THE GOVERNMENTAL ELITES IN POST-COMMUNIST ROMANIA

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The Governmental Elites in Post-Communist Romania

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Abstract

The author, Ciprian Iftimoei, starts from explaining the etymology of the „elite” term, emphasizing the fact that the study of elites represents the geometrical point in which the sociology meets political science, reunited in a possible border discipline that we might call elitology. The fact that the society cannot be governed directly by the people is a reality that cannot be contested not even today.

Ciprian Iftimoei studied thoroughly the debate monism versus pluralism in researching elites, and defines the „elite” concept in relation to the correlative concepts („sub-elites”, „counter-elites”, „non-elites”) and presents a typology of elites based on fourteen classification criteria, focusing on describing the typology elaborated by John Higley in collaboration with other representatives of the democratic elitism (M. Dogan, M. Burton etc.).

**Keywords:** government, elites, post-communism.

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The author, Ciprian Iftimoaei, starts from explaining the etymology of the „elite” term, emphasising the fact that the study of elites represents the geometrical point in which the sociology meets political science, reunited in a possible border discipline that we might call elitology. The fact that the society cannot be governed directly by the people is a reality that cannot be contested not even today.

Ciprian Iftimoaei studied thoroughly the debate monism versus pluralism in researching elites, and defines the „elite” concept in relation to the correlative concepts („sub-elites”, „counter-elites”, „non-elites”) and presents a typology of elites based on fourteen classification criteria, focussing on describing the typology elaborated by John Higley in collaboration with other representatives of the democratic elitism (M. Dogan, M. Burton etc.). The author focuses on elaborating an inventory of methods for researching elites: the deductive-historical analysis, the positional analysis, the reputational analysis, the decisional analysis (event analysis), the comparative analysis and the combined methods applied in the research of elites. The purpose of this epistemological and methodological study is to emphasise the conceptual frame and the applicable methods in researching the role of the political elites in consolidating democracy.

In order to study the role of the political (governmental) elites in consolidating democracy (in post-communist Romania), the author used the following work hypotheses:

- the concrete methods of recruiting and selecting the governmental elites determine the configurations of the governmental elites;
- the elitist configurations have a direct impact on the type of governance;
- the type of governance (democratic or non-democratic) determines the democratic consolidation process. The research hypotheses are placed in causality relationship (recruitment-configuration-governance) with the democratic consolidation process.

For testing the validity of the formulated hypotheses, the author applied the following methods and research techniques:

- the analysis of the political biographies of the ministers that belonged to the governmental post-communist elites, combined with the sociological interview analysis (20 ministers were interviewed) and the analysis of the statutory documents of political parties, in order to emphasise the concrete methods of recruitment and their impact on the governmental elites configurations;
The statistical analysis of data provided by *EliteGuvPostCom* data base, which includes socio-educational, demographic, political and professional data concerning the people that have occupied ministers positions during the post-communist period;

- the institutional political analysis of the successive governments during December 1989 – May 2012, starting with the „temporary” government led by Petre Roman and ending with the government led by Prime Minister Victor Ponta.

From the analysis of information gathered from the sociological interview with the ministers, two sets of criteria (political and professional) have resulted, which in their turn contain two categories (general and special criteria) used in selecting members of the governmental elite. The most important political criteria are: loyalty to the party, seniority in the party, the importance of their position in the party organization, the electoral results obtained during the last elections, notoriety and trust of candidates, the relationships with selectors or recruiters. With regard to professional criteria, the authors mentioned the following: professional training level, work experience, the compatibility of professional training and work experience with the "job description" of a minister, communication abilities, capacity of making decisions in crisis situations and governmental teamwork. An innovation brought by the study of recruitment methods was to elaborate a formula for calculating the average duration of accessing government elites: 25 years since completing the university studies.

The educational background of the post-communist governmental elites is dominated by technical studies which compete with the legal and economic studies. The preeminence of technical studies over the other categories represented a dominant peculiarity of communist elites that also applied for post-communist elites. The explanation for the dominance of technical studies in the professional training of post-communist governmental elites reside in the need of competent resources in technical and economic fields, recruited mainly from former managers of state enterprises and bureaucrats of the communist period. Almost a quarter of post-communist governmental elites (19.07%) is represented by academics from higher education institutions and academic research institutions, which means that a high level of education certified by scientific titles (such as PhD title) is socially valued. The type and level of professional training of governmental elites is reflected in the quality of governance, the efficiency and effectiveness in public policymaking process. This statement should be
completed by the fact that the efficiency of the ministers’ activity depends not only on their level of training, but also on the political and/or governmental experience before their designation in the executive government, on the political support necessary to promote often unpopular reforms, on public image.

In all governments after 1989 most of the officials were men and during only two governments the presence of women of more than 15% was admitted: Adrian Nastase government and Emil Boc government. We noticed that during the first 10 years after the Revolution practically no woman entered any of the first six governments. The Ponta Government had 21 ministers, including 3 women that represent 14.28% of the entire cabinet, compared with a European average of 25% female ministers. The Government with the lowest average age is Mihai Razvan Ungureanu's and the cabinet with the highest average age is the "temporary" first government of Petre Roman. Membership to PCR and to nomenclature of the post-communist governmental elites had a significant influence on the democratic transition and less on democratic consolidation in Romania.

The institutional political analysis applied to executive power and to post-communist governments indicates the following political consensus elements within government elites: 1) admission to NATO; 2) adherence to the EU; 3) the perspective of acceding to the Schengen area. After achieving a major national interest, there was a period of conflict. The main cause of the conflictual status that characterise not only the Government, but the entire Romanian political system, is the constitutional arrangement and the afferent legislation that regulates the relations between the three powers (executive, legislative and judicial), the relations between the fundamental institutions of the rule of law (Presidency, Government, Parliament, Justice, Constitutional Court). The second referendum organized for dismissing President Traian Basescu (July 2012) showed unmistakably the constitutional conflict that was amplified by political elites to paroxysm and also the urgency to rearrange the constitutional relations between the state institutions, considering the experience gained in more than two decades of democratization, the existing political realities and the requirements imposed by the Euro-Atlantic status of Romania.
References


Biodata

Sorin Bocancea, Professor Ph.D., Dean of the Faculty of Political and Administrative Sciences of "Petre Andrei" University of Iasi. He has a Ph.D. in Philosophy (2006) and Ph.D. in Political Sciences (2008), both titles obtained at the "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iasi. His scientific areas of interest are political philosophy, political ideologies and European studies. Published Books as sole author: *Institutions and Policies in the European Union* (2004), *City of Plato* (2010). Professor Sorin Bocancea is currently director of the Political Science Review "Polis".