

Elite Turnover and Political Careers in the Top Executive: A Comparative Examination of Practices in Moldova and Ukraine

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Abstract: Scholarship on the nature and dynamics of politico-administrative relations has been prolific (e.g. Verheijen 2001; Connaughton, Sootla, and Peters 2008; Hustedt and Salomonsen 2017; Shaw and Eichbaum 2018). A common theme running through it has been the study of top political appointees within the executive branch, whose appointment is commonly seen as a proxy for the nature and operation of the political and administrative systems in the country (e.g. Bach 2020, Meyer-Sahling and Morgan-Collins 2021, Lopes and Vieira 2023, Demirelli and Aydin 2024). This empirical research agenda, however, has largely overlooked post-Soviet countries, which remain largely absent from those discussions. This is regrettable as insights into the logic and patterns of top political appointments in such countries can offer valuable insights into the impact of regional governance specificities, including high political instability, party system volatility (Kitschelt 2015) and personalistic patterns of party development (Magyar and Madlovich 2020), on politico-administrative relations.

The aim of this paper is to address this gap by providing a first insight into the patterns of top political appointment within central executive ministries in Moldova and Ukraine. To this end, it will zoom in on the career profiles of top political appointees as well as turnover dynamics in the period between 2010 – 2024 in both countries. To address these research objectives, the paper will utilize documentary data on recruitment and dismissal as well as biographical data on the career backgrounds of appointees. The study represents a contribution to the workshop as it speaks to several of its central themes, including its interest in longitudinal trends in recruitment within the top executive and comparative analysis of politico-administrative processes.