

The Management of the Senior Civil Service in Hungary in the International Context

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Abstract

This paper deals with the management of the senior civil service (SCS) in Hungary in an international context, focusing on the reasons and effects of politicization on senior appointees.

The financial crisis of 2008 has had the effect of calling into the question of professional and social status of senior civil service in Europe. Several comparative analyzes prove that a certain convergence can be detected between the European countries. The majority of the states are working on the establishment of a SCS, and at the same time many of them are depriving it of its own institutionalized structure. However, this evolution did not produce a new technocratic model, but in fact it reinforced the political influence. At the senior management level, the Weberian interpretation of bureaucracy based on the principle of the separation of administrative and political roles has been replaced by the notion of a fuzzy border between politicians and bureaucrats.

However, the emergence of politics has been appeared differently in the European countries. While the administrative elites of the Western countries have been shown some stability despite the disappearance of the Weberian universe, in the Eastern countries, the politicization was reinforced and the old "nomenclatura" has been transformed into a new "clientura", producing an almost complete "fusion" of political and administrative roles.

In this context, it is necessary to analyze the legislative status of the Hungarian bureaucratic elite between 1992 and 2021. Such a study could fill a gap because the Hungarian SCS as a subject was mostly part of political studies, and the lawyers and sociologists has not paid sufficient attention to it. It can be explained by the fact that, on the one hand, the evolution of the legal regime has not led to a sui generis status, except for a short period of time, and on the other hand, the data on top managers are difficult to access.

Despite all the difficulties, in this paper we intend, on the one hand, to present the evolution of the "status" of senior civil servants and their management in international comparison and, on the other hand, to draw a portrait of the members of the senior civil service by analyzing their publicly available personal data (distribution by assignment, gender, age group, degree, foreign language knowledge, etc.). Given that one of the main questions of the studies on SCS is to what extent SCS status is different from "common status" of public servants, our analysis will include a comparison of total staff statistics with that of senior civil servants, seeking sociological differences between the two social groups.

Finally, the paper provides country-specific, fact-based argumentation to the theme of politico-administrative relations and identifies that depoliticization intentions of senior civil servants failed, and leadership of public service in Hungary - in line with international trends - became more politicized.

Point for practitioners

The paper provides fact-based data and analysis on the most relevant demographic data of senior civil servants in Hungary, which will be the first analysis of this kind. It will allow practitioners in public administration and public policy to better understand the politico-administrative relations and to elaborate tailor-made proposals for decision-makers regarding the future regulation of senior civil service in Hungary and abroad. Furthermore, it will contribute to the debate on how politicized the senior civil service is with scientific findings and country-wide experiences. These results could also contribute to the design of senior civil service in other countries, especially in Central and Eastern Europe.

Key words

bureaucratic elite, Hungary, leadership, politicization, senior civil service

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1. Introduction

The financial and economic crisis of 2008 has once again drawn attention to the social and professional situation of senior civil service in Europe.³ Several comparative analyzes show that some convergence can be detected between the practices of European countries.⁴ Most countries are working on their own senior civil service systems, and in some of them the status and HR system of senior civil servants is already separate from the general civil service. Although the development did not result in a new technocratic model, political influence among senior officials increased.⁵ At the level of top management, the consistent separation of political and administrative roles has been abolished, and the line between bureaucrats and politicians can be crossed.⁶

At the same time, the increase in political influence has taken place in different ways in European countries. While in Western Europe the Weberian model of the administrative elite shows a degree of stability⁷ until then, in Eastern European countries, politicization intensified and the old nomenclature was transformed into a new clientele system, almost completely merging political and administrative roles.⁸ In post-communist countries, political “shift management” of senior civil service developed as early as the 1990s, during the transition period, as cadres inherited from the communist regime were generally replaced in the absence of political trust, and this practice was maintained by later left-wing and right-wing governments. The introduction of guarantees of depoliticisation was also hindered by public service reforms serving greater flexibility and smaller numbers.⁹

The aim of the study is to analyze the legal status and some social characteristics of the Hungarian administrative elite in this international environment.

The situation of Hungarian senior civil service is usually dealt with in works with a political approach,¹⁰ less legal and sociological analyzes. One reason for this may be that senior civil servants do not have a sui generis legal regulation, they are a special area of general civil service regulation, and reliable data on this category of personnel are not available.

Despite the difficulties, we analyze the development of the legal status and management of Hungarian senior civil servants, using the method of international comparison, as well as "draw" portraits of members of the Hungarian administrative elite and their professional and sociological data (gender, age, place of birth, diploma, etc.).

We are looking for answers to the following questions:

1. To what extent does the development of the legal status and management of Hungarian senior civil service coincide with the common tendencies of the member states of the European Union?
2. What are the professional and social characteristics of a “typical senior civil servant” and do they differ from those of a “typical civil servant”? What is their gender and age composition, and how does this differ from the data for civil servants?

Our research method is the analysis of Hungarian legal regulations, OECD and EU expert studies, as well as relevant literature, as well as the collection and analysis of personal data of public officials published in 2017 and 2021.

2. International environment

2.1 The concept of senior civil service

The concept of senior civil service varies from country to country,¹¹ but it is not uncommon for it not to have a uniform interpretation even within a single country. Thus, in France, for example, the term “haut fonctionnaire” denotes a high social status enjoyed by those who are members of a highly prestigious “corps” while identifying the administrative elite with administrative leaders.¹²

According to the OECD definition, the characteristics of the senior civil service are:

- includes non-political positions at the top level of government;

³ Rouban (2014) p. 637

⁴ Kuperus – Rode (2008); Kuperus – Rode (2016)

⁵ Rouban (2014) p. 637

⁶ Werner – Veit (2010)

⁷ Heyen, Erk Volmar et al. (eds.) (2005), cited by Ágh (2014)

⁸ Naxera, Vladimir (2013) cited by Ágh (2014)

⁹ Meyer-Sahling, (2004)

¹⁰ Gajduschek (2005); Vass (2010); Ványi (2015)

¹¹ Kuperus – Rode (2008) p. 9.

¹² Rouban (2014)

- operate under a legally differentiated, structured and centralized management system;
- its members are appointed to a policy advisory, executive or public service position through a competitive appointment.¹³

However, for comparisons between countries, the OECD has also developed a more flexible indicator than the one above. According to this, the characteristic of the independent senior civil service separated from the general one is:

- the status of senior civil servants is distinguished from that of "general" civil servants;
- operate tools and procedures for the recruitment of talent for senior civil service;
- apply a centrally defined competency profile for senior civil service;
- develop selection, performance management and remuneration tools specifically for senior civil service.¹⁴

The definition emerging from the elements listed is practically in line with the concept used in the European comparative studies already referred to.¹⁵

Among the management levels, the OECD considers D1-D4 managers to be senior civil servants, despite the fact that, according to the ILO's Unified International Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08), positions D3-D4 can be specifically classified as mid-level management categories.¹⁶ The practice of the EU Member States is not uniform either. While positions D1, D2 and D3 are treated by the vast majority of States¹⁷ as senior civil service positions, position D4 is considered to be a senior civil service in only 10 Member States.¹⁸

Not only do the concepts of senior civil service differ from country to country, but so do the names of the positions. Positions D1 are generally referred to as «Secretary General» or «Permanent Secretary», while positions D2 and D3 are referred to as «Directors General» and «Director».¹⁹

2.2 Policy-administrative relationship system

Based on the classical Weberian model, politics decides, while bureaucracy implements the policy decision to which it treats it neutrally.²⁰ The two are clearly separated. However, the traditional model is in transition.

Political expectation that leaders at the central level of government are not only passive observers of change but to respond sensitively to new political priorities. A value-neutral attitude should be replaced by a commitment to value.

The rigid line between politics and administration is disappearing.²¹ Senior civil servants are often involved in making political decisions, while politicians, as experts, demand an increasing say in the implementation of policy decisions and in the management of public institutions.²²

This change will also have an impact on the status rules. Although most countries continue to validate the differences between the two roles and basically base the selection of administrative leaders on merit, some states are more likely to have a hybrid solution, and the terms of appointment include political considerations as well as merit and experience.²³ Based on all this, the policy-administrative relationship is now much more nuanced compared to the Weberian model.

The policy-administration relationship system has also been reshaped by New Public Management (NPM) at both structural and relational levels. As a result, the number of hierarchical levels has decreased. Public policy-making

¹³ OECD (2008) p. 17-18, cited by Kuperus – Rode (2008) p. 9

¹⁴ OECD (2017), p. 148.

¹⁵ Kuperus – Rode (2008). p. 10.; Kuperus – Rode (2016)

¹⁶ Management levels D1-D4 are based on the ILO's International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08). According to this, the D1 leadership position is located directly below the minister or state secretary in the hierarchy. Its holder is an adviser to the Government on administrative matters, oversees the implementation of public policy decisions and, under the supervision of the Minister / State Secretary, ensures the overall management of the organization. D2 is located directly below position D1. It develops, reviews its field of expertise, plans, directs, coordinates, evaluates the organizational units under its control. Defines goals, strategies, programs for subordinate bodies / departments. The D3 position is the level below D2, its responsibilities include the development of work plans, personnel management, budget planning and use. The D4 position is below the D3 level, its holder contributes to strategic and financial planning, establishes and supervises financial processes, controls costs, and ensures the efficient use of resources.OECD (2017), pp. 267-268.

¹⁷ 23, 27, and 22 Member States Kuperus – Rode (2016). p. 16.

¹⁸ Idem

¹⁹ Idem p. 15.

²⁰ Weber (1919)

²¹ Visscher (2004) p. 207

²² Stenmans (2002) cited by Visscher (2004), p. 207

²³ Ketelaar – Manning – Turkisch (2007) p. 15

and implementation are separated. Political actors decide on strategies and available resources, while administrative leaders are responsible for managing resources efficiently and achieving set goals. Tasks, goals, tools, performance indicators are defined by agreements between politicians and senior officials. Thus, NPM reinterpreted the traditional dichotomous (concept-execution) model. It placed more responsibilities on administrative leaders in the areas of institutional management and political implementation, while giving politicians a wider margin of discretion to enforce political priorities.²⁴

Politicians are constantly striving to place as much responsibility on bureaucrats as possible while maintaining their influence in politically sensitive matters.²⁵ In some countries, the transfer of responsibility has become such that the “let the bureaucrats manage” principle has been replaced by “force the bureaucrats to manage!” requirement. In such circumstances, administrative leaders would face performance constraints much more than they would appreciate the freedom of action that comes with autonomy.²⁶

No matter how much the NPM has reinterpreted the relationship between policy and administration, the increase in subordination to policy remains unchanged. However, the strengthening of political influence has not had a uniform effect in European countries. While in Western Europe, despite the weakening of the requirement of neutrality, the administrative elite is characterized by a degree of stability,²⁷ in Eastern European countries, staff changes have become commonplace as political changes have reached higher senior official positions.²⁸ The roots of the booty approach in these countries go back to the 1990s, when cadres inherited from the communist regime were generally replaced in the absence of political trust. Later, this practice was maintained by both left-wing and right-wing governments. In addition, the introduction of guarantees of depoliticisation was hindered by public service reforms serving greater flexibility and smaller numbers.²⁹

In order to exercise its own influence, politicians seek to create a legal environment in which they have the widest possible room for maneuver when appointing or dismissing.

Politicians intervene in the selection of senior civil servants in a number of ways. At the same time, countries’ practices differ in the extent to which they allow room for political deliberation. The politician, e.g. the Minister is free to consider, assist in determining the selection criteria, appoint from a pre-selected 2-3 candidates, or, in justified cases, reject the selected candidate.³⁰

A fixed-term appointment serves to maintain political influence. In the vast majority of EU member states, senior civil servants are appointed for a fixed term in D1 positions on the basis of political confidence.³¹ In some countries, fixed-term appointments are associated with unjustified termination. Fixed-term appointments are for a minimum of three and a maximum of seven years.³² In career systems, upon the expiry of the appointment of the senior civil servant, it is possible for the senior civil servant to reintegrate into the general civil service.³³

Countries are mixed in terms of whether recruiting and selecting senior civil servants is from within or outside the internal staff. The former is more characteristic of career systems, e.g. France, Germany. In some states, both methods are possible, in some cases depending on whether a suitable candidate has been found through internal recruitment.

The degree of political influence is also evidenced by the frequency of exchanges of senior officials. Fluctuation is low in grades D3 and D4, as opposed to higher levels where it is more significant.³⁴

2.3 Development of the senior civil service

In general, we can declare that states are paying more and more attention to senior civil service which is seen as a special circle of civil servants. There are several reasons for this.

On the one hand, the orthodoxy of the NPM has resulted in a decentralized organizational structure in which organizational fragmentation and the self-centered approach has prevented the management of increasingly

²⁴ OECD (1997); Putseys – Hondeghem (2002) cited by Visscher (2004), p. 208

²⁵ Visscher (2004), p. 208

²⁶ Shaw – Richet (2012) p. 122

²⁷ Heyen, Erk Volmar et al. (eds.) (2005), cited by Ágh (2014)

²⁸ Naxera, Vladimir (2013) cited by Ágh (2014)

²⁹ Meyer-Sahling, (2004)

³⁰ Kuperus – Rode (2016) p. 25

³¹ In D1, fixed-term appointments are made in 18 Member States. Kuperus – Rode (2016) p. 30

³² Idem.

³³ Idem.

³⁴ Kuperus – Rode (2016) p. 33

complex problems, be it health, climate change, or the financial crisis. At the same time, the creation of senior civil service positions can break down sectoral constraints,³⁵ as senior civil servants are able to judge sectoral interests from a general government perspective³⁶ and have the competencies needed to take on the greater responsibilities assigned to them.

Decentralization has taken place especially in human resource management. The average value of the OECD indicator showing the degree of decentralization in 2016 was 0.64.³⁷ Few countries (eg the Czech Republic, Spain, Greece, Luxembourg) still belong to the "more centralized" system, while others are characterized by decentralization.³⁸ However, decentralization alone is of no value, as it only provides an opportunity for greater flexibility and efficiency. In fact, it is only an advantage if top managers are competent in human resource management and are able to apply state-of-the-art HRM tools tailored to the individual needs of civil servants.

On the other hand, reforms run the risk of not achieving the set goals in all respects. However, the risk of failure can be reduced by managing change. While organizational and operational transformations require well-defined financial and economic technical knowledge, other skills are needed to manage change. This is especially true for the upper level of governance, where managerial competencies need to be complemented by new types of "leadership" skills.³⁹ Strategic thinking, results orientation, openness to dialogue, etc. In addition, senior officials should be able to mobilize members of the organization towards reform goals based on common values and principles, instead of traditional bureaucratic management tools, while also having the appropriate political sensitivity.⁴⁰

Finally, the formulation and implementation of public policies generally requires international coordination, so senior management must be able to think in an international and European context.

The acquisition of these high-level competencies requires special selection, development techniques, attractive forms of employment and incentives, so countries tend to treat senior civil service as a distinct category within the entire civil service, sometimes with their own special status, training, further training and HRM system. .

While in 2011 the average value of the OECD indicator showing the degree of specialization of HRM practice for senior officials was 0.45 and in 15 states the "more specialized"⁴¹ system of senior officials was typical,⁴² in 2016 the OECD average rose to 0.55 and the system of senior civil service in 20 countries could be classified as "more special".⁴³

Other analyzes support the specialization of senior civil service systems.⁴⁴ According to this, between 2008 and 2015, there was a significant increase in the number of EU Member States in which senior officials have a formally differentiated, special status and, in some cases, centralized staff management. Compared to 2008, 7 new Member States were added to this group. There has also been an increase in the number of Member States where civil servants holding the post of senior civil servant do not have the special status of senior civil servant but are subject to special conditions. During the period already mentioned, the number of these countries increased by 7 new Member States. Developments are therefore in the direction of senior officials acquiring their own legal status, or at least subject to special conditions. Their selection is separate from the general procedure and takes place centrally, with the assistance of an independent government body.⁴⁵

3. Senior Civil Service in Hungary

Despite the fact that according to the OECD's assessment, Hungary is one of the countries where the legal status of the senior civil service and HRM practice differs less from the general civil service, the introduction of the senior civil service started in the 1990s.⁴⁶ There are four stages in the process:

- the 90s;

³⁵ Pollitt – Bouckaert (2004)

³⁶ Shaw – Richet (2012)

³⁷ On a scale of 0 to 1.

³⁸ OCDE (2017) p. 145

³⁹ OECD (2001)

⁴⁰ Huerta Melchor (2008)

⁴¹ We speak of a "rather special" category when the value of the OECD indicator for the country exceeds 0.5.

⁴² OECD (2011) p. 99

⁴³ OECD (2017), p. 149

⁴⁴ Kuperus – Rode (2016)

⁴⁵ Kuperus – Rode (2016) p. 17

⁴⁶ OECD (2017) p. 149

- the period of the Act on the Career Path of Civil Servants, passed in 2001;
- the period of 2006-2010;
- the period after 2010.

In the early 1990s, the government was motivated by the introduction of political neutrality as well as special rules for the status of senior civil servants. In the interests of political neutrality, the status and career of political appointees (political advisers) and civil servants have been separated. The employment of the former was linked to the person of the appointing minister, i.e. with the departure of the minister, the legal relationship of the political advisers also ended. While the appointment of the latter was for a “retirement” career, the change of minister did not affect their employment. The culmination of the careers of civil servants appointed for an indefinite period was the appointment of the Administrative State Secretary. The Administrative State Secretary exercised employer rights against all ministerial civil servants. Thus, at least in theory, the post of Administrative State Secretary embodied political neutrality and the continuity of the civil service. In practice, however, Administrative State Secretaries were also replaced during the change of government.

Under the level of Administrative State Secretary were the Deputy State Secretaries, who were also appointed for an indefinite period, independently of government cycles. The Deputy State Secretaries were also considered senior civil servants.

According to the Hungarian use of the term, the senior civil servants were called "state officials" (állami vezető). The status of state officials on certain issues - e.g. selection, conditions of appointment, termination of employment, remuneration, etc. - derogated from the general civil service rules, while in the remaining matters they were subject to the general civil service rules. Thus, although they did not have a special legal status, in certain respects the rules applicable to them differed from the general provisions for civil servants.

The Deputy Secretaries directed heads of departments as well as heads of units.⁴⁷ These levels of management were not considered by the legislation at all to be positions of senior civil service and were subject to general civil service status.

Position	OECD	Hungary in the 90's
D1	secretary General / permanent secretary	Administrative State Secretary
D2	director général	Deputy State Secretary
D3	director	head of department
D4	head of unit / service	head of unit

The Act on Career Path of Civil Servants, adopted in 2001, has already established the senior civil service status as a sui generis legal status. Special provisions different from the general civil servant rules applied to the selection, conditions of appointment, further training, remuneration and termination of employment of state officials. The law limited the number of state officials to 300. Anyone could apply from the inside, from among the civil servants already appointed, as well as from the outside. The state officials were appointed by the Prime Minister and, in the event of termination of their legal relationship, were placed in the disposal staff for two years, from which they could be reactivated at any time.

The purpose of introducing the status of state officials was to broaden career perspectives and strengthen government coordination. It offered a career opportunity for those who did not want or could not get into a leadership position. The personnel management of the state officials was carried out by a Government Personnel Center set up for this purpose, instead of the ministries. Although the status of state official has been maintained for several cycles of government, these goals have not been achieved. The professional (competence) conditions for filling the positions of state officials were not defined, and HR tools and methods assessing the ability and aptitude were not applied. The selection process was not transparent. The selection was therefore much more about political trust than professional competence. In a short time, the status of state officials became a tool for political client building.

⁴⁷ Occasionally, they replaced head of departments.

Position	OECD	Hungary in 2001
D1	secretary General / permanent secretary	Sui generis senior civil servants whether or not they hold leadership positions
D2	director général	
D3	director	
D4	head of unit / service	

A radical change took place between 2006 and 2010. The posts of Administrative State Secretary, Deputy State Secretary and the sui generis status of state official have been abolished. At the highest level, there were only politically appointed State Secretaries and Junior State Secretaries, who were appointed for the duration of the government's term of office. As a result of the change, not only the senior civil service was abolished, but - with the abolition of the position of Administrative State Secretary - the minister also got the right to appoint civil servants of the ministry.

Position	OECD	Hungary between 2006 and 2010
D1	secretary General / permanent secretary	Abolition of the posts of Administrative State Secretary and Deputy State Secretary and of the sui generis status of senior officials.
D2	director général	
D3	director	
D4	head of unit / service	

In the post-2010 period, the senior civil service was rebuilt, and its current structure was defined in 2018 with the adoption of the Act on Government Administration. Political and professional leadership was separated. Political leadership include the Prime Minister, the Minister and the Secretary of State. They are appointed on the basis of political trust for a definite period of time, without professional conditions. They are free to politicize and have political responsibility for their activities

Professional leadership include the Administrative Secretary of State, the Deputy Secretary of State, the Head and Deputy Head of the Government Headquarters, the Head and Deputy Head of the Central Office, and the Director General of the Territorial Government Office. Their appointment is for an indefinite period, without a separate selection procedure. The condition for their appointment is at least a specialized higher education degree. Their political rights are limited. Their salaries are determined on the basis of discretion within the legal framework, they can be exchanged at any time without giving reasons.

Senior leadership	Selection	Term of office	Restriction of political rights	Renumeration	Dismissal
Political leadership - the Prime Minister - Minister - State Secretary	discretionary powers, no professional condition and a special selection procedure	until the term of office of the Prime Minister	no restrictions	by law	Initiative based on the discretionary power of the Prime Minister
Professional leadership - Administrative State Secretary - Deputy State Secretary - Head and Deputy Head of Government Headquarters, - Head and Deputy Head of	discretionary power, for appointment required at least specialized higher education degree, ⁴⁸ but no selection procedure	appointment for an indefinite period	He/she may be a member of a political party but may not hold office in the party, may not take public appearances in the name and on behalf	By law, the lower and upper limits are set, within which the amount of salary is determined by the employer.	He may be dismissed at any time without justification..

⁴⁸ A person headed by the Minister for Children and Youth may also appoint as a Deputy State Secretary who does not have a specialized tertiary education but is undergoing training to obtain one, provided that the Deputy State Secretary is responsible for youth policy. [Act CXXV.of 2018. Section 224 (1a)]

Government Central Office, - director of a regional government office			of the party, but may be a candidate in parliamentary elections.		
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Senior executives may also be classified as OECD senior officials as follows:

Position	OECD	Hungary after 2010
D1	secretary General / permanent secretary	Administrative State Secretary, Head of Government Headquarters, Deputy Head
D2	director général	Deputy State Secretary, Head of Government Central Office, Deputy Head
D3	director	director of a regional government office
D4	head of unit / service	

After the presentation of the Hungarian civil service, we turn to our research examining the demographic and sociological conditions of the senior civil servants.

4. Research

4.1 Methodology

In our research, we focused exclusively on Administrative State Secretaries and Deputy State Secretaries, as they represent the top positions in civil service careers and they are most in contact with the political leadership of the ministries, so in our opinion the two positions have the strongest impact with politics.

In addition to defining the staff, a critical element of the research, and its greatest difficulty, was obtaining reliable data.⁴⁹ The starting point was the autobiographical data available on the government's official website.⁵⁰ However, in addition to personnel and structural changes, the structure of the government website also changed in October 2020, and the CVs of many senior civil servants are not or not yet available on the new website. Furthermore, contrary to the general practice in Western Europe, there is no unified central register of Hungarian senior civil servants and the curricula vitae of senior civil servants published on the government website also show great variation in structure and content.⁵¹ At the same time, despite all these difficulties, we believe that a fact-based analysis of the demographics of senior civil service is pioneering in Hungary and can make a significant contribution to expanding theoretical and practical knowledge about senior civil servants.

Therefore, in the course of the research, in the case where the CV of the senior civil servant was not available on the government website, we used the data available on the archived version of the government website⁵² or other reliable written source. If the lack of data could not be eliminated, it was indicated separately by indicating the sample size.

In the course of our research, we sought to work with the latest data, so we updated the already completed analyzes as of September 15, 2021.

In analyzing data on civil service, in the absence of a more recent survey, we relied on a 2017 statistical summary.⁵³ Although it is not methodologically appropriate to compare the 2017 and 2021 data and draw reliable conclusions from it, we believe that a comparison of the two databases may be appropriate to identify the main trends.

4.2 Key findings

In the course of our research, we examined the senior civil service of the Hungarian central government bodies, the Administrative State Secretaries belonging to category D1, and the Deputy State Secretaries belonging to

⁴⁹ At this point, we would like to thank the students of our department, Virág Dely and Anna Garab, for their contribution to the data collection.

⁵⁰ Government (2021)

⁵¹ In many cases, it is typical that the CV available on the government website does not include the place of birth or date of birth, nor can it be considered complete in terms of the presentation of professional experience.

⁵² Government (2019)

⁵³ Belügyminisztérium (2017)

category D2. The two categories have a sample size of 124, of which 11 people (9%) are Administrative State Secretaries and 91% are Deputy State Secretaries.

Among the senior civil servants, the number of men in the sample was 93 (75%), while the number of women was 31 (25%). Among Administrative State Secretaries, we find similar proportions in the distribution of 8 people (73%) and 3 people (27%).

At the same time, the headcount figures for the total administration show inverse proportions. 76% of the staff are women and 24% are men.⁵⁴ However, the proportion of women in ministries is lower, but even in these bodies there are twice as many women as subordinate civil servants as Administrative State Secretaries or Deputy State Secretaries. There is a general tendency for the proportion of women in positions with higher pay to gradually decrease. The proportion of women in “more profitable” public administration is 8% lower than in local governments.⁵⁵ The proportion of women is 53% in central government bodies and 63% in regional bodies.⁵⁶ The highest average earnings are achieved in autonomous bodies, where men are already in the majority (49%-51%). The over-representation of women is an international phenomenon. On average in OECD countries, women are slightly over-represented (59.6%) in the public sector, and their share is growing steadily.⁵⁷ The proportion of women in the public sector is generally higher than in the private sector, as education and health have traditionally been considered “feminine professions” internationally. One of the aims of recruitment and selection policy is to eliminate this stereotype and promote more proportionate access for women to other professions.⁵⁸

At the same time, a change in the gender ratio is indicated by the fact that the ratio between women and men is already balanced among the administrative scholarship holders. There are only two percent more women, and even men are in the majority for generations between the ages of 31 and 45. The picture is somewhat nuanced by the fact that scholarship holders are mainly concentrated in the ministries, so the change cannot be generalized yet.

Examining the education of the senior civil servants, it can be stated that all but one of them have a tertiary education (99%). This privilege was made possible by an amendment to the law passed in 2019 in the Ministry for Children and Youth. We have data on a total of 115 people with tertiary qualifications. Based on this, we can say that among the first qualifications, law degrees are in the overwhelming majority. Of the senior civil servants surveyed, 50 (43%) have a law degree. The proportion of lawyers is further strengthened by the large number of law degrees obtained as a second qualification, as an additional 9 (8%) have obtained such degree. In terms of the careers of government officials, the Faculty of Law of Eötvös Loránd University (13 people) and the Faculty of Law of Pázmány Péter Catholic University are outstanding, with 13 in the former and 10 in the latter. A relatively large number of those with a degree in economics in the first place in the senior civil service are represented by 19 (16%). Among the qualifications obtained in the first place, the qualifications of teacher (8 persons), public administration (4 persons), agriculture (4 persons) and political science (3 persons) can also be highlighted. The remaining part is divided between those with humanities, technical, medical and pedagogical qualifications in a percentage of one or two percent. In contrast, other proportions within the entire administration are typical. The largest share is represented by those with a degree in economics (23%), while the second place is shared by those with a degree in law and technology (14%).

It is striking, however, that only a small number of senior civil servants, a total of two, obtained his/her higher education abroad, and the proportion of foreign universities among other higher education courses is also remarkably low. This shows that there is little embeddedness among senior executives gained through international training and a weak ability of the public sector to educate senior civil servants with experience gained at foreign universities.

Almost half of the senior civil servants also worked in the private sector. At the same time, their time in the public sector is particularly low. Nearly half have one or two years of civil service experience, while the other half did not work in the civil service at all prior to his appointment. The length of public service varies from 1 to 7 years. 80% of senior officials speak English as their first language, 12% German, and 3% French. As a second language, 48% speak German, 24% speak French, 13% speak English, and 10% also indicated a third language.

⁵⁴ Belügyminisztérium (2021)

⁵⁵ The proportion of women is 59% in public administration and 67% in local governments. Source: Belügyminisztérium (2021)

⁵⁶ Belügyminisztérium (2021)

⁵⁷ OECD (2019) p. 96

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Reliable data on the age of senior civil servants out of 124 were obtained. Based on this, the youngest chief executive is 24 years old, the oldest is 74, and their average age is 45.5 years. The distribution of senior civil service by age group is illustrated in the figure below:

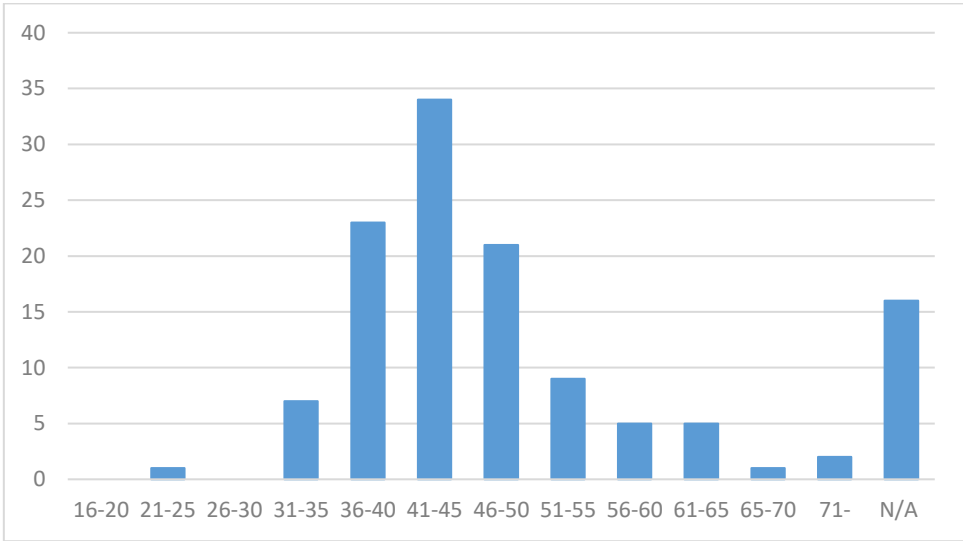


Figure 1. Senior civil service by age group Source: own research

The figure clearly shows that the 36-45 age group is over-represented among Hungarian senior civil service, they make up 52% of the top managers in the sample of 108 people examined. This is also surprising because senior civil service typically come from the most experienced age group and occupy these positions as the pinnacle of their professional careers. The contrast is even stronger when looking at the average age of Administrative State Secretaries (D1). This is 45.27 years, also slightly lower than the average for senior civil service members. At the same time, this figure is significantly shaped by a 68-year-old Administrative State Secretary, who is also considered to be remarkably elderly in the overall sample of senior civil servants. Without it, the average age of Administrative State Secretaries would be only 39 years.

If we look at the age composition of senior civil servants by gender, we find that the age distribution of men and women shows great similarities, with no more senior officials in the over-65 age group due to a special pension rule.

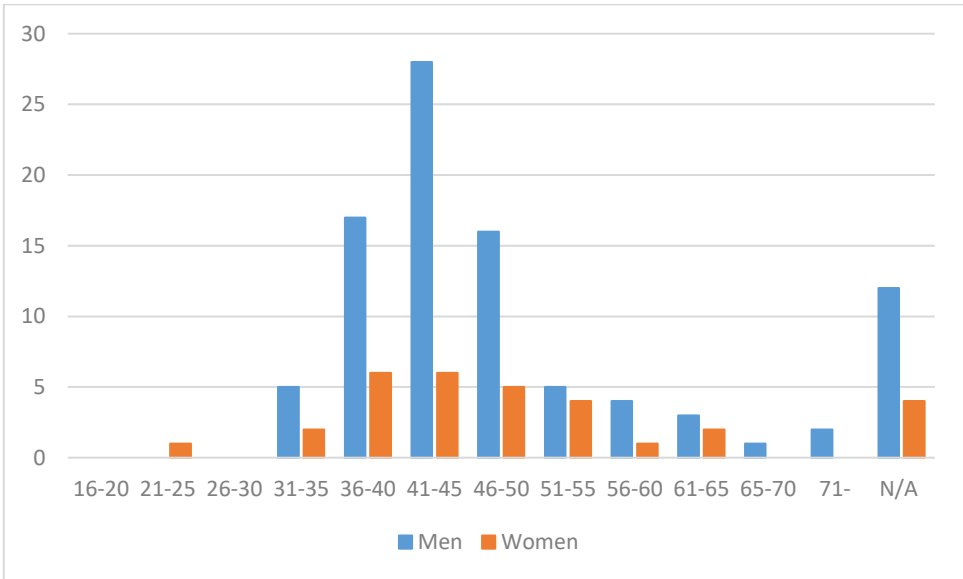


Figure 2. Senior civil service by age group Source: own research

An even more interesting conclusion is reached when comparing the percentage of age groups of senior civil servants with the age groups of civil servants. The total sample size of the 2017 survey was 114,915, so this quantity provides an accurate picture of the age groups in the public sector even without the proportions changing significantly since then.

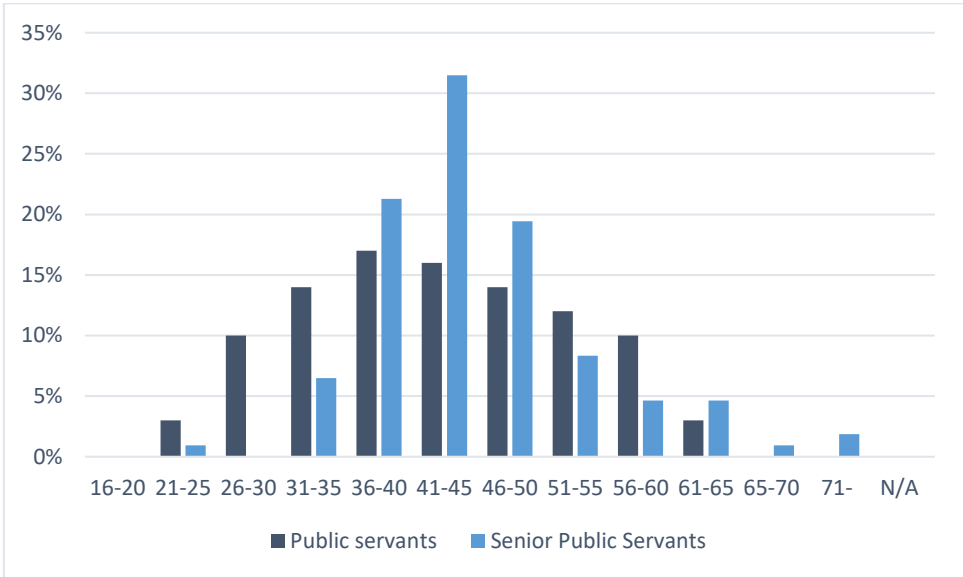


Figure 3. Public Servants and Senior Civil Servants by age group Source: own research

It is clear from the data that the percentage distribution of civil servants, in addition to the predominance of younger age groups, shows a relatively even picture and ends after 65 years due to retirements. Compared to this, the proportion of middle generations (36-50 years old) is outstanding among senior civil servants - contrary to our expectations, however, the proportion of senior civil servants is significantly lower than our expectations compared to the older generations, the over-56s make up only 12% of the sample.

The rejuvenation that took place between 2010 and 2018 is strongly felt in the age distribution of the personnel of the Hungarian public administration. The average age is 42.8 years. So, on average, the total staff is more than 2.5 years younger than the senior civil service. It is also related to rejuvenation that the proportion of people under the age of 35 is significantly higher than the international average (18%) (31% in the case of Hungary). With this result, Hungary ranks third in the ranking of OECD countries.⁵⁹ The proportion of people under 35 in ministries is the highest, at an 11% higher than average. The outstanding proportion is also explained by the Hungarian Public Administration Scholarship Program, which has been announced regularly for years, as the scholarship holders are primarily located at the ministries. At the same time, the proportion of young people under the age of 35 working in local governments is below average. All these data show that not only gender ratios but also age distribution are distorted by differences in disposable income.

Based on the research data, we can say that the typical Hungarian senior civil servant has a university degree in law from the Faculty of Law of Eötvös Loránd University, is in his mid-forties, has English language skills and only a few years of administrative experiences, works in the central government administration (typically a ministry) and holds the position of Deputy State Secretary.

5. Conclusion

In our study, we examined to what extent the development of the legal status and management of Hungarian senior civil service coincides with the common tendencies of the European Union member states, and what are the demographic characteristics of Hungarian senior civil service, what is a “typical senior civil servant”?

The development of the Hungarian system of senior civil service shows that the separation of political and administrative positions could not be stabilized, the rules of the status of senior civil servants are not suitable to prevent the positions of senior civil service from being part of the political loot. All this happened despite the

⁵⁹ OECD (2017)

intention to separate political and administrative (professional) positions since the change of regime. The means of this were to make the positions of Administrative and Deputy State Secretaries part of the careers of civil servants. At the same time, the regulation of the status of Administrative and Deputy State Secretaries contains several special provisions compared to the status of civil servants, but nevertheless they did not create an independent, “senior civil service” status. This means that, in terms of status, Administrative and Deputy State Secretaries are government officials, but are subject to special provisions on certain issues. An exception to this was a short period when the status of state official was created (in 2001), but was later abolished due to its politicization. Based on all this, Hungarian development less follows the international trend, the essence of which is that countries are increasingly distinguishing the status of senior civil servants from the status of “general” civil servants, applying special rules and procedures for the selection, remuneration and performance evaluation of senior civil servants.

The demographic data we examined among Hungarian senior civil servants support that the proportion of men is overrepresented among senior civil servants. This is particularly important in light of the fact that the vast majority of women in the entire administration work. At the same time, the proportion of women in jobs that are more responsible and therefore more financially valued is declining. Senior civil servants are typically 36-50 years old. This figure, but especially the fact that the average age of D1 Administrative State Secretary, is very young, only 45 years, suggests that someone with less experience can typically be a senior civil servant. The relegation of professional experience to the background is also supported by the fact that only almost half of the senior civil service have one or two years of public service experience. The longest professional experience is 7 years. At the same time, it should also be seen that the average age in the entire public administration has been low in recent years, so even this may be affected by the emergence of younger age groups in top management positions.

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