Weberian or highly politicized public administration? A snapshot of the politicization of Hungarian public administration

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Abstract: In recent years, the issue of the politicisation of public administration has re-emerged in political science, as numerous country studies have highlighted the politicisation of public administration, challenging the classic Weberian expectation of bureaucratic neutrality (Meyer-Sahling, 2008; Dahlström, 2009; Bach et al., 2018).

This phenomenon underpins the formation of the international research group COREX: COMPARATIVE RESEARCH ON THE EXECUTIVE TRIANGLE, which aims to examine the relationship between public administration and politics through comparative and country-specific case studies based on a systematically collected and coded large-scale database. The main objective of the research is to present an overview of governments, sociodemographic characteristics, and the career trajectories of the executive triangle — politicians, bureaucrats and political advisors — at a fixed point in time (1 July 2024), based on data collected from multiple countries.

This study presents the Hungarian data from the COREX WG-2 database, focusing on career paths. It addresses the following questions: who are the members of the executive triangle; what characterises their recruitment; and what can be learnt about the politicisation of Hungarian public administration from the analysis of their career paths? Importantly, this study is the first to provide systemic data on Hungarian political advisors, a group previously unexamined in existing research.

Preliminary results suggest that, while Hungarian public administration exhibits politicisation, the careers of top civil servants are more closely associated with public office than with political parties. High-ranking ministry officials are typically recruited from within the public sector; however, many began their careers after 2010, indicating that political loyalty may also influence appointments.