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POLITICAL ELITES IN THE ‚GREAT TRANSFORMATION‘. MULTIPLE PATTERNS OF DEVELOPMENT OR LARGE-SCALE CONVERGENCE?

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PLENUM 4: THE ‚GREAT TRANSFORMATION‘ OF POST-SOCIALIST SOCIETIES

Despite the importance of mass protests for the unexpected collapse of Communist regimes across Europe, the regime changes as such and the crafting of the new political order were largely driven by elites. Political elites were key and crucial actors (not only) in the early periods of transformation – as constitution-makers, co-designers of a (more) market-based economy and as decision-makers when the countries' integration into European and international institutions was at stake. Therefore, a thorough study of elite formation and developments over time in post-communist polities seems essential to get a better understanding of the 'Great Transformation'.

The proposed presentation/paper wants to analyze the structural features and the dynamics of elite-making in the post-communist transformation. The analysis will cover both aspects: the recruitment and career logics in the political sector and some key attitudes of political elites (politicians in public office). The presentation focuses on similarities and differences in the development of political elites in six Central and East European countries. The selection of countries combines a most-similar cases approach (the Visegrád countries) with the virtues of a most-different cases design (including one South-East European country and one non-EU member state).

Research questions:

The investigation is guided by the following research questions:

- (a) What similarities, what differences between elite formation processes in post-communist European countries can be observed?
- (b) In the later stages of the transformation process, have different recruitment and career patterns stabilized, or is there a secular trend of convergence, making the post-communist elites more and more alike?
- (c) Aside from the structural features of the elites, do they share common ideas, political perceptions and preferences, especially with regard to Europe and European integration?
- (d) How can prevailing differences across countries be explained? Are they rooted in pre-socialist traditions, a result of the initial power configurations in the formative period of the new regime, or rather caused by the transformation processes themselves?