

## The Development of Political Elite

### *Abstract*

... the governing elite is always in a state of slow and continuous transformation. It flows on like a river, never being today what it was yesterday. From time to time sudden and violent disturbances occur. There is a flood – the river overflows its banks. Afterwards, the new governing elite again resumes its slow transformation. The flood has subsided; the river is again flowing normally in its wonted bed.<sup>1</sup>

The continuous transformation of the elite has been aptly described by one of the classics of elite-research, Vilfredo Pareto. He tried to describe the changes of ordinary days and special events by taking an example from nature. This survey will take the reader back to events of considerable importance in the past and will arrive at the point where the *river overflowed its banks* and finally will follow how *events took a normal course again*. This work will attempt to discover in the case of Slovakia what course the river took after the flood, and which has ultimately become the typical course of the country's everyday events.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the political elite was identical to the national elite, just as it is in the case of current day Slovakia and as it was observed in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy of the time<sup>2</sup>. Later, by the broadening of universal suffrage and the emancipation of social strata, an individual group was formed, which was recruited in a different way. Earlier, it was the prerogative of the privileged social strata to get into the political elite, while nowadays any social group can take part in the forming of politics. Despite this, the broadening of opportunities did not mean that the composition of the political elite mirrored the composition of society, but it brought about the professionalization of the political elite, where the politician protects the interests of several social groups. Thus, it became difficult to define the composition of ideal political representation since different democratic representations possess different features. When observing the political representation of some countries one could conclude that for example university education is a typical feature of today's politicians. However, looking at

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<sup>1</sup> Pareto, Vilfredo, *The Governing Élite in Present-Day Democracy*, in *Classes and Elites in Democracy and Democratization* (ed. Eva Etzioni-Halévy), Garland, New York, 1997, pp. 47-52.

<sup>2</sup> Ilonszki, Gabriella, *Belated Professionalization of Parliamentary Elites: Hungary 1848-1999*, in *Parliamentary Representatives in Europe 1848-2000. Legislative Recruitment and careers in Eleven European Countries* (Maurizio Cotta, Heinrich Best ed.), OUP, 2000.

Norway, a country with an exemplary democracy, less than one third of its MPs received a university education in the past 50 years. Concerning the equal representation of women one also has to conclude that the majority of developed democracies lag well behind in the number of female MPs compared to women's social proportion in those countries<sup>3</sup>. In spite of all this, some tendencies are about to take place, which will be used as a basis for comparative analysis of Slovakia. With an awareness of these impending changes, this work will attempt to analyze some cases of deviancy, as well.

While researching the change and *circulation* of the elite one has to face uncertain factors. While new MPs prevent the parliament from *fossilization*, frequent changes hinder the work-efficiency of the parliament and the professional development of parliamentary representation.<sup>4</sup> Continuity on a certain level is also needed for the development of the rules of the game inside parliament as well as to maintain cooperation among certain groups and the development of policies within some frameworks.<sup>5</sup> The balance between circulation and *reproduction* is a prerequisite for the consolidation of a democracy and for the development of the consensual elite. This balance keeps the activity of the political elite within certain norms.<sup>6</sup>

The aim of this study is to research the group of representatives who got into the parliament since the change of regime in 1989, when a new era began in Slovakia's life. We will try to analyse the historical roots of the post-transition Slovak political elite and the influence of these roots on the present political events.

In spite of the fact that democratic political systems lie on multiple pillars, the parliamentary representations are the ones which receive the most publicity. The decisions which influence the voters are not made in the parliament; nevertheless, it was the parliament that became the place for political battles. This is particularly true for post-transition East-Central Europe, where a certain degree of overparliamentarization can be observed due to the lack of

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<sup>3</sup> Cotta, Maurizio, Best, Heinrich, *Between Professionalization: Synoptic View on Making of the European Representative*, in *Parliamentary Representatives in Europe 1848-2000. Legislative Recruitment and Careers in Eleven European Countries* (Maurizio Cotta, Heinrich Best ed.), OUP, 2000.

<sup>4</sup> Shabad, Goldie and Kazimierz M. Slomczynski (2002) 'The Emergence of Career Politicians in Post-Communist Democracies: Poland and the Czech Republic'. In: *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 27, 333-360.

<sup>5</sup> Linz, Juan, Pilar Gangas, and Miguel Jerez Mir. 2000. "Spanish Diputados: From the 1876 Restoration to Consolidated Democracy." In *Parliamentary Representatives in Europe 1848-2000: Legislative Recruitment and Careers in Eleven European Countries*, eds. Heinrich Best and Maurizio Cotta. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>6</sup> Linz, Juan, Pilar Gangas, and Miguel Jerez Mir. 2000. "Spanish Diputados: From the 1876 Restoration to Consolidated Democracy." In *Parliamentary Representatives in Europe 1848-2000: Legislative Recruitment and Careers in Eleven European Countries*, eds. Heinrich Best and Maurizio Cotta. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

stable political parties and settled balance of power.<sup>7</sup> The same process can be observed in Slovakia, a fact which highlights the importance of this study.

The analysis of MPs is an exciting intellectual adventure since "... by studying the nature of the elite one learns a lot about the nature of the society itself..."<sup>8</sup> In addition to getting to know the society we have an opportunity to follow the development of the political system paying special attention to the main actors, the political elite. The aim of the quantitative and qualitative analyses presented in this study is to present how the composition of the political elite changed over the course of political developments in Slovakia. In order to get an overall picture of parliamentary representation in the years past this survey will attempt not only to only analyze numbers and data but also to outline the circumstances of elite development.

A typical feature of the Slovak party system is what is referred to as *political tourism*, where the so called *institutional nomads*<sup>9</sup> frequently change parties, or in some cases become independent. As a result, some parties split up, merged, or their leaders resigned from the party forming a new one. However, in many cases the MPs/representatives just became members of another party. There were some cases in which the number of renegade independent MPs had increased so much that their role in legislation became of key importance. Sometimes this mobility of MPs took place due to individual or party purposes, but in all cases it influenced further development of the elite. Detailed circumstances of the MPs movements will not be outlined in this study. On the other hand, the description of main trends is essential in the understanding of the development of the elite.

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<sup>7</sup> Agh, Attila. 1995. "The Experiences of the First Democratic Parliaments in East Central Europe." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 28, 203-14.

<sup>8</sup> Laswell, Harold D., Daniel Lerner C., Easton Rothwell, *The Comparative Study of Political Elites*, Stanford University Press, 1952.

<sup>9</sup> Shabad, Goldie and Kazimierz M. Slomczynski (2004) 'Inter-party Mobility Among Parliamentary Candidates in Post-Communist East-Central Europe'. In: *Party Politics*, 157-176.