

Populists' Initial Steps in Transforming Patronage Bureaucracy

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Abstract: The study of political and ministerial advisers has seen significant advancements in recent years, shedding light on their crucial roles within government structures. However, a notable gap exists in our understanding of advisers to technocratic ministers—specifically, their career profiles and the multifaceted roles they undertake. This research article addresses this gap by focusing on the Ódor technocratic government, appointed by President Z. Čaputová in March 2023, following the collapse of the previous three-party minority cabinet.

Specifically, we look at the type of expertise (policy, political, PR & media) the ministerial advisers possess and how their roles evolve in interactions with the civil servants and technocratic ministers (many of whom held senior civil service positions immediately before becoming ministers).

Our primary objective is to scrutinize the career profiles of ministerial advisers. We aim to uncover how their roles (policy, political, PR & media) evolve and adapt through interactions with both civil servants and technocratic ministers, many of whom previously occupied senior positions in the civil service. This inquiry takes on added significance in light of Slovakia's record of a highly politicized (patronage-based) top civil service, marked by frequent replacements of senior civil servants during government transitions. Consequently, it is crucial to explore how ministerial advisers navigate the complex terrain between politicized civil servants and technocratic ministers in the Ódor government. To achieve these objectives, our research employs semi-structured interviews as the principal method. These interviews will involve technocratic ministers, civil servants, and ministerial advisers, providing a holistic and nuanced perspective on the dynamics and challenges inherent in their interactions.