



## The Politics of Appointment of Top Civil Servants: Career Backgrounds and Civil Service Politicization in the Czech Republic

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### Abstract

This contribution seeks to answer the question whether the new civil service legislation that entered into force in 2015 in the Czech Republic led to the depoliticization of the country's ministerial bureaucracy. To that end, we compare the career backgrounds of top civil servants before and after the entry into force of the new Civil Service Act. The article examines the career backgrounds of the persons appointed as ministerial deputies between 2013 and 2018, focusing on their last "pre-deputy" jobs and considering a broader set of their career attributes. A focus on the previous job reveals that even before the law was introduced, bureaucrats constituted the largest share of appointees, and their share even increased with the new legislation. The incidence of deputies appointed directly from party-related jobs dropped considerably. However, when a broader set of career attributes is considered, the share of partisans among the pre-2015 deputies nearly matches that of the career bureaucrats. Ostensibly political careers among the post-2015 deputies declined but remain significant. Hence, there has been a decline in the open politicization of the ministerial bureaucracy after 2015. Party political effects also matter, as the new ANO party, after entering the executive, has taken a different approach to top bureaucratic appointments than the other major governing Czech parties. Typically, deputies appointed into the positions under the ANO's control would not have links to the party itself but would be recruited via non-party channels, e.g. from pre-political networks of the ANO ministers and leaders. Consequently, though less politicized by party agents, the current Czech system is more a product of choices made by government ministers of the day than a stable arrangement resulting from firmly established norms and rules.

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## 1. Introduction

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Civil service politicization is a widespread strategy used by politicians worldwide, whether to increase control over the public policy formulation and implementation or reward their loyal political supporters for their service. Although the scope and the tools of politicization vary, it represents one of the cornerstones of politico-administrative relations. Numerous case studies and comparative analyses cover the phenomenon (Bach and Veit 2018, Dren et al. 2012, Nahtigal and Haček 2013, etc.), and there are well-documented cases focusing on established Western democracies and the new democracies alike. In post-communist Central Europe, politicization has been scrutinized by academics in Slovakia (e.g. Staroňová and Rybář 2020, Staroňová and Adamicová 2016, Beblavý et al. 2012), Poland (Gwiazda 2008, Mazur et al. 2018) or Hungary (Meyer Sahling 2008, Gajduschek 2007). Surprisingly, the nature and extent of civil service politicization has been relatively underresearched in the context of the Czech Republic.

Before 1989, the Czech Republic (then a part of Czechoslovakia) belonged to the Soviet-dominated Eastern Bloc, in which politicization of the state administration was one of the crucial principles of centralized state management (Scherpereel 2004). The first attempts to establish an independent, merit-based professional civil service took place only after the transition to democracy, especially in the process of accession to the European Union.

The European Commission, in charge of monitoring the progress of the then candidate countries of Eastern Europe, highlighted the adoption of the Civil Service Act (CSA) as one of the conditions to be met by the Czech Republic before joining the European Union. The successive Czech governments, however, were very reluctant to fulfill this obligation. Eventually, in 2002, the Civil Service Act was adopted (Act No. 218/2002), but it was never implemented in practice (Scherpereel 2009). Only a decade after gaining the EU membership, in 2014, did the Czech Republic adopt a CSA that was to provide a comprehensive basis for the professional civil service (Špaček 2018, 166–168). It entered into force in January 2015.

The absence of legislation protecting civil servants from undue political pressures may suggest that political interference has been widespread. However, empirical analyses of the extent and nature of the civil service politicization are scarce. Moreover, most academic works focus on the period before the adoption of the 2014 Civil Service Act and, thus, do not consider the extent of change brought about by the new legal framework. In this article, we seek to contribute to our understanding of civil service politicization by examining the most senior civil servants' appointments in the Czech ministerial bureaucracy. We analyze some of the top civil

servants' critical career characteristics to understand their relative importance in the process of appointment to the top bureaucratic posts in the Czech government. Our primary goal is to answer the following question: Did the new civil service law result in a depoliticization of the top tier of the Czech ministerial bureaucracy? We do so by mapping out the career backgrounds of top civil servants before and after the 2014 Civil Service Act entered into force. Besides, we also use a party-political perspective of top bureaucratic appointments: We examine the differences in the profiles of top civil servants appointed by the major Czech political parties. In the rest of the article, we proceed as follows. Firstly, we briefly review the literature on civil service politicization in the Czech context and discuss the new civil service legislation's adoption. Secondly, we examine the profiles of top civil servants appointed to their positions in 2013–2018. We explore the relative importance of, among other, party-political, expert, and administrative attributes of their careers and examine the appointments sanctioned by major Czech political parties. Finally, we assess whether and how the new civil service legislation affected depoliticization in the top layer of the Czech ministries.

## **2. Contradictory accounts of state politicization in the czech republic**

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Studies of civil service politicization in the Czech context tend to concentrate on the period before the adoption of the 2014 Civil Service Act. Furthermore, to our knowledge, no academic works are focusing on careers and backgrounds of senior civil servants in the Czech state administration. The Czech case is usually studied in a broader comparative context (i.e. in-depth analyses of the Czech administration are mostly absent) with the typical conclusion that the Czech state administration is less politicized in the region of post-communist Europe. Scherpereel (2009, 190–191) describes the process of passing civil service law between 1998 and 2002 as driven by the EU accession. Even though the law was passed in 2002, it was vehemently opposed by the then main opposition party and never entered into force. Consequently, the situation wherein “leading positions in the ministries and district offices could be awarded to party loyalists who met minimal professional standards” persisted (Scherpereel 2009, 207). Klíma (2020, 85–86) even claims that “the party elites intentionally endeavoured to conserve an extreme dependency of civil servants on the current political representation.” In Klíma's view, each government change would lead to personnel earthquakes in ministries, resulting in suboptimal performance of the state administration.

In contrast, a large-N survey of civil servants carried out by Kohoutek and Nekola (2016) concludes that ordinary civil servants believed that administrative jobs were filled primarily on the basis of the professional qualities of the candidates. Nevertheless, the survey also concluded that hiring and promotion to higher managerial positions in the state administration were perceived to be influenced

by political superiors (Kohoutek and Nekola 2016, 95). In other words, filling top management positions in the state bureaucracy was determined by the candidates' political affiliation. Hiring and firing at lower levels was influenced by what the authors call functionally hidden politicization (personal acquaintances or personal contacts to a politician). Most ordinary officials reported no politically motivated interventions in their work.

Comparative works that include the Czech Republic put the extent of politicization in the country into perspective. Meyer-Sahling and Veen (2012) conclude that within the region of post-Communist Central and Eastern Europe, the Czech case belongs to the group of countries where the overall politicization of senior civil service reaches medium levels: It is more politicized than in the Baltic states but less politicized than its Central European neighbors Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia. Similarly, a 22-country comparison covering five regions on three continents puts the Czech Republic among countries with medium-politicized state administrations (Kopecký et al. 2016). The study also identifies party actors' desire to control policy-making in the state administration as the primary motivation for politicization. As summarized by Kopecký (2012, 80), "politicization of the state is neither absent nor particularly pervasive" in the Czech case. While the top bureaucratic posts are heavily politicized, political appointments are rare in lower managerial positions and low-level jobs.

Importantly, there are significant differences in approaches to civil service politicization by individual Czech political parties. According to Kopecký and Spirova (2011), some parties display well-coordinated mechanisms for patronage appointments. These are either the older parties, which have more prolonged and uninterrupted histories, clear constituencies, and established structures, e.g. the Christian Democrats (KDU-ČSL), or parties that have evolved organizationally since the 1990s and for which building of patronage mechanisms has become part of their organizational maturity, e.g. the Civic Democrats (ODS) and the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD). In contrast, newer parties lack such mechanisms. In these parties, patronage appointments are made in an ad-hoc manner and based almost exclusively on the leaders' individual preferences.

### **3. The 2014 civil service act**

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When the European Commission assessed the civil service status in the new member states, it concluded that the Czech Republic was the only post-communist country that did not have a civil service law in place. The change of attitude of the Czech government took place only after a threat of sanctions from Brussels. The government of the Social Democratic Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka responded in 2014 by passing the civil service legislation, which entered into force in January 2015. Its goal was to prevent excessive replacements of civil servants after the elections

leading to government change. In contrast to the pre-2014 situation, civil servants' status would be governed by a specialized law and not by the ordinary Labor Code.

One of the fundamental changes introduced was a separation of political and administrative positions in the ministerial hierarchy. Besides government ministers, special posts of deputy ministers (the "political deputy" or "náměstek člena vlády" in Czech) were created. Up to two such posts could be filled at each ministry by the line ministers, who could hire and fire them at their discretion. The rest of the bureaucratic positions at each ministry were to be filled on the basis of merit. This permanent civil service hierarchy consisted of three managerial layers, with the so-called specialized deputy ministers (the "professional deputy" or "náměstek pro řízení sekce" in Czech) on top, followed by Directors of Departments in the middle, and the Heads of Units representing the lowest managerial layer. The post of Secretary-General ("státní tajemník" in Czech) was established at each ministry. The central role of the Secretary-General, who is functionally in an equal position with Professional Deputy Ministers, is to manage the organizational aspects of their ministries. Crucially, all these positions were to be selected on the basis of merit, and a system of performance evaluation free from political interference was to be applied.

Although establishing an organizationally and functionally distinctive authority to manage the civil service had been contemplated, eventually, a decision was made that would subsume it under the existing system of state institutions. The Civil Service Section was set up at the Ministry of the Interior, headed by the Deputy Minister of Interior for the Civil Service ("Náměstek ministra vnitra pro státní službu" in Czech). The Section issues civil service regulations binding on all civil servants and is in charge of recruitment into the civil service. Its agenda mostly covers organizational aspects of the civil service and management of service and labor relations. The position of its head, nicknamed the "Supreme Bureaucrat" ("superúřadník" in Czech), highlights a delicate balance established by the Civil Service Act between concerns of those who wished for a depoliticized state administration and those striving for more political control. The Supreme Bureaucrat is appointed to the post by the government for six years. Though formally in the Deputy Minister of Interior position, he is neither a professional deputy minister nor a typical political deputy minister at the ministry. His powers include the right to appoint the members of the selection committees in charge of civil service recruitment, including the Secretaries-General of the line ministries. However, the ministers have the right to nominate a portion of selection committee members and thus do have an influence over the recruitment process. Besides, being a Deputy Minister at the Ministry of Interior, the Supreme Bureaucrat's formal superior is the minister himself, which opens the possibility of political pressures on the civil service (Pichrt et al. 2015).

Other aspects of the civil service legislation further question the extent of depoliticization at the ministries, three of which deserve special mention here. First-

ly, the law stipulates that professional deputies may deputize their ministers in the meeting of the government ministers and the parliamentary and Senate committees. The extent of such practice is unknown, but there is a risk of civil servants openly taking up party-political roles in deputizing their political superiors. Secondly, the government had the right, once a year, to issue a reorganization of the line ministries, leading to mergers and the abolition of organizational units and, subsequently, to layoffs. In 2018, for example, due to the passing of the new organizational structure of line ministries, the positions of 23 professional deputy ministers were abolished (Horák 2020). Since the freshly installed government made the decision, it was widely believed to be motivated by the desire to get rid of the top civil servants appointed during the previous government. Thirdly, an amendment to the Civil Service Act passed in early 2019 changed the status of Secretaries-General and relaxed the procedure of hiring new civil servants. Secretaries-General, who manage personnel matters in their ministries, may now be recalled from their positions by the government (previously they could be removed only in a disciplinary procedure). Furthermore, the new hiring rules make it easier to select candidates from outside the state administration. According to critics, both measures make it easier for the elected politicians to influence the supposedly merit-based recruitment in the state bureaucracy (ČTK 2019).

#### **4. Data and methods**

The principal question we aim to answer in this contribution is whether the 2014 Civil Service Act has resulted in a depoliticization of the Czech ministerial bureaucracy. Given the multi-faceted nature of the concept of civil service politicization, we limit our analysis to the top layer of ministerial bureaucracy: deputy ministers before the 2014 CSA and professional deputies (hereafter only “deputies”) after the adoption of the CSA. Hence, we concentrate on what Peters and Pierre (2004) call formal politicization, i.e. an opportunity to influence new officials’ recruitment. Moreover, we narrow the focus of our analysis to select the deputies’ career attributes, with the expectation that ostensibly party-political backgrounds (see below) of deputies signal the crucial role of political connection for getting the top administrative job. Conversely, career paths without a significant party-political element signal that other, presumably technical and specialist, attributes account for appointments to the top administrative positions. We believe this relatively simple analytical approach is justifiable when academic works on Czech civil service politicization are scarce, and research into career patterns in the Czech ministerial administration is virtually non-existing.

Our analysis considers all persons appointed as deputies between January 2013 and December 2015 and all professional deputies appointed between January 2015 and December 2018. By this, we focus on the posts that fall into the category of top ministerial civil servants who are supposedly selected on the basis

of merit. Thus, we exclude the political deputy ministers appointed after January 2015. The following criteria determine the choice of the time frame: It covers the full duration of three cabinets (the Rusnok “presidential” cabinet of 2013, the Sobotka left-right coalition government of 2014–2017, during which the CSA was adopted, and the Babiš I single-party minority government of 2018). We also add deputies in their positions in the final months of the center-right Nečas cabinet in the first six months of 2013 and consider the early period of the Babiš II two-party minority cabinet appointed in mid-2018 (see Table 1). Because the kind of politicization we investigate is related to government changes, the latter two cabinets are included to increase the number of government turnovers. The selection of our time frame was also impacted by data availability: We used Freedom of Information requests that we addressed to all government ministries to obtain the names and terms in the office of all deputies. However, we were not successful in getting systematic data from the period before 2013. Thirteen out of fourteen Czech ministries released the data for the 2013–2018 period, while the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs refused to share any substantial information and was thus excluded from our analysis. The tenure of each deputy was then linked with the individual ministers and coalition governments who oversaw their appointment. As the CSA entered into force in January 2015, our data cover approximately the same time before and after it became effective.

**Table 1**  
Party composition of Czech governments, 2013–2018

<b>Cabinet</b>	<b>Duration</b>	<b>Party composition</b>	<b>Period covered in the Analysis</b>
Nečas	2010–2013	ODS, TOP09, LIDEM	1/1/2013–10/7/2013
Rusnok	2013–2014	Caretaker government	11/7/2013–29/1/2014
Sobotka	2014–2017	ČSSD, ANO, KDU-ČSL	29/1/2014–13/12/2017
Babiš I.	2017–2018	ANO	13/12/2017–27/6/2018
Babiš II.	2018–on	ANO, ČSSD	27/6/2018–31/12/2018

Source: Authors

Given that the deputies’ official biographies were not made available by the ministries, we had to rely on open-source information like websites of the ministries, newspaper articles, personal webpages, and party statements, as well as various official documents available online. By combining these sources, we could construct a dataset containing the names, tenures, and genders of all deputies between 2013 and 2018. We also collected information about their last occupation before being appointed to the posts of deputies. Furthermore, we managed to trace which political party was given the informal right to put forward the persons appointed as the pre-CSA deputies. Linking deputies to the party-political background of the

government ministers would not provide complete and reliable information about their political connection because most Czech governments were composed of several political parties, and the coalition partners typically had the right to nominate their deputies in the ministries controlled by other parties.

Altogether, we managed to collect basic data on 216 deputies, 145 serving before the adoption of the CSA, and 71 deputies appointed under the new legislative framework. We inductively constructed five groups of deputies on the basis of their last pre-deputy occupation: 1. politicians (elected officeholders and political advisors), 2. career bureaucrats, 3. private sector positions, and 4. public sector positions. We also identified the fifth group, positions in the non-governmental sector. Even though such inductive categorization slightly differs from the ones seen in academic literature (e.g. Meyer-Sahling 2008), it captures a variety of backgrounds. Also, it provides sufficient grounds for distinguishing between party-political posts (category 1), bureaucratic positions (category 2), and other jobs (categories 3 to 5).

Considering the last pre-deputy position may not be sufficient to capture the complexity of the career backgrounds of the top civil servants. Thus, we attempted to construct more complex “typological profiles” of persons appointed to the post of deputies. We tried to capture a more complex career profile beyond the last pre-deputy jobs, taking into account whether the person’s last occupation is congruent with his or her previous career path. To that end, we examined whether the deputies had run for elected office on a party ticket, served in the capacity of officially representing a political party, whether they have had a record of working in a specific sector, etc. Given the incomplete information about the deputies’ career paths, such an endeavor is necessarily tentative and needs to be understood as such. We inductively identified four broad career trajectories for the deputies: partisans, partisan-specialists, experts, and career bureaucrats, according to the dominant career experience in the last decade before becoming deputies. We can also differentiate between party-related career backgrounds (typological profiles 1 and 2) from other, non-party career paths (types 3 and 4). Such information enables us to draw tentative conclusions about the extent of top civil service politicization and the scope of change caused by the new CSA.

## 5. Empirical results

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### 5.1 Previous positions of top civil servants

The first perspective we adopt considers the last occupation of the persons before being appointed as deputies. We were surprised to find out that even before the adoption of the CSA (i.e. in 2013 and 2014, N=145), the largest group (N=57 or 39.3%) of deputies came from positions assigned to **career civil servants**. A majority of them came from lower managerial positions within their ministries. Thus, their appointment to the position of a deputy can be interpreted as their profes-

sional career advancement. A number of them had held positions as deputies at another ministry, managerial positions in the Government Office, or positions in Diplomatic Corps.

**Politicians** (N=34, 23.5%) constitute the second-largest supply of deputies. Some deputies were appointed directly from politico-advisory positions. One can identify several spokespersons, assistants to elected officials, and various political advisors. Besides, elected officials constitute a small but significant supply of top civil servants. The group thus includes former mayors, members of parliament, elected officials in regional assemblies, and senators who lost their seats in unsuccessful reelection bids and were subsequently appointed as ministerial deputies.

**Private** and **public** sectors supplied an equal number of deputies (in both cases N=25, 17.2%). There was no type of private or public organization that would dominate: In the case of the former, deputies coming from large corporations (e.g. banks, insurance, and other credit companies) seem to be most prevalent, but several people from small companies and even self-employed persons (e.g. physicians) can be detected, too. Similarly, there is no dominant pattern among deputies coming from public organizations, as nationwide, regional, and even local-level organizations supplied future ministerial deputies. **NGO representatives** represent the fifth group of people appointed as deputies. However, given their small number (N=4, 2.6%), they do not constitute a significant career background in the top Czech civil service.

To summarize, career bureaucrats constitute the largest group of future deputies before the adoption of the Civil Service Act. Politicians, especially those from lower political advisory posts, and unsuccessful elected officials account for about a quarter of deputies. In addition, public and private sector organizations seem to be equally important in supplying top civil servants. One can conclude that a diversity of backgrounds had been typical for the Czech top civil servants, with ostensibly political positions playing an important, though not a dominant role.

Our data show that the adoption of CSA further contributed to the rise in the importance of career bureaucratic position holders in the appointment of top civil servants. Between 2015 and 2018, 47 out of 71 newly appointed deputies came from bureaucratic career positions (66.2%). Most of them advanced to their positions from lower managerial posts in their ministries. Among the appointments from outside the state administration, public sector job holders (N=12, 16.9%) outnumber those from the private sector (N=7, 9.9%). The number of ostensibly political post holders diminished further, making up only 7% (N=5) of the new deputies. A provisional conclusion presents itself that the adoption of the CSA decisively contributed to a decline in the importance of party-political contacts in top civil servants' appointment.

**Table 2**  
Deputies: The last occupation before appointment (2013–2018)

Occupation	Before CSA (Absolute Number)	Share (%)	After CSA (Absolute Number)	Share (%)
<b>Career Bureaucrats</b>	57	39.3	47	66.2
<b>Politicians</b>	34	23.5	5	7.0
<b>Private sector</b>	25	17.2	7	9.9
<b>Public sector</b>	25	17.2	12	16.9
<b>NGOs</b>	4	2.8	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	145	100.0	71	100.0

Source: Authors

Nevertheless, such interpretation should be taken with caution. As we explained above, focusing exclusively on the newly-appointed deputies' last position may be misleading because it reveals little about the overall career paths of top bureaucrats. Other aspects of their careers, including previous engagement in the party-political, expert, and other types of activities, should be taken into account.

## 5.2 Career trajectories

Although we admit that our data on career paths are incomplete, we identified four ministerial deputies' tentative typological career profiles. Firstly, some of them are **partisans**. They had a history of acting on behalf of a political party in various capacities, e.g. ran on party tickets for elected office or held a position within the party hierarchy. They may have briefly occupied positions in public or semi-public organizations, but their engagement could usually be attributed to them being party members or party agents. There is no discernable record of them working in positions that would be considered to give them a professionally relevant background for their careers in the position of deputies.

Secondly, there are **partisan-specialists**. Even though their careers are also linked to political parties, they differ from the partisans because their education and work experience indicate a substantive experience and skills received independently of their engagement in party-political activities. In other words, they were party agents, but they simultaneously cultivated professional expertise that was later directly relevant in their state administration jobs. **Career bureaucrats** represent the third typological profile of the deputies. Their career paths reveal little or no engagement in party-political activities. Their most significant career trace is long-term permanent work in state administration, typically (though not exclusively) at a ministry where they got the top civil service appointment. Finally, outside **experts** represent the fourth type of deputies. Like career bureaucrats, they

display no career traits linked to party-political activities. Unlike them, however, their previous careers evolved outside state administration, in expert and professional positions, regardless of their employment sector. Typically, they combined public and private sector work experience. Crucially, throughout their careers, they had accumulated expertise that came to be relevant for their state administration appointments. As seen in Table 3, the share of career civil servants has increased since the adoption of the CSA. Even before the legislation was introduced, career bureaucrats were the largest group among the deputies, constituting 43.4 % of top civil servants. Since 2015, their share has reached three-fifths of all deputies. The most remarkable change occurred in the incidence of “pure” partisans appointed to the top administrative posts, as it dropped from 40 % to 14.1 %. A share of experts also increased from 14.5 % to 22.5 %. Regardless of the appointment period, the number of party-experts remained low, constituting only 2.5 % of cases before 2015 and 4.2 % since 2015.

**Table 3**

Typological career profiles of deputies before and after the CSA (2013–2018)

<b>Typological career profile</b>	<b>Before CSA (Absolute Number)</b>	<b>Share (%)</b>	<b>After CSA (Absolute Number)</b>	<b>Share (%)</b>
<b>Career Bureaucrat</b>	63	43.4	42	59.2
<b>Partisan</b>	58	40.0	10	14.1
<b>Party-Expert</b>	3	2.1	3	4.2
<b>Expert</b>	21	14.5	16	22.5
<b>Total</b>	145	100.0	71	100.0

Source: Authors

Comparing career profiles with the last job of deputies before their appointment confirms our provisional conclusion about a decline in the importance of ostensibly partisan backgrounds. The share of career bureaucrats among deputies before the CSA entered into force was the largest among all groups. However, the examination of the broader aspects of career backgrounds also reveals that some party activists had gained managerial experience in public and private sector jobs just before being appointed as deputies. In other words, a portion of (future) deputies had been politically involved before (or alongside) their careers in private and public sectors. Because of our data’s incomplete nature, it is impossible to establish distinctive career patterns based, for example, on sequence analysis that could reveal more nuanced career paths.

The number of deputies with a party-political connection after 2015 is higher than initially indicated by examining the deputies’ last occupations. Moreover, a

typological profile approach shows that partisans and party-experts' combined incidence nearly matched that of career civil servants in the pre-CSA cohorts. Two out of five deputies appointed before the new CSA was implemented had an undeniable record of working for a political party that nominated them. Career bureaucrats dominate the post-2015 top civil service; however, some 16 % of them still display distinctive linkages to political parties. Hence, our data show that even though the politicization of the merit-based top civil service has been reduced, individuals with a party-political connection continue to play a significant role. Still, it is worth mentioning that many of them do possess relevant professional qualifications.

### 5.3 Party differences

Our data also allow for a tentative exploration of different approaches to top civil servants' appointments by governing political parties. The pre-CSA appointments can be directly attributed to individual ruling political parties on the basis of public statements of ministers and party leaders. In addition, government ministries headed by ministers from different parties tended to display different attitudes towards filling deputies' posts. There were apparent differences between the Civic Democrats (ODS) and the Social Democrats (ČSSD) on the one hand, and the ANO (Action of Dissatisfied Citizens) on the other. ODS and ČSSD have been two traditional post-1989 parties that dominated the Czech political scene for two and a half decades following the Communist regime's breakdown. They had a developed territorial party organizational structure and a sizeable membership, at least by the post-Communist standards. In contrast, ANO has come to dominate Czech politics since 2017, but it was organizationally different from its two more established competitors. It has been a top-down political entrepreneur party with limited territorial organization and membership, firmly controlled by its founding leader Andrej Babiš (Kopeček 2018).

Both ODS and ČSSD took advantage of politicized appointments to the top administrative jobs, but each approached civil service politicization differently. ODS used political appointments extensively during the ODS-led Nečas government: Deputies appointed by the previous government were dismissed, and party loyalists, with a long record of working for ODS, were typically appointed. Shabu (2013) reported there were 22 ODS deputies at the end of the Nečas cabinet, most of them also serving in the subsequent caretaker Rusnok cabinet. Similarly, ČSSD took advantage of their control over ministries (during the ČSSD-led Sobotka cabinet). However, instead of firing the inherited deputies *en bloc*, the Social Democratic Ministers would typically increase the number of top civil servants and fill the newly created posts with their members.

On the other hand, ANO approached the ministerial bureaucracy differently. The party presented itself as a team of experienced managers and non-politicians who do politics differently. Typically, deputies appointed into the positions under

party control would not be ANO members but would be recruited from pre-political networks of ANO ministers. There is some evidence that a share of deputies was recruited from the Agrofert company, a corporation owned by the ANO founder Andrej Babiš. Several newly appointed deputies admitted they were approached by Babiš himself, or by his associates, to take up posts in the ministerial bureaucracy.

After the adoption of the CSA, the governing parties' opportunities to directly control appointments of deputies were reduced. Nevertheless, anecdotal and indirect evidence suggests that governing parties did find their ways to influence the selection process of new deputies. Again, differences between ČSSD and ANO, the two main governing parties in the post-CSA era, seem to persist. The number of deputies in the ČSSD-led ministries tended to grow due to the passing of annual reorganizations of the ministries. The new appointees often had a connection to the party. Deputies in the ANO-led ministries typically lacked a direct linkage to the party. Besides having a personal connection to some of the leading figures of the party, some of the new "ANO deputies" also possess undisputable public reputation and strong professional credentials.

Moreover, there seems to be little evidence for purges of the top civil servants in the ANO-controlled ministries: At least until the end of 2018, we see some reduction of positions in the ministerial bureaucracy, but the extent of changes was not excessive. In addition, there is another difference between ČSSD and ANO. While ČSSD would seldom miss the opportunity to appoint their people into the designated political deputy ministerial posts (allowed by the new CSA), ANO ministers largely refrained from the practice. One can assume that putting forward party affiliates into openly political state bureaucratic jobs would run contrary to the ANO's image of a new party representing a clean break with the past practice of excessive party control of the state institutions.

These observations are consistent with the conceptualization of ANO as a "technocratic populist" party (Havlík 2019). Its executive leaders are reluctant to engage "traditional" bureaucracies, put emphasis on pragmatic "what works" policies, and follow highly personalized strategies both in personnel recruitment and decision-making (Drápalová and Wegrich 2020, 3).

## **6. Conclusion**

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This study's main goal was to shed some light on the nature and extent of politicization of the Czech civil service by examining the career profiles of ministerial deputies who constitute the top layer of ministerial bureaucracy. To that end, we studied the background of deputy ministers before and after the adoption of the 2014 Civil Service Act. Firstly, we examined the last occupation of the persons who were appointed the ministerial deputies. In the pre-CSA period, the largest share of deputies came from positions of civil servants, followed by people who came from

various party-political posts. After entry into force of the new civil service legislation, the share of political backgrounds of the ministerial deputies declined, and the role of career bureaucrats was further strengthened.

Secondly, we presented four tentative typological career profiles of the ministerial deputies that consider a broader range of their career traits. Seen from this perspective, career civil servants were still the largest group of people appointed to the posts of deputies in the old administrative system. However, party politicians ranked a strong second largest category. Here too, the new civil service legislation seems to matter, as the importance of ostensibly party-political careers declined after 2014. In other words, we detected a shift towards a less politicized state administration at the level of deputies. However, a brief overview of other aspects of civil service legislation reveals that the sustainability of this development hinges upon the willingness of government ministers to maintain the status quo. In case the government decides to embark upon the reorganization of the ministerial hierarchy, allowed by the legislation, ministerial deputies may be fired. The adoption of new Civil Service legislation in 2014 may signal a shift from partisan politicization to bounded and open politicization (e.g. Meyer-Sahling 2008) in that top officials are more frequently appointed from the ministerial administration (bounded politicization) after the elections, and/or are replaced by people from outside the political environment.

We also considered different approaches of major political parties towards the politicization of top civil service. ODS and ČSSD, two major established parties, extensively used the opportunity to shape the top layer of ministerial hierarchy. In contrast, ANO, the post-2017 hegemon in the Czech party politics, adopted a different strategy: Instead of putting forward deputies linked to the party, it recruited a portion of “its” deputies through personal networks of the key party leaders. Such a strategy may reflect the fact that ANO is a new and organizationally underdeveloped party. However, it may well reflect a trend towards higher personalization of ministerial appointments that rests less on the mediating role of party headquarters and puts a premium on personal resources of the individual officeholders, as detected by Staroňová and Rybář (2020) in a slightly different context.

After the introduction of the Civil Service Act, the Czech Republic seem to resemble the public administrations where most senior officials are promoted internally from positions within the bureaucracy (Derlien 2003; Hustedt and Salomonson 2014; Veit and Scholz 2016). In a way, it represents a case between, for example, the Spanish or Portuguese high politicization and Danish non-politicization models (see Bach et al. 2020). However, the current setting of the Czech system is more a product of choices made by government ministers of the day than a stable arrangement resulting from firmly established norms and rules. New positions can still be created relatively quickly, and the ministers do have tools to influence the outcomes of bureaucratic recruitment. In contrast to Germany, where the interdepartmental

mobility is relatively low (Veit and Scholz 2016), the number of Czech ministerial deputies with working experience at several ministries is relatively high.

As the present work is based on incomplete data and works with tentative career profiles of senior civil servants, more empirical research is needed to establish concrete career patterns and sequences of career development of the administrative elites. Moreover, the difference of various party approaches to civil service politicization needs to be reexamined by expanding the time frame in which bureaucratic careers are examined, with the primary aim to include more governing political parties into the analysis. In addition, patterns of civil service politicization should include organizations other than government ministries, e.g. state-owned enterprises, executive agencies, and regulatory bodies.

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