

## Book Review: The Europe of Elites: A Study into the Europeanness of Europe's Political and Economic Elites

by Blog Admin

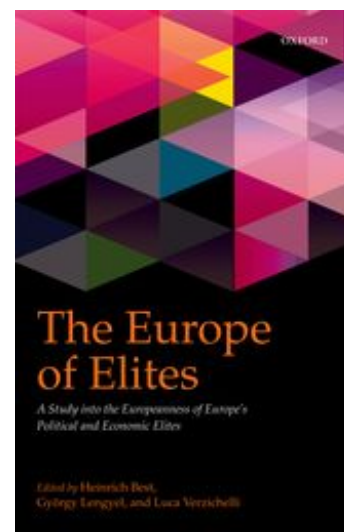
February 6, 2013

*The current debate around the eurocrisis and European integration often centres on the role of Europe's elites, who are accused of imposing policies from the top down, with little democratic consent. Giulia Pastorella is impressed by the comprehensive look at Europe's movers and shakers given by **The Europe of Elites** and finds that it may be suggesting that there is no such thing as a united elite European class that is driving the European project forwards.*

**The Europe of Elites: A Study into the Europeanness of Europe's Political and Economic Elites. Edited by Heinrich Best, György Lengyel, and Luca Verzichelli. Oxford University Press. 2012.**

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During the current crisis, many European newspapers have accused the EU's elites of deepening European integration from the top-down, against the will of the peoples of Europe. In other words, now that the EU has come to mean austerity instead of prosperity, the happy days of Eurlitism, when national elites could count on the permissive consensus of the public in matters of European integration, are over. Yet, despite their sometimes-dubious legitimacy, Europe's elites seem more determined than ever to pursue their project. This would seem to presuppose a common vision of where Europe should be going among national elites. The main purpose of *The Europe of Elites* is to test whether this common *Europeanness*, a binding set of ideas, visions and attitudes towards Europe, really exists.





The starting hypothesis of the book is that European integration is plausibly the result of a convergence of ideas and purposes of European elites, which has occurred after more than 60 years of close collaboration across borders through institutions and business, and increasingly common education at the top international schools. *The Europe of Elites* uses data from surveys conducted in 2007 on top-ranking politicians and top managers in 18 European countries to test this hypothesis. While findings of the book support the view that European integration remains primarily an elite-lead project, Heinrich Best, editor of the present work, co-director of the Scientific Network '*European Political Elites in Comparison: The Long Road to Convergence*' and author of various books on European Elites, concludes that there is no such expected convergence.



The explanation for these persisting differences between national elites is to be found in a variety of aspects of their lives and opinions, which are analysed separately in a series of stand-alone chapters. Hubé and Verzichelli impute the absence of a common *Europeanness* to the lack of interest in European careers. Unsurprisingly, in the same way the European Parliament elections are second-order elections, so are the posts that result from them. Gaxie and Hubé consider that belonging to a new or an old member state is the main determinant in the elites' different attitudes towards European institutions and their future powers, while Lazic, Jerez-Mir, Vuletic and Vázquez-García argue that increased ethnic heterogeneity within some elites positively influences attitudes towards supranational integration. Other findings are more in line with classic political science expectations, such as that left-leaning elites are more worried about maintaining political and social equality and social security while right-leaning elites are more concerned with competitiveness of the economy.

At a time when the entire European project is being questioned and scrutinised, perhaps one of the most interesting lines of enquiry in the book is that which considers elites' perceptions of the threats to a cohesive Europe. Interestingly, the threats that elites perceive as being most dangerous are not what one would be likely to expect: nationalism and socio economic differences among the EU member states continue to be perceived as the highest threat. Although the surveys were conducted in 2007, these perceptions were sadly accurate, as the unfolding of the Eurocrisis shows us every day.

Most of *The Europe of Elites* confirms what European Studies scholars knew or suspected already, but it also has some surprising findings. As far as the Europeanization of policy making is concerned, for instance, economic elites are more open than their political counterparts in most policy domains. On the other hand, on the issue of major extensions to European institutions' powers, economic and political elites are equally sceptical. Intuitively one would expect a clear gap, as political elites' power is more threatened by the 'creeping competences' of European institutions than economic elites' power. Moreover, while female political elites show a stronger attachment to Europe than their male colleagues, female economic elites show aversion to deepening of European integration.

Despite being a book on elites, the authors rightly do not ignore the relationship between elites' and the masses' attitudes to Europe. Here stereotypes are proven unfounded: the (in)famous elite-masses gap is not as consistent as the myth would have it. It varies widely between policy areas as well as between countries. Reassuringly for Europhiles, both masses and elites however show similar levels of support for policies that are already in place.

Given the current situation of the EU, one would hope to find in a work of such title and scope some indications as to which elites might be ready to integrate more in the future, and why. Early in the book, Cotta and Russo provide evidence of the fact that Europe *à la carte* is probably the best way forward to accommodate the different needs of the national elites, although the *menu* ordered by each elite will differ substantially. No one will just order more Europe: each will order more of different courses of the same Europe. This, or other forecasts for future scenarios deriving from the analysis of the data, could have been made more explicit in the introduction or conclusion of the book.

*The Europe of Elites* is clearly a very comprehensive book, but one that leaves the impression of a patchwork, with little overarching narrative. This is by no fault of the writers, as it is a result of the patchwork-nature of the elites' *Europeanness* itself, to the point that one wonders whether it makes sense to use that concept at all.

The only certain conclusion one can draw from the book is that, while the elitist character of European integration is confirmed, the myth of Euretism is to be revised. If, as *The Europe of Elites* suggests, there is no such thing as a united European elite class driving the European project forward, then the legitimacy and democratic capacities of the European project have just been given another blow.

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**Giulia Pastorella** graduated in 2011 with a Double MSc in European Affairs from the Institut d'Etudes Politiques (Paris) and the London School of Economics, winning the LSE European Institute Leonard Woolf prize for Best Dissertation and LSE European Institute Michael Oakshott prize for Best Overall Performance. Giulia is currently a PhD student at the LSE European Institute. She is a Research Officer at the LSE European Institute, working on a book on national stereotypes. [Read more reviews by Giulia.](#)