

[Home](#) > [French Politics](#) > Article

The current members of the European Round Table: A transnational club of economic elites

| Symposium Article | Published: 30 September 2010

| Volume 8, pages 275–293, (2010) [Cite this article](#)[Save article](#)[View saved research >](#)

[French Politics](#)

[Aims and scope →](#)[Submit manuscript →](#)[Audrey Pageaut¹](#) 142 Accesses 11 Citations [Explore all metrics →](#)

Abstract

The European Round Table of Industrialists (ERT) is usually presented by the media and in the literature as one of the most influential economic lobbies at the European level. In order to go beyond this mere observation and to better inform the logics of collective commitment of economic elites in the European political space, this article suggests a detailed sociological analysis of the resources of the current members of the ERT. It appears that this group is not homogeneous, as it brings together economic leaders with various profiles. This suggests that the ERT is not merely a tool of economic pressure, but that it is also a tool for a social elite strategy of distinction. Being an ERT member provides social, political and

symbolic capital with a specific European value. This sociological approach of elites therefore intends to give some clues to reinterpret the power of economic elites in a more socially informed way.

 This is a preview of subscription content, [log in via an institution](#)  to check access.

Access this article

[Log in via an institution](#) 

Subscribe and save

 Springer+

from €37.37 /Month

- Starting from 10 chapters or articles per month
- Access and download chapters and articles from more than 300k books and 2,500 journals
- Cancel anytime

[View plans](#) 

Buy Now

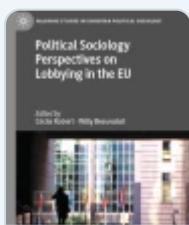
[Buy article PDF 39,95 €](#)

Price includes VAT (Poland)

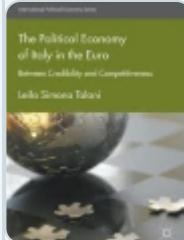
Instant access to the full article PDF.

[Institutional subscriptions](#) 

Similar content being viewed by others



Pressure Group or Social Partner? A Political Sociology of the European Trade Union Confederation



Chapter | © 2025

Consensus and Credibility: Italy and the Process of European Monetary Integration: A Closer Look at...

Chapter | © 2018



The Role of Social Enterprises at European Level

Chapter | © 2017

Explore related subjects

Discover the latest articles, books and news in related subjects, suggested using machine learning.

[Economic Sociology](#)

[EU Politics](#)

[European Politics](#)

[European Economic Law](#)

[European Economics](#)

[European Economic Integration](#)

Notes

1. For a synthesis of the debate, see [Puchala \(1999\)](#).
2. Without opening here this specific debate, it can be underlined that the main problem of the research about a transnational capitalist class (see, for instance, [Sklair, 2001](#)) is that it delivers little evidence about the relations their members *concretely* develop. In addition, another problem of such a concept refers to the idea of a complete emancipation of the economic elites from their national framework. However, the withdrawal of public authorities in the regulation of economy and more generally the globalization do not necessarily imply the end of national modes of organization ([Hall and Soskice, 2001](#)).
3. The results presented here rely particularly on empirical data collected about the current members of the ERT (members in December 2007), using a methodology that consists in collecting biographies and making prosopographical studies in order to apprehend the group studied in a collective and structural perspective. The analysis also relies on the precise

study of some documents produced by the ERT (charters, official reports and so on) and press articles. Moreover, a dozen interviews with current and past members or their associates were undertaken.

4. The population studied here is composed of 46 biographies of ERT members in December 2007.
5. Among the 18 countries, 15 are member states of the European Union (the United Kingdom, Spain, Portugal, France, Germany, Italy, Greece, Finland, Hungary, Sweden, Ireland, Belgium, Netherlands, Austria and Denmark) and three are not (Turkey, Norway and Switzerland).
6. Since the second half of 2008, there is a woman in the ERT group: Güler Sabanç, from Turkey.
7. We use the ranking of the 2000 biggest companies worldwide, established by the magazine *Forbes* and titled 'Forbes Global 2000' for 2007. It takes into account the sales, the benefits, the resources of the firms and the value on the markets.
8. The self-presentation of the organization on its website (<http://www.ert.be/home.aspx>) puts the emphasis on the quality of the members (CEOs or chairmen), the European and multinational dimension of the firms, the sectors of activity, the geographical diversity of the group: 'ERT is an informal forum bringing together around 45 chief executives and chairmen of major multinational companies of European parentage covering a wide range of industrial and technological sectors. Companies of ERT Members are widely situated across Europe'.
9. For details and a discussion on the notion of European enterprise, see [Schröter \(2008\)](#).

10. The biographical data consist of past and current positions and activities.
11. A limitation of our work must be underlined at this stage of the analysis. The collection of the biographical data was conducted through the combination of three main sources of information: national or international biographical databases such as the *Who's Who in France*, *The International Who's Who*, or the *Who's Who in European Business* and professional CVs generally available on the websites of the different firms. The construction of these databases relies on self-declaration. This means that some information can be voluntary hidden and some might be 'massaged' by the people studied here.
12. The 'Bilderberg Club' or the 'Bilderberg conferences' is a space of sociability that gathers, unofficially, more than a hundred members selected among political and economic elites from Europe and North America. It has held annual meetings since the 1950s.
13. For Boltanski, the analysis of the positions of power can be used to measure the social surface area of the members - that is to say to assess the extent and the nature of their social capital - and, at least in part, the extent and the power they have. The social surface area of someone is the part of the social space that one can cover and control occupying successively different positions of power. Therefore, the social surface area depends on the dispersion of the positions in various social areas, on their value and on their number.
14. Data from the last version of the Charter of the ERT.
15. The current members of the Steering Committee are: Jorma Olilla (Nokia), Leif Johansson (Volvo), Peter Sutherland (BP), Jean-Louis Beffa (Saint-Gobain), Gerard Kleisterlee (Philips), Henning Kagerman (SAP), Paolo Scaroni (ENI).

16. Words of an ex-Secretary General of the ERT: Keith Richardson, 'Big business and the European agenda. Reflections on the activities of the European Round Table of Industrialists, 1988-1998', Sussex working paper, no. 35, August 2000.
17. Interview with an ERT official, Brussels, June 2009.
18. Interview with a French ERT member, Paris, April 2009.

References

Banlanya, B., Doherty, A., Hoedeman, O., Ma'anir, A. and Wesselius, E. (2005) Europe Inc. Comment les multinationales construisent l'Europe et l'économie mondiale? Marseille, France: Agone.

[Google Scholar](#)

Bauer, M. and Bertin-Mourot, B. (1996) Vers un modèle européen de dirigeants? Paris: Abacus Editions.

[Google Scholar](#)

Boltanski, L. (1973) L'espace positionnel: multiplicité des positions institutionnelles et habitus de classe. *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 14: 3-26.

[Google Scholar](#)

Bourdieu, P. (1979) *La distinction*. Paris: Editions de Minuit.

[Google Scholar](#)

Bourdieu, P. (1989) *La noblesse d'État. Grandes Écoles et esprit de corps*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit.

[Google Scholar](#)

Bourdieu, P. and de Saint-Martin, M. (1978) Le patronat. *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 20 (1): 3-82.

[Article](#) [Google Scholar](#)

Charle, C. (1987) *Les élites de la République*. Paris: Fayard.

[Google Scholar](#)

Cohen, A. (2007) Constitutionnalistes en quête de Constitution. La Convention dans le champ du pouvoir européen. In: A. Cohen and A. Vauchez (eds.) *Anatomie d'un 'moment constituant' européen. Elites, mobilisations, votes*. Bruxelles, Belgium: Presses de l'Université libre de Bruxelles.

[Google Scholar](#)

Cohen, A., Dezelay, Y. and Marchetti, D. (2007) Esprits d'Etats, Entrepreneurs d'Europe. 'Constructions européennes'. *Actes de la recherches en sciences sociales* 1-2 (Special Issue): 166-167.

Cowles, G.M. (1995) Setting the agenda for a New Europe: The ERT and EC 1992. *Journal of Common Market Studies* 33 (4): 501-526.

[Article](#) [Google Scholar](#)

Daumas, J.-C. (2003) Introduction: à propos du capitalisme familial. In: J.-C. Daumas (ed.) *Le capitalisme familial: logiques et trajectoires*. Actes de la journée d'étude de Besançon du 17 janvier 2002. Besançon, France: Presses Universitaires Franc-Comtoises.

[Google Scholar](#)

Favell, A. and Guiraudon, V. (2009) The sociology of the European Union: An agenda. *European Union Politics* 10 (4): 550–576.

[Article](#) [Google Scholar](#)

Georgakakis, D. (2009) The historical and political sociology of the EU. *French Politics* 7 (3–4): 437–455.

[Article](#) [Google Scholar](#)

Greenwood, J. (2002) Inside the EU Business Associations. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave.

[Book](#) [Google Scholar](#)

Greenwood, J. (2007) Interest Representation in the European Union, 2nd edn. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

[Google Scholar](#)

Haas, E. (1958) The Uniting of Europe. Political, Social and Economic Forces, 1950–1957. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

[Google Scholar](#)

Hall, P.A. and Soskice, D. (eds.) (2001) Varieties of Capitalism: The Institutional Foundations of Comparative Advantage. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

[Book](#) [Google Scholar](#)

Kauppi, N. (2005) Democracy, Social Resources and Political Power in the European Union. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.

[Google Scholar](#)

Lindberg, L. (1963) The Political Dynamics of European Economic Integration. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

[Google Scholar](#)

Martin-Fugier, A. (2004) 'Le Siècle' (1944-2004) Un exemple de sociabilité des élites, Vingtième siècle. Revue d'histoire, n° 81.

Mazey, S. and Richardson, J. (eds.) (1993) Lobbying in the European Community. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

[Google Scholar](#)

Michel, H. (ed.) (2005) Lobbyistes et lobbying de l'UE. Trajectoires, formations et pratiques des représentants d'intérêts. Strasbourg, France: Presses universitaires de Strasbourg.

[Google Scholar](#)

Moravcsik, A. (1998) The Choice for Europe. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

[Google Scholar](#)

Nollert, M. and Fielder, N. (2000) Lobbying for a Europe of big business: The European Round Table of Industrialists. In: V. Bornschier (ed.) State-building in Europe. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 187-209.

[Chapter](#) [Google Scholar](#)

Offerlé, M. (2009) Sociologie des organisations patronales. Paris: La Découverte.

[Google Scholar](#)

Puchala, D.J. (1999) Institutionalism, intergovernmentalism and European

[Article](#) [Google Scholar](#)

Sandholtz, W. and Zysman, J. (1989) 1992: Recasting the European bargain. *World Politics* 42: 95-128.

[Article](#) [Google Scholar](#)

Schröter, H.G. (ed.) (2008) *The European Enterprise. Historical Investigation into a Future Species*. London: Springer.

[Google Scholar](#)

Sklair, L. (2001) *Transnational Capitalist Class*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

[Google Scholar](#)

Van Apeldoorn, B. (2000) Transnational class agency and European governance: The case of the European Round Table of Industrialists. *New Political Economy* 5 (2): 157-181.

[Article](#) [Google Scholar](#)

Wagner, A.-C. (1998) *Les nouvelles élites de la mondialisation*. Paris: PUF.

[Book](#) [Google Scholar](#)

Author information

Authors and Affiliations

University of Strasbourg, GSPE-PRISME, MISHA, 5 Allée du Général Rouvillois, Strasbourg, 67083, Cedex, France

Audrey Pageaut

Rights and permissions

Reprints and permissions

About this article

Cite this article

Pageaut, A. The current members of the European Round Table: A transnational club of economic elites. *Fr Polit* 8, 275–293 (2010). <https://doi.org/10.1057/fp.2010.14>

Published 30 September 2010 Issue date 01 September 2010
DOI <https://doi.org/10.1057/fp.2010.14>

Keywords

economic elites **interest groups** **European Union** **club** **biographies** **political sociology**

Search

Search by keyword or author

For more information, contact the Office of the Vice President for Research and Economic Development at 401-863-2300 or opred@brown.edu.



Navigation

Find a journal

Publish with us

Track your research