

Intellectual Elite: Identification Problem and Influence on Socio-political Processes in Europe by the Example of France and Poland

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Consideration of the mediator structures' role in the modern socio-humanitarian research seems to be quite topical. However, the research is mostly focused on the structures of the civil society and their interaction with governmental institutes, which is quite explainable. Against this background, insufficient attention is given to studying of the specific social groups having direct influence on the political elite's behaviour and the decisions it makes. It is mostly development of the XX-century Europe where the influence exerted by these social groups is difficult to overestimate. Any socio-political and economic transformations cause a certain resonance with intensity depending on a lot of factors. Especially important in this period is the extent of interaction of social groups and political elites. An essential part of such influence is played by the social structure that the West refers to as the intellectual elite or intellectuals. It is the result of their interaction with the social environment and the political elite that the vector of further development of this or that country largely depends on. It actually acts as a distinctive modulator of the attitude the society takes to any actions performed by the political elite. Thereby, the intellectual elite has a powerful toolkit to influence the decisions made by the authorities and can even counterbalance them at certain stages in the development of the state.

The term 'intellectual' became widely spread in 1898 in France after the famous 'Manifesto of Intellectuals' ('Manifeste des intellectuels') had been published. It was a protest against the Dreyfus case, which was signed by 1,500 persons, including scientists, journalists and writers¹. It was about that case that the intellectual elite of the country made one of the first split into mainly liberal-socialists, who defended Dreyfus, and national-conservatives, who supported the charge. According to S.Lipset and R.Dobson, the term 'intellectual' designated, first of all, those critically and radically thinking literary people protesting against the reality conditions². Later this meaning lost its political connotation and stuck to the category of professionals involved in generation and spread of knowledge and ideas. This article is to analyse this term in more details because its treatment is rather indistinct for some reasons though it is the centre of many works³.

In our opinion, the term 'intellectual' has a narrow and a wide sense, which differ in their genesis and social functions. The narrow sense is the 'Author'⁴. According to the philosophy of post-structuralism, an Author is a person making a unique product that has not existed before. The product can be a text, a work of visual art, a piece of music, etc. This concept differentiates between two types of Authors: an autonomous Author who is emerged in a certain discursive tradition and simply makes a 'product', and an Author holding the so-called transdiscursive position, i.e. not only does s/he create his/her texts, but also inspires other authors' texts. Michel Foucault referred to such type of Author as a 'founder' ('fondeur') or an 'institutor' ('instidurteur')⁵. It is those Author's features that stipulate a genuine intellectual. Such intellectuals are the people consolidating the society, and their right to the mediator's role is not contravened. Rightfulness of that treatment of the intellectual elite can be confirmed by A.Toynbee's history concept. The essence of that concept is the problem of a 'challenge' menacing the very existence of the society and an 'answer' to this 'challenge', the author of the 'answer' being the creative minority⁶.

¹In same the period, a considerable effect was produced by Émile Zola's letter to the President of the country F.Faure beginning with 'I Accuse' ('J'accuse'). Zola's letter argued that the French Administration concealed the proofs of Dreyfus's innocence.

² Lipset S., Dobson R. The intellectual as critic and rebel//*Deadalus*. Vol. 101, 1972. P. 166.

³ A number of researchers do not differentiate between the terms 'an intellectual' and 'intelligency', which is certainly wrong.

⁴ The author concept was developed in post-structuralist philosophy by Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze. In development of that concept, they actively used ancient philosophy, in particular, Plato and Aristotle.

⁵ Foucault M. *Intellectuals and Power*. M.: 2002. p.98.

⁶ Toynbee A. *A Study of History*. M.: 1991. p.46.

Toynbee underscores that socio-political development of a state is pushed by the people who can go beyond the limits of a primitive life and generate creation expressed in various forms. The process can be driven both by 'social groups of creators' and 'individual creators'. Actually, Toynbee meant the intellectual elite ('intellectuals'), whose role in the historical development of the society is difficult to overestimate. In Toynbee's opinion, however, it is ideal if such individuals enter the political elite because they provide stable development of the state and effective interaction between the authorities and the society. From our point of view, the latter is wrong because the value of the intellectual elite is its intermediate position between the political elite and the society. The independent position provides the intellectual elite with a serious toolkit to interact with the political elite and the social institutes.

However, the narrow interpretation is too 'exacting' on the definition of an 'intellectual'. Author intellectuals were not numerous in Europe, and if one takes into account that some of them directly co-operated with autocratic and nationalist state regimes¹, then it would be wrong to delete the whole layer of people who are not 'Authors' in the post-structuralist sense of the word – the so-called public intellectuals - from that concept. They are "scientists, engineers, doctors, lawyers, professors, etc. As individuals, these people do not differ from other people – each of them, whatever s/he does, exposes and supports the reality that s/he excels in his/her transformation project"². They create and disseminate life philosophy and political ideology. They are those whom Z.Bauman refers to as 'interpreters', i.e. those who make ideas of one community understandable for another community. Unlike intelligency, the intellectuals are a priori not so much oppositional to the authorities as aiming at dialogue between the society and the state. Their consciousness may be filled with scepticism but remain unremitting and always connected with rational research and moral judgements – they speak the truth to the authorities³. The intellectuals had great power with socio-political processes in the countries of the West throughout the XX century, which often led to adjustment of the current line of development of the country. In particular, the right-wing intellectuals of France, England and Spain seriously admired the arising Nazi Germany in the 1920-30s and considered it as an example for imitation. And a lot of left-wing intellectuals supported the Soviet Union. One more negative process caused by a lot of European and, first of all, French intellectuals of that time was immoralism, which found sufficiently broad support in the society.

As a result, Paris became one of the most socially demoralized cities of Europe as early as in the 1930s⁴. In their turn, the socialist-intellectuals could not resist more aggressive representatives of the nationalist wing. Moreover, they took too much interest in extensive reasoning on the illusory new world and paid no attention to the negative processes taking place in the society and the state. For obvious reasons, the right-wing intellectuals practically disappeared from the socio-political life of Europe for a long period of time after the war. A number of researchers refer to the post-war period of development of Europe as the 'Golden Age of intellectuals'. And that is no wonder as intellectuals fell under a strong influence of left-wing ideology in this period. Student uprising of May 1968 in Paris became one of the key events of this period⁵. The intellectuals concentrated at universities or around them and influenced young people essentially through their works and public lectures. From their point of view, it was right time for real transition to political modernisation. In particular, G.Deleuze compared intellectual speech with an action manifested in resistance⁶. As one of the main manifestations of an intellectual is resistance, the 1968 Parisian uprising were in his opinion a logical step in functioning of the intellectual elite of the society - «intrusion of the Real though they often tried to represent it as transition of power to the Imaginary⁷ actually, it was a breakthrough of the real per se»⁸.

¹ A bright example is outstanding German philosophers, including Martin Heidegger and Ernest Junger, who openly supported the Nazi.

² Sartre J. Speech for the defence of intellectuals [http://sceptis.ru/library/id_2752.html]// research and educational magazine "Скепсис" (Sceptis).

³ Bauman Z. Legislators and Interpreters. Culture as the Ideology of Intellectuals // *Neprikosnovenniy Zapas (NZ)*.2003 No.1(27). p.7.

⁴ In particular, it is perfectly reflected in the works of the American writer Henry Miller. His novels show all moral dissoluteness of the French society in the 1930s.

⁵ Actually, the youth protest area was wider and covered not only Europe but also the USA.

⁶ Deleuze G. Foucault. M., 1998. p.121.

⁷ Here, Deleuze appeals to the famous slogan of 1968 'imagination to power!' According to Sartre, imagination is the most characteristic and important feature of human reality.

⁸ Deleuze G. *Alphabit* (in cooperation with Claire Parnet) http://www.gumer.info/bogoslov_Buks/Philos/delez_alf/index.php

Such intrusion could switch the system to socio-political modernisation. «We have completely changed the French society – it has become freer and obtained an idea of struggle», argued D.Cohn-Bendit, one of the leaders of 'May-68'. To sum it up, the 'revolution without revolutionary future'¹ exerted an undoubtedly strong influence on the subsequent modernisation of the country and was a success in this respect. However, the difficult processes involving the intellectual elite representatives could not but lead to accumulation of a great deal of contradiction in their environment and cause their gradual split. A strong wave of protests of the late 1960s sharply rushed back as early as in the 1970s, when a lot of intellectual elite representatives of the European countries started comprehending the past and looking for new forms of interaction with the state. Many of them considered the 'Parisian spring' and other protest actions as failure and gradually felt disappointed in such methods of struggle. According to I.Wallerstein, it was an important characteristic of the 1970s intellectuals that they split into various groups after the 1968 events. It was a period when the society became less interested in Author intellectuals. Gradually, the latter made a deliberate choice not to exert any direct influence on the society and the authorities and withdrew into their highly specialised environments. After that, the intellectuals as a relatively single group could be forgotten², and the Author-intellectuals gradually ceased to play a key role in interaction between the society and the power. Step by step, public intellectuals came to the foreground. There seems to be two processes resulting in that state of affairs:

1. The civil society institutes, which appeared to be more understandable for the masses than a classical category of intellectuals, started to play an important part. At the same time, the intellectuals' radical position started repelling the maturing youth of the 1968 generation.
2. On the other hand, some general intellectuals started supporting authorities since the 1970s, sometimes directly co-operating with them by helping to make decisions³. As a result, the political elite did not have to dialogue with the society through intellectuals.

Especially interesting is also the intellectual elite's role in Poland as the major region of Central Europe. Unlike France, the key part was played by public intellectuals. By about the 1930s, Poland already had some basic preconditions for the intellectuals to appear. Like Europe, it had two ideological camps - liberals and nationalists - that somehow facilitated appearance of the intellectuals. In this period, it was Polish socialism that Polish intelligency was mostly irritated by. The liberals considered socialist Poland to keep away from Western Europe though 'independent Poland is a part of the Western world'.

The nationalists proceeded from aspiration to regain the lost lands (Western Ukraine) and terminate the Soviet occupation of the country. They treated any reforms as re-modernisation of the country and were similar to the liberals in this respect⁴. As early as in the late 1950s, Poland saw mass actions of workers and students caused by by two factors. First, there was a strong dissident movement actively supported by the working class. In this respect, Poland was closer to the countries of Western Europe as there the intellectuals had a wide potential basis of protest. Second, a strong influence of Catholicism had a humanistic effect on the intellectuals, preventing them from excessive radicalism. In this period, an active role moved to 'commandos' (or 'Michnik's Group'), a group of intellectuals concentrated around the well-known journalist and the dissident Adam Michnik. It included B.Torunchik, Y.Gross S.Blumstein, J.Zazhitskaya, Y.Kofman and many other scientists, professors and writers with an active civic stand⁵. March 1968 saw a new surge of protests in the country. This time, the main force was students. That triggered off the intellectual groups to fight both with the government and among themselves. The arising disorders seriously disturbed Gomułka and the nationalist intellectuals in attendance on him.

¹ Ibid, p.17

² Wallerstein I. Intellectuals in the transition epoch [http://dialogs.org.ua/crossroad_full.php?m_id=326] // analytical portal Диалог.ua.

³ For example: Jacques Attali or Max Gallo became political advisers to François Mitterrand. Others turned into the so-called new philosophers - A.Glucksmann, B-H.Lévy, M.Clavel, who deprecated the revolutionary theory and socialism as such. Thereby, they played on the field of the authorities, which did its best to depict any protest behaviour in an unfavourable light.

⁴ In this case, the term 'Polish liberal' should be considered in the context of the political system of the country socialist in its essence. In this situation, any criticism of the socialist regime was liberal. A lot of intellectuals started with socialist outlook but later became anti-Communists.

⁵ Andrej Frizke 'Commandos Landing Force' [<http://www.fcp.edu.pl/przegląd-prasy/259-->] // Poradnik Historyczny 14-15.06.2008.

It must be said that it was this group of intellectuals that a considerable part of the society sympathised with. Trade Union 'Solidarity' was finally legalised as soon as in 1980 after a number of protests and disorders caused by economic difficulties. The strikers' leader in Gdansk L.Wałęsa and the government signed an agreement stipulating establishment of free trade unions and release of political prisoners. 'Solidarity' leant on liberal intellectuals and Catholic intellectuals,¹ who articulated the requirements of the trade-union movement and supported refusal of socialism and construction of a capitalist system in Poland. After General W.Jaruzelski came to power in 1981, the situation became much worse. Actually, 'Solidarity' was outlawed, and its leaders began to be pursued by the authorities. Despite relative liberalisation in economy, the political regime was seriously toughened, and a lot of members of 'Solidarity' and the Workers' Defence Committee were arrested. When L.Wałęsa and 'Solidarity' came to power, the country immediately turned to economic transformations. Like all other post-Communist countries, Poland was in a difficult economic situation. The country chose settlement of contradictions between the groups of the political and the social elite rather than a social revolution. That allowed avoiding serious problems in socio-political development in the first years of the reforms.

Unlike the Russian society, the Polish society of the post-Communist period is noted for having been successfully prepared both for 'shock therapy' and the transition period by the intellectuals. Why that was not the case with Russia is a separate question. But Poland understood that «the democratic government cannot solve all problems and is valuable for its nature rather than the results of its activity, which are not necessarily better in every respect than those obtained under liberal governance»². That was the contribution that the Polish intellectual elite made at the new stage of modernisation of the country. J.Habermas wrote about the special status of the intellectual in the late XX century and noted that «the constellation fated to become a right place for the contemporary intellectual type appeared as early as in the incubatory period, when viruses of the Great French Revolution were spreading all over Europe»³. In his opinion, an intellectual is a part of the world where the main thing is «the political culture of objection»⁴. An intellectual should not use his/her influence

"obtained by means of words"⁵ to come to power – that is where the basic distinction between the social and the political elite lies. Another point of view is represented by the researcher D.Petras, who thinks that practically, intellectuals do not influence politics – their importance lies in propagation in favour of the regime, analysis of the condition of social and economic reforms, as well as enlightenment of leaders and active members of political parties⁶. Speaking mostly of the left intellectuals, he focuses his attention on two groups: reformists and revolutionaries who only limit themselves to public statements. Actually, this treatment represents an intellectual as a high-precision tool for the state to attain some definite goals.

In the XXI century, intellectuals' activity can be filled with a new content. The global problems that the world community has faced are urging a lot of analysts to propose their solutions where intellectuals will play an important part. J.F.Richard notes that solution of each global problem needs establishing an institute of experts - the so-called 'mobile research networks' – with a scope limited to some particular problematics. They will analyse the world situation and develop possible 'answers' of the whole mankind. These experts should work until they find a general solution. The next stage may involve rating of countries depending on successes of the countries in this or that area. He sees an irrefutable advantage of such a system in direct influence of such research networks on national states and adjustment of the latter's methods of struggle against world problems. In addition, the author suggests establishing a 'Big Twenty'. «There will be 20 experts selected to solve each problem, voices of all countries being properly heard»⁷. Apparently, the attitude to the role of intellectuals in socio-political processes of Europe is rather diverse. It is not surprising as they evoke different reaction to their actions like any contradictory phenomenon.

¹ The group split off after 1956 and started playing an essential part among liberal intellectuals. Its role became especially noticeable after 1978 election of Karol Wojtyła as the Pope later referred to as Jan Paweł II.

² Hermes G. Culture and Democracy. M., Progress, 1994. p.25.

³ Habermas, J. The First to Sense What Matters: What Distinguishes an Intellectual// Neprikosnovenniy Zapas (NZ). – 2006. - №3. p.3.

⁴ Ibid, p. 5

⁵ Ibid, p. 6

⁶ Petras, D. Role of Intellectuals in Public Changes [<http://www.left.ru/7/petras1/24-2phtml>]//analytical portal Лефт.рф.

⁷ J.-F. Rischard. Expecting Apocalypse? [<http://www.nedelya.ru/view/4375>] // Nedelya Data Portal

Jean-Paul Sartre fairly noted that «the intellectual as a product of a disrupted society makes this disrupted society evident because s/he has co-opted its disruption. Therefore, s/he is a historical product»¹. Actually, appearance and development of intellectuals in Europe was a historical phenomenon caused by specificity of development of the region as a whole and the course of its modernisation. Like receptors, they were the first to feel the problems of development of their country and then relayed their understanding to the society as a whole. Though their influence on the recent processes in Europe is not so serious as it used to be, it is still quite considerable. Today it has become obvious that intellectuals play an increasingly global role, the traces of their influence stretching far beyond the boundaries of Europe. That means that their institutionalisation in a single country depends also on the public needs for activity of such a group.

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¹ Sartre J.-P. *Speech for the defence of intellectuals* [http://scepsis.ru/library/id_2752.html]// research and educational magazine "Скепсис" (*Scepsis*).