



Good Governance

Political Leadership in Challenging Times: Europe and America

Executive Summary

- Political elites currently have a deficit of communication. Although an essential function of political life, elites' public discourse has increasingly become jargon policy-oriented, meant to ensure international consensus. It has left the political elites of Western democracies in an entirely different framing than the simplified issue-focused discourse, fit for mobilizing the masses.
- Political candidates increasingly show leadership deficits. Focused on coalition building and electoral engineering, elites are no longer engaging the followers within and outside their organizations. Furthermore, divisive electoral confrontations show the predilection to exploit the public agenda for short-term gains.
- Political leaders today tend to have a deficit of legitimacy. Leaders' professional and political background is not entirely congruent with the systems of democratic election. Selection from narrow clusters makes for weak representativeness of deliberative and executive bodies

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Bucharest, 27th January 2017

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INTRODUCTION

Leadership matters! It has the distinctive ability to shape the organization beneath, and the organizations' performance with regards to competitors. In politics more than anywhere else, it is the figure and character of the leader that imprints on the culture of the party organizations, and society at large.

The leadership defaults we currently see in most of the contemporary (Western) political parties can be attributed to distinctive internal (e.g. organisational dynamics) and external conditions (e.g. growing disenfranchised segments of society) for power depreciation. Such defaults result in poorer policy outcomes, as well as a growing political instability.

The internal democracy has always been poor in new democratic party systems, while primaries in western democracies have become so divisive that they threaten the very organizations for which they compete. There is also the challenge of generational transition, as young party members across Europe are sooner driven by socialization than policy-making motivations. Additionally, established party leaders' are remissive to share the spotlight and ensure a smooth generational transfer of prerogatives. According to the most recent European Barometer on Youth, the average of young people contemplating getting involved in politics is only 12% in the EU¹.

Outside a party's political organisation, we find an increasingly unstable party competition, as political alliances detach the political organisations from their base, and extremism is filling up the void. Given the process of cartelisation, and the lack of intellectual epicentres the policy output tends to be dominated by shallow translations of international recommendations, and only marginal or limited interest for the development of a context specific policy agenda. Furthermore, the political discourse became so radicalized over the past 5 years that little matter whether such contentious leaders win (e.g. USA, Hungary) or lose power (e.g. UK, France), their very participation in mainstream debates leaves behind strong social cleavages along new, identity-related lines.

1. Context matters: structure shapes actors

- Formation and Education of World Leaders
- Professional of Politics?

The lifecycle of political leadership starts with the recruitment, selection or election of a leader. In the traditional party organisations (e.g. cadre party, mass party) the party leader was usually the product of the organisational filters: the leader emerged from within the organisation, passing through different stages of management (e.g. youth organisation leader, local or regional leader).

In the contemporary political organisations of Europe and North America, we find a much less traceable trajectories of political leadership. The instability and lack of predictability of the path to political leadership is embedded in a global context marked by various changes of paradigm (see for example the VUCA diagnostic labeling: vulnerability, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity (Bennett and Lemoine 2014)).

¹ European Youth in 2016, Special Eurobarometer of the European Parliament, May 2016

At the same time, both Europe and America are short of leaders able to have a coherent and substantial dialogue with their constituencies. They lost touch with the grassroots and settled for merely relaying messages from supra-national forums (e.g. Brussels), or that of a narrow party elite. While most leaders live in an ivory tower, they are unable to connect to the single most important element of the democratic social contract: the citizen. This current state of affairs is exemplified by the seemingly surprising Brexit vote, the rise of the Front National, or the results of the latest US elections.

While the path to power (both political and governmental) seems to be less standardized everywhere (e.g. adopted leaders, new parties), structural differences stand out between the Western democracies and New European Democracies.

Over the centuries, states have been governed through a number of "cracies", such as aristocracy (i.e. nobility), autocracy (i.e. one leader), bureaucracy (i.e. civil service), monarchy (i.e. one family), oligarchy (i.e. narrow elites), plutocracy (i.e. wealthy), technocracy (i.e. technical experts), theocracy (i.e. priests or religious law), meritocracy (i.e. the meritorious), military juntas and others. The concept of democracy, or the representative government is fairly new and sometimes vague, as it is quite easy to miss the moment when a democracy turns into something else. For example, both Western democracies (i.e. Western Europe and the US) and former Communist Europe have for the past 27 years been governed on the foundations of the Rule of Law. In the new democratic setting, the challenge is that secondary regulations may or may not be implemented efficiently within the overall framework. The regulator process is partly driven by international compliance and convergence benchmarks, but also, and more importantly, is often fuelled by national inadequacies of regulatory alignment with such international practices.

In Figure 1 we have analysed the educational background of key political leaders in Western

Democracies and EU leadership. Once we chart the educational profile of leaders in Western Europe, USA and EU-level mandates, we find a clear predominance of three disciplines: legal studies, economics and political science. All three are central to the governing process.

Our analysis did indeed reflect the fact that most political leaders in Western democracies tend to be graduates of prestigious universities, from their home countries. Still, more important than the institution itself is the field of studies, as it informs and creates a doctrinarian socialization which can in turn lead to a homogenization of practice. Meeting peers with similar educational backgrounds can create lasting network linkages in international relations.

In Figure 2 we have analysed the educational background of key political leaders in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), since the fall of communism. We can easily see here that the election/selection of political leaders has been drawing on much more diverse educational backgrounds. Leaders with military studies can be found in Poland and Romania, while Humanities, Medical Sciences, Natural Sciences and Engineering are frequent across all cases. In fact it is Humanities and History that is the most frequent met educational background of political leaders in CEE, as opposed to legal studies in Western Democracies.

As recent publications point out (see Ketchley and Biggs 2016) under centrally-planned economies, intellectual elites might be actively encouraged towards technical specializations (e.g. engineering, physics, chemistry) in order to meet the industrial economic specialization targets. As such, the diversity of CEE leaders' educational backgrounds (by comparison to Western counterparts) might be explained by the ecology of their early development, and not necessarily by individual inclinations. Also, the high prevalence of humanities and history majors in CEE political leadership can also be attributed to a more critical perception of politics and governmental affairs - which in turn

might lead an individual towards political activism.

Figure 3 looks at the specific case of Romania to see whether the political leadership profile over the past decades is a reflection of the overall trends of the distribution of graduates per profile. The sharpest growth has been that of graduates of economics, having a tenfold increase since 1990. While engineering was the main specialization two decades ago, it lost ground in recent years to legal studies, humanities and history cohorts. By 2013, economics, legal studies and political science graduates made for 38% of total graduates. In other words, in what concerns contemporary Romania, we can find a comfortable pool for the election/selection of political leaders with similar educational backgrounds as those in Western democracies or supranational bodies of the EU. The boom of 2007 graduates came in the context of the preceding cycle of economic growth.

In contrast, if we look at the professional background of elected Members of Parliament (MPs) we find a sharp decreasing trend of professionals (e.g. lawyers, economists, engineers, medical doctors) from 57.90% of total Romanian MPs in the cumulative legislatures of 1990-2004 to 21.80% in 2012.

Regardless of their academic background, new MPs should rely less on intermediaries (e.g. analytical reports, consultants, experts) to find out what people think and want. This is because citizens' point of view often gets lost in translation, and leaders get a distorted account of wants and needs. It is even more important to do this as political parties across Europe have lost their mobilization capacity—both internally, and externally.

Protsyk and Matichescu point out that while “it is rare to find top business leaders serving as ordinary MPs in Western European

parliaments”, CEE countries often abound with such backgrounds (2011:209). Nevertheless, as we can see in Table 2, recent elections in Western Europe have brought to office increasingly more MPs with an occupational background in business (see for example UK).

In contrast, the sharpest difference between the composition of the Romanian Parliament and Western counterparts remains the very high percentage of career-politicians in the overall distribution. Almost half of the current Romanian legislative body is comprised of MPs with little professional experience outside party politics. This can become a liability in terms of cooperation with both national and international executive counterparts. On the other hand, the overall disengagement from politics might leave political parties with a shortage of candidates from other occupational backgrounds.

Europe's political crisis rests on three broken processes: how it comes about its leaders, how it defines itself and how it is able to talk to the “other”. Leaders are not born but raised and the EU has proven unable to raise the next generation of leaders that can both mobilize supporters within the EU and empower it to play a significant role in international affairs. Europe feels less and less like a team marathon and more like an individual sprint where everybody is expecting a big resettle and rushing to minimize loses.

Although difficult subjects have currently been on Europe's agenda, such as CETA, TTIP², the refugees, and its relationship to Turkey or Russia, its leadership still seems more enticed by short-term political gains. That is why a Two Speed Europe³ came to be. In this context, periphery or CEE states claim recognition, but they yet do not have the internal stability of Western democracies. In contrast, the West is under Germany's spell of “Wir schaffen das”⁴ but lacks a wide popular support.

² The Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement between Canada and the EU; the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership between the USA and EU.

³ *This Strategikon report* Magdin, Georgescu, *Two Speed Europe*, Strategikon, March 2016.

⁴ *Ibid supra*: Angela Merkel, “We can do it”, federal press conference on the refugee crisis, 31 August 2015.

So, how does one develop leaders? Are they taught in school or raised in the party? While education and academic record are important and will define reactions and skills, the political wisdom to mobilize and lead the crowds can only be acquired within the ranks of the political organizations. This dual formation path will always create liabilities for younger leaders.

2. Who Will Lead Tomorrow? Young Party Members and the Rule of Experts

- Typologies of Young Party Members in Europe
- Transnational Integration Platforms

According to a large sample survey of young party members in contemporary European political parties, Michael Bruter and Sarah Harrison assess and define three categories of motivations (2009:1284):

1. Professional-minded members (smallest group) – “behave like mini-leaders who already consciously prepare what they hope will be their professional political future”
2. Moral-minded members (biggest group) – “most radical of young activists, the most likely to engage in confrontational forms of participation, and the most likely to consider joining nonpartisan organizations. They do not really consider politics a profession and they see their future as activists, not politicians.”
3. Social-minded members – “join a party to fulfil their social needs, make like-minded friends, engage in interesting discussions, and meet stimulating people. They are the least active of all members, the least efficacious, the most critical of the party’s organization, and the least dedicated when it comes to devoting time and energy to its cause. The loyalty of social-minded members is limited and their critical sense toward the party makes them doubt the long-term future of their partisan commitment. “

The study is essential to projecting future actions of leadership formation within the party’s own structures because it clearly highlights the most successful young party-member profile: the professional-minded partisan who is most likely to succeed and progressively become tomorrow’s leaders:

- Desire to become politicians, run for election, and quickly access responsibility positions.
- Behave and, to a certain extent, seem to think like young leaders in the making.
- Try to remain close to the median voter, and they care about their party’s vote-seeking ability and their own office-seeking objectives.
- Highly involved in the electoral activities of the party but shy away from radical modes of participation.
- Efficacious and always supportive of the party line, but they can be critical of older members with their different perceptions of politics. Use a different approach and a different discourse, and abide by the intricate rules and habits of the party and political class they are, and want to be, part of. They believe in professional politics, and their ambition, relationship to the party, and sense of what does not work within it are influenced by their perceptions of what befits a young leader.

The authors’ assessment of the young party members motivations in Romanian political organisations nowadays sooner suggests a social-minded typology predominance than a moral-minded typology predominance. Furthermore, the small group of professional-minded young partisans is small across Europe, much smaller than in the decades of mass-party mobilisation and stable party systems. Nevertheless, the proactive recruitment and formation of this echelon of future leaders seems to be a central preoccupation of Western parties, and of the main European political families (e.g. PES, EPP). Their means of selection and development usually involve such tools as Summer Schools, Traineeships, mock Policy-Making Forums etc.

While largely ignored, or only superficially supported in Romanian political parties, the “professional-minded young activists are far more efficacious than average, whereas social-minded members are least efficacious” (Bruter and Harrison 2009:1279). Romanian political organisations, much like their CEE counterparts have been much more focused on social motivation and mobilisation (e.g rallies, events, online forums) than on effective integration into the underpinnings of Central/Core Party Executives. Our assessment is that the most likely reason for the poor efforts to attract and integrate professional young party members is their often antagonistic positioning to older members and traditional mobilisation tactics.

Perspectives on Political Education

These may take forms such as political academies, experimental (sociological) laboratories, debating, staged performances as political leaders in relation to peers, etc.

The authors advocate the necessity of bringing to bare both education and training for political actors, thus making the political elites more competitive and making the selection of political elites tougher. The formula of education plus training would prepare politicians not only analytically with respect to policy making, but would also help them be more in touch with society, preventing fractures the likes of which brought forth contemporary waves of nationalism, isolationism and populism.

What are the main European parties doing to develop their members towards a European scope? There is almost no national dimension for that, though there are some cases where national parties make arrangements for their members to undertake international political education trainings. Mostly, it is the pan-European political families, identifiable by the

European Parliament groups, which organise European-scope various forms of short political trainings – mostly policy oriented, rather than political ethos developing. Next to these, over the past few years, we have also seen the emergence of civil society-driven European programmes, such as the Friends of Europe’s #EYL40 “European Young Leaders under 40” programme⁵, which, though it does not cater directly to current political party members, it strives to create a groups of young European leaders with the potential of becoming political leaders or, at least, be involved with political affairs of the Union.

There is a confounding, both in the West and around the world, between preparation for Political Leadership, and national administrative / management leadership, with schools primarily dedicated to civil service, national administration, technical roles, and least to preparing people for political leadership.

There is a limited number of places where one can study political leadership and/or public management with an international scope. Traditionally, it is the former imperial powers or regional hegemony that maintain such schools which, in many cases, stem from their imperial administration traditions and institutions. It is the case of the United States, United Kingdom, The Netherlands, France, Germany, Austria, and Russia. While China’s Party School System went through some international opening-up over the past few years, it cannot yet be considered an open system accessible to any interested parties from around the globe.

Political Leaders’ development remains primarily an on-the-job business, both fuzzy and not very transparent. Compared to all other fields of training, including military and intelligence studies, political training and development remains insular. A newer mode of entry into politics is recruitment from the governance and public administration educated “caste”. However, the phenomenon

⁵ Defined by the Friends of Europe as a programme meant to identify talents with “fresh, diverse

backgrounds”, foster a European identity, aimed primarily at public leaders.

is much too recent to include people in the higher echelons of party political leadership.

There seems to be a preference to send the youngest political leaders, mostly those trained in governance and international affairs, off to positions within international organisations. There is one main advantage and one main disadvantage about such a practice. The main advantage is that for the first time in history (referring primarily to the past two decades, and primarily to the US, Germany, China) young political leaders break into their roles directly on the international stage and that already during their formative years. Their socialisation factor with other political leaders from around the world is tremendous, contrary to older national political leaders. Add to that that they grow into an international affairs mindset – so, theoretically, a high potential and talent to “fix the world’s problems”.

The clear disadvantage is that they develop and mature much like diplomats – estranged from the voting populace, disconnected, perceived as technical staff by the population and with little skills in communicating with the average voter. They are more likely to deal with the likes of the neo-liberal elites⁶ out of Harvard, Princeton, etc., or the foreign affairs staffs sent by national governments which are themselves educated many a times in schools geared specifically for international affairs and not for political leadership.

Further, for the time being, they have to submit to the political line from national capitals, which is crafted by the “old guard” of national politicians. There may be, however, a chance that on the long run, in about two generations, these young people will successfully migrate back into national politics and imprint on their home political cultures. Mr. Martin Schulz returning to national politics is not a good example for such migrations, as he has emerged from national politics and he is closing the end of his public political career. However, he may be among the first to open the way to a

⁶ Ban, C., 2016. *Ruling Ideas: How Global Neoliberalism Goes Local*. Oxford University Press.

renewal of national political culture and leadership development, thanks to his experience as head of one of the most important international political fora.

Purposefully trained political elites are almost non-existent. Yet this is the case for other professionals, such as artists, entrepreneurs, civil society leaders and social entrepreneurs, business people, etc. There are no specific financing lines under the European Parliament or under DG Education, DG Media, for training such leaders. The pervasive model for political leadership is learning by doing, getting the culture and behaviours absorbed organically.

Political Foundations, particularly in Old Europe and the US, in some sense play the role of “party schools”, as some of their objectives are to train and shape young political leaders, as well as providing the venues and opportunities for them to break into their public roles. In countries with less of a liberal democratic tradition, we see a similar role for what can be described as “government patronage schools”, this being most prominent in Russia and China.

A few words about why universities should have a role in educating and training future political leaders:

Neutrality and comprehensiveness. The experience of former communist party schools of Eastern Europe was heavily ideological. We may be witnessing a convergence of curricular thought when it comes to the educational requirements of political leaders. This presents the opportunity to formalise training and ensure it is objective, open to many perspectives, and comprehensive.

Diversity. One of the main faults in today’s politics, particularly in the West, where it had not previously been a *modus vivendi*, is the fracturing, isolationism, and acute partisanship of political factions⁷. Similar to the Facebook effect, in such situations those with strong

⁷ See tables from Andris, C., Lee, D., Hamilton, M.J., Martino, M., Gunning, C.E. and Selden, J.A., 2015. The rise of partisanship and super-

political opinions get to see (and perceive) around them only their own pervasive political views, resulting in being completely oblivious to the other existing political opinions of other segments of society (and the surprise of the Democrats with the victory of Donald Trump is a good example of that)⁸. Whereas, universities are (were) cauldrons of diversity, exchanges of ideas, and encountering “real people”, from outside the world of politics.

Professionalization. National politics (in contrast to the politics of international affairs) started as a representation function of the various “states” of society. See as examples Les États Généraux of pre-Revolutionary France leading to the 1789 Revolution; the 1689 English Bill of Rights and the Thirteen American Colonies “No Taxation without Representation” movement of the 1750s-1760s leading to the American Revolution. However, as societies and politics evolve, and governance itself becomes more professional, so too the training of political elites must evolve and become more professional.

Adequacy of education in relation to political career tracks. As Paul Cairney⁹ comes to highlight in his 2007 article, there is a true “industry”, or methodology related to advancing a career into Member of Parliament positions; he furthers the research by bringing to light that there are practices of onboarding wannabe politicians depending on their most recent occupation prior to elections. While in itself it may sound like a reasonable practice, it also confirms that “the system” perpetuates itself through selection processes based on image, not necessarily by the adequacy of studies and career track of the people in politics or seeking to get into MP roles. It is the kind of practice that further reinforces the point made earlier in this study that the selection processes associated to political life may lead to a body of cadres detached from the multitude of profiles of the electorate.

cooperators in the US House of Representatives. *PLoS one*, 10(4), p.e0123507.

⁸ For a visual representation of this tendency over the past 50 years, please see the annexed table on Partisanship in the US House of Representatives.

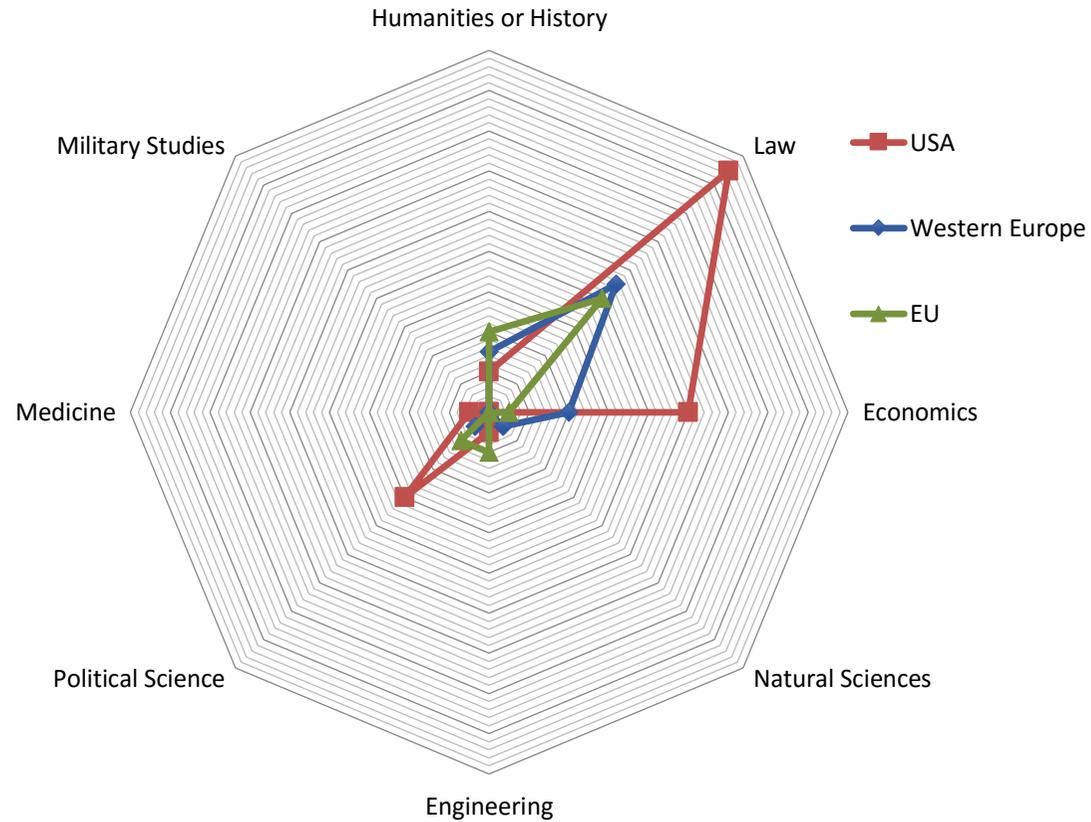
Knowledge Capital as facilitated by university-based socialisation, constitutes an offset means for the lack of family background and/or support in politics and/or public life involvement. This is a highly relevant aspect as it pertains to the frustration of the common party member that may be hopeful of reaching the higher echelons of the party. It has often been accused that those from influential families or from families with a past in public life don't start as low and go much higher in politics than regular citizens joining a party. Those merely joining undergo some “political life experiences” that those joining from already “elite” families do not. An easy example is the practice in Romania of sending young party members collating posters on walls during electoral campaigns (not necessarily as paid campaign staff). It is questionable whether or not it fulfils the promised function of “getting party members to know their constituencies”. However, it does seem to considerably increase frustration within the junior ranks, and has the potential of negative long term impacts on the behaviour of future party senior members (similar to hazing on US college campuses, or other humiliating and deprecating practices in various societies).

Our recommendation is for the professionalization and institutionalisation of political elites education and training. This would also entail the development of professors for such education.

⁹ Cairney, P., 2007. *The professionalisation of MPs: Refining the ‘politics-facilitating’ explanation.* *Parliamentary Affairs*, 60(2), pp.212-233.

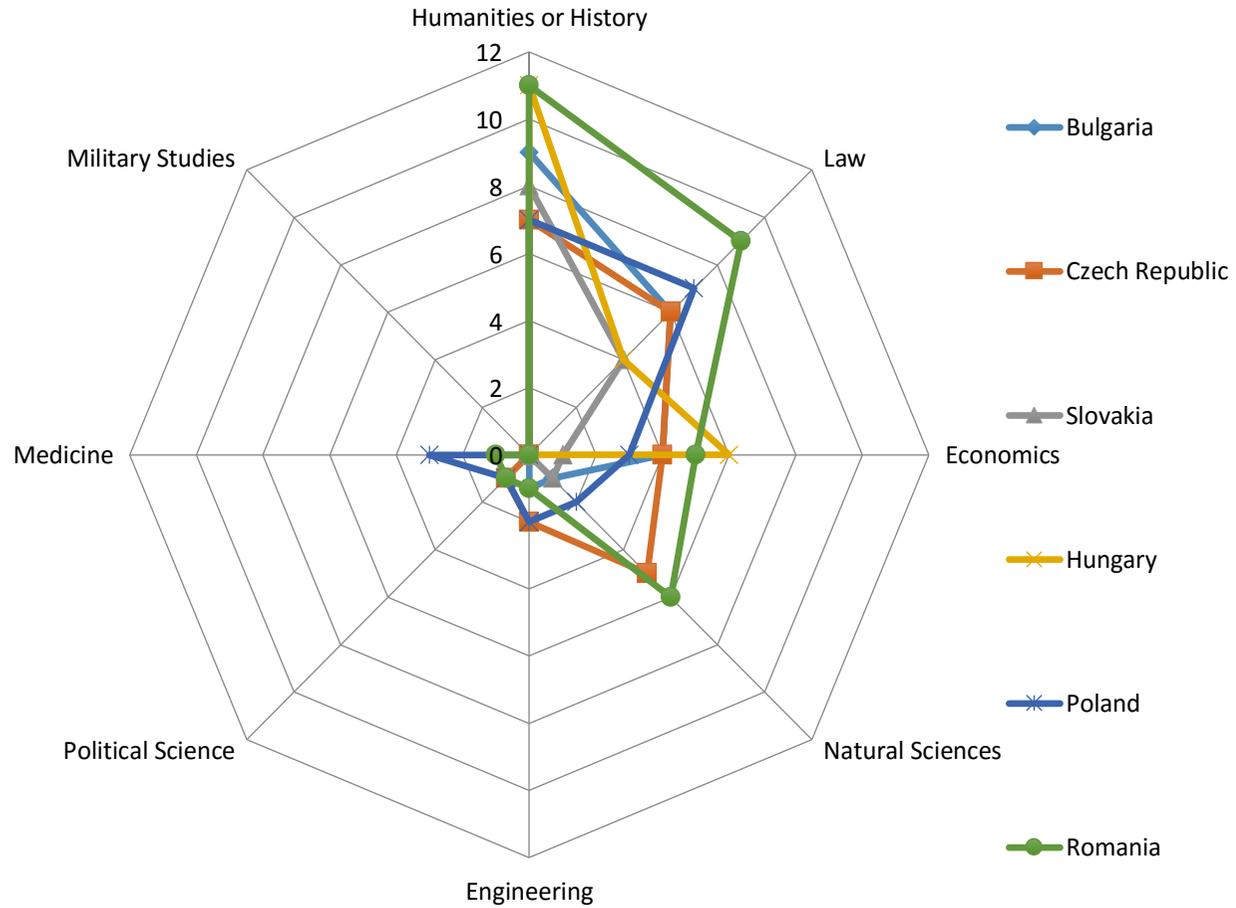
CHARTS

Figure 1. Political Leaders' Educational Profile - Western Democracies & EU



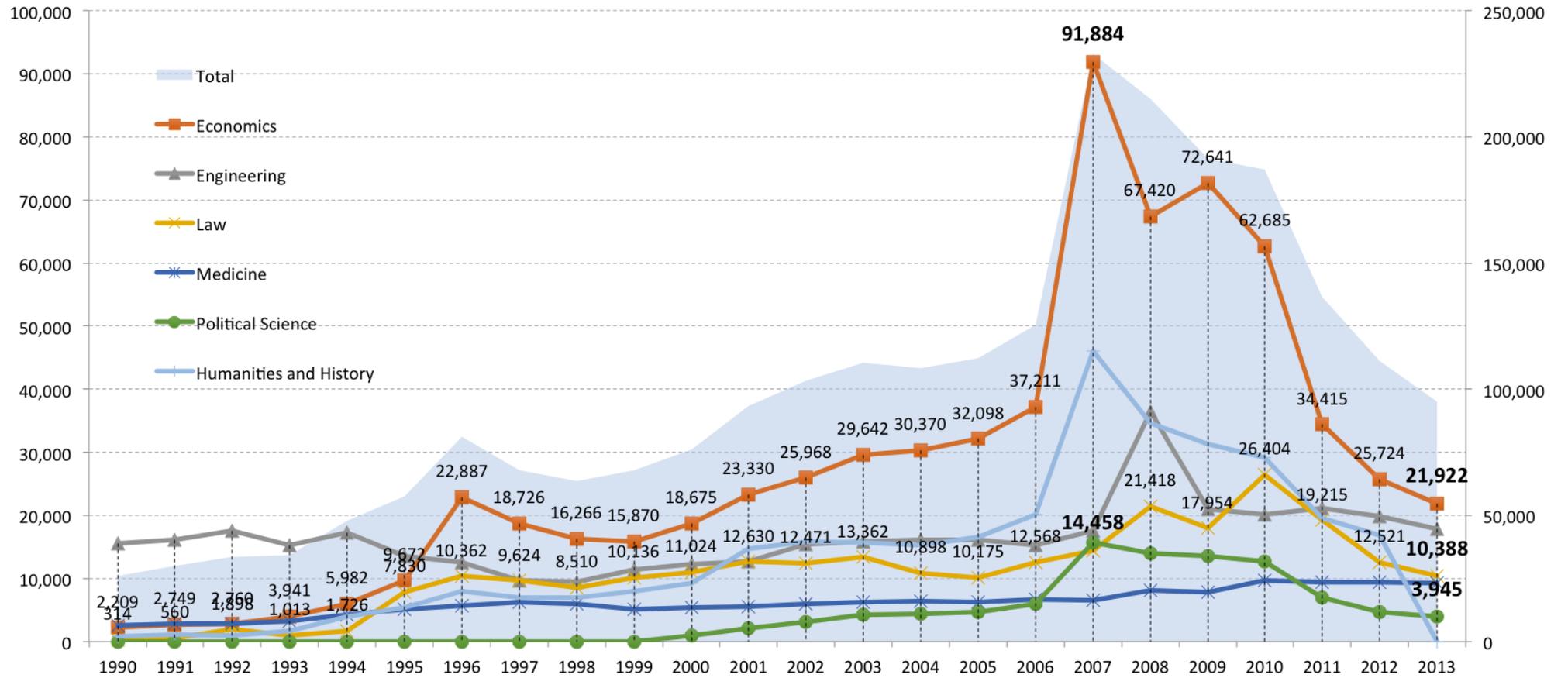
Source: compiled by the authors based on public records

Figure 2. Political Leaders' Educational Profile – CEE



Source: compiled by the authors based on public records

Figure 3. Graduate Cohorts in Romania by Profile (1990 – 2013)

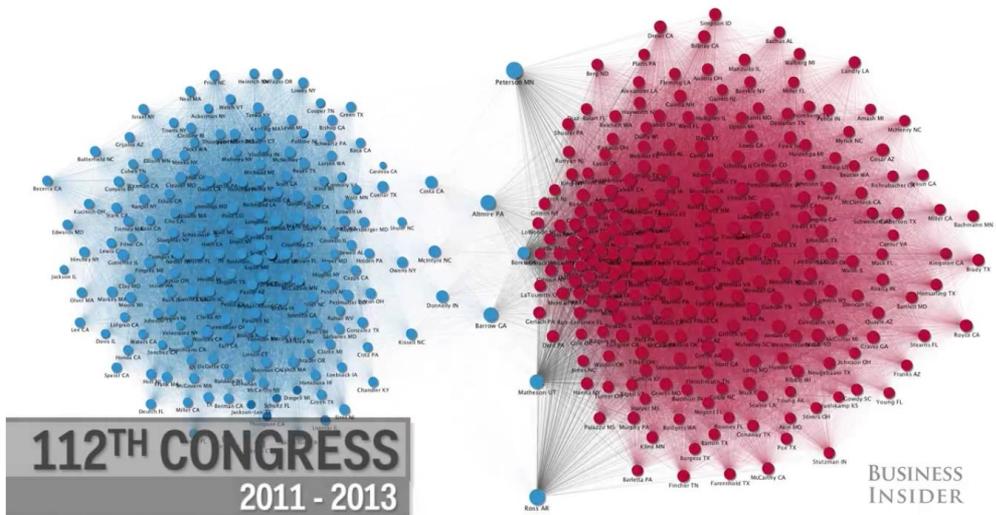
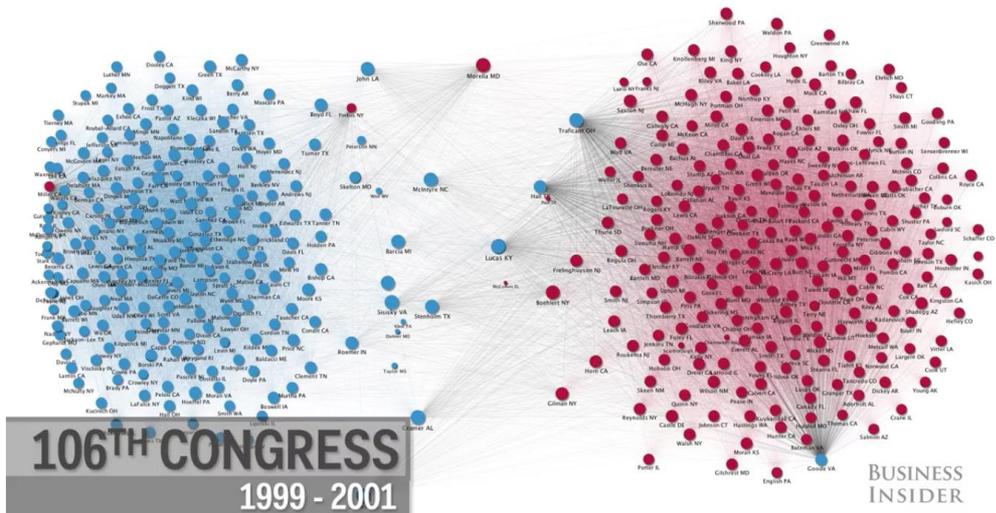
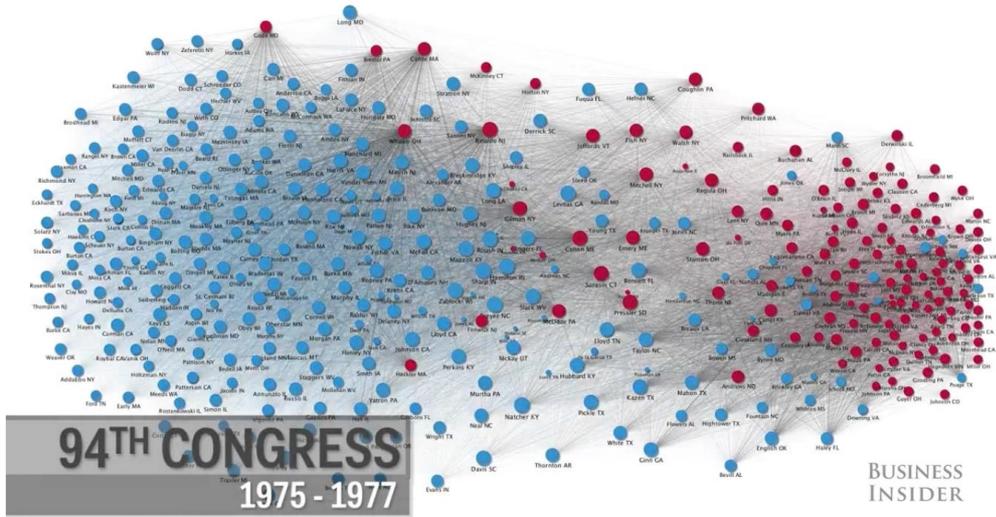


Source: INSSE

		Table 1. Occupational Background of Romanian MPs			Table 2. Comparative Overview of MPs Occupational Background			
		1990 - 2004	2004	2012	UK (2010)	Romania (2012)	Germany (1994)	Romania (1990-2004)
Professionals	Lawyers, economists, engineers, medical doctors, agricultural specialists, third sector employees (NGOs, trade unions, business associations), other professions.	57.90%	34.80%	21.80%	45.7%	21.80%	67.1%	57.90%
Educational and Cultural	Cultural, media, sports, university faculty, other teachers	13.20%	24%	3.00%	6.1%	3.00%	3.7%	13.20%
Managers and Employers	Private managers and entrepreneurs, state managers	7.90%	13.80%	19.35%	25.1%	19.35%	5%	7.90%
Civil Servants	High office civil servants, civil servants, law enforcement personnel, military	11.60%	22.80%	4.90%	2.9%	4.90%	13%	11.60%
Politicians	Elected officials holding full-time public office (high office politicians, regional politicians, other politicians); full-time party functionaries	1.80%	0.60%	46.59%	14.5%	46.59%	8%	1.80%
Others	Blue collar workers, students, retirees, homemakers	1.70%	0.30%	21.80%	5.7%	21.80%	3.2%	1.70%
<p>Source: Protsyk and Matichescu (2011) for 1990-2004, and 2004; the authors' own coverage for 2012</p>					<p>Sources: UK- Social background of MPs, House of Commons Library, Butler, Kavanagh, Cowley et al The British General Election of 2010 & previous editions; Germany</p>			

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About Strategikon:

Strategikon is an independent, English-speaking, Bucharest-based think tank. As mission and vision, it aims to provide "Innovative Strategies" (Strategikon's slogan) to address key challenges for relevant stakeholders in Romania, Europe and around the world; it also intends to raise the quality of the debate on international relations in the region. Strategikon addresses three main areas: International Security; European Union Affairs; and Good Governance.

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