



A progress report on a European Science Foundation network, EURELITE: European political elites in comparison—The long road to convergence

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BACKGROUND

The progress of the early work for this research programme in comparative prosopography was described in the paper given at the Commission's conference in Bilbao in 1997.¹ Since then, the research, refinement and analysis of existing biographical data for legislative representatives in individual European countries for the period from 1848 to the present has proceeded steadily. Political scientists and sociologists form the majority of the participants; few are historians. The leaders of the group are Heinrich Best (University of Jena) and Maurizio Cotta (University of Siena).

AIMS

Since the inception of the project, it has been planned to produce comparative series of data on parliamentary representatives from as many countries as possible and, very important, to present the findings in a clear graphic form. For the first time, the prerequisites would be provided for a truly comparative study of parliamentary representation in Europe. The project focuses on elite transformation and models of representation. This comparative work derives from the pioneering work of Stein Rokkan on state formation in western Europe.² He saw value in the comparative study of political elites, because their structure sets the stage for the formation of particular socio-political coalitions. He believed these particular socio-political coalitions to be the decisive factor in any explanation of the variations

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¹ V. Cromwell, 'Parliamentary History: Methodology and Approaches', in J. Agirreazkuenaga and M. Urquijo (eds), *Contributions to European Parliamentary History* (Studies presented to the International Commission for the History of Representative and Parliamentary Institutions LXXIX, Bilbao, 1999) pp. 591–604.

² S. Rokkan, *Citizens, Election, Parties* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1970).

among European party systems. He was interested in recruitment patterns because he maintained that the changing composition of elites reflected the processes of social and political mobilization and integration. By placing the representative at the centre, the project focuses on the effects of political democratization as parliamentary democracy emerged.

The group is well aware of the difficulties in this work. Varying parliamentary histories, different national cultures and technical problems with the data obviously handicap the work. Every effort is being made to ensure that those using the resulting publications will be provided with adequate signposts to these limitations. It is hoped that the database created for the project will continue to grow and be enhanced. Efforts are being made to collaborate in the future with the Inter Parliamentary Union. The chief purpose is the creation of an important reference tool.

PUBLICATION SO FAR

The results of early work led to the publication in 2000 of the first of two planned books, *Parliamentary Representatives in Europe, 1848–2000*.³ This volume presented the analysis of the data from each of the countries separately, and provided an overview of the material then available. Each chapter focused on one country. The countries then covered were Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom.⁴ An important early finding by the group related to the Europe-wide growth in political professionalization and the increasing recruitment of representatives by parties in the period after 1918. The effects of different electoral systems on political recruitment were clear.

Separate from the main project, funding in both Germany and the United Kingdom enabled detailed work to be completed on a comparison of political recruitment in these two countries.⁵ This work was reported in the *Journal of Legislative Studies* in 2001.⁶

DEVELOPMENTS SO FAR

Data from the new parliaments established in central eastern European countries since 1989 has become and is becoming available. These datasets are being

³ H. Best and M. Cotta (eds), *Parliamentary Representatives in Europe, 1848–2000: Legislative Recruitment and Careers in Eleven European Countries* (Oxford, 2000).

⁴ The data for these countries have been provided by the following scholars: Denmark (Mogens Pedersen), Finland (Ilkka Ruostetsaari), France (Daniel Gaxie), Germany (Heinrich Best and Karl Schmitt), Hungary (Gabriella Ilonszki), Italy (Maurizio Cotta and Luca Verzichelli), the Netherlands (Ineke Secker), Norway (Kjell Eliassen), Portugal (José M. Magone), Spain (Pilar Gangas and Juan Linz) and the United Kingdom (Valerie Cromwell and Michael Rush).

⁵ The British-German Academic Research Programme (ARC Project 841), supported by the British Council and the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD), 1996–98.

⁶ H. Best, V. Cromwell, C. Haussman and M. Rush, 'The Transformation of Legislative Elites: The Cases of Britain and Germany since the 1860s', *The Journal of Legislative Studies* 7, no. 3 (2001), pp. 65–91.

integrated into the database.⁷ Efforts are also being made to fill the gaps in the western European data, in particular from Belgium and Sweden.

The success of the publication of the first book resulted in the grant of European Science Foundation funding for a Network (2001–2004). This has facilitated the completion of the work of the project and the preparation for the publication of a second book to present the resulting comparative analysis. A meeting was held in Granada in June 2003 to review early draft chapters for this second book, for which the first was the foundation. All of these drafts are comparative and thematic across those European countries for which data is available. The book's first section will cover individual variables such as nobility, selection of parliamentary candidates, civil servants, political backgrounds and careers, and gender, and the second and larger section will cover variations between and within party families, and also the recruitment of party officials. It is hoped that the second book will have been published by the end of 2005.

For further details on the data or on membership of the group, please contact Heinrich Best (<Best@ifsws.soziologie.uni-jena.de>), Maurizio Cotta (<cotta@unisi.it>) or Valerie Cromwell (<v.kingman@btinternet.com>).

⁷ In addition to Hungary, where data exists from 1848, post-1989 data has been provided on Croatia, Lithuania, Poland and Rumania. It is also expected from Estonia and the Czech Republic. There is now hope of acquiring data from Russia, as Oxana Gaman-Golutvina (Moscow) has received funding from the Russian Science Foundation for the data gathering. There is also the possibility of data from Slovakia.