

‘We are all friends here.’ Politico-administrative relations in Moldova – between patronage, political control, nepotism and state capture

Marchevska Denitsa

Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Public Management Institute, Leuven, Belgium

Abstract: Scholarship on the nature and dynamics of politico-administrative relations has been prolific (Verheijen 2001; Connaughton, Sootla, and Peters 2008; Hustedt and Salomonsen 2017; Shaw and Eichbaum 2018) but empirically it has largely overlooked CEE and post-Soviet countries. To remedy this, the aim of the paper is to unpack the ways in which those dynamics play out in Moldova’s executive triangle. More specifically, the goal is to examine how Moldova’s patronal legacies (Magyar and Madlovics 2020), propensity for oligarchic state capture (Marandici 2021) and highly personalistic party system (Crowther 2023) have affected the interactions between senior officials and political appointees. It will zoom in on the ways in which formal and informal practices have underpinned and facilitated the pervasive politicisation of the Moldovan public sector.

To this end, the paper will address the following research questions:

- Who advises Moldova’s ministers, how are they recruited and what is the institutional set up for their operation?
- What role and functions do advisors perform in the policy making and governing process in Moldova and how do those differ from the functions performed by other senior officials?
- How do those dynamics and functions vary (if at all) across sectors, governments, policy domains and individual ministers and what explains such variation?

In order to do answer the research questions, the paper will utilise a combination of documentary data, biographical data on the career background, recruitment and dismissal of senior officials as well as qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews with (current and former) civil servants, ministerial advisors and other policy experts.

The paper represents a contribution to the workshop as it provides insights into the nature of politico-administrative relations and the role and functions of senior officials in a political system which has largely remained absent from the literature to date. As such, it allows not only for the broadening of current scholarship’s empirical basis, but also for gaining a deeper understanding of the ways in which high levels of corruption, tendency towards the personalisation of the political and party system, significant donor involvement and low administrative capacity, which are characteristic for Moldova (Marchevska and Steen 2022), affect those dynamics. In doing so, the paper addresses a number of the workshop’s core topics, including relating to national specificities in politico-administrative relations, patterns of politicisation and their effects.