impression of a general consensus and alliance between the elites and the masses. Pareto (1966) also argues that the emerging counter-elite, in order to boost its chances of success, creates the illusion of as little distance as possible between itself and the masses, pretending to represent the interests of all the oppressed. It tries to win the masses to its side to become its ally in the struggle against the ruling elite.

Classical elite theory views elites as a very unstable, dynamic phenomenon. However, the reason for this dynamic instability is the behavior of the elites themselves. For example, Pareto (1966) explained the dynamics of elites by the circulation of superior and inferior elements (persons) in society, with the fluidity or blockage of this circulation being entirely in the hands of the ruling elite. However, according to him, the most important factor in the replacement of elites are psychological predispositions (residues), or innate character traits of fox-like

and lion-like elites. However, the actual competition of the ruling and emerging counter-elites for the trust of the masses and their efforts to form alliances with the masses have not become the subject of intensive analysis in classical elite theory.

The theme of the alliance of elites and masses as a factor of the dynamics of elite life, or elite replacement, has long been overlapped within elite studies by themes such as competition between individual segments or factions of elites, changes in the configuration or composition of elites, elite stability, elite autonomy, elite control (by the masses), elite reproduction, conversion of elite political, cultural, and economic capitals, or the theme of elite degeneration or decadence. It can be said that the representatives of mainstream elite theory, when analysing the dynamics of elites, still attribute only a secondary role to the masses, or non-elites. Even the mobilization of the masses affecting the (in)stability or replacement of elites is seen as a success or failure of elite leadership or as a consequence of their (in)ability to create “elite pacts” or “elite settlements” (Burton, Higley 1987).

Of course, it has happened many times in history that rising counter-elites have been able to overthrow the ruling elite without the help of the masses, e.g., in the form of a palace coup or military coup. But in a democracy, such a replacement of elites loses legitimacy. Only mass mobilization, which is such an important factor in the competition between old and new elites in modern democratic societies, can provide it. However, the mobilization of non-elites or the general public is important in a democracy both for legitimate elite replacement and for

the sustainability and correction of the behavior of democratic elites. This was already noted by C. Wright Mills (1956), when he spoke of a “genuine public” that, through the mobilization of social movements, associations, and the media, continuously checks the performance of ruling elites and balances their power in society. Only in this way, according to Mills, can the power elites be prevented from forming a ruling cartel that turns democracy into a hidden oligarchy.

The reflection on the mass mobilization of non-elites, which is not initiated by political leaders but by civil society activists and their organizations, has entered modern elite theory as a factor that not only limits but also actively corrects the behavior of ruling elites (see Etzioni-Halevy 1993; Knight 1998; Ruostetsaari 2006). Civil society organizations (CSOs) are most often cited as watchdogs of democracy that, through their expertise and ability to mobilize citizen participation, enforce transparency and accountability of ruling elites. In this way, CSOs help to keep democratic elites in good leadership shape and improve their resilience to potential non-democratic challengers or counter-elites. Even in this case, however, the interaction of civil society and CSOs with ruling democratic elites is not analysed as an alliance but rather as a conflict in elite studies.

DUAL ALLIANCE OF ELITES AND NON-ELITES

The alliance between the emerging counter-elites and civil society in Central Europe has been coming to the attention of mainstream elite theory since the fall of the communist

regime. E.g. in the former Czechoslovakia, where civil society was weakest in Central Europe, the cultural elite took the lead in “embryonic civil society” during the Velvet Revolution in 1989 (Ritter 2012: 15) and allied with representatives of student strike committees and dissident organizations led by Charter 77. As a civil society organization, Charter 77 represented dissenting voices of various political persuasions and also worked with Obroda (Revival), an organization founded by reformist communists who sought to play the role of political opposition toward the end of the communist regime, to replace the communist elites (Glenn 2001: 136). The founding of the Civic Forum created a broad alliance of civil society organizations supporting the replacement of the ruling communist elites. The Civic Forum’s sprawling network of grassroots organizations in local workplaces eventually drew trade unions into the anti-regime alliance, and thus the Communist Party-led “workers state” collapsed (Ritter 2012: 21). As Gil Eyal (2003) writes in his book on the birth of post-communist elites in Czechoslovakia, after the revolutionary events there was also an alliance of dissidents with the group of technocrats (the group of neo-liberal economists and bankers). The dissidents led by Václav Havel (as representatives of civil society) together with the technocrats led by Václav Klaus (who could be described as members of the emerging counter-elite) replaced the communist elites in top political positions.

The contribution of dissidents and CSOs to the success of the Velvet Revolutions in Central Europe is also highlighted in the literature on civil society analysis. Larry Diamond, one

of its most prominent authors, quite obviously lobbies for recognition of civil society's contribution to "Velvet" elite replacement in Central Europe, arguing that, "In a number of prominent cases civil society has played a crucial role, if not the leading role, in producing a transition to democracy" (Diamond 1997: 28). A broad strand of civil society theory, drawing on the Tocquevillian tradition, credits CSOs with a major influence on the democratization process that followed the overthrow of communist regimes. Earlier, followers of Alexis de Tocqueville such as Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, Robert Putnam or Theda Skocpol perceived CSOs in terms of democracy as its "intrinsic good" (Fung 2003). For Putnam (2000: 336), the quality of civil society directly affects the health of democracy. It is no different in the case of replacing undemocratic communist elites with democratic ones.

However, civil society theorists who often describe the functions of CSOs (see, e.g., Salamon, Sokolowski 2001; Foley, Edwards 1996; Wilson, Janoski 1995; Uhlin 2009) never include the function of replacing elites. Nor is it found in Diamond's (1997) list of 13 functions of democratic civil society. This is despite his recognition of the pivotal role of CSOs in the transition to democracy. Throughout history, CSOs have often helped pro-democracy counter-elites overthrow non-democratic elites and their leaders have subsequently participated in the formation of the new ruling elite. The examples of the Velvet or Coloured Revolutions are clear evidence of this (Lane 2009). However, CSOs are further described with romantic pathos as organizations that never seek power for themselves, i.e.,

strictly following the “non-usurpation” imperative (Schmitter 1993), and also always serving democracy—helping to defend democracy from attacks by authoritarian leaders and fighting against non-democratic regimes. This democratic romanticism of the Tocquevillian tradition, however, rejects an alternative (still marginal) tradition of conceptualizing civil society based on the works of the Italian Marxist political scientist Antonio Gramsci, published in 1948 (11 years after his death) under the title *Prison Notebooks*.

Gramsci, in his conception of competing historical hegemonic and counter-hegemonic blocs, elevated the theme of the alliance of elites and non-elites to a necessary condition for the destruction of the hegemony of the bourgeois elites, or their replacement by the rule of the proletariat. Gramsci was not concerned with the beneficial influence of civil society on democracy. In the first place, he saw it as the arena in which a specific struggle for cultural hegemony takes place (Schwarzmantel 2015: 199–205). It is a struggle to create a dominant power alliance, a so-called hegemonic historical bloc, through which the whole of society can be controlled. The ruling class seeks to consolidate its power in a non-violent way by seeking consensus for its vision of a social order in which it plays a dominant role. It offers attractive opportunities for various social and political groups within civil society to participate in its hegemony. Gramsci argued that it is the success of the ruling bourgeois elites in building a hegemonic historical bloc that makes their rule resistant to attempts by the proletariat to replace it with its (communist) elites. According to Gramsci, the proletariat will

never be able to defeat the bourgeoisie elite unless it succeeds in creating its own counter-hegemonic historical bloc that incorporates all subaltern groups in society organized around all sorts of identities, including gender and racial identities (Katz 2006: 338). The counter-hegemonic “historical bloc” in Gramsci’s eyes represents a coalition of groups that bridges “the differences between the myriad groups disadvantaged” by the relations of force in society at a specific historical moment (Katz 2006: 336). Only such a broad coalition can guarantee the successful replacement of the ruling elite.

Gramsci’s conception of the competition between allied blocs for hegemony within civil society implies its division into at least two parts, each of which enters into an alliance with a different type of elite. One part consists of the hegemonic “bourgeois civil society” (Gramsci 1971: 263), which is allied to the ruling elites and generates a consensus on the existing power distribution. And on the other side, an alternative counter-hegemonic civil society is formed, which, in alliance with the representatives of the proletariat, seeks hegemonic change, i.e., to enforce proletarian cultural hegemony and overthrow the ruling elite.

Paradoxically, this concept of the Marxist political scientist corresponds well with Pareto’s interpretation of the dynamics of elites through the concepts of elite circulation and elite change, which, with its proclaimed realism, aimed precisely against the Marxist interpretation of historical development. With some simplification, one can say that in the case of the hegemonic historical bloc, civil society acts as a facilitator

of elite circulation. CSOs function as “flow-through heaters” in which their members and leaders acquire the necessary skills and go on to careers in public administration or the commercial sector. Civil society leaders thus act as agents of elite circulation. They are prospective elite members. They follow the strategy of co-optation by ruling elite and continuously climb up the social ladder to elite positions. In this way they smoothly, evolutionarily revitalize the ranks of the ruling elite. Under their leadership, CSOs willingly cooperate to solve a plethora of problems important to the ruling elite. They act as deputies of the incumbent elite, are pillars of its stability, and increase its resilience to its challengers. In the second case, by contrast, civil society leaders act as agents of the project of elite change. They join the side of the ascendant leonine counter-elite and fight against a corrupt government of a largely fox-like elite that is losing the courage to use violence against its challengers. They speak publicly on behalf of all the oppressed and try to create the impression of legitimacy and inevitability of replacing the ruling elite. Successfully building a counter-hegemonic historical bloc increases the chances of victory over the old ruling elite, and at the same time increases the chances that some civil society leaders may move into the positions of the ruling elite.

Over time, elite theory has become more democratized (it seeks to reconcile the existence of elites and the principle of democratic egalitarianism) and the interaction between elites and the public represented by CSOs has become more central to its focus. However, this interaction is still seen as a threat of elites becoming too dependent on public sentiment rather than

the prospective benefits of alliances. But there is also another problem, which has been pointed out by Eva Etzioni-Halevy (2003). She directly warns against the alliance of elites and non-elites, claiming that the insertion of CSOs and their leaders into networks of governance creates an environment for clientelism and undermines the autonomy of elites, which she argues is a fundamental condition for the functioning of democracy. She also warns against CSOs taking too much sides with the ruling elites, which may be perceived as betrayal by the public. As CSOs leaders are co-opted into the networks of governance, they no longer defend the interests of the citizens. On the contrary, they create and defend their own interests first and foremost.

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As representatives of the people or the voice of the public, they then fail. Ideally, in Etzioni-Halevy's view, CSOs leaders should function as relatively autonomous sub-elites that form a separate interest group placed between elite and non-elite with large power autonomy. The role of CSOs leaders is intermediary, they are supposed to ensure power balance between elite and non-elite (Etzioni-Halevy 1993: 96). However, the sub-elite position of civil society leaders remains outside the research scope of mainstream elite studies because simply civil society leaders are not among the "real elites" (Johansson, Uhlin 2020: 83).

The notion of the intermediary role of CSOs as an autonomous sphere standing between the private world and the state is also appealing to civil society theorists (Cohen, Arato 1992; Diamond 1994; Keane 1999; Kopecký, Mudde 2003; Schmitter 1997), who, on the other hand, are more concerned about the dependence of CSOs on the state, or on the ruling elites. The role

of civil society leaders as brokers or mediators between elites and ordinary citizens also fits well with the concept of participatory democracy, in which CSOs largely provide the space for citizen participation in public life. Both elite theory and civil society theory tend to prefer the perspective of elite autonomy or civil society autonomy, and view cases of alliances between them with suspicion or relegate them to the periphery of their attention.

The phenomenon of alliances has been taken for granted in elite studies as an obvious part of explaining the successful or unsuccessful replacement of elites. It was seen, but went unnoticed as a separate factor. However, the situation has changed recently, and the reflection on the factor of alliances has become more and more frequent in the context of the rise of populist elites and the process of erosion of democracy in Central European countries. The replacement of standard democratic elites by populist elites has been made possible precisely by the counter-hegemonic alliance of populist elites and a part of civil society (Ekiert 2020; Greskovits 2020), which contradicts the normative pro-democratic definition of civil society. The organizations that make up this part of civil society receive various negative attributes: undemocratic (Diamond 1994), uncivil (Kopecký 2003; Ruzza 2009), fake or pseudocivil (Geró, Kopper 2013). On the other hand, the erosion of democracy or the process of democratic backsliding (Bermeo 2016; Hanley, Vachudova 2018; Luo, Przeworski 2020) during the rule of populist elites provokes a reverse alliance response, as standard democratic political parties join with the progressive, pro-democracy part of civil society in their own

counter-hegemonic alliance and seek to replace populist elites. The analogy with Gramsci's concept of competing hegemonic and counter-hegemonic blocs is quite obvious.

POST-COMMUNIST HEGEMONIC AND COUNTER-HEGEMONIC ALLIANCES¹

The empirical findings on the alliance between elites and civil society in the Czech Republic and other post-communist Central European countries presented in the following text support the validity of these two hypotheses:

1. The success of attempts to replace elites is closely related to the success or failure of elites to build a sufficiently strong hegemonic or counter-hegemonic bloc, i.e., to involve civil society in their efforts;
2. The replacement of elites in these countries is not only an "elite game" but also depends on the ability of civil society organizations to mobilize the general public in support of one part of the elites.

SLOVAKIA

The first populist politician in post-communist Central Europe who, after replacing the communist elites, successfully tried to win the support of a significant part of civil society and build a hegemonic pro-national alliance was Vladimír

¹ The aim of this part of the text is not to analyse individual alliances in detail or to give an exhaustive list of them, but to show their importance for the development of political elites. And to highlight the phenomenon of elite-civil society alliances as a specific factor of elite replacement.

Mečiar in Slovakia. As the ambitious leader of the first democratic coalition government after 1989, Mečiar broke with the “Verejnosť proti násiliu” (Public Against Violence) movement, which had nominated him for the premiership, and founded his own political movement “Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko” (Movement for Democratic Slovakia). After winning the 1992 parliamentary elections, he formed a coalition government with the nationalist-oriented Slovak National Party. Subsequently, reports began to leak out that he had begun to create an allied network of pro-nationalist CSOs as a source of his political support, which he also won over through financial support and various favors from his government (Jancura 2013). This is how, for example, he has, according to his own account, endeared himself to the Catholic Church or the Slovak Matica, as the most important organization of the broad Slovak national movement (Malová 2008).

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The composition of this movement was very diverse. It included political parties, civic associations, state-owned organizations, and many newspapers and weeklies that supported the national agenda. These organizations were characterized by varying degrees of radicalism.² Mečiar continued to build a loyal section of civil society even after he won the next parliamentary elections in 1994. He supported the formation of alternative

² “Among the ‘radical’ groups were new organizations including the Slovak Liberation Movement, Slovak National Unity, Slovak National Democratic Movement, the Independent Party of Slovaks, and the Slovak National Congress, as these organizations demanded the independence of Slovakia. Other SNH actors included more traditional associations such as: Independent Association of Economists of Slovakia (NEZES), Štúr Society, Slovak Librarians Club, Association of Slovak Soldiers, National Petition Committee of Slovak Citizens, Roots, and Syntéza 1990, which behaved less radically” (Malová 2008: 353).

umbrella youth organization (Marušiak 2014: 71) and trade union organization (Leška 2011: 194), which he then used for his own political support. However, the government's efforts to privilege "loyal CSOs" also had a counter-productive effect. As Darina Malová argues, the Slovak National Movement lost its protest agenda after the establishment of the independent Slovak Republic in 1993, and many of its representatives were given positions in Mečiar's government after the 1994 elections. As a result, while their organizations received various benefits from the government, they lost the ability to mobilize the public (Malová 2008: 359).

Hence, Mečiar's hegemonic alliance failed after several years to confront the newly forming counter-hegemonic alliance formed by the standard opposition democratic parties and three coalitions of pro-democracy CSOs, the most prominent of which was OK '98 (Civic Campaign) (Bernhard et al. 2020: 7). The impetus for this counter-hegemonic alliance came from Mečiar's efforts to weaken the mechanisms of public control of the executive by parliament, the media, and CSOs (Marušiak 2014: 70). And it was the alliance of political parties and CSOs that showed the way how one can counter "leaders who try and use their powers of office to undermine the constraints placed on them by democracy" (Bernhard et al. 2020: 8). The aim of the Civic Campaign and virtually the entire counter-hegemonic alliance was to "change the style of governance" (Malová 2008: 360), the achievement of which led to the replacement of nationalist-populist elites with pro-democracy, mostly liberal-oriented elites.

HUNGARY

What Mečiar failed to do in Slovakia, Viktor Orbán later managed to achieve in Hungary. After narrowly losing the parliamentary elections in the spring of 2002, he called on his supporters “to form small groups of people, troupes of friends, civic circles...” (Orbán 2002, cited by Greskovits 2020: 251), which then gave birth to a national conservative movement the “Civic Circles Movement.” Since its birth, this movement, besides promoting a conservative agenda, has been aimed at controlling or politicizing the masses and controlling civil society (Antal 2018; Hann 2020; Greskovits 2020; Kövér 2015). That it has successfully fulfilled this purpose is evidenced by the fact that the movement itself has reached mass proportions. According to Béla Greskovits’ data, it had “11 thousand civic circles with 163 thousand members active in about a thousand municipalities” (Greskovits 2020: 252). Moreover, the Civic Circles Movement cooperated with hundreds of other ideologically related CSOs (church, cultural, environmental, peace, trade unions, farmers associations, and civil and human rights) (Greskovits 2020: 252–253). Orbán managed to create his own civil society, linked by conservative-neoliberal ideology, which became a solid part of his counter-hegemonic alliance against the ruling Social Democratic Party.

Overall, as Attila Antal (2018: 12) puts it, Orbán’s political party Fidesz “can be seen as a counter-hegemonic project against the Left.” The illiberal part of civil society supplied Fidesz with experienced activists who gradually became its members,

formed new local party organizations, and moved into the party machinery (Greskovits 2020: 256). The conservative illiberal counter-hegemonic alliance helped the populist Orbán and his Fidesz followers to replace the standard social democratic elites in positions of power. Thanks to the tipping of this alliance into hegemonic mode after the 2006 parliamentary election victory and its long-term persistence, Orbán has maintained his power to this day. Even after the power grab, the populist elites led by Orbán and the institutions of the state controlled by them did not and do not cease their struggle to control civil society, opting for carrot and stick tactics to do so. On the one hand, they have pursued a clientelistic strategy of rewarding and demanding favors from allied CSOs. Thus, a large part of Hungarian civil society, which we could call “illiberal civil society,” has come into a close relationship with the state, which controls it and uses it for its own benefit, just as it did under socialism (Hann 2020; Gerő, Kopper 2013; Kövér 2015).

And on the other hand, the populist-led state has long bullied the autonomous part of CSOs “active in the fields of human rights, civil liberties, and control of corruption” (Greskovits 2020: 248), limiting its ability to control political elites. Part of the struggle for civil society is also the demonization of autonomous CSOs as enemies of the nation and allies of foreign powers and friends of people conspiring against the Hungarian state, which of course includes George Soros in the first place. The permanent finding of enemies and threats to the Hungarian nation has sustained the ability of the illiberal part of civil society to mobilize a large part of society in support of the

ruling populist elites and to permanently provide legitimacy to their rule. The failure of counter-hegemonic mobilization in Hungary over the past 15 plus years is not so much indicative of the weakness of Hungary's counter-hegemonic alliance, but rather the strength of an autocratic political leader who can build his hegemonic alliance with a large segment of civil society on clientelistic control of the state apparatus, the public mass media, the police, and the judiciary.

POLAND

Undoubtedly the most successful Polish builder of alliances between political elites and civil society is the populist leader of the Law and Justice (PiS) party, Jarosław Kaczyński. Under his leadership, liberal elites were successfully replaced by populist ones in the 2015 parliamentary elections. However, this elite replacement was preceded by the long-term formation of an alliance between PiS and conservative-oriented network civil society organizations (Stanley 2022: 128). The most important ally of PiS has been the Catholic Church, whose own and allied organizations co-form the dominant part of Polish organized civil society.³ From the early 1990s onwards, the “clerical sector” of civil society gained increasing influence in Poland, with Radio Maryja in particular contributing to its dissemination among the general public. Exactly in the spirit of the Tocquevillian tradition, the Catholic Church relied

³ “The recent resurgence of civil society in Poland has been dominated by religious organisations: 79 per cent of all civil society organisations in Poland either have an explicitly religious background or are otherwise linked to the Catholic Church” (Szelewa 2021: 312).

on a dense network of small grassroots organizations with informal membership, which mostly consisted of “prayer and chapel groups, as well as groups organizing sports and leisure activities” (Ekiert 2020: 13).

Like Gramsci, Kaczyński and his PiS understand that civil society represents “an important battle ground to dominate country politics” (Ekiert 2020: 13). The political struggle of liberal and populist elites for hegemony in society and for the support of CSOs polarized Polish civil society into two camps (Stanley 2022: 128), which, in Grzegorz Ekiert’s (2020: 8) view, gradually led to its “polarization,” i.e., its vertical, identitarian division into two parts (the conservative-nationalist part and the liberal part), which communicate little with each other. Elżbieta Korolczuk (2017: 4) even speaks of an “open war” between the two sides. In this war of two political-civic alliances, Kaczyński’s hegemonic conservative-nationalist alliance currently has the upper hand, using state resources to weaken the influence of hostile liberal organizations and to protect and strengthen the influence of friendly ones (Ekiert 2020: 13; Stanley 2022: 119). It uses tactics of delegitimization,⁴ bullying, and intimidation (Smith 2018: IV). It seeks to change the “composition of Poland’s civil society” (Ekiert 2020: 13) in its favor, or to colonize the hostile part of CSOs by replacing its elites (Stanley 2022: 119).

The division of CSOs by the government into friendly and unfriendly also has implications for the economic situation

⁴ For example, Kaczyński has publicly stated that those who participate in anti-government demonstrations are “Poles of the worse sort” (Fomina, Kucharczyk 2016: 63).

of CSOs. Polish sociologist Grzegorz Piotrowski (2020: 208) describes how Polish populists from the Law and Justice party have secured the loyalty of CSOs by manipulating their financial support. In contemporary Poland, conservative-oriented CSOs are considered “true Polish civil society” and are generously supported by subsidies from the state-controlled National Fund for the Development of Civil Society, while other CSOs that profess liberal values suffer from a lack thereof. As in Hungary, there is an outgrowth of the state and the pro-government part of civil society in Poland. Ekiert even compares the current situation to the period of Communist Party rule, when civil society was nationalized, and argues that in Poland there is a “re-etatization of illiberal pillar of civil society” (Ekiert 2020: 11). It is worth recalling, too, that the significant strengthening of the conservative-national part of civil society was preceded by the long-term depoliticization of liberal-oriented CSOs (Korolczuk 2017; Piotrowski 2009), their domestication by public administration institutions, and their loss of the ability to mobilize the public.

CZECHIA

The season of the rise of populist leaders to the top of politics in Central Europe has not left out the Czech Republic, where there has been only a partial liberal elite replacement. It has played out over the continuation of two electoral terms directed by the populist leader, billionaire Andrej Babiš. In 2011, he founded his political movement Association of Dissatisfied Citizens

(ANO) with a very strong anti-corruption accent. He won the second highest number of votes in the 2013 parliamentary elections. With his ANO movement, he then entered a government coalition with the Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) and became Minister of Finance. He tried to act as a dissident in the government, thus managing to stay in the political spotlight and won the next (2017) parliamentary elections. Although he could have, he did not want to enter into a coalition with other parliamentary populist parties (the Communists and the Party of Direct Democracy) and extended his coalition with the ČSSD.

The replacement of the liberal elites has not been fully completed, but Babiš's ANO has, if necessary, outvoted its standard coalition partner in parliament in cooperation with populist parties. And the populist president Miloš Zeman also played into his hands. Remarkably, this formally incomplete, dispersed elite replacement was kicked off by the alliance of Babiš and the anti-corruption CSOs associated in the joint initiative "The Reconstruction of the State." The political movement ANO was founded by co-opted grammes and personnel of anti-corruption CSOs (Hanley, Vachudova 2018). In order to show good relations with the anti-corruption CSOs in public, Babiš even posed for journalists wearing a helmet with the logo of this civic initiative (Leschtina 2013). The cultivation of good relations between the populist politician and liberal CSOs resulted not only in the adoption of several anti-corruption laws in the Czech Parliament, but also in the significant media attention Babiš drew to himself. It made him the number one anti-corruption celebrity and allowed him and his ANO

movement to enter big politics through the front door. The most prominent representatives of The Reconstruction of the State became members of the government's advisory body (the Government Council for Coordination of the Fight against Corruption) and collaborated in the drafting of anti-corruption documents of governments in which Babiš appeared as finance minister or prime minister (even at a time when he was already being prosecuted).⁵

Babiš's electoral success was largely due to his cooperation with Transparency International CZ, the most popular Czech anti-corruption organization. It lent him the legitimacy of an anti-corruption fighter and completely left him in charge of mobilizing the public in the fight against corruption. The close relationship between him and this CSO is evidenced by the fact that after the success of his ANO movement in the 2013 elections, he engaged its former director, Adriana Krnáčová, as mayor of Prague, and he also tried to get the current director of Transparency International CZ, David Ondráčka, elected as Minister of the Interior. He was unsuccessful in this effort, but it is telling that Ondráčka agreed to his ministerial nomination on behalf of the populist movement. Today, the cooperation between Babiš and the anti-corruption CSOs seems more like a tacit alliance—neither side likes to talk about it. This is because the hybrid hegemonic bloc composed of populist

⁵ Members of the Government Council for Coordination of the Fight against Corruption in 2019 were David Ondráčka, Director of Transparency International CZ (since 2016), Pavel Franc, Director of Frank Bold (since 2014), Karel Škacha, Director of the Anti-Corruption Foundation (since 2018), Martin Kameník, Chairman of the anti-corruption civic association Oživení (since 2014) (*Výroční zpráva* 2020).

political entities and liberal-oriented CSOs that Babiš created did not last long. Even as Prime Minister, Babiš retained decisive influence over the business activities of his food, agricultural, and chemical empire Agrofert, and anti-corruption CSOs accused him of a conflict of interest and stopped cooperating with him. In return, Babiš accused Transparency International CZ of corruption. Apart from a few organizations of seniors, Babiš has not cooperated with any other major network of CSOs since then. After the 2021 parliamentary elections, populist elites were replaced by counter-elites of liberal-oriented parties and movements that could rely on informal alliances with the majority, liberal-oriented part of civil society. In particular, the “Million Moments for Democracy” movement, which was successful in organizing numerous mass protests against Babiš and his government.

The question is why Babiš did not use the well-known scenario of building hegemonic alliances, which proved to be suitable for the political survival of populist leaders in Hungary and Poland? Why did he not forge a strong enough alliance with a section of civil society, for example in the field of sport, charity, or recreation, which sympathized with him? Nor has he forged an alliance with the network of Islamophobic CSOs (Slačálek, Svobodová 2017), which became massively active after 2015 in the wake of the refugee crisis. He did not do so despite his declaration that the Czech Republic would not accept a single refugee under his government. Originally from Slovakia, Babiš has never been one of the Czech radical nationalists. The fundamental factor that prevented Babiš (unlike Kaczyński

and Orbán) from extending cooperation with civil society was the absence of ideology. His entrepreneurial (Heinisch, Saxonberg 2017) or technocratic (Bušíková, Guasti 2019) populist style of political leadership offered “only” a vision of effective management of the state as a private company. However, this vision did not have sufficient potential to create an alternative to the neoliberal ideology prevailing among Czech CSOs. Its clientelistic strategy of building a hegemonic alliance could not be backed by conservatism and the strong influence of the Church in the atheistic Czech Republic, as is possible in Hungary and Poland. Moreover, as Seán Hanley and Milada Vachudova (2018) conclude, Babiš had (and still has) enormous economic and media power at his disposal, which he incorporated into his political marketing and which allowed him to create and effectively use ad-hoc clientelistic networks as needed. So, he didn’t care much about building his own permanent network of CSOs.

WHOSE GAME IS ELITE REPLACEMENT?

CSOs form hegemonic and counter-hegemonic alliances; what matters is with whom, and against whom. History shows that these are not always pro-democratic alliances against non-democratic forces (Berman 1997; Riley 2005). This alliance opportunism of CSOs fits Gramsci’s conception of competing alliance blocs rather than Etzioni-Halevy’s demo-elitist notion of their autonomous position in the power configuration of society and especially in relation to political elites. It seems that

CSOs networks are always somehow drawn into and involved in elite replacement or, conversely, in their persistence. Either they are part of a hegemonic alliance or a counter-hegemonic one. Examples from Central Europe show that their alliance effectiveness, or their ability to mobilize mass support in favor of the survival of the ruling elite, is volatile. Over time, their mobilizing potential declines as a result of clientelistic interpenetration with public institutions, depoliticization, and a focus on agendas that do not require mass public involvement. Sometimes this happens despite support from the ruling elites. The liberal-oriented elites supported by the European Commission have not succeeded in significantly reducing the so-called democratic deficit, even with the enormous efforts put into participatory engineering (mobilizing citizens' participation in decision-making from above). On the contrary, financial support from the state and the professionalization of CSOs have led to their greater depoliticization (Piotrowski 2020). CSOs have also not been able to control the ruling liberal elites, effectively enforce their accountability, or maintain consensus with them on liberal democracy. Therefore, the failure of the liberal section of civil society must also be part of the explanation for the rise of populism. The replacement of elites does not only occur by their becoming decadent, as Pareto says, but also by the decadence of their allies in civil society who are no longer able to mobilize the public in support of the ruling elites.

On the contrary, in the case of successful elite replacement, the mobilizing power of CSOs, with the exception of the Czech incomplete elite replacement, has always played a significant

role. This is not to say, of course, that elite replacement is just a “civil society game.” After all, as we have seen in the Hungarian, Polish but also Slovakian examples, the populist strategy of building hegemonic alliances is based on the colonization of friendly CSOs and this finding rather supports the “elite game” hypothesis. Piotrowski’s description of the situation of Polish CSOs before PiS came to power also points to a reduced degree of autonomy of CSOs drawing funds from public budgets.

Of course, the alliance of elites and CSOs for the purpose of governing elite replacement or its maintenance always entails some degree of interdependence in the joint venture. The question is to what extent this dependence is desirable from a democratic perspective.

The preservation of elite autonomy, as required by Etzioni-Halevy’s (1993) demo-elite model and the performance of the intermediary role of CSOs (Diamond 1994) in processes toward elite replacement or elite maintenance, is rather undesirable from the normative point of view of Gramsci’s concept of allied blocs. In the intentions of this perspective, liberal-oriented CSOs should always ally themselves either in a liberal hegemonic bloc or in a counter-hegemonic bloc with liberal political elites. In a liberal democratic regime they should strive for liberal elite maintenance and in an autocratic regime they should contribute to autocratic elite replacement. Conservative and illiberal CSOs, on the other hand, from the perspective of illiberal democracy advocates, should always strive for either liberal elite replacement or illiberal elite maintenance, depending on the political regime they are in (see Table 1).

**TABLE 1. THE FUNCTION OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS
IN LIBERAL AND ILLIBERAL DEMOCRACY**

POLITICAL REGIME TYPE	CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS	
	Liberal	Illiberal, conservative
Liberal democracy	Elite maintenance	Elite replacement
Illiberal democracy	Elite replacement	Elite maintenance

Source: author.

However, the answer to the question of whether the autonomy of elites and the relatively autonomous intermediary role of CSOs is desirable or undesirable is not clear for all four functions of CSOs. In a liberal democracy, liberal CSOs perform an elite maintenance function that involves not only support but also critical distance and the ability to enforce accountability of friendly ruling liberal elites. In this case, CSOs without autonomy do not represent a desirable effective accountability mechanism that can successfully counter the abuse of power by liberal elites and keep them in good liberal democratic shape. Liberal elite maintenance requires the autonomy of liberal CSOs. Conversely, illiberal elite maintenance requires the allegiance and full dependence of illiberal or conservative CSOs.

It is also important how CSOs acquire their liberal or illiberal orientation. They may do so voluntarily, through manipulation, blackmail, or even under direct political pressure. The above descriptions of the examples of interaction between elites and CSOs have not once shown that liberal elites try to change the value orientation of CSOs by direct coercion. On the contrary, it is quite clear from the description of the behavior of

non-liberal ruling elites that they seek to control the value orientation of CSOs hostile to them and to dominate the whole of organized civil society. In general, the ruling liberal-oriented elites in Central Europe have tended to formalize and institutionalize their alliance with CSOs in the form of participation of CSO representatives in the activities of various government advisory bodies and partnerships entered into at various levels of government. Paradoxically, this has largely domesticated and depoliticized CSOs. The ability of CSOs to enforce accountability of the ruling liberal elites has been weakened and they have failed in their function of liberal elite maintenance. Ruling populist elites, on the other hand, rely more on personal connections and clientelistic ties between the leader and friendly illiberal or conservative CSOs. The loss of autonomy of CSOs and their direct involvement in politics is far greater in this case.⁶ The victory of populist elites in the Central European countries takes these countries back to the era of socialism, when the emancipation of CSOs from the direct influence of ruling elites on their value orientation was only possible at the cost of personal heroism and self-sacrifice.

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⁶ In this sense, for example, Ágnes Kövér (2015) speaks openly about the civil society captured by the Hungarian state under Fidesz.

Populism_and_Nationalism_in_Eastern_Europe_Success_for_the_Right_Failure_for_the_Left_ECPR_General_Conference_Hamburg_22_25_August_2018

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THE RULE OF POPULIST NATIONALISTS IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

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ABSTRACT

The surges of populist nationalists into political leadership position in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) have been typically analysed from the society-centred perspective as responses to major societal transformations. Taking an elite- and leader-centred approach, this chapter: 1) emphasises the central role of political elites and leaders, characterised as populist nationalists, in engineering the surges; 2) locates these surges within modern trends in centralisation of power/authority; and 3) points to the degenerative and dysfunctional nature of populist-nationalist politics. Finally, 4) it casts the glance at the populist rule and the quality of governance (WGI). The analysis encompasses the main CEE countries, but focusses on Poland and Hungary, where populist elites are most entrenched politically. In line with the classical and contemporary elite analysis, political elites are defined as “ruling minorities” at the apex of political power; populism is seen as a distinctive leadership style that combines “anti-elitism” with demagoguery; nationalism focusses on contesting the European Union (especially its legal-political order), and “quality of ruling” is defined in line with the World Bank’s WGI.

KEYWORDS: political elites, populism, populist leaders, democratic stability, quality of ruling (governance)

Populist nationalism spreads like wildfire across Europe, including Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), especially Hungary and Poland, where populist elites, leaders, and regimes establish and entrench themselves in power. Two decades ago, nationalistic populism was a fringe phenomenon, but after the Global Financial Crisis, the surge of illegal migrations, unexpected Brexit, traumatic and damaging pandemic, as well as the increasingly autocratic and belligerent rule of Aleksandr Lukashenka in Belarus and Vladimir Putin in Russia, populist nationalism has become a force to be reckoned with globally. Populist-nationalist leaders and parties have more than tripled their electoral support in Europe during the last two decades, sit in more than a dozen European parliaments and governments, threaten the political establishment in France, and most recently started to form ruling coalitions in Sweden and Italy. Moreover, the unexpected durability of populist leaders Viktor Orbán in Hungary and his fan and emulator, Jarosław Kaczyński, in Poland have changed the images of populist-nationalist leaders and regimes from “temporary” to “entrenched” (e.g., Héjj 2022; Sadurski 2022; Krygier, Czarnota, Sadurski 2022). What causes particular concern among political observers is the dysfunctional disruptive nature, as well as degenerative—destabilising and anti-democratic—consequences of populist ascendancy and rule. Populist-nationalist leaders mount attacks on largely liberal (“conventional”) political elites, replace them with mediocre loyalists, inflame conflicts and deepen political-cum-social divisions, undermine the established political norms and conventions, degrade democratic political cultures, and undermine

the main political (meta)institutions, such as rule of law, party-neutral state, fair electoral contest—and that erodes democratic stability, effectiveness of ruling, and quality of governance. Moreover, these degenerative trends not only arrest political development, but also marginalise the affected countries within the European Union.

As argued elsewhere (Higley, Pakulski 2022), convincing explanations of the surges of nationalist populism should complement “societal” analyses with elite- and leader-focused analyses. Such analyses should also pay more attention to the most established populist leaders in CEE, especially in those countries that until recently were regarded as stable, thoroughly liberal “consolidated democracies.” This ended—rapidly and unexpectedly—in the second decade of the new century. First Orbán, and then his follower-emulator, Kaczyński—both relatively new converts to populist nationalism, both opportunistic in ideological leading, and both keen on supporting massive “handouts” to their supporters—not only won elections and captured governmental power, but also entrenched themselves in power and started what looks like a “populist-nationalist era.” These leaders played the roles of nationalist-populist pathbreakers in taking control of the respective governments through populist campaigns, and then in establishing themselves in power by gradually taking over the entire state apparatus, including the judiciary, state-controlled media, and public and private enterprises. They replaced meritocratic system of appointments to the top positions at the apex of the state administration, the mass media, the top judiciary, the key

financial institutions, and the state-controlled with clientelist partisan nepotism. Their “pathbreaking” ascendancy—and then unexpected political durability, due mainly to the elite-wide clientelism—highlights the central role played by the populist leaders and elites in shaping political regimes, the key institutions, as well as the processes (and consequences) of ruling, including the subsequent electoral outcomes. The fact that these political accomplishments occurred under widely varying “societal” (mass) circumstances—economic growth and decline, institutional “wobbles” and stability, intense conflicts and relative calm, high and low inflow of immigrants—demonstrates the importance and explanatory utility of the elite- and leader-centred approach. It also suggests that the convincing explanations of populist surges should include the leaders’ capacity for “autogenic” rise, that is, for their ability to reinforce their rule by actively creating conditions conducive to their continuous domination (Higley, Pakulski 2022).

ELITES, LEADERS, CENTRALISATION OF POWER, AND “BACKLASH NATIONALISM”

The term “elites” (also: “political elites,” “power elites,” “ruling minorities,” etc.) refers to ubiquitous small groups that form at the apex of decisional (power) hierarchies in the largest and most resource-rich organisations, particularly the modern state (e.g., Field, Higley 1979; Pakulski 2018). In complex modern societies, they are highly differentiated (though quite cohesive) and include the incumbents of top power positions

in the state administration, government, main judiciary, top business and finance organisations, armies and police forces, the mass media, the major churches, the dominant movements (typically, led by charismatic leaders), etc. They monopolise the most important political decisions, reinforce their high status, act in a solidary manner in defending their power positions, ally themselves with the major “political forces,” and reproduce themselves through selective patronage of able individuals from outside elite ranks. Importantly, such elite groups, often described as “power networks” (e.g., Knoke 2018), form in all complex societies, both democracies and autocracies, including contemporary liberal and illiberal regimes. But they differ widely in their composition, structure, unity and consensus, ideological orientations, openness, mobility, etc.—and these differences, in particular elite structure and consensus, affect vitally the key political outcomes, such as political stability and the nature (e.g., democratic or otherwise) of political regimes (e.g., Best, Higley 2018; Higley, Burton 2006).

Elites themselves are highly differentiated and structured in a complex way. Moreover, there seems to be a consensus among contemporary students of politics that political power in modern societies is increasingly concentrated and centralised in the hands of small “leadership groups” (Weber 1978) embedded in executive cores of wider political elites. Students of power also agree that the processes of power centralisation, often described as “personalisation” and “presidentialisation” of political power may gradually shift power into the hands of individual leaders (often celebrities) surrounded by

“court-like” core groups of trusted friends and loyal clients (e.g., Savoie 2008; Best, Higley 2014). These top leadership groups often reinforce their dominance by adopting the populist styles of campaigning and rule. They weaken institutional checks-and-balances, widen their patronage by nepotistic appointments, extend their control to the strategic segments of state apparatus, mass media, top judiciary, and business-cum-financial sector, and through them, to public opinion and electoral processes. Due to this increasing concentration and centralisation of political power, and due to the periodic surge of nationalistic populists—most of them quite popular and electorally successful—contemporary democracy tends to tilt towards “despotic democracy” (Tocqueville), “leader democracy” (Weber), “elite democracy” (Schumpeter), “illiberal democracy” (Zakaria), “authoritarian populism” (Norris and Inglehart), “populocracy” (Fieschi), “modern populism” (Mudde), or “anti-constitutional populism” (Sadurski) (e.g., Field, Higley 1979; Zakaria 1997; 2020; Pakulski, Körösenyi 2012; Mudde n.d.; Higley, Pakulski 2022).

One should also mention a new ideological trend reflected in the contemporary surges of populist leaders: “neo-nationalism” or “backlash nationalism.” It reflects the growing nationalistic commitments that form as a hostile backlash to globalism and cosmopolitanism. With the waning of mass enthusiasm for “global connections”—economic, political, cultural—especially with the widely publicised failures and dysfunctions of globalisation (e.g., regional deindustrialisation, fracturing of global supply chains, uncontrolled mass migrations, pandemic

spread, and cultural marginalisation of nationally-specific and traditional lifestyles), this backlash against globalism gains popularity among populist leaders. It also spreads among some segments (elderly, less educated, rural, religious) of mass populations. Many populist leaders harness such sentiments, reinforce them, and forge them into mass resentments that are mobilised in populist campaigns against “EU/Brussels dictate,” “Western decadence,” “foreign secularism,” and “erosion of national traditions.” The consequences of the marriage of the anti-globalist nationalism with populist style of campaigning, as argued below, are quite destructive. It spawns a new breed of populist-nationalist leaders and elites.

POPULIST NATIONALISM

The label “populism”—the reader must be warned—is often used as a vague and derogatory epithet of criticism and condemnation. Here it is more clearly defined and used as a descriptive, rather than evaluative, term. It refers to a political style of campaigning and ruling that defy (and undermine) the conventional style of political competition. All populist leaders: 1) *blame allegedly arrogant, usurpatory, corrupt, and unpatriotic “elites”* (the term used as a derogatory label) for real or imagined betrayals, prejudices, and policy failures, and criticise globalist liberalism attributed to the blamed “elites” (typically, their predecessors and critics) for political failures and pathologies. They also 2) declare they are *the only authentic representative of “the people”*—circumscribed by populist

nationalists as members of a single ethno-national community¹—and purport to be staunch defenders of national identities and traditions. That allows them 3) to portray themselves as *sole legitimate servants of “the people” bound by the people’s will* (“vox populi, vox Dei”). Another political trademark of populist-nationalist leaders is 4) *demagogy*, especially toxic demagogy of blame, condemnation, and resentment. This “blame the enemies” habit is amplified by the mass media, which populist leaders take over, and then use as tools of partisan propaganda and political elevation. All populist nationalists (sometimes referred to as “right-wing populists”) amplify and exploit mass anxieties by “nominating” and demonising the “enemies of the nation”—internal and external, the two are often related. At the same time, populist leaders 5) *rise mass hopes* by declaring that they—and only them—are capable of defeating the ubiquitous and treacherous foes, and solve the major problems that the nation faces (e.g., Higley, Pakulski 2022).

This style of campaigning and ruling—as warned by students of the Bolshevik, fascist, and national socialist populism in the early 20th century, as well as more recent campaigns by Donald Trump in the US and Orbán in Hungary—proves effective in achieving broad popularity and considerable mass support, especially among the non-urban, less educated, poorly informed, and anxiety-ridden segments of populations. That—and the ruthless political patronage-cum-partisan nepotism—allow populists, even in minority, to cultivate relatively stable “iron

¹ The so-called “leftist populists,” like the supporters of Hugo Chávez, the “bolivarists” in Venezuela, circumscribe “the people” in a Marxist way, as “dominated and exploited classes.”

constituencies,” and form right-of-centre ruling coalitions. Above all, their control of the media and the state helps them to spread propaganda, exercise partisan patronage, and lay their hands on state resources in political campaigns. Moreover, nationalist-populist leaders and elites emulate their successful strategies and support each other internationally.

CONSEQUENCES OF POPULIST RULE

Most observers agree that populist-nationalist elites and leaders corrode liberal democracy and effective governance. First, their nationalistic (anti-global, anti-EU, anti-neighbour) sentiments prevent them from effectively countering the major new challenges faced by contemporary societies, especially the European ones. The common feature of these challenges—such as environmental degradation and climatic change; the viral pandemics; uncontrolled “crisis migrations,” and security threats coming from aggressive “neo-imperial” Russia—is that they are *global, and therefore require coordinated supra-national (“multilateral”) responses*. Nationalist populists and their narrow national strategies are notoriously ineffective in dealing with them—all of them. Thus Poland, formerly one of the leaders of modernising post-communist reforms, faces now (2022) one of the worst air pollution problems in Europe, suffers one of the highest in the EU rates of “excess deaths” related to Covid-19 pandemic, an almost total inability to accommodate non-European refugees, and serious security problems caused by exposure to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Second, populist nationalists do a lot of damage to liberal political norms and institutions that secure political stability and democratic practices. Their campaigns deepen social divisions and aggravate political conflicts (within elites and societal), destabilise politics, degrade public discourse, weaken trust, and damage the key political institutions, including rule of law, ideologically neutral state administration, and electoral systems. This results in what Francis Fukuyama (2014; 2018) diagnosed as “political decay,” “constitutional crises,” “democratic backslide,” and “autocratic shift” (e.g., Mudde n.d.; Fukuyama 2018; Fieschi 2019; Przeworski 2019; Sadurski 2019; 2022).

Perhaps the most damaging aspect of the populist-nationalist rule is the degradation of politics that traditionally (the so-called “Eastonian² politics”) focussed on inclusion, defusion of political conflicts, and stabilising the main political institutions. Populist leaders replace such politics with “Schmittian³ politics” (“friend vs foe”) of conflict and exclusion. They are using the mainstream media to enflame political conflicts at home and abroad, replace programmatic left-right policy cleavages with highly emotionally charged, moralistic right-wrong, friend-foe divisions. This is seen as posing a serious threat to political stability, effective governance, and liberal democracy worldwide (e.g., Poggi 2002; Fukuyama 2014; 2018; Zakaria 2020).

Naturally, the strength of this political degeneration of elites and leaders, the scope of the accompanying “political decay,” the distance of “democratic backslide,” and the width of the

² Named after David Easton, a Canadian-born American political scientist (Poggi 2002).

³ Named after Carl Schmitt, a German political scientist and philosopher (Poggi 2002).

“autocratic shift,” are a matter of degree. In Belarus, where autocratic dictator Lukashenka rules in a despotic and brutal way, where elites are deeply divided and opposition is excluded and persecuted, the processes of degeneration and decay are most advanced. In Poland and Hungary, where populist rulers are in the process of dividing and polarising elites and mass citizenry, the opposition—while under heavy barrage of attacks and accusations—still maintains a degree of freedom, though the mass media, and therefore public discourse, are under complete control of Orbán and his Fidesz elite. In the Czech and Slovak Republics—so far (2022) less affected by populist surges members of the CEE family—populists are prominent political figures, but have not (yet?) entrenched themselves in power (e.g., Frič et al. 2014; Pakulski 2016; Lengyel, Ilonszki 2016; Przeworski 2019; Sadurski 2022; Héjj 2022).

POPULIST RULE AND EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE

If the widely shared view that populist-nationalist leaders and elites, when entrenched, weaken democracy and effective governance is correct, we would find their confirmation in the popular rankings and indices of democracy (Freedom House, EIU, World Press Freedom Index – RFS), as well as the main indices of quality/effectiveness of governance, such as the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) and Bertelsmann transformation index (BTI, WIT). All these data, one should stress again, show that the deterioration of governance, specially

in the areas crucial for pro-Western and pro-democratic transformations (described aptly by Poland's first democratic PM, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, as "return to Europe"), have been occurring **after** the electoral victories—and the subsequent political entrenchments-cum—"anti-liberal, conservative crusade"—of populist nationalists.

The first part of this hypothesis—about the negative correlation between populism and liberal democracy (indicators of democratic regime, freedom of the press, independence of the judiciary, and rule of law)—has already been confirmed and widely publicised (e.g., Mudde n.d.; Przeworski 2019; Applebaum 2020). There is no doubt that populist rule is inimical to liberal democracy—however defined and measured. The timing and location of the "democratic backslide" (decline, twilight) also confirms the link between the two. Belarus turned into autocracy since the beginning of Lukashenka's rule. Hungary declines rapidly in indices and rankings of democracy since the victory of Orbán; in fact, it has been classified since 2021 as a "hybrid regime" by Freedom House. Poland, formerly a poster-image of successful liberal democratisation and an example of successful "consolidation of democracy," has been sliding back in the rankings of "democracy," "freedom," "rule of law," and "press freedom" since 2014–2015. It now trails Czechia and Slovakia in democracy rankings and indices, and it is dangerously close to the "relegation zone" (see, for example, Freedom House Index, WJP Rule of Law Index, the EIU Index of Democracy).⁴

⁴ <https://rsf.org>; <https://www.eiu.com>; <http://freedomhouse.org>; <http://worldjusticeproject.org> [all accessed: 17.10.2022].

The claim about the declining quality of governance in the populist-ruled countries is more controversial. This is because populist nationalists gain, at least initially, considerable electoral support, typically based on popular promises of welfare generosity, enhanced national pride, and political inclusion—often identified with “democratisation” and “good governance.” What they actually deliver becomes apparent only gradually, when external analyses and assessments, free from partisan bias, become widely available, and when multiple ruling failures become transparent and penetrate the thick veils of propaganda. Therefore, in order to test the claim of political decay and erosion of good governance under the populist rule, we run a very basic comparative analysis of the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) from four CEE countries (Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, and Poland) comparing the countries (roughly ranked in terms of populism) and the periods of rule (before and after the populist surge). Poland appears to be most useful for such comparison because of her recent experience of conventional (2007–2014) and populist (2015–2021) politics. The data from Hungary are also useful in this respect, though the populist rule there started earlier, in 2010.

The Worldwide Governance Indicators (1994–2021), updated by the World Bank in late September every year, allow for a rough comparative analysis of changes in the quality of ruling/governance (we choose the first term as more adequate) in a broad comparative perspective (time: 1994–2021 and 190 countries). This broad comparative perspective, combined with a wide range of “governance” (quality of ruling) indicators

collected by the World Bank, allow us to draw some conclusions not only about general trends in the quality of governance in major CEE countries in relation to populist trends.

Before we look at the results and conclusions, let's answer the question of what do WGI indicators measure and how should they be interpreted? As the authors explain, governance

consists of traditional and institutionalized activities through which state power is exercised. It consists of processes for the selection, monitoring and exchange of governments; the government's ability to formulate and effectively implement sound policies; as well as the respect of citizens and the state of the institutions that shape the mutual interactions of the governed.⁵

Thus, WGI indicators contain elements of evaluation, and that justifies treating them as indices of good or effective governance.

WGI indicators are aggregated and standardised comparative measures and assessments of the effectiveness of governance and management, collected from more than 30 sources, mainly government reports, analyses of private enterprises and NGOs, results of social surveys, opinions of expert and civic bodies, and assessments of think-tanks. As we mentioned, they mainly concern the activities of the administrative apparatus of the state, but also contain data from the main social organisations and the largest enterprises. They are grouped in six "dimensions of governance":

- voice and accountability⁶

⁵ <http://info.worldbank.org> [accessed: 17.10.2022].

⁶ This includes, among others, sensitivity of organisations to social pressures and demands, the ability of agencies to account for their actions, indices of democracy and human rights, measures of civil liberties and expression, and assessments of the integrity of elections.

- political stability and absence of violence/terrorism⁷
- government effectiveness⁸
- quality of government regulation⁹
- rule of law¹⁰
- control of corruption.¹¹

The Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (2006–2022) systematically places the ability of policymakers to steer (manage) society and the economy at the centre of its analysis and, as a result, is the only index in the world that measures and compares quality/effectiveness of management through self-collected data assessed from a “transformational” point of view. The dynamics of BTI/WIT indicators is very similar to the WTI results. It shows the increase in most indicators of the effectiveness of governing in Poland until 2015, when the national populists take governmental power, and then a systematic decline. The relative values paint even more dramatic picture. According to governance indicators, Poland climbed from 18th position in 2010 to 5th position in 2016, and fell to 45th position in 2021. Hungary is recording a similar, sharp

⁷ This includes, among others, indices of violent protests and conflicts, assessments of terrorist threats, as well as risks to public security, and measures of involvement in external conflicts and wars.

⁸ This includes, among others, assessments of bureaucratic obstacles, measures of transport quality, energy supply, efficiency of education, as well as the quality of medical services.

⁹ This includes, among others, a wide range of indicators of fairness and equality of competition, discrimination and privilege (e.g., state protectionism), investment freedoms and financial activities, and finally all kinds of regulatory burdens hindering the activities of companies and citizens.

¹⁰ This includes measures of compliance with the law by government and public agencies, independence of the judiciary, the level of crime, especially organised crime, respect for property rights, trust in the police, and trust in the judiciary.

¹¹ This includes assessments of the level of corruption of state institutions and officials, measures of trust in politicians, transparency of government activities, as well as control and sanctioning of incorrect financial transactions.

but earlier and more rapid decline (from 77th to 101st position). Neither the Czech Republic nor Slovakia recorded such declines (the Czech Republic recorded a slight decrease from 12th to 13th position; Slovakia from 9th to 14th position).¹²

We devote so much space to the description of the aggregated WGI and BTI/WIT indicators to emphasise their comprehensiveness and to emphasise the usefulness of these indicators in comparative studies of the dynamics of the quality/effectiveness of governance and equally important international comparisons of the “quality of governance (or ruling).” Of course, the precision, reliability, and “consistency” of these indicators depend on the quality of the data provided by individual governments, agencies, and expert panels, but the requirements of the World Bank and the Bertelsmann Foundation, as well as the internal consistency tests carried out by the authors of WGI, guard their overall quality and usability. This is confirmed by the popularity of WGI indicators, in particular, and by their widespread use in political analyses. Suffice it to say that WGI indicators are recommended by Francis Fukuyama (2014: 72–79), one of the most prominent contemporary political scientists studying political development and regress, as indices of the quality of governance and “political decay” (Fukuyama 2014).

¹² For example, in the case of Polish BTI data, on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is the lowest degree of transformational effectiveness and 10 is the highest, in 2015–2022 the scores of “social/civic participation” fell from 8 to 4; “effective conflict management” from 9 to 5; “ability to implement changes (implementation)” from 8 to 7; “ability to control processes” (direct, prioritise) from 9 to 7; “capacity to learn from previous experience” (e.g., reports) from 8 to 6; “resource use efficiency” from 8 to 7; “policy coordination” from 9 to 7; “corruption” from 8 to 7; “building consensus on policy goals” from 10 to 7; “preventing activation of anti-democratic actors” and “political reconciliation” from 9 to 5.

What do the data show? First, in 2021–2022 Czechia and Slovakia seem to be ahead of Poland and Hungary in effectiveness of governance and “transformational capacities,” and all four are far ahead of Belarus and Russia. Second, the trend follows in reverse the trajectories of populist nationalism. In Hungary, the initial rise in most dimensions of effectiveness of ruling was followed by a more recent—most apparent after 2010 (a year of electoral success of Orbán)—decline in most indicators of quality of governance (except for political stability, which grew slightly in 2010–2021, and government effectiveness that remained unchanged). The most pronounced drop in Hungary occurred, predictably (considering the Freedom House reports), in the dimension of “voice and accountability” that contains most measures of democracy. Third, there is little or no evidence of “political decay” in Hungary and Poland before the “anti-liberal,” populist-nationalist turn (2006–2010 in Hungary and 2015 in Poland). In particular, the 2015 electoral slogan of Polish populists “Poland in ruins” has no support in the governance data and trends. Under the rule of largely conventional (that is, only moderately populist) Donald Tusk’s elite (PO in 2007–2014) the indicators of effectiveness/quality of governance grew in the direction of improving (higher quality, higher effectiveness) governance, while after the populist campaigns of Kaczyński’s elite (PiS since 2015) they have been declining. Such a trajectory of decline differs from the direction of change among Poland’s closest non-eastern neighbours: Czechia, Slovakia, and Germany. These neighbours, to remind, have shared with Poland the main external conditions—global

economic fluctuations, regional political conflicts, including energy crisis, and finally the Covid-19 pandemic. That suggests that changes in the quality of governance reflect mainly the “internal factors” such as changes in the leadership and ruling elites, in particular, the declining capacity of the newly recruited apex of the “governing elites”—the key decision-makers appointed to the top positions in the populist-led governments, state administration, the (now “governmental”) mass media, top judiciary, the major state-controlled corporations and financial regulators, etc.—to rule and govern in an effective way.

This diagnosis is, obviously, preliminary. It points to the “key explanatory factors” in accounting for specific political outcomes, such as effectiveness/quality of governance. These suggested factors are the ruling capacities and competences of newly ascendant governing elites. But, while being preliminary, it has multiple virtues. Above all, it is embedded in a well developed (classical and contemporary) elite theory, especially its segment explaining elite orientation, dynamics, succession, and governing capacity (success and failure), as well as consistent with the comparative data on elite ruling performance. Moreover, it is complementary to widely publicised critical diagnoses linking political outcomes with the strength/weakness of democracy, in particular the key democratic institutions: the rule of law, party pluralism, ideologically neutral state, and “public accountability” exercised through open and fair electoral system. We allude to these issues in the conclusions, while more detailed theoretical elaboration awaits further research and publications.

CONCLUSIONS

This admittedly basic and preliminary analysis leads to seven conclusions, which may also serve as conclusions to the chapter:

1. The politically entrenched populist nationalists weaken not only democratic pluralism and stability—as many political observers have already noted and demonstrated—but also quality (effectiveness) of governance. Moreover, this weakening, reflected in the dynamics of WGI, BTI/WTI indicators, is most conspicuous in Hungary and Poland.

2. Poland and Hungary show a distinctive pattern of rise and then fall in governing effectiveness which follows closely the accompanied rise and fall in democratic qualities of political regimes there. The quality of governance in Poland increased in the years 2007–2014, that is, under the largely “conventional” (i.e., only moderately populist) style of rule of the Civic Platform (PO) and its leaders, and then fell in 2015–2021, i.e., under the populist rule of Kaczyński’s leadership. It is worth noting that this Polish trajectory of first growth and then decline includes extremely important indicators of “voice and responsibility” and “political stability and absence of violence.” This seems to confirm the diagnoses of incompatibility of populist-nationalist ruling style with effective governance. The Hungarian results are similar, though less clear and consistent.

3. These results puncture the myth of the alleged political decline under the centre-left regime (e.g., “Poland in ruins”) promoted by populist leaders during their victorious electoral campaigns in 2010 in Hungary and in 2015 in Poland. They

also puncture the myth of alleged political development and improvement promoted by the populist rulers since their victories. In Hungary and Poland, the two countries that experienced rapid surges of populism and then the entrenchment of the populist rule, the indicators of effective governance have been declining. The obvious correlates of this decline are sharpening social and political conflicts, widening incompetence, “nepotistic corruption,” incoherent and wasteful policies and social chaos. The popular diagnoses of “the reversal of postcommunist transformation” (the latter defined as “return to Europe”) seem to be consistent with the governance indices and their trajectories.

116 4. This decline of “effective governance” suggested by the Polish and Hungarian data is not detected in Czechia, Slovakia, and Germany. Depressingly, the only European countries that share this declining trajectory observed in Poland and Hungary are Belarus and Russia. The Polish governance indicators seem to be heading in the same direction as those in her non-EU eastern neighbours, although Poland has much higher value of all governance indicators than Belarus and Russia.

5. The largest decrease in the quality of governance indicators in Poland and Hungary is observed in the dimension of “voice and responsibility.” This is consistent with the declining rankings of democracy in both countries as diagnosed by Freedom House and *The Economist* (EIU). Populist rule coincides with “democratic backslide.”

6. The comparisons of Poland and Hungary with their neighbours from the European Union, such as Germany, Czechia, Slovakia, and Lithuania, show a widening gap to the advantage

of the neighbours. In recent years, the Czech Republic has not only overtaken Poland in the strength of the WGI, but it also increased its advantage, as it increased the quality of governance in the decade 2012–2021. The Czech indicators in 2021 are higher than the Polish and Hungarian ones in all dimensions of the quality of governance.

7. The biggest—and still growing—differences in the quality (effectiveness) of governance separate the populist-afflicted Poland and Hungary from Germany, especially in the dimensions of the “rule of law,” “control of corruption,” and “voice and responsibility.” While at the end of the first decade of the 21st century political leaders of Poland and Hungary promised to “catch up with Germany,” at the beginning of the second decade these optimistic hopes look illusory. The rule of populists seems to bring Poland and Hungary further away from Western Europe and closer to their eastern neighbours.

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POLISH POLITICAL ELITES— AN UNFINISHED PROJECT

ABSTRACT

The topic of this chapter is the question of the lack of a true democratic political elite in Poland. The article describes the low assessment of the elites by public opinion, the negative role of the populist ruling elite, the low participation of women in the elite, the social characteristics of the religious elites, and as a reference point for the actual elites—the heritage of the intelligentsia. The reason for the lack of a democratic elite is the dominance of the second generation of post-transformation politicians, whose political socialization has resulted in the widespread use of political malpractice combined with a weak internalization of the significance of basic political institutions.

KEYWORDS: political elite, Polish politics and government, democratic transformation

INTRODUCTION: THE ELITE AS A PRODUCT AND SUBJECT OF POLITICAL CHANGE

The new social and political system initiated in Poland in 1989 also had its elite dimension. The change involved a fundamental replacement of the old elites—in some spheres approaching a total replacement—and the emergence of new

types. All of the new elites have had to learn new patterns of operating and functioning within a fundamentally new institutional framework. This is particularly evident for the political and economic elites. Living in conditions where elitism is accepted is also a new phenomenon. Elites live on an open stage and have become part of popular culture. Certain social expectations of their functioning have emerged, and they have had to adapt. Specifically, in current conditions, the use of traditional and social media is part of effective operations.

In Poland, the elite exists as a phenomenon inherent in modern society. The Polish elite has both traits typical of elites in general and its own specific features, which are related to the country, its history, and culture. Public attitudes toward the elite are a mixture of admiration, envy, dislike, a longing for the elite and the realization through them of ideals, and a sense of discrepancy between reality and the ideal. There is also a need to match supply and demand.

It should be noted that knowledge about the Polish elite is neither extensive nor complete. The data is complex and difficult to acquire. In addition to those members of the elite who are better known, there are also those about whom information is quite sparse, and they themselves, like the business elites, try to be as invisible as possible.¹ Due to limited space, this chapter focuses on the general image of the Polish elites, the

¹ The data for this text is drawn from works devoted to specific elites, sociological surveys such as those of CBOS (Public Opinion Research Center) and IBRiS (Market and Social Research Institute), my own research and calculations, opinion-forming magazines such as *Polityka* and the tabloid *Fakt* (the newspaper with the largest circulation in Poland), and information from MSN Poland (Microsoft Network).

power elite, and the traditions important to the Polish elite (“intelligentsia”). The description of the elites is rather concise and omits the economic elites. Instead, the chapter sheds some light on the lesser-known Polish Episcopate.

THE CONCEPT OF ELITES IN THE PUBLIC CONSCIOUSNESS

The word “elite” found its way into the Polish language at the dawn of the 20th century. At the time, it had a positive evaluative meaning. Its earliest use in Polish-language dictionaries and encyclopedias that I can find is from 1899 and reads as follows: “Elite (French): a selection, a flower (of a nation’s intelligentsia); an elite corps—a select division of the army” (*S. Orgelbranda Encyklopedia powszechna* 1899).

A poll commissioned by the weekly *Polityka* in June 2017 shows what is currently understood by the term “elite.” According to the respondents, the elite in present-day Poland are people who are rich and influential (50% of indications). In contrast, only 20% of the respondents agreed with the statement that the elite are people who deserve respect because of their intellect, competence, and moral stance. The respondents associated elitism mainly with money and the resulting opportunities. The following categories were selected most often: the richest people in Poland (78%); well-known performers and celebrities (72%); media owners, heads of TV stations or newspapers (71%); politicians and doctors (69% of indications each); academics (62%); entrepreneurs (59%); military and

police officers (54%); and priests (48%). The other proposed categories were chosen much less frequently.

Wealth/high income (60% of indications) was indicated as the path to the elite first, followed by connections and acquaintances (42%), gaining political power (38%), and originating from the elite (35%). Other criteria were indicated by significantly fewer respondents: education (27%), prestigious profession (25%), high intellectual and moral qualities (18%), and finally, patriotism and civic involvement (6%). This negative assessment of the elite corresponds with answers to the question about the respondents' aspirations for their children. Only 18% would like their children to enter the elite, while 62% would not (Janicki 2017).

A low opinion of elites and assigning people to them because of their money, power, or influence, rather than for their merit or patriotism, is linked to a lack of social and political authorities. In qualitative research, when respondents are asked to name authorities, they first mention deceased individuals. These are most often legends of the Polish Church and of politics and culture. Living members of the elite are only recalled sporadically and with difficulty (IBRiS 2021a: 9). This negative image of the elite is conveyed both by opinion polls and unanimously by publicists from different sides of the political scene. It is widely regarded as a defect in modern public life (Szomburg 2005).

THE NEGATIVE IMAGE OF POLITICAL ELITES AND ITS SOURCES

Elites are perceived negatively in Poland, and among them, it is the political elites that have the lowest ratings. In addition to quantitative data, one can cite qualitative data confirming the trend. Thus, the 2021 IBRiS qualitative survey showed negative associations with the word “elite.” In fact, Polish elites are often referred to in ironic terms, for instance, as “the pseudo-elite” (IBRiS 2021b). In the 2017 *Polityka* poll discussed above, the political elites received decidedly very low ratings. When asked to evaluate the political elite in Poland, 20% of the respondents rated it well, and 50% rated it poorly (Janicki 2017).

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For political elites, there is more data, and, more importantly, it is dynamic in nature. Attitudes can be tracked over a longer period of time, and current assessments, which are often formed under the influence of a crisis, can be separated from more enduring trends. The data also shows that such attitudes do not occur in isolation but are clearly linked to the prestige of professions and social positions, as well as to opinions about corruption in Poland.

In surveys of professional prestige in Poland, the poor ratings of political elites are confirmed by the low prestige of three representatives of this sphere: ministers, members of parliament, and party activists. This is well illustrated by the prestige of other professions. While the prestige of professors remains constantly high, that of politicians is low. Less than half of the respondents hold them in high esteem. Party activists are rated the lowest.

If one considers changes over time, the prestige of politicians has clearly declined over the past quarter of a century. Only the prestige of party activists has been stable—it was and is very low (Table 1).

**TABLE 1. PRESTIGE (HIGH ESTEEM) OF PROFESSIONS.
RESPONDENTS' INDICATIONS BY SURVEY DATE (IN %)**

	1995	1996	1999	2008	2013	2019
University professor	84	82	84	84	82	83
Doctor	79	77	75	73	71	80
Entrepreneur, owner of a large company	45	39	48	54	61	65
Minister	49	40	43	36	37	33
Member of parliament	45	34	42	24	32	27
Party activist	21	18	20	19	20	18

Source: CBOS 2019.

The prestige of the political elite is closely linked to the assessment of their integrity, which is just as low. In the latest available survey, 54% of the respondents rated the integrity of members of parliament as low, and 61% held the same opinion about politicians in general. If one looks at the figures dynamically, not only are the ratings of politicians' integrity low, they are getting even worse. Over nearly two decades, the integrity ratings of members of the political elite—high-level government officials, MPs, and politicians—have steadily declined, and the percentage of respondents convinced of their low integrity has almost doubled (Table 2).

TABLE 2. ASSESSMENT OF THE HONESTY AND INTEGRITY OF REPRESENTATIVES OF VARIOUS PROFESSIONS. RESPONDENTS' INDICATIONS BY SURVEY DATES (IN %)

How would you assess the honesty and integrity of:	Low	Average	High	D.K./N.A.
Academics				
1997	3	25	55	16
2000	4	21	62	14
2006	2	18	68	12
2016	2	30	55	13
Private entrepreneurs				
1997	23	50	16	10
2000	22	49	18	11
2006	15	51	25	9
2016	19	53	18	10
Officials in district and municipal offices				
1997	31	53	12	5
2000	35	50	9	6
2006	26	48	21	5
2016	20	55	19	6
High-level national officials				
1997	18	47	17	18
2000	38	39	9	14
2006	34	40	14	13
2016	35	47	9	9
Members of parliament				
1997	24	52	13	10
2000	45	40	6	10
2006	49	37	7	7
2016	54	36	3	7

How would you assess the honesty and integrity of:	Low	Average	High	D.K./N.A.
Politicians				
1997	32	48	8	12
2000	46	39	6	9
2006	50	34	8	7
2016	61	32	2	5

Source: CBOS 2016.

Similarly, the public's view of corruption among politicians—party activists, councilors, MPs, and senators—is that it is prevalent. More than half of the respondents (52%) are convinced that such corruption exists. These percentages are lower in the case of the private sector and education. Government officials, the judiciary, and the health service are in the middle of the scale (Table 3).

TABLE 3. IN YOUR OPINION, IN WHICH AREAS DOES CORRUPTION OCCUR MOST OFTEN (2021)?

Area	%
Among politicians: party activists, councilors, members of parliament, senators	52
In central offices and ministries	35
In municipal, county, and provincial offices	31
In courts and prosecutor's offices	26
In the health service	23
In state-owned companies	20
In the police	12
In private companies	7
In banks	4

Area	%
In schools and universities	1
Elsewhere	1
Hard to say	16

Source: CBOS 2021. The percentages do not add up to 100 because the respondents could indicate more than one area.

If the data is considered in terms of changes over the past 20 years, it can be seen that beliefs about the corruption of politicians and officials at various levels have been relatively long-lasting. For comparison, it is also important to look at how opinions about other institutions have changed. Such beliefs have markedly declined with regard to the judiciary, the health service, and the police. On the other hand, they have increased with regard to state-owned companies. In the latter case, this can be linked to political changes in Poland. On the timeline, this is approximately when the current elite came to power and can be linked to personnel policies in this sector, where positions are treated as part of a system of spoils and benefits (Table 4).

As a further reason for the low ratings of elites in Poland, one can point to the failure of their members to uphold ethical standards. High ethical standards are expected of politicians, both in office and in the private sphere. These standards are not fixed, and in the case of the private sphere, they are clearly becoming more liberal. There is a growing tolerance for cohabitation and for different sexual orientations. The latter has ceased to be an obstacle to holding public office, but negative attitudes to crime, alcoholism, accidents under the influence, and lying have remained the same (Table 5).

**TABLE 4. IN WHICH AREAS IS CORRUPTION MOST PREVALENT?
RESPONDENTS' INDICATIONS BY SURVEY DATE (IN %)**

	X 2001	VI 2002	VI 2003	VI 2004	V 2005	VII 2006	XII 2007	IV 2009	IV 2010	VI 2013	V 2017	X 2021
Among politicians: party activists, councilors, members of parliament, senators	54	52	60	64	61	35	44	55	60	62	48	52
In central offices and ministries	38	29	37	39	34	22	32	27	26	18	21	35
In municipal, county, and provincial offices	29	25	29	30	21	28	25	28	31	27	30	31
In courts and prosecutor's offices	37	33	33	42	37	32	30	29	29	31	32	26
In the health service	47	42	43	37	50	53	58	54	58	53	38	23
In state-owned companies	13	12	11	11	11	9	15	14	13	13	17	20
In the police	31	23	25	21	34	31	28	16	15	21	16	12
In private companies	13	9	11	9	12	8	9	10	8	9	12	7
In banks	6	3	5	4	4	3	2	4	3	2	5	4
In schools and universities	7	8	4	5	4	8	3	3	3	3	2	1
Elsewhere	1	0	1	1	1	2	0	4	1	2	1	1
Hard to say	1	12	8	7	6	15	10	8	7	8	13	16

Source: CBOS 2021. The percentages do not add up to 100 because the respondents could indicate more than one area.

TABLE 5. POLITICIANS—PRIVATE LIFE AND PUBLIC FUNCTIONS.
RESPONDENTS' INDICATIONS BY SURVEY DATES (IN %)

Would you support in parliamentary elections a politician whose competence and knowledge you rate highly but who...	1998	2001	2013
cohabits	69	74	79
is a homosexual	28	30	55
has committed adultery	54	49	46
has cooperated in the past with the Security Service of the Polish People's Republic	12	21	18
has been convicted of a criminal offense	3	5	8
is addicted to alcohol	2	4	7
has caused an accident while driving under the influence of alcohol	7	6	7
sometimes lies in public	5	3	6
was suspected of involvement in a corruption scandal	—	—	5

Source: CBOS 2013.

Respondents' beliefs about which acts call for a withdrawal from politics are the reverse of their criteria for endorsing a politician. Lying in court or in public, tax fraud, or bribery should end with the politician leaving office. The exception is marital infidelity (Table 6). Nevertheless, only half of those surveyed would vote for such a person. In the previous parliamentary term, there was a case where an extramarital affair that ended in the breakup of a family caused one of the party leaders to leave politics. The party was pro-European and strongly liberal on economic and moral issues. This event interrupted a promising career, especially given the lack of specialists in political macroeconomics.

**TABLE 6. SITUATIONS IN WHICH A POLITICIAN SHOULD RESIGN.
INDICATIONS OF RESPONDENTS BY SURVEY DATES (IN %)**

In what situation should a politician resign from office? Should they resign if they...	1998	2001	2003	2013
gave false testimony under oath	96	97	97	95
accepted a bribe	95	96	98	95
committed tax fraud	95	88	95	91
lied in public	80	84	83	75
committed adultery	28	37	24	29

Source: CBOS 2013.

The question arises as to what Poles expect from the elites—what normative expectations they form of them. Here, IBRiS qualitative research from winter 2021 provides a lot of information. According to the report, the “true elite” are those who are widely held in esteem, and this esteem concerns both high achievements in the non-political sphere and personal qualities. Only both of these criteria together, or rather their combination, give a person legitimacy to hold a position in politics. The criteria are high competence and authority in the person’s native field, such as science, culture, art, medicine, or social activism. Such people are then expected to develop important ideas and be guided by them in life and to possess a certain kind of charisma—the ability to attract attention and people, and to infect others with their own views and ideas. Furthermore, they are expected to be self-reliant and independent, as well as empathic—understanding people and their needs. Qualities that inspire confidence are also expected: a high level of personal

culture, that is, responsibility. Moral backbone, honesty, and modesty are important (IBRiS 2021b: 10).

A CBOS survey from early 2023 shows the current low level of trust in the political elite. Of the list of 18 major Polish politicians whose popularity is surveyed on a monthly basis, most do not have the trust of the public. Only five of them have a positive score in this regard. They include the country's current president, who hails from the Law and Justice party, two leaders of opposition parties, the minister of defense, and the minister of foreign affairs. Among the politicians who are not trusted are the chairmen of the two largest parties (both the ruling one and the opposition), the three leaders of major opposition parties, and the most important people in the country's politics: the speakers of the Sejm and Senate, as well as the prime minister (CBOS 2023).

THE RULING ELITE OF THE LAW AND JUSTICE PARTY

When writing about contemporary Polish elites, it is impossible not to address, if only in the briefest of terms, the issue of the current ruling elite. From the perspective of the social sciences, characterizing the Law and Justice elite is difficult because of the paradoxes of its political appeal, which involves populism and anti-elitism, and its political practice, which involves building its own elite. There is also the question of the party's qualifications to create this elite and the question of how this elite functions (Wasilewski 2010).

Law and Justice's specificity lies in a political appeal that includes social conservatism, nationalism, an anti-liberal welfare state, anti-Europeanism, and building support through social transfers to the party's political base. On the elite level, there is a combination of programmatic anti-elitism and self-creation as a new elite.

Programmatically, Law and Justice is capitalizing on the negative social reaction to contemporary macro-political trends and processes related to Europeanization. There are many types of reactions to the dominant trends of the era, such as moral liberalism (conservatism), cosmopolitanism and globalization, Europeanism (nationalism), and economic liberalism (social and welfare state). These have been developed into the standard "rightism," which is characterized by social conservatism, nationalism, an anti-liberal welfare state, and anti-Europeanism. In addition, the atmosphere of threat to the country from Poland's former enemies, Germany and Russia, is invoked, and contemporary fears of being flooded by immigrants are awakened. In the face of all these threats, fundamentalist slogans of patriotism and defense of the foundations of society—family, work, and religion—are invoked. To these elements, Law and Justice adds protection of the weakest—pensioners and multi-child families—and an attitude of reserve toward the EU.

Law and Justice also has many of the characteristics of the elites of the second wave of the revolution—disillusioned reformers radicalized by what they saw as a lack of progress in implementing that revolution. The current Law and Justice government is the second formed by the party. The previous

one, in office from 2005 to 2007, lost power as a result of its defeat in a clash with the Constitutional Court, which stopped the government's main action—the vetting of teaching staff, including academics, in regard to complicity with the previous regime. Early elections were not successful for the party. Many Law and Justice politicians may have felt that it was the party's lack of effort to build a strong support base—its own political base—along with an overly cautious implementation of its own program, ineffectiveness in fighting the political opposition (the alternative power elite), failure to fully control the mass media, and lack of determination in controlling the judiciary that determined its defeat at the time. Hence, the party is currently set on avoiding these mistakes and expresses its intentions with a characteristic mixture of cynicism, brutality, and fundamentalist axiology. The ease with which extra-legal means are employed is obvious and cannot be reduced to mere instrumentalism. For this reason, journalistic comparisons of the Law and Justice party to the Bolsheviks are common (Brinton 1965; Pacewicz 1983).

The third feature of this elite is its anti-elitist populism, at the same time as the party is constructing a “new” elite, supposedly free of the flaws of its predecessors. In its appeal to voters, the party attacks the previous elite and accuses it of many mistakes (which the current elite will correct). There are also programs to “complete” the decommunization of the power apparatus (the state administration, the foreign service) and the judiciary. The latter programs are not just a matter of changing the previous system; they also serve to create

space for new-elite personnel and, in the case of the judiciary, to cripple the third branch of government, which could otherwise invalidate many of the current team's illegal actions and thus significantly weaken its *de facto* power.

On the other hand, there are clear practices of building a new elite, and the ruling style of the Law and Justice party can be seen as its self-representation. Members of the elite follow their own logic, which involves presenting actions on important issues as being exclusively the result of their own work. The condition for such a portrayal is a monopoly on important decisions, their exclusive authorship. This is furthered—as during the pandemic—by suppressing alternative proposals from local governments and torpedoing offers of cooperation, or allowing them only as implementers of the government's “good” ideas.

An important element of the elite's self-creation is its manner of legislating. It consists of extraordinary legal measures and ostentatiously high program budgets, which are often artificially inflated to increase the effect. The procedure for introducing laws is rushed. Legislative stages are shortened, and *vacatio legis* is treated similarly. Often successive readings are conducted at a single session of the Sejm, while consultations are either skipped or reduced to mere appearances. The opposition's ability to use the parliamentary tribune to criticize the government has been significantly curtailed. The opposition is now supposed to be merely a passive backdrop for the government's legislative work, which the president then signs with lightning speed. Sometimes he is transported by special plane to the

signing ceremony, which is broadcast on state television. And then the law is immediately promulgated.

At the same time, a certain image of the elite is broadcast, meant to be a show of strength and right. Law and Justice presents itself as an energetic, competent new elite, which is capable of implementing solutions. It is supposed to combine decisiveness, speed of action, and efficiency. It simultaneously legitimizes various actions that strengthen the scope of its power and restrict civil rights and freedoms. Although more educated observers associate these behaviors with “ignorance” and “arrogance,” it is not they but rather the average citizen who is the addressee of this image.

The marginalization of the opposition in the legislative process and the ostentatious rejection of motions critical of government ministers also serve to reinforce this image. When bills are introduced, almost all of the amendments proposed by the opposition or the Senate are rejected in the Sejm, usually by several hundred votes. The aim is to simultaneously demonstrate Law and Justice’s own strength and the alleged low quality of the opposition’s contributions. Such striking rejection of the opposition’s criticisms and amendments is in turn intended to paralyze opposition deputies and make them passive in the face of the government’s actions.

At the same time, such a picture of parliamentary action contributes to the creation of a negative image of the opposition. The protesting opposition is portrayed as a barren force, opposing everything on principle (“total opposition”) and consequently only slowing down aid processes that serve society. In

this way, legalism is eroded, and legal arguments are depreciated because the ruling party presents them as mere tactics.

The consequence of this style of lawmaking is not only that the opposition is removed from participation but also that the public and the affected groups themselves are kept from having a voice. This is done at the expense of the quality of legislation and, paradoxically, efficiency. As a result, the inaccuracy of legislation has increased significantly. Some laws had to be amended immediately after enactment, even before they entered into force. Others have already been amended more than a dozen times. There have been misguided government programs that produced effects opposite to those intended.

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The main way the current elite gains mass support is by transferring resources to individuals, groups, and organizations associated with it and through social transfers to its electorate. The elite's rule has come to be colloquially associated with increasing transfers. The cyclical nature of the transfers also raises expectations. Such a method has broader significance than the mere buying of support. It is also a kind of legitimization, a way to show that the ruling elite is close to the people. At the same time, the beneficiaries of the system may fear that this kind of gratification will be interrupted when the ruling team changes. A side effect is the support of the masses for democracy. It is clear to the groups who benefit that without the need for cyclical re-election, they would never be the object of such efforts by the ruling group.

As a research problem, the issue of the competence of the elite is a difficult one but needs to be addressed in order to show

the specificity of this particular elite. Without considering this question—without this element of characterization, as well as its multifunctionality—it is impossible to describe the new elite. The full significance of the lack of competence is, after all, quite complex. It also has a number of causes: 1) low quality as a result of the path on which the alternative elite has been formed, 2) Law and Justice's elite-building strategy—the low quality of mid-level cadres and the use of negative energy as a tool of power, 3) material benefits, positions for members of the power elite and their families as rewards, and 4) low quality as a bonding element of the elite—a common fear of losing power.

The first contributing factor was Law and Justice's situation as the main opposition party. Law and Justice, having been the first- or second-ranking party for almost a decade, was a constant contender for power. Willingly or not, it became a gathering place for malcontents. Its politicians are opponents of both the economically and the morally liberal parties. It is also a group turned against the dominance of elites from the country's capital, Warsaw. But such a composition of the party's elite can be useful to the party's leadership. From the point of view of those currently in power, ruling through people who have "stains" on their resumes gives them more control. The same effect of full disposability is achieved by entrusting high positions to people whose competence is in gross disproportion to the requirements of managing a given institution.

But the factor of self-selection is still at work. The fact that disposability, subordination, and usefulness to the system favor

participation in the Law and Justice's elite can be looked at from another angle as a kind of exchange between a candidate for a position and the system. In exchange for the nomination, the person makes available to the system the resources of the institution he or she heads (such as a public railroad or central bank). In a sense, such candidates can be said to be selling their negatives.

Third, the mechanism of economic gratification is a policy of rewarding members of the power elite and their families for their participation in the power mechanism. The offer of benefits sometimes serves to build the necessary coalition in parliament and local governments. In this case, ostentatiously rewarding those who had to step down is necessary in order to confirm that they will not be forgotten and abandoned by the system. The need to constantly reward members of the power elite is sometimes caricatural. A special law against excessive salaries for the power elite was ostentatiously presented in the media, but it was immediately followed by a series of speeches about permissible exceptions: unique qualifications, family unity, and a politician's wife who needs a job to compensate for her husband's move. Deviation from this mechanism is not possible, as it would risk the disintegration of a group devoid of other cohesiveness. Fourth and finally, the mechanism of rewards and benefits produces a common interest: only the continuance of the existing power arrangement will allow members of the elite to maintain this stream of benefits, and the loss of power would entail material losses for almost all party members. In turn, participation in repeated violations of the law creates fear of suffering the consequences.

ANTI-ELITISM AND LAW AND JUSTICE'S ELITISM

The anti-elitist narrative has played a huge role in Law and Justice's message to the public, although it is not the only populist party in contemporary Poland. In her evaluation of political elites in speeches delivered during the eighth term of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland, Małgorzata Stefaniuk (2019) described the place of the elite issue in Law and Justice's narrative in detail. It consists of several threads. The first is foundational. It is a criticism of the historical elites (of which the main opposition party is the heir). The Round Table Agreements, which led to the peaceful end of the communist system, are questioned. The agreement is often described as a "secret deal" in which the historical elites, in exchange for power, ensured impunity for the communists and especially the former dictator, General Wojciech Jaruzelski.

The second element is a direct criticism of the previous ruling elite. This has even found a place in political satire in the phrase "It's Tusk's fault." Much of the criticism is directed at the rule of Donald Tusk, who is Jarosław Kaczyński's main rival in the upcoming election battle. Tusk was prime minister for seven of the eight years of Civic Platform's government. According to Law and Justice, these were times characterized by selfishness, wastefulness, and contempt for the people. In Law and Justice's view, it was a "state of satiated power circles, where the ruling elite is doing well, but citizens and their needs do not matter," and a "theoretical state, which was strong against the weak and weak against the strong." It was

a comfortable elite that did not take responsibility for its actions and cared only for its own interests and pleasures.

This anti-elitist rhetoric also serves to discredit the current main opposition group. This group is accused of lacking patriotism and damaging Poland externally, as in the statement that “Those who criticize this bill the most ... are those who represent the Poland of the elite, the Poland of the oligarchy, the Poland of the clan, the Poland of the caste.” This old elite forms the opposition of “total negation.” Thus, we have a clear continuity. This elite “continued, despite losing power, to display hypocrisy, pursued a disastrous foreign policy, and did not care about the Polish *raison d'état*, while it is now engaged in denouncing the new authorities to foreign elites and uses lies” (Stefaniuk 2019: 392).

Anti-elitism is a clear part of the narrative of the pro-government media (as observation of these media over two and a half months in late 2022 and early 2023 shows) and has two dimensions. The first is criticism of elites in general. Among members of the former elite who have been accused of involvement in criminal situations, arrested, charged, or convicted in recent years are two former prime ministers, three former ministers, one former deputy minister, the grandson of a former president, one of the richest Poles, a well-known soccer player, 14 figures connected with the stage or screen, three well-known lawyers, and quite a few figures from local elites (councilors and mayors). Such investigations are meant to show, on the one hand, the state of the elite and their behavior and, on the other, the energy and consistency of the authorities in prosecuting abuses.

The second anti-elite attack is against specific members of the elite with the aim of either causing them to leave their posts or suffer a significant loss of authority. The targets have been leaders and activists of the historic “Solidarity” movement (sometimes heroes of that struggle), as well as individual locally popular deputies or senators, movie and TV stars, or celebrities who have engaged in opposition actions. Sometimes, in the wake of such attacks, candidates withdrew or did not run again. Prominent figures from the ranks of the opposition have been discredited, such as the speaker of the Senate, who was accused of corruption, or the former minister of health, who was called a “traitor” and accused of fraud when he switched to the opposition.

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Furthermore, in addition to Law and Justice’s objections that it is not itself an elite and its ostentatious chastisement of certain field activists for displaying “elitism,” there is another theme in the parliamentary rhetoric. Almost simultaneously, Law and Justice recognizes itself as the new political elite while strongly emphasizing that its government is not a government of the elite because it works for the benefit of ordinary citizens and is formed by people who are aware of the nation’s needs. As a result, “We have restored a sense of dignity and stability to Poles. We have addressed the issues of ordinary Poles, and not, like the previous government, the issues of political elites” (Stefaniuk 2019: 393, 396).

Also noteworthy are statements by prominent party activists that here we have a new elite, free from the defects of its predecessors and capable of governing. Such a message appeared

in the context of the 2019 elections. At Law and Justice's party convention, just before the elections, the party chairman declared that "alongside the post-communist elite, there is already a new elite in Poland, which is capable of changing it." He stressed that during the past term, his party "proved credible in fulfilling its pre-election promises." At the same time, his party is not an elite "that elevates itself, that considers itself superior, but one that wants to serve, and it is this service that is elitist" ("Kaczyński" 2019).

I would not like to reduce anti-elitism to a simple, cynical method of fighting for power. It is not the case that it is most often the opponents of the current elites who want to establish themselves on the political scene under the guise of bringing a breath of fresh air to it. Anti-elite tendencies exist in the Law and Justice party both consciously and unconsciously. At the same time, they are a link to the party's political base. Rather, the thesis should be that Law and Justice is entangled in apparent contradictions and operates within them. These are contradictions between the program that is geared toward winning support and seeking a political base through ostentatious gestures and the pragmatics of power, that is, the need to bind the ruling, type-B elite to the party's elite and make the government's survival their common cause. This, in turn, requires a stream of rewards and gratifications.

**THE DESIRE FOR ELITES—THE PROBLEM
OF THE INTELLIGENTSIA**

The problem of the quality of the elite, that is, the ethical and intellectual standards of the elite in the Polish context, almost automatically raises the question of the intelligentsia and the vitality of its ethos. The traditional intelligentsia was not identical to the stratum of either intellectuals or people with a higher education. In addition to education, a certain ethos was important. The intelligentsia was expected to prioritize social goals over individual ones. This group was expected to serve society through political and moral leadership. The intelligentsia was expected to have knowledge and intellect, patriotism and high morale. Ethical qualities were mandatory in both public and private life. The model included personal culture, modesty, trustworthiness—keeping one's word and being honest with oneself and others, as well as cultural interests. In addition to personal qualities, the intelligentsia was expected to show active patriotism, evidenced by participation in collective patriotic efforts, and currently by social engagement (Kurczewska 1998).

The ethos of the intelligentsia was a modernization of the chivalric ethos, and its significant feature was honor. The desire to avoid any stain on one's honor was an important motive. The political struggle should be conducted honestly, and the goals should be noble. Patriotism was inseparable from sharing and practicing progressive ideals on a daily basis. The ideas of nationalism, the superiority of the nation over others, political Machiavellianism, violence and force were alien to it. And on an

individual level, so were individual goals: career or wealth. On the other hand, the ethos was close in spirit to the slogan “For Your Freedom and Ours,” which combined the ideals of Polish patriotism with the willingness to work for the freedom of other nations.

These ideals were propagated by literature and embodied in life. Their models were celebrated in literature, and the dilemmas associated with them became the subject of works by the most prominent Polish writers. The ethos reproduced in literature in this way was part of socialization. A society raised on such models expects, on the one hand, enlightened and effective action aimed at higher collective goals and, on the other hand, certain personal qualities.

Aleksander Gella attempted to universalize the concept by proposing to use this term for a group that constitutes either the elite or its recruiting or political base. Members of such an elite are supposed to be noble intellectuals motivated by compassion for the underprivileged classes, promoting their political, social, and cultural advancement, and opposing undemocratic regimes on their behalf (Gella 1979).

How current this model can be is an important question. It is still a living tradition. It was still active during the “Solidarity” period and at the beginning of the transition. Clusters of the traditional intelligentsia were the backbone of the “Solidarity” union. During the period of the Polish People’s Republic, they played a significant role in the emergence of anti-system organizations such as the Workers’ Defense Committee (KOR), whose activity and ethos were a living exemplification of this model.

The first generation of the transition elites—the main figures of the transformation—were another incarnation of the intelligentsia ethos. The places where the pro-“Solidarity” movement gained the most support in 1989 and 1990 were places where there was a concentration of the intelligentsia. Later, these places supported the parties that originated from them, such as the current liberal and pro-European parties. These places have the highest voter turnout in European elections.

After the transformation occurred and its greatest goals—the change of the system to a democratic and market-based one—were achieved, there was a sense that the intelligentsia had come to an “end,” its mission had been fulfilled, and its leadership tasks would henceforth be handed over to new industrial and managerial elites and to movements associated with new historical tasks, such as the pro-ecological transformation (Śpiewak 2005).

In the circles opposed to Law and Justice, there is now a sense of a certain return to the intelligentsia ethos. The movement’s values, its modes of action, and the personal models that guide its activists are a living link to this tradition and ethos. The centers where the Law and Justice’s opposition enjoys the greatest support—and the party associated with it holds power—are also concentrations of the intelligentsia. The largest such concentration, for example, is the nation’s capital. It is precisely the layers of the traditional intelligentsia—academics or people of culture—who are heavily involved in resistance and opposition to Law and Justice. People in the social sciences, culture, and science who side with the populist regime are

few in number. However, such issues are not decided by the researcher but by everyday life. Researchers of the problem rather cautiously speak of a “post-intelligentsia” (Śpiewak, Kulas 2015).

The idea of the intelligentsia is still alive as a model of the elite. A consequence of these high expectations of elites is the heroization of national figures, who have been portrayed as people without personal lives, people without blemish, ready to make the highest sacrifices, including of their life, for the national cause. Some of the consequences are interesting. This idea has created a demand for literature of the “unmasking” kind, which describes a different, less glorious side of the heroes. Such “unmasking” took place in regard to such figures as Ryszard Kapuściński or Lech Wałęsa. Both tendencies—apologetics and criticism—stem from society’s high expectations of its heroes.

THE EPISCOPATE

Due to Poland’s history and strong religious ties, religious elites are of great importance, especially the Episcopate of the Catholic Church. Data on the Episcopate can be found on the Episcopal Conference website, but the information is not very extensive. Nevertheless, it is possible to compile some facts on this basis and thus get a picture of this group. It is a fairly numerous body. At the beginning of 2023, it had 147 members. The Conference includes senior and ordinary bishops, who have a full vote, and auxiliary bishops. It also includes the nuncio,

the field bishop of the Polish Army, and bishops of other rites who recognize the supremacy of the Pope. Here the division according to voting rights is irrelevant. Rather, it is a body that follows a consensual mode of decision-making, avoiding agonistic or conflictual forms (votes or factions). It tries to leave space for individual stances and allows its members considerable autonomy in action.

The Episcopate has a rather distinctive social composition. First of all, it is the best educated—albeit in a specific manner—elite. 86% of its members have doctoral degrees, of which 24% are professors of lower or higher rank. They teach at seminaries, Catholic universities, or university theological departments. But at the same time, it is the oldest group. The average age among those currently holding office is 61 years, and among the senior (retired) bishops, the average age is 81.7 years. Although various backgrounds are represented, there is a noticeable overrepresentation of men from villages and small towns. 38.1% were born in rural areas, 38.8% in a small or medium-sized town, and 23.1% in a city. Only 9 were born in a metropolis. A small group, 6.8%, are monks.

Members of the Episcopate are usually recruited from their own diocese. They maintain contact with their place of origin and provide charitable support to its public institutions. For their compatriots, they are often a source of pride.

The path to their position is fairly standard, though difficult, and their spiritual and intellectual formation has a certain elitist logic. The path begins with attending seminary after graduating from high school. In most cases, they serve an internship

as curates or pastors, which gives them a basic understanding of pastoral work. They then study theology at home or abroad to deepen their theological knowledge and learn about issues affecting the local and universal Church. Prior to episcopal ordination, they are given one or more fields of independent activity, but it is not often a parish. They are then appointed auxiliary bishops to learn the problems of local church governance from the inside and become familiar with their own mission field. There are only three exceptions to this rule.

To put it more numerically, when future members of the Episcopate are ordained as presbyters (commonly known as ordained priests), they are about 25 years old. They are ordained as auxiliary bishops at around 50, and as bishops, leading a diocese on their own, at 56. The latter position can be held until the age of retirement, which is 75. In regard to seniority in office, they serve as auxiliary bishops for 10.5 years, and as “ordinaries” for 6.5 years (Table 7).

**TABLE 7. PATHS OF MEMBERS OF THE POLISH EPISCOPATE
TO THEIR CURRENT POSITIONS
(AVERAGE YEAR OF ORDINATION)**

	Year of birth	Year of ordination as presbyterate	Year of ordination as auxiliary bishop	Year of ordination as diocesan bishop
Bishops (total)	1953.8	1978.8	2003.1	2012.0
Auxiliary bishops	1960.8	1989.4	2013.6	—
Ordinary bishops	1959.3	1985.1	2009.3	2015.5

Source: Own calculation on the basis of the website: <https://episkopat.pl>—accessed in February 2023.

The early choice of career and standardized biography indicate that the path is clear in advance. There are no periods of hesitation and identity-related wandering. Long job placements are characteristic. It is extremely rare for bishops to move from diocese to diocese. Their period of preparation for the highest posts is long, but so is their tenure. Probably one reason is the desire to create a strong bond between the bishop and his congregation. Such long periods in office result in the bishop strongly imprinting his individuality on his diocese.

Compared to other elites, what is very unusual is that members of the Episcopate remain active members after retirement, although this is largely dependent on health. Such senior bishops make up about a third (34.7%) of the Episcopate's members. It can be assumed that their voice, due to their prestige, is quite significant.

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The structure of this elite has undergone major changes in recent years due to two significant reforms. The first, carried out by Pope John Paul II in 1992, increased the number of dioceses to 41 in order to bring Church structures closer to local communities. Today, almost every major city has its own bishop.

The second major change, toward greater collegiality in the Church, came in 2009 under the pontificate of Benedict XVI. The position of primate became purely honorary—it is now just a title. The primate lost his authority over the local Church, and many of his functions were taken over by a collective body (Dyduch 2013). Seen from another angle, this significantly affected the position of the Church in the country. The primate has always been of great political importance in Poland. He used

to be the second person in the state, right after the king. During an interregnum, he formally replaced the king (as “interrex”). In the past, there have been many prominent primates who acted as informal leaders during periods of partition or other difficult times for the country. They also played a significant role in recent Polish history. Without the support of the Church, the Round Table Agreements, which made regime change possible, might not have happened. The Church’s support played a major role in the opposition’s victory in the first parliamentary and local elections. Even today, despite the decline in the Church’s authority—as a result of scandals associated with it or the weakening importance of religion—the Church is still a significant actor, although it does not flaunt its influence. The Church’s high position gives rise to the expectation that it will use its voice in crisis situations. Therefore, the Church takes a stand on domestic and foreign policy issues.

The Church seems to be acting under the pressure of its awkward situation. It cannot openly support the Law and Justice party, as this could cause moderate and liberal Catholics to leave the Church. The Episcopate cannot disassociate itself from the party, lest it lose ties with the majority of the members of the Church and the ordinary clergy.

ELEMENTS OF TRADITIONALISM—THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE ELITE

One of the elements of tradition and continuity is the strong masculinization of the political elite. The role of women there

is still too small. Although there have been three female prime ministers in Poland, as well as a female presidential candidate put forward, it can be said that they owed their positions to political weakness rather than strength. Due to their lack of clear individuality and political background, they were considered suitable for bringing together diverse coalitions and could run for or hold key positions in the state without threatening those politicians who controlled their parties. The law of increasing disproportionality is also evident in regard to women in various political scenes—the higher the level, the fewer of them there are (Gendźwił 2020: 217–218).

The same applies to parliament. The increasing share of women can be seen more on electoral lists than in parliament itself. The jump in the share of women on the lists is related to the introduction of mandatory quotas. It has caused some growth but not a revolution (Table 8).

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TABLE 8. THE SHARE OF WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT FROM 1985 TO 2019 (IN %)

	1985	1989	1991	1993	1997	2001	2005	2007	2011	2015	2019
cand.	21.2	12.5	12.9	13.1	16.0	23.0	24.5	22.9	43.5	42.4	42.1
MP	20.3	13.3	9.6	13.0	13.8	20.2	20.4	20.4	23.9	27.2	28.7

Source: for the period 1985–1993, after Dubrow 2013–2016. For the period 1997–2019, own calculations based on the data from the Polish National Electoral Commission.

The systemic change initially caused a decline in women's participation in local and national politics. This was, however, only an apparent decline, as it resulted from the departure from the so-called key, that is, the mechanical filling of quotas in formally

elected bodies. Behind the change was the presumed conservatism of society because the new elites, fighting to seize power from the communists, were afraid to take risks in this direction.

However, this is changing, albeit slowly. The shift in attitudes toward women's presence in politics is confirmed by survey data. In the 2017 European Values Survey (EVS), 82.6% of Poles agreed that it is a feature of democracy that women have the same rights as men, while 69.2% considered such equality to be a fundamental feature of democracy. The principle of gender equality is associated with democracy and is even the principle that enjoys the most public support.

Both the example of the local scene and the composition of the parliament indicate a gradual change of a permanent nature. Since the first free elections, public attitudes have changed significantly. There is a noticeable increase in women's participation in all areas of local government. We also observe an increase in the number of female local government executives (Table 9), also at the lowest level—among village leaders (*sołtys*). Although it should be noted that the countryside represents the more conservative part of society, even there, prejudice is fading, and greater tolerance is setting in (Matysiak 2015).

TABLE 9. THE SHARE OF WOMEN AMONG VILLAGE MAYORS, TOWN MAYORS, AND CITY MAYORS (IN %)

	1990	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010	2014	2018
Female local government executives	4.6	5.9	5.5	6.7	7.9	9.1	10.7	11.7

Source: own calculations.

Since 2015, Poland has seen two mass women's demonstrations against the tightening of the abortion law. The protests received wide publicity, and the women were supported by the majority of the public opinion. The women's demands are likely to be met if the ruling party loses in the upcoming parliamentary elections. However, the abortion issue does not reduce support for the ruling party among Polish women, which is probably due to that party's social program.

CONCLUSION

The current Polish elites are in crisis. In present-day Poland, it is rather difficult to speak of the form of the elite postulated by Higley's theory of democracy. The Polish political elite does not form a consolidated elite conducive to such a democracy. It is not just a question of how a democratic elite is formed but also how it develops a certain way of doing things. Such habits are considered necessary for the effective operation and stability of new political forms such as democracy (Wasilewski 1998). A democratic elite, especially a normatively consolidated elite, is a condition for a mature and sustainable democracy (Burton, Gunther, Higley 1993; Higley 2010).

Currently, the main factor shaping the Polish political scene is populism, which is simultaneously destroying it. Although populism in various forms has been part of the Polish political scene from the very beginning, populist leaders first came to power only in 2005, then lost power after two years (Wasilewski 2010). In 2015, they gained power again and are now enjoying

a second term in office. Since 2015, this factor has shaped the political scene and, consequently, the image of the power elite.

The rise of populism was fostered by conjunctural factors, as well as by more permanent and profound elements. The emergence of such a movement is not atypical for Poland, and it is significant that it has gained considerable public support. The specific conjuncture that favored it was also important: first, there was a temporary economic improvement, then a pandemic, and now an external threat. This has allowed Polish populism to function for quite a long time in spite of the strategic requirements of the rules of power and in violation of the constitutional law and the laws of economics.

Observers of the political scene also associate changes in the political culture of the elite with a transition period in politics—mainly in the second generation of the post-“Solidarity” elite and its identity. Andrzej Brzezicki, a researcher of biographies of the recent political elite, points out that in Polish politics today, active politicians, that is, those who set the tone, are persons who, although they started in anti-communist movements, occupied secondary rather than leading positions during the transition period. The change of the system provided them with opportunities, often by accident, through the defeat of more promising but also more ambitious and impatient colleagues. Circumstances, not their own value, paved the way for them. At the same time, the path of natural political succession was disrupted. Another factor is formative experience. Brzezicki sees its repercussions in two strong, common traits among politicians on both sides of the barricade: their attitude

to religion and to expertise. They are not as firmly grounded in fundamental values as the leading politicians of the first generation. Hence their nihilistic and instrumental attitude to these values (as indicated, for instance, by having a church wedding for political purposes before an important election campaign). Another manifestation is the lack of scruples about using politics for personal gain. Politicians' political experience includes participation in protests and demonstrations—a world in which they feel comfortable and which for them is comprehensible and transparent. Despite having been in politics for many years, political “mandarinism” is alien to them. They are not accustomed to thinking about politics in terms of a broader European or global perspective. They do not appreciate the importance of the rules of the political game. They do not understand the importance of institutions. Kaczyński with his populism has shown the possibility of a politics based on simple tricks and without the need for broader programs. In addition, the new politicians are dependent on leaders, because only leaders can ensure their political existence (Brzeziecki 2020).

A significant characteristic of the current political scene is the persistent and strong conflict among the elites. Poland's political elites are divided according to various ideological, political, and personal criteria. They are characterized by a permanent struggle between their structures, for instance, between the Civic Platform party and the Law and Justice party. The opponent is treated as an enemy with whom one cannot talk, only fight. Polish political elites are quarrelsome, have a selfish understanding of the common good, and underestimate the

role of compromise and cooperation in the smooth functioning of the state. This situation hinders consensual, pragmatic problem-solving. It also has other consequences. As Andrzej Werblan (2009: 52) writes of demoralization through conflict and struggle, “Every civil war is cruel and demoralizing, but such a derivative pseudo-revolutionary ‘war’ demoralizes in two ways. While fighting a real opponent can also build resistance and teach respect for others, retaliation and persecution only teach hatred and cunning.”

The above review of the state of Poland’s political elite may seem pessimistic; nevertheless, the Polish political scene is quite unstable, and thus change is possible, including for the better.

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NEW ELITES, OLD PRACTICES? VOLODYMYR ZELENSKYY'S RULE IN PRE-FULL SCALE-WAR UKRAINE IN RELATION TO PIERRE BOURDIEU'S THEORY OF PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

The paper analyses Ukraine's fields of power, focusing on the informal practices of newly elected (in 2019) President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, as well as the parliamentary elites that came to power in the same year, given that the role of the Supreme Rada was supposed to be strengthened after the Maidan revolution. Referring to Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practices, the article attempts to answer the question of whether institutional changes, together with a substantial renewal of political elites, resulted in a change in informal practices and ultimately led to a change in the rules of the game in the public sphere and behind the scenes, or whether the continuity of old ways of coping, time-proven decision-making strategies, and informal hierarchies prevailed even under the new conditions.

KEYWORDS: political elites, parliamentary elites, Pierre Bourdieu, theory of practices, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, informal practices, Supreme Rada

INTRODUCTION

Volodymyr Zelenskyy's rise to power in 2019, in both presidential and parliamentary elections, heralded the beginning of a new era in Ukrainian politics. Faced with massive disappointment with the old elites, who seemed too prosperous, powerful, and experienced to give up the existing corruptive practices even after the Maidan revolution, the new president with no political background actively reassured voters that "new faces" and goodwill would be enough to change the existing practices, fight corruption, and even deoligarchize Ukrainian politics. Therefore, immediately after winning the presidential race, Zelenskyy dissolved the parliament, bringing into it people who had never been there before.

It bears noting that a substantial renewal of the parliamentary elites had already taken place after the Maidan revolution, which brought 64% of new deputies in 2014. A wave of huge disappointment followed after a while. It became clear that new people do not necessarily bring change and make a difference when they are managed by the old elites. Moreover, it turned out that it was even easier to manipulate and take advantage of the so-called "new faces," as these MPs did not know how to operate effectively in the Supreme Rada, which relied on informal practices and a set of rules that were known only to a select circle of experienced deputies.

Despite the fact that after the Maidan revolution, the role of the Supreme Rada was supposed to be strengthened, the post-Maidan President, Petro Poroshenko, *de facto* managed

to maintain his influence over the Parliament through informal mechanisms. Zelenskyy did exactly the same. Although he lacked a political background and experience in politics, he was quickly shown how to navigate the existing political system with a set of informal practices. The fact that his “Servant of the People” party was able to form a coalition and consisted of “new faces” made this task easier than ever.

The present study is a continuation of my earlier research on the social practices of the parliamentary elites in Ukraine from 2002 to 2016 in relation to Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of practices, habitus, capitals, and fields, which I conducted in the Ukrainian parliament. It was based on ethnographic observation, as well as semi-structured interviews with 55 respondents (mainly MPs’ assistants, but also MPs, parliamentary correspondents, spin doctors who worked for certain MPs) (Iwaniuk 2020). Those interviews dealt in general with the various practices associated with being an MP in Ukraine, and specifically with strategies for achieving goals and being effective in the parliament, particularly in committees. The questions also referred to the time needed to familiarize oneself with both the formal and informal rules of parliamentary activity and to most difficult and demanding parts of an MP’s job, paying special attention to working with parliamentary assistants. The interviews also focused on MPs’ lifestyles, their relations with each other, their logic and understanding of unwritten rules (doxa), their motivations and off-stage behavior.

For the purposes of the current study, a few additional interviews were conducted, namely with two MPs from the

“Servant of the People” party, one journalist (parliamentary correspondent), and two MPs’ assistants from Petro Poroshenko’s “European Solidarity” party and the “Holos” party.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Through the lens of Bourdieu’s approach, we can look at the production and reproduction of power by political elites, which provides a broader understanding of why ruling elites continue to reproduce the same old practices and remain resistant to radical change. According to Bourdieu’s theory of practices, practices are considered the result of an unconscious relationship between a habitus and a field, as illustrated by the following equation: $[(\text{habitus})(\text{capital})] + \text{field} = \text{practice}$ (Grenfell 2014).

Over the past few decades, the Ukrainian parliament has seen a predominance of informal practices over formal ones, which has to do with the habitus of members of the political elites, i.e., the dispositions they bring to politics, acquired in previous professional experiences, lifestyles, and political culture.

The theory of practices helps capture some of the heritability of behavioral strategies; the way decisions are made and the logic behind them; as well as the way of thinking and motivation that makes the elites keep old practices in place. Bourdieu demonstrates why it is so difficult to change practices and move to a new stage of development, not only for the elites, but for society as a whole (Swartz 2012).

THE *SENS PRATIQUE* OF THE SUPREME RADA

In this regard, the atmosphere in the Supreme Rada, as well as its *sens pratique*—its hierarchies, its set of formal and informal rules, and their impact on the behavior and practices of MPs—are of high importance. The implications are that throughout its history, the parliament has been a front for networking and an elite club rather than the representative body it is supposed to be. According to the respondents, there is an atmosphere of a paradoxical mix of suspiciousness and no-holds-barred competition. On the one hand, MPs seem to constantly fear imprisonment, while on the other, many feel free to text with their business partners, patrons, or supervisors right on the voting floor in the limelight, which has caused many political and personal scandals. No less shocking are the practices of instrumentalized disorder and violence, described in detail by Ioulia Shukan (2013).

Overall, formal institutions such as the Supreme Rada, the Cabinet of Ministers, and the Office of the President function according to two parallel codes. While they are formally governed by written law, in reality, they conduct informal practices. Formal legislation is never fully implemented, and the social contract consists of a series of shadow rules (Minakov 2016).

Some of the practices have been brought to the parliament from the earlier, pre-political careers of certain MPs and are the result of their propensity for bringing particular dispositions to politics, acquired in those previous career paths, such as running large companies, factories, dealing with gangs, doing

business, etc. The practices of elites should be complemented by an understanding of their motivations and the reasons why they chose to run for politics, e.g., the need to solve business problems, access to networking, clientelism, parliamentary privilege, immunity of MPs, representing the interests of oligarchs, making a difference, etc.

I am shifting from business to politics (without giving up business) because I do not want to lose everything I have earned and achieved over the past ten years.¹

Most Ukrainian politicians and businessmen started making money when values were not an issue, so no one heeded them. These people are still mentally escaping poverty. This is why they are terrified of losing their money, status, and lifestyle, while simultaneously they love expensive attributes: watches, cars, luxury mansions, etc.²

Against the backdrop of a post-colonial and post-communist heritage, oligarchic groups of regional origin have emerged that focus mainly on defending their own economic interests. They do not think in terms of national interest and what is beneficial to society. They often lack national identity, and many have been influenced by external actors (Vozniak 2006).

As for the common characteristics of political elites in Ukraine, they include sacralization and personification of power; adherence to and reproduction of nepotism and clientelism; lack of transparency in decision-making processes; lack

¹ Author's interview with a member of the "European Solidarity" party, Kyiv, December 20, 2019.

² Author's interview with a spin doctor, Kyiv, May 10, 2019.

of political accountability; lack of shared values and a national idea; dominance of conflict rhetoric and behavior; prevalence of informal practices over formal ones (Matsiievskyy 2016).

LACK OF SUBSIDIARITY IN THE PARLIAMENT

Work in the Supreme Rada is organized in a way that leaves plenty of room for favoritism, clientelism, nepotism, and corruption practices at all levels. First of all, there is no principle of subsidiarity in the parliament, which forces MPs and their assistants to direct all their demands and problem-solving to the highest possible level, which in turn leads to abuse of office wherever possible. For instance, even in the case of a simple need for a parking place, a parliamentary assistant should submit a request to the head of the parliamentary apparatus. This person, in turn, is accused, among other things, of being responsible for fake purchases of new furniture and computers that never reached the Supreme Rada. As many journalistic investigations and the respondents' comments indicate, many frauds occur when it comes to material and technical support for the functioning of the parliament, as well as anything relating to the benefits and privileges of MPs (such as the right to free housing; state-owned villas; unreasonably expensive renovations in their parliamentary offices; communicating among themselves via secret telephone lines financed by budget money; free stays at health resorts, which usually benefit not the MPs themselves but their assistants or other people close to them; and many other things).

OLD VS NEW PRACTICES IN THE PARLIAMENT

One of Ukraine's biggest institutional problems, which creates other problems in elites' relations, is the ambiguity of power and authority between the Supreme Rada, the president, and the prime minister. The unclear division of power has already caused several deep political crises and has been the biggest institutional challenge to political stabilization (Gallina 2008). Several institutional compromises were made to resolve the political crisis, such as the political reform of 2004, when amendments to the Constitution were adopted to transform Ukraine's political system from presidential-parliamentary to parliamentary-presidential. This political reform was cancelled in a few years when the next president, Viktor Yanukovych, came to power, trying to consolidate power by all means. Although the 2004 political reform returned after the Maidan revolution, the competition for power between the Supreme Rada, the president, and the prime minister continued.

The previous parliament convocation was characterized by numerous efforts by the president to use his influence over MPs in order to steer the political process in the desired direction. Practices that took place included the use of parliamentary fixers to gather votes for presidential laws; the mass bribery of MPs in exchange for voting for certain laws; and the active cooperation between the presidential party, "Petro Poroshenko Bloc," and oligarchic groups in the parliament, such as "Vidrodzhennia" and "Volya Narodu," which compensated for the lack of a stable

coalition and provided President Poroshenko with additional votes in exchange for the preferential treatment of oligarchs in state companies and budget resources. Moreover, the former Head of the Supreme Rada, presidential appointee Volodymyr Hroisman, used such illegal practices as signal voting (voting on a draft law multiple times in a row until it is passed, which directly contradicts the Regulations of the Supreme Court), putting pressure on parliamentary groups, negotiating with oligarchs, voting at night, etc.

It bears noting that those informal practices had been inherited by Poroshenko's people from their predecessors, some of whom still remain in the Supreme Rada, even after many new deputies have entered it, promising to start from scratch. There are still politicians who know the internal codes and informal rules that allow them to achieve their political goals as quickly and effectively as possible, although their number is dwindling. Especially against the backdrop of the new wave of fresh and young parliamentarians who had very little knowledge of efficient parliamentary practices and no political experience. This is one of the reasons why, despite the high percentage of new faces, many old practices have persisted in the Supreme Rada.

Although with the coming to power of new elites, there were expectations of establishing new rules—this time formal rather than informal, as Bourdieu's theory suggests—it turns out that the new people are more inclined to pick up old practices (especially under the existing institutional framework) rather than set up new ones. It is noteworthy that similar expectations appeared already during the two “windows of opportunity,” the

first after the Orange Revolution with the presidency of Viktor Yushchenko and the new institutional framework in place, and the second after the Revolution of Dignity with the presidency of Petro Poroshenko and many new faces in the parliament. In both cases, informal practices prevailed over formal ones.

THE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT OF UKRAINE AS A DECISION-MAKING CENTER

All Ukrainian presidents attempted to find a way to weaken the Supreme Rada and strengthen their own position through a set of both formal and informal practices. Volodymyr Zelenskyy has not been an exception to this rule. The first “guide” who instructed the new president how to do it was an ill-reputed lawyer, related to a notorious oligarch Ihor Kolomoisky (who allegedly encouraged Zelenskyy to enter politics), Andrii Bohdan.

Despite the fact that Zelenskyy quickly and efficiently caught up on previous practices, for effect, the Presidential Administration was immediately renamed the Office of the President of Ukraine, and an unsuccessful attempt was made to relocate it. Seeking to adhere to new transparent principles in politics, Zelenskyy tried to disassociate himself from his predecessors in the public spotlight, while in reality, he was quickly learning how to reproduce such practices as clientelism, nepotism, manual party management, non-transparent relations with media, persecution of anti-corruption activists, and many others.

The significance of the change in the reputation of the presidential administration lay in the fact that, for a reason, it was associated with the centralization of power, the supervision of activities of various bodies, and back-door deals. Throughout the history of independent Ukraine, this institution has been considered a decision-making center that exercised much more power than it had been formally granted. Consequently, the chief of the Administration used to be regarded as the President's right hand and thus second in command. The influence of this forefront political player on the president can hardly be overestimated, which makes the head of the Administration/Office extremely powerful. All the more so when the president has neither a political background nor experience and knowledge.

Bohdan, Zelenskyy's new head of the Office of the President, was someone who linked the new president to the notorious oligarch Kolomoisky (Bohdan used to be his personal lawyer). Notably, Bohdan used to work in the first and second governments of Mykola Azarov during the presidency of Viktor Yanukovych, but immediately after the Maidan revolution, he found himself on the party lists of the Petro Poroshenko Bloc, after which he once again changed political camps and finally joined Zelenskyy's team. Such a political career means that Bohdan not only was an opportunist and lacked a moral backbone but, most importantly, possessed a fairly wide range of connections across the political spectrum, which made him an ideal candidate for continuing old practices and securing back-door deals. It is also worth noting that due to having held office

under Yanukovych, Bohdan was subject to lustration and should have been removed from public office for at least 10 years. However, after the Presidential Administration was renamed the Office of the President, its employees were exempted from the lustration law, which allowed Bohdan to become its head despite the loss of reputation and mass public disapproval.

From the very beginning of his term, Bohdan has caused numerous scandals. He was accused by investigative journalists of forcing the State Bureau of Investigation to begin the illegal persecution of the fifth President of Ukraine, Petro Poroshenko, and members of his team. Another scandal pertained to his involvement in offshore and loan scams, as well as his ownership of large plots of land in a luxury area that he had bought while working in the civil service. On top of that, while serving as the Head of Zelenskyy's Office, Bohdan secretly met with his long-time client oligarch Kolomoisky, even though he publicly claimed to have distanced himself from him.

The way Bohdan was managing the affairs in the Office of the President meant not only reproducing old practices, but also influencing and even manipulating the new president, who did not understand the behind-the-scenes processes, so he could not control or challenge them. There have been multiple photographs of Bohdan standing or sitting behind Zelenskyy at public events, whispering something in his ear.

As is often the case in Ukrainian politics, the Head of the Presidential Administration/the Office of the President supervised the Supreme Rada in order to make sure that the coalition would vote the right way. To this end, Bohdan used informal

practices and tools of influence. As the people interviewed during this research claim, Bohdan often behaved in a very rude manner when talking to MPs, emphasizing that they “were nobodies and did not have a say in anything.”³

Not letting anything get in his way, Andriy Bohdan often used swear words, changed his responses, and even shouted at people. Because of such behavior, Bohdan clashed with the Speaker of Parliament at the time, Dmytro Razumkov, as the latter was not used to such communication.⁴

It was also Bohdan who invented the so-called “turbo-speed” regime, that is, the lightning-fast pace of the legislative process, which in practice meant passing laws one after the other, without careful deliberation and with violations of procedures. It got to the point where 34 laws were passed by more than 300 votes in a single plenary day. Such practices not only drew the fire of fierce public criticism but also triggered resistance and resentment from the “Servant of the People” party’s own members, including the then Speaker of Parliament.

In addition to the hastiness of the decision-making process, staff turnover, and lack of competent personnel, there were other practices that became commonplace during the first two years of Zelenskyy’s administration. After only nine months in office, Bohdan himself was replaced by another controversial figure, Andriy Yermak, who as the Head of the Office conducted very similar practices as Bohdan and quickly became not only Zelenskyy’s right-hand man but the second most powerful person in the country.

³ Author’s interview with a member of the “Servant of the People” party, Kyiv, January 2020.

⁴ Author’s interview with a member of the “Servant of the People” party, Kyiv, January 2020.

Although Yermak's reputation was better than that of his predecessors, his biography was nevertheless filled with facts that were not favorable to Zelenskyy. For instance, Yermak used to be an assistant to an MP from Yanukovych's "Party of Regions" for three consecutive convocations; he allegedly did business with Russians from Vladimir Putin's inner circle; and, to top it all off, a scandal erupted shortly after his appointment, which involved his younger brother trading public posts. Another controversy surrounding Yermak was caused by the fact that he appointed the ill-reputed Oleh Tatarov as his deputy. The latter is another Yanukovych-era official who sided with the Berkut against protesters during the Maidan revolution and used to work for disgraced, corrupted, and pro-Russian politicians. Despite the public outcry, Tatarov not only retained his post in the Office of the President but was also put in charge of supervising the law enforcement agencies.

STRICT PARTY DISCIPLINE

As seen above, the "old elites" that surrounded Zelenskyy were able to consolidate power, especially when the President's "Servant of the People" party was full of inexperienced, mostly young and often naïve members. Zelenskyy's party won the largest number of seats in the parliament in the history of Ukrainian parliamentarism: 124 MPs entered the Supreme Rada from the party list, and another 130 people's deputies were elected by the first-past-the-post system.

It bears noting that most of these people neither had a clear sense of how parliament functions nor felt strongly about their specific responsibilities. Under these conditions, Zelenskyy's team decided to use strict party discipline to control the faction. There was even an attempt to push through legislation that would allow disobedient MPs to be expelled from the faction and even from Parliament. The faction leader of the "Servant of the People" party, Davyd Arakhamia, repeatedly argued that a so-called imperative mandate should be adopted, explaining the necessity to make people's deputies blindly obey the decisions of the party bosses by his experience in business, which he used to run before entering politics.

When I was in business, I employed many people, about 2,000. I conducted individual interviews, both for hiring and firing. I realized that 2 out of 10 hired people would be laid off, which is normal. The most important thing is to realize this as soon as possible, identify these people, and "correct the mistake," while in Parliament, you only have a chance to do this once every five years, which is not right. ("Davyd Arakhamiia" 2022)

Such "business approach" to politics, which is shared by Zelenskyy himself and his close associates, is quite telling. Aiming for efficiency at all costs, doing politics the same way as business, the new ruling elites do not understand the whole point of following democratic procedures on the way to achieving political goals. While their predecessors at least realized the need for democratic procedures (even if they often broke them), Zelenskyy's business colleagues, who have become high-profile politicians, honestly do not see the point in sticking to procedures for the sake of efficiency.

Therefore, following the logic of the above-mentioned leader of the faction, Arakhamia, the parliament would lose its key function and become an institutional body that merely confirms decisions made elsewhere. Interestingly, this vision alludes to the way the Supreme Rada functioned during the Soviet era when it only maintained the facade of a democratic institution.

From the way the “Servant of the People” party operates from within, punishing those who disobey, question the decisions of party leaders, or have their own dissenting opinions, it can be inferred that the party lacks democratic procedures and is managed from the top down, while in most cases its members merely confirm decisions made by someone else.

As a result, the discipline of the current, 9th convocation parliament has improved significantly compared to the previous ones. Moreover, the “Servant of the People” party turned out to be the most disciplined party in the history of Ukrainian parliamentarianism. In the first two years of its presence in the Supreme Rada, its MPs took part in 83% of all voting procedures and even up to 90% when the voting concerned high appointments (Stavniichuk 2021).

WHAT IS DIFFERENT THIS TIME?

The most widespread practices to secure votes in previous convocations were the distribution of money in envelopes, barter deals, blackmail, and the so-called “piano playing” (voting more than once, including for absent colleagues, which used to be one of the most common practices). For years, deputies refused

to prohibit it, impose any punishment for “piano playing,” or introduce a technological solution to the problem. In the conducted interviews, some MPs admitted that they had to vote for their absent colleagues in order to secure votes amid mass absenteeism of deputies, especially on certain days (like Friday).

Our faction (Petro Poroshenko Bloc) often votes for other people because we want to pass new good laws, while our coalition partners have become the opposition.⁵

It is worth noting that the architecture of the Rada’s electronic voting system has been built in such a way that a deputy can vote from anywhere in the session hall by simply inserting a card and pressing the button. Although it was technically possible to eliminate this practice, political will was lacking. The new MPs minimized “piano playing” by adopting a corresponding law in December 2019, which provides for criminal liability and sets a substantial fine for violations. Moreover, in 2021, for the first time in the history of Ukrainian parliamentarianism, one MP was held legally accountable for voting on behalf of another deputy. Finally, in March 2021, a technical solution was implemented that put an end to one of the most widespread and long-standing practices in the Supreme Rada.

Noteworthy, the elimination of voting for others has brought changes to another common practice typical of all previous convocations, namely mass absenteeism. Due to the fact that since December 2019, MPs can only vote in person, their

⁵ Author’s interview with a member of the “European Solidarity” party, Kyiv, December 20, 2019.

attendance in the Supreme Rada has increased significantly, which has had a positive impact on the quality of their work in parliamentary committees.

Another practice that has been minimized, if not eliminated, are the so-called envelope salaries, given either for a certain vote or as a monthly payment for loyalty and discipline, which also have a long history in the parliament. As far as the “Servant of the People” faction is concerned, such a practice is no longer used, or at least is no longer common, and ordinary MPs do not receive money in envelopes alongside their salaries.

NEPOTISM AND CLIENTELISM

However, such practices as clientelism and nepotism have lingered in Ukrainian political life, and their scale is still quite large. Moreover, in the 9th convocation, the practice of appointing people close to the president despite their lack of competence reached its peak. Zelenskyy promoted a few dozen of his childhood friends and colleagues from his previous job, the TV entertainment production company Kvartal 95 Studio, to the highest positions, such as party leader, faction leader, head of the Security Office, head of the anti-monopoly committee, assistant to the President, etc.

In addition, many people with ties to the presidential family and business through the Kvartal 95 Studio and the comedy shows produced by it have become people’s deputies from the president’s party. Notably, they almost never speak in the parliament and loyally support Zelenskyy’s legislative initiatives.

At the same time, there are significant capability gaps due to the lack of competent cadres, which have quickly become a key problem and have caused turbulence and frequent staff turnover.

THE LARGE NUMBER OF DRAFT LAWS AND “AMENDMENT SPAM”

Typically, only 10–12% of draft laws become laws. It is a widespread practice in the Supreme Rada to register as many bills as possible without a strong motivation to get them adopted by the parliament. What the MPs want is to show personal “efficiency,” which they often measure by the number of submitted bills, when in reality, an inadequately large number of bills registered every year to create the impression of efficiency is rather counterproductive. A concern is that MPs can easily register numerous bills, often violating parliamentary procedures, and that they lack long-term planning practices and well-established communication among themselves in the parliament. From the beginning of the 9th convocation’s term on August 29, 2019, until July 1, 2021, MPs submitted more than 3,000 draft laws, but not many of them were passed (Stavniichuk 2021). It is worth noting that most of the legislation was registered by parliamentarians.

In the previous convocation, almost 76% of all registered bills and 56% of passed bills were simply amendments to existing laws. Also in the present convocation, most of the new bills introduce changes to the existing ones, e.g., in 2020, there were over 1,500 amendments to the legislation on land

ownership. Overall, from July 2019 to July 2021, 5,309 votes for amendments were held, accounting for 57% of all votes.

There is a belief that everything must be resolved by the parliament. In addition, quick decision-making prevails. A new bill is considered by many MPs to be a panacea for all ills, which is obviously not true. In fact, the tsunami of bills in the Rada is one of the reasons why the institution is so ineffective and on its way to eventually losing people's trust.⁶

PARTY DICTATORSHIP

Running a mono-coalition proved more difficult for its leaders than first thought. The main emphasis was put on discipline, loyalty, and obedience. Instead of distributing money in envelopes in exchange for votes, there was psychological pressure, the threat of expulsion from the faction, and the prospect of public humiliation and media attacks. The leader of the "Servant of the People" faction in the parliament did his best to maintain tight control over his "charges" in order to facilitate the passing of laws and ensure the implementation of "recommendations" coming from the Office of the President.

Before the start of the new convocation, the "Servant of the People" faction was randomly divided into 15 groups, each consisting of 15–20 deputies. The leaders of these groups were also randomly selected by the party leaders and the Office of the President. Each group had its own group chat on WhatsApp, where the group leader would send the agenda, suggestions

⁶ Author's interview with a political consultant, Kyiv, January 2020.

for draft laws, information about the faction's plans, recommendations from the Office of the President, and the Cabinet of Ministers' position on the legislation.

One of the most important tasks of the group leaders was to relay group sentiments to the faction leadership, which in turn relayed them to the Office of the President. The leaders of the "Servant of the People" faction are in constant contact with the Office of the President. Its Head demands that the coalition passes all bills that come from the Office of the President and the Cabinet of Ministers as quickly as possible, ignoring the fact that regulations are being broken and that deputies need to at least read what they are supposed to vote for.

In the first weeks of the new convocation's term, the newly elected members of the "Servant of the People" faction indeed unquestioningly carried out whatever Zelenskyy and his team wanted, but at a certain point, they began to resist. Firstly, they did not like the practice of adopting laws which they had not had a chance to see before voting. Secondly, the deputies did not want to impose a so-called imperative mandate, which would make any disobedience punishable and could end with the MP not only being expelled from the faction but also losing their seat in the parliament. Thirdly, they found themselves under the public spotlight. Finally, they did not like the idea of being nobodies.

Although the "Servant of the People" faction responsibly attended meetings and took part in voting during its first two years in power, the MPs managed to pass only a third of the draft laws in the second reading. Moreover, 64 presidential

legislative initiatives did not receive a sufficient number of votes from the members of his party.

CONCLUSION

The very idea that fresh faces would establish new practices and implement crucial changes in the existing system was illusory and had already failed once after the Revolution of Dignity when the Supreme Rada was filled with many idealistically disposed people who quickly realized how little they could do without teamwork, experience, connections, and leverage, and how easily many of them had been manipulated by more experienced colleagues who knew the informal rules of the game and how to achieve their goals in the most efficient way. High expectations were not met after Zelenskyy and his team came to power, as double standards were very often applied, while lack of experience and understanding of the situation was used to push things in the desired direction.

President Zelenskyy's lack of political experience did not stop him from repeating the conduct of his predecessors, who tried to strengthen their position through informal practices. Having enlisted inexperienced, often naïve and unknown politicians in the "Servant of the People" party in exchange for their loyalty and obedience, Zelenskyy, on the one hand, surrounded himself with old-timers in politics, who could advise him on how to consolidate power and use his leverage and, on the other hand, with his childhood friends, business partners, and acquaintances, who would ensure authority.

The conclusion is that Zelenskyy has chosen a very similar way to his predecessors to govern the country by building a vertical, where the Office of the President would pursue its agenda despite being limited by democratic procedures and use informal practices (both old and new) to achieve its goals.

The full-scale Russian aggression on Ukraine has undoubtedly brought some changes to the functioning of the Ukrainian political system. While this topic in itself deserves a separate article, it is worth mentioning here that effectiveness in implementing democratic principles does not necessarily coincide with the role of a charismatic and dedicated leader, as Volodymyr Zelenskyy has proven to be.

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THE FIELD OF POWER IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA— A PRELIMINARY DESCRIPTION

ABSTRACT

The article aims to describe the contemporary Russian political elite using the perspective of the field proposed by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. A major challenge in the attempt to describe the Russian elite nowadays is the limited access to information about its members, compounded by the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and the resulting censorship. The perspective of the field, which so far has not been comprehensively applied to describe Russia's socio-political reality, turned out to be of use, as it allows structuring deliberations on the elite and formulating a precise, scientific description. For the purposes of the research, open sources were used: official documents, information from the media, and expert reports. The institutional and hierarchical approach together with the author's subject matter expertise were used to select 40 representatives of the narrow political elite in Russia as of 2022, who were subjected to a partial demographic and socio-biographical analysis. In the course of the research, it was proven that the selected group is quite homogeneous in terms of age, gender (with a crushing overrepresentation of men), and level of education. As for the structure of the field, several professional sub-fields were distinguished within it—mainly representatives of services, business, professional officials. The main feature linking these figures is the fact that they have President Vladimir Putin's personal trust, which was identified to be the main force in the field. Given the key importance of the personal relations of individual members of the elite with President Putin, the weakening of his role in the

regime, and especially his removal from office, would undermine the entire structure of the field of power in Russia.

KEYWORDS: capital, field theory, field of power, elite, Russia, social structure

INTRODUCTION

The article aims to describe the contemporary Russian power elite using the perspective of the field proposed by French researcher Pierre Bourdieu. A major challenge in studying the Russian elites nowadays is the limited access to information about them, only compounded by the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and the resulting censorship. Another obstacle are the often secret personal and environmental criteria that determine membership in Russia's narrow ruling elite. Also of great importance is the failure of the institutional criterion at the stage of selecting members of the elite—i.e., the fact that in the Kremlin's authoritarian and even, as some researchers argue, partly totalitarian system of power, the formal position and real importance of individuals and institutions often do not coincide; it is informal relationships that are the foundation of shaping the field of power.

The field perspective of the social structure proposed by Bourdieu makes it possible to minimize the negative impact of these factors on the description of the elite. The field perspective, which so far has not been comprehensively used to depict Russian socio-political reality, may prove useful, as it allows structuring the deliberations on the elite and formulating

a precise, scientific description, even taking into account specific Russian conditions. The description obtained in this way differs from journalistic and expert discussions present in the public sphere in that it is more structured, embedded in a specific research perspective, which makes it more objective. This initial description of the elite is one of many possible ways of describing a social group that is perceived as having an influence on the political and social life of the state.

The aim of this research is to answer the questions of who are the members of the Russian elite, what are their demographic and social characteristics, and what are the main relations and divisions in the narrowly understood field of power in Russia. The objective is therefore to determine, using reasoning categories proposed by Bourdieu, the structure of this field as well as its main characteristics. A wide variety of open sources of information—official state documents, information from media outlets, as well as expert reports—were used for the study.

The institutional and hierarchical approach and the author's subject matter expertise were used to select 40 representatives of Russia's narrow political elite as of 2022, who were then subjected to a partial demographic and socio-biographical analysis. The focus was primarily on age, gender, education, and the connections between the chosen individuals and President Vladimir Putin, who is considered to be the key figure in the Russian power system. The preliminary conclusions of the study are described in the summary.

FIELD ANALYSIS AND THE ELITE

An elite (French: *élite*, from Latin: *eligere* = to select or pick out), according to the Cambridge Dictionary, is “the richest, most powerful, best-educated, or best-trained group in a society.” It is also defined as “those people or organizations that are considered the best or most powerful compared to others of a similar type.”¹ In political and sociological theory, an elite is a narrow group of people who are perceived to be superior in some respect to the rest of the society, have more political power, wealth, privilege than others in the group or society.

The sociological theory of elites is the key reference point for this research. Its most important concept is the phenomenon of the political elite, which, according to the approach systematized by Polish sociologist Włodzimierz Wesołowski, is closely related to the concept of power. He claims that “the power elite is a product of the political structure of society. It includes those who take part in the process of shaping and making state decisions. Their power consists either in their ability to exert direct influence on those who make decisions or in their participation in the decision-making process itself” (Wesołowski 1974: 83). This interpretation of the power elite refers to the earlier considerations of other elite researchers—world-renowned sociologists such as Pareto, Mosca, and Mills. Importantly, according to Wesołowski, the power elite is an element of not only the formal but also the informal structure of society, which ultimately leads to the distinction of two

¹ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/elite>.

groups within the elite: those who take part in making political decisions (decision-makers) and influential individuals, cliques, and pressure groups without formal political status, who directly influence decisions in the state (Wesołowski 1974: 84–86).

A very interesting and innovative concept of elites was proposed by Bourdieu in his theory of social structure. In his understanding, social structure is a multidimensional space in which individuals with different capitals move along different tracks. Central to this system are relationships.² Bourdieu proposes a distinction between several types of capital: economic, cultural, social, and symbolic—these categories can be used to describe the position of individuals in society. The main definition of the concept of capital for the purpose of this article is the one formulated by Bourdieu in his 1986 article “The Forms of Capital,” in which he states:

Capital is accumulated labor (in its materialized form or its “incorporated,” embodied form) which, when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor. It is a *vis insita*, a force inscribed in objective or subjective structures, but it is also a *lex insita*, the principle underlying the immanent regularities of the social world. (Bourdieu 1986: 241)

In simplified terms, it can be assumed that economic capital is a person’s property or material assets; cultural capital is education, skills, achievements, and intellectual capabilities; social capital, in turn, is one’s location in a network of social contacts

² The theoretical assumptions are described in Bourdieu’s main work on capital theory, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, the first French edition of which was published in 1979.

or acquaintances, while symbolic capital is the ability to convert cultural or social capital into material goods. The author of this concept himself develops the definition of capital as follows:

And the structure of the distribution of the different types and subtypes of capital at a given moment in time represents the immanent structure of the social world, i.e., the set of constraints, inscribed in the very reality of that world, which govern its functioning in a durable way, determining the chances of success for practices. (Bourdieu 1986: 242)

188 Interestingly, Bourdieu avoided the term “elite” but rather spoke of a “field of power,” which we can define as a group of leaders standing at the head of their social circles, which he calls “fields.” Depending on the type of capital that is of key importance, we can distinguish several types of fields: cultural, economic, political, religious, scientific, or artistic. In each field, a separate game is played around the stakes that are considered a priority. In other words, the key actors in a given field together form, in each country, a more or less mutually known and interconnected environment that shares common interests and goals. This environment can be equated with what is commonly called the elite.

Additionally, valuable modifications that can be applied to Bourdieu’s theory were proposed by Iván Szelényi and his team (Szelényi, Treiman, Wnuk-Lipiński 1995), who introduced the concept of political capital as a particular type of social capital useful in considering elites in Central and Eastern Europe. Political capital is not only a party affiliation, which had to be taken into account as a key variable in the study of the post-socialist elite conducted by Szelényi’s team, but is

understood more broadly as “loyalty to the boss or maintaining good relations with those in power” (Szelényi, Treiman, Wnuk-Lipiński 1995: 13).

Another researcher interested in the idea of social capital was Robert D. Putnam, who coined his own definition of social capital and popularized this term. In his influential publication *Bowling Alone*, he states:

Whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to properties of individuals, social capital refers to connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In that sense, social capital is closely related to what some have called “civic virtue.” The difference is that “social capital” calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations. A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital. (Putnam 2000: 19)

Putnam’s main idea, most fully presented in his book *Bowling Alone*, is to explain what happened to Americans’ sense of being connected and their participatory potential. In this book, he also discusses two types of social capital—bonding social capital, which is within a group or community and is more inward-looking and protective, and bridging social capital, which is between social groups, social classes, or other important sociodemographic or socioeconomic characteristics. According to Putnam, bonding social capital is good for “getting by” and bridging social capital is crucial for “getting ahead” (Putnam 2000). In general, Putnam’s deliberations on social capital as a resource for society contrast with Bourdieu’s approach to social capital, who treats it as an individual human resource.

His thoughts on trust and social capital, however, could become an interesting theoretical extension of the categories introduced by Bourdieu and be helpful in looking at relations within the Russian field of power, where the most important factor in creating elite circles is Putin's personal trust. An example of such a significant meaning of personal trust and relationship based on bonding social capital can be identified in Russia in the following examples from the past and present—i.e., the relationships of members of the so-called “Family”³ centered around the figure of President Boris Yeltsin in the 1990s. A contemporary and current example is the personal relationship and trust between almost every single member of the Russian power elite and President Vladimir Putin, which is considered to be the main criterion for recruiting members of the current Russian political elite.

Another theoretical category borrowed from the study mentioned above is the division into two basic models of elite recruitment: the theory of elite reproduction and the theory of elite circulation. It was Szelényi and his team who noted that in the initial years after the fall of communism (the research was carried out in 1993), a significant reproduction of the elite was observed in Russia, i.e., representatives of the old elite—the party nomenclature—occupied key positions in the state, which

³ The “Family” was not only relatives of Boris Yeltsin, president of the Russian Federation from 1991 to 1999. It included Yeltsin's daughter Tatyana Dyachenko, seen as the Kremlin's gray eminence, and her husband, Valentin Yumashev, former head of Yeltsin's presidential administration, as well as the president's closest friends and associates, who enjoyed significant political concessions. The case that caused the first visible division in the “Family” was the accusation of the head of the Yukos oil company, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, of economic crimes.

was associated with relatively few institutional changes in the first years after the transformation (Szelényi, Treiman, Wnuk-Lipiński 1995: 196). When analyzing the composition of the contemporary elite in the sample specified in this article, it is necessary to answer the question of whether we can speak of increased circulation as a method of recruiting the current elite in Russia or whether reproduction (which does not entail the replacement of the elite) is still the dominant way of entering the field of power.

A point of reference in this analysis is also the research of Tomasz Zarycki, who drew attention in his works to the structural differences between the fields of power in the core and peripheral countries. In this perspective, Russia was included in the so-called third zone as a state that is on the periphery but is relatively strong in relation to the international environment and as a state with partial political autonomy (Zarycki 2014: 19). According to the author, in peripheral countries, the main division lines of the political scene do not result from the type of capital present in the field (in simplified terms, the dominance of cultural capital is characteristic of left-wing parties, while the dominance of economic capital is typical of right-wing parties), but rather from the attitude toward the center. In the field of power, we can thus distinguish two camps: a globally oriented, liberal, pro-core camp and a locally oriented, conservative, anti-core camp. Until a few years ago, such a dichotomy also seemed valid with regard to the Russian field of power, especially between 2008 and 2012, when Dmitry Medvedev held the office of President of Russia. In 2022, in the context of the tightening

of the Kremlin's authoritarian policy and its anti-Western stance, it no longer seemed to manifest itself so clearly. The conventional divisions in Russia's power camp between pro-democratic so-called "liberals" and so-called "siloviki," who were opposed to pro-democratic reforms, pointed out by some observers in the past two decades, have been blurred with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, resulting in an escalation of anti-Western rhetoric and in consolidation within the Russian political elite.

The aforementioned, very interesting and innovative concepts of Bourdieu, although they have entered the canon of social sciences in regard to the study of Western societies, are much less frequently used to analyze the social realities of Eastern Europe. As Zarycki (2008: 13–14) notes, Bourdieu's paradigm is not only a theoretical approach but also a specific language for describing social change, which is becoming a meaningful, universal language in contemporary social sciences. Adopting Bourdieu's social theory as the basis for analyzing and describing the elite in Russia can therefore be seen as an attempt to translate the political and social realities of contemporary Russia into the language of capital. Using the concepts of capital and field theory coined by Bourdieu can serve to describe the Russian elite in a more scientific and objective way than the numerous fragmentary and speculative descriptions present in the media space. Using Bourdieu's language to describe the Russian elite can contribute to a better understanding of this group in light of Western sociology, for which the Russian elite remains an increasingly hermetic group and a difficult object to study.

HOW TO DETERMINE THE FIELD OF POWER IN RUSSIA?

Since the emergence of modern Russia from the ruins of the USSR, the state decision-making mechanism has remained largely unclear. It is difficult to determine who makes the decisions and what data is being taken into consideration in making the choices. The fact remains, however, that for Russian as well as foreign observers, important decisions concerning the Russian state often came as a surprise, like President Yeltsin's decision to leave office in 1999⁴ or Putin's decision to invade Ukraine in February 2022. There are several reasons behind this. Firstly, an important feature of the Russian system of power is that people who are not formally connected to the system of power or who hold a secondary position in state institutions can play a crucial role in the whole state system. An oligarch or a head of a state corporation often has more say than a minister. In this system, the Security Council, which is formally only a constitutional advisory body to the Russian President, means more than the State Duma, the lower house of Russia's Federal Assembly. Secondly, as a rule, friendships or experience from working together elsewhere are crucial in appointments to key state positions. In the case of the current Putin's elite, significant groups are made up of members of the so-called "Ozero" Cooperative and city officials from St. Petersburg who were

⁴ In his New Year's Eve speech on December 31, 1999, Yeltsin unexpectedly announced: "I am tired, I am leaving." His place was taken—under the provisions of the Constitution—by the then head of government, the young former KGB officer, Putin.

associates of Putin in the 1990s. A large number of members of the Russian elite have experience of working in the secret services—the Soviet KGB and its successor, the FSB—and carry the ties and working methods learned there to the next levels of their careers. It is impossible to say unequivocally who has the greatest influence on the president’s decisions and who provides him with key information, but it is important to realize that the political elite in contemporary Russia, although it forms a hermetic group, has never been and is not, contrary to popular opinion, a monolith. Various informal interest groups as well as various strategies of struggle for power and influence clash in it, but all these details do not come to light. However, some symptoms of these divisions and tensions reach the public, although sometimes only after the fact. This scarce information is a signal that, in Bourdieu’s terms, there are divisions in the field of power, and a game is still being played.

The key question that needs to be answered is what is at stake in the game going on in the field of power in Russia. What is the commonality of interests, what are the rules of the game, aspirations, and reasons for rivalry within the Russian elite? The main goal of the elite is undoubtedly to maintain and exercise power, preserve and multiply the wealth accumulated so far, and also—something that became crucial after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022—preserve the personal security of elite members and their families. The rules of the game in the field include, above all, respecting and not undermining President Putin’s key role in the system, seeking his favor and avoiding public criticism of the president in general.

Moreover, some of those who belong to the elite operate based on the rules of criminal culture (picked up by Putin in his youth in Leningrad), which is also present throughout the Russian public space. An in-depth analysis of the importance of criminal culture and its determinants in the practices of the power elite and Putin personally is presented in a work by Polish reporter Krystyna Kurczab-Redlich (2016) entitled *Wowa, Wołodia, Władimir*. The rules prevailing in the field also include a very specific way of decision-making and operating that is typical of the secret services—in particular, solving problems (especially concerning state security and public support) in the special operation mode,⁵ acting by surprise, as well as ruthlessly eliminating political opponents. Examples include the 2015 assassination of opposition politician and former member of Yeltsin’s elite, Boris Nemtsov, or the attempted poisoning and later imprisonment of Alexei Navalny in 2021. Another important principle is the acquiescence to corruption by members of the elite in exchange for loyalty to the sovereign, which is also observed at every level of the Russian state’s functioning. Political scientist Maria Domańska (2019) described these mechanisms in depth in her monumental work *Putinism after Putin. The Deep Structures of Russian Authoritarianism*.

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For the purpose of this study, an attempt was made to determine the Russian field of power in a very narrow sense, i.e., to choose only the most important, powerful, influential figures in the state. In this manner, the super-elite has been selected:

⁵ For example, the Kremlin and the Kremlin propaganda describe the war in Ukraine as a “special military operation.”

40 individuals at the very top of the hierarchy in the Russian regime. It is a hermetic, oligarchic group that concentrates in its hands power and the greatest wealth. Of course, it would be a gross oversimplification to think that the elite consists only of those 40 selected people. There are many more in this group. The task of this preliminary study, however, is to identify the most important people in the elite and make the first experimental attempt to describe this group using the conceptual apparatus and approach proposed by Bourdieu. If it turns out that his theory is applicable to Russian conditions, the scope of the study will be expanded. The possible continuation of the study could consist of enlarging the sample to include regional and industrial elites. Presumably, the entire field of power in Russia may consist of several hundred to several thousand individuals.

To identify the key actors in the Russian field of power, an institutional approach was used. The aim was to select the key and influential state institutions in Russia and to identify the leading actors in these structures. Due to the limited scope of the study, only those occupying the highest positions in the hierarchy were analyzed. Officials employed in the Presidential Administration and the Security Council were considered first. While the key role of the latter institution is unquestionable, the formal importance of this collegiate body in the system of power in Russia is reduced to an advisory function. The Security Council is chaired by the head of the state, President Putin. The so-called permanent members of the Council include the prime minister, the deputy prime minister, the chairpersons of both chambers of the parliament, the ministers of internal

affairs, foreign affairs, and defense, the head of the Presidential Administration, the Secretary of the Council, as well as the directors of key services, such as the Federal Security Service and the Foreign Intelligence Service. On the other hand, the actual role of the government and the State Duma in this authoritarian system of power, contrary to the provisions of the Constitution of the Russian Federation, is limited and secondary to the decisions of the president. From these bodies, only the highest-ranking officials, who are usually also members of the Security Council, were selected for the study. The Russian elite, like elites in other countries, has a formal and informal structure. Due to historical and cultural specificity, this informal part of the elite is extremely important. The discrepancy between the formal and real importance of the various institutions in Russia has been pointed out by Russian elite researchers, Yevgeny Minchenko, author of the “Politburo 2.0” model, and renowned Russian sociologist Olga Kryshтанovskaya (2005), among others.

In every field of power, or colloquially speaking, in the elite, one can distinguish sub-elites or interest groups. The selected narrow elite also includes representatives of groups distinguished according to the sphere of activity, i.e., the political sub-elite, the military sub-elite, and the economic sub-elite. Moreover, Patriarch Kirill, a representative of the religious sub-field, was added to the study group since due to his numerous common interests with the state’s highest leadership, he may be counted among the ruling elite. The mutual benefits of the Kremlin’s cooperation with the Russian Orthodox Church, represented by Kirill, in the political, ideological, and economic spheres were described in depth in the

report *The Altar and Throne Alliance. The Russian Orthodox Church vs. the Government in Russia* (Chawryło 2016). An important position in the Russian field of power is also occupied by informal groups of influence, i.e., people who are formally outside the elite but exert great influence on decisions in the state. These are mainly representatives of key business sectors (such as the mining, energy, media, and banking industries), with significant economic capital and close personal relationships with President Putin. This group includes, inter alia, Arkady and Boris Rotenberg, Gennady Timchenko, and Yevgeny Prigozhin.

RESULTS

The first step of the analysis consisted in determining the basic demographic characteristics of the members of the narrow elite, i.e., their age and gender; in the second step, their biographies were reviewed in search of common elements. Even a cursory analysis of these data indicates that the average age of Russia's narrow elite is very advanced. The results show that the majority of the officials included in the analysis are on the verge of retirement age or have already passed it—the average age in the analyzed group is as high as 63.4 years. The oldest members of the elite are Patriarch Kirill (76), the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Chairwoman of the Federation Council, Valentina Matviyenko (73), and the Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov (72). The youngest people in this group are the President of the Chechen Republic, Ramzan Kadyrov (46), and the Prosecutor General of the Russian Federation, Igor Krasnov

(47)—in the selected group, such relatively young people are rather exceptions. In response to the ageing of the elite and the lack of willingness to rejuvenate its ranks, already in 2017 President Putin signed a law on raising the retirement age of officials working in the apparatus of government agencies and holding political offices. According to the act, which entered into force on January 1, 2017, the age limit was to increase by six months every year to ultimately reach 65 years for men and 63 years for women. Subsequently, pension reform was initiated in 2022, raising the retirement age for the general public. As a result, the retirement age for men will be gradually raised in Russia from 60 to 65 over the next two years. The retirement age for women will reach 60 years by 2024, which is still low compared to Western European countries.

The age structure of the elite and the legal changes introduced by the Russian authorities raising the age limits for state officials suggest a lack of willingness on the part of those in power to allow circulation in the ranks of the elite and to treat reproduction as the main method of recruitment into a narrow elite. This is primarily because the main criterion for elite selection in Russia's authoritarian system is trust. The basic principle that describes the relationships between elite members is that most of them are personally acquainted with Putin and can be considered his close associates or even friends enjoying his personal trust. It appears that old and proven collaborators of the president remain in key positions, changing only their official titles, while the inflow of fresh blood into the system is being stemmed. As proved by the analysis of basic demographic data, the most

important people in the Russian field of power share important historical experiences that have shaped their worldview and mentality, which makes it easier for them to understand each other. These experiences encompass the times of the USSR, its disintegration, failed attempts to implement democracy, the period of “predatory capitalism” in Russia, and others.

Moreover, the gender disproportion in the composition of the selected group is noteworthy—only 5% (2 out of 40) are women (i.e., the Chairwoman of the Federation Council, Valentina Matviyenko, and the President of the Central Bank, Elvira Nabiullina). An additional regularity is that the positions held by women are not among the most important in the system and are associated with implementing decisions and advising rather than independent decision-making. This overwhelmingly low feminization rate confirms that women in Russia have a much lower chance of being recruited into the elite than men, which in turn confirms that traditionalist and patriarchal relations prevail in the elite, as in the Russian society as a whole.

Looking at the personal composition of the selected group, it can be observed that its members have cooperated with Putin at different stages of his career as an official and politician. The following interest groups can be distinguished in the Russian field of power: 1) friends from Putin’s youth in Leningrad; 2) colleagues from his service in the KGB; 3) colleagues from the municipal administration in St. Petersburg, 4) associates from the Presidential Administration and other political functions. The first group mainly includes businessmen who have made fortunes thanks to their acquaintance with Putin, like brothers

Arkady and Boris Rotenberg and Gennady Timchenko (they meet in the sambo and judo sports section). In terms of capital, this means that they were able to successfully convert the social capital they possessed into very significant economic capital.

The second group includes KGB/FSB officers Sergei Ivanov, Nikolai Tokarev, and Sergei Chemezov. In the St. Petersburg municipal administration, in turn, Putin worked with Dmitry Medvedev and Igor Sechin. Cooperation in the purely political and administrative spheres connected Putin with Dmitry Peskov and Anton Vaino. Interestingly, a separate group includes only two members representing the regional elite: the mayor of St. Petersburg, Alexander Beglov, and the President of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov, whose political ambitions, as indicated by his role in the war with Ukraine, are much greater than being the head of one of the regions. On the other hand, Moscow mayor Sergei Sobyannin, given his position and Moscow's importance in the centralized Russian system of power, should be included in the elite at the federal level.

The examination of the biographies of elite members showed that they are all highly educated, most often in the fields of economics, law, or technical or military sciences. The only exception may be Yevgeny Prigozhin,⁶ in whose case it is uncertain whether he completed his education at the higher academic level. About 40% of the surveyed group hold a PhD or other higher academic degree, e.g., Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin has a postdoctoral degree in economic sciences. This indicates that members of the

⁶ Contradictory information about Prigozhin's education appears in the source materials. He himself denies having completed higher education.

elite also have high cultural capital (understood as the level of education). A research hypothesis that requires verification may be that members of the elite sought to improve their status in society and used their position in the elite to convert their high social and economic capital into cultural capital.

On the other hand, assessing the political characteristics of the surveyed elite representatives requires further detailed research. Preliminary results indicate that the overwhelming majority of them started their careers in the Komsomol⁷ or the Communist Party of the Soviet Union at the regional or national level and in the Soviet secret services or diplomacy, which meant being part of the party nomenclature. Later, most of them joined the ranks of the United Russia party.

As mentioned above, while following the biographies of the elite members selected for this study, one may notice that the main method of recruiting candidates for key positions is circulation within the group. Firstly, the percentage of people under 50 in this group is extremely low and amounts to 5%. Secondly, the individuals selected for the study have rich political experience and have held lower or higher positions in the system in the past, replacing one another. A striking example is the “swapping of seats” of president and prime minister in 2008–2012 by Putin and Medvedev, referred to as “rokirovka” (described in chess terms as a “castling move,” Russian *рокировка*). There are other instances: Putin, director of the FSB from 1998 to 1999, was succeeded by Nikolai Patrushev, who held this post in the

⁷ The All-Union Leninist Young Communist League, usually known as the “Komsomol,” rus. Комсомол, was a political youth organization in the Soviet Union.

years 1999–2008; then, in May 2008, Alexander Bortnikov was nominated for the office. All three of these elite members, despite the passage of time, remain in the top leadership of the state and sit on the Security Council, which is most probably the state's key decision-making collective body. Most of the people described above have been members of the Security Council for many years, attaining permanent member status.

SUMMARY

It has been established that the described group of representatives of the Russian elite, selected from among those considered to be the most important figures in the system, is quite homogeneous in terms of age, gender, and level of education. The group is quite old (in terms of the members' age), with a crushing overrepresentation of men. The selected elite members are well educated—at least from a formal point of view. As for the structure of the field, several professional sub-fields can be distinguished within it, consisting mainly of service officers, businessmen, and professional officials. The main feature linking these figures is the fact that they have President Putin's trust (which, in Putnam's terms, can be equated with the prevalence of bonding capital). It can be concluded that informal relations are the foundation that shapes the field of power in Russia's authoritarian political system.

The common concern of the elite is to maintain power, wealth, and security. At the time the study was conducted (i.e., in the second half of 2022), there were no immediate or public

signals of sharp disagreements and divisions within this group; it maintained solidarity and cohesion, at least in the public sphere. A likely explanation for this situation is that there is an unwritten rule in this field that one is not allowed to criticize Putin, and his decisions, though objectively unfavorable for the country, are not publicly challenged by members of the elite. Nevertheless, speculation about a possible and imminent split at the top of Russia's government continues in the media and expert circles. However, due to the nature of the functioning of the Russian authoritarian system, a possible split or collapse of the regime may be difficult to predict. If it occurs, it will have an unexpected and violent course. However, because of the prolonged invasion of Ukraine (the Russians expected to have that country conquered quickly), President Putin's hitherto unshakable position has weakened and is now tightly linked to the course of the war and its result, which could lead to serious consequences in the future. In the Russian field of power, President Putin is a key figure, a link between other figures, a point of reference, an arbiter, a guarantor of balance, and a key decision-maker. Given the crucial importance of the personal relationship of individual members of the elite with the president, the weakening of his role, and especially his possible removal from the system, will undermine the entire structure of the field of power in Russia. It is the criterion of familiarity, trust, and subordination to Putin that is the key force in the Russian field of power, determining its shape and structure.

Finally, it should be emphasized that the presented attempt to describe and characterize the field of power in Russia in the

language of capital proposed by Bourdieu is only preliminary. In order to make a full description, the sample of elite representatives should be expanded (ultimately even up to several hundred people), and additional variables should be included in the study. Firstly, the research should be supplemented with more detailed data on social background and political and professional affiliations. The main task would then be to identify those elite members who never joined or did not have the opportunity (due to their young age) to join the Communist Party or the United Russia party. Given that most of the individuals selected for this study have completed higher education, it may be useful to indicate the type of education they received and any other additions to it. This data may contribute to a more comprehensive and objective description of the field of power in Russia, which may result in a better understanding of this country and its actions in the international arena.

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TABLE 1. SELECTED MEMBERS OF THE RUSSIAN POLITICAL ELITE INCLUDED IN THE ANALYSIS

	Name	Position	Date of birth	Age in 2022
1.	Vladimir Putin; Владимир Владимирович Путин	President of the Russian Federation, Chairman of the Security Council of the Russian Federation	7.10.1952	70
2.	Nikolai Patrushev; Николай Платонович Патрушев	Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation	11.07.1951	71
3.	Anton Vaino; Антон Эдуардович Вайно	Head of the Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation, permanent member of the Security Council of the Russian Federation	17.02.1972	50
4.	Sergei Naryshkin; Сергей Евгеньевич Нарышкин	Director of the Foreign Intelligence Service (SWR), permanent member of the Security Council of the Russian Federation	27.10.1954	68
5.	Sergei Kiriyenko; Сергей Владиленович Кириенко	First Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation	26.07.1962	60
6.	Vyacheslav Volodin; Вячеслав Викторович Володин	Chairman of the State Duma of the Russian Federation, permanent member of the Security Council of the Russian Federation	4.02.1964	58
7.	Dmitry Peskov; Дмитрий Сергеевич Песков	Press Spokesperson for the President of the Russian Federation	17.10.1967	55
8.	Vladimir Kolokoltsev; Владимир Александрович Колокольцев	Minister of the Interior of the Russian Federation, permanent member of the Security Council of the Russian Federation	11.05.1961	61

	Name	Position	Date of birth	Age in 2022
9.	Mikhail Mishustin; Михаил Владимирович Мишустин	Chairman of the Russian Government, permanent member of the Security Council of the Russian Federation	3.03.1966	56
10.	Igor Krasnov; Игорь Викторович Краснов	Public Prosecutor General of the Russian Federation, member (ordinary) of the Security Council of the Russian Federation	24.12.1975	47
11.	Alexander Bortnikov; Александр Васильевич Бортников	Head of the Federal Security Service (FSB), permanent member of the Security Council of the Russian Federation	15.11.1951	71
12.	Alexander Bastrykin; Александр Иванович Бастрыкин	Head of the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation	27.08.1953	69
13.	Viktor Zolotov; Виктор Васильевич Золотов	Commander-in-Chief of the National Guard Forces Command of the Russian Federation (the so-called Rosguard), member (ordinary) of the Security Council of the Russian Federation	27.01.1954	68
14.	Andrei Belousov; Андрей Рэмович Белоусов	First Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation	17.03.1959	63
15.	Alexander Novak; Александр Валентинович Новак	Minister of Energy of the Russian Federation, Deputy Prime Minister for the fuel and energy industry	23.08.1971	51
16.	Sergei Shoigu; Сергей Кужугетович Шойгу	Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation, permanent member of the Security Council of the Russian Federation	21.05.1955	67

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	Name	Position	Date of birth	Age in 2022
17.	Sergei Lavrov; Сергей Викторович Лавров	Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, permanent member of the Security Council of the Russian Federation	21.03.1950	72
18.	Valentina Matviyenko; Валентина Ивановна Матвиенко	Chairwoman of the Federation Council, permanent member of the Security Council of the Russian Federation	7.04.1949	73
19.	Dmitry Medvedev; Дмитрий Анатольевич Медведев	Deputy Chairman of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, permanent member of the Security Council of the Russian Federation	14.09.1965	57
20.	Sergei Sobyenin; Сергей Семёнович Собянин	Mayor of Moscow, member (ordinary) of the Security Council of the Russian Federation	21.06.1958	64
21.	Sergei Ivanov; Сергей Борисович Иванов	Permanent member of the Security Council of the Russian Federation	31.01.1953	69
22.	Igor Sechin; Игорь Иванович Сечин	CEO of the state corporation Rosneft	7.09.1960	62
23.	Alexei Miller; Алексей Борисович Миллер	CEO of the state corporation Gazprom	31.01.1962	60
24.	Arkady Rotenberg; Аркадий Романович Ротенберг	Businessman, oligarch, co-owner of SGM (StroyGazMontazh)	15.12.1951	71
25.	Boris Rotenberg; Борис Романович Ротенберг	Businessman, oligarch, co-owner of SGM (StroyGazMontazh)	3.01.1957	65
26.	Gennady Timchenko; Геннадий Николаевич Тимченко	Co-owner of Novatek—the largest non-state gas producer in Russia	9.11.1952	70

	Name	Position	Date of birth	Age in 2022
27.	Yevgeny Prigozhin; Евгений Викторович Пригожин	Businessman, oligarch, sponsor of a troll factory, founder of the Wagner Group	1.06.1961	61
28.	Roman Abramovich; Роман Аркадьевич Абрамович	Oligarch, investor, politician	24.10.1966	56
29.	Sergei Chemezov; Сергей Викторович Чёмезов	General director of the Rostech corporation	20.08.1952	70
30.	Yurii Kovalchuk; Юрий Валентинович Ковальчук	Shareholder and former president of Rossiya Bank	25.07.1951	71
31.	Patriarch Kirill; Vladimir Mikhailovich Gundyayev; Патриарх Кирилл	Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus', Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church	20.11.1946	76
32.	Ramzan Kadyrov; Рамзан Ахматович Кадыров	President of the Chechen Republic	5.10.1976	46
33.	Elvira Nabiullina; Эльвира Сахипзадовна Набиуллина	President of the Central Bank of Russia	29.10.1963	59
34.	Nikolai Tokarev; Николай Петрович Токарев	Chairman of the Russian company Transneft	20.12.1950	72
35.	Herman Gref; Герман Оскарович Греф	President of Sberbank	8.02.1964	58
36.	Anton Siluanov; Антон Германович Силуанов	Minister of Finance of the Russian Federation, member (ordinary) of the Security Council of the Russian Federation	12.04.1963	59
37.	Alexei Gromov; Алексей Алексеевич Гро́мов	First Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation	30.05.1960	62

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	Name	Position	Date of birth	Age in 2022
38.	Alexander Beglov; Алекса́ндр Дми́триевич Бегло́в	Governor of St. Petersburg, member (ordinary) of the Security Council of the Russian Federation	19.05.1956	66
39.	Valery Gerasimov; Вале́рий Васи́льевич Гера́симов	Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Federation, member (ordinary) of the Security Council of the Russian Federation	8.09.1955	67
40.	Rashid Nurgaliyev; Раши́д Гу́марович Нурга́лиев	Deputy Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, member (ordinary) of the Security Council of the Russian Federation	8.10.1956	66

PART II

THE ELITES OF POLISH SYSTEMIC TRANSFORMATION

THE POST-INTELLIGENTSIA'S LONG ENTRY INTO THE 21ST CENTURY: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

ABSTRACT

The main aim of this article is to examine the contemporary Polish intelligentsia. Since the second half of the 19th century, the intelligentsia has been one of the most important groups in Polish society and culture. By organizing civil society, the intelligentsia tried to maintain a sense of national unity and even “replace” the lost and partitioned state. However, its importance has been diminishing in parallel with the process of transformation after 1989. The author traces the main causes that led to the current situation. Unlike some scholars, he claims that the intelligentsia neither has “retired from the stage” nor does it play a hegemonic role in Polish society. By adopting the combined perspective of historical sociology and analysing qualitative empirical data on the intelligentsia’s elite (i.e., in-depth interviews, articles, statements, discussions, books, etc.), the author argues that the intelligentsia has not been transformed into a middle class but neither does it exist in its former state. Since the current stratification in Poland is not based on rank order, the importance and status of the intelligentsia are diminishing. However, representatives of Polish elites have retained some characteristics of the former status group. Thus, the author suggests that “post-intelligentsia” would be a more accurate description of the group’s current condition.

KEYWORDS: Polish intelligentsia, rank order, status society, ethos, transformation, post-intelligentsia

INTRODUCTION

For more than a century, the Polish intelligentsia was both the native equivalent of the middle class and the source from which the country's elite was recruited. In a sociological sense, the emergence of the intelligentsia was determined by overlapping impediments to the country's development. These included social backwardness, the lack of an own state, and the failure to develop capitalist relations, which in other countries led to the emergence of class stratification and therefore the bourgeoisie (subsequently the middle class). As a result, the intelligentsia became a hegemonic stratum and was able to reproduce itself over generations. Its representatives played a crucial role in politics, society, and culture. For several decades, there was no other group that could challenge its position and influence.

According to most researchers, the role of the intelligentsia was expected to change after the transformation of 1989. It is worth highlighting several prevailing positions from the discussion about the future of the intelligentsia that took place in the 1990s. According to the first and dominant view, this social group had to inevitably come to an end (Kurczewska 1992). It was to be replaced by the middle class, and its ethos was to evolve into that of the middle class. Members of the intelligentsia would adopt a strategy of embourgeoisement and attempt to use their cultural and social capital for their benefit in a capitalist system. In a similar vein, some researchers predicted that the intelligentsia would split into intellectuals and professionals. Some added that intellectuals would maintain the

importance of the intelligentsia as a separate group. Over time, these opinions and predictions were supplemented and amended. It was stressed that members of the old intelligentsia did not become part of the middle class but rather of the upper class. They often have a new lifestyle that is motivated by a different ethos than that of the old intelligentsia or the middle class. Other researchers have proposed an explanation influenced by the theory of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. From this theoretical standpoint, the habitus of the intelligentsia has not changed, and this group is still a social hegemon (Zarycki, Warczok 2014).

AIM OF THE PAPER

Despite these claims, I argue that the intelligentsia neither exists in its former state nor has it been transformed into the middle class. I assume that in order to understand the phenomenon, we must accept that it is changing and being changed. Throughout history, the intelligentsia has taken on various social, regional, political, and cultural forms, while retaining a high position in the rank order of Polish society. The main aim of my article is to examine the contemporary remnants of this former stratum and outline its current condition. I also claim that it does not play a hegemonic role in Polish culture. I pay special attention to the fact that the intelligentsia has been reacting to political and cultural transformations and has been adapting to new societal and economic challenges. It did not entirely “retire from the stage” along with the former

system, nor did it survive in its previous form. Its importance has diminished over the last 30 years as social stratification shifted from a rank order to a capitalist class society. It is still important to some people and milieus, and some people still define themselves as part of this status group. However, the values and lifestyle of the intelligentsia have undergone enormous transformations. Although few of the intelligentsia's values still apply, and its attitudes depend on political and social events, its ethos is no longer a distinctive feature of the educated layer. Intellectual elites have been able to maintain their importance only to a certain extent; they even deny their own significance. Most educated people have no sense of the separate identity of the intelligentsia and do not use the term. Moreover, the intelligentsia is not an important element of the social structure, as it was in the past. Today, it is just one of many competing segments of the symbolic elite. For these reasons, I have introduced the term "post-intelligentsia," which, as I argue here, should be used nowadays instead of "intelligentsia." This article deals with a status group (*stratum*) that has been very important throughout Polish history and sheds light on the identity of the upper strata of Polish society, especially contemporary Polish intellectual and cultural elites. Although I see the transformation of the entire contemporary Polish intelligentsia, in this article I concentrate mainly on the humanistic elites and intellectuals.

ORGANIZATION OF THE PAPER

The article consists of two related parts. In the first, using the perspective of historical sociology (Skocpol 1984), I outline the history of the intelligentsia and indicate its earlier place in Polish culture and social structure. This approach is inspired by Reinhart Koselleck's seminal and critical work on the public sphere. Therefore, I "concentrate on the present that has passed, not on its past. ... The method used is thus a combination of analyses from the history of ideas and analyses of sociological conditions" (Koselleck 1988: 7–8). Moreover, I accept Koselleck's assumption about the interweaving of social history and the history of concepts, as well as the need to relate them to each other (Koselleck 1989). I adopt Max Weber's distinction between the two main logics of stratification: rank or status order (*Stand*) and class order (*Klasse*). Status is an effective claim to social prestige. Thus, according to Weber, "Depending on the prevailing mode of stratification, we shall speak of a 'status society' or a 'class society'" (Weber 1978: 306). While class is based on economy, rank order is typically founded on status gained through a shared lifestyle, formal education, hereditary or occupational prestige. Status groups, Weber wrote, "may come into being: a) in the first instance, by virtue of their own style of life, particularly the type of vocation: 'self-styled' or occupational status group" (Weber 1978: 306). Weber's perspective can be seen as both a multidimensional view of social structure and a hypothesis of the historical development of a given society.

This theoretical remark is particularly important in the Polish context because the discussion about the intelligentsia and its possible change or end took place after the systemic change and economic transformation of 1989. Polish society has never been entirely socialist. Under communism, the intelligentsia remained the most important social stratum and could not be explained in class terms. Rank and class continue to overlap, making Poland a good example of a dual stratification order (Domański 1994; Zarycki 2015). Polish society differs from the typical society in the West due to the role of the status group in its social structure. The main status groups were the intelligentsia and the peasantry. The intelligentsia played a central role in the field of cultural production, due to the key historical role of cultural capital (Eyal, Szelényi, Townsley 1998). Therefore, the transformation of Polish society in recent decades (including democratization and economic liberalization after 1989) has been manifold. First, it encompassed the transition from the socialist economy to the modern contract-based capitalist society. Second, it also included a change in cultural patterns and symbolic hierarchies of status societies.

This theoretical framework helps show the historical role of the intelligentsia, which filled the gap in the absence of a bourgeoisie and an independent state. However, the historical part is a starting point for presenting my position on the transformation of the intelligentsia and its status. In the second part of the article, which deals with the present, I draw on different sources. Firstly, I reconstruct the claims of sociologists and other commentators about the contemporary intelligentsia. I am interested

in the dominant and representative views rather than in specific authors. I also use existing sociological data and, above all, synthesize data from field research on Polish intellectual elites. The empirical data refers to aspects of social structure that people are aware of and includes 70 qualitative interviews, an analysis of books and other texts, and participatory observation of several intellectual environments. The first group of respondents consisted of members of the younger generation of intellectuals from various ideological backgrounds, primarily centered around publishers and magazine editors. The second group consisted of well-known writers, academics, and experts. The third group included NGO activists. The respondents were often leaders in their communities, enjoying prestige. In addition, ten interviews were conducted with experts on the subject. The main purpose of selecting respondents for the expert interviews was to deepen the theoretical aspect of the research (both in a historical and sociological sense); those respondents were not the subject of the analysis. Interviews were conducted with people representing various ideological positions and actively participating in the public sphere. This made it possible to capture a variety of attitudes and thus meet the criteria of representativeness in qualitative research (Flick 2008). In line with the tradition of research on the intelligentsia (Chojnowski, Palska 2008), I did not presuppose its definition in my own research based on in-depth interviews. The attempt to describe the intelligentsia was to be the result of the study and not one of its preliminary assumptions. However, in keeping with the aim of this article, I present my findings in a synthetic

form and, for the sake of coherence, do not cite the answers of the respondents.

The operationalization of the field research was based on several theoretical assumptions. First, it stemmed from the distinction between the intelligentsia understood as an elite and as a socio-professional stratum (Czepulis-Rastenis 1973). Second, it was assumed that the elites influence their audience (the stratum), shape its consciousness, and maintain its separateness (Domański 2008; Szczepański 1960; Żarnowski 2008). Moreover, I adopted the “pluralist theory of the elites,” which emphasizes the multiplicity and diversity of competing elites seeking to exert the widest possible influence (Etzioni-Halevy 1993).

THE CONCEPT OF THE INTELLIGENTSIA

Before the intelligentsia became a social hegemon, the concept itself appeared in 1844, although initially, it did not include content derived from historical experience and rather set the horizon of expectations. Karol Libelt (1967), who first used and defined the term, underlined the role that educated members of a backward society should play, describing it in terms of a mission. He proposed a cultural and social role for the intelligentsia. It was no coincidence that his text was entitled “On the Love of the Fatherland.” Thanks to him and other authors who repeated his views, from the very outset, members of the intelligentsia developed a legitimizing awareness of their historical role, which they later more or less

accurately fulfilled. However, the term originally meant the intellectual elite, i.e., scholars, writers, clerks, politicians, and so on, or generally speaking, people who earned a living from intellectual activities. All these disconnected groups did not yet form a separate social entity. Although some scholars claim that the intelligentsia became a separate social stratum in the mid-19th century (Czepulis-Rastenis 1988), most agree that this happened after the January Uprising of 1863. At that time, the disinherited nobility, with its customs and memory of lost Polishness, moved to the cities and dominated the fragile layer of burghers.

However, for all these reasons, the concept of the intelligentsia is ambiguous. It has changed with historical experience (Koselleck 1988), allowing new aspects of this group to be described. From the 1870s until the end of the First World War, there were several ways of understanding the term, i.e., as denoting the middle class, the elite, a non-existent group (or a group that should not exist), or “the intelligent proletariat” (Zahorska 1978). As a result, historians and social scientists have not agreed on a single definition of the term. Janusz Żarnowski (1964: 14) noted, with some exaggeration, that there are as many academic approaches to the intelligentsia as there are definitions of it. Thus, the term “intelligentsia” did not become a theoretical category of the social structure (Kwaśniewicz 1994). However, social scientists and historians have tried to systematize the problem. Aleksander Gella (1987) identified three main types of definition: functional, attributional, and historical. In turn, Joanna Kurczewska (1998) pointed out

the four most common perspectives: (1) a group of people who perform artistic or intellectual work; (2) a group of people who occupy a position in the social structure that enables them to perform certain functions in society and the state; (3) people who stand out intellectually, artistically, or morally; and (4) people who are honored because of their axiological orientation. Some contemporary commentators regard the intelligentsia as an elite (intellectual, artistic, moral, etc.), while others see it as a social and professional stratum. However, in reality and in research practice, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish the intelligentsia. These different ways of understanding often serve to complicate the discussion. The ambiguity of the concept results in discrepancies in assessing the future of the intelligentsia and its role in history. Hence, discussions in the last quarter century about the disappearance of the intelligentsia have led to different conclusions depending on the definitions adopted.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE EMERGING STRATUM

The beginnings of the intelligentsia date back to the late 18th century. The proto-elite of the Enlightenment period was comprised mainly of clerics, officers, teachers, writers, doctors, and journalists. Yet they did not have a sense of their own distinctness as a group. This proto-elite also lacked a single concept by which its members could define themselves. According to Libelt, the intelligentsia, due to its education, was supposed to lead the nation, while at the same time assuming a service role

to the lower social categories. The concept of the intelligentsia has changed and become ambiguous since, over the course of history, it has come to include new content to allow for the description of new experiences (Koselleck 2004). It is thus important to observe how its meaning has evolved; we need to complement and historicize the conceptual framework of the intelligentsia. The term “intelligentsia” originally had two basic meanings, which were used interchangeably. In the narrower sense, the term signified the elite. In the broader one—the entire social stratum. In the latter case, it can be considered to some extent the equivalent of the Western bourgeoisie (Koestler 1987; Zienkowska 1987). Hence, it is important to distinguish between the two main actors on the social and historical scene: the intellectual elite and the intelligentsia understood as a social stratum (Czepulis-Rastenis 1988). The distinction between the stratum and the elite is not clear. Nonetheless, it is important for the theory. First of all, the intelligentsia was constituted as an elite. The term “intelligentsia” itself was then rarely used. Only in the second half of the 19th century did a social stratum emerge, whose members used that word when talking about their place in the social hierarchy (Hertz 1931).

The influence of the elite on the other strata was enormous. Elites comprise mainly intellectuals, artists, writers, and scholars, especially if they are active outside their own profession and tackle more general topics. The importance of the elite stems from the complexity of modern societies. Furthermore, I assume that even within the intelligentsia there was not one elite, but many elite groups that competed with each other for available

resources. This position is referred to in sociology as a “pluralist theory of the elites.” Depending on the socio-political context, the intelligentsia elites moved closer together or further apart. Thus, it is worth remembering that there were struggles and divisions between the different factions. Yet historians writing about the intelligentsia tend to overlook political differences among the intelligentsia and even conceal internal divisions (Micińska 2008). Rather, they emphasize the common elements of the group’s activities and attitudes (Cywiński 2010). Both in terms of being its elite and as a stratum, the intelligentsia has been invaluable to the Polish public sphere. The intelligentsia shaped Poland’s symbolic culture, its hierarchies of values, and forms of civic engagement. However, it was the intellectual elite of the intelligentsia that defined important issues and shaped the consciousness of the stratum as a whole. The intellectual elite, therefore, provided intellectual and cultural content for the rest of the intelligentsia. The elite shaped the worldview and image of the stratum’s members and generally produced positive opinions about the intelligentsia and its role as an indivisible social agent.

Unlike the bourgeoisie, however, the Polish intelligentsia was formed as a result of the society’s backwardness, along with the partitioned country’s semi-peripheral location and lack of independence. Members of the intelligentsia were convinced of the need to preserve the cultural distinctiveness of their nation. The absence of a Polish state caused the intelligentsia to form semi-public networks consisting of cafes, salons, antique shops, editorial offices, private libraries, and self-education circles.

Some of these had both overt and hidden functions. As a result, the intelligentsia provided a native alternative to the official but foreign institutions, with which it did not identify. Its roles and functions can be depicted by applying Bourdieu's concept of "cultural capital" and by adopting Weber's concept of rank order. The intelligentsia came into being "by virtue of [its] own style of life, particularly the type of vocation: 'self-styled' or occupational status group" (Weber 1978: 306). In terms of Weber's framework of stratification (Eyal, Szelényi, Townsley 1998), the intelligentsia did not form a separate class like the bourgeoisie or the German *Bildungsbürgertum*, both of which are perceived as having followed the path of normal development. Instead, the Polish intelligentsia formed a social rank that, to some degree, was "capable of acting as a collective agent entrusted with the task of building modern civilization" (Eyal, Szelényi, Townsley 1998: 61) but which also retained some characteristics of the feudal order. Hence, it can paradoxically be seen as both a manifestation of modernization and of backwardness. Despite the differences between the three regions of partitioned Poland, the social history of the Central European intelligentsia can be traced as "a process of 'interrupted embourgeoisement'" (Eyal, Szelényi, Townsley 1998: 70).

The situation of the intelligentsia in each partition of former Poland was slightly different. In the second half of the 19th century, anti-Polish pressure was stronger in the Russian and German partitions than in autonomous Galicia, where the intelligentsia resembled the bourgeoisie, having a relatively wide range of autonomy (Homola 1984). The Russian partition

was particularly important for the formation of this stratum. Not only did the intelligentsia emerge there as the most numerous group compared to other regions, but, due to limited autonomy, it played a compensatory role to the state. Through a network of societies and initiatives, it created a kind of “state within the state” (Sdvižkov 2011), at the same time cultivating the memory of Poland’s past independence and plans for its future freedom. At that time, the intelligentsia became heterogeneous and so numerous that historians speak of its “overproduction” (Jedlicki 1978). Moreover, the larger the intelligentsia became, the more it came to be internally differentiated. Differences between the partitions also played a significant role. The remnants of the Kingdom of Poland were the *de facto* center of the intelligentsia—especially after the semi-independent state lost its autonomy in 1864—while the educated class in Galicia resembled the bourgeoisie (Homola 1984). In spite of regional differences, thanks to social networks, a common culture, and cooperation between people from different regions who crossed the partition borders of the divided country, there was a single Polish intelligentsia.

Both the intelligentsia and the gentry were heirs of the Polish nobility (Zarycki, Smoczyński 2017). However, the intelligentsia competed with the gentry for leadership in society and cultural hegemony. As a result, over time, two types of ethos emerged that seemed to be opposing and competing with each other. The nature of the gentry’s ethos involved marking differences and distinctions. At the same time, the ethos of the intelligentsia was ostensibly expressed as inclusive. Historians have stressed that despite the diversity of inherited traditions,

cultural patterns, and lifestyles, this recognizable ethos made the intelligentsia a distinctive social group. Yet this ethos was rarely explicitly articulated. Although the ethos of the gentry and the ethos of the intelligentsia manifested themselves in different ways, both reinforced the main dimensions of the aristocratic tradition: the importance of culture and a clear aversion to the modern economy. Thus, the intelligentsia universalized the ethos of the previous nobility. For these reasons, the intelligentsia was criticized by its own members. This narrative has particular resonance in Polish discourse and culture (Brzozowski 1983; Chałasiński 1997; Zajączkowski 1961). Critics not only rejected the tradition and cultural heritage of the landed gentry, but they also refused to identify with their own social rank. Under the influence of the Russian intelligentsia, they pointed to cultural privileges and unfair social relations, while expressing a sense of “guilt” and “debt” with regard to their genealogy. They were against pure charity and philanthropy.

According to many historians, the intelligentsia finally emerged as a social and cultural hegemon after the First World War (Nałęcz 1994). Poland's regaining of independence in 1918 was also considered to be a political triumph of the intelligentsia. In the Second Republic of Poland, members of the intelligentsia occupied influential positions. Although the intelligentsia remained diverse in terms of origin and education, income, ideological and political orientation, habitus, lifestyle, and professions, the term became a synonym for educated people. By the late 1930s, a gradual process of *embourgeoisement* could be observed. Moreover, the independent state revealed

the weakness of the intelligentsia's ideal of being an egalitarian, open group. For people from the lower social classes, social advancement was slow and required on average two or three generations (Żarnowski 1964). It was still not easy for those without the proper genealogy to move upward, as the old intelligentsia guarded its separate position, primarily by emphasizing the cultural distance between groups of different origins.

THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF POLAND

The process of "normalization," meaning mainly embourgeoisement, was interrupted by the Second World War. During this time, due to warfare and the occupiers' attempts to liquidate the Polish elites (including the *Intelligenzaktion* in the lands incorporated into the Third Reich or the "AB Action," *Außerordentliche Befriedungsaktion*, in the General Government, and also the Soviet policies), the population of people with a higher education decreased by 37 percent (Habielski 2009: 171). The Second World War and the following Stalinist period caused an upheaval that changed the borders, political order, and social structure. The gentry and the intelligentsia connected with it were deprived of political and cultural influence. Thus, as a result of the losses and the implementation of new political policies, the gentry disappeared as a group after the war, while the intelligentsia could not be rebuilt in its previous form. Moreover, the pre-war intelligentsia became the object of criticism along with the pre-war Polish state, in which the intelligentsia had played a hegemonic role. One of the most pronounced critical

opinions was voiced in 1946 by Józef Chałasiński (1997), who was then vice-rector of the newly founded University of Łódź.

Leaving aside the broader conclusions, I want to underline the main characteristics of the intelligentsia in the People's Republic of Poland (PRP). In the following paragraphs, I will examine the long-term impact of this period on the evolution and constitution of the intelligentsia. It was then that the intelligentsia's ethos started to decline. The post-war authorities treated the pre-war intelligentsia with distance. At the same time, they tried to make both the intelligentsia in general and the intellectual elites into supporters of the new social order. However, their main goal was to educate their own socialist intelligentsia (Mikułowski-Pomorski 2001), which stemmed from both the need for qualified staff and the belief that the intelligentsia—drawn from the popular classes—would legitimize the new system under the leadership and supervision of the party. These tasks were to be carried out by post-war institutions, including universities and high schools. The state had a monopoly on hiring people with higher education.

Yet the project of creating a socialist intelligentsia failed for several reasons. In the People's Republic of Poland, upward social mobility was easier for representatives of the popular classes. However, even members of the “new intelligentsia” recruited from the popular classes conformed to the old patterns (in terms of ideas, lifestyles, attitudes, and ways of speaking), as was the case with academics, artists, and scientists (Palska 1994). Moreover, socialist mass culture was also the work of the intelligentsia. Above all, the word “intelligentsia” was then

still in widespread use. The structural conditions of the time supported the existence of the intelligentsia and the dominance of intelligentsia culture.

However, in the PRP, the word “intelligentsia” had many meanings (Szczepański 1973: 93–98), two of which I consider to be the most basic and incompatible (Kulas 2018). First, it signified a category comprising educated people involved in serving the state apparatus. In this sense, the intelligentsia was understood to mean white-collar workers (Szczepański 1973: 238). The term itself was popular in the social sciences, media, culture, and official language. To scholars and intellectuals, and even their fellow citizens, the word seemed a neutral designation. For most social scientists, it simply described a social stratum based on higher education and thus on certain professions. In this approach, the word “intelligentsia” referred to all people with a higher education. It encompassed educated people who served state institutions under the supervision of the party. The majority were neither anti-systemic nor rebellious. The industrialization of the country required specialists. Thus, the technical intelligentsia was gaining in importance. The state was the main employer of the intelligentsia, which therefore depended on it. In the 1970s, many specialists enrolled in the party. To a lesser extent, the word was used to refer to people with a certain lifestyle, customs, and values. The word also described an intellectual elite and a particular ethos. Beginning in the late 1960s, there was a systematic evolution of the idea of insubordination, mainly among intellectuals who were critical of the party or those who had become critical

(Gawin 2013; Kennedy 1992). They were called “dissidents,” although the word was primarily used in reference to Russian intellectuals (Falk 2003; Flam 1999).

Finally, the very concept of engaged intelligentsia was revived in the 1970s (Cywiński 2010; Jedlicki 1972; Michnik 1998; Skórzyński 2012: 50–52; *Znak* 1972). The idea drew on the ethos and attitudes formed at the turn of the 20th century. By referring to the historical heritage, it was possible to distinguish the dissenting intellectuals from the intelligentsia in the first sense, especially since there was an overlap with the division into a part of the intelligentsia (“we”) and the power elite (“they”), along with the nomenclature that supported it (Torańska 1994). By referring to the historical legacy of the “rebellious” intelligentsia, the intelligentsia in the PRP was able to distinguish itself from “paid officials ... and officers of the state apparatus” (Iłowiecka-Tańska 2011: 93). Moreover, the intellectual elites appealed to moral arguments, building a model of anti-politics based on values rooted in the intelligentsia tradition of opposition to a hostile state, with which identification was difficult because it remained outside of society (Boggs 1993). In the People’s Republic of Poland, the state was not only undemocratic, illiberal, and authoritarian but was also considered “foreign” due to the dominance of the USSR. Human rights and civic freedoms were not respected. The economy was centrally planned.

The intelligentsia was able to tap into culturally rooted values of opposition to authoritarianism. Although an independent state was always the main goal of the intelligentsia, its historical

experiences led it to view the state as a Janus-faced institution. The intelligentsia's attitude toward the state, especially after the Second World War, was thus full of ambivalence. Although those ambivalences were not peculiar to the Polish intellectual elites alone, it is worth remembering the native context. The socialist state of the time was perceived by them as oppressive, hostile to its citizens, and a violator of human rights. As one Polish sociologist wrote, "The policy of the state was based on lies, disrespect for human dignity, and disregard for the national traditions and the culture of Europe. The essence of non-political politics was defined as building a civil society, i.e., an intermediate level between family and the state" (Morawski 1999: 73).

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Polish intellectuals, meanwhile, could draw on their own independent tradition. Being critical of the party and the former system, they not only restored the meaning of an "engaged intelligentsia" but also adopted practices from the intelligentsia's history in partitioned Poland. In so doing, over the decades, they were able to formulate an appealing and native model of civil society, which they opposed to the authoritarian state. The patterns and actions of the historical intelligentsia provided an example of civil society for the oppositional elite. The past served as a source of patterns, experiences, and myths. Once again, the intelligentsia could recreate its *habitus* to operate efficiently within the oppressive state. Thus, this *habitus* can be considered as being deeply rooted in Polish history and testifying to the long persistence of the intelligentsia's social and cultural patterns. One of the best examples is the "Flying

University,” established in 1977. It referred to a similar initiative of the same name from the 19th century.¹ One of the most famous and effective instances was the Workers’ Defence Committee (KOR). Intellectuals tried to force the authoritarian government to protect basic human rights. There were also other similar activities, such as semi-legal seminars, unofficial publications, scholarship assistance, and lectures. All can be interpreted as indicative of the ability to create an institutional framework within a hostile state. By creating its own oppositional institutions, civil society practices, and a vision of engagement based on anti-politics, the intelligentsia became a social agent and was able to operate even in an undemocratic context.

THE BEGINNING OF “THE END”

Despite the fine reproduction of tradition by those engaged intellectuals, the 1970s marked the beginning of the transformation of the Polish intelligentsia, which ceased to be a separate stratum characterized by its own ethos (including both ideas and lifestyles). I believe that the gradual process that began then disintegrated this group both in the structural sense, as a separate category, and through the transformation of its moral values, aims, and attitudes. I will discuss the latter issue in more detail below.

¹ The Flying University was transformed into the Society of Science Courses in 1905 (later into a university); similarly, the Flying University 2 was also transformed into the Society of Science Courses in 1978 (then into an association financed partly by the Workers’ Defence Committee—later the Committee for Social Self-Defence, KSS KOR). Both were active in lecturing and publishing.

According to popular opinion, during its history, “[t]he intelligentsia won this authority by becoming spokespersons for a new universalism, civil society” (Kennedy 1992: 29). While this may be true of oppositional elites, sociologists and historians have also observed an opposite tendency among educated people. In order to explain this, once again I must return to the difference between the elite among the intelligentsia and the intelligentsia as a professional and social stratum. The intellectual elites were critical of the system. Meanwhile, specialists, i.e., people with technical training, were gaining in importance and looking primarily for stability and a career. In the 1970s, many of them joined the party, as having a party affiliation significantly facilitated an individual’s career. Unlike the intellectuals, these people were not critical of the system. Rather, they wanted to use the opportunities it offered for their own benefit. In this sense, the technocratic intelligentsia of the time more closely resembled its counterparts in the West and was more interested in capitalizing on its professional and cultural skills than in subversion and protest (Gouldner 1979; Konrád, Szelényi 1979). Yet the educated people were internally divided in terms of prestige, status, social roles, and functions. This division corresponded to the actual balance of power. The rift between the nomenclature and the intelligentsia, although blurred in some respects in the sociological sense, was clear in the social consciousness.

Evidence of the tensions between these two tendencies appeared in social research, publications, and discussions of the time. Moreover, some commentators doubted whether

technocratic professionals should be called part of the intelligentsia at all (Szacki 1991; Kennedy 1991: 237–243). They were of the opinion that white-collar workers were more like a socialist version of the middle class than like the intelligentsia. Members of this so-called intelligentsia were therefore profoundly different from the above-mentioned engaged intellectuals, who had different values and lifestyles. All this was well depicted in the Polish literature of the time, and even better in the cinema (both in ambitious movies and popular series). The Cinema of Moral Anxiety, a Polish film movement that flourished then, was almost entirely devoted to these themes and depicted well the intelligentsia's moral accounting. However, "socialist mass culture" was still the work of the intelligentsia, and the term itself was in widespread use at the time. Structural conditions (economic, social, and political) supported the existence of the intelligentsia and the dominance of its culture.

The next decade brought disillusionment with the socialist model of development among educated people. There was a justified feeling (due to low wages and a lack of meritocratic principles of promotion) that socialism did not allow for the realization of ambitions and opportunities provided by education. Ironically, until the 1980s, the party authorities tried to maintain the myth of the socialist intelligentsia. Party bulletins were issued for the Basic Party Organization (POP) on the role of the intelligentsia for Poland's socialist development. However, almost everybody knew that it was a façade. The project of the so-called socialist intelligentsia was soon discredited by the broad

social movement of “Solidarity” and the deteriorating economic conditions of the educated. Therefore, both members of the intelligentsia and people connected with the authorities and employed by the state (managers, specialists, and even part of the nomenclature of the younger generation) were interested in a transformation of the system. The belief in the necessity of change gradually brought together representatives of different environments and recent political opponents. However, for the dissident elite, the democratization process and the rejection of authoritarianism were more important. In turn, members of the party sought to use the change to their advantage. All educated people (including those with ties to the former system) argued that breaking with the communist system and its stalled development would benefit the whole society.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF 1989 AND THE POST-INTELLIGENTSIA

The fall of communism and the beginning of the Third Republic of Poland can be interpreted as a victory of the rebellious intellectuals allied with the workers. This group was a prominent agent inspiring changes. However, a broader segment of educated people counted on the benefits from the transformation. According to sociologists, the real winners were cultural capitalists consisting of dissident intellectuals and reformist communist technocrats; both groups promoted the idea of civil society and economic rationalism. As I have tried to show, the intelligentsia was mentally prepared for change

long before the transition of 1989. Yet the educated people needed the change to have legitimacy, which the intellectuals provided. Not coincidentally, the 1990s saw the beginning of a large debate about the condition and future of the intelligentsia (Kulas 2018). The main problem in the discussion was that the term “intelligentsia” was used to refer to several incompatible things. For some authors, it meant a separate stratum, for others, mainly an elite, for still others, having certain qualifications (education and profession) and/or cultural capital. In effect, predictions about the future of the intelligentsia depended on how the concept was understood.

However, at the time, it was expected—as one author put it—that the intelligentsia would be “retiring from the stage” (Kurczewska 1992). Sociologists predicted the end of the intelligentsia many times and at different historical moments. Jan Szczepański (1962) wrote that after the Second World War, the intelligentsia (regardless of the system) could not be revived in its former interwar form because of the losses it had suffered (Mokrzycki 1974). Paweł Śpiewak (2005: 184) argued that the disintegration had occurred earlier, in the interwar period, while Andrzej Mencwel (2016) posited that its approximate end date was marked by events in the coastal cities in 1970. For most authors, however, the beginning of the transformation in 1989 was crucial (Mokrzycki 2001: 74). Most define the intelligentsia as a by-product of dependency and backwardness, which created an abnormal situation. If the “abnormal” situation made the intelligentsia necessary, then “normality” would inevitably make it unnecessary (Gawin 2008). “Normal” meant “just like in the

West” since normality was defined according to the standards of the major Western states and societies.

Achieving “normality” was easier said than done. Poland’s social structure did not correspond to that of developed societies because of the intelligentsia and the oversized peasantry. Moreover, there was no native bourgeoisie with the value system proper to it. However, the view of the intelligentsia as the native counterpart of the middle class appeared quite early and was clearly articulated at the turn of the 20th century. The intelligentsia performed similar functions, and thus its members had the same prestigious credentials. Both groups aspired to high culture and had similar types of networks.

Although some authors have argued that in some respects the intelligentsia of the People’s Republic of Poland also resembled the middle class, it differed from its Western prototype in that bourgeois values had been suppressed under the previous system (Żarnowski 2008). Moreover, the intelligentsia’s standard of living was low, and its income did not match its qualifications. Many of its members were frustrated by the lack of a meritocratic system of promotion. All this set the intelligentsia apart from the middle class in the West, while simultaneously making its members believe that life under capitalism was better. Consequently, some observers predicted that the intelligentsia would form the basis of the future middle class. However, many authors believed that the intelligentsia should transform into the middle class and play an important role. If the nucleus of the new democratic society was to be the middle class, then the nucleus of the middle class was

to be the intelligentsia (Słomczyński 1999: 153). Because its members are rational, individualistic, and critical of populist rhetoric, the intelligentsia was supposed to provide “cadres” for the nascent capitalism. Depending on the definition adopted, the intelligentsia was to be replaced by people of knowledge, native cognitive workers (Ziółkowski 1999), intellectuals, and at a more detailed level, “concrete” intellectuals (Foucault, Deleuze 1986), symbolic analysts (Gawin 2002), or experts and managers.

Some sociologists stressed, however, that the Polish intelligentsia would not simply transform itself but rather evolve as a mixture of the native version of the intelligentsia and the middle class (Wesołowski 1994). In this way, it could contribute to a more pragmatic approach toward capitalism. While some professionals (mainly doctors, lawyers, economists, and engineers) would become part of the middle class, others would not (Borucki 1994: 114). Moreover, some parts of the intelligentsia would form an elite group within the middle class (Domański 2012: 109), thus distinguishing and reproducing themselves (Mokrzycki 2001: 73). As for the middle class, it would not consist solely of the former intelligentsia: the capitalist market offered new professions and required new qualifications. However, the old professions remained. Lawyers, writers, doctors, teachers, and editors—who are perceived as part of the intelligentsia—are also typical professionals in the West. Thus, the transformation of society was not primarily about changing professions but about changing perceptions of professional roles and reformulating the ethos (Kulas 2017).

In other words, it was primarily about re-evaluating functions and the hierarchy of values in culture and professional life. The re-evaluation of ethos was not an effect in itself. It helped gain a better position in status competition and impacted the possible co-optation into important institutions, both public and private. Finally, the intelligentsia, with its vision and attachment to history, is still the most important nexus in the state power structures.

DISCUSSION

Many of these diagnoses and predictions have come true, but the changes did not happen in a straightforward manner. I would argue that although there is no intelligentsia as a separate stratum, members of the Polish middle class of intelligentsia origin have not simply assimilated the Western pattern. A part of the Polish middle class (especially its upper segment, the representatives of certain professions and occupations) has retained many features of the intelligentsia and its ethos (Kulas 2017). In conclusion, I would like to return to the question of change within this former hegemonic stratum and argue for the concept of the post-intelligentsia. To understand the transformation of the Polish intelligentsia, it is necessary to trace the changes within three main interrelated but distinct dimensions: the separateness of the intelligentsia as a status group in the social structure, the qualifications of its members (mainly occupations and professions), and finally its culture. Although its distinctiveness as a separate stratum encompasses all of these

factors, I argue that status (ethos) and culture played a crucial role in securing the intelligentsia's place in the rank order.

As was stated at the beginning of the article, in contrast to the bourgeoisie, defining the intelligentsia in economic terms is irrelevant. The bourgeoisie can be viewed through its possessions, credentials, and culture, whereas the emergence of the intelligentsia was mainly the result of the country's dependent economic development and lack of an own state. Unlike the bourgeoisie, the intelligentsia was not able to work in the state apparatus, freely participate in the public sphere, or accumulate wealth. Thus, the intelligentsia cannot be defined in economic terms, using the classical Marxist approach. It was not a class but a stratum whose status was defined not by cash but by particular credentials, especially in terms of occupation, education, and, above all, through culture. As a result, even if the occupations of the intelligentsia were similar to those of the bourgeoisie, it was economically deprived and socially restrained. Yet representatives of both the bourgeoisie and the intelligentsia pursued similar professions and occupations, to some extent playing the same roles in society. However, in contrast to their counterparts in the West, the Polish intelligentsia could not perform many public functions. Due to the different historical context, its members came to have a different ethos, lifestyle, and values. They had to perform other functions to compensate for the lack of normal development.

Therefore, the transformation of the intelligentsia was multidimensional. First, after 1989, a large part of the intelligentsia—impoverished in the 1980s and longing for better economic

conditions—underwent a process of embourgeoisement and could now be defined as part of the middle class (Domański 2015). According to sociologists, “having fulfilled its historic mission, the liberal intelligentsia acted as an intellectual vanguard of the economic bourgeoisie” (Eyal, Szelenyi, Townsley 1998: 2). During the transition period, the economic situation of the intelligentsia gradually improved. Even more important, however, was the fact that affluence (like the transformation into the middle class) was one of its most explicitly articulated goals. As a result, a large part of the former intelligentsia transformed into the middle class both economically and culturally. This process can be described as a transition from socialist rank order to capitalist class stratification.

The intelligentsia used to fulfil both professional and civic roles. However, the areas of activity of educated people and elites (related to work, politics, education, and science, even the third sector) are becoming increasingly specialized and professionalized. In the Polish cultural context, many professionals—such as doctors, lawyers, academics, even engineers—were perceived as members of the intelligentsia and embodied its ethos, while in the West, most of them would simply be typical members of a given profession. In Anglo-American and Western European societies, medicine and law have their codes and sets of practices (Evetts 2013). It was not only the ideology of professionalism that appealed to the intelligentsia, but also the new professions and occupations that appeared alongside the market economy. In addition, in many places, meritocratic standards of promotion replaced the criterion of belonging

to the intelligentsia. In addition to the old professions, new ones emerged, linked to the market economy. The contemporary Polish middle class includes social categories that have neither intelligentsia origins nor identity. Similarly, the cultural elites partially consist of members of the intelligentsia and also encompass new categories (for instance, celebrities).

The gradual shift within the culture, especially the ethos, was all the more significant because it was the values, attitudes, lifestyles, and shared ideas that made the intelligentsia a unique social category. In this respect, the existence of the intelligentsia was based on such factors as self-perception, norms, cultural preferences, tastes, aspirations, and origin. In the past, belonging to the intelligentsia was a source of prestige. Today, many people do not want to see themselves as its members. University graduates do not assimilate to the cultural patterns of the intelligentsia but to new ones, regardless of their social background. Even many interviewed members of the intellectual elites deny having this identity (Kulas 2017). Their denial can be interpreted as a manifestation of the tradition of intellectuals who criticize the intelligentsia for not fulfilling its role. Members of the upper segment of the middle class of intelligentsia origin have retained some characteristics of intelligentsia culture. Moreover, some professional groups (doctors, for instance) tend to present and legitimize their activities in terms of a mission for the whole society, even if they do so somewhat instrumentally to gain group benefits. They can obtain the support of society because their profession is perceived in the Polish cultural context as endowed with an important mission. Hence, the

intelligentsia's patterns have overlapped with middle-class lifestyles. Some qualitative studies suggest not simply the replacement of the old values and attitudes with new ones but rather a clash, differentiation, fragmentation, and co-existence of these two sets of values. In this context, a thesis about the hybridization of the intelligentsia's culture can be put forward.

Consequently, despite the transformation and market-driven concerns, some parts of the group of educated people have retained the habitus of the former intelligentsia. This corresponds with some sociological claims about several parallel trends taking place within society, which cannot be reduced to a mere change of the intelligentsia into the middle class (Wesołowski 1994). Therefore, as a consequence of these transformations, representatives of certain professions (for instance, doctors, lawyers, or economists) have become part of the middle class while others have not (Borucki 1994: 114). There is a difference between the part of the middle class originating from the old intelligentsia and the rest. Regardless of their occupations and professions, the descendants of the intelligentsia formed an elite group within the middle class, thus distinguishing and reproducing themselves. In other words, in the Polish context, the middle class evolved as a mixture of native cultural patterns with Western ones. It is also worth mentioning in passing the axiological and identity-related differences within the intelligentsia. Representatives of both its right-wing and left-wing circles emphasize the end of or significant transformations within the intelligentsia. At the same time, one can notice the

importance of intellectual milieus, both those of the past, associated with national and Catholic identity, and the more recent ones, formed in the times of the Polish People's Republic. After all, it is members of the intelligentsia who initiate and define the most important moral disputes in today's Poland. They also take part in power games and, as a result, influence political affairs. Without intellectuals, it is impossible to understand contemporary political divisions and polarization. It is the intelligentsia that is responsible for contemporary authoritarian actions and the populist turn, which in a way distinguishes Polish populism from populism in other countries.

CONCLUSION

I argue that although the concept of the intelligentsia no longer refers to a separate segment of the social structure, it is still a relevant and current concept of culture and morality. It encompasses people with an intellectual and cultural background who are active in the public sphere, that is, those who combine a professional career with work for the benefit of society as a whole. The contemporary elite still includes people—scholars, writers, activists, and journalists—whose value system resembles the ethos of the intelligentsia. Some still define themselves in this way. The intelligentsia ethos is also being revived among representatives of younger generations, who are drawing on models from the Polish intellectual tradition. Nevertheless, according to my and other research, intelligentsia identity—even in cultural and intellectual circles—is weak, and

moreover, as was mentioned above, many people deny having such an identity. Although organizations that are deeply rooted in history may use the word “intelligentsia” in their names (e.g., the Club of the Catholic Intelligentsia), newly-founded associations no longer do so.

However, the patterns of the intelligentsia are rooted in deep structures of social memory. They have an impact even without prior articulation. Then there are also people who consciously seek inspiration from the tradition. By so doing, they can undoubtedly be called contemporary successors of the intelligentsia. Therefore, the patterns of intelligentsia culture would seem to apply in some cases. They provide an important point of reference and are presented as worthy of emulation. To a certain extent, they prevail in institutions such as universities, cultural or educational bodies, and associations. Nowadays, such an ethos reveals itself not through simple declarations of identity but through the practice of inherited cultural patterns. Furthermore, those intellectuals who are critical of the intelligentsia can also be perceived as those who affirm its true ethos. The arguments they use when criticizing the intelligentsia’s privileges appear to be the same as those used by their well-known predecessors.

Moreover, despite modernization, being part of the European Union’s structures, and being an independent state, Poland remains a semi-peripheral country. It is located between the democratic West and the authoritarian East. Hence, the transformation has not eliminated the challenges that educated people face. As mentioned above, in the past, the intelligentsia was

in opposition to the authoritarian state. The current political situation may therefore make certain values and attitudes relevant again. Similar structural conditions have shaped the intelligentsia in the past. Now these conditions may cause some individuals to adopt attitudes comparable to those of their cultural ancestors and the model of the public sphere they believed in. In the past, the intelligentsia became active at special historical moments: above all, in situations where its autonomy was threatened. In this respect, the current socio-political context is important due to the tensions between supporters of the European Union and of political and individual freedom on the one hand, and defenders of Polish nationalism and the right-wing politicians on the other. However, these divisions also mark the intelligentsia itself, which encompasses both advocates of the European Union and those who articulate the postulates of national egoism. Nevertheless, political upheavals and threatened values may contribute to the activation of the intelligentsia. Its inherited past may once again turn out to be a source of resistance and engagement.

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**THE RULE OF LAW
IN AUTHORITARIAN STATE AND THE
PROGRAM OF UNIVERSAL
PRIVATIZATION: HOW THE GDAŃSK
LIBERALS SAW THE AGREEMENT
WITH THE COMMUNISTS ON THE
EVE OF POLISH TRANSFORMATION**

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I present the Gdańsk liberal milieu's idea of political transformation. It was based on two foundations: the idea of an authoritarian rule of law and the universal enfranchisement of citizens on public property. It assumed the creation of a transitional regime, between the totalitarian communist state and a democratic sovereign Poland. The concept of universal enfranchisement, presented by Janusz Lewandowski and Jan Szomburg, implied carrying out an "act of euthanasia" of statism through extensive privatization of state property. The Gdańsk liberals argued that first there must be a change in the economic base in Poland, and only then could the system be fully democratized. The spread of private property was the most important "threshold" of the political transformation that would transform a nation of workers into a nation of free owners.

KEYWORDS: neoliberalism, democracy, "Solidarity," labor movement, intelligentsia, political transformation

In December 1988, that is, exactly a year before the implementation of neoliberal reforms that went down in Polish history as the “shock therapy” or the Balcerowicz Plan, the Gdańsk liberal milieu decided to present its own proposal for political and economic transformation in Poland. The milieu was centered around the underground magazine *Przegląd Polityczny* (The Political Review), which had been published in the publishing underground since 1983. The Gdańsk liberal circle consisted of young intellectuals recruited from the intelligentsia. It achieved unprecedented success in both the ideological and political fields. Jacek Luszniiewicz, an economist and researcher of the history of Polish economic liberalism, has no doubt that this was the most important Polish opposition liberal milieu that functioned in the 1980s: “The group, which was not numerous in total, turned out to be the most important center of Polish opposition liberal thought, playing a major role in the process of its reorientation and nationwide institutionalization” (Luszniewicz 2008: 187). The Gdańsk circle combined effectiveness in the field of ideas with effectiveness in the field of power. In 1990, the Liberal Democratic Congress party was founded, from which Jan Krzysztof Bielecki, the second prime minister of the government of the Third Republic of Poland, and Janusz Lewandowski, the influential Minister of Ownership Transformation in 1991–1993, were recruited. The most important figure of this milieu is undoubtedly its creator, Donald Tusk, who served as Poland’s prime minister from 2007 to 2014 and is still the leader of the country’s largest opposition party.

The first occasion to publicly manifest their agenda was the Gdańsk Liberal Congress held on December 10 and 11, 1988, in Gdańsk (“Wprowadzenie” 1989: 5). During the two-day event, a political program was presented that was derived from the experience and thoughts gathered over the previous years by the Gdańsk liberal milieu. It was attended by dozens of people, and papers were delivered by, among others, Tusk, Lewandowski, and Bielecki. The congress was almost an official declaration of willingness to participate in governing the country by the milieu of *Przegląd Polityczny*. During the first part of the session, liberals proposed the creation of a transitional regime, which was to combine authoritarianism with capitalism (Mażewski 1989: 10–19). The second part was devoted to the presentation of the proposal for economic reform and a bold program of universal privatization (Lewandowski, Szomburg 1989: 20–28). In the third part, meanwhile, the issues of regional reform and decentralization of the state were discussed.

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The Congress was held under conditions of accelerating liberalization and decomposition of the communist regime. In the late 1980s, both sides of the political dispute signaled the possibility of an agreement. In February 1988, one of the leaders of the democratic opposition, Bronisław Geremek, proposed an “anti-crisis pact” to the regime in the magazine *Konfrontacje* (Dudek 2014: 121). The conditions of the agreement were the legalization of “Solidarity,” the guarantee of freedom of association, and the creation of an upper house of parliament, for which free elections were to be held. At the same time, work was underway to pull the Polish economy out of the

crisis. The regime had already held a referendum on “radical economic recovery” in 1987, which was to require surviving “a difficult two- to three-year period of rapid change.” Yet the mandate to carry out unspecified profound changes was not strong, and the referendum proved to be invalid (Dudek 2014: 110–121). The communist authorities, however, did not stop looking for a way out of the deteriorating political and economic situation. The wave of strikes that swept across Poland in August 1988 led to a meeting between Lech Wałęsa and the Minister of Interior Affairs, General Czesław Kiszczak (Dudek 2014: 172). Negotiations between the opposition and the authorities then began, leading to the Round Table talks in February of the following year. The introduction of a radical neoliberal economic reform program based on the privatization of public assets, the opening of the Polish economy to international competition, or the abolition of employment guarantees were still treated as “science fiction” by opposition supporters of neoliberal transformation at the end of 1988 (Gomułka, Kowalik 2011: 93). It seems significant that many of the ideas put forward during the Gdańsk Liberal Congress came into effect and became the foundation of Polish transformation. The reconstruction of the discussions held during this event makes it possible to show neoliberal reforms in a much broader historical and ideological context. These reforms also served as a platform for the formation of an alliance between two elites previously hostile to each other—the Polish intelligentsia and the nomenklatura members of the Communist party.

THE RIGHT TO POLITICS

The opposition circle of Gdańsk liberals in late 1988 attempted to emerge from the political and journalistic underground. The way to do this was the already-mentioned Gdańsk Liberal Congress, which was organized according to the principle that one must “squeeze everything one can out of the system” (Stankiewicz, Śmiłowicz 2008: 98). Speeches delivered at the Congress showed the paradoxes of neoliberal thinking—liberal reforms were de facto quite revolutionary in nature. This is because moderation and the method of small steps—traditionally associated with liberalism—were combined with radical rhetoric and demands for a profound transformation of social relations. Another problematic issue was that economic changes were to be implemented without a democratic mandate. This did not arouse resistance in the liberal milieu; on the contrary, premature democratization could, according to its members, bring deplorable social consequences and lead to social protests. A final paradox was the liberals’ declared hostility to the state and its omnipotence, while at the same time the need to use the state to create capitalism and expand the boundaries of the free market. Without statist tools, the bold plans proposed by the Gdańsk liberals could not be implemented.

The Gdańsk Liberal Congress was opened by Donald Tusk with a paper entitled “The Right to Politics,” in which he described the historical, ideological, and strategic choices of the young Gdańsk circle, which tried to enter politics (Tusk 1989: 6–9). The main generational experience was December 1970,

which revealed the evils of communist power. Polish workers were fighting against a hike in food prices. The protests ended in bloodshed when the army opened fire on the demonstrators. This upheaval led to the intelligentsia's cooperation with the workers, followed by the former's obvious involvement in the "Solidarity" movement itself. As Tusk said, it was at this time that new slogans appeared for the first time in the conversations of oppositionists: "'Free market, individualism, property rights'—for the younger among us, this was exotic, *terra incognita*, but appealing with the promise of breaking out of the vicious circle of Polish impossibilities and 'in – out' dilemmas" (Tusk 1989: 7). The failure of "Solidarity" after martial law was imposed in December 1981 and the weakness of its underground structure were a signal for the would-be "red guard of the Polish revolution" to change their ways. In just a few years, they created their own organizational, financial, and ideological base around *Przegląd Polityczny*:

An internal minimum program was thus formed: our own magazine, our own publishing house (both functioning underground), material independence from the state. The latter was not so difficult to achieve, especially in Gdańsk, thanks to the work of self-made managerial talents creating and running dozens of cooperatives and companies. (Tusk 1989: 7)

The main thrust was the spread of liberal thought, which was the best way out of the "Polish impossibility" and the path to normality.

In the paper presented at the Congress in 1988, Tusk described his growing concerns over time about the perception and reception of liberalism in an authoritarian country. This

vision was dramatically different from the surrounding reality; the discussion of liberalism could easily be reduced to “clericalism and academic discussion” (Tusk 1989: 8). Liberalism spoke of evolution as a value, not revolution, which was implied by the application of liberal principles to the reality of an authoritarian and socialist country. This required the adoption of “original interpretation and peculiar methods of action” (Tusk 1989: 8). The milieu decided to fill the fissures that had been created in the cracking system of the People’s Republic of Poland. In the second half of the 1980s, quite a few initiatives emerged that promoted, in various ways, liberal ideas. However, Tusk cooled the enthusiasm, stressing the nature of the communist regime:

Regardless of the number of companies and clubs, and the extent of freedom of speech (here progress is probably the greatest), Poland is still a decidedly undemocratic, statist, illegitimate state. The burning issue is to change the constitution, which must become a set of specific guarantees that actually restrain the disposers of power. (Tusk 1989: 9)

Tusk referred to who was to implement the reforms:

Our task is, we undertook it anyway, to construct proposals, specifics, and only then to organize pressure to implement them. ... However, it cannot be ruled out that there will be a need, including among us, to build a broader platform. After all, today’s meeting is intended, among other things, to get to know each other more closely, groups and circles that have taken freedom as their idea. (Tusk 1989: 9)

The Congress, therefore, was to be the first step in building its own political party, and the milieu went beyond the field of journalistic production and was very keen to convert the cultural and social capital it had gained over the previous five

years into political capital that could be used in the struggle for power.

Tusk wanted to finally implement what he had announced with Wojciech Duda in the introduction to the first issue of *Przegląd Polityczny* five years earlier when the editors announced the start of work to create an elite political formation (“Od redakcji” 1983: 1–2). The establishment of *Przegląd Polityczny* enabled not only the formulation and exchange of ideas, but also set in motion a social process that involved the production of a milieu, or social-intellectual circle, which is the characteristic form of existence and reproduction of the intelligentsia. According to Jerzy Jedlicki,

the proper social form of existence of the intelligentsia is the environment, just as the way of being of the nobility was the neighborhood and “the comity of the chivalric state.” The intelligentsia produces a social environment wherever it is found, and where direct contacts cannot suffice, it produces an environment of correspondence. (Jedlicki 2008: 19)

Tusk followed the path—set long ago by the opposition intelligentsia—of building an environment by creating its own magazine. *Przegląd Polityczny* became a tool for young Gdańsk intelligentsia to build an environment that enabled them to accumulate cultural, social, economic, and, finally, symbolic capital that made it possible to enter politics as the first serious liberals in Poland. *Przegląd Polityczny* became a powerful vehicle for the intellectual and political game of power and ideological hegemony.

In the public debate of the late 1980s held among the Polish intelligentsia, the economic program of the Gdańsk liberals had little to no competition. For Tusk, the answer to the economic

and political crisis boiled down to the free-market transformation and the introduction of guarantees of civil rights:

We want to aim for a Poland in which power will come from the will of the voters, but which at the same time will be a power limited by law and civic guarantees, in which the priority of the person over the institution will be recognized, in which the right to property will be guaranteed, because freedom requires property. "This is nothing new!" someone will say. And he will be right. But all new ideas, all "third ways," "non-bourgeois civil society," "socialisms with a human face," "solidarisms" trump utopia and political fiction. We still have this stuff in excess. (Tusk 1989: 9)

Similar words were said in Tusk's manifesto two years earlier (Donecki 1987: 11–21). Here the leader of the milieu drew a clear line of political division, and the only alternative to socialism and central planning was, according to him, market reform in the neoliberal spirit, based on the spread of private property and private economic activity. It was ownership that was to be the primary guarantor of civil rights and freedom. Tusk concluded: "Poles are slowly becoming a civil society, with a pretty well-educated political elite, with a growing political culture. The last ten years have accelerated the process of recreation or emergence of civil society" (Tusk 1989: 9). The final outcome of the ownership transition was a creation of a bourgeois civil society. Only then could full democratization of the system take place.

PROGRAM OF UNIVERSAL PRIVATIZATION

The platform for an agreement between the communist authorities and the opposition, according to the Gdańsk liberals,

was economic reform based on privatization of the economy and the creation of a free market. The economic reform was not only to bring prosperity but also to create a new socio-political system. In December 1988, during the Gdańsk Liberal Congress, Janusz Lewandowski and Jan Szomburg presented their own signature project, which was meant to be one of the foundations of free market reform (Lewandowski, Szomburg 1989: 20–28). Interestingly, they presented the first draft of the idea a month earlier, during an academic conference on transformations in the Polish economy, at the Central School of Planning and Statistics in Warsaw. The originator of this session was today's head of the National Bank of Poland, Adam Glapiński, and its organization was handled by the Deputy Minister of Economy in the first "Solidarity" government of Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Stefan Kawalec (Gomułka, Kowalik 2011: 92). Among those invited were economists Janusz Beksiak, Ryszard Bugaj, Marek Dąbrowski, Janusz Lewandowski together with Jan Szomburg, and Marcin Świącicki. The latter was at the time a Communist Party-educated official at American universities and secretary of the Prime Minister's Economic Consultative Council. The main issue discussed during the session was the privatization of public assets. Kawalec recalled many years later that the Gdańsk liberals initially wanted to present "a mixed economy model, that is, state and private" (Gomułka, Kowalik 2011: 94). They changed their minds after reading his proposal, which went much further and imitated some solutions introduced by Margaret Thatcher:

Seeing this, Lewandowski and Szomburg prepared and presented a new proposal at the conference—the later famous concept of universal enfranchisement through the free transfer to citizens of property vouchers entitling them to purchase shares in privatized enterprises. This concept was used in the so-called “coupon privatization” carried out in 1991 in Czechoslovakia, as well as in Russia. In contrast, the concept of privatization presented in my paper was soon implemented in Poland by Krzysztof Lis as Plenipotentiary for Ownership Transformation in Tadeusz Mazowiecki’s government. At that time, however, during a conference in November 1988, the privatization ideas we discussed, although very well received, were treated as absolute science fiction. Leszek Balcerowicz was not present at that conference. (Gomułka, Kowalik 2011: 93).

The organization of the session thus shows that the liberal economists gathered around *Przegląd Polityczny* were part of a broader reorientation, also evident in the academic field. The introduction of capitalism was becoming an ever-closer prospect, but this did not yet mean acceptance of the mass privatization program and agreement with the neoliberal agenda. The years 1988 and 1989 were a time of tremendous acceleration of ideas and radicalization. What seemed like “science fiction” in November 1988, a year later was already part of the government agenda.

Szomburg and Lewandowski were economical experts of the workers’ council movement during the first “Solidarity” of 1980–1981. Their own experience provided them with valuable lessons and confirmed the validity of their ideological choices. They described the workers’ council movement attempts to reform the socialist system during the first “Solidarity” era. At that time, the first “threshold” of support for the introduction of elements of market competition among enterprises was achieved.

This was the vision of a “market game organized by a central planner” (Lewandowski, Szomburg 1989: 20). The economic system, according to the “Solidarity” program, was to be based on market competition between self-governing, independent, and self-financing social enterprises. Due to poorly identified sources of the problem, however, the reforms “sanctioned and froze the post-Stalin arrangement of property relations in industry” (Lewandowski, Szomburg 1989: 21). The source of the failure of all socialist reforms was already pointed out before the Second World War by Ludwig von Mises, who “warned that the central figure of a healthy economy is the entrepreneur and that the figure of the manager cannot be a substitute for it” (Lewandowski, Szomburg 1989: 21). Because of the lack of private ownership of the means of production, rational management is impossible: “the socialist economy is alien to objectivized economic calculation, as a result of the lack of real owners of capital, there is no rational allocation of resources” (Lewandowski, Szomburg 1989: 22). Only economic reform, based on the restoration of private property relations, could succeed. Standing in the way of change was the problem of political safeguards for property rights. To this end, it was necessary to introduce a mechanism for the exercise of power based on the rule of law, which was “the condition for authentic property and authentic entrepreneurship” (Lewandowski, Szomburg 1989: 23). However, the rule of law was to be introduced by a power that did not have a democratic mandate. This was of no concern to the liberals, for whom what mattered above all were guarantees of property rights and

economic exchange. For this, a democratic mandate from the authorities was not needed.

The answer to the problem of lack of ownership in the Polish economy was the idea of universal privatization, that is, “the transfer of property rights from the state administration to the broad masses of society” (Lewandowski, Szomburg 1989: 25):

The content of our proposal is universal enfranchisement, that is, the real transfer of ownership powers from the state administration to the broad masses of society. This must be a radical de-statization of the economy, not only in the formal sense, but also in the effective sense, that is, it must lead to the imposition of different criteria of economic control on enterprises than before and to the abolition of economic paternalism. (Lewandowski, Szomburg 1989: 25)

Szomburg and Lewandowski believed that the natural process of introducing private property would take too long and poison the economy, so there was a need for “an act of euthanasia: the extensive parceling out of state property” (Lewandowski, Szomburg 1989: 25).

The concept of universal enfranchisement or privatization was to grant listed property vouchers to all adult Polish citizens. This meant “a top-down transformation of amorphous state property into a decentralized system of individual and voluntarily transferred rights over existing productive assets” (Lewandowski, Szomburg 1989: 23). The vouchers were to be registered and could be used to acquire shares of appropriate value in state-owned companies. A timetable for privatization and deadlines for listing companies on the stock exchange were to be made public. In addition to the issuance of ordinary shares, the concept called for the issuance of preferred shares, which were

dedicated to employee crews. In this way, Lewandowski and Szomburg wanted to meet the “aspirations of local government under new conditions” (Lewandowski, Szomburg 1989: 26). Privatization of the state sector was supposed to make it possible to build a capital market based on millions of small shareholders, but it was not entirely clear where the huge funds needed for investment and recapitalization of plants were to come from:

It seems that the act of parceling out state property, as a result of which a property entitlement is created in every Polish home, which will soon be able to be tested on the stock market, has mobilization qualities. ... The parceling out would extend to all enterprises of the competitive sphere while leaving the Treasury's shares in some key industry plants. (Lewandowski, Szomburg 1989: 26)

DEPROLETARIANIZATION OF POLISH SOCIETY

In addition to the economic goal, the liberals set an equally important social goal: universal enfranchisement. They wanted to change the structure of society as a whole:

We recognize at the same time the social dimension of the proposed operation. For the transformation of a mercenary society into a society with a diversified income structure will be set in motion, in which a layer of shareholders, entrepreneurs, and profiteers will emerge alongside the multitude of people subsisting on income from labor. (Lewandowski, Szomburg 1989: 27)

The program of universal enfranchisement was a tool of liberal social engineering. The authors themselves called it “a conscious operation to create ... a broader layer of risk-taking individuals,

necessary in the work of revitalizing the economy, building an economic culture” (Lewandowski, Szomburg 1989: 27). This approach stemmed from the themes presented in the pages of *Przegląd Polityczny*, a neoliberal reading. Central to them was the deproletarianization program created by Wilhelm Röpke, which became one of the foundations of the ordoliberal project (Braniecki 1986: 79). The spread of property was to bring about profound changes in human mentality and in the character of society as a whole. Neoliberals wanted to bring about a transformation of the working class into a middle class, whose existence was based on private property. The proposals of Szomburg and Lewandowski had little in common with the evolutionary nature of liberalism, which was often mentioned in the pages of *Przegląd Polityczny*; moreover, not the entire circle of the Gdańsk liberals shared the enthusiasm of the creators of the concept of universal enfranchisement.

Tadeusz Aziewicz, at the time an associate of Lewandowski and Szomburg and a researcher at the Institute of Economic Theory at the University of Gdańsk, in the discussion after the paper, referred to Lewandowski and Szomburg’s ideas as a “capitalist revolution”:

The decomposition of statism is taking place, while the speed and scope of this phenomenon in the face of an increasingly acute crisis give rise to impatience. In this situation, there are attempts to cut the Gordian knot, to make a “capitalist revolution.” ... Our task is more difficult, and one should not delude oneself that we will solve it by some one-time act. There have been enough experiments, and Poland in 1988 certainly cannot afford them. (Aziewicz 1988: 76)

Aziewicz did not spare criticism, comparing Lewandowski and Szomburg to social engineers: “the proposed solution is not a reaching back to old, proven patterns, but another great experiment, a huge construction designed by candidates for social engineers, based on not very stable foundations” (Aziewicz 1989: 57). The demand to carry out “an act of euthanasia of statism” evoked associations with the communist revolution. Dariusz Filar, in turn, compared it to the decreed liquidation of private property by the Communists after the Second World War. This gave rise, in his opinion, to the illusory hope that one could “sign a decree and behold, out of millions of paupers, I have a million capitalists” (“Dyskusja redakcyjna” 1989: 60). At the same time, he criticized the concept of universal enfranchisement, pointing out that the allocation of vouchers was, in his opinion, too egalitarian. Filar listed among the constitutive features of liberalism “freedom, not equality” and “evolution, not revolution” (Filar 1988: 23). He also wrote that liberals do not believe

in the possibility of crafting an ideal, flawless, perfect social system behind a cabinet desk or in the silence of libraries. Liberals advocate a small-scale social experiment from which, if successful, broader reforms can be derived. They opt for piecemeal moves, the sum of which will only result in great change. (Filar 1988: 28)

This was a very different reading of liberalism than Szomburg and Lewandowski did. For they stood on the ground of neoliberal theory, which held that liberalism should actively oppose the totalitarian threat. They believed in an order that must be pursued even using the tools of social engineering.

This stemmed, it seems, from their unabashed faith in the beneficial effects of universal private property and the free market. This faith was criticized during the Congress by sociologist Ireneusz Krzemiński, who accused the liberals of creating an illusory image of economic change:

Polish liberalism constructs myths of the free market economy. Why do I say myths? Because it seems to me that concepts such as Hayek's are mythical concepts. I think that the reality of the West gives the lie to such concepts. It is only the combination of liberalism with other concepts that produces a living social and economic reality. ("Dyskusja redakcyjna" 1989: 63)

The creation of utopias by the ideologues of the movement also brought the capitalist revolution closer to the communist revolution. Lewandowski himself, in an interview 13 years after the events described above, said that the concept of universal enfranchisement had a "Bolshevik" and "revolutionary" character (Kalicki 2002). He defended his idea as a "reform pacemaker" through which a civil society could emerge:

It was a legitimate form of stock thinking. On paper, it had no small amount of charm, for it promised to recreate in one fell swoop the historical subsoil of civil society. In fact, it was the only thought innovation in the process of "unscrewing communism"—a process that was an intellectually sterile imitation of foreign models. (Kalicki 2002)

The liberals' project was a proposal to create a new utopia in which property changed people's characters and social mentality.

The liberals wanted to bring change under the conditions of an authoritarian country and were ready to give up full democracy

in order to carry out economic reforms. The liberal revolution did not appeal to the democratic mandate of the majority, and the liberals themselves expressed distrust of the masses and fear of the tyranny of the majority. A profound transformation of social relations required the use of means that only the state apparatus had at its disposal. The liberal revolution was not to be done by society, but by the public administration and by the elites. In *Przegląd Polityczny*, the conviction was present almost from the beginning that the way out of the economic, social, and political crisis was through agreements with the regime on the grounds of economic reform. The capitalist direction of change, which assumed the marketization of the economy and the equality of all types of property, was never controversial. However, Szomburg and Lewandowski's concept of universal enfranchisement, presented at the end of 1988, went a step further; it was to be a radical exit from statism through a broad parcellation and privatization of state property. Liberals had already rejected the assumptions of the welfare state and the idea of seeking a third way between capitalism and socialism. The welfare state was, in their view, the seedbed of totalitarianism, which suppressed economic and political freedom. It was a doctrinaire adoption of the assumptions of neoliberalism, which saw the state apparatus as a source of pathology in public life. At the same time, the Gdańsk liberals realized that they had to implement their changes through statist methods, and one member of the editorial board of *Przegląd Polityczny* argued in a discussion after the Congress that "without the participation of state institutions it is impossible to transform

the system—the state cannot be rejected or ignored, it must be changed” (“Dyskusja redakcyjna” 1989: 59). Another discussant called for the construction of an active state: “The maximal state is going away—it was the Stalinist model. The minimal or natural state is incompatible with current conditions. Our vision of reprivatization and regionalization requires the concept of an active state. This is a kind of paradox” (“Dyskusja redakcyjna” 1989: 73). Creating a new capitalist society under socialist economic conditions was not an easy task. The free market and the owner class had to be constructed almost from scratch, and this created a contradiction within the framework of liberal logic. Liberalism called for evolution and moderation. It presented itself as a path of middle ground and compromise, and finally preached the limitation of state omnipotence. The rapid changes in social reality that free-market reforms had to entail challenged assumptions about the evolutionary nature of liberalism. They also needed a mandate to be carried out, and the liberals knew that the problem in introducing capitalism was the “statist consciousness” of Poles, who were attached to egalitarian ideas and job security. The idea of a capitalist revolution, introduced by an “authoritarian rule of law,” made it possible to circumvent the problem of the democratic legitimacy of the changes and at the same time instill new forms of social thinking. This revolution was to take place from the top down, and a political settlement between the intelligentsia opposition, which supported the neoliberal program of rapid economic transformation, and the regime, divested of ideology, required the creation of new political forms of transition.

A LAW-ABIDING AUTHORITARIAN STATE

In an atmosphere of liberalization of the system, social delegitimization of the communist regime, and deep economic crisis, the circle of Gdańsk liberals presented their own project of political agreement with the authorities. The author of the concept was Lech Mażewski, and it was so important to the liberals that they presented it on paper three times: first in the pages of the tenth, then the eleventh issue of *Przegląd Polityczny*, and as a lecture at the Congress in December 1988. Already in the tenth issue of *Przegląd Polityczny*, Mażewski published a text titled “Is the People’s Republic of Poland Still a Totalitarian State?” in which, for the first time, the proposal to create an “authoritarian rule of law” was made (Mażewski 1988b: 100–116). Mażewski’s proposal continued the thought expressed in the concept of the new rationality, which assumed that the Polish People’s Republic would evolve into an authoritarian state divested of ideology. There were at least formal reasons for this. In 1980, the Supreme Administrative Court was established to serve citizen review of administrative decisions. The Constitutional Tribunal was established in 1982 and began adjudicating in 1986. In the same year Poland, again after more than thirty years, joined the International Monetary Fund, and in 1987 the communist authorities established the office of Ombudsman. These changes, however, went virtually unrecorded in the texts of the columnists of *Przegląd Polityczny*. Mażewski also did not write about them, although the introduction of the rule of law was central to proposals for systemic

reform in the absence of democratic, elected institutions. He proposed

a state system in which public authority does not have democratic legitimacy (and therefore its actions are not based on the will of the majority expressed in free elections), but is limited and controlled in its actions. Limits in the functioning of authoritarian power are not only factual, but also institutional. (Mażewski 1988a: 196)

Here Mażewski was referring to judicial control of the government's actions "based on its real independence, which is a matter of fundamental importance" (Mażewski 1988a: 198). However, he did not explain how the "real independence" of the judiciary would be guaranteed in a state where political power was still held by the communists. The legitimacy of the entire law abiding justice system was based solely on the will of the new political elite.

Mażewski argued that the People's Republic of Poland had undergone a significant evolution over the past two decades toward a more open system. He listed the basic foundations of the totalitarian state, which consisted of an official ideology, a mono-party system, organized coercion and violence, central control of the economy, and a monopoly on arms control (Mażewski 1988b: 110–111). The death of official ideology came as early as 1968 and was sealed by the rise of a democratic opposition in the second half of the 1970s. In the Polish People's Republic there were also no signs of mass terror, and the state never had full control over the economy because collectivization had not been carried out in Poland and individual farming still existed. Mażewski concluded that the

People's Republic of Poland was not a totalitarian state, but an "incomplete authoritarian system," which was characterized by the following elements:

the absence of the goals and totalitarian methods typical of communism, the impossibility of rebuilding an official ideology to replace Marxism-Leninism in this role, respect for the special status of religion and the church instead of striving to create a new secular religion, changes in the power elite leading to the elevation of representatives of the army and the bureaucracy to its forefront, the slow reduction of the scope of state interference in economic life, toleration of the existence of institutions and activities seeking to reconstruct an independent society. (Mażewski 1988b: 110)

The process of further transformation of Poland into an authoritarian state was possible by reducing the influence of the state. Mażewski stressed that first there should be the introduction of capitalism in Poland, and only then democracy:

We have before us the great task of transforming the statist Polish society into a market society. Removing the overgrowth of the state in the social body will certainly not be painless. The reconstruction of civil society in Poland will not take place through premature democratization of the system—for the threat of totalitarian recidivism is too great here—but through evolutionary liberalization, which will only be crowned by the emergence of democratic institutions. And there is no other way if the dream of liberal democracy, of a Western-type democracy, is to come true in Poland. Ahead of us, therefore, is the quest for the establishment of a full authoritarian system, the further detotalization of the People's Republic as a partial stage in the process of recovery from totalitarian collapse. The primary task here would be to replace the dead structure of totalitarianism, with the institutions of a law-abiding authoritarian state. (Mażewski 1988b: 110)

The liberals believed that before Poland could become a democracy, there had to be a social transformation first, the foundation

of which would be changes in the country's economic structure. The foundation of civil society was the free market and property, which were to be the guarantors of human freedom. The rule of law in this context is first and foremost a guarantee of individual rights to free economic activity.

The concept outlined in the paper in December 1988 went much further than what Mażewski had presented just a few months earlier. However, the context had also changed. After the wave of summer strikes, negotiations began between the government and the opposition, and an opportunity to take joint responsibility for power was looming:

The concepts of an authoritarian rule of law should be treated as a necessary minimum, a minimal program of state reform, necessarily maintaining the monopoly of political power in the hands of the current ruling stratum. Meanwhile—as a result of the two strike waves—the pattern of relations between the authorities and society has changed. It may be possible for the political opposition to violate the monopoly of political power remaining in the hands of the communists. (Mażewski 1988b: 110)

Mażewski argued that the People's Republic of Poland was no longer a totalitarian, but an authoritarian state, and that the further unsealing of the system that was taking place before their eyes should have been supported. By the end of 1988, it was already possible to imagine a new system in which part of the power would fall to the opposition through free elections.

Of course, according to the logic of Mażewski's reasoning, the authoritarian order was an ad hoc goal that would lead in the long run to the full democratization of the system. The opposition would enter into an agreement with the government that would lead to the enactment of a new Basic Law: "The new

model of public authority could also play a role in Poland's pending transition—probably painful—from a command economy to a market economy” (Mażewski 1989: 10). The system was to be similar to the presidential system, in which the head of state was to be elected in free elections, but only from among candidates put forward by the Communist Party. The president had the right to appoint the prime minister, decide on power ministries, dissolve parliament, and fill half the seats in the Senate, while the role of the parliament was to dismiss ministers and the prime minister (Mażewski 1989: 12–14). This relegated parliament to a secondary role in the process of government, and the place where Mażewski hoped for significant concessions from the government was the reform, or rather the creation, of local government, which in the People's Republic had been reduced to a facade and auxiliary role. Municipalities were to own their own property, and councilors were to be elected in free elections. This was a step toward building a civil society:

In general, the aim should be to deprive the state of influence over all those activities that can be carried out by social forces in the form of various forms of self-government, social organizations and associations, and ad hoc civic initiatives set up. (Mażewski 1989: 16)

In his speech, Mażewski referred to Alexis de Tocqueville, who stressed the importance of local government and associations in shaping civic attitudes. However, this was not a closed proposal. The concept of an authoritarian state was to be a stage in regime change, not an end in itself. The dynamics of the changes taking place in the Soviet Union could have enabled greater democratization of the regime in the future:

The presented system, if applied in practice, could take a variety of institutional shapes. This depends primarily on the political strength of the main actors in public life in post-totalitarian Poland and the changes taking place in the USSR. The increasing importance of the social element could, for example, lead to a situation in which the PZPR's monopoly on nominating candidates for the presidency is abolished, or the head of state's right to fill Senate seats is curtailed or even taken away. Under favorable circumstances, this could lead to an attempt to eliminate the Communist Party as an intermediary in communicating with Moscow. The institution of a president who can directly direct foreign policy and defense, and who at the same time has the confidence of the people, given to him in democratic elections, is a good starting point for building a structure of external compromise between Polish society and the USSR. In turn, in the situation of an independent Poland, a parliamentary system with clear elements of presidentialism, perhaps with some amendments very useful in stabilizing a sovereign state. (Mażewski 1989: 19)

Mażewski's proposal gained approval in the discussion immediately after the paper was delivered. Ireneusz Krzemiński praised it for triggering the public imagination ("Dyskusja redakcyjna" 1989: 62). Aleksander Hall added that it is necessary to think about a transitional period regime, which is needed on the road to full democracy.

It is necessary to have some kind of transition period and transition period institutions that create the prospect of launching the elements of democracy to a large extent, and on the other hand give guarantees to the ruling establishment, which, after all, has very real interests and power. ("Dyskusja redakcyjna" 1989: 58)

Only a compromise with the government made it possible to resolve the crisis between the government and the opposition, which was tired of the political stalemate and economic crisis. Piotr Kapczyński, too, saw no other way but to propose certain systemic solutions:

the key to solving the Polish circle of impossibility should be sought in the purely political sphere. Political solutions in our conditions will certainly be imperfect and limited, but we are doomed to them. Even flawed political changes are better than no solutions at all. (*"Dyskusja redakcyjna"* 1989: 64)

It is impossible not to agree that a spirit of realism and pragmatism hovered over the liberals' policy proposals.

SUMMARY

In conclusion, the Gdańsk liberals first wanted to implement neoliberal reforms and only then allow a vote on them. Under full democracy, with a socialist structure of the economy, it would have been impossible to carry out "shock therapy." The Danzigers realized this, which is why they preferred liberalized authoritarianism with elements of the rule of law to democratic socialism. This choice cast a shadow over the entire political transformation with huge consequences for Polish democracy, which we still have to deal with today. However, the neoliberal program must be viewed not only as a program of political transformation, but also as a tool for building a new power alliance. Political scientist Ivan Krastev wrote that the order that emerged in Central Europe after 1989 was based on an anti-egalitarian foundation: "The former communists were anti-egalitarian because of their interests. Liberals were anti-egalitarian because of their ideology" (Krastev 2007: 60). Krastev's diagnosis should be changed: liberals were anti-egalitarian not only because of their ideology, but also because of their interests. The neoliberal program proposed by the

Gdańsk liberal milieu in 1988 to establish a new state system based on free-market shock therapy, rule of law, and civil society provided the framework for building a new power elite composed of the intelligentsia and nomenklatura.

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“FIXERS”: CONVERSIONS AND ARRANGEMENTS OF CAPITAL IN THE NARRATIVES OF THE POLISH BUSINESS ELITE

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this chapter is to present, systematise, and analyse the activities as well as the relationships established by members of the Polish business elite in the course of their lives. The creativity and diligence of the respondents in the described processes are not inferior to their ability to use public and private institutions or to bend the rules, which is how they accumulate economic, social, political, and cultural capital, subsequently building their dominant position. A systematic description and analysis of the life paths, turning points, biographies, and capital conversions carried out by members of the business elite can be an interesting supplement to the dominant discourses and ideologies describing the business elites in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). I use biographical analysis as well as Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social fields to identify and describe the sequences of biographical structures accompanying capital conversions carried out by the richest Poles. Analysis of 19 in-depth interviews with leading Polish businessmen provides an insight into the network of changing, multiple audiences of those conversions, allowing me to situate the dynamics of the elite's business relations in the wider context of consolidation of the CEE business field.

KEYWORDS: capitalism, transformation, biography, business, capital, class, elite

284 The position of the Polish business elite was not built in a day. Entrepreneurship has been partially enabled already by the political economy of the late socialist period (Gardawski 2013: 45). However, it was Wilczek's Act (Dz.U. 1988 no. 41 item 324), Balcerowicz's economic reforms (1990), and the political developments that followed the Round Table Agreements (1989) that set the pace for the accumulation of capital. One of the most significant aspects of the observed changes was increasing structural polarisation. The impoverishment of many social groups, such as workers from closing industrial facilities, resulted in bitterness and anger (Leyk, Wawrzyniak 2020: 50) directed against an emerging group of rich businessmen and fuelled the "red baron myth" (Ost 2007: 253–254), linking economic capital to former political positions under state socialism. The biographies and autobiographies of the business elite became the topic of popular publications, both critical and enthusiastic, on the subject (Bielakowski, Nisztor 2015; Kostrzewski, Miączyński 2012). The weekly *Wprost*, recognising the strength of this mixed sentiment, began to publish in 1990 an annual list of 100 richest Poles, and in 2005, the Polish edition of the business monthly *Forbes* followed suit. The process of business elite formation remains one of the most symbolic and visible aspects of the structural changes that followed the Polish transition to capitalism (Domański 2012: 153).

In this chapter, I present, systematise, and analyse the activities and relationships established by members of the Polish business elite. I try to answer the question of how members

of the Polish business elite accumulate wealth, power, and social position. The members of the elite were identified using three criteria: country of dominant business activity, wealth, and position. To be classified as such, the businessman should conduct his main business activity in Poland (however, some have tax residence in Cyprus). His estimated wealth should exceed 150 mln PLN (about 32 mln EUR), over 500 times more than the median household wealth and over 2,500 times more than the average monthly salary in Poland in 2016, according to the National Bank of Poland (Bańbuła, Żółkiewski 2017). Moreover, he should be professionally active and control (directly or indirectly) a large company or a group of companies, as defined by the European Commission Recommendation (2003/361/EC).

The difficulty associated with the study of elites, in particular the business elites, lies in the limited, time-consuming, and often conditional access to potential respondents (Palska 2002: 34). The size of the Polish business elite is not sufficient for the methods of classical quantitative analysis (Bańbuła, Żółkiewski 2017: 28–29). On the other hand, a proper biographical analysis would require a detailed description of the recruitment processes and interviews conducted with respondents, followed by a presentation of the historical, social, and institutional contexts of their biographies, including an in-depth account of elite members' business operations (Każmierska 2004: 155–157; Schutze 2016: 160). Such a requirement, however, could have rendered the study of the business elite impossible. Nevertheless, the obtained results, despite lacking the level of representativeness

comparable to regular results of research of other social groups, can provide some insight into the process of capital conversion within the business elite of Poland.

The analysis was performed on 19 biographical interviews, conducted and recorded between 2010 and 2015, coded R1–R19. The business elite is generally a male-dominated group (Freeland 2012: 86), and 18 of the respondents were male, which resulted in a noticeable gender bias. Only one woman (R19) agreed to participate in the interviews, and the rejections were justified by the researcher's inability to ensure anonymity when presenting the female respondent's gender.

PLURALITY OF CAPITAL CONVERSIONS, PLURALITY OF CONVERTED CAPITAL

There was no single path to the Polish business elite. The plurality of the elite's recruitment channels has been emphasised several times by sociologists (Gardawski 2013: 54; Szelényi, Treiman, Wnuk-Lipiński 1995: 121; Jasiecki 2013: 189; Wesołowski 1994: 27; Domański 1994). However, despite researchers' consensus on this subject, the importance of different types of capital: cultural, political, and social, has been widely disputed.

For some sociologists, the cultural capital of the Polish intelligentsia (Zarycki, Warczok 2014: 45) was a decisive factor during the fall of communism and facilitated the cooperation with Western banks and corporations, providing privileged access to economic capital (Eyal, Szelényi, Townsley 1998: 46;

King, Szelényi 2004: 282). For other researchers, the political capital, especially the hierarchical networks of Communist Party members, was crucial because it reduced the legal consequences of corrupt practices and rent-seeking (Staniszkis 2001: 193) or even the demonstrative use of violence (Sojak, Zybertowicz 2008: 171; Łoś, Zybertowicz 2000: 154). Furthermore, some scholars have preferred to focus on the social networks of resourceful individuals, self-recruiting small entrepreneurs who operated within the informal economy under communism (Gardawski 2013: 45), becoming more important than a purely political network in the process of creating an efficient network and building a business position (Domański 1996: 115).

Against this background, the temporal dominance of each type of capital in the process of elite formation was stressed, connecting the different types of dominant capital with the successive stages of Poland's transition to capitalism and the country's level of integration with the global economy (Jasiecki 2013: 160–161; Wasilewski 2004: 69–94). Moreover, the complementary rather than mutually exclusive nature of different forms and types of capital in the elite formation process was emphasised (Szelényi, Treiman, Wnuk-Lipiński 1995: 121). The dynamic construction of the dominance of particular types of capital was strongly influenced by the global context, such as the involvement of the International Monetary Fund in the Polish economic transition (Wnuk-Lipiński 1996: 86).

Despite the diversity of sociological approaches, the importance of the conversion of different types of capital (Bourdieu 1986: 24–25) in the process of accumulation of economic capital

by business elite members can be observed. According to field theory, capital is a social relation that produces effects in a social field (Bourdieu 2005: 147–148). In this regard, cultural capital is the ability to collect, symbolically process, preserve, and reproduce objectified cultural resources (Bourdieu 2008: 169). Political capital is measured by the ability to use the public to achieve private goals (Bourdieu 2009: 26). Social capital is identified with a network of relationships and contacts to obtain resources (Bourdieu 1986: 21). Economic capital is quantified by cash or its equivalents (Bourdieu 1986: 16). To measure an agent's placement within a social field, both the absolute (conditions) and relative (positions) amount of dominant capital must be taken into account (Bourdieu 2014: 295–296).

Nevertheless, the process of capital accumulation in the analysed approaches remains linear. After the dynamic biographical “big jump” (Mills 2000: 110), performed in the case of the Polish business elite during the transition (the 1990s), the business position of the entrepreneur is secured, no risks are taken, and all that remains to be done is the accumulation of advantages (Mills 2000: 110). This approach overlooks the constant activity, agency, and risks taken by members of the business elite in the process of “doing business” throughout their biographies. In this regard, an analysis of different biographical narratives of business elite members can provide insight into the different moments of capital conversion and the tensions between the types of agency used to convert capital (Lipiński, Wawrzyniak 2024). I call the observed repetitiveness of biographical structures within the narratives of the business

elite, preceding and following the conversion of capital, the arrangement of capital.

The arrangement of capital can be regarded as a process in which a person gains access to “the main chance, usually with other people’s money” (Mills 2000: 115). An entrepreneur arranges an exclusive relation or network of relations with institutions, using his cultural, political, economic, and social capital. This allows him to create unique institutional circumstances, giving him an advantage over potential competitors. The process of establishing an exclusive relation is far riskier than the regular business operations that follow, as his actions can transcend the constraints of dominant normative and legal orders. The arrangement can involve “flexible networks” of entangled relationships between elite members, combining different forms of capital (Wedel 2009: 15). The accumulation of economic capital and social position in the economic field that follows a series of successful arrangements helps to reduce that risk, leading to a lack of accountability of future members of the economic elite (Wedel 2014: 59–63).

The conversion of capital, performed by elite members through the arrangement, is achieved through the process of adapting behaviour and rhetoric to meet the expectations of crucial audiences (Carpenter 2010: 33). Members of the elite must identify key audiences, such as holders of political power, analyse their expectations, and adjust their behaviour in a series of processes resulting in capital accumulation. It is a complex process, in which a capitalist has to balance between gaining formal and informal legitimisation of his actions, while limiting

the dissemination of the obtained advantage to other agents operating in the economic field. The arrangement not only establishes the foundation of the entrepreneur's business activities but also becomes the lens through which they view their own biographical narratives. Hence, an analysis of those narratives, focused on identifying potential arrangements of capital, can be considered a promising starting point for research on the business elite.

BEYOND CHANCE AND CONSPIRACY: CONVERSION OF CAPITAL IN THE NARRATIVES OF THE BUSINESS ELITE

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Ryszard¹ became financially independent from his parents while studying at a university of technology. When he was active in the Polish Students' Union² in the early 1970s, he and his fellow students convinced the party authorities at the university to open a hotel for young guests from abroad in the dormitories during the summer holidays. "These were hotels for students, but they paid in foreign currencies" (R9). Half of the profits were collected by the state, and the other half went to a scholarship fund for foreign student trips. The hotel, which offered accommodation for prices several times lower than the high-class Victoria Hotel, turned out to be a great success, both for its guests and for students, the hotel's potential staff: "Everyone

¹ Polish businessman (R9), name changed, one of the leading Polish industrial entrepreneurs, included in the *Wprost* and *Forbes* Top 100 richest Poles rankings since the early 1990s.

² Polish: Związek Studentów Polskich, a former student organisation dedicated to social work, culture, sports, and tourism, which was active from 1973 to 1982.

was in a hurry to get in. They wanted contact with people from the West. They made friendships and contacts” (R9).

Ryszard himself also established some foreign contacts, which is how he was able to go to Great Britain for two months soon afterwards, having been invited by the descendants of Polish RAF pilots. He spent that time working in a cassette tape factory, to which he had been recommended by friends. Ryszard returned to Poland in a used mini-Morris purchased from his employer, with £200 in his pocket and a deep sense of his own resourcefulness. He then started working at a student radio station. This is how he met the employees of two radio stations, who drew him into the world of stage and announcing. Over time, these acquaintances turned into business and political contacts. It was the colleagues who persuaded him to return to university and change his major to electronics, which was closer to the industry.

As a wedding gift, Ryszard’s wife’s family sponsored him a trip to the United States. “And when I saw America... I fell in love. I saw a country for active people, where *the sky is the limit*” (R9). He and his wife decided to stay overseas, although the consulate in T. (American city, name changed) took away their passports, and his father-in-law was temporarily arrested in Poland. Looking for a job, Ryszard found employment with his wife’s brother as a car salesman. Later, a Czech whom he met at work recommended him to an installation company, where he was taken on as an “assistant to an electrician’s assistant” out of pity, even though he knew English only “from song titles” (R9). While working, he started attending a language

school. One evening, while he was repairing a broken transformer at the company, the owner made a joke: “*you son of a bitch, you lied to me, you are an engineer*” (R9), and made him his deputy.

This promotion encouraged Ryszard to try his hand at a large insurance company where, as he learned, “they were looking for someone with Eastern experience” (R9). Through his wife’s friends, he met Dr Lars Dekker (name and surname changed), the owner of a well-known holding company with over 35,000 employees, with whom Ryszard, already an American “Rick,” started playing tennis regularly. The two became friends. Shortly thereafter, it turned out that Dekker was also the owner of the insurance company that employed Ryszard, so he came up with the idea of making him his assistant for Eastern Europe and sent his tennis partner to a prestigious postgraduate program.

The timing turned out to be extremely convenient. One of Dekker’s companies wanted to reduce the cost of components for production carried out at one of its factories. The well-connected Dekker, who employed the daughter of an important American politician at one of his enterprises and had been friends with an influential family of Republican businessmen for years, came up with the idea to start the production of components in Poland. Despite the martial law that was in effect in Poland at the time, an American-Polish meeting was organised at the Polish Trade Relations Office. Full of misgivings due to his history of contacts with the Polish consulate, Ryszard attended only after much persuasion by Dekker. “Rick’s” fears turned out to be exaggerated—the then Polish minister of external trade, who was present at the meeting, approached him and asked:

“What guarantees do you want? Poland really wants Dr Dekker to come to Poland” (R9), and offered him a consular passport. From being an illegal immigrant in the United States, Ryszard became Dekker’s “American representative” in Poland.

The first of many visits by Ryszard “Rick” to the Dekker factory opening in Poland did not go entirely without difficulty. Upon his return, he was arrested for illegally exporting documents covered by state secrecy, and only a quick phone call to the Polish central office saved him from arrest. As an attempt to make up for the inconvenience and the need to wait for the next flight, the officials from the central office arranged for Ryszard to meet with the then deputy minister of foreign affairs. Ryszard’s position in Poland gradually improved, and flights between the US and Poland became more and more frequent. Impressed by “Rick’s” local efficiency, Dekker initially offered him shares in one of his holdings as a bonus. A few years later, when he was retiring, he sold the rest of the shares to Ryszard, saying: “We’ve always treated you like a family member. You were like a son to me. And your sons are like my own grandchildren” (R9). Ryszard entered the 1990s as a well-established entrepreneur with international experience, which he used to further his business endeavours.

Ryszard’s story outlined above shows a specific dynamic, noticeable in the biographies of representatives of the Polish business elite, which consists of a colourful collage of opportunities, risks, plans, and coincidences. When asked about the reasons behind their success, the richest Poles often point to the role of luck and chance.

In general, I was very lucky with the kind of people I met. I learned a lot from them. (R4)

I was hardworking and lucky. Just like in sports. Because who is good at sports? That person needs to be hardworking, that is 20–30%, you must be mentally resilient. And what constitutes 50%? That's luck. (R12)

294 A closer look at Ryszard's biography shows that luck appears at strictly defined moments in his life and is surprisingly orderly in nature. It should not be ruled out that Ryszard's idea to open a hotel was born freely during a meeting with friends, but it would not have been possible to implement it if not for his earlier activity in the Polish Students' Union and contacts with the authorities. Born in an intelligentsia family, Ryszard could also easily get to know his student friends and persuade them to follow his ideas. His adventure with the radio probably would not have happened without the experience of working for a British cassette tape production company and the conviction of his own awesomeness, reinforced by his return with a mini-Morris purchased after working his seasonal job. The trip to the US, the first job, and the tennis matches with Dekker in the States could have looked different: without his wife's family and friends, it would not have been possible to establish a relationship with his supervisor, and the anecdote explaining the promotion in the workshop would not have made sense without the diploma of the university of technology. When an opportunity presented itself in Ryszard's life, it was a lucky coincidence that he usually had the resources and was able to use them effectively to his advantage.

But Ryszard was neither devoid of initiative nor merely a passive recipient of the gifts of fate. All the time, he was eager

to seek new opportunities, take risks, open new ventures, learn the necessary skills and adapt to changing circumstances. In his life, one can notice the considerable activity with which he established, maintained, and transformed various social relationships, which he could later use to achieve his goals. Getting to know Dekker through his wife's friends (social capital) and then developing their friendship thanks to education (cultural capital), tennis skills (cultural capital), and self-confidence (cultural capital) allowed Ryszard to advance within the structures of the insurance company (economic capital), further develop his competences through prestigious studies (cultural capital), and enter Dekker's circle of friends (social capital). The work put into accumulating various forms of capital and creating a network of relationships enabled Ryszard to make favourable conversions that increased his social position, allowing him to implement increasingly ambitious business operations over time.

Ryszard's acquaintance with Dekker also gave him the opportunity to learn conversions from a seasoned expert. Lars Dekker, a (transatlantic) businessman with a PhD in several fields (cultural capital), owner of a holding group (economic capital), employed the daughter of a leading American politician (conversion of social and political capital) and maintained business and social relations with the American political elite (social and economic capital). Then, Dekker recognised the competences of Ryszard (cultural capital), his colleague-employee (social capital), and used his political contacts (social and political capital) to arrange a meeting between Polish and American high-level decision-makers (political capital), which

enabled him to launch a low-cost production of components in Poland, ensuring the development of a competitive advantage in the form of lower production costs than in the US (economic capital) and future business contacts in Central and Eastern Europe (social and economic capital). By taking part in the conversions arranged by Dekker, Ryszard not only increased his own capital resources but also developed and deepened his understanding of the various logics governing the political and economic spheres, which significantly facilitated his further conversions.

Interestingly, the subsequent conversions of capital in Ryszard's story are not always directly and intentionally connected. Ryszard is not an operetta-like criminal mastermind who ruthlessly carries out a plan devised in early childhood, and the relationships he establishes are hardly of a primitive and instrumental nature. He is not always in control of the situation and often follows the change: accepting an offer of a radio job, an invitation to play tennis, or a family visit to the United States. In a variety of dynamic social situations, he is able to recognise key agents and rules of the field, identify risks and threats, and negotiate the stakes that he considers important. This is particularly evident in risky international political and economic conversions. After Dekker's proposal to launch production in Poland, Ryszard is aware of the risk of returning to the country, but he does not pass up the opportunity and takes advantage of Dekker's contacts and his understanding of the Polish economic situation to press for additional guarantees. When the risk arises and a customs officer arrests Ryszard for

exporting state secrets, he calmly assesses the situation and uses his business contacts at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Although he misses his flight back to the US, he gains influential acquaintances due to the Ministry's eagerness to make it up to him, which is a significant help to the development of his business activities in Poland. His career has been a series of many tactful evasions and flashy plays rather than a consistent adherence to a carefully considered course.

Ryszard's international business success can hardly be reduced to a single key biographical or historical moment that determined the subsequent course of his entire career. Opening a hotel in a dormitory, going to Great Britain, meeting future partners while working a radio job, emigrating to the US, getting promoted at work, meeting Dekker, taking part in a Polish-American meeting at the trade relations office, returning to Poland as an American representative, starting an independent business, buying out Dekker's shares—all these events played an important role in Ryszard's career. However, none of them changed the particular dynamics of his biography, which consists of actively seeking further opportunities for converting various forms of capital; there is no end to position-building, no happy ending followed by a stage of unthreatened consumption.

Therefore, there is no single key transformation in Ryszard's life, neither the personal one that made him a member of the business elite, quietly profiting from his past operations, nor the social Transformation, spelt with a capital letter, associated with the economic reforms of Wilczek (1988) or Balcerowicz (1990).

His professional path shows the considerable porosity of formal hierarchies, conventions, rules, and limitations of reality, which he was able to exploit in the conversions he carried out, opening a student hotel, meeting foreign friends, travelling, working and emigrating abroad, maintaining social relations with senior management in his organisation, returning to Poland despite losing his passport, running an American representative office in the Polish People's Republic, or avoiding arrest for exporting state secrets.

Since Ryszard was able to realise many ventures even before the political and economic changes of 1988–1990, which were often portrayed as difficult or impossible in communist Poland, the systemic transformation does not play a special role in his life, being merely one of the many transformations and institutional opportunities that he has used to his advantage. Rather, his successful business operations form a consistent chain of efficient capital conversion, shaped through complex social practices. The particular structure and economics of those practices, which I call arrangements of capital, emblematic of members of the Polish business elite, warrant further analysis.

THE WAY TO THE TOP: THE ECONOMICS OF CAPITAL ARRANGEMENT PRACTICES

Grzegorz,³ a young rebel, moved out of his parents' house in the first year of university and decided to set up a hippie

³ Polish businessman (R3), name changed. He has been listed in the *Wprost* and *Forbes* Top 100 richest Poles rankings since the early 2000s.

commune with his friends: “The whole Paris was on fire, hippies in the States, and we just soaked it up” (R3). Thanks to their work in a student cooperative, where they did simple jobs such as cleaning or washing windows, they were financially independent. Due to the cooperative’s favourable contracts with state-owned enterprises, “you would get a day’s wage for an hour or an hour and a half of work. This was what the efficiency was back then” (R3). After some time, the carefree life full of film, theatre, and culture of the 15 students living in a two-room apartment was disrupted by the militia, who intervened after having been notified by the neighbours. During the search, texts by Adam Michnik and Leszek Kołakowski were found.⁴ Fortunately, Błażej (son of a high-ranking party member, name changed) took all the blame. He was transferred to another university, and for the remaining students, the case ended with being detained for 48 hours.

Although Grzegorz had to move back in with his parents, he took a liking to the student independence for good. Other than working in the student cooperative, a way to earn money was to go abroad. For a fee, “a very distant aunt from the States” (R3) sent the alleged relative an invitation that allowed him to leave for a year after his second year at the university. Working as a dishwasher and cleaner, he learned English and earned \$5,000, a considerable sum of money at the time,⁵ which allowed him to move out from his family home for good

⁴ Adam Michnik and Leszek Kołakowski were writers and democratic opposition activists during the times of the Polish People’s Republic.

⁵ The average salary in the 1970s in the People’s Republic of Poland was about \$20–30 (Kochanowski 2010: 207).

and encouraged him to travel further. He went to Sweden and Germany and worked as a waiter in London. Each time, spending a couple of months abroad gave him the opportunity to earn the equivalent of several years' salary. He got accustomed to the comfort that came with high wages, got used to "a type of living minimum. That it [was] nice to have money" (R3).

During his final year of university, he decided to start something of his own. He considered three industries: "greengrocery," i.e. private greenhouse farming, the "plastics people," who owned plastic injection moulding machines, and the auto service industry. "Greengrocery" was immediately rejected, as Grzegorz had neither the land nor the qualifications, nor the desire to take up farming. The "plastics people," who supplied bowls and toys to stores, were, in Grzegorz's view, a closed group, a "caste" to which he had no access. Cars were the only option left. He set to work with enthusiasm. He was hired as a mechanic at a transportation service base and within months read all available books on car construction, learning all the ins and outs of building a Fiat 125 carburettor. With the basics acquired, he went to work in West Germany.

The experience he had gained in an auto repair shop in Hamburg, the money he had accumulated, and the contacts he had made led him to try his hand at car trading, which seemed a more profitable occupation than repair and servicing. He quickly realised that the profitability of the car trade had its limitations as well: due to the legal restrictions in the Polish People's Republic, which allowed only one car to be transported at a time, it was impossible to employ workers legally; "the

party decided that you would not be a capitalist but would have to live off your own labour” (R3). A second-hand car then had to be reconditioned in a Polish workshop, there were plenty of traders at the car market, but the customer did not always show up right away. Grzegorz noticed that no one was trading trucks due to formal restrictions; trucks were much needed by farmers, required a category C driver’s licence, and it was generally forbidden to transport them across the border. These challenges did not stop the young entrepreneur: first, he obtained a driver’s licence and then registered each damaged truck in West Germany as a caravan, which allowed him to promptly transport them to Poland.

His friends were very interested in his business activity. None of them needed a truck; “they asked me to bring parts for their cars. And I did it as a friend” (R3). Car parts, formally belonging to a dilapidated truck crossing the border, found their way to satisfied friends, and the direct contact with the customer, speed of operation, and low margins made his illegal activity much more attractive than the formal intermediation offered by state-run foreign trade offices, which forced customers to wait several weeks. A truck full of parts could turn into “pure money” in no time; Grzegorz realised that “great, I already have a car, the car is wrecked, so if I add car parts to it to sell, no one at the customs will know I have anything to sell at all” (R3), so he went from serving a small circle of friends to mass, lucrative smuggling of car parts.

“In the meantime, in addition to my business activities, I was tentatively involved in politics” (R3), recalls Grzegorz, who

became a member of the regional Intervention Commission of “Solidarity” on the recommendation of a friend of his parents. The imposition of martial law found him in Germany. Upon his return to Poland, he was threatened with compulsory army conscription for being a member of the opposition, but, he adds, “I somehow managed to evade that draft” (R3). The bigger challenge was that he could not run his business, “there was nothing to do,” (R3) and machines could not operate without parts.

It was a friend of a friend, Krystyna (name changed), a well-known Polish sportswoman and a coordinator of sports undertakings financed by the state-run Central Committee for Physical Culture, who came to Grzegorz’s aid. “Having seen the world,” with his foreign contacts and a caravan truck, he seemed the ideal candidate to organise the logistical part. The lack of a passport was not a problem. Soon, Grzegorz was paid a special visit:

At night, 10 pm, knocking, “Who’s there?” “It’s the militia.” Oh fuck, fuck, it’s over. I open the door. “Mr. T.?” “Yes, yes, T.” “Good morning, sir, we brought you your passport.” [laughter] Phones were not working then. I get in the car, I go to Krystyna, she lived on Bracka Street. “Jesus Christ, Krystynka, how did you do that?” “Oh, you know, P. [a member of the authorities]...” (R3)

Krystyna’s acquaintance with P., a member of the country’s authorities at the time, proved very effective, and Grzegorz began a new stage of his career, that of a *de facto* smuggler, which was to last for the next 7 years.

The scheme designed by Grzegorz was simple. Athletes affiliated with sports organisations earned significant amounts

of money doing work for state-owned enterprises: “If you worked in a state job, you got 3.60 PLN per hour; here, you could get a rate of 36–70 PLN for this type of work” (R3). They earned a lot, but a significant barrier to getting rich were high income taxes: “If I wanted to get that money myself, I would have to pay 80%” (R3). The money was therefore transferred to the account of the sports organisation, from where it was difficult to legally extract it. A way to avoid taxation was to organise sports events, often co-financed by the government. The organisation of events considered prestigious for the Polish People’s Republic offered great opportunities, both in terms of crossing the border and avoiding customs duties:

Through some of my acquaintances, I got to the vice-president of the General Customs Office, Director X. It was when Y [a well-recognised sportsman] had just died [in an accident], and he was a very famous person. I am talking to the president, he bought me a coffee, ... and he says, “You know what, I can’t just do that for you...”, and I say, “Do you know why Y died? Because we didn’t have money for new equipment. We were using used equipment, and it didn’t last. We would like to have a new one for this trip. This is why I come to you; this car is a subsidy for a sports event.” And so, he called Mrs Basia from the secretary’s office, and Mrs Basia put her stamp on it [laughter]. (R3)

Buying new equipment for sporting events thus allowed for the massive trafficking and smuggling within the limits of the law. Instead of the 100 gas cartridges needed, the organisations would buy 1,000, selling the unused ones on the spot at a profit, which went to the athletes in the extremely attractive form of foreign currencies: “For example, we would buy ...100 pairs of trapper shoes for \$1.50 and sell them for \$8” (R3).

For Grzegorz, an additional benefit was the ability to mass-transfer car parts formally intended for repair to Poland for his customers. Grzegorz was aware that he was involved in organised crime, but considered it justified on the grounds that “trade was illegal” in the Polish People’s Republic, that “there was no other way,” and that “it was just paranoia that the store was empty. That people wanted to drive a car but had no car parts for it. And I wanted to make money, that’s obvious” (R3). In his narrative, it was the state authorities imposing restrictions who were the criminals.

Grzegorz was drawn into sports not only as a businessman, but he also took a liking to the environment and began regularly participating in sporting events:

One drunken night in J. [a city in India], the guys said, “Grzesiek, you’re fit, healthy, why aren’t you coming with us?” “Because I was not fucking invited.” “Oh, come on, you’re coming with us ...” “OK, I’m going.” I trained for two days. Two days of training, and I went ... So, I had a lot of experience with the world before 1989. (R3)

His adventure in sports ended with the tragic death of two friends during a sporting event, which coincided with the economic reforms of Wilczek and Balcerowicz. Grzegorz focused on business, and the money, competences, and experience accumulated in the 1980s gave him a huge advantage over his competitors. After breaking his leg, he was forced to change his distrustful attitude towards employees, so he began to protect “valuable contacts” and transformed his company into a professional corporation, which is still one of the industry leaders in Europe today. Recalling the past, he concludes: “Winning

was natural for me. We are in this position today. It is natural, it had to be that way” (R3).

Grzegorz’s story demonstrates the multifaceted impact that various forms of capital, acquired and developed during formative years, at university and elsewhere, can have on respondents’ subsequent business activities. Grzegorz benefited a lot from studying the humanities, even though it did not involve acquiring practical skills directly useful in trade or car repair. Entering the student environment enabled him to work for favourable wages at the student cooperative, giving him the chance for financial independence from his parents (economic capital) and the opportunity to live in a hippie commune (social capital), develop his passions (cultural capital), and meet the children of prominent politicians (political capital). The student environment and the commune experience build Grzegorz’s self-confidence (cultural capital), which prompted him to go abroad for seasonal work, where he developed his language skills (cultural capital), earned money (economic capital), and became accustomed to having it (cultural capital). Studying at the university allowed Grzegorz to develop the ability to learn and analyse, which helped him to quickly earn a mechanic’s qualification and a category C driver’s licence (cultural capital); the ability to manipulate symbols (cultural capital) allowed him to work out how to register his truck as a caravan, which enabled him to cross the border (political capital) and gain a business advantage (economic capital). Being part of various student communities, including athletics, also allowed Grzegorz to find his way in the sports community (social capital).

However, for Grzegorz, going to university was primarily about his friends, a rich source of social capital. Thanks to the favours offered to his friends (social capital), Grzegorz saw the profitability of trading in car parts (cultural capital), which allowed him to develop a profitable market niche with very high demand and turnover of current assets (economic capital). The acquaintance with Krystyna, whom he had met through his friends (social capital), combined with his truck driver's licence (cultural capital), foreign language skills (cultural capital), and his own truck (economic capital), enabled Grzegorz to obtain a passport during martial law (political capital), reach out to decision-makers when organising expeditions (political capital), and then skilfully use the strong legitimacy of sports and sporting events (cultural capital) to obtain favourable interpretations of regulations and permits (political capital). The development of long-standing business relationships with German parts suppliers, one of his competitive advantages in the 1990s, would not have been possible without the use of a network of acquaintances, built on the social circles he had managed to enter during his studies.

During the analysis of the structure of Grzegorz's biography, a recurring sequence can be observed. Grzegorz follows a plan related to his desire to enter an interesting community and then to run a profitable business. When a danger arises that should become a threat, preventing these plans from being carried out, it turns out that the situation suddenly improves, the danger ceases to be a threat, and the event becomes an opportunity, strengthening his confidence in his next actions. The intervention

and search conducted by the militia during the communist period, when illegal political literature is found (threat), thanks to the influence of the father of one of his colleagues, ends with only a brief arrest, and Grzegorz describes this episode as the beginning of an adult, independent life (opportunity). Militiamen who come to the apartment of a smuggler-oppositionist at night during martial law (threat) turn out to be messengers who bring a passport that allows business travel (opportunity). Due to the imposition of martial law, Grzegorz is threatened with forced conscription to military service (threat); as he himself states, “somehow he managed to evade it” (opportunity). The sequential nature of the occurrence of threat and opportunity means that the threat does not interrupt the implementation of the biographical plan and is therefore not fully a threat, and the opportunity is not a reworking of the effects of the threat and is therefore not fully an opportunity. Together with Jan Kastory, we called these elements of the respondents’ biographies perplexities, obstacles that make it difficult for the respondent to convert and take advantage of a business opportunity (Kastory, Lipiński 2012: 149).

The main function of perplexities is to point out the prevailing rules of the social field within which the conversion of capital is carried out. The rules of the field, often communicated in a dynamic and narrative manner through the adventures described, have been previously recognised and used in the process of arranging capital conversion. The visit of the militia is an episodic adventure, while the process of obtaining a passport to offset the effects of the threat of martial law, which forced Grzegorz to make an unplanned return to the country and

prevented him from continuing his trading and smuggling activities, has a much more orderly character. Making use of his acquaintances, resources, and competence, Grzegorz meets Krystyna, who, through her connections, “gets” him a passport. Thanks to Grzegorz’s activated network of contacts and his active involvement, the threat associated with the imposition of martial law becomes an opportunity. Because of the short-lived and reactive nature of the actions taken by Grzegorz, they can hardly be called a biographical plan. The preparatory nature of these processes, leading to a rare competitive advantage, would indicate processes of arrangement, in this case, conversions of cultural capital into social capital and social capital into political capital, enabling a competitive advantage to facilitate later expansion.

Another, more vivid example of the perplexities Grzegorz encountered, indicating the arrangements he made, is his recollection of the meeting at the Central Customs Office. Faced with restrictions prohibiting the re-export of means of transportation and materials he imports, Grzegorz activates a network of social and political contacts to secure a meeting with the institution’s vice-president. During the meeting, he deliberately appeals to the strong political legitimacy associated with sporting events strongly supported under state socialism in Poland, additionally taking advantage of a recent high-profile accident that occurred during such an event. As a result, he obtains “the stamp of Mrs Basia,” that is, permission to implement the described scheme, which allows him to easily import parts and participate in a unique, privileged international supply trade

aimed at bypassing the high income tax by the sports circles, which in turn allows him to expand his network of contacts and get rich.

Obtaining a passport and meeting at the Central Customs Office, events with a threat-arrangement-opportunity structure (hereafter referred to as T-A-O), differ from the simpler situations with a threat-opportunity structure described earlier primarily in the placement of the arrangement processes in the event. In the case of more complex T-A-O events, it is only the vision of a serious threat materialising that forces Grzegorz to make the arrangement. It consists of recognising the rules and logic of the social field, identifying and reaching out to key agents in the field, understanding the relationship between capital and the key agents, and then mobilising the capital held so as to influence the key agents to gain a competitive advantage or avoid a barrier in a way that is consistent with the logic and rules, not always formal, governing the field. Grzegorz is successful not only because he recognises the rules of the field (Rychard 1996: 471–472), but also because, as an individual, he can carry out a favourable transformation or reinterpretation of them (Rychard 2011: 462). For simpler threat-opportunity events, the arrangement precedes the potential barrier: Grzegorz anticipates the threat before it materialises and then performs the actions that make up the arrangement. This allows him to respond almost instantaneously to the next potential threat, a process which has a sequence structure of arrangement-threat-opportunity (hereafter referred to as A-T-O). The ability to anticipate and prevent potential threats, as indicated

by the A-T-O perplexities, is therefore equally important as the ability to recognise and flexibly adapt to new situations since it enables one to bypass emerging institutional barriers and seize opportunities, as seen in the T-A-O perplexities. It should not be ruled out that both traits are important elements of the capital arrangement processes present in the narratives of the Polish business elite.

Lack of the appropriate types of capital, inability to reach key agents, or incorrect recognition of the rules of the field prevent effective implementation of the arrangement. This can be seen in the briefly mentioned Grzegorz's failed attempts to enter the "greengrocery" and "plastics" industries. The barriers of cultural and economic capital, the lack of land and competence that prevented Grzegorz from starting a career as a "greengrocer," and the barrier of social capital associated with joining the "caste of the plastics people," caused him to abandon his involvement in these sectors and take up the car trade, later explaining it as a personal interest.

In his biography, recurring memories and descriptions of foreign trips can be observed. Whether it was seasonal work while studying, travelling to Germany for business and smuggling, or travelling for his sporting activities later, they allowed Grzegorz to broaden his horizons, "make his way in the world," earn money, deepen ties with friends, and meet new business contacts. Travelling allowed him to gain distance to the institutional framework of communist Poland, and sometimes even to work out a way around this barrier: it was while working in Germany that Grzegorz came up with the idea of registering

his truck as a caravan every time, which became his business asset. Finally, going abroad required a passport, and sometimes also additional permits. On the one hand, these barriers were a constraint that was inconvenient for the respondents; on the other hand, they made the possibility of frequent travel abroad an advantage, building their position. Ryszard's story described earlier shows that both departure and return can be the source of capital. Obtaining and re-acquiring a passport are among the most common examples of arrangements found in the respondents' biographies.

The barriers that supposedly originate from the institutional system of the People's Republic of Poland thus play a dual role in Grzegorz's and Ryszard's stories. They are a constraint, limiting access and hindering the respondents' biographical plans. However, circumventing these barriers, made possible by the arrangement processes implemented, is a key asset of the respondents and, indirectly, becomes a source of various types of capital, including economic capital. The communist authorities, as both the perpetrator of repression and the source of key forms of capital, were by 1989 the most salient audience of the respondents' arrangements, understood after Carpenter (2010: 33) as the key stakeholder, observer, and evaluator of actions. Grzegorz himself notices it and states that the law of the People's Republic of Poland completely "excluded" the possibility of conducting private business, then adds a moment later:

Of course, there were various loopholes, various ways around it. For example, if you were a Pole with a foreign passport, a so-called polonus,

you could set up a Polonia company.⁶ You could run a legal business, employ people, have imports, exports. At the time, if you were an owner of a workshop or a Polish company, you couldn't employ more than six people. If you had a transportation company, you couldn't hire more than one handyman. You could fake it and pretend there were two workshops for different people, and so on, and so forth, sure. ... this is how you could gain knowledge, experience, contacts, etc. When 1989 came, those who were on the job practically stood no chance because they didn't have the experience. Those who had been doing something before, scheming, first of all, they had the ability to take risks, the ability to scheme, they had deals, ideas, and so on and so forth. And these people won the most. (R3)

In his story, Grzegorz emphasises that winning and gaining a business position were natural and inevitable for him. The course of his biography, however, representative of the life path of many of the richest Poles, shows that his success was a result of many factors, with the central role played by the exceptional activity and the ease with which he was able to arrange capital conversions in a volatile institutional environment. He could anticipate risks and adapt to changes, accumulating different forms and types of capital. He built relationships, gained knowledge and competences that allowed him to recognise and understand the rules of various social fields and the logic that governed the agents operating there. He identified and then contacted key agents in each field. He correctly recognised the relationship between the conditions, positions, and dispositions of agents operating in the social field

⁶ A regulation introduced in 1976 (Dz.U. 1976 no. 11 item 63) permitted the establishment of agencies of foreign companies. A citizen of the Polish People's Republic could work for one of them but could not own it; consequently, citizens encouraged family, friends, or acquaintances abroad to set up such joint ventures of foreign and expatriate capital, which then opened their agencies in Poland.

and the capital they held. He used this knowledge to influence key agents, such as decision-makers in public institutions in the Polish People's Republic, to gain a competitive advantage, achieving his goals within the informal rules of the field while avoiding sanctions associated with extra-legal activity. His life path has been one of constant dedication to building his business position, and the luck he claims to have had in recovering from one adversity after the other has been meticulously earned.

CONCLUSIONS

Analysis of interviews with members of the Polish business elite indicates that their success is founded on and reproduced through the continuous creation of asymmetric structures. These structures enable individuals to accumulate different types of capital by creating and developing networks of asymmetric relationships. These relationships are formed both with the decision-makers of key institutions and with the immediate environment. Moreover, asymmetric relationships make it possible to overcome barriers that impede access to capital and its subsequent accumulation, unavailable for the other market players. Having access to the key capital in a given institutional system is critical for the success and expansion of a business operation. Hence, the institutions and decision-makers who control this capital become the main audience (in Carpenter's terms) of the seductive (Baudrillard 2007: 37) actions of elite members. In the period from the imposition of martial law to the late 1990s, political capital remained the most important. Starting in the

late 1980s, the central role of public institutions was gradually taken over by Western financial institutions, which after the Russian financial crisis of 1998 became the main audience for the arrangements performed by members of the elite, for whom economic capital has become the most relevant capital.

The actions of the business elite, although calculated, do not result from the existence of a conscious plan, a secret conspiracy, ill-will, personal decisions, a particular ethos or value system of the members of this class but from structural regularities. These are typical of the dominated economy of late capitalism, in which the acquisition and rapid turnover of increasingly virtual capital becomes more important than the narrowly defined business processes involved in the efficient organisation of production, trade, and distribution of goods and services. The ability to use public and private financial institutions in this process determines the social position of members of the business elite. Breaking the cycle of successive arrangements in the long term leads to degradation and loss of position, as was evident in the case of one of the respondents (R7).

For representatives of Poland's business elite, the political and economic transformations of 1988–1990 were primarily one of the many moments of institutional change in which they could mobilise the capital they possessed to arrange economic capital. The institutional transformations used by the business elite, however, did not begin in 1989, nor were they linear (Rychard 1996: 465). Both moments of crises and prosperity became opportunities for those surveyed, allowing them to build their business positions. Martial law (R3, R9), the emergence

of Polish companies (R12), the 1991 parliamentary elections (R4), the introduction of a tax on outsized wage payments (R2), the privatization of local workplaces (R16), the Russian financial crisis (R2, R7, R8, R18), Poland's entry into the European Union (R11, R14), infrastructure investments associated with Euro 2012 (R15), crises in the construction industry (R16), or the more mundane decisions of individual corporations to make foreign direct investments in Poland (R1, R17) are examples of moments when entrepreneurs and managers who recognise the rules of the field and, over time, personally shape them, become rich through converting capital at the expense of monetised institutions and relationships. There are many such moments in the biographies of representatives of Poland's business elite, and the processes of arrangement of capital still carried out by them—although increasingly often at banquets and galas rather than at border crossings, checkpoints, and during student trips for “holiday jobs”—are certainly not merely a thing of the past.

The question of the *nomenklatura*, foreign, intelligentsia, or “self-made” origins of the Polish business elite, inflaming public opinion, was widely problematised in the 1990s. The hidden goal behind studies of the origins of the business elite, particularly the narrative of political capitalism, was to question the moral rightness and legitimacy of capitalism, especially its local, dependent model (Nölke, Vliegenthart 2009: 672; Jasiecki 2013: 101). Igniting public imagination and political debates, the issue of “*nomenklatura* enfranchisement”—as presented in David Ost's critically cited construct

of the “red baron”—tends to assume that a “baron” of a different colour would be legitimate and would rightfully build the only possible “free market” capitalism in Poland. However, analyses of the interviews indicate that, just as the transition period was one of many moments in which capital conversions took place, the political capital associated with membership in communist institutions was one of many types of capital that, usually in combination, were used in these conversions. The repeatedly asked questions about the origins of the Polish business elite (“illegitimate” communist nomenclature members or “legitimate” self-made men), which shape several impactful political narratives (see, for example, Kaczyński 2011: 50), completely ignore both the diversity of capital conversions performed by Polish businessmen of different social and political backgrounds, the role of capital conversions in global capitalisms in general, as well as the dynamic, continuous rivalry between different forms of capital within the Polish business elite.

Entrepreneurs and managers, members of the Polish business elite, are and always have been flexible. They owed the development of their position to their ability to recognise formal and informal hierarchies, key actors, and rules of various social fields in changing institutional conditions. They used them to their advantage, at the expense of others. The arrangements of capital focused on the dominant power relations, capital, and interest games in the business field at the time, rather than on specific political views or value systems. Moreover, the ultimate goal and measure of the effectiveness of the relationships they create is the ability to monetise them, to convert them into

economic capital. Therefore, the Polish business elite, despite its claims to “freedom” and “creativity,” agency gained through entrepreneurship, is forced to constantly follow and adapt to the dominant social order, becoming merely a cog in the machine of the centralisation processes of globalised capitalism.

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ELITES AND THEIR SCHOOLS IN POST-COMMUNIST POLAND

ABSTRACT

Competing socio-historical forces in contemporary Poland are influencing elite formation and elite school education, resulting in the emergence of different types of schooling for the diverse elites. The emerging elite schools represent varying degrees of convergence of global and European identity, socialist heritage, and tradition.

This chapter uses examples of school websites to illustrate that, while Polish elite schools' abilities to produce individuals with future influence and power are undeniable, there are significant differences in the socio-political and socio-cultural outlooks that these schools have sought to foster. Their specific modes of operation indicate the manner in which they have hoped to influence students' future loyalties and standpoints on various legal, political, moral, environmental, and social issues. Examination of the discourses of elite schools' websites offers a distinct depth of insight into these schools' ideological profiles and the discursive techniques they adopt to appeal to different types of elite clientele. This chapter demonstrates that elite schools differ according to the characteristics and outlooks of the elites that select and support them.

The websites' pertinent outlooks are analysed through the lens of four critical perspectives, which I call four angles of scrutiny: Globalisation, European integration, Socialist heritage, and Tradition. This novel theoretical approach and associated methodology expose post-communist elites' and their schools' differing ideological stances in the context of Poland's specificity as a post-communist country. This contribution is a platform on which other researchers may build.

KEYWORDS: education, elites, Poland, elite schools in Poland, educational transformation in Poland, elite education market, socio-political outlooks of elites, commercialisation of education

INTRODUCTION

322 The political and economic changes that occurred in Poland in 1989 and the early 1990s allowed for a significant restructuring of the education system. They created a platform for the emergence of new, non-public schools which were not bound by the rules of the previously existing, government-controlled, centralised system of education. New schools could be created by legal and natural entities: the new legal arrangements allowed for partnerships between Polish and foreign citizens to enter the education market. As a result, a number of Polish-international partnerships, as well as totally foreign entities, opened new educational enterprises in Poland. It was also an opportunity for parents, teachers and community groups to set up independent schools that reflected their ideals and beliefs. While this process has provided school choice for parents in Poland, it has also resulted in a significant reconfiguration of the education “market” with different levels of “prestige.” Education in Poland is, predominantly, government funded and, traditionally, prestige was associated with top-ranking government schools with long histories and traditions. However, the elite school market has been growing rapidly and wealthy parents are increasingly seeking education in the non-government sector.

Economic globalisation has been a major socio-historical force in the early stages of Poland’s transition that strongly

affected educational reforms and the emergence of new elites. The dramatic changes to Poland's political and economic system in 1989 coincided with the hegemony of the neoliberalism in the West and were reflected in the economic reforms, colloquialised as shock therapy, that led to the free market economy. Privatisation of national industrial enterprises and other publicly-owned assets brought rampant unemployment, a large inflow of foreign investment, an influx of transnational corporations and the fast growth of local small and medium private enterprises. The effects on the newly emerging institutions, including educational institutions, the national psyche and Polish citizens' way of life were enormous (Domański 2005; Grabowska, Szawiel 2001; Levitas, Herczyński 2002; Janowski 2007; Jakubowski et al. 2010; Sztompka 2008).

Poland's accession to the European Union in May 2004 led to the greater opening of Poland towards social and cultural influences from the EU (Alexiadou, Lange 2015; Maj-Waśniowska 2016; Mitter 2003; Pépin 2006). It had a major influence on transnational governance processes that impacted national policies, including educational policies. The EU membership opened new opportunities for mutual conditioning and had a significant impact on social and cultural transformation processes. However, in spite of general support, particularly among the elites, for the so-called return to Europe, a curious split appeared between those who favoured the greater integration with EU and those arguing against it in the name of political and cultural sovereignty. A division emerged between Euro-enthusiasts and Euro-sceptics. The Euro-sceptics, in particular,

frequently overlooked the positive effects of economic and social changes and resorted to emotional arguments involving national tradition, history, religion and culture (Karolewski 2011; Lane 2013). Nationalist traditions and Catholicism are, therefore, significant socio-historical forces influencing the elite formation and elite school education.

The fourth major, foremost, socio-historical force is Poland's socialist heritage. In spite of the political system's transformation, socialist heritage remains present in political and social spheres, including citizens' psyche. Socialist heritage has been used by conservative political entrepreneurs, selectively, as a polarising force to drive the wedge between those who advocate for greater social inclusiveness and secularism and those who see it as a threat to established values, particularly around Catholicism, gender roles, and the "traditional" family values (Cervinkova, Rudnicki 2019; Chelcea, Druță 2016).

THEORY AND METHOD

These major socio-historical forces roughly sketched above became the foundation of my theory, assisting in developing the typologies of contemporary Polish elites and elite schools. This novel theoretical approach uses four critical perspectives, which I call four angles of scrutiny: Globalisation, European integration, Socialist heritage, and Tradition. I will, very briefly, introduce these critical perspectives and illustrate some of the arising insights each offers. It should be noted that, for the purpose of analysis, I separate these

perspectives while, of course, in reality they frequently overlap and blend together.

GLOBALISATION

Academic literature commonly subdivides globalisation into three major areas: economic globalisation, cultural globalisation, and political globalisation (Babones 2007). My study considers all aspects of globalisation but focuses on those that facilitate the emergence of Polish, globally oriented elites as consumers of luxury goods including the new forms of elite education. I pay particular attention to the aspects of globalisation theory that underscore the role of transnational corporations (TNCs) in Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries.

The demands of the economic restructurings had an immediate impact on the Polish education system which needed to modernise quickly to suit the demands of the changing economy and to serve the newly mobile and internationally-connected parts of the population. At the same time, the strong influx of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)¹ in the form of TNCs (including transnational education corporations) triggered demand for an internationally-minded workforce with cosmopolitan skill sets and knowledge of foreign languages, especially English. This led to the growing attractiveness of international schools and bilingual streams in local schools.

¹ https://www.paih.gov.pl/publications/foreign_investors_in_poland

326 Joining the European Union (EU) in 2004 and the Schengen border-free zone, in March 2008² facilitated further global and European integration. Polish students were now allowed to visit other countries and to study abroad free as citizens of the EU. Consequently, the role of prestigious local and international schools changed. While still predominantly serving the needs of transnational corporations and diplomatic corps, they opened their doors to local, cosmopolitan, globally oriented elites. The numerical growth of international school operators has been a result of demand and supply driven factors and can be seen as a facet of neoliberal globalisation: the denationalisation of education gives private actors an opportunity to step in. Declining state control over education standards and curricula mean that businesses can gain more influence over education.

Beyond pragmatic motives, there has been a growing demand for international schooling among local middle- and upper-class families for the reason of prestige. As researchers have observed, “becoming international (internationalisation), is a strategy for social positioning, a means of upward social mobility: students seek to internationalise their studies, and professionals internationalise their curriculum vitae, careers and social networks” (Basaran, Olsson 2018: 98). Apart from their traditional clientele of international business families and diplomatic corps, international schools have been increasingly

² Poland signed the Schengen agreement on December 2, 2007, with the immediate lifting of passport checks for ground and sea border crossings. Airport checks, however, remained until March 29, 2008.

attracting globally oriented, local, Polish elites who seek prestige and exclusivity.

EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

European integration is usually presented as part of globalisation processes and supranational integration driven mainly by economic forces. Indeed, the EU evolved from the European Economic Community to ensure peace and economic growth of its member states. The transnational, single market was created to enhance the economic might of the EU and to make the EU economy more competitive. Thus, European integration is frequently presented as a result of internationalisation of the economy and increased movement of products and money. What began as a predominantly economic union has evolved into an organisation spanning policy areas, from climate, environment and health to external relations and security, justice and migration. Researchers of European integration often pointed to the “civilisational” and democratic effects of European integration (Karolewski 2011; Radaelli 2003). In doing so, they underscore the norms of universal human rights, accommodation of racial and multicultural identities and elimination of many forms of discrimination. In the education sphere, an emphasis of European integration on universal education, lifelong learning, basic competencies and skills and credit transfers has been applauded by professional and cosmopolitan elites. Some narratives in Poland, however, present European integration as a form of supranational identity transfer that evokes robust resistance

among the communities whose attachment to national sovereignty and traditions is strongest (Karolewski 2011; Lane 2013).

SOCIALIST HERITAGE

Socialist heritage was mainly described during the post-communist period as either “legacies” or “heritage” handed down from the period of real socialism (Pop-Eleches 2017; Sztompka 2008). Communist legacies included historical heritage, institutional practices and socio-cultural traits exemplified by political, economic, and cultural-psychological spheres. The most obvious legacies of the communist system include positive factors such as egalitarianism, social welfare, strong community and family networks. But there are also negative factors of central control, uniformity, collectivism, mediocrity, political passiveness, reliance on a higher authority such as the government or Church, lack of individual initiative, and disengagement in civil society.

Along with the obvious remnants of communist tradition, another form of legacy must be brought into focus; a political and cultural process spreading in many CEE societies that demonises socialism and reinforces the hegemony of a neoliberal system. Socialism is perceived as a threat, even by those who would benefit from its redistributive policies. This has been exploited by warring political elites to undermine their opposition. Such deployment serves not only to protect economic liberalism and the hegemony of TNCs but also to resist ecological and human rights policies of the EU and local,

non-government organisations (NGOs). Social movements such as environmentalism, feminism and progressivism are presented as legacies of the communist era that still features, in common national memory, as a period of ideological oppression and restriction of individual freedom. As some researchers have observed, post-communist CEE societies are more neoliberal than traditional Western economies (Cervinkova, Rudnicki 2019; Chelcea, Druță 2016): any attempts to limit the free market or free choice are portrayed as a communist conspiracy agenda.

TRADITION

The angle of tradition includes elements of Poland's socialist heritage but draws, predominantly, on earlier periods of Polish history that have had a major impact on elites' formation, transformation, values and beliefs. I explore how traditionally constituted elites, with strong attachment to national tradition and religion, resist globalisation and greater European integration because they see those trends as a threat to national identity and sovereignty.

The critical perspective of tradition helps to problematise Poland's collective values and beliefs, deeply rooted in a strong, patriotic, Catholic tradition. It underscores the differences between cosmopolitan, globally oriented, pro-European elites and those who are more nation-centred and embracing of tradition, particularly the notions of Christianity and Romanticism, and who see the social and cultural (but not necessarily

economic) impact of globalisation and EU integration as another form of foreign dominance and a threat to national sovereignty and national identity (Góra, Mach 2017; Zarycki et al. 2022).

Although Poland has been portrayed by the media and researchers as a pro-global and pro-European country, there has also been plenty of evidence of resistance to globalisation and noncompliance with EU directives; a phenomenon that some researchers called “opposition through the back door” (Krause 2006). Integration into the EU has been touted as the best means by which Poland may develop its industrial and commercial base. However, integration into a supranational entity, with control and input on national affairs ranging from work pension distributions to nutritional standards, has been greeted with considerable reluctance by many local populations and, occasionally, utilised in political struggles by disunited elites.

The four critical perspectives described above form the basis of my research methodology. They form a prism through which I analyse and interpret the profiles of the elites and elite schools to identify their socio-political and socio-cultural proclivities that influence the formation of elites’ values and choices. Hall (2006: 21) defines values as “the ideals that give significance to our lives, that are reflected through the priorities that we choose, and that we act on consistently and repeatedly.” It is suggested that what we value is usually revealed in the way we act and may be expressed in the form of beliefs or value-judgements. Pertinent to my analysis is Inglehart and Baker’s (2000: 19) conclusion that, while economic development is

associated with shifts away from absolute norms and values, a society's broad cultural heritage "leaves an imprint on values that endures despite modernisation."

This cultural heritage imprint on values is clearly dividing Polish elites, with some political entrepreneurs skilfully exploiting it to appeal to the emotions and imaginations, values and beliefs of subaltern groups to ensure their support and consent. It not only leads to democratic instability but, also, inadvertently causes divisions between different "tribes" within the elite group of Polish citizens (Fomina 2019).

My theory of four angles of scrutiny adds to the ways elites in post-communist countries have been described and analysed in the past. Examining elites' relationships with globalisation, European integration, socialist heritage and tradition, this research approach exposes nuances outside simple, bi-polar divisions such as left versus right, or conservatives versus liberals. It helps us to understand why such camps are far more internally divided than bi-polar divisions suggest.³ In 1989, there was a common enemy that united the opposition. In 2023, there are multiple "others," depending on their perceived relationship with the notions of globalisation, European integration, socialist heritage, and tradition.

³ For example, the secular liberals and Catholic liberals may have a different stand on abortion and gay marriage and yet both may support globalisation and EU integration. The dividing lines are not simply between conservatives and liberals. Ultra-right elites support liberal economic policies of the centre-right party but reject their "communist" sympathy for the European Union and their support for LGBTQI rights; Catholic liberals are willing to constrain the individual rights of others in the name of tradition and religion and are docile in opposing the Church and its involvement in politics. Centre-right liberals criticise far-right populists' attacks on democracy but are not willing to join forces with the left for fear of being labelled "communists."

RESEARCH METHODS

The definition of what constitutes an elite school in Poland is challenging. According to Kingston and Lewis (1990), there is no precision in categorisation of an institution as elite or not. The collective evaluation of elite-ness points to a belief that a given institution is likely to improve the life chances of its graduates (Kingston, Lewis 1990). We understand “improving life chances” to mean obtaining a significant advantage over the competitors by creating such conditions that lead to accessing enrolment at the best universities and, consequently, to obtaining prestigious and well-paid occupations. Most often, an elite school’s credentials comprise not only academic but also cultural indicators that contribute to the high status of graduates, giving them an edge over their competitors (Kingston, Lewis 1990).

Elite status is usually a correlation of two factors: excellent measurable results and high stratification potential that is usually linked to a school’s prestige and alumni network. Public perception, however, particularly among elite groups, is also an important factor (Bowman, Bastedo 2009). According to Vidaver-Cohen (2007), a good reputation is considered to be one of the non-material assets that an organisation may possess. No doubt, elite schools have the best reputation among elite groups. Gaztambide-Fernández (2009) suggests elite schools’ prestige comes from their ability to be exclusive and excluding as they have control over the selection processes. In Poland, the perception of a school’s prestige among the general public and the school’s alumni, students,

parents and teachers is a contributing factor to the school's status as elite.

To establish which schools have a reputation of being elite required a mix of different methods. These methods include collecting and analysing extant and generated data such as historical, sociological and political studies and research literature on matters of Poland in changing times, the shifting configuration of Polish elites and recent changes to the Polish school education system. I immersed myself in media portrayals of contemporary Poland, I examined school ranking tables, key policy documents, both Polish and EU, school websites and parents' discussion forums. In the preliminary stages of my research, I had informal conversations with representatives of various elite groups, seeking their views and assessments of the best public and non-public schools. The data in my study is drawn from multiple sources and involves elicited (generated) and extant (selected) data sets such as in-depth, semi-structured interviews of 1–1.5-hour duration with principals or deputy principals from selected elite schools, elite schools' websites and online media commentaries, with the texts illuminating public discourse by contributing a range of views and experiences.

Consequently, I focused my research on a small group of the most prestigious schools in Warsaw. The schools selected for my study are considered elite on the basis of their selectivity and general prestige, high academic results and higher school fees than other schools in their groups. The status of these schools comes from their stratification and networking potential. These schools are all considered elite yet show significant differences

in their missions and socio-political outlooks. Applying thematic and discourse analysis of the elicited and extant data sets, I identified four broad categories of elite schools, reflecting their proclivities to major socio-historical forces described in the theory section. Elites with different values and interests selected and supported schools to promote particular political, social and cultural outlooks. These choices shed light on the elites themselves, illuminating their dominant characteristics and proclivities.

The identified school categories are as follows:

- **international schools**—focused on producing international citizens, equipped with cosmopolitan skills and fluent in foreign languages, mainly English;
- **social schools**—focused on educating socially conscious citizens, socially and politically involved and committed to democracy;
- **Catholic schools**—focused on educating Christian, patriotic Poles, committed to the preservation of national history and tradition promoting Catholic values and the traditional heteronormative family;
- **government schools**—focused on producing experts and professionals in various fields and promoting competition and meritocracy.

These are ideal-typical categories based on the strongest proclivities demonstrated by different groups.

In the next part of this chapter, I exemplify how these distinct missions are marketed and communicated to prospective clients through selected elite schools' websites.

ELITE SCHOOLS' WEBSITES: VALUES AND BELIEFS

Since the exposure of the education sector to market forces and subsequent competition between schools for potential clients, elite schools from public and private sectors have increasingly used aesthetic symbolism to promote their ideological narratives to attract potential clientele (Gottschall et al. 2010; Meadmore, Meadmore 2004; Mills 2004; Saltmarsh 2007; Symes 1998; Wardman et al. 2013). Similar trends may be observed in Poland. In my analysis, I highlight how elite schools employ text, images, symbols, and narratives in their websites to market themselves to prospective families. These discourses are sourced through examination of various parts of the selected elite schools' websites including the home page, mission statements, logos, school prospectuses, photographs, videos and links. In the analysis of such discourses, I have been guided by the established theories of elite schooling as well as my theory of four angles of scrutiny. I examine how various discourses function to make the school's educational offer both elite as well as distinct so it appeals to different subgroups of the most privileged of Polish citizens.

In the examples to follow,⁴ I highlight the dominant values and beliefs of my ideal-typical elite school categories. For the purpose of my analysis and interpretation of the generated material, I conceal the identities of the schools by allocating

⁴ Due to limited space, only a few examples are presented here. For more details, see Dunwill 2023.

fictional names and only reveal their alignment with the four ideal-typical elite school categories.

DOMINANT VALUES AND BELIEFS— INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

While all elite schools in Poland acknowledge the importance of global and European connections, tradition and civil society, the degrees of emphasis differ. On the websites of international schools, globalisation and global connections feature most prominently. This is particularly noticeable when examining school logos and other elements of their Home pages. The world, represented by an image of a sphere, epitomises this global scope. These schools attract those elites who are most affected by globalisation; they either choose this kind of education for perceived competitive advantage or are forced to do so by their international occupational circumstances.

Logos and mission statements extant on the international schools' websites generally emphasise a global outlook, global connections, and educating global citizens who must be able to face the challenges of the contemporary and future world. Typical statements include phrases such as: "education that meets both local and international standards in an environment of openness, multiculturalism and achievement"; "fostering the development of dynamic, considerate and responsible world citizens" (International school XXX). Or, "Citizens who are aware of the world's diversity and complexity [able] to respond

to new challenges they encounter in the contemporary world” (International school ZZZ).

Our educational offer is created in accordance with international standards and teaching methods. All programmes implemented in our school are designed to increase children’s sensitivity to other people’s cultures, attitudes, and needs. We believe this approach will help young people to find their place in the international community and to develop their interest in being active members of a global society. (International school ZZZ)

Such discourses indicate that these schools are excellent breeding grounds for developing students’ portfolios of dispositions required for global mobility and for global citizenship beyond the confines of nation-states, at a transnational level (Ong 1999). They produce leaders and facilitators of global change (Bunnell 2019) or, at least, global citizens able to engage in economically rewarding work at national and international levels. Promotion of the IB diploma programme, widely offered by international schools, on their websites subliminally communicates the IB’s claims to foster international understanding and cooperation and produce more compassionate, socially responsible, global citizens.

Apart from the images of a globe, the cosmopolitan character of international schools is signalled by language icons, displayed on the top of home pages, that allow the user to select a language in which the information may be displayed, usually either Polish or English. Interestingly, locally oriented schools do not provide that, even if they offer the IB diploma, which is a signal that they probably exclusively target Polish-speaking audiences.

Schools emphasise developing 21st century skills such as communication and presentation, creativity and innovation, teamwork and project management, critical thinking and problem solving, and an ability to collect, filter and absorb information. This internationally focused, futuristic, pragmatic, and synergistic approach is a very strong signifier of the international schools' ethos. And it comes through the website discourses implicitly and explicitly.

As mentioned earlier, pathways to prestigious universities constitute an important signifier of elite-ness. On school ZZZ's website, for example, the global reach of graduates is visualised by a magnificent, interactive image of the revolving globe, allowing the user to click on various places to reveal the name and location of past and future destinations of graduates at well-known, prestigious, world universities. Such technically advanced and inviting navigation tools are indicative of the school putting its students at the cutting edge. The use of interactive apps is a powerful marketing tool conveying a school's superiority; not just over more ordinary schools but also over other elite schools. It shows that they are "ahead of the game" (Kenway, Fahey 2014) and in a league of their own. As online promotion of schools took an important step forward from printed prospectuses (Drew 2013; Symes 1998), videos and interactive apps are yet another step forward in marketing tactics, introducing an element of fun and increasing engagement. As Symes (1998: 144) notes, school promoters will "do anything to press home.... that the school is keeping abreast of the latest technology." Thus, Koh and Kenway conclude,

“the school becomes a virtual spectacle that precedes and exceeds the school itself” (Koh, Kenway 2016: 15).

DOMINANT VALUES AND BELIEFS— SOCIAL SCHOOLS

Social schools focus on democracy, human rights and civil liberties. This is skilfully represented by one school’s logo—a symbolic tetrastyle in a circle—that immediately brings to mind the ancient Greek agora. Ancient Greece is widely referred to as the “Cradle of Western civilisation and the Birthplace of Democracy,” largely due to the influence of its cultural and political attainments during the 5th and 4th centuries BC on the rest of the then-known European continent. The logo represents the school’s connection to European traditions and commitment to social justice and democratic values and its focus on citizenship and civil society. These values go beyond local history and traditions and embrace universal and European imaginaries. This school is a member of the European School Network (ESN) and has connections throughout Europe.

References to democracy feature prominently on the school’s website. In fact, the school’s governance structure represents a mini democratic society, with a tri-partite separation of power. A School Board acts as the government, a school parliament has the function of legislative authority, and the school court has a judicial function. The school argues that this is an exceptional element which “distinguishes it from other high schools” and makes it truly democratic. Under the “About the school” tab, we read:

School democracy is one of the foundations of our school. It is an exceptional element that distinguishes our school from other high schools, because our students can participate in school management and influence it through various democratic institutions. (Social school CCC website)

Commitment to diversity of intake is also frequently declared by social schools, even if it may risk the school's top-ranking place:

Our school is not focused on a fierce rivalry between pupils, or on achieving spectacular successes. We do not fight at all costs for rankings. In addition to highly talented students and students who pass the entrance exams, we also accept young people who need extra care - sick, disabled, and struggling with psychological problems. We also accept children of political refugees and guarantee them free education. ... If despite this attitude for over a dozen years we have been on top of social school rankings and we rank among the best high schools in Poland, we can see the validity of our path: good results do not necessarily depend on competition and ruthless fight for success. (Social school CCC website)

The school is well aware of the marketing power of successful ranking and winning competitions and Olympiads and is high achiever in many academic areas. Nevertheless, this social school promotes the image of being progressive, uncompetitive, socially conscious and inclusive.

DOMINANT VALUES AND BELIEFS— CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

In my study, "Catholic schools" refers to non-public schools set up by organisations and foundations influenced by Catholic ideology: it does not mean that they are owned or governed by the Catholic Church. The participating elite schools are

sponsored by private associations influenced by the philosophical and religious ideology of Opus Dei.

Contrary to international schools and concurrent with my ideological angle of tradition, the Catholic schools' websites bring to the forefront narratives and discourses rooted in Polish Christian history and tradition and promote the values and beliefs of the Catholic Church. The links and images frequently advertise Christian holy days and celebratory events. Promoted workshops, lectures, guest speakers and other events are conducted by and/or connected to organisations of a religious nature or Catholic universities such as Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw and frequently show images of priests. On the Home page of school AAA, we read: "School is not only about learning! It's also about traditions, customs, and the community."

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The Catholic schools' websites embrace religious and Christian imaginaries. Their mottos encourage a fearless response to life challenges:

BBB is a school that creates good habits and virtues among boys, arouses the desire to serve God and people and inspires courageous responses to challenges of everyday life. (Catholic school BBB)

Catholic schools employ highly symbolic images in their logos. School AAA, for example, displays a boat sailing across what looks like an open book, probably the Bible, its arched pages evoking the image of ocean waves. The boat has a large sail that resembles an archbishop's mitre (ceremonial headpiece) with a large cross in the middle. The image

conveys a powerful narrative of how Christian Catholic values should guide us through the dangerous waters of a life journey. Another Catholic school (BBB) uses the biblical line “*duc in altum*” in its crest which, coincidentally, also displays a boat, a rudder and waves. These images are strategically placed on the crest to signify and valorise the elite ethos of the school. Accordingly, the school crest is used to mark the Home page as a location governed by the school’s elite values (Drew 2013). Home pages clearly indicate that being a part of a prestigious and exclusive community makes students unique and exceptional:

Lyceum AAA is a non-public general education high school in which upbringing and teaching is based on evangelical values. In educational and didactic work, we combine tradition with a modern view of the world and people.

Our students are unique and exceptional. And you can be one of them.

The prominent narratives on these websites represent the “ethos” of the institutions. A message from the principal conspicuously displayed on the new Home page of school BBB, a single sex boys’ school, exemplifies this:

Male teachers should be role models of a Christian gentleman and should help the boys to strive for improvement to better serve others. Young men need good role models. One of the goals of BBB is to help parents raise their sons to become the sort of men that their daughters would like to marry. (School BBB)

This short statement contains a discourse that signifies the values and beliefs of many schools in this group: respect for others, courage to face the challenges of life, tradition represented

by a Christian male gallantry and traditional, heteronormative values of marriage and family.

DOMINANT VALUES AND BELIEFS— GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

The most prestigious government schools in Poland display many characteristics of elite schools around the world. They combine a long tradition and historically established prestige with excellent academic results. The government elite schools in my study dominate the rankings based on the High School Certificate (Matura) exams. Entrance to these schools is extremely competitive, based on the final, externally set exams that complete the junior stage of education. Most of these schools cultivate their tradition through their schools' mottos, hymns, commemorative plaques and trophy cabinets. They have strong alumni associations and celebrate the successes of their famous alumni. Graduates of these schools continue education at the best national universities and the most prestigious faculties.

Elite government schools' websites proudly display the schools' history and the history of their patrons, whose images frequently feature on a school logo. The patrons of elite government schools are most frequently influential historical figures: kings, politicians, scientists, artists or other significant leaders. "Tradition-Present-Future" reads the motto on one of the websites. "Our school is 100 years old" declares another. The heritage of the school is not a thing of the past but a force

in the present and the future. As Kenway et al. (2017: 92) state, “these schools project power and accomplishment. It is a compelling aspect of their marketing and appeal in the present.” Displaying the symbols of history and tradition, these schools underscore their superiority against the other, less established, new players on the market. Their long history is a marker of long-established quality, reliability and stability.

Several of the elite government schools in Poland are able to project an image of greatness through magnificently restored buildings, and impressive list of famous alumni, the signifiers of elite-ness that have been attributed to highly influential private schools in the West. One of the government schools in this study has its own museum that is regularly visited by students from other schools in Poland. Such visits contribute to the school’s elite image as visitors leave greatly impressed and likely to praise the school among family and friends. The school’s long history, together with the complimentary visitors’ comments and photos, are displayed on the webpage under the tab “History”—“Museum.” A list of famous visitors to the school includes Queen Elizabeth II, Lech Wałęsa and Jan Nowak-Jeziorański.

Although history and tradition have a strong presence on government schools’ websites, it is their academic success that dominates their discourses of superiority. Winning at Olympiads has become a dominant signifier of prestige of government elite schools. References to successes on subject competitions and Olympiads feature prominently on schools’ websites, usually under the tab “About the school”—“Success.”

Such discourse is homage to meritocracy; proof that the meritocratic system assures success and achievement for those who deserve it because of their personal qualities, their hard work and commitment to study, regardless of their economic or social background. It is a powerful imaginary that disavows other aspects and conditions that facilitate academic success.

TYPOLOGY OF ELITES IN POLAND

The developments in elite research have led to a considerably expanded concept of the word “elite.” From the initial, classic definition of elites by Vilfredo Pareto (1935) to the most recent studies of the role of experts and “influence elites” that include second tier individuals who have the power to influence government policies and elections outcomes (Gulbrandsen 2017; Wedel 2017), research on elites employs different approaches and methods of categorisation (Dunwill 2023).⁵ Nevertheless, most contemporary researchers agree that elites are groups of people with disproportionately high levels of economic, social, and cultural capital at their disposal that can be converted into other forms of capital. Elites in my study have sufficient economic resources to choose any kind of school. Therefore, apart from their economic advantage, it is their values and beliefs, their *Weltanschauung* that become the subject of my analysis.

⁵ Due to limited space, only a few examples are presented here. For more details, see Dunwill 2023.

The key to my typology of elites is the emergence and diversification of the elite school market in post-1989 Poland. To develop this typology, I examined, among other factors, the characters and profiles of elite schools, their websites and marketing strategies and their dominant attitudes towards the issues of globalisation, European integration, socialist heritage and tradition. I propose that these schools' educational offer targets a particular group of elite clientele that shares similar socio-political and/or socio-cultural outlooks.

Based on such a hypothesis I construct four ideal-typical groups of elites:

1. *Globalists*—proactive, liberal, cosmopolitan, internationally oriented, pro-global and pro-European.
2. *Civil Society Builders*—proactive, socialists, concerned with democracy, human rights and development of civil society.
3. *Guardians of Religion and Tradition* (both secular and religious)—reactive, conservative, change-weary, nation-centric and Euro-vigilant elites, and Catholic conservative, frequently anti-global and Euro-sceptic elites.
4. *Pragmatic Professionals*—bound by professional standards and focused on professional and personal achievements. May have diverse outlooks, being progressive or conservative, globally oriented or nation focused, depending on personal circumstances (Zawadzka 2018).⁶

⁶ Contrary to the traditional ethos of the *intelligentsia*, Pragmatic Professionals are not necessarily committed to any particular ideology, although some may be. The most recent research suggests that, after 1989, this group's work ethic and value system has been evolving to resemble their Western liberal peers. Social status became connected to money and consumerism became a quasi-ideology of lifestyle.

The identified types of elites are ideal-typical constructs. Below, I briefly describe each group's dominant values and beliefs, taking into consideration the elites' ideological relationship with the notions of globalisation, European integration, socialist heritage and tradition.

GLOBALISTS

As I described earlier, global factors such as trade and capital flows, liberalisation leading to increasing foreign competition, absorption of innovations from technologically advanced countries, intensive outward but also inward labour migrations, contributed to rapid economic growth and internationalisation (Szpunar, Hagemeyer 2018).

The elites who choose international schools, described here as Globalists, in most cases adhere to the view that the world will increasingly become globally connected, economically, politically, culturally, socially and environmentally (Steger 2009). Many view globalisation as inevitable. Although Polish Globalists usually see globalisation in a positive way, it does not mean that they view it uncritically. They see, however, international schooling as giving their offspring a competitive advantage in the future, increasingly competitive, job market. High status international education has become a desired commodity (Ball 2003; Bunnell 2014). Just as the demand for international education has increased exponentially in China, India and the Middle East, the same is also true for the new CEE economies, including Poland (Brehm, Webster 2014). But its growth is

impeded by the character of Polish elites, many of whom are locally oriented and critical of hyper-globalisation processes.

Globalists argue that, as future leaders will need to operate and compete in the global arena, they need to learn and study with the best. They are frequently critical of local education, viewing it as parochial, inward looking and nation-centric. Globalist elites believe that, to ensure their offspring have the best access to positions of status and power globally, they must be able to compete on the global not national arena. This is reflected in the strong demand for places at the most prestigious tertiary institutions—Oxbridge, Ivy League or *Grandes Écoles*. Their choices demonstrate that these elites perceive the style of education that these institutions offer as superior to the local one. Globalist discourse supports a free market, meritocracy, competition and individual rights. Many geographically mobile families select international schools for convenience, for the portability of credentials and the language of instruction. However, local elites are also attracted by the school's prestige that comes from the economic capital required to afford the school fees, as well as the potential future economic success and international connections such schools facilitate.

CIVIL SOCIETY BUILDERS

A general consensus among researchers is that civil society in post-communist countries is weak and that communist legacies, such as hostility towards and mistrust of communist organisations, the persistence of family and friendship networks

and disappointment with the post-communist transformation, are a significant cause of social apathy (Bernhard 1996; Howard 2003; Sztompka 2008).

Post-communist countries are frequently portrayed in the literature as “democracies without citizens,” in which elites have succeeded in institutionalising democratic procedures, protection of basic civil rights and multi-party competition but failed to counter a paucity of associational life, volunteering at the grassroots level and weak participation in the institutions of representative governance. Warning of the dangers to democratic consolidation, prominent scholars have pointed to declining legitimacy of democratic institutions, disenchantment with liberal values and the growing popularity of populist and radical right parties (Rupnik 2007).

The weak social capital among the Polish public is illustrated by their weak social ties (except for family ties) and weak participation in and support for social non-profit actors. Secondly, a low level of political discourse is demonstrated by extremely low rates of participation in the national elections, low levels of participation in protest activities or petition signing and low levels of membership in political parties. All these characteristics confirm that Poland remains a country where civil society, although rapidly evolving, has not yet fully developed (Czułno 2013). Such a view has occasionally been contested by some scholars. Ekiert, Kubik and Wenzel (2017: 334), for example, argue that a weak civil society in Poland is a myth and that “since mid-1990s, the intensity of the more ‘civil’ forms of activity (participation in and support for NGOs,

volunteering, etc.) has been growing.” This view, however, is not widely shared by other researchers.

The low level of civic participation became a major concern of the socially conscious elites that I call here Civil Society Builders who see it as a threat to democratic consolidation. Raising the civil engagement of future citizens became a major undertaking of the creators of elite social schools. Building a civil society is listed as one of the main goals in the mission statement of the Społeczne Towarzystwo Oświatowe (STO), the Social Educational Association, created by a group of progressive parents, intellectuals and educationists. The aim of the STO was to create schools where education would be focused on student’s general development and where socialisation for democracy and civil society would feature prominently. The schools in my study (both created by STO) make it their mission to educate future responsible and active citizens who are socially involved and ready to contribute their talents, time and effort for the benefits of their communities and society in general. The students are encouraged to think critically, defend democracy, eliminate political inequality, advance civic equality and slow down the growth of economic inequality. They should develop improved understanding of the basic principles of civil society in everyday life and display respect for public property and public good, human rights, the environment, and minorities. The cultivation of religious and racial tolerance, inclusiveness of people with special needs and advocacy against gender-based violence, respect for LGTBQ (non-heterosexual identifying) groups and respect for society’s norms and expectations is

pursued. The Civil Society Builders are socially engaged elites, active in publicly funded NGOs, private foundations or community organisations. A majority supports social-democratic principles in politics and liberal principles of the economy. Most are strongly pro-European and anti-authoritarian.⁷

GUARDIANS OF RELIGION AND TRADITION

The transformation of 1989 witnessed the re-emergence of previously suppressed and often clandestine groups of the old *intelligentsia* with roots in the Polish nobility (Jakubowska 2016; Kurek 2008; Smoczyński, Zarycki 2021). Numerous societies of Polish gentry sprang up, genealogical societies tracing the family histories emerged, and even monarchist organisations such as the Conservative-Monarchist Club and Organisation of Polish Monarchists established their existence.⁸ This trend is also noticeable in other CEE countries but is, perhaps, most obvious in Poland where nearly 10% of the country's population were nobles before World War II, the largest percentage in Europe.

⁷ Unfortunately, in many public schools, civic education is seen by students, parents and even school directors or teachers as something less important than other subjects that give “real,” hard knowledge. Teachers preach about democracy or transmit abstract information about political systems but rarely convey applicable knowledge and civic efficacy, preparations for active and informed participation in public life, or democracy (Pacewicz 2004: 1).

⁸ The Conservative-Monarchist Club (Polish: Klub Zachowawczo-Monarchistyczny, abbr. KZ-M) is a Polish organisation of traditionalist, counter-revolutionary, and Catholic character. It was founded on March 7, 1988 as a society. The doctrine of the club can be characterised as integralist conservatism. It is a metapolitical organisation, keeping apart from daily politics; instead, it aims at advancing ideas of a free market and Catholic traditionalism. It considers itself a successor to the Conservative-Monarchist Club founded in Kraków, 1926, which, in turn, succeeded the Conservative Party founded in 1922. The Club publishes a quarterly entitled *Pro Fide Rege et Lege* and maintains the internet portal konserwatyzm.pl (http://dbpedia.org/page/Conservative-Monarchist_Club).

In her seminal study on noble elites, Jakubowska (2016) explores how old *intelligentsia* and landowners use history and tradition as a form of capital. She points that this group still see themselves as special and entitled, bound by tradition and religion, regardless of their economic situation. Although some families are wealthy, many can be described as middle-class *intelligentsia* with more modest economic resources. Their social and cultural capital, however, their family and community connections, allow them a special prestige and status among elites in general. Many of them have been purchasing land properties and building manors or renovating the old family estates recovered after the fall of communism. Possession of a country property, where extended family can gather to enjoy the “country lifestyle” has become fashionable and a sign of prestige that is being replicated by the new aspiring landowners.

The common bond of interest forged by ownership of landed property and participation in the comprehensive apparatus of political, legal, and religious control established a pervasive cultural link among the various levels of landed society. The bond was sealed by the myth of origins that set them apart as distinct, superior, and ordained to rule over the masses, the myth that served as the ideology for deployment of power. (Jakubowska 2016: 3)

Not all representatives of the old elites are conservative and nation-centric. They are, however, more likely to value tradition and have a respect and emotional attachment to the Catholic Church which they consider a bastion of Polish national identity. Many are cosmopolitan and quite worldly, particularly wealthier members of previously aristocratic families with

ties to *émigré* circles and world-wide support networks. There seems to be no conflict between their cosmopolitanism and their attachment to the national tradition and narrowly understood patriotism. Whether they live in Poland or abroad, the old elites emphasise the importance of tradition and “Polishness” (Jakubowska 2016).

They are also likely to underscore the difference between so called “old” and “new” *intelligentsia* (Kurek 2008; Nalaskowski 2022). The “old” *intelligentsia* emphasises importance of Poland’s tragic and brave history and tradition, particularly Poland’s narrowly understood cultural superiority. They are fiercely anti-communist and privately critical of the “new” *intelligentsia* (first generation professionals educated in communist Poland), pointing to their inferior manners, imperfect language, provincial intonation and poor commitment to preserving a strictly Christian national identity. Guardians of Religion and Tradition portray new members of the *intelligentsia* as over-eager to adopt and promote progressive policies of left-wing parties and EU, just to prove their ethical and intellectual superiority over those who refuse to leave their traditions behind (Paliwoda 2013). In their view, no diplomas of higher education could possibly replace the culture of distinction passed through the generations, embodied by the habitus of the “old *intelligentsia*” and demonstrated by their education credentials, world-wide connections, impeccable manners and charisma, command of foreign languages, artistic prowess, effortless confidence and feelings of self-worth. For them, the educated children of peasants, who still have “straw sticking out of their boots,”

will remain inferior no matter what political, bureaucratic or economic position they have obtained in the new reality (Jakubowska 2016). As Smoczyński and Zarycki (2021: 157) observed, to “be in milieu,” a member needs to be perceived by other members as linked with the other members by either constant socialization or family ties. These elites similarly took the opportunity to create schools that are more culturally and socially selective and promote traditional family values based on Catholic and other national traditions.

PRAGMATIC PROFESSIONALS

This group consists of highly educated individuals, experts in their field, committed to their profession or field of expertise. Occupying high positions in public service and academia, many of them fall into the category described as influence elites (Wedel 2017; Dunwill 2023). The free profession population consists of engineers and representatives of medical industries, financial, artistic, legal and construction and real estate services. Regardless of their personal wealth, these citizens may yield real power, particularly when they choose to act as political or military advisors.

Pragmatic Professionals are not necessarily committed to any particular ideology, although some may be. With few exceptions, organising their businesses, working long hours, keeping up with the competition, and updating their qualifications usually leaves them little time for civil society involvement unless they choose to make it their career. This is contrary to the traditional

ethos of the *intelligentsia* (Jedlicki 2009; Kulas 2017). In the Polish People's Republic, the highly educated group of professionals enjoyed a high status, even if in official discourse it was not a dominant group. As in pre-war Poland, they had a particular mission to preserve the nation's identity, its memory, language and culture. The honourable ethos of *intelligentsia* meant that its effort and focus was on community and social commitment rather than on economic means. This has begun to change. The most recent research suggests that, after 1989, this group's work ethic and value system has been evolving to resemble their Western liberal peers. Social status became connected to money and consumerism became a quasi-ideology of lifestyle.

Zawadzka, in her study of "Lifestyle and Value System of Professionals and Managers," confirms that, although statistically various forms of social and political activity rise together with one's level of education and income, the interviews with professionals and managers within her research show that contemporary respondents chose relatively easy and non-committal forms of social participation:

irregular donations, or allocating 1% of their tax to charities, while some were engaged in the activities of school committees or housing cooperatives. Nevertheless, none of these forms of engagement seemed crucial to one's self-identity. Many interviewees talked about lacking the time due to work-related commitments and an intense family life. Some openly pointed out that they were simply not interested in social and community issues. (Zawadzka 2018: 174)

Her study also demonstrates that consumerism plays an increasingly important role in the lives of upper middle-class *intelligentsia*. She states:

Polish professionals and managers began to resemble their Western peers: focusing on work duties, relying on themselves, and expecting appropriate pay for high-quality, professional service. As such, social status became connected to money, and the idea of an intelligentsia began to fade. (Zawadzka 2018: 166)

356 Dominant consumption patterns pertain to free time activities, lifestyle, refined cultural choices and the consumption of exotic experiences. Generally, we would expect the representatives of highly educated professionals to be progressive and proactive, pro-global and pro-European but their Globalist sympathies are counterbalanced by an equally significant attachment to national identity and respect for religion and tradition, as these elites are frequently operating within the nation-state and are locally anchored. The members of this group combine qualities of all other groups identified before but it would be difficult to identify a dominant ideological preference. Therefore, the description Pragmatic Professionals seems to fit the profile of this group well.

The mosaic of occupations in this category shows that it is heterogeneous and, consequently, can differ significantly in needs, expectations and preferences. There is one thing, however, that binds this group together—their awareness and appreciation of the role education has played in their lives. These highly educated and successful professionals are strong supporters of meritocracy and see education as key to their success. They are also more likely to believe that their success is mainly due to their innate abilities and hard work rather than their family and social connection (Baczko-Dombi, Wysmulek

2015). These elites' preference is for top-ranking, academic, government schools. Pragmatic Professionals who favour the selective government schools do not need to found or create new schools to serve their needs. They choose established, top ranking institutions with long traditions and impressive lists of famous alumni and support them through alumni and parents' foundations. They legitimise their school's exclusivity through broadly accepted meritocratic principles.

CONCLUSION

This chapter focused on the dominant political and social proclivities of elite subjects and the schools they selected and supported. With my theory of four angles of scrutiny, I demonstrated the different relationship that diverse Polish elites have with the four critical perspectives of globalisation, European integration, socialist heritage, and tradition. These factors, I argued, helped to configure the diverse political and social outlooks of post-communist elites. The socio-political context of post-communist Poland gave rise to groups vying for political, economic and cultural dominance. The practices and offers of elite schools in Poland indicate the durability of socio-cultural and axiological divisions between the elite groups.

The desire for differentiated education resulted in different types of elite schools. By examining the characters and profiles of elite schools, their websites, marketing strategies and their dominant attitudes towards the issues of globalisation, European integration, socialist heritage and tradition, I proposed that their

educational offer targets a particular group of elite clientele that shares similar socio-political and/or socio-cultural outlooks.

I demonstrated that, while elites increasingly sought education in the independent sector, the profile of the schools chosen by various elite groups differed. These included schools anchored firmly in national tradition, social schools influenced by civic and humanitarian values, and globally oriented international schools offering a wide range of cosmopolitan and transnational connections and mobility. Top-ranking, academically superior government schools attracted ideologically neutral professionals aspiring for future academic and professional careers. These choices shed light on the elites themselves, illuminating their dominant characteristics and proclivities.

My sample analysis of websites illustrated how the schools in the four ideal-typical categories used ideologically diverse discourses to project their ethos and identities to construct elite status and to appeal to distinct groups of clients. International schools' discourses positioned them as globalist and liberal. Visuals and text were, as expected, most globally oriented, with the focus on educating citizens of the world. The targeted clientele included global diplomatic and business communities, corporate employees and local economic elites. Elite social schools projected their image as progressivist and liberal, strongly supportive of EU policies and programmes and European network connections. Social schools' websites promoted participation in civil society and commitment to democratic principles. The targeted clientele was mostly liberal, progressive, mostly secular and pro-European *intelligentsia*,

with high social capital. Catholic schools appeared localist and conservative. Catholic schools' websites, again as expected, utilised Christian, Catholic symbols and language, emphasising religious and cultural homogeneity. The targeted clientele were mostly conservative, traditional Catholic families, with high cultural capital. Government elite schools were moderately conservative, highly academic, test result oriented and competitive. Prestigious government schools, with their selectivity, rigorous and demanding academic curriculum and a rather limited range of extracurricular offerings, reflect the communist image of education that was uniform, centralised and based on meritocratic principles. The schools' selectivity and university pathways, revealed on the websites, appealed to professional families of *intelligentsia* who, most likely, possessed high cultural and social capital.

Future studies may examine how elite-ness is emphasised by different groups and how it is contrasted to opposing groups of elites ("ego" ideology and "alter" ideology). This can be demonstrated in the ways that opposing political and cultural elites portray each other in their political and media crusades. For example, in Poland, the conservative guardians of tradition and religion embrace their nationalistic stand as the highest virtue, while the EU-supporting, socially and multiculturally inclusive and ecologically conscious, left-wing, ethical elites underscore their moral stand as a virtue and a symbol of prestige. What one group considers a virtue is not necessarily perceived in that way by others—one side being labelled communists and fascists, redistributing wealth and seeking authoritarian power

to restore one-party dominance, the other side being called communists and traitors, favouring “leftist” ideology, selling out to transnational entity and willing to betray national interests for reasons of expedience. It would be interesting to examine how the issues of globalisation, European integration, socialist heritage and tradition divide (and/or unite) elites in other post-communist countries and to examine, in greater depth, the implications for their socio-political and cultural outlooks and their involvement in various social, cultural and political spheres.

The polarisation between various elite “tribes” is significant, not only in the political but also in socio-cultural areas of life. To be progressive in Poland means to support liberalism. These progressive citizens now face hard choices in their political strategy. Liberalism offers greater tolerance, individual freedom, respect for human rights and concerns for the environment but it also seems to mean ruthless economic competition and exploitative practices. Their authoritarian populist opponents, by contrast, offer redistributive policies that appeal to many, both in spite of and because of conservative, religious and nationalistic sentiments. The choices for all Poles are limited. For Polish elites, they may be even more so. Liberalism sanctions their rise. Right-wing populism complains about their exclusivity and greed. And there is a spectrum in between upon which elites take up various positions. It now appears that, by positioning themselves as outside the masses—including educationally—Poland’s elites, of various stripes, now must carefully assess the ways they see, and are seen, by others. This requires continued research and, possibly, new angles of scrutiny.

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VANISHING ELITES AND POLAND'S UNFINISHED TRANSFORMATION

ABSTRACT

The premise of this article rests, firstly, with the failure to have completed Poland's transformation following the breakthrough of 1989 and secondly, the failure to have formed new elites. This failure consists, in my view, in not having achieved the metamorphosis of Polishness (i.e., a real change in the identity of the social system). We have made a Transition in Poland, i.e., a change of the authorities and the state itself. However, we have neglected a matter fundamental to the Transformation, that is, a change of social consciousness. The "elites" played a special role in this fundamental omission for the condition of Poland today. Although, strictly speaking, they did not play such a role, because the old ones no longer existed and new ones had not yet emerged. For elites are not created, they are formed. As a result, there was no entity capable of creating a new pattern of existence for Poland.

KEYWORDS: elites, Poland, transition, transformation, identity

Elites were, are, and will be (Król 2020)

With Marcin Król having spoken these words, doubts about the existence of elites in modern Poland might be deemed unwarranted. All the more so as today's elites are being violently criticized and openly fought against—both by ideological

opponents of any elites whatsoever, and by political aspirants to take their place. It is not my intention to quarrel over whether we in Poland have the kind of elites the nation is capable of forming—or, conversely, to argue that the nation we have was formed by the elites. Neither position seems to me to make real sense. During the First Civic Congress in 2005, I presented the view of the non-existence of elites and at the same time stressed their urgent need (Kieniewicz 2005: 30–34). Today, I could repeat that view, along with its basic argumentation. I say this with bitterness.

366 The premise of this article rests, firstly, with the failure to have completed Poland's transformation (conceived, of course, as a process) following the breakthrough of 1989 and secondly, the failure to have formed new elites, although not as they are understood in the social sciences. This failure consists, in my view, in not having achieved the Metamorphosis of Polishness (i.e., a structural change of the Identity of the social system) (Kieniewicz 2003: 38–42; 2021a: 30–34). I understand the vanishing of elites, in turn, as the closure of the revolutionary process originated with the shipyard strike of 1980. I clarify that I do not evaluate the changes, neither those made nor those not made.

Parenthetically, I do not believe such a task as identity change was set after 1989. There simply could be no such talk about setting a goal of identity change. The fundamental objective was to make the transition to a new regime and regain sovereignty. These tasks were fulfilled by 1993, when the Russian armies left Poland. The new regime was confirmed by the constitution adopted in 1997. However, no program to transform the social

system was taken up. We did not go beyond the general idea of rejecting the socialist mode of production and distribution and of striving for an albeit murkily formulated “normality.” It can be argued today that we confined ourselves to the prospect of colloquially understood modernization, something to be brought about by aligning management and consumption with an imaginary ideal rather than with the adoption of a genuinely existing patterns of life (cf. Brzechczyn 2016; Skocpol 1979). That is why I speak of an unfinished Transformation. We have made a Transition in Poland, i.e., a change of the authorities and the state itself. If no Metamorphosis has happened, this was primarily due to a lack of will to invent and consolidate our new Identity. Or was this really the case?

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Things look starkly different today, when our achievements and failures (and perhaps especially their consequences) can be assessed. After all, is the debilitation of the state and the undermining of democracy a consequence of underachievement? Or is it necessary to reach deep into the past to make an attempt at evaluation? According to some researchers, it is possible to make a Transformation (from communism to capitalism) without moving on to democracy (Burawoy 2001). In Poland, the rejection of communism was primarily a consequence of the push to democracy, but not necessarily to capitalism. The acceptance of capitalism, most often without understanding its essence, was a consequence of the belief that this was part of the desired acquisition of the civilizational experience of Europe (Bauman 2004). The dispute that once divided supporters of the priority of Transition over Transformation (Bryant,

Mokrzycki 1994; 1995) seems irrelevant today inasmuch as the reality and meaning of both processes have been questioned.

I wish to weigh this matter beyond the disputes of yesterday and today. For it is a political dispute that has its roots deep in our community, in our collective memory, and in the attendant will or lack of will for change. In the build-up to the pivotal elections of June 4, 1989, it seemed that all the necessary elements for profound change were within our grasp—namely, the Solidarity ethos and patriotic elation, along with readiness to serve and hope for the future. I'm not going to deny that. And yet, before the 1990s were over, it was clear that something had gone wrong, that our atavisms had defeated us yet again... Accepted into NATO, we then entered the European Union—only to realize nearly twenty years thereafter that we have not reached the end of the process at all. What's more, deep division of opinion has emerged as to the nature of that process—and even its meaning.

I have referred to this process as Transition and Transformation, noting the importance of the latter element in particular (Kieniewicz 1993; 2008a). Transition is a gradual, evolutionary rather than revolutionary change in the system. For me, an example of such a path was Spain after the death of the dictator, with the dismantling of the old order according to the law (*de la ley a la ley*) and the forming of a new order in a consensual constitution. Spain's path to democracy (*transición*), though not without tensions and conflicts, was considered a model. What I call Transformation, on the other hand, is a more complex and protracted process of changing society and, in particular,

its economic foundations. From the beginning of Poland's changes, I believed that we had underestimated the difficulty posed by carrying out the Transition before the Transformation. I was not alone. I had the conviction that Leszek Balcerowicz had a similar understanding of the problem. Even before the Round Table talks, which began in February 1989, even before the political decisions were made later that year, there had been attempts to make changes to restore a market economy. However, the turnaround in Poland was spontaneous, and instead of a Transformation, a surgical rescue intervention had to be made. The operation succeeded, but this does not mean that the further course of the Transformation was secured. On the contrary. We seem to have recognized that the obstacles along the way derive from the legacy of the previous regime and assumed they would vanish as soon as everyone becomes convinced of the rightness of the reform and, above all, its inevitability. So long as the *homo sovieticus* in the Poles was eradicated. Meanwhile, the friction lay much deeper. It was not enough to admit that we simply wanted things to be better, more and more normal, leaving capitalism to be the dream of merely a few. A society experienced with having built socialism faced a task that was understood as building capitalism. However, this way of production and distribution does not build itself, it can be born only in a longer process. We knew this. And we wanted to believe that "shock therapy" would speed things up. We were unable, however, to convince people of this.

Were those who knew and truly understood the road ahead and what the Balcerowicz plan adopted by "our" government

entailed, the elite (cf. Porter-Szűcs 2021: 520)? In the generally accepted sense, this is probably the label to use, and for this reason those elites were roundly condemned, both the reformers and the beneficiaries. On the other hand, I do not think that all those who were better-informed, which fact did not necessarily translate into their material success, considered themselves superior, i.e., an elite. In a word: they seem not to have felt called to lead, in their own view. Yes, they consciously shouldered the responsibility, but they did not pursue the establishment of a meritocracy. The elite must recognize themselves as an elite milieu in order to be recognized as such by others.

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My thesis is as follows: we have neglected a matter fundamental to the Transformation and important to the Transition—no less than modernization itself. Because in order for the process of Transformation to begin, and especially to come to completion, there must be an awareness of the need to replace the tools for its implementation. And above all, there must be a readiness to complete the requirements not only as a project, but especially as a change of consciousness. This is precisely what has been missing. It was as if the August uprising that yielded Solidarity in 1980 exhausted the resources thereafter necessary to formulate this “great project” (in Ortega y Gasset’s sense) for Poland’s future.

The “elites” played a special role in this fundamental omission for the condition of Poland today. Although, strictly speaking, they did not play such a role, because the old ones no longer were accepted and new ones had not yet emerged. For elites are not created, they are formed. As a result, there

was no entity capable of creating a new pattern of existence for Poland. Elites are necessary in order to convince of the need to make these and not other fundamental changes. At least in societies trying to modernize. In other words, there must be elites in order to carry out a change resulting in the assumption of a new Identity. A change that is not a rejection of tradition but a choice of the best option compatible with it (Szacki 1984: 11). It would seem that it is precisely at the time of recovering from a crisis that the field opens up for leaders who provide the impetus, are an example and a challenge—in a word, for the formation of an elite (Wiśniewska 2005: 120). And such people appeared, although they did not create a milieu, that network of informal ties that builds a belief in the peculiar distinctiveness of *optimates*. This had something to do with the clear deformation of the concept of superiority. Solidarity referred to the principle of subsidiarity, but in practice it was interpreted in the spirit of the myth of equality reigning in the People's Republic.

The consequence of Poland's deficit of elites, then, was the failure to complete even ill-conceived modernization. Or rather, did it take on an addictive form? I do not mean the trivial accusations hurled in political brawls, although their current level makes one give honor to the disputes of years ago, when, for example, Kołodko and Balcerowicz were so vehemently against each other. What I mean by this is that in modernizing, organizational, legal, and technological endeavors, we reached for proven models without sufficiently considering the importance of our own project (Koźmiński, Sztompka 2004).

After all, in the dispute of the 1990s, everyone was right. Both opponents of experimentation and supporters of tradition. On the other hand, a social and political consensus was not formed on the issue of changing Poland in accordance with the resources at our disposal. This is especially true of the idea of remedying the weakness of social capital, which is what I meant when I said that we screwed up everything there was to screw up. Though I targeted myself with that remark, it was not well received. Perhaps we should say to ourselves, “it’s the educational system, stupid,” but then we really believed in the miraculous power of the market. Perhaps it was not possible to embrace all the priorities. The result, however, was a modernization that was addictive and a Transformation that perpetuated peripherality. The idea of transforming Poland into a new Borderland of a polycentric Europe never lived to see a presentation (Kieniewicz 1999; 2008b). Except perhaps for my speech at Yalta, but that was of no consequence.¹

Determining how the post-1989 changes occurred can help understand why they entailed Poland’s continued peripherality rather than its (that is, our) Metamorphosis. By this I mean a change in the Structure of the system resulting in a new form, a new Identity, one that removes the threats to existence that confronted us before. The essence of such a change would be the acquisition of the ability to autonomously free oneself from the dependence inherent in a peripheral condition

¹ On September 10–11, 1999, in the Livadian Palace near Yalta, a conference of leaders of the countries of the Baltic and Black Sea region was held, accompanied by a conference of experts and advisers, “Baltic – Black Sea Cooperation: to the Integrated Europe of the 21st Century Without Dividing Lines.” My talk entitled “Memory for the Future” met with friendly interest.

(cf. Sosnowska 2004). Failure is not tantamount to conceding the rightness of theses about the betrayal of elites (obviously, post-communist ones), or recognizing, in turn, anti-communist elites as a pathology. The defense of Identity can perpetuate such negative circumstances as none other than peripherality. Thus, the search for a new Identity succeeds only when such circumstances or threats are reduced (Kieniewicz 2021b).

The most difficult thing to pin down is that of the principles, values, and perceptions that determined the behavior of the people making the changes or, on the contrary, blocking the transformation processes being introduced. Not only because of their entanglement in political or personal controversies. First of all, this is because of the need to take into account the circumstances: regional, continental, and global. The first determine the conditions of Transition, their impact on the changes of post-communist societies (Åslund 2007; Balcerowicz 1995; Jasiecki 2013). The second were, and still are, the circumstances determining the status of the former European periphery expecting civilizational advancement (Berend 1996; Todorova 1997). Finally, it is necessary to link the changes to the state of the world system, both economic and ecological (Frank, Gills 1993; Wallerstein 2004). This corresponds to the cultural, civilizational, and human level of the transformation experience.

I grasp peripherality according to Rokkan (1987), rather than Wallerstein, as the comprehensive dependence of societies on the core of the regional or global market economy. It results in an inability to make autonomous Transformations, i.e.,

a dependence in making the changes necessary for existence. Economic dependence and the inadequacy of the division of labor (in a word, backwardness) are consequences of peripherality understood in this way. They are striking, but not decisive. Peripherality manifests itself in human attitudes more than in forms of the state, economy, or culture. Throughout the post-Soviet sphere, the return to Europe and capitalism in colloquial thinking were supposed to be a leap, this time to the kingdom of abundance. In fact, they meant entering yet another trap of peripherality (Krasnodebski 2003). The concept of borderlanddom could not gain popularity at the time (cf. Kieniewicz 2013; 2017).

The borderland is a space with exceptionally strong tensions. They arise from the clash of strong stimuli from outside the environment with resistance from within, rooted in the local culture, while at the same time appealing to analogies in the understanding of civilizational belonging. This happens as a consequence of the openness of the division (for here the border, in the sense of a frontier, cannot be located) between Us (along with our Others) and Strangers (cf. Osterhammel 2013: 483ff.). Borderlanddom is thus a circumstance that promotes the confrontation of different value systems, attitudes to life, conditions of existence, professed religions, and established traditions. Crossing a border understood in this way is an expression of the dynamics of civilization (Kieniewicz 2014b). This kind of relationship characterized the former Rzeczpospolita (Republic of Nobles) and was lost during the period of partition, from 1795 to 1918. It was not possible or even attempted

to recreate them. Or rather, did actions conditioned by the mythologies of the time of captivity not prove effective in the era of awakening national consciousness and the confrontation of nationalisms?

Therefore, in interpreting the Transformation, the concept of breakthrough is crucial. I call it a break in continuity, a sudden accumulation of circumstances that threatens the existence of a society (its Identity), regardless of the causes. In other words, a breakthrough is also dangerous when it is or was expected or desired. Faced with the threat of catastrophic non-existence, societies form or adopt narratives to convince themselves of continuity all the more strenuously. Hence the ambivalence toward the events of 1989, including the outlandish interpretations of the “thick line”—i.e., the first non-communist government’s supposed refusal to pursue transitional justice. A breakthrough in this sense combines the phenomena of Transition and Transformation, and is a momentary conjuncture that allows two separate processes to accumulate.

The Polish Transition meant a change in the basic parameters of the system, primarily in its Organization, and assumed the establishment of new political and economic institutions. This, in turn, resulted in by no means anticipated changes in the structure of the system. These, then, were to contribute to the Transformation, initiate an adaptation to the new circumstances and, consequently, lead to a New Identity. The Polish breakthrough of 1989, however, spans more than three decades and there is no consensus on marking the turning point. This has very serious consequences.

Our attention has been focused from the beginning on the political and economic aspects of change. We think of it as a “transition from communism to capitalism,” or from totalitarianism/authoritarianism to democracy. We do not pay attention to the connections between our Polish changes and global processes. We continue to think and act according to experiences shaped by the communist regime, that monstrosity of social revolution and Soviet domination that ruled minds as well. The persistence of this ghastly legacy is puzzling. The youngest two to three generations of Poles also seem to be infected by it. This manifests itself in the persistence of the argument about the correctness of chosen or rejected strategies. It does not occur to us that things can be done otherwise. Or perhaps the syndrome of thwarting those who stand out is perpetuated in us?—especially those who have thrown themselves into commerce, production, and small-scale enterprise in general? In a word, as a community we have underestimated the efforts of people affirming in material initiatives their belonging to civilization. In Polish we have many terms for cursing them: *Badylarze! Prywaciarze! Dorobkiewicze!*² How we loathe them... Hence also arises, or so I think, the neglect of research on the environmental aspects of the Transformation, and especially the failure to see how much environmental modifications have affected social change (Pavlinek, Pickles 2000). I do not exclude the possibility that this whole set of issues lies at the root of the neglect of the social dimension

² Greengrocers, privateers, parvenus.

of transformational process, a kind of blindness to its imminent political consequences.

This also shows an underestimation of the great challenge of our time, which is the prospect of communities that are still counted as the peripheral rest of the world in the global division of production and distribution. Focused on our own problems, we embrace the ethical dimensions of this phenomenon, neglecting the messages of the future (Barber 2014). As if it were enough for us to espouse concepts of convergence and believe in progress (Mahbubani 2013). Pessimists are convinced of the impossibility of crossing the poverty barrier and believe in revolution (Husson 2011). These extreme attitudes are also reflected in the representation and evaluation of our Transformations. Optimists are inclined to appreciate our achievements, while pessimists, on the contrary, see the causes of failure in the application of market solutions (Åslund 2010; Klein 2014). In both tendencies I read a conviction of the obviousness of the eternal peripherality of our region (cf. Sowa 2011). This is reminiscent of the old pessimism about the periphery's capacity to initiate self-sustaining growth (cf. Leibenstein 1963).

All this has important implications for research and for life. While much is said about the negative aspects of consumerism, it seems that not enough attention is paid to its role in denying the past and losing faith in the future. In research, we do not engage with global challenges, we do not participate in the debate on the contested present (Friedman 2008; Napiórkowski 2022). Is this the fault of historians? Research is

dominated by sociologists, especially those interested in change (Sztompka 1993; Zarycki 2009), especially that aspect called post-communism (Staniszki 1999). This is invaluable material. Economists seem to have had more influence on the public's opinions, regardless of the choice of options. The most interesting results come from the work of psychologists and cultural scholars drawing on the achievements of post-colonial studies (Buchowski 2001; Woo, Parker, Sachs 1997). Under these circumstances, the small output of transformational theory (Kollmorgen 2010; Wolf, Hopfmann 2001) is not surprising. Perhaps this is why it is impossible to say how and when Metamorphosis occurs?

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Thus, the situation is as follows: successes in Transformations do not ensure the stability of the political Transition. On the contrary, tensions arise in the sphere of production and distribution that block the consolidation of the democratic foundations of the state. As a result, it turns out that it becomes possible to deviate from the seemingly generally accepted pattern. This state of affairs should not be surprising if we realize that the progress of the transformations has not eliminated peripherality. By this I mean the undervaluation of education, disregard for dignity, dependence on role models, the drain of talent. Hence the atrophy of values, the Potemkin façades, and imitation. All this points to the process, one so terrible in its consequences, of the final elimination of elites.

Meanwhile, it is the elites who are able to describe the future, to show the way to attain a new Identity. Only the elites have the courage to define our participation in the crisis engulfing

the human race and open our eyes to the necessity of participating in the search for a World project of independent development and ecological sustainability (Kieniewicz 2014a). It is from the elites that we can expect the courage to come up with solutions in all dimensions and for all. Finally, as a consequence of these opportunities, the chance of a Polish Metamorphosis would return, opening the prospect of participating in the debate on the future of Europe (Krastev 2013).

And so elites were, are, and will be—but they are always very different. The achievements of our past seem frail in this regard. We underestimated and disregarded the ancient tradition of civic elites, captivity weakened the elites of birth and possession, we did not respect the achievements of intellectual and artistic elites, only for the 20th century to bring their physical and material liquidation. I repeat, elites are born, they cannot be created. The revolution carried out in a state of subordination, i.e., our dual dependence in the modern world—on the Eastern hegemon on the one hand and on the Western mirage on the other—has resulted in a new form of society oriented toward mediocrity. This was not remedied by the appropriation of Catholicism by Polishness (Kieniewicz 2008c), nor were we transformed into angels by the “fatal force” of poets³ (Kieniewicz 2023). The turnaround of 1989 changed everything in Poland. Except for the anti-elite phobia.

³ Juliusz Słowacki, *Testament mój*.

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PART III

DEBATE

**ELITES OF POST-TRANSFORMATION:
THE CASES OF CENTRAL AND
EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES
FEBRUARY 23, 2022
(TRANSCRIPTION OF THE DEBATE)**

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Participants: Konstantin Gaaze (Independent Researcher), Mikhail Minakov (Kennan Institute), Ivan Peshkov (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań), Anastasia Sergeeva (For Free Russia Association), Tomasz Zarycki (University of Warsaw), and Kamil M. Wielecki (University of Warsaw, moderation).

Kamil M. Wielecki: Starting our debate, I would like to ask our guests about the process of the formation of elites in Poland, Ukraine, and Russia during the post-socialist transformations. In Poland and Russia, we had shock therapy; in other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the changes were perhaps less abrupt. In general, however, the transformations were executed in a top-down model and comprised the implementation of institutions borrowed from the Western market democracies.

In this respect, I would like to ask you about the role of elites: did the functional elites in Central and Eastern Europe impact the post-socialist systemic transformation, or were they affected by it?

Konstantin Gaaze: I would say that there are three factors. You mentioned shock therapy, but shock therapy as a concept or as a historical label is too vague to me. There were a lot of things there: it was the liberalization of prices, it was a calculative movement... It was a lot of things.

The most important factor was the model of privatization. If you try to distinguish between, for example, Poland and Russia, you will see that in terms of liberalization of prices, there were many similar processes, but in terms of how priorities were shaped, it was quite different. For example, in Russia, the Yeltsin administration made a kind of exchange with the State Duma. The Yeltsin administration banned labor workers from being a part of privatization. It banned the possibility of privatizing factories as a collective body. But in return, they allowed the communist State Duma to ban foreign investors from participating in privatization, at least in its first stage.

So, what does this mean in terms of the ruling class? It means that in 1990, 1993, 1995 or so, many state organizations and institutions, from governor's offices to the Kremlin, required at the same time—I do not know—hundreds of corporate lawyers, hundreds of lawyers who, in fact, simply did not exist in Russia at that point. You will laugh, but many of my

informants had started very successful careers that led them, for example, to become high-ranking officials, consultants in the regional legal or economic offices of Russia's regional governors. So, the model of privatization was crucial.

Second—this is not my idea, basically. It is an idea that one of my mentors, Professor Thomas Bierschenk from the University of Mainz, gave to me. It concerns the type of source that is crucial for the state budget. The type of rent that is crucial for the state budget and for shaping the elite.

So, the first step is low-level lawyers or consultants who started to make their careers at that time. The second step: guys who understand how oil is traded on the global market because oil for the last 20 years has been absolutely crucial as rent for the Russian state, for the Russian budget, for the federal budget, for the regional budget, consolidated budgets, for the whole public financial system.

Then, and this is interesting, about five or maybe seven years ago, Russia experienced a drastic change in the type of crucial rent because the personal income tax in 2013 gave the federal budget more money than oil exports. I saw in my field how, for example, a bunch of guys who were first successful corporate lawyers and then public servants, or who were first successful oil traders and then successful public servants, left the public service, or their careers came to a halt. They were replaced by guys who understand how to tax people and how to make it more convenient for citizens.

And, as you know, our current prime minister, Mikhail Mishustin, before he was appointed prime minister, was the

head of the Russian internal revenue service. So he was basically responsible for the shift from oil to personal income tax as the main source of budget income.

Only the third factor concerns the type of political regime. As far as I can see, in the last 20 years with one president, we have experienced maybe three types of political regimes. Because in the beginning, it was very modern, very rational, bureaucratic authoritarianism. And afterwards, in the terms that Guillermo O'Donnell used to describe Argentina before the junta, in the early 1970s, it was personal authoritarianism but not a dictatorship. Of course, Medvedev's presidency was a case of a very progressive but personal authoritarianism, too, because he was always opposed to the ruling class. It is one of the reasons why he has no chance for a second term. And now we have a full-blown dictatorship in a very old style. I could refer you to the admirable works of Peter Baehr on Caesarism and charisma in this respect.

So now it is Caesarism. We have not seen this kind of political regime for quite some time. So this type of regime brings new tasks, but it does not reshape, or at least has not yet reshaped, the face of the Russian ruling class. It is a great empirical question. Will we see a fracture in terms of types of careers between personal authoritarianism and dictatorship? In more specific terms: is President Putin going to replace the entire bureaucracy that came from the industrial sector, oil trade, tax institutions, and so on, and replace them with other people? I do not know with whom because we have not seen this kind of political regime for quite some time.

One more important thing. There is a strange passage in Gramsci where he writes something like this: hegemony is not just the core of the state that goes hand in hand with discursive power. Hegemony is also a kind of a moral example. So when talking about Russia, it is important to understand that we do not have a political class in the normal European sense, understood as people elected to the parliament who get positions in the government, and so on and so forth. Our guys from the Duma can be appointed to the government, but this has not happened in the last 24 years. Since the crisis of 1998, when some of the deputies from the Communist Party were appointed to Yevgeny Primakov's government.

So it is important to understand that essentially Russia is ruled by bureaucrats who present themselves as public politicians, whom they are not. Their public speeches are not the speeches of public politicians. If you happened to see this parody of a council, the Security Council, which aired on Russian TV two days ago, you would have seen that they do not even have the skills for improvised public speeches because, for 20 years, they have been used to prescribed speeches that their secretaries wrote for them.

It is very interesting in broader sociological terms, as this is a huge and quite modern society. And I should say—perhaps against the mainstream of European or American academia—that I think Russian society is pretty modernized. It is maybe more modern than even the Russian power itself. It is a modern society that is governed not by politicians but by bureaucrats who try to behave like real politicians and fail almost every time.

Basically, just for starters, I think that is it. And I would like to give the floor to the other speakers. Thank you very much.

Kamil M. Wielecki: Thank you very much, Konstantin. You have raised many issues, which is good, as I think that these themes will come up later in the discussion. Now, let us move on to Ivan.

Ivan Peshkov: Dear colleagues, after this complex and very rich insight from Konstantin, I just want to say a few words about the geographical and cultural dimensions in this big political process, which we call overcoming configuration.

It has been a very long process over the last three decades. When we look back to the beginning of the 1990s, we can see very strong calls for independence or cultural autonomy from very different groups, e.g., from ex-Soviet republics, ex-autonomous areas, a special kind of ex-settler states, such as in the Far East. Calls for freedom, autonomy, cultural autonomy, economic autonomy, special policies, special treatment. When we look at the present times, there is nothing. Yes, there is a special status of some republics, like Chechnya or maybe Tatarstan—much, much less—but generally, after three decades, we can see a very special kind of degradation of collaborative nationalism and, finally, the transformation of regional elites into second-class elites.

When we talk about this, we need to keep in mind the very unstable network of ideas, experiences, mythologizations, and

projections regarding two basic questions: What does it mean to be Russian in the Russian Federation now? What does it mean to be Soviet, post-Soviet, or ex-Soviet in the Russian Federation?

The collapse of the Soviet Union gave rise to unclear divisions between the internal and external aspects of the idea of being post-Soviet. What does it mean: post-Soviet? This category can be read very differently in different contexts. Sometimes it is *post-Soviet*, sometimes it is *still Soviet in post-Soviet times*.

The second process, which is very important here, is the transposition of a fractal, ethno-political structure of the Soviet Union to the Russian Federation. Yes, the Russian Federation at the beginning of the 1990s recognized itself as a small USSR with a neoliberal economy, with the absence of a powerful state, which also meant a strong Soviet nostalgia and a very complicated network of ethno-political structures. The ethnic question is complicated inside and outside Russia. In the new circumstances, the national question is transformed into a neurotic promise that can never be effectively realized. As Russia tries to be some very strange version of the Soviet Union, ethnic republics or ethnic autonomous regions should pretend to be ex-Soviet republics, with some kind of sovereignty, with some kind of political choice.

When we look to the Far East, to Siberia, the ethnic question divides the post-Soviet space. What is the division between the so-called Soviet Russian mainstream and so-called nationalist claims? What does it mean: *our land, our history, our subjectivity* in the Republic of Buryatia or the Sakha Republic?

And this ethnic or nationalist revival tries to be the only possible response to the ideological vacuum and the strong fear of Russian nationalism and generally Russian chauvinism. After 1991, there was a very strong synthesis between local communist cadres, ethnic intelligentsia, and ethnic managers, which has rewritten parts of Soviet territory in the Russian Federation as Buryat, as Sakha, as Tuvan, and tried to create a modern, nation-oriented, ethnopolitical home.

And if we look at Siberia and the Far East, we can see two big traps for national movements. The first trap is the demographic domination of the Russians. It is not just Russians but their mainstream in general. This demographic domination creates a very special track for ethnopolitics, which can only survive with strong support from Moscow. Yes, because ethnopolitics generally needs constant support from the imperial center. Demographic domination creates a paradox: political elites seek Moscow's support—and every ethnic movement tries to be Moscow's ally again—while cultural elites fight against Russian cultural influence.

The second trap is that the republics in the Far East still contain some elements of "settler states," which continues to create the possibility of Russian cultural domination. Ethnic movements, in general, see Russian nationalism as much more dangerous than Moscow itself. Asian national movements look to Moscow for help in defending themselves against Russian nationalism and Russian cultural domination.

Even though it may seem like a trigger for cultural and political alternatives, these potential movements are being

depoliticized by the government as a phenomenon that one may call an instance of collaborative nationalism. Energetic, charismatic persons are being shifted to academia, museums, and ethnic spaces to cause the exoticization of national culture and reduce the political potential of local elites. After that, they are relocated outside Russia. There are very strong differences within these communities; the border between wise compromise and cynical betrayal of the nation is unclear. This institutionalization of collaborative nationalism has completely destroyed this very strong call for independence and for the emergence of alternative elites. It has also moved our charismatic, energetic persons to the outside of social life or sometimes outside of the country.

This is a very comical substitution for political life in these regions. It concerns all cultural differences and alternatives, commodified and used predominantly in the tourist market. That is what I wanted to start with.

Kamil M. Wielecki: Thank you very much, Ivan, for bringing this regional perspective because I think that it is very valuable. Most of the media coverage and the way we see Russia in the public discourse is focused on the big, European cities, the two capitals, St. Petersburg and Moscow. It is very important to understand how those local elites from the ethnic republics in Siberia cooperate, merge with, or oppose the federal elite. Thank you very much for that. Now, I would like to ask Anastasia Sergeeva for her perspective.

Anastasia Sergeeva: Thank you very much. First of all, I am a practitioner in my life, and that is why I am very glad that my colleagues have provided us with a theoretical perspective and given us some overview of the situation in Russia. Another point is that, sadly, I have been in Poland for many years now. I was also involved in Ukrainian civic education programs to some extent, small but certain. And that is why I wanted to discuss all our three countries.

I am very happy that you started our discussion with the thesis that the most efforts have been made in the field of economics, especially economic changes, and institutions, while the NGO sector has been growing on its own with some assistance, with a certain exchange of experience, but without any systematic structure or civic political education. And I believe that the perspective of civic education greatly influenced all our countries in different ways.

In Poland, we saw the very important role of consensus, public consensus concerning the choice of the European path. The same was seen in all Central European countries, including the Baltic states. I believe that the consolidation of the elite and the emergence of new elites around this European prospect helped a lot in Poland's road to Europe. And it helped a lot in building institutions, in building the Polish political system.

In Ukraine, the situation was different. Ukraine was more or less abandoned in the 1990s in comparison to Russia, Poland, Central Europe, in terms of civic and political education. And they had no concrete consensus on the future path.

And so, the subsequent events in the 2000s and 2010s showed that it was a very big, important mistake, which had not been taken into account because the Ukrainian elites did not have any specific idea about the future of Ukraine; they were divided between Russian and European or Western influences. Over the last 20 years, we can see the consequences of this situation.

In Russia, the situation has been the weirdest because of different points of view. First of all, as Konstantin mentioned, privatization and economic reforms. I believe that it was really very difficult to introduce another privatization system, not because of the political views or the situation of the elites, but because of Russian society's very strong preconceptions concerning state ownership and the state system. During the 70 years of the Soviet Union, every Russian citizen learned at school that state ownership was equal to people's ownership. That is why it was not possible to simply sell, for example, major state-owned enterprises into private hands without producing some very specific discourses about political and cultural values around it. In Central Europe, in the Baltic states, there was no discourse about direct international participation in the process of privatization. The majority of state property was bought by international corporations, which happened as part of the international investment process, while in Russia, this was also a huge and sensitive issue. And it was not possible to carry out privatization in this way. This is just one example, but there are many others. Ivan spoke about the situation of the nations in the Far East. This is also a very important point from the perspective of civic education because people in Russia were

not prepared for the transformation and had no consensus on the future development. They had very different ideas or none at all. And, of course, at the level of local and regional authorities, this consensus also had to include national identities, ethnic identities, and even local identities like *Siberian*, or *Volgian*, or one of the thousand identities of Russia.

The lack of a specific discourse about identity; the lack of a discourse about the future of Russia has also made it very difficult for the elites at various levels to become institutionalized. We saw that, in fact, Russia really failed in the field of institutions. Konstantin spoke about the very specific role of the bureaucracy in different periods of Russia's development. I believe that this fact is very illustrative.

When speaking about civic education and the system of political education, which was actually more or less implemented in the 1990s, most attention was paid to the electoral procedures, to the voting systems. The Russian elites introduced this type of civic education as it corresponded with their interests and ideas about the electoral process. They assumed that this process would be very easy to carry out through quick and short-term manipulation of public opinion instead of building constituencies, instead of building communities, instead of building a long-term reputation based on one's political actions.

In fact, all the fractions of the Russian elites had a common idea: that they could give money to a good political technologist, who would win elections for them and give them power. So, power could be bought. This message was also sent to the people and the voters. Because they saw that their vote, also

a commodity in this system, was most valuable when sold at the best price, they chose not the best politicians, not the best elite members, not the best leaders, but the most profitable proposition as to how they could sell their vote.

I can also add that during the last 10 years, even the system of civic education that we had, which more or less brought some kind of civil society to Russia, was completely destroyed by the political regime with the use of very specific repressive legislation that began to be introduced in 2004. I believe that the people who contributed to the building of this system of civic education lost the opportunity to become members of the elites long before 2014, before the annexation of Crimea. After the annexation of Crimea, people who adhered to the values present in Russia during the 1990s and 2000s were completely eliminated from the elites. And also: those people who were recruited beforehand, many of them, the majority of them, are now being eliminated from the elites on different levels, step by step, throughout the last 10 years. So this is quite pessimistic, but the optimistic point is that during the last 10 years, even more than 10, starting from 2009, 2010, we could see a huge and growing wave of grassroots activities, grassroots movements that are built on completely different principles: community and long-term development of leaders' reputation.

This gives hope because in the case of some of the changes that I believe could not be brought about from within Russia alone, we have gained at least some basic ideas about the people, potential partners, and how we can build another political system, another civil society.

My last point also concerns all three countries. It is about the role of diasporas in this transformation process. I believe that the Polish case is the best example of the active role of the diaspora and emigrants in the transformation process. The Ukrainian case may be less active, but still, it has become more or less active in recent years. As for Russia, we can see that there was no diaspora there for a long time, and this is also connected to the question of identity. Russian emigrants who left during the times of the Soviet Union, during the regime change, or during the 1990s did not have any specific Russian identity. They were divided into different groups, had different identities, and it was difficult for them to find some common ground. But there is a positive thing because the emigrants from the last 10 years, who primarily left Russia because of values, because they were looking for the best countries, the best places—not from an economic point of view, not from the perspective of the social life, but specifically from the perspective of the environment of values—they turned out to be political, especially during the 2010s. They showed other patterns and represented at least a new generation of identity. And I can see that in different countries, specifically in European countries, previous generations of Russian immigrants have also joined these groups. I believe that maybe, if this process is not stopped and continues to develop, we could see some kind of a structured Russian diaspora in a couple of years. This could be very important for the establishment of a new society, a new community, and for bringing about changes inside Russia, because right now, we cannot build any civil society, any civic structures in Russia,

even at some underground, unofficial level, but we can view and discuss them outside the country. And if we further develop the processes of internal communication between the grassroots movements inside Russia and the diaspora outside, then we can help to find some kind of idea, some kind of hope for a less violent and less brutal transformation process in Russia in the future.

Kamil M. Wielecki: Thank you very much, Anastasia, for providing this point of view and your experience as a practitioner. Thank you also for highlighting this comparative perspective, as this was another goal of our debate. Now, let us turn to Mikhail Minakov.

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Mikhail Minakov: Thank you, Kamil. I would like to start, according to Kamil's instructions, with some methodological remarks and then move on to Ukrainian elites.

So, first of all, I am talking about power elites here. It is a specific term, and Konstantin was correct when he said that there is a difference between elites, especially power elites, and the political class. In the past, I did my research on power elites in Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Georgia, and Russia for over 10 years. Because of its sensitivity, it was never published in a public document, but it was used for a number of reports.

When we talk about power elites, we also envisage that there is a political system with certain power centers (administrative, judiciary, financial, law enforcement, security, army, political, media, religion, ideology, etc.), and these power centers are

controlled by one or several groups. All the groups controlling these power centers are power elites. There is a constant rotation of these groups as a result of competition between them. The power elites are constantly reconstructed: moving to the centers, moving away in opposition or to a counter-elite position. A more generalized division would be power elites versus the masses. This kind of picture was invented at the beginning of the 20th century by leftist, socialist thinkers, who, in the course of their studies, lost faith in their cause or lost faith in the possibility of a just society, in the possibility of equality, and so on.

So basically, this image, the idea that every society is inevitably turning into this division between the 20% who will control 80% of the wealth and the 80% of the population who will have only a meager 20% of that wealth. Of course, this ratio has been revised many times, but the pessimistic picture is always there: whatever we do, every group is divided into a powerful minority and a subdued majority. And the power elites theory is connected with this type of pessimism.

On the one hand, it is a pretty decent political theory and model. On the other hand, a very pessimistic, ideological, and sociopsychological phenomenon manifests itself in such a theory.

But if we take it seriously, and if we use this model for the analysis of a nation's development, it is very important to deny any type of *elitarian mysticism* that you can find in the literature, including in the first half of the 20th century. For example, *leaders are those who see beyond the horizon*. I am

afraid this is usually not the case, especially with post-Soviet elites, whether in Ukraine or Belarus. Here, the power elites usually do not look far ahead and have little foresight. They hardly make predictions, but they are masters of the *now*. They are very good at controlling the present.

Instead of a mystical approach to the definition of the elites, I prefer a functionalist definition of power elites: power elites are those whose decisions affect the daily lives of the population in the mid- to long term. Yes, some active citizen groups outside the power centers may also introduce a short-term policy. But if it is not supported by the power elites, it will most probably disappear without implementation.

Starting with these remarks, I would like to say that in the Ukrainian case, we had several waves of power elite formation. We cannot use the term *power elites* as if it meant the same in 1992 and in 2022.

The first wave is connected to the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the need to create a new state from nothing. Basically, like the rest of the post-Soviet emerging nations, Ukrainians had to invent statehood, political freedom, a market economy, a legal system, and so on. It was all in the making. A Soviet man inventing political freedom. In each case—in Russia, Ukraine, or in Georgia—the results were a little bit different. Although there was a common starting point, the paths differed. Still, the first wave in Ukraine was pretty much the same as in many other post-Soviet countries, and it concerned sociopaths, those who in Soviet times were considered unable to follow social norms, the political order. They became champions

in the competition for the new power centers after the fall of Soviet communism.

And if we look at the first, say, 10 years, imagine taking the 2001 *Forbes* list for Russia and Ukraine, and we see that many of the people on the list came from groups that did not follow the common rules in the late Soviet Union. Scholars, for example—especially those who worked in institutes of the Academy of Sciences and had their own ethos, their own norms, their own ways of life—or criminals, or the group of people who would later be called *red directors*. These groups were very specific. They had their own norms. They fit very well into the nomenklatura, or even not specifically into the nomenklatura, but into important layers of Soviet society. And they had to reinvent themselves after the socioeconomic and political order was broken. So here sociopathy was actually a benefit to internal competition in the early 1990s. And the new order built by them, consisting of contradictory norms, rested on very fragile foundations.

The second wave came in Ukraine with Kuchma's first and second terms, so basically from 1994 to 2005, when there was a new wave of bureaucrats, a new wave of families who were becoming owners of the centers of power in a certain way. We did not have strong state institutions. The government was always weak. So the strength came from the clans. I am using *clan* here as a neutral term that means *adopted political family*. And these adopted political families could control several banks, for instance. And then later they would take over the national bank at the level of departments.

Thus, the head of a system based on these early clans is usually not that important (he is more of a broker between competing clans), but at the second level, the major policymakers and implementers were critical. However, this system was completely destroyed by the first Maidan in 2004–2005, and this constellation of elites disappeared. Those who had invested a lot in proficiency and professionalism as public administrators, judges, or MPs lost: it turned out that it was better to belong to clans that were more oriented toward political competition, aggressive action, rather than professionalization.

Then came the third wave, which was connected to these aggressive clans that fought against civil society. And at one point, civil society organizations, the biggest ones based in Kyiv, even became a sort of power centers themselves. Orysia Lutsevych has brilliantly named this phenomenon *NGO-cracy*. Since 2014, they have influenced many public and non-public centers of power, even in the military and security services. In a way, this kind of conflict between the clans and the NGO-cracy has been very important for Ukraine's political development.

These waves continued until recently. The last big wave was connected to the electoral revolution of 2019, to the new generation coming to power. Again, in the Western mass media, especially recently, one can read very critical articles about President Zelenskyy's entourage, but essentially, these are young people who were pursuing their careers at a lower level, a mid-rank level, and who got the chance, thanks to the electoral system, to find themselves in the parliament, or as a governor, or as a minister, or a deputy minister. However, this was the

first wave, which did not really reach the centers of power. Suddenly we realized that after 2014, after Euromaidan, these centers were already less and less connected to formal structures such as the Verkhovna Rada.

They are either oriented toward some international players or toward the president. This is also a very strange situation. Due to the reforms, due to the anti-corruption measures, the power elites have found themselves in a very difficult and unusual situation. They are still looking for new waves, new ways of life, or new ways of creating allegiances and loyalties. They do not really understand—in many ways—how to survive the change.

Also, I would say that for a long time, especially due to the influence of the oligarchy clans, the quality of the elites was affected by a phenomenon that is usually called negative selection. So if you have participated in some criminal activity and there is a so-called *kompromat* on you, you are more trusted within the clan. The clan will invest in you and promote you because they have some strong evidence of control. And this is also a very important part of how clans actually compete with each other, how they invest in the power structures. And this is something that still exists.

I will conclude with something that reflects on the issue signaled by Konstantin Gaaze, the conflict between the intelligentsia and the political class in Russia. In Ukraine, it is more interesting because of the political pluralism there. We do not have such a clear-cut division. I would say that today we have intellectuals, but actually, the intelligentsia has disappeared. We have a lot of *intelligenty*, I myself am an *intelligent*,

and my family is a family of *intelligenty*, but as a social group, the intelligentsia has ceased to exist. There are more intellectuals who represent different kinds of different ideologies, but not the intelligentsia.

Right now, for example, intellectuals who are able to speak publicly on Zoom are much more needed than those who can speak brilliantly in a crowd, but this is changing, as you know. So, I would say that intellectuals are now being used. They are in the networks used by the clans, and they are fighting with each other in discursive wars.

What could have been used for the unity of society and defragmentation of Ukraine is now rather protected by the misuse of intellectuals for social fragmentation. And I think the power elites are much stronger than any counter-elite group, which today would consist of intellectuals.

Intellectuals are not one group or one stratum, but they are very much divided. I will stop here and will be happy to continue the topic in the discussion.

Kamil M. Wielecki: Thank you very much, Mikhail. That was really interesting and, I think, important for our debate. Let me just reiterate the role of networks because I think this might also come up in our discussions. The role in forming networks, vertical or horizontal, like you said about clans—that is the first thing. And the second: I love your remark that if there is a *kompromat* on you, you are more trusted. Now, let us turn to Tomasz Zarycki.

Tomasz Zarycki: I would probably propose a quite different perspective, not only on policy but also in general. Those who are familiar with my work may know that I try to build a long-term historical perspective on the elites, on a much larger scale than most of the previous speakers.

I also use the work mentioned by Konstantin today, Eyal, Szelenyi, and Townsley's *Making Capitalism Without Capitalists*. I was very much inspired by this work, especially by their thesis about the dominant role of the intelligentsia in Poland, maybe Hungary, to a lesser extent Czechia.

But at the moment, I am trying to add another element to the model that they did not use, namely the concept of the field of power, which I find very useful. Bourdieu proposed it as a technical synonym for the elite. I think that because it is very technical, it allows for a discussion that is less emotional and less politicized, less involved in the everyday political debates and negotiating who should be considered part of the elite, and who should not, which we are all part of, to some extent.

Bourdieu's idea, then, is that there is a field of power, like a social field above all other social fields. In this field, the elite of the elite, the long-term elite, meets. The field of power can be virtual, can sometimes be physical, like banquets, clubs, conferences, and government meetings. Probably none of these places, in most countries, is the only place where the entire elite meets. The point is that the field of power is a place where elites belonging to different fields, like scholars, business people, politicians, clergy, whatever the elites are in any country, if they are part of the field of power, one day they will meet each other.

So the technical definition of the field of power is that it encompasses all people who, being the highest members of the elite of their own field, are also invited to the venues where representatives of other elites appear. They can negotiate what Bourdieu calls *the exchange rates* of different types of capitals—or the relations between different fields, between the economic field, the cultural field, religion, all the special forces or the security forces, as in Russia especially. In this view, you have to distinguish all the other different fields as, of course, very important, the bureaucratic field or the political field, but the political field is just one of the fields. Politicians are just one of the fractions of the elite.

I argue that in Poland, the intelligentsia is still a dominant actor. I have this long-term view that the most radical revolution in terms of the field of power in Poland took place in 1918. It was parallel to the Russian revolution because it was related to the economic transformation in the Russian Empire. This general Russian revolution changed the position of the economic elites, destroying them in Russia, while weakening them considerably in Poland since a large part of the Polish economic elites had assets in the Russian economic system.

The Second Polish Republic emerged as an intelligentsia republic, where the economic elite, such as the landowners and the bourgeoisie, was marginalized; it became a weaker actor in the field of power. And then came 1945, bringing the process that started in 1917, 1918—the complete destruction of the economic elite—to an end. And who remained in its place? As I argue, the intelligentsia. With different fractions,

e.g., the conservatives versus the communists, who become the Stalinist *nomenklatura*. But the Stalinist period did not last very long in Poland: from, roughly, 1949 until 1956, and that was it. I think that 1956 is already the moment of the return of the mainstream intelligentsia to the field of power. And then, slowly, the communist elite, the apparatus, and the bureaucratic elite weaken, and then communism falls in Poland in 1989. It was then that the question of privatization, mentioned rightly by the previous speakers, especially Konstantin, became also crucial because privatization in Poland followed a specific path, especially since no oligarchs emerged in this process.

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Thus, a large part of state assets was sold to foreign owners. Foreign companies have become an important actor, but also a relatively large part of the assets has remained in state hands. Both of these categories of assets, as I would argue, are managed mainly by members of the intelligentsia, managers.

On the one hand, there are foreign companies and managers who are, technically and economically, dependent on their foreign owners. Some are part of the global system but have some autonomy. And then there are state managers who belong to the bureaucratic or political field. But I would say that those fields are rather weak and unstable in Poland. These managerial positions are among the many other elite positions that members of the intelligentsia can hold. Typically, members of the intelligentsia, members of the elite in Poland, engage in several types of professional and non-professional activities in what academia calls *multipositionality*. Not necessarily at the same time, but

at least with the possibility of switching to another one, which allows the intelligentsia elite to maintain the stability of their privileged position.

So in the Stalinist period, you would avoid open political activity and, probably, become a historian of the Middle Ages. Once the situation liberalized, you would go to Catholic intelligentsia clubs and start discussing how society should be governed. Then, after the conservative turn in 1968, you would emigrate for a few years and join the diaspora, which of course was important. And then you would return and become a manager, the head of the Polish branch of Coca-Cola or a similar company. And if you were fired, you would become a manager in a state-owned company.

If we look at it from a long-term perspective, we can see, let us say, a deep elite, an extremely stable intelligentsia elite. Normally, I would call it hegemonic, because of the symbolic dimension, but it was probably not hegemonic in purely technical terms.

My vision of the contemporary Polish elite is that it is quite fragmented. We do not have any dominant fraction of the elites, we have a quite weak professional political class, which is somewhat similar to other countries of Central and Eastern Europe. And we have several strongly autonomous fields, with relatively autonomous elites.

Many people would probably disagree with me from a political point of view, as the current government is trying to actively influence various fields, like academia or the legal field. But in the long term, I think that these elites are pretty

stable because the elites of those fields are able to reproduce themselves, especially in the cultural and academic fields, which are both relatively autonomous in Poland. With respect to the global cultural field, Polish culture is really autonomous. It does not have to care about all the global trends; we are building a national culture that is largely self-sustaining. Governments have changed, economic systems have changed, but the classic great figures of Polish culture remain in place, and the elites are able to reproduce themselves.

To conclude, this is also my definition of the elite: it is a group with the ability to pass on its privilege through generations. The intelligentsia in Poland is able to systematically and consequently transmit its privilege and status.

You can be a politician in Poland, but then you lose your job and no one remembers you. You can be a manager in a private or state-owned company, and you may be able to get rich, but again, everyone forgets you once you lose that job. But when you join this core network, you can be pretty sure that even if you lose your job, your position will be secure. Maybe not in the exact same place, e.g., you may not be able to stay in the cultural industry, but you may find a privileged position in another field.

Kamil M. Wielecki: Thank you very much, Tomasz. That was quite optimistic for us because, I think, all of us here aspire at least to be a member of the intelligentsia. Thank you also for bringing this long-term perspective on the changes and the constant reproduction of classes.

Now, I want to ask all the speakers if they have any brief comments on what the others have said. I will start by introducing a kind of a new topic that you have only briefly mentioned so far. I want to ask you about the consolidation and division within the elite. Because we have a certain tendency to think of the elites as a ruling class, just one group, sometimes, as Tomasz said, a field of power in which different interests clash, but which is basically one. Is this the case in light of your research and experience? Also, what are the possibilities for vertical mobility? Because Tomasz said that there is practically no vertical mobility nowadays. Konstantin said that this vertical mobility, if I understood correctly, was only possible during the 1990s, and now it is no longer possible. It has been argued that in Ukraine, in turn, the horizontal networks are stronger, or much more influential, than the vertical ones. I also want to ask you about the composition of the elites. Konstantin, could you start, please, because you said that this ruling class, as you called it, is really a small group of some 500 people who actually have any influence on the decision-making processes. However, there is a whole army of bureaucrats who execute the orders. What are those horizontal networks in the bureaucracy? What is the level of resistance or resilience to orders that come from the top ruling class?

Konstantin Gaaze: So, first of all, I understand this very literally. If I could draw a material line between the army of bureaucrats, as you call it, and the ruling class, I would draw it at the level of material practices. For example, there is

a bunch of guys who have special means of communication: what they call *ATS 1* and *ATS 2*.

These are special phone lines, secured and protected by the federal security service. If you have them, you are part of the ruling class, if you do not have them, you are part of the army of bureaucrats, as you call it. For years, sociology has been too vague about drawing distinctions, so I am trying to draw a very concrete material distinction.

If you can call a guy who has *ATS 1* using your *ATS 1* or *ATS 2*, you are part of the ruling class, it is as simple as that. It is interesting that today, 103 years after Max Weber gave his illuminating speech on *Politik als Beruf*, we are still asking that question. Why do bureaucrats follow orders? Why, why, why do they do it? I mean, it is kind of funny. Maybe it means that we do not understand how bureaucracy works. Maybe it means that there is still something we do not understand. Maybe it means that we have not understood Weber the right way. Maybe it means that there are some intellectual obstacles inside academia, and we are all bureaucrats as well. For example, there is a nice piece by Don Brenneis that explains that sociologists and anthropologists are basically bureaucrats as well. Bureaucracy is analytically invisible to academia. Brenneis is well known in the field of the anthropology of *bureaucracy*.

So why do bureaucrats follow orders? Because they have been given those orders and because they are part of the production machine. Part of a machine that produced, at least, domination, and it was pure domination in the early 1990s. It was not hegemony; it did not set a moral example. It was pure

domination. It was domination supplemented by money and privileges. This is the reason why we have oligarchs in Russia—because their domination was foundational to the state.

And the domination of the state in Poland, I think, was much stronger than the domination of the state in Russia, and an example of that might be the liberalization of prices by the Gaidar government in January 1992. That was exactly 30 years ago, congratulations.

So the situation was very weird, and that was why it had to be supplemented with extra money or extra privileges. Let me give you one example. Ivan Peshkov will be glad to hear it. It is an interesting case about Buryatia.

There was just one private jet in Buryatia for five years: from 1992 to 1997. It was owned by the Russian mob. They were all boxers who controlled the *Buryatmyasprom*: the biggest meat factory in the Far East. And the governor of Buryatia, not even a governor, the head of the republic, asked them to give him their private jet to fly to Moscow to attend some Kremlin meetings or to attend a meeting with President Yeltsin.

So this is the first angle. The other angle, as it happens now, is that basically, state corporations provide special services to the government. For example, if you launch an IPO of, I do not know, Alrosa, on the Moscow stock exchange, and then you call the negotiator, who is the head of Rosneft, asking him to buy some of Alrosa's shares, just to keep the bid going, just so the shares can look good on the stock market. And I think that in five years, we will once again see a weak state that must supplement its orders with privileges and money.

Can we say, for example, that corruption is a kind of special social fabric that keeps the ruling class and the bureaucracy together? In a sense, yes, but I also have to mention that in the last 20 years, the salaries of mid-level public officials have risen at least four, maybe even five times. Being a mid-level bureaucrat in the Russian government who has served, for example, for 20 years, earns you, at the current rate, about \$3,000 a month, which is good, even by Moscow standards. So the question of why the bureaucracy works is, I am afraid, bigger than this workshop. If you ask me how I answered this question in a methodological sense, I answered it by analyzing the material practices of who made phone calls to whom or who sent emails to whom.

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Just to finish my chaotic remark: the interesting moment is when you start to use new material practices. And, for example, the Moscow police, who manage President Putin's, Medvedev's, and high-ranking officials' motorcades, have started using WhatsApp to coordinate the movement of the motorcades on Moscow streets.

And, for example, lots of bureaucrats have stopped using a closed system of communication, something like Microsoft Teams but for the Russian government—it is closed, it is disconnected from the Internet—but they have started to use their regular email accounts, such as Mail.ru or Gmail. And it is interesting how it changes the bureaucracy, the way the bureaucracy works, and the answer to the question of why the bureaucracy works at all.

Ivan Peshkov: I would like to comment very briefly on Konstantin's words. I think that in the last 20 years, the context of the consolidation and the division of the elites has changed drastically because 20 years ago, as I think, in most post-socialist countries, there was a very strong ideology of success: political success and, above all, economic success.

I absolutely agree with Konstantin and Mikhail that the ruling class is a fundamental issue of general political analysis. But from the perspective of society, 20 years ago the elites were a much bigger group than just the ruling class: they consisted partly of rich people, partly of high-ranking bureaucrats and networks of friends and relatives. But now, the domination of the ruling class has completely changed the consensus on the definition of success. In most countries of Central and Eastern Europe, one can observe a very strong political mobilization, in Russia perhaps a somewhat messianic mobilization. The meaning of being rich has drastically changed, as it no longer guarantees attention—in the last 8 or 10 years, we have rethought the consensus bond between wealth and security.

The ruling class tries to restructure this coalition of success into a political one, which then uses the power of the state to control the rich. It controls them through various means: tax policy, arrests, and others. I think the scale of this control differs greatly within the post-socialist countries.

Anastasia Sergeeva: I will refer to what Tomasz said about the field of politics, which in Russia was specifically viewed as the highest political elites, but we can see that now it is not

just about politics, not just about some political or economic interests, but it is also starting to include more and more cultural, social, historical narratives.

We can see how these parts of the elites are perceived by the Kremlin, especially by Kremlin groups engaged primarily in the legislative and executive processes.

And my other point is also about the depth of the Russian elite structure. If we look from the top, if we look only at the federal level, at the bureaucracy, we can see a narrow, vertical, and structured part of the elites with a small number of decision-makers, next to a huge number of bureaucrats who adjust and implement these policies. But if we look from another angle, we can see that this system is much more complicated at each level, in each structure, in each institution, and in each region.

It has its own landscape. It has its own patterns, different political and economic views and interests, but also different cultural and historical contexts and different personal networks in each world, sometimes with very occasional participants. We really do not know anything, or we know very little, about Russian regional structures, about Russian regions.

And speaking of elites. We also have very little knowledge about what is going on and how these patterns function in different regions. We have specialists—anthropologists—in different parts of the national regions, we have specialists on different institutions, elites, or bureaucrats, and also different leaders. But we do not have any specialists on this huge complex picture of the power relations in Russia and what is happening now, what can be predicted for the future, and how the patterns

of these local and regional interests could affect the structure of the whole country in the future.

I believe it is very important to keep this in mind because otherwise, we can only see a very white and black picture of Russia, which is not really true.

Kamil M. Wielecki: Thank you very much. I think this is a very important point. We also got the impression that the research on this topic is very fragmented and dispersed. There is a lack of cross-sectional studies.

Mikhail Minakov: I just wanted to make one important remark, going back to your initial question.

The thing is that power elites do not exist in the singular. It is like with money. Either there is none, or there is a lot of it, right? And in this case, with power elites and the model of power elites analysis, one should always understand that there are many power centers and groups that currently control these centers.

There are also parts of the power elites who aspire to take over the power centers, the competitors. In a way, this model is very dynamic and constantly looks at different players. So, when you do monthly surveys of the situation in the power centers, you measure which groups have actually increased their presence in the power centers, which have actually failed, and so on, and so on.

But there also is a critically important difference that distinguishes the analysis of power elites from, for example, the

analysis of political class or bureaucracy. In the power elites model, you always look at two channels of rotation. One channel is uncontrolled—elections. And the other channel is controlled: it is where you have bureaucratic careers, for example. Those qualities that will make you a better career specialist will define the elite group. So these are important elements that show that power elites are never one thing. It is never one group. It is not even one social group. And then, they usually do not have the stable identity that a political class would have. Well, identity is probably the issue here.

And then you have different channels. In the case of Ukraine, for example, we have elections that work. Maybe they do not produce a democratic effect, but these elections actually bring unpredictable people to power, and unpredictable results always happen. So this minimal effect of elections definitely exists, but also, since the vertical rotation of the elite is constantly problematic, we have the effect of broken lifts. An example of this can be the Maidan protest, a successful protest movement that changed the government and the groups in control of the power centers. It produced an additional, uncontrolled way of elite rotation.

To conclude, I also want to mention that in recent years, the power elites have created several narratives that unite them. So, in a way, there is a negative identity against others. For example, against foreigners, against Russians, who are now legal enemies, but also against the West, which has created a number of anti-corruption institutions to control them.

For example, the so-called e-assets declaration system, which I constantly use to study what is going on with my students.

It is very interesting to see how the power elites save their money. What is the taste of these groups? Here Bourdieu's analysis works brilliantly. Why do you need a golden icon, for example, and why do you invest in it? Why do you keep your capital in things like that, not in shares or banks?

And then, there is the spirit of competition with these foreign groups that are entering Ukraine, that are competing in Ukraine with the locals, which creates a certain new dynamic. So this is not only a national framework, but also a transnational one, which is also very important. In the case of Russia, I am not sure if it works, but for many other post-Soviet countries, it does work.

Kamil M. Wielecki: Thank you very much, Mikhail, for this comment. Let me open now the Q&A session. We already have two questions online. Let us gather more of them and then give the speakers some time to answer.

Krzysztof Gorlach: First question for our Russian and Ukrainian colleagues: are oligarchs an important part of the power elite in your countries? The second question is for Professor Tomasz Zarycki: can we observe the oligarchization of the Polish economy under the recent government, which is trying to nationalize some companies and control others?

Piotr Kulas: I do not want to summarize, but I think that you have somehow proved the thesis that was already formulated by Professor Zarycki some time ago, which is very inspiring.

The thesis is that in Ukraine, generally speaking, there are clans that actually rule, and they operate within the field of power. In Russia, this field of power is dominated mainly by bureaucrats or politicians, whatever you want to call them: people who do not have to run in general elections. And in Poland, the field of power is dominated by the intelligentsia, according to what Professor Zarycki said. Would you agree with this comparative approach? Would you say that in every country, in spite of their similar roots, different groups actually exercise power: bureaucrats in Russia, clans equipped with money in Ukraine, and the intelligentsia equipped with culture in Poland?

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Maciej Grzenkowicz: I have been thinking about different fields of power, and I assume that the contemporary field of power has been infused by influencers, for example, people who gain power in non-traditional ways. For example, it is quite easy nowadays to gain followers on social media, which has provided a new, previously unknown type of capital.

And we can see that in today's world, in Poland, in Ukraine, and maybe to a lesser extent in Russia, influencers play an important role in promoting or distinguishing political trends among the masses. Do you think that influencers play an important role in the field of power? How can they actually influence the future of the elites in those countries?

Katarzyna Chawryło: We know very little about the relations within the Russian elite. About the relations, the communication, the divisions within the elite because it is very closed, and the

process is not transparent. What can we learn about the relations between the Russian elites from situations like the one that we observed a couple of days ago: Putin's meeting with the Russian Security Council? During that meeting, he tried to pressure the members of the Security Council to say that they are in favor of recognizing the Eastern Ukrainian regions as independent countries. I think this is quite important because we do not have much information about how they communicate, how they work. Situations like this tell us something. How do you think we can evaluate it?

Wojciech Cendrowski: Tomasz Zarycki noted that elites are a social group that can transmit or reproduce their status. Are there elites that do not fit this definition? I think, for example, of the recent situation in Kazakhstan. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, there has been just one president, a former Soviet politician in Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev. According to outside observers, he has transmitted his power to the new president, Tokayev. However, at the beginning of January, we could see that Nazarbayev's position was not stable, and he had to flee Kazakhstan due to protests. What happens in a situation like this, when we have a strong elite, but after an unforeseen event, I will call it a black swan, the power relations change?

Kamil M. Wielecki: Thank you very much. I think that we have collected all the questions, and I see that Anastasia would like to start.

Anastasia Sergeeva: I will answer Katarzyna's question and refer to the questions about influencers and the field of politics simultaneously. Speaking of the field of politics, it is owned by Putin, Patrushev, and Bortnikov, and controlled by the FSB specifically. No bureaucracy is present in this process, it is not controlled by bureaucracy at all. So two days ago, it was a very specific style of power in Russia, it is called *skhodka*. In the 1990s, it was the name for a meeting that preceded clashes between criminal clans. Before such a clash, which was called *strelka* in Russian, the clan would meet, and each participant, decision-maker, or member of this clan had to openly tell the others that they were in it.

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So that is what we saw two days ago. Putin, as a representative of the clan, came to the world and announced on TV his bad decision regarding the global *strelka*. And that was it, nothing more. And speaking of influencers. The main influencer we had in Russia was Navalny, and again, since politics is controlled by the FSB, we could observe the process of elimination of Navalny from this sphere, starting with his prosecution at the beginning of the 2000s and later, to his poisoning and imprisonment last year. So here it is about influencers in Russia, in the current field of politics.

Kamil M. Wielecki: Thank you, Anastasia. Now let us move on to Mikhail's answer.

Mikhail Minakov: First of all, about the oligarchs in Ukraine. These oligarchs and their clans exist, and they are strong. You

can see that sometimes they are in danger, like in the last few months, but before that, they were winning a lot. So, in a way, they come and go, but they are constantly there. And there are, I would say, about 10 to 12 stable groups that have existed in Ukraine for at least 20 years. There was about five or six that existed for a long time and have disappeared recently.

So, for example, the Yanukovych clan has disappeared, while the Poroshenko clan has grown. Until recently, it was one of the biggest, strongest, and most influential clans. And here I would like to use the example of the Poroshenko clan to address the question about influencers or links between the elites and the masses. And I must admit that such influencers do exist. They are used by the clans, but they are not usually part of the core groups, the clans themselves as adopted political families. They are associated, they are paid. They are part of the power pyramid, as Henry Hale put it. But they are rarely part of the clan, and if they become part of the clan, they disappear as influencers.

This is an interesting, I would say, empirical fact that needs to be better understood. In a way, clans fight for the hegemony, but they do not use their own members to do so. These intimate relationships within the clan are too important, while influencers are disposable. So you can change them. You can use them in the struggle for hegemony.

And in Poroshenko's case, his was one of the first clans to start investing in a certain type of ideology. And he was the first to do it very successfully because he created a very big portion of society attached to the ideology promoted by influencers in his group. And this is already something between

a clan, a pyramid, and then a sectarian network in a sense of political religion. At the same time, the Yanukovych clan's ideological investments have failed.

When we talk about clans ruling Ukraine, I must admit it: they are very important, they are part of the landscape, but there are non-clan groups as well. For example, Zelenskyy came to power without having a clan.

This is why he was so vulnerable to everything that was happening in the summer of 2019, when basically diplomats, senior officers, senior bureaucrats, and MPs did not listen to him. He was a nobody to them. Yes, he was a very important person for the nation. He was elected by 73% of active citizens, but at the same time, he could not govern.

So he needed to restart the parliament and start appointing his corporate friends and his business partners to very important positions in public office. Without a party and without a clan, governing was almost impossible. And two and a half, almost three years later, he created his own entourage with protoclan-like structures.

Kamil M. Wielecki: Thank you, Mikhail, for this perspective. Now it is Tomasz's turn to answer the questions.

Tomasz Zarycki: So there was a very interesting question from Professor Gorlach about the prospect of oligarchization in Poland. This is a fascinating, very important question.

I do not have any empirical data, but rather intuitions based on what I read. And my answer would be negative. I see

something opposite to oligarchization. If we define oligarchization in economic terms, it is the creation of these wealthy barons and clan heads. So if Kaczyński or the ruling party are trying to acquire these previously private assets and enterprises, especially the media conglomerates, to buy them through the state, I think that is the opposite of oligarchization because it is just an extension of the state system.

And those institutions, those companies will be managed by party-nominated managers: most likely members of the intelligentsia, that is, people who are not very wealthy and who are not politicians, who are simply selling their skills. That to me is the definition of the intelligentsia, and they are disposable.

So I do not see the process of creating an oligarchy in Poland at all. Some people in the Polish public discourse, of course, point to the head of the state-owned oil company Orlen, Daniel Obajtek, as the new Polish oligarch. But in my opinion, he is not an oligarch. He is a party-nominated top manager, a quite wealthy person from the point of view of a university professor, but even some of our colleagues own several apartments, here, at the University of Warsaw. Obajtek is accused of owning about 10 apartments, five houses, something which is, of course, impressive to me, but you cannot compare that to any of these really wealthy Russian, or even Hungarian, oligarchs. I think that Hungary is the most interesting case here because Kaczyński is quite often compared to Orbán. This is one of the big differences because from what I read about Hungary, Orbán is trying to decide all political issues, but he is also, at the same time, building his own loyal oligarchy. But not using state-owned

companies, but rather private companies and his supposedly loyal oligarchs.

As I assume, the basic idea is to have the ability to retain influence and the position of power in case he loses the political power that he has. To have a backup, some economic assets in case he loses his political assets, but I do not see this instinct in our conservative government at all. I do not see this pattern of creating loyal, really rich private business people. I think the ruling conservatives are not interested and at the same time do not even have the skills to support their own loyal businesses. One of my friends pointed out that maybe Obajtek is not the best case in point, but most of these managers in state-owned companies change quite often, as in the case of the main state-owned bank, PKO BP, which has recently undergone two changes of its president, which also happens in many other important state-owned companies.

The management is changed quite often, which, I think, points to the fact that the bureaucratic elite is produced by the Polish state, but also kept under control, not allowed to take over the companies it manages. So, I could be wrong, but my answer to this very important question is that we do not see any oligarchization in Poland.

Piotr Kulas asked about the comparison of these three countries. I agree. I think that you summarized my thought very well. I think that the Ukrainian case is the most unclear. And it was very interesting to hear from Mikhail the story of the clans. So maybe my question would be: are those clans mostly economic clans? Because it is interesting to know to what extent, what

kind of resources are crucial here, but I assume it is just the economic kind.

So it would be a nice triangle. We have political capital dominant in Russia, economic capital in Ukraine, and cultural and partly social capital, mostly informal, in Poland. Although the case of Yanukovych has shown that some factions of the field of power in Ukraine cannot retain their economic resources without having some political resources.

The question of the transmission of power in Kazakhstan is a very good one, but it is much too early to answer it, in my view. As I said, I try to analyze processes in a long-term perspective. In this approach, you can only answer the questions later, at least several decades later, to be sure whether we are observing just a tactical conflict within the elite, technical, physical changes, or deeper changes that are meaningful in a really long-term perspective.

I think that, from a long-term perspective, 1918 in Poland was a turning point. But the depth of this change was probably not clear during the interwar period. Only now can we appreciate and understand the depth of this transformation.

Kamil M. Wielecki: Thank you, Tomasz. Let us conclude with Ivan's comment, and then we will be ready to close the debate.

Ivan Peshkov: I would just like to comment shortly. I think if we connect oligarchy with political power, we can see many examples in Russia and Ukraine, but if we connect it with the possession of some autonomy, free will, or the ability to provide

one's own policy or a policy different from the center of power, there is a big difference between Ukraine, Russia, and Poland. In Russia, after the beginning of the Putin era, after the last 18 or 20 years, we experienced an absolute conversion, the whole oligarchy was moved to the center of power. And there was a very strong policy from the center of power concerning surveillance, punishment, and discipline. From this perspective, the Russian case has shown us a hundred percent conversion, all the relatively rich, politically powerful people with strong policies moved to one side of the center of power.

Kamil M. Wielecki: Thank you, Ivan, and I would like to thank all of our guests for being with us, both those who are with us in person at 72 Dobra Street in Warsaw, as well as those online. Any closing remarks?

Piotr Kulas: My first impression is that we can understand ourselves better when we put ourselves in a comparative perspective. Thank you very much, colleagues. Goodbye.

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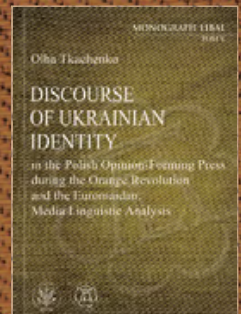
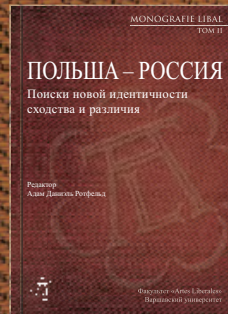
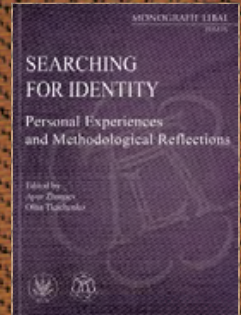
PREVIOUS VOLUMES



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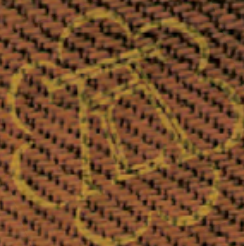


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LIBAL MONOGRAPHS

VOLUME VI



The systemic transformation in Central and Eastern Europe brought about the emergence of consensual elites that ultimately favoured a consolidated democracy. Today, however, some countries are experiencing democratic backsliding, with the elites fragmented or even divided. The book presents several case studies of how elites across the region have been changing. They can be instrumental in both democratization and democratic backsliding. Illiberal elites claim to represent the will of the people, which in their view is true democracy. To understand the current state of democracy, it is necessary to examine the role of the elites in this process. It is also pertinent to address the question about the origins and characteristics of the contemporary elites that threaten liberal democracy and undermine the existing consensus.