

Call for Sessions - WEHC 2015 [S20072]

Proposed title of the session

Diversity and Changes in Role of the Economic Elites in Politics in the 19th and 20th Centuries

Abstract

The panel intends to study the extent at which the economic elites undertook political roles and the changes in their political role during the 19th and 20th century, especially in Central Europe. Taking in view only the area of the former Habsburg Empire several stages can be defined: at the beginning of the 19th century the economic and political spheres were very distinct. The Liberal era created a new situation: among others the emancipation of Jewish high bourgeoisie representing an important economic power led to the fact that they were also given an opportunity to directly participate to politics. Also, in the second half of the 19th century there was an increase in „ethnic” entrepreneurs, which in the case of the Austro-Hungarian Empire meant that both the majority ethnic groups (Germans, Hungarians) and the minority ethnic groups (Romanians, Czechs, Serbs, Slovaks, etc.) grew a stronger entrepreneurial vein and they were competing with each other and with the Jewish entrepreneurs. A competition for which they also used political help. Another interesting topic for research would be the entrepreneurs of aristocratic origin. Many times in the case of aristocratic families politics and economy intermingled and some of the representatives of these families held high political offices and still were important participants to the economy.

At the end of the First World War, when the Habsburg Empire was dissolved the situation of the entrepreneurs differed largely in the various new states that were formed. Except Austria and Hungary in all other states the entrepreneurs once belonging to the majority ethnic groups lost their privileged positions, just like the aristocrats, while the Jewish entrepreneurs attempted to secure their positions by specific strategies. Both groups obviously needed direct or indirect assistance of the political sphere. Economic nationalism played an important role during the entire era as well. At the beginning of the Second World War, and in many cases even earlier than that the situation changed drastically again. The most radical change was total exclusion and even physical extermination of the Jewish entrepreneurs. It is interesting to notice that representatives of the economic elite attempted to survive using various strategies and many of them pampered the illusion that they would stay away from politics – but this proved a dangerous illusion. And there were many new „entrepreneurs” who had no experience and no money and therefore meant to gain an economic status using politics.

Besides research on this topic for Central Europe the panel welcomes comparative researches also from other regions.

I. Corresponding Session Organiser

Prof. Roman Holec (Comenius University, Bratislava [Slovakia])

II. Co-Organiser(s)

1. Corresponding Organiser.
 2. Dr. Judit Pál (Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj [Romania])
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III. Expected Participant(s)

1. same as correspondent.
2. Judit Pál (Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Institute of History [Romania])
3. Franz Adlgasser (Austrian Academy of Science, Institute for Modern History [Austria])
4. Jerzy Kochanowski (University of Warsaw, Institute of History [Poland])
5. Antonie Doležalová (Charles University Prague, Institute of Economic Studies [Czech Republic])
6. Andrea Pokludová (University of Ostrava, Center for Economic and Social Studies [Czech Republic])
7. Zoltán Kaposi (University of Pécs, Institute of Economic and Regional Studies, Faculty of Business and Economics [Hungary])
8. No input.