

Politicization of top civil servants in Hungary. Political governance and impact of populism

Vanyi Eva

Ludovika University of Public Service , Faculty of Public Governance and International Studies, Budapest, Hungary

Abstract: Politicisation in the top bureaucracy is not a new topic in political science and public administration and has been studied from different aspects for decades. The politicisation of public administration has also occurred in Western and Eastern European countries, as party patronage, as a common phenomenon of modern party politics, plays an important role in the distribution of public offices and the control of the work of the state through party patronage positions. In Hungary, the politicisation of bureaucrats in ministries began in the 1990s and continues to this day. However, since the beginning of the millennium, new trends have emerged in politics that have had an impact on the composition of the Hungarian civil service.

The aim of this paper is to present that the deeper politicisation of the top bureaucracy, which started in the 2nd Gyurcsány government, in connection with the trend of political governance and the post-2010 populist government, could deepen the politicisation in the 2010s and 2020s. The paper examines the composition of Hungarian civil servants in different governments between 2006 and 2022, including the impact of political governance and populism on the bureaucratic elite. Their socio-economic status, career path to executive leadership positions and professional background will be examined to answer the research question: whether political governance or populism caused the highly politicised civil service system in Hungary.

The results come from a database containing socio-demographic and career data on all members of Hungarian cabinets, including political and bureaucratic leaders, from 1990 to 2022. The database is suitable for comparing cabinets over a long period of time.