

# ELITES IN CRISIS

## INTRODUCTION

This special issue is dedicated to the problem of “Elites in Crisis”, and is based on a conference organized at the Corvinus University of Budapest in May 2017<sup>1</sup>.

In a broader sense, the volume is an outcome of the lasting and common interest of scholars in understanding and critically analyzing the structural and behavioral characteristics of the top layers of society, called elites. Elites are understood here as those who by virtue of their position or reputation are able to significantly influence social reproduction processes. From the late seventies onwards, when John Higley and his colleagues – relying upon the tradition of Mosca, Pareto, Michels, Mills, Schumpeter and Aron – outlined a new elite paradigm, concerted efforts have been devoted to furthering this approach. The paradigm connects the unified and fragmented structural features of the elites to different political system characteristics – including regime change. One outcome of these research efforts was the completion of a volume that focused on the post-socialist transformation and the role of elites in this (Higley-Lengyel 2000). After a series of conferences (Lane et al. 2007), Europe-wide elite and mass surveys were coordinated by the Siena University in 2007 and 2009 in the framework of an FP6 project called INTUNE (Integrated and United), resulting in several books and articles (Ilonszki 2010, Best et al. 2012, Westle-Segatti 2016). Further workshops were held to promote theory-building about components of transformation, elites and crisis (Blum et al. 2014, Best-Higley 2014, Pakulski 2016), while a new comparative elite survey called ENEC (European National Elites and the Eurozone Crisis) was organized by the University of Almeida with a focus on the national specificities of distressed elites (Vogel-Teruel 2016).

The “Elites in Crisis” conference fitted into this series of academic undertakings, with its aim of reconsidering the role of elites in turbulent times. In reflecting on the relevance of the elite paradigm, the invited scholars presented their views and findings about more recent elite research. What light do recent developments shed on the elite paradigm? How do elite consent and division influence the emergence of crises and the subsequent crisis management? How do elites conceive their own role, their relationship

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with different segments of society and with the international environment? What are the tasks of elites in this changing context? What do they think and what does academia think about the connection between elites and crises? The conference contributed to such theoretical considerations, retrospective evaluations and new research findings concerning the identity, threat perception and crisis management of elites.

Editing the papers for this volume was not an easy task due to the richness of the content and the large number of contributions. The editors of this volume thank those conference participants who had other commitments and whose contributions could not be published in this issue. Additionally, CJSSP policy is that the editors of the journal are not eligible to publish their own articles within the journal. The first five pieces that follow start by addressing the elites and the topic of crisis using a broader perspective, then in the next nine the scope is narrowed to Eastern Europe and Hungary.

*The Editors*

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