



**PhD Program in
Political Science**

Ph.D. THESIS

Éva Ványi

The Hungarian government elite between 1990 and 2010

A study of career paths in the government

Abstract

Supervisor:

Gabriella Ilonszki, DSc

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1. The subject and questions of the study

A government that is responsible for the implementation of political decisions, legislations and decrees is a decisive element of the political institution structure. The international and Hungarian political science literature has paid great attention to the operation of a government as a decision-making body, to its process of decision-making, and its changing role and position in the political structure. However, the study of who exercises governmental decision-making, who the members of the cabinet are, where they come from and where they are going did not appear in political sciences until the 1970s. The study of the Hungarian governmental elite is still “young”: however, several papers have dealt with the questions of a government as an institution since the change of the regime (Müller [1991, 2008], Sárközy [2012]), the changes in its constitutional and legal situation (Sári [2005]), how its institutional structure came to existence and how it has changed (Sárközy [1996, 1999, 2002, 2005, 2007], Szilvásy [1994, 1998, 2007]), and governmental decision-making (Pesti [2000, 2006]) and other topics related to the subject. But the questions: who the individuals are that form the government, and how they get into that position have gained relatively little coverage so far.

The aim of the present paper is to give a general picture of the governmental elite after the change of the regime, who have been in governmental positions in the past two decades, what sociological-demographical background they possess, what political and/or professional career path they followed before getting into governmental positions and where they are going after they lose those posts.

1.1 The analytical presentation of the government elite

The aim of the descriptive analysis of the governmental elite is to demonstrate the process of change and the emergence of the elite through the analysis of empirical data collected over a relatively long period of time: twenty years. This study based upon an independent database focusing on members of the governing elite aims to reflect on the studies lead by Iván Szelényi that were started in the early 1990s over several post-communist countries in Eastern Europe with regard to the *elite-circulation* and *elite-reproduction* in these states (Szelényi [1994], Szelényi-Szelényi [1995]). The basic theoretical question is: what happens during the change of the regime to members of the former elite, and what the new

elite is like: whether in the process of *elite-circulation* the majority of the former elite get out of power, and the whole elite transforms fundamentally, or an *elite-reproduction* process takes place and members of the former elite transfer their influential potential into the new regime. Seemingly, in several countries many members of the former political class (nomenclature) were able to transfer their powers or influential potential without serious problems into the new democratic establishment. Although their political space became smaller, they could convert their political capital into economic capital and positions and they thus remained influential. In 1993-1994, Iván Szelényi and his colleagues carried out a study based upon empirical data to gain an insight to the question in the new democracies of Eastern Europe. According to the survey carried out in six countries¹, during the change of regime a considerable change in the political elite took place in Hungary. Szelényi describes the processes of the first years as “dysfunctional quick elite-change” (Szelényi [1994] p. 43.) in which the leaders of political life tried to turn a new page for the new regime, and tried to find people without considerable party-state past to be appointed to important offices. In many cases, however, it meant that the new leaders lacked the necessary expertise; therefore the new administrative, economic and cultural sphere could not operate efficiently enough. He supposed that this quick elite-change was one of the reasons that initiated the new circulation process at the general elections in 1994.

The author of this paper attempts to determine whether that major elite-change published after the change of the regime applies to the governing elite as well, and whether the selection of the elite shows any circular nature: are elite-changes followed by returns, and what the implications of these processes are on the political system.

1.2 The study of the party-state continuity

This paper undertakes more than the description of the governing elite after the change of the regime: that is the examination of the party-state nomenclature past of the governing elite. It is common knowledge that after the change of regime, the Hungarian political elite could not normalise their relations with the former cadres of the party-state. The implications of this are still present today; a public debate has re-started recently in connection to the introduction of a “lustration” bill. However, political science has not yet examined the topic

¹ Russia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Bulgaria

thoroughly. In the 1990s a debate started between András Körösényi and Ferenc Gázsó how the nomenclature system became a political fault line (Körösényi [1996, 1997], Gázsó [1996, 1997]), but the party-state past has not yet been scientifically evaluated.

The analysis of the composition of the elite of the party-state and their cadre-competence lists (Szakadát [1992], T. Varga-Szakadát [1992]) has been started in history papers (Huszár [2005], Kiss [2005]). However, we know relatively little about the continuity or fluctuation of the political, and more specifically the governing elite after the change of the regime. Since the topic is important and present, it is worth starting these studies in the segment of governing elite after the change of regime. Based on the gathered empirical data, we could draw a more detailed picture than the usual statement that “they preserved their positions”. The aim of this study is to draw a clearer picture, and to answer the question whether the re-appearance of members of the old elite in leading positions of the new system stabilises or de-stabilises the political system, and specifically the situation of the government.

The study of the nomenclature past of the political class will also enable us to follow the process of elite-circulation, elite-reproduction in the governmental segment by comparing different government cycles. Based upon the above mentioned argument, a new question arises: whether the elite-reproduction theory could be completed with the notion of *late elite-reproduction*, that is, if we can support the idea that although directly after the change of the regime not too many members of the former elite made their ways to the new political and specifically governing elite, after a short consolidation period in governmental offices, they could have decisive influence on political decision-making?

1.3 The political embeddedness of the governing elite

Another area of study is to examine the politically embedded nature of ministers and secretaries of state, and thus the explanation of the appearance of experts and specialists in the government. Governmental decision-making is a political act; as a result, those who are given positions in a given cabinet also act in a political field. The literature draws attention to the fact that governmental work requires not only political but specific professional knowledge as well (Dowding-Dumont [2009] p. 5.), a minister leading a cabinet is supposed to be the specialist of his field, a good manager and a good politician at the same time (Blondel [1991] p. 7.).

After reviewing the list of members of cabinets after the change of the regime, it becomes apparent that it was not only politicians who fulfilled governing positions over the past 20 years. To a smaller or greater extent, each cabinet included ministers who were appointed not because of their political career, but owing to their professional past and achievements in the private sector. This tendency is obviously not a Hungarian speciality, the studies of expert appointments have been a central question of the study of the governing elites from the beginning (Blondel [1985], Blondel-Thiébaud [1991], Dowding-Dumont [2009]). This paper attempts to reveal the fluctuation of non-politician ministers and secretaries of state and their functions in the government, what justified their invitation to the government, how they contribute to the quality of the operation of the government, and last but not least, what political structure consequences there are and can possibly be for involving experts in the political decision making process. Apart from this, a question arises: can one differentiate among the governing elite a separate politician and a different expert group, and if so, based upon what criteria?

Alongside with the examination of experts and political problems, another question arises: the politically defined nature of professional leaders such as administrative undersecretaries, but in a reverse sense as in case of ministers and secretaries of state. According to the Hungarian legal regulations until 2006, and after 2010 again, administrative undersecretaries are professional leaders of their ministries and by law they are not considered politicians but lead the apparatus of their departments as administrative experts. Contrary to the principles, however, the governmental role of administrative undersecretaries cannot be clearly separated from politics. The role they play in the governmental decision-making process, the fact that practically it is the Administrative Undersecretaries' Meeting that decides on the agenda of governmental sessions (except for the period between 2006 and 2010), has put them in a special situation. By law, they are neutral administrative officials, but by their decision-making position, they cannot possibly avoid getting involved in political decision-making. This dual function of administrative undersecretaries has had its consequences on the practice of their nomination: individual governments have always appointed new professional leaders to posts that are supposed to be independent from government changes and are meant to support professional continuity. Seemingly, the system has been imbued with politics (Lőrincz [1997], [2000 a,b], Meyer-Sahling [2008], Szente [1999]). During my studies I examined this phenomenon as well, primarily the question of administrative undersecretaries as professional leaders. The data processed from the biographies of administrative undersecretaries show that a large proportion of those in

positions have some administrative experience, that is to say, they are not complete outsiders as leaders. Apart from this, it is a fact that at government changes, these leaders have been largely replaced, so they are real actors of the political field. However, this does not necessarily mean that experts loyal to political directions and parties, but without administrative experience are appointed as professional leaders.

1.4 The fluctuation of the governing elite

To analyze the career-path of the ministerial elite, it is indispensable to examine how the members of the elite moved between individual positions and governments. This analysis points out how open or closed this elite segment is, whether we can identify a distinct governing elite group inside the political elite, and if so, what characteristics this group possesses. To answer these questions, the nature of the fluctuation of governing officials has to be determined; which is more characteristic: moving inside a government or between governments. It also has to be determined who have had what positions in how many governments, and what other aspects have played a role in fulfilling these government posts, and whether there is a specifically Hungarian governmental career-path.

1.5 The post-career paths of the governing elite

The analyses of post-career paths of members of the elite is an integral part of the ministerial career, which shows what inspiration they can draw from having served in governing positions. A potential option is to continue a career in politics or start one in case of those who arrived in governing from the private sector. To gain insight into post-career paths, the outgoing positions and long-term career posts are analyzed. The data thus allows us to study the possibilities of a career in the government not only from a direct point of view, but also from the experiences of a long term career.

2. Applied methodology

2.1 Definition of the governing elite

In the theoretical literature there is no universally accepted definition of who belong to the elite. The notion of the elite can vary according to the purpose of the given paper (Putnam [1976] p. 14.). Based upon this, my interpretation is that political officials, members of law-making and representative bodies, and government officials belong to the elite, who exercise their powers through being elected or appointed, and who have a decisive influence on the political decisions of a state.

The governing elite is normally defined as the prime minister and the minister, admitting that others may also be in the focus of studies. The expressions “ministers” and “members of the government” do not necessarily have the same meaning, the latter word has a broader meaning including leaders under the ministerial level (Blondel [1985] p. 8.): secretaries of state, and the teams that support the ministers’ day-to-day work (Dogan [1989] p. 4.).

Based upon the Hungarian constitutional regulations, the notion of “member of the government” unambiguously means the prime minister and ministers; however, in this paper I have broadened the meaning of the governing elite including political secretaries of state and administrative undersecretaries playing a major role in governmental decision-making. Based upon legal regulations, until the introduction of the 2006 bill about the re-structuring of government it is worth examining the prime minister, ministers, political secretaries of state, and administrative undersecretaries, between 2006 and 2010 this applies to government members, secretaries of state and professional secretaries. Based upon the 1997 *LXXIX.* bill on *The status and responsibilities of members of the government and secretaries of state*² and the 2006 *LVII* bill on *The status of members of the government and secretaries of state*³ are those who fill in the above mentioned positions form the body of governmental decision-makers. But study did not cover the deputy secretaries of state, and, after 2006, the professional secretaries of state due to lack of data in this field.

² http://www.complex.hu/kzldat/t9700079.htm/t9700079_5.htm

³ <http://www.complex.hu/kzldat/t0600057.htm/t0600057.htm>

Based upon the legal definition, the Hungarian systems considers political and administrative secretaries of state as part of the government, for this reason it is justified to involve these positions and those who occupy them in the scope of study; and although administrative undersecretaries are professional leaders by definition, their role in governmental decision making, and the political nature of their status outlined above also strengthened the need to analyze their career-paths.

2.2 The definition of government used in this paper

According to the Hungarian constitutional regulations, the government is formed when the ministers are appointed, its mandate is valid until the next general elections or until the mandate of the prime minister expires⁴. In studies in political sciences concerning the field of governance based upon internationally accepted standards, the definition of the authority of a government is somewhat different, for this reason government cycles have been separated when carrying out this study. According to the literature a new government is set up (Müller-Strom [2000] p. 12.; Woldendorp et al. [2000] p. 10.):

- when a new government is elected;
- when the person of the prime minister changes;
- when the party-composition of a government changes.

According to this, between May, 1990 and May 2010, the data of members of nine governments were entered in the database.

2.3 Database containing empiric data

Under the framework of The Elite Research Center of the Institute of Political Sciences at the Budapest Corvinus University a database was created that includes the most comprehensive data about the members of the Hungarian governing elite in a long historical time span: from the mid-19th century until these days. This database renders the historical

⁴ 1949. XX. Bill: The Constitution of the Republic of Hungary 33. § (5) and 33/A §; The Basic Law of Hungary article 16. (8) and article 20 (1).

description of the prevailing governing elite, and the detailed analyses of their relations possible (*Hungarian Ministerial Database*).

The data of the governing elite that were recorded can be deemed relevant from historical, sociological and political point of view:

- gender;
- age;
- education, its type and orientation;
- family data (father's profession, the political past of the family)
- position filled in;
- place of appointment
- time in office
- occupation before appointment;
- political party connections;
- political past;
- extra-political activities.

The data were recorded in a SPSS database, which allowed the management of several hundred characteristics and their analysis from various points of view. In the database created within the framework of The Elite Research Center the data of prime ministers, ministers, and political and administrative secretaries of state were recorded.

For the ministerial elite after the change of the regime I created an SPSS-based database, which includes some supplementary information. On the one hand, it contains the data of deputy secretaries until 2006, and on the other hand, the professional experience prior to their the appointment was also recorded, along with their positions in the party-state cadre system and whether they belonged to the MSZMP⁵ or KISZ⁶. During the analysis both databases were used.

The sources of biographical and career data were fundamentally the officials' almanacs in case of governments between 1990 and 2006 (Dr. Kajdi-Dr. Marinovich- Dr. Müller [1994], Dr. Kiss-Tóth-Dr. Müller- Dr. Lóránt [1998], Ughy [2006], Dr. Kovács [én]). In case of governments that did not have officials' almanacs, we used the ministers' biographies in

⁵ Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party

⁶ Communist Youth Association

the volume called Hungarian governments 1848-2004 (Bölöny-Hubai [2004]) as well as publicly available biographies on the internet. The database containing empirical data makes it possible to analyze the data widespread. Individual governments can be analyzed one by one, but it is also possible to make comprehensive searches and thus making comparative statements.

3. The results of the thesis

This dissertation aims to create a comprehensive picture of the members of the Hungarian governmental elite after the change of the regime within the framework of a political analysis. The presentation of the socio-demographical characteristics of members of the elite showed the embedded and closed nature of this group. The number of available positions in a political system is always limited; the actual number depends on several characteristics of the actual political institutional system. This thesis basically tries to draw a profile of the elite after the change of the regime along three fundamental questions: who the members of the elite are; what socio-demographical characteristics they possess; and where they come from and where they are going.

The analysis of their socio-demographic features answer the “who are they?” question aiming at their sociological embeddedness, and governmental positions are open to member of what sociological background. The research has shown that the governing elite, similarly to the parliamentary elite (Ilonszki [2005, 2009]) represents a relatively narrow group of society. The vast majority of the governing elite are males with secondary or higher education. The closed nature of the elite group is strengthened by the sheer number of those filling governmental positions: over nine governmental periods only 333 were given leading ministerial appointments, nearly half of them more than once. The data show that those in governmental offices form a special group inside the political elite. The high number of returning to offices shows that acquired governmental competences and experience serve as a good entry to occupy offices in future governments.

The question “where do they come from?” was put into a broader theoretical context by testing the elite-circulation and elite-reproduction theories that were articulated at the change of the regime. The question was analyzed in two dimensions: what positions the elite occupied in the party-state, and the analysis of career before they entered governmental

offices, trying to seek answer to the question according to what characteristics are government officials selected.

The research aimed at the party-state nomenclature past of members of the elite showed that parliamentary and government elite did not move together as far as elite-change is concerned. At the time of the change of the regime, during the first two government periods the political and professional positions of the government showed two different patterns: in the group of political leaders there was almost complete elite change; however for professional officials, many were appointed who had occupied some nomenclature positions prior to 1990. In this sphere, in the parliamentary elite and the political leaders of the government elite change was not typical. However, the elite-change and elite-circulation strategies of the first governmental periods did not become permanent later: in varying numbers, members of the communist nomenclature were appointed to certain positions. It is visible that right-wing governments tend to appoint fewer members of the previous nomenclature, and characteristically they had not had high-level offices before the change of the regime. In case of left-wing governments, the proportion of members of the old nomenclature is higher, however, the composition is not homogeneous. Statistically speaking, it was the Horn-government that contained the highest number of officials who had played important roles in the party-state period, however their recruitment scope was more diffuse than those of later socialist governments. The one-time party leaders could make their way into the Horn-government in fewer numbers than after 2002. This change had political reasons: Gyula Horn, who was elected prime minister in 1994, in the second parliamentary period after the change of the regime, in coalition with the SZDSZ⁷, did not have much room to decide in this respect if he wanted to avoid the appearance that the old system was returning. So characteristically, those who came from the previous executive level were appointed after the change of the regime. In the period after 2002, however, although the appointment of one-time party-state elite members showed a declining tendency, former MSZMP and KISZ leaders appeared in the governments in great numbers; apparently the political debate then was less intense in society in this respect. Putting the question of the party-state past into a 20-year time period, it seems that the presence of one-time members of the former nomenclature in the government did not become a destabilizing factor. Even the most critical point, the revelation of the agent past of prime minister Péter Medgyessy, did not cause a big enough commotion to create cabinet crisis. This shows that by the early 2000s tolerance with the

⁷ Federation of Free Democrats, a liberal party

prominent members of the former elite had become part of our political culture, even cases of great importance and moral content could not overwrite this.

To sum up, on the governmental level, the data of the former nomenclature shows a dual picture: on the one hand, on the level of political leaders the early elite-change process turned into an elite-reproduction process in case of socialist governments. Even the rightist governments could not carry out complete elite change, but the proportion of nomenclature members in the new governing elite was considerably smaller than in left-wing governments; characteristically they were appointed to professional leading positions; their recruitment base was mainly administrative and other outside the political scope.

The research of professional career-path in the appointment practice of various governments aimed to shed light on the background of the politician and expert appointment practice trying to find an explanation for the governmental role of ministers and political secretaries of state who had followed a non-political career-path. Apart from the first two governmental periods, in which political experience was not relevant due to the lack of political career prior to the change of the regime, in the governments next to the professional politicians, non-political and expert ministers and secretaries of state started to appear. A question that arises is that why non-politicians enter the political arena, the most important decision-making center, what role they play in governance, what extra value justifies their presence among governmental officials. The ground of non-politician experts in governments is undoubtedly the post of a minister. The political secretaries of state seem to have been politically embedded, professionals who had pursued that career. There were a few exemptions in every government, especially after 1998, when legislation allowed more than one political secretaries of state to be appointed in a ministry to carry out a specific task.

Among the ministers, also after 1998, as the governmental politics started to become more and more prime minister-centered, a great number of non-politician ministers appeared, although they never became dominant, not even in case of the Bajnai-government labeled “expert cabinet”. So the professional ministers do not seem to shape the political character of the government, but they strengthen their professional profile. Regardless of which government, expert ministers were mainly appointed to departments that are most important from an economic point of view: economics and finance. Beyond implementation of the economic program outlined in the government program, these expert ministers normally expand the prime ministers political room to realize his plans. A program supported by professional arguments, created by a professionally acknowledged expert can have greater chances when confronting other political groups. However, what is an advantage for the prime

minister, might become a disadvantage for the expert minister at a certain point: non-politician ministers do not have much room to act in the government while it is in the interest of the prime minister and/or the government and broader political aspects. An expert minister does not have a political background, is not supported by a party, or fraction, and his actions are not motivated by the logic of “being re-elected or not”. This explains why expert ministers normally do not occupy their office for the whole governmental period, after they step down, they are usually replaced by politician ministers (Ilonszki-Ványi [2011]).

The question of professionalism is reflected from a different approach in the political nature of the body of administrative undersecretaries. Despite the principles that they wanted to realize at the change of the regime, and legislation, the continuity of appointing expert administrative officials did not become accepted practice. Essentially, every new government completely changed the highest professional leading level as well. For this reason, the situation of the administrative undersecretaries is undoubtedly political. However, the question arises whether the change of officials at government changes means that these appointments are made on a political basis. The study of the recruitment background of elite members showed that the vast majority of administrative undersecretaries came from the public sector, and the analysis of the previous career also proved that most of them had relevant public office experience, mainly in ministries before gaining nomination.

An integral part of the study of governmental career paths was to draw up the post-career stations of the elite to determine in which direction are government officials going after they have left their office. The data recorded in two periods led to two different conclusions. After leaving the governmental offices, many moved towards politics. Comparing the incoming and outgoing positions, it becomes visible that after political and sometimes in professional offices the political sphere appears as a relevant career-path. Obviously, in case of administrative undersecretaries this is more like an exemption, the next step for them is provided by public offices or the economic sphere. The study of the primary outgoing positions show that in short term a political governmental positions strengthens the political embeddedness of those who occupied these positions, many times in case of those who did not arrive from the world of politics into the government.

More than two decades have passed since the change of the regime, and this time has allowed us to reach a long-term conclusion about the members of the governing elite. This study has tinged the picture of career-paths in governments, since it has shown that the suction effect of the political sphere is often temporary, and many move back and forth between the political and other social sectors. In individual governments, the number of those who stay

in politics for a long term and those who arrived into a governmental position from an originally political status are nearly the same. The data gained from the analysis of long term careers seem to strengthen the political nature of the governing elite, and thus they can be defined as a sociologically and politically distinctive social group. The data appear to prove that in the political segment of governance, a potential political career might be an attractive possibility even with smaller or bigger sidetracks. Professional leaders differ from political leaders in terms of long-term career-paths. Data show that their career-paths show a rather diffuse picture, and although the majority of them stay in public offices, the economic sector is also open in front of them. The cyclic nature of career-paths shows a lot of similarities with those in political positions, and sometimes they return to public office administration.

Finally, the question is: is there a specifically Hungarian governmental career pattern? Based on the presented data, I think there is; over the past twenty years there have been some tendencies that might help us describe a Hungarian governmental career-path with the two different groups, political and professional leaders with all their similarities and differences. The number of those occupying governmental positions, and their movements between these positions seem to draw up a specific governmental elite group with high rate of incumbency. Among the political posts, it is the position of the political secretary of state that can be deemed as the most stable both in the respect of their politically embedded nature and their time in office. The fluctuation of the first line, that is to say, ministers seem to be of greater volume, this segment is less homogeneous due to the arrival of non-politician ministers, however, the percentage of ministers is not big enough the change the cabinet's political character. In case of professional leaders, there is also specific career-path: mainly they arrive from the administrative sector with relevant professional experience. As part of the practice that came to existence inside the Hungarian political system, few of them could preserve their posts after government changes, but attached to left or right-wing governments many of them returned to public offices even from the private sphere.

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