European Union: Still an elite project?

Luca Verzichelli
CIRCaP – University of Siena

ANU Centre on EU studies
4 August 2011

Outline

• Role of elites in European Integration: traditional views and recent challenges
• Redefining the research agenda: a framework for the analysis of the elites in the transformation of European citizenship
• Some outcomes from elite surveys of the IntUne project (www.intune.it)
• Open questions and implications for the future research
Classic visions of the “Elite project”

• **Federalist views**: political and social leaders as driving actors of a “new democratic age”.

• **(Neo) functionalist views**: elected representatives and stakeholders *within states* incrementally see the common perspective as the best way to pursue new objectives.

• **Intergovernamentalism**: governmental actors (top leaders/epistemic communities) control the negotiations and determine punctuations in the path of integration.

**ALL ELITE-CENTRED THEORIES**

No doubt, European integration has been always led by elites. A considerable split between elites and citizens has therefore emerged, becoming more and more profound in the course of time

New challenges

• Complication of the EU structure and bureaucracy
• Financial crises and incremental costs
• Emergence of anti-Europeanist parties / resurgence of nationalism

European integration traditionally seen by elites as *a means to advance political goals which they would not be able to enforce alone* (Haller 2008).

Something went wrong after mid-nineties?
- From **permissive consensus** to **constraining dissensus** (Hooghe and Marks 2009): a greater role has now to be attributed to non-elites actors as consequence of a conflictual politization of many European issues.
- **Costs of Europeanization**: EU has become an important issue in national political agendas and the public discourse on Europe is now essentially about identity rather than material advantages
Integrated and United? A Quest for Citizenship in an Ever Closer Europe

- One of the few Integrated Projects on the theme of Citizenship financed by the European Union within the context of the 6th Framework Programme.
- Four year project started on the 1st September 2005 and is coordinated by the University of Siena. It involved 29 European Institutions and over 100 scholars across Europe (18 EU countries + Serbia + Turkey).
- Main puzzle: explanations of the transformation of perceptions and definition of EU citizenship in the EU.
- Broad grid of dimensions/levels of analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IntUne research field</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public opinion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experts networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Discourse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Questions from the *elite* IntUne working package

1. What the meanings and dimensions of the concept of citizenship perceived by European domestic elites?
2. What the degree of convergence among European elites, concerning the further extension of the EU governance?
3. What about their attitudes towards closer integration and their acceptance of an increased power of EU institutions?

Here a few sketches with evidences from 2 waves of survey


I refer mainly to political elites and to research questions
- Orientation to work on EU issues and have a supranational career
- Explanation of the main indicators of Europeanness
- Emergence of different clusters of attitudes among politicians

Dynamics of change (2007/2009) observed by the IntUne elite surveys

- **Attachment to Europe** (% strongly + somewhat attached) decreases (from 87 to 78%)
- Support to **single foreign policy** decreases (from 55 to 50% strongly in favor, 86 to 79% in favor)
- agree with **strengthening the powers of the EP** decreases (from 71 to 66%)
- agree with statement “Member states ought to remain the central actors of the European Union” increase from 34 to 42%
- Decline of both the quota of respondents with high trust in European Commission (37 to 32%) and high trust in European parliament (48 to 41%)

**Possible explanations**

- Increasing weight of nationalistic, euro-sceptical, right-wing elite representatives
- Frustration due to the emergence of financial crisis (2007/2008)
- Frustration due to the difficulties of the Lisbon Treaty

**BUT**
Attachment to Europe is NOT necessarily correlated to ideology and NOT necessarily correlated to trust in EU institutions;

- Expectations of a broad scope of EU governance are also not strongly correlated to positive judgments about EU and to strong quests for a closer union;
- Non political elites are more *Europeanised* in terms of socialization but sometimes more realistic and severe towards the EU institutional performance
- In the end, the overall quota of respondents who are somehow attached to Europe and thos who argue that, overall, their country benefit(ed) from being member of the European Union remain stable and high

Main results from multivariate analyses

- Left-right distribution partially explains declaratory orientations and attachment
- Age and seniority tend to explain familiarity and positive orientations to “real life EU” while newcomers and politicians from new MS tend to be more enthusiastic towards “innovation scenarios”
- EU membership is an important variable in explaining control over technical issues and trust in a core-institution like the Commission
- Country-specific factors at work but not easily classified in “models” (southerners vs. old core of EU, CEE vs. West, etc.)
### Simple picture of the complexity in the distribution of European (domestic) political elites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The European Commission should become the true government of the EU</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Member states ought to remain the central actors</strong></td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>Federalism 16.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>Compound model 35.3%</td>
<td>Intergovernmentalism 41.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analyses based on data reduction methods and multivariate analyses confirm the polarization towards more than 2 positions.

### Would you continue your career in Europe?

- Only 20% of national politicians answer positively (35% among economic and social elites). Trend slowly declining.
- The % remains low also among those who show the assets for an international career like foreign language skills, experiences of living abroad or supranational networks of relatives and friends.
- **Nation states** are (still) the primary foci of political elites’ career planning.
Another (less simple) picture of elite complexity

Difficult to explain the (minoritarian) attitude to “run Europe” of domestic politicians. Very few cosmopolitans, general trend to have a position in the middle of a multidimensional space built by “EU relevance” and “parochialism”

Multi-corrispondence analysis run on the first survey (politicians). Dimensions are 1) concern for European issues, 2) Europeanization of personal characteristics.

Oblique factorial analysis of political elite’s attitudes toward European Union

This test suggests the existence of five main dimensions that can be easily interpreted:
1. Support for supranational political integration
2. Trust in European institution
3. Support for delegation of “new policies” to the European level
4. Support for delegation of “traditional state policies” to the European level
5. Representation of national interests
(provisional) outcomes

- Elite’s role is still crucial in defining future perspectives of EU, but increasingly controversial and constrained by new intervening variables
- Domestic politicians are still more inclined to a closer union but they do not seem exactly forward-looking and are often uncertain;
- Elites’ trust in EU institutions, although declining, remains in the average higher than trust in domestic institutions
- When asked to express their attitudes and positions towards Europe and supranational integration, domestic elite do not define themselves along a simple one-dimensional continuum (pro-Europe↔anti-Europe) …
- But display rather variable combinations of positions depending on whether they are asked to express their views on aspects that concern the nature of the European polity, its institutional configuration, or different sets of policy goals

... summing up

Good news for pro-Europeanists: the overall views of domestic elites towards European integration is not that much changed over the years

**BUT**

- Concerning signs of uncertainty, complexity and contradiction are evident. Domestic elites (specially politicians) look more vulnerable and exposed to changeable pressures from media and a more skeptical public (the **constraining dissensus** argument). Costs of Europeanization are also emerging

Europeans do exist.

**A European ruling class still missing?**
More intensive data analyses and further interpretations coming ...


- Several focussed studies and articles on elites’ *Europeanness* (see [www.intune.it](http://www.intune.it) for a list of references)