



Discontinuity in Elite Formation: Former Komsomol Functionaries in the Period of Post-communist Transition in Lithuania and Belarus

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Abstract

This study looks into the post-communist pathways of the young functionaries of the Communist Youth League, the so-called Komsomol. The Komsomol can be regarded as an important stepping stone within the pathways into the communist elite. Given that these young functionaries eventually had to replenish the ranks of the established communist elite, the study proposes to conceptualize them as the prospective communist elite. It is this prospect of them becoming the communist elite that makes them so interesting to study: their position in the Komsomol signified that they were pre-selected possessors of the quality to strive for 'good life'. Simultaneously however they are observed as people who desired to organize their accomplishment by following the rules of the game. However, with the breakdown of the communist regime this kind of career logic has abruptly declined. Against this background, the main research question is: 'What happened to the former functionaries of the Komsomol in the course of the post-communist transformation, and why?'

This thesis attempts to shed light on questions of elite formation by drawing on retrospective accounts of insiders. These perspectives represent a previously hardly researched 'other side' of an experience that took place before and after the collapse of communism, an aspect which remains indispensable in understanding the post-communist development. Altogether 36 biographical in-depth interviews were carried out in 2005 with the Central Committee functionaries of the cohort of 1986-1989 in Lithuania. Interviews were also conducted with former functionaries in Belarus and utilized to facilitate the analysis of the Lithuanian data.

The discussion of data is organized into two parts. The first empirical part deals with several aspects of the condition of the Komsomol functionaries at the moment of the exit from communism. This part outlines the main desires that motivate their decisions at this turbulent time; it also aims to explore the meaning of this moment in order to understand how it may have affected their lives. Was it a moment of loss? Or was it a moment of liberation? The second empirical part of the study explores the mobility of the former functionaries after the breakdown of communism. Here the study observes how the striving which initially propelled them into the communist structures was eventually converted within the post-communist structures. How did those people who were striving for 'good life' in the old system

organise their accomplishment during post-communism? While the study represents an exploration into the subjective notions of accomplishment, it also proposes a reflection on how this process of subjective striving results in elite formation.



Vaida Obelenė

Short bio: S Before coming to the EUI, Vaida Obelenė worked for seven years as a civil servant and researcher with Lithuanian and international organisations, predominantly in the fields of youth policy and third sector development. The PhD thesis on the post-communist mobility pathways of former Komsomol functionaries, which she defended in February 2009, springs from her early activities when in 1995, while a student of sociology at the University of Vilnius, she became an activist in youth voluntary work organisation “Austėja” and the National Youth Council. This engagement in the formation and advocacy of emergent youth policy in post-communist Lithuania as well as encounters with the members of the “old” regime lead to her interest in communist youth policy and youth leaders, and hence the Komsomol, and it eventually prompted her to investigate the matters further by doing a systematic study on the topic.