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Article

Profiles and Careers of State Secretaries in the 132nd Government of Romania

Abstract: *This paper investigates the profiles and careers of State Secretaries – dignitaries from the central public administration who help ministers in the management of the ministries in which they carry out their activity, officials that in Romania are considered the second echelon of power of the Romanian executive branch. The aim is to expand the scope of studies on the Romanian political elites and to contribute to the broadening of knowledge regarding the careers of politicians in the second echelon of power, elite studies carried out by the work of Stefan (2009) and Iancu (2017). The study will identify certain patterns that underlie the selection process of state secretaries, advancing the knowledge of the career paths of top Romanian politicians. Focusing on State Secretaries appointed after the formation of the 132nd government, on November 25, 2021, the present paper acknowledges that, according to the Administrative Code of Romania, state secretaries have an important role in the development of government policies and strategies. Given the critical role of governmental elites in outlining public policies and in adapting their countries to a changing international environment, marked by contingencies and structural crises, both the public and the academic interest in the state secretaries' profiles and access to power is high (Stefan, 2009). I expect to find different profiles and career paths, according to their age, gender, academic profile, previous occupations, the influence of political sponsors, party credentials, and of previous positions held in various public institutions. The information is gathered from public sources: resumes, official pages of ministries, and public media information. Based on the public information, the study reveals that previous experience in public institutions or being a member of the County Council are common traits among politically affiliated state secretaries and that professional and managerial skills are important assets when analysing appointments in the positions of state secretaries of politically unaffiliated persons, the so-called technocrats (Stefan, 2018).*

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tries to a changing international environment, marked by contingencies and structural crises, both the public and the academic interest in the state secretaries' profiles and access to power is high (Stefan, 2009). I expect to find different profiles and career paths, according to their age, gender, academic profile, previous occupations, the influence of political sponsors, party credentials, and of previous positions held in various public institutions. The information is gathered from public sources: resumes, official pages of ministries, and public media information. Based on the public information, the study reveals that previous experience in public institutions or being a member of the County Council are common traits among politically affiliated state secretaries and that professional and managerial skills are important assets when analysing appointments in the positions of state secretaries of politically unaffiliated persons, the so-called technocrats (Stefan, 2018).

Keywords: *career paths; governmental elites; political elites; Romanian state secretaries*

The present study observes the selection mechanisms, profiles, and careers of dignitaries occupying the positions of state secretaries within the ministries during the 132nd government, more precisely the state secretaries in office at the time this article is presented (April 2023), though an exhaustive analysis on the population of junior ministers from the selected period.

Nowadays, there is a high level of interest in the political establishment represented by the state secretaries, as these central administration dignitaries are part of the governmental elite and represent a population from which part of the future ministers are selected.

Stefan's study on ministers appointed between 1989 and 2008 frames the 239 ministers appointed between December 1989 and December 2008 and their experience (both political and non-political). Parties distinguish between candidates for cabinet positions based on a variety of characteristics, including the applicants' professional backgrounds and prior involvement in local or national governance (Ștefan, 2009).

The research carried out by Alexandra Iancu on state secretaries from the range time 1990-2008, revealed on the one hand the fact that, at the level of ministerial selection, the previous holding of the position of state secretary is one of the main ways of access to a ministerial portfolio (Iancu, 2011), and on the other hand, a major percentage of people were co-opted into positions based on non-political criteria, such as performance in the profession and technical expertise, thus 53.1% represented the percentage of new entrants into politics.

The present paper's purpose is to expand studies carried out on the Romanian governmental political elites by Laurentiu Ștefan and Alexandra Iancu. I expect to find out whether the *Mandarin* (Dogan, 2019) and the technocratic tendencies (Iancu, 2017) were also preserved in the state secretaries' population analysed.

My work is inspired by the studies carried out by Laurentiu Ștefan and Alexandra Iancu on governmental elites and their study methods altogether with the work on political elites that French scholar of Romanian origin Mattei Dogan developed in the 80s (Dogan and Higley, 1998b). The exhaustive study on the chosen population of state secretaries used as a basis the public information found in the resumes of the state secretaries found on the official websites of the ministries, the professional networks, or the universities. In the few exceptions, where this type of info was nowhere to be found, I utilized with caution the media sources, trying to extract the public data from various media sources and filter it, for a higher degree of authenticity.

Despite the precariousness of official public information regarding the careers and political paths followed by some of those currently occupying the governmental positions in question, by corroborating the data, I could identify the processes through which these people ended up being appointed by the prime minister in charge of various ministries.

Individuals and small, comparatively cohesive, stable groups with significant decision-making authority are referred to as elites, according to John Higley (Best and Higley, 2018). Career paths can indicate a lot about the opportunities available, the formal and informal power structures, and the institutional setup of a political environment. Nevertheless, the study of political careers is a subject of interest *per se* (Ștefan, 2009).

The information gathered was structured on three pillars of analysis, in order to obtain clarity in outlining the profiles and careers:

1. Gender, age, academic background, and professional career of the persons who hold state secretaries' positions in the selected period;
2. The previous positions held in public administration and public institutions;
3. Party membership/party leadership.

From those three perspectives, I look for and extract patterns that led to the identification of the profiles of junior ministers in charge of specialized branches within the ministries.

I expect that the resulting typology is a combination of political and non-political elements that led to the recruitment of certain individuals to the positions of state secretaries at the expense of other individuals who targeted those positions.

The cabinet of ministers of the Government of Romania (March 2023) is composed of the prime minister, 2 deputy prime ministers, and 19 ministers. One of the deputy prime ministers also holds the position of minister, so currently, the cabinet of ministers consists of 20 ministers. They have a total of 100 state secretaries under their command.

In addition to the state secretaries within the ministries, the second echelon of dignitary positions includes other state secretaries and persons holding public positions with the rank of state secretary, such as the director of the cabinet of the prime minister (rank of state secretary) and four state secretaries from the prime minister's chancellery, members of the working apparatus of the two deputy prime ministers, heads of institutions subordinated to the Government. They are not the subject of this analysis.

Back to the state secretaries within ministries, the largest team number, respectively 7, is at the Ministry of Investments and European Projects, the Ministry for Development, Public Works and Administration, and the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure.

There are 6 state secretaries each at the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Environment, Water and Forests, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. Five secretaries of state are in charge in the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Energy, and the Ministry of Entrepreneurship and Tourism. At the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Research, Innovation, and Digitization, and the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity, teams of 4 state secretaries are formed each. The Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Family, Youth, and Equal Opportunities each are led by 3 state secretaries. In the leadership of the Ministry of National Defence and the Ministry of Sports, we find 2 state secretaries each.

Part I – Non-political characteristics

Gender, age, academic background, and professional career of the persons who hold state secretaries' positions in the selected period are analysed as follows.

1. Gender distribution

Among the 100 secretaries of state, there is a share of 18% of women. The ministry with the largest number of women state secretaries, moreover composed entirely of women, is the Ministry of Family, Youth, and Equal Opportunities, having a board of 4 women, if we count the minister too, Mrs. Gabriela Firea from the Social Democratic Party. This ministry is also one of the 2 ministries led by women, in the studied government. I notice a correlation between the woman minister and the number of subordinate women state secretaries. This could be a top-down approach as the answer to the issue of insufficient inclusion of women in politics, as the poor levels of political representation for women place our nation at the bottom of comparative international evaluations (Băluță and Tufi?, 2021).

At the opposite pole, with 7 state secretaries and all men, is the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure. Both the Ministry of Family, Youth, and Equal Opportunities and the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure are headed by ministers who are prominent members of the Social Democratic Party.

Besides the previously mentioned Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure, where there are no women in the position of state secretary, in 5 other ministries we do not find any women in the position of state secretary: Ministry of Research, Innovation, and Digitization, Ministry of Energy, Ministry of Environment, Water and Forests, Ministry of Labor and Social Solidarity and Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.

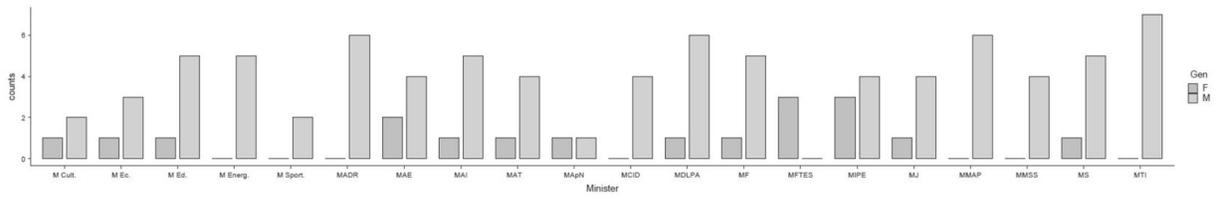


Figure. 1 Gender plot

2. Age

While the average age of the state secretaries (except 7 of them, whose age is not mentioned in public documents) is 47 years, the highest frequency based on the birth year is the age 43 (9 state secretaries). The majority of them can be labelled as Generation X, born between 1965 and 1980, which means that their contact with the communist era was minimum. They become adolescents in the first years of the transition and graduate at the end of the 90s, therefore until nowadays, they gained approximately 20 years of working experience. The Millennial generation (generation Y) is well represented, with 37 state secretaries being born after 1980 (Raiu, 2021). As the average age is below 50, there are small chances of encountering former communist elite reproduction in the population studied (Grosescu, 2006).

Table 1. The ratio between the ministry and the average age

Ministry of Research, Innovation, and Digitalisation	41.2
Ministry of Environment, Water and Forests	41.2
Ministry of Finance	42.8
Ministry of Sports	43.5
Ministry of Energy	43.5
Ministry of Investments and European Projects	44
Ministry of National Defense	45
Ministry of Health	45.3
Ministry of Justice	47
Ministry of Agriculture	47
Ministry of Labor and Social Solidarity	47.2
Ministry for Development, Public Works, and Administration	47.7
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	48.3
Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure	49.2
Ministry of Education	50
Ministry of Family and Equal Opportunities	50.6
Ministry of Internal Affairs	51
Ministry of Entrepreneurship and Tourism	52
Ministry of Culture	52.3
Ministry of Economy	54.7

The lowest average age among the state secretaries is registered at the Ministry of Research, Innovation, and Digitalisation, where we also meet the youngest state secretary – Eduard Tatian Mititelu, while the Ministry with the highest average age is that of Economy (54,7 years average age). The oldest state secretary is found at the Ministry of Culture, in the person of Madalin Voicu, 70 years old.

3. University studies

Regarding the completed studies, the research showed that the state secretaries are graduates of higher education with bachelor's degrees, 46 of them also followed master's studies while the Ph.D. holders count for 22. The Academy of Economic Studies ranks first in the list of universities where state secretaries have completed their undergraduate studies. Babes Bolyai University is ranked second, while Bucharest University, Alexandru Iona Cuza Ia?i Universi-

ty, University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine, and Craiova University are tied for third place.

4. The field of university studies

I could observe a majority share of graduates of technical studies; therefore 27 state secretaries hold engineering degrees. In second place, tied, are 24 graduates of economics and 24 graduates of law studies. Seven state secretaries are graduates of medicine, 3 are mathematicians, 3 hold degrees in geography, 2 each studied political science and theology, and one graduate each studied physics, journalism, communication, philology, history, and music.

5. Postgraduate studies

As mentioned before, 45 state secretaries hold a master's degree, and those with doctoral studies number 22. The largest number of postgraduate doctoral studies graduates can be found at the Ministry of Education, respectively 4 state secretaries out of a total number of 6. This Ministry is followed by the Ministry of Finance, where 3 of the 6 secretaries of state hold a Ph.D. The ministries among which there is no Ph.D. are the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure.

Other ministries that have Ph.D. graduates in their junior ministers' teams are the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Research, Innovation, and Digitalisation, Ministry of Investments and European Projects, Ministry of Energy, Ministry of Environment, Water and Forests, Ministry for Development, Public Works and Administration, Ministry of Entrepreneurship and Tourism, Ministry of Family, Youth and Equal Opportunities, and Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.

6. The field of postgraduate studies

The preferred post-university studies (master's or doctorate) are economics/management (17 graduates), followed by technical studies – engineering (11 graduates). Equally, 5 graduates each, are those who followed post-university studies in law and public administration.

7. The relationship between studies and the field of activity coordinated as state secretary – the convergence of studies with the managed field

The research revealed a correlation between the completed studies and the branch of activity coordinated within the ministry as the central body of the state administration, so at the Ministry of Finance the majority of state secretaries have economic (financial) studies, at the Ministry of Investments and European Projects there is a high percentage of economists, as of Ministry of Internal Affairs – 3 out of 6 state secretaries have law studies.

At the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, there are 2 engineers and 2 law graduates, all state secretaries from the Ministry of Justice are law graduates, and the Ministry of Research, Innovation, and Digitalisation has 2 engineers, one mathematician, and one management graduate in its team. In the Ministry of Economy, there are 2 economists and 2 engineers, and the Ministry of Energy has 2 economists and 2 law graduates in its state secretaries' team.

Engineering studies dominate at the Ministry of Agriculture where 5 out of 6 state secretaries are agronomic engineers, at the Ministry for Development, Public Works and Administration (4 engineers), Ministry of Environment, Water, and Forests (3 engineers), and at the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure (3 engineers). All state secretaries from the Ministry of Health have graduated in medicine.

8. Previous occupation

A notable observation regarding the previous occupations – a large share is that of ex-public servants, (32), followed by those who have worked as engineers (12), managers (12), professors in academia, and teachers/inspectors in the pre-university system (12).

9. Dominant career and leadership positions in the non-political career

The dominant career for approximately half of the state secretaries was in public administration, the judicial system, and the health system. Some of them come from the business environment and the private sector. A career in state education constituted the main path for many state secretaries. In their career before their first political appointment, 75% of them held management positions, such as director, ambassador, manager, president, dean, vice dean, and vice-rector.

10. (Non-political) experience in public institutions – a career in public administration

A large majority of the studied population (83%) has bureaucratic experience in public institutions. Some of them served as high dignitaries (2 general secretaries within the ministries, 2 junior general secretaries within the ministries, 5 prefects, 2 sub-prefects), directors of various departments within the ministries, ambassadors, state agencies directors, presidents of public institutions, parliamentary or governmental advisors, advisors in county councils, members of the boards of directors in state companies. Many of them can be labelled as being the top civil servants (Dogan and Higley, 1998a).

Following the analysis of this cluster of variables related to academic background, previous occupation, leadership positions held in the previous career, and non-political experience in public institutions, I noticed that economic studies and managerial training, along with technical, legal, and administrative studies are predominant, as previous works have shown (Iancu, 2011).

Leading management positions, from positions such as director, president, head of the faculty, or head of an institution, are also a constant in the previous career of state secretaries. Adding the experience in public administration, present in 83 of the 100 state secretaries' professional careers, a trajectory that creates the prerequisites for the appointment is revealed.

Part II – Experience in public political positions

The year of entry into politics and the year of appointment to the position of state secretary

For most of the studied population, the year of entry into politics coincides with the year of the first appointment as secretary of state, namely the year 2022 (for 23 of them). With only one percent less, 22 of the state secretaries from the studied government made their debut on the political scene in 2020, which coincides with the local elections in 2020. Part of them were elected local or county councillors in 2020 and, between 2021 and 2022, they left the position of local or county councillor obtained after the elections to occupy the position of state secretary.

Previously held positions as state secretaries, ministers, or parliamentarians

Some ministries have state secretaries who previously held the position of state secretaries within the same ministries. These are the Ministry of Finance (Daniela Pescaru), Ministry of Internal Affairs (Bogdan Dospescu), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Daniela Grigore Gîțman), Ministry of Research, Innovation, and Digitalisation (Tudor Prisecaru), Ministry of Education (Ionel-Florian Lixandru and Gigel Paraschiv), and the Ministry of Culture (Andras -Istvan Demeter and Mădălin Voicu). Three of them were previously junior state secretaries.

Two of the studied secretaries were at one time ministers. Raed Arafat, currently state secretary within the Ministry of Internal Affairs, was the minister of health for a short period, in 2012, in the Ponta government. Csilla Hegedus from the Ministry of Investments and European Projects was minister of culture for a short period also in a government led by Victor Ponta, in 2014. Among the current state secretaries are also 7 former parliamentarians. According to the press statement Ionuț-Sorin Banciu (2021), from the Ministry of Environment, Water and Forests, resigned in 2021 from the PNL deputy mandate obtained following the 2020 parliamentary elections, considering that the experience he has accumulated in the field of environmental protection will be better utilized within the executive. Claudiu-Vasile Răucăci, currently a member of the Ministry for Development, Public Works and Administration state secretaries' team, was a PNL deputy in the period 2016-2020.

Vass Levente, from the Ministry of Health, previously obtained a mandate as a UDMR deputy in the period 2016-2020. Tudorita Lungu, from the Ministry of Entrepreneurship and Tourism, was elected deputy from the PNL between 2016-2020. Previous mandates of deputies had also state secretaries from the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Transports and Infrastructure. The Ministry of Transports and Infrastructure also counts a former senator, in the person of Ion Popa.

Previously held positions as local elected officials

The position of state secretary was for some of them a natural continuation of the political career started at the local level. So, of the 100 state secretaries that form the second echelon of the 20 ministries in Ciucă government, 15 were previously county councillors, 12 were local councillors, and 2 were general councillors. There are also former 2 vice presidents of county councils and 2 former deputy mayors.

Part III – Party membership – political affiliation

Caused by the fact that the government configuration studied in the present material is a coalition between parties of the left and the right, both state secretaries supported by the Social Democrat Party (PSD) and state secretaries supported by the National Liberal Party (PNL) are judiciously distributed in most ministries, in addition to those propelled or originating from the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR). Not surprisingly, 37 state secretaries are affiliated with PSD and 37 with PNL, while UDMR was propelling 11 state secretaries. For 11 state secretaries, the research based on the public information collected could not reveal political affiliation, considering that there are no public lists (with party members) where this type of information can be found.

Leadership positions within the party

A percentage of 20% of politically affiliated state secretaries held leadership positions within the parties that supported them in the position. One of the state secretaries in the government under analysis occupies the top position of vice president within an influential political governing party. This is Csilla Hegedus -vice-president Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania, responsible for communication, a politician who at one time held the positions of the minister and vice-prime minister. An example of leadership position within the party combined with the status of previously holding a locally elected position is that of a state secretary from the Ministry of Finance, who held a position of first vice-president of the PNL Iasi organization before being elected as county councillor, and during his incumbency was appointed state secretary.

In conclusion, the rise in local structures and public administration structures could be observed in the analysed population. The access paths to the political position of state secretaries were the administrative branches and the local political branches, while the important credentials were constituted by previous training and activity, which have a noticeable continuity with the direction administered in the newly gained political position explored by the present study.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

About the author

Emilia-Laura Vartolomei is a doctoral candidate in the field of Political Sciences at the Doctoral School of SNSPA.

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