

# Who Runs Public Administration? A Longitudinal Study of Technocratic Ministerial Appointments in Post-Communist Romania (1991–2021)

Cătălin RAIU

Laura MINA-RAIU

Cătălin RAIU

PhD, Lecturer, Department of Public Administration,  
Faculty of Business and Administration,  
University of Bucharest, Bucharest, Romania  
Board Member, National Council  
for Combating Discrimination, Romania  
E-mail: catalin.raiu@faa.unibuc.ro

Laura MINA-RAIU

PhD, Associate professor, Department of Administration  
and Public Management, Faculty of Administration and Public  
Management,  
Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania  
E-mail: laura.minaraiu@amp.ase.ro

## Abstract

Starting from the traditional public administration dichotomy ‘power versus knowledge’, concerned with the cleavage between politicians and bureaucrats, this paper’s main purpose is to reframe a classic theoretical model, by placing the spotlight on a new, under-conceptualized public sector actor: the technocrat. Second, the paper performs empirical research starting from an own-build comprehensive database that includes all the ministers appointed in the Romanian Government during a 30-year time-frame (October 1991–November 2021). In spite of being a rather young democracy with a communist public sector legacy, research findings indicate that in Romania we can clearly identify patterns similar to other European countries (primarily Italy), consisting of appointing technocrats to the cabinet. Such nominations are discussed in correlation with the advancements of new theories of democracy and public administration, imprinted with Neoliberalism, New Public Management, and Good Governance paradigms.

**Keywords:** technocrat, politician, democracy, knowledge, and power.

## 1. Introduction

There is an old English saying, *Experts must be on tap, but not on top* (Mansharamani, 2012), used by several politicians in Anglo Saxon spaces in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to explain a fundamental theme for Public Administration which is the separation of (political) decision and (bureaucratic) expertise.

In the past few years in some European states, there have been appointments of ministers without any political background, but with an excellent professional or academic reputation. These are persons who have done very well in their areas of expertise, and who have been entrusted with ministerial portfolios, usually for a short period, whose mandates are linked to fairly specific and clear government priorities. For instance, the Italian Government was run by financier Mario Monti for 18 months starting November 2011, while Romania's Government was led by Dacian Cioloș for over 1 year, starting November 2015. Both Government Cabinets were run by persons who had never appeared on the electoral lists of any political party, and these can therefore be considered entirely technocrat governments. But these two examples are just the tip of the iceberg because in Italy, Romania, and other European countries there are several Government Cabinets that include Ministers that fit the technocrat description, recruited from the academic, administrative, business, finance, or even non-governmental organization environment (Kiely, 2017, p. 739).

Recent studies have shown that public sector workers find more trust in representative institutions than in technocrat ministers (Migchelbrink, 2023), but also that there is a European trend in appointing technocrats as ministers even though, 'full technocrat governments remain extremely rare in EU democracies' (McDonnell and Valbruzzi, 2014). In this context, our paper navigates the borderline between politics and administration embedded in the neo-Weberian dichotomy of politicians versus bureaucrats, by analyzing the appointments as ministers of a new public administration actor: the technocrat.

## 2. Literature review

Even though there is a large body of literature dedicated to the circulation of elites in public administration (mostly embedded in organizational theories or theories specific to human resources), mainly concerned about how elites accede professionally to high positions, including ministerial ones, not much attention is paid to elites' political affiliation.

Thus literature dedicated to technocracy and/or technocrats is relatively underdeveloped due mostly to the history and evolution of public administration in Western countries. As a general rule, both public and academic interest in this subject overlapped with periods of financial crises, beginning with The Great Depression (1929–1939), continuing with The Oil Crisis (1970s), and finally with the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, the latter leading to the political appointment of the cabinet of Mario Monti in Italy, which can be considered the first fully technocratic cabinet in Europe.

Our approach is an innovative one, as it follows the circulation of political elites at the top of public administration starting not from organizational theories, but rather from the

representative democratic theory (Sartori, 1987; Manin, 1997), which assumes that top public functions are by definition reserved for venerable, influential party members, who can garner the most votes for their party. In other words, to be a minister in a democratic regime means rather to hold the political power to push for certain public policies and less to be a good professional in the respective area of governing.

We studied the consecrated research dedicated to this subject, beginning with the pioneering research entitled *Technocracy* by Jean Meynaud (1964) and that of James Burnham (1941), *The Managerial Revolution. What is Happening in the World*. James Burnham attracts attention to the fact that, in the context of the managerial revolution that at the end of the 1930s, the society moved from bourgeois capitalism to a managerial society characterized by an accentuated separation between ownership and control, or decision and implementation, the number of managers grew rapidly, especially in the USSR, requiring more stringent control over bureaucrats and experts by politicians.

Due to the lack of references on the conceptualization of technocracy, we extended our search and findings on the principal characteristics of the technocrat to studies dedicated to the relationship between power and knowledge, the separation of politics and bureaucracy, and the evolution and diversification of public administration, especially the change in paradigm in recent years through New Public Management (Zulean *et al.*, 2017) and various attempts at reform (Profiroiu and Negoită, 2022).

Therefore, although it cannot be said that there is a continuous preoccupation of administrative scientists with technocrats and technocracy, a portrait of the technocrat can be gleaned from this research. Despite this, we believe that the term ‘technocrat’ does not yet have any scholarly value and that there is still a need for more precise conceptual refinement. It is for this reason that we propose our own definition of a technocrat at the end of the chapter dedicated to the conceptualization of the term.

Giovanni Sartori (1987) believes that although technocrats are offered more power in democratic regimes, one cannot speak of technocracy in the sense that this was experimented in South America during totalitarian regimes. Technocracies assume domination of society (Centeno, 1993, pp. 314–316) by an elite that tends to impose a single, articulated vision on society, and which is characterized or occasioned by a variety of factors: the complexity of the act of governing that rises naturally concomitant with the development of technology in general or the need for the legitimization of a regime that coopts morally and professionally upright persons who are accepted to a greater extent by the population.

Recent studies have been carried out on Greece (Soulitis, Klironomos and Karoulas, 2023), Italy (Vittori *et al.*, 2023), Austria (Helms, 2022), Portugal (Pinto and Tavares de Almeida, 2018), and several other countries (Kaltenegger and Ennser-Jedenastik, 2022; Brunclík and Parížek, 2018; Pastorella, 2015). Similar studies on Romania were carried out by Laurențiu Ștefan (2009; Ilonszki and Ștefan, 2018, pp. 203–233; Ștefan, 2018, pp. 140–159), but their focus was more on a general vision of Romania’s post-communist ministerial population, with the technocrat element being treated peripherally. None of the above-mentioned studies uses a statistical analysis over a 30-year period based on a complete database consisting of all the ministerial appointments. In general, these studies

point out that there is a new trend in European countries to appoint technocrats to ministerial positions, especially in times of great political and administrative turmoil, but they do not explain the development of the administrative sector in connection with the political system. Our approach is that the two systems, the administrative and the political, are closely interrelated: the higher the quality of democracy, the higher is the performance of the public administration and vice versa.

### **3. Methodological approach and research design**

Based on the observation of this trend associated with contemporary democratic regimes, the main hypothesis of this research is founded in the fact that current democracies change their nature by migrating from a classical formula of representative, liberal democracy to a deliberative-type democracy, from a classical, politico-administrative system that includes separation of professions (politician, bureaucrat, expert, etc.) to a post-democratic paradigm (Crouch, 2020) and which also includes, among others, the circulation of elites from the non-political area (academia, administration, finance, civil society, etc.) to the political field, already foreseen by Max Weber a century ago (Runciman, 2021, p. 146).

This article is a continuation and an expansion of previous research dedicated to the presence of technocrat ministers in the Romanian Government in the 1991–2014 period. That research did not include the Cabinet led by Dacian Cioloș (Raiu, 2015, pp. 63–74).

The study does not include either the pre- or post-ministerial careers of the persons in question, but rather limits itself to a longitudinal-type, statistical analysis of the appointments of technocrat ministers compared to those that can be considered politicians in the classical sense of the term. Therefore, the first part of the study is dedicated to conceptual boundaries, through the composition of a portrait-definition of the technocrat minister as opposed to the politician minister, beginning with the state of knowledge as it is described in specialized literature.

The theoretical approach circumscribes a neo-Weberian framework because it begins with the idea that politics and public administration are separate, and that they must function within a democratic regime not only in the sense of respecting their autonomy, but also within a somehow fertile tension (Overeem, 2010 and 2005) or even by framing bureaucracy as a non-political technical body opposing the Parliament (Schmitt, 2004, p. 12). Furthermore, politics is separate from other spheres of social life (culture, religion, economy, etc.), which it tends to neutralize and to which it offers as much freedom and autonomy as possible, as the political regime democratizes (Schmitt, 1929/1993). Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the empowerment of various areas has brought about an accelerated division between politics and society, respectively between politics and administration, generating a career separation between politicians, bureaucrats, and experts, a context in which we consider the presence of technocrats as ministers an exception rather than a rule.

The main objective of this paper is to find out if Romania joins the European trend according to which the appointments of technocrat ministers, to the detriment of senior politicians, is also increasing. The comparison with other jurisdictions is possible up to a level

because we did not identify similar studies for other countries, as we will explain in the next chapter. Furthermore, we aim to fill a gap in the literature on the conceptualization of the term ‘technocrat’ and to provide a new, straight-forward, and operational definition of ‘technocrat’. We also aim to present the broader political and administrative context that explains the reason why Romania is following the European trend to appoint technocrat ministers at the expense of politicians. The trend itself is often described in the literature as part of the decline of the neo-Weberian paradigm of politics-administration dichotomy (Aberbach, Putnam and Rockman, 1981) and the reshuffle of democracy.

To analyze the longitudinal presence of technocrats in ministerial positions in the Romanian Government in the 1991-2021 period, and counter this with the presence of political ministers, we have developed a unique database that includes all ministerial appointments in Romania in the respective period. The time frame begins in October 1991, when the first permanent (non-provisional) government was formed following the referendum-approved Romanian Constitution, which was the foundation for the democratic regime after nearly half a century of communism and ends with the dismissal of the Florin Cîțu Cabinet, and the appointment of a government led by former military general Nicolae Ciuică on 25 November 2021. The database contains the names of the ministers, the period in which they occupied one or more positions as ministers, the names of the portfolios/areas they served, as well as the codification of the area using a division of governing areas, from governing people to governing things. In other words, ministries such as education, labor, and health belong by definition to the group known as ‘governing of people,’ whereas areas like energy, transportation, or finance are associated with the ‘governing of things’ group. We used this dichotomy to test a working sub-hypothesis, namely one according to which there is a greater predisposition to offering ministerial posts to technocrats in areas that have a lesser direct impact on people, as opposed to those in which there is more work with people and in which there can be a greater electoral impact.

The database was later divided by days, in order to use the statistical and graphic data analysis to observe how many technocrats or politicians occupied ministerial positions in the 16 October 1991–25 November 2021 period. The reason we did not split this database by ministerial cabinets or electoral cycles was that a large portion of ministers, politicians, or technocrats was to be found in successive cabinets, although their dominant political orientation changed. During the data collection, we realized that there are more intermediate categories of ministers, making it impossible to reduce the entire database down to only politicians or only technocrats. As such, the first, significant category in terms of the number of ministers, is that of persons who obtained their ministerial position as technocrats, but at the end of their mandate, they were seen to be members of a political party. For purely operational reasons, we have named this data category hybrid—technocrat-political ministers, and we individualized this separately in the analysis.

We classified as minister-politicians those persons that at the time of appointment were either members of a political party or were considered associated in the public space with a political party by virtue of public positions or various prior candidatures. We did not count *interim* ministers, because their appointments, limited by Romanian legislation

to only 45 calendar days, are conditioned upon the status of the member of the cabinet and, therefore, do not refer to a similarly generous recruitment base as is the case for other ministers.

The data in the periods in which they carried out their mandates were taken from public sources, most of these available online, while that of the ministers' political affiliation, especially during the first years of Romania's democracy, was gleaned from interviews given by persons involved in major political decisions in the 1990s<sup>1</sup>.

We did not opt to break down the mandates of the ministers by political party. In some cases, the offering of ministerial mandates to technocrats has not been causal since the technocrats were taken in by a certain political party, but rather they were either part of negotiations by the coalition of governing parties or taken in directly by the coalition, and not by a specific political party.

#### **4. Who is a technocrat? Conceptual framework**

The approach to delineate a conceptual framework of the technocrat begins with a central idea within the democratic theory, namely that governing is not a scientific act, but rather a politico-administrative act which, first and foremost, must be representative of the population as a unique, indivisible entity. In this sense, Gaetano Mosca (1961, p. 599) explains the relationship between political science and politics: 'This art of governing is not political science, though it has, at one time or another, anticipated applications of a number of the postulates of political science. However, even if the art of governing has now and again enjoyed prestige with certain classes of persons who have long held possession of political functions, knowledge of it has never served as an ordinary criterion for admitting to public offices persons who were barred from them by social station. The degree of mastery of the art of governing that a person possesses is, moreover, apart from exceptional cases, a very difficult thing to determine if the person has given no practical demonstration that he possesses it.' Therefore, the presence of a technocrat in a ministerial cabinet is not mandatory, but rather an exception.

The public perception of a technocrat is linked to the definition of this person as someone who has a very deep, detailed, and rigorous knowledge of an area or sub-area of activity that is appreciated by society (medicine, education, engineering, finance, etc.). However, neither the increasing prevalence of the term 'technocrat' nor how it is used in the public space offers an operable conceptualization in a rigorously scientific framework. To define the main characteristic of the technocrat (knowledge, science, expertise), we used the method by which Aristotle divided knowledge into three types:

- Τέχνη – *technē* (craft, art), meaning productive, instrumental knowledge, which has a practical finality; for example, art or the capacity of physicians to heal a sickness;

---

1 For this information, we are especially grateful to Victor Opaschi, former presidential adviser, and state secretary for religious affairs.

- ἐπιστήμη – *episteme* (science, knowledge), meaning theoretical, contemplative, philosophical, analytical knowledge, that does not have a practical dimension finality, but rather knowledge itself; for example, geometry. Foucault (1970) believes that *Episteme* is atemporal knowledge, which grounds truth at the theoretical level;
- φρόνησις – *phronesis* (practical wisdom), meaning the use of practical wisdom to make ethical judgments for practical action (Massingham, 2019).

By systematizing the three types of knowledge, we can say that *Techne* is related to civil servants and private experts, *Episteme* more specifically to academics and philosophers, and *Phronesis* to persons who undertake practical actions based on the assimilation of theoretical knowledge, including politicians who are called upon to know and discern the political will of the people.

Michel Foucault theorized the relationship between political power and knowledge by assuming a conceptual coupling of the two: ‘power/knowledge,’ in the sense that ‘power’ and ‘knowledge’ are impossible to separate not only at the governmental level but also at the academic, cultural, and other levels. Stivers (2008, pp. 110–112) believes that knowledge and power are two forces that contribute simultaneously to the creation and functioning of the modern, liberal state from the very moment that, as shown by Foucault (2007) and Scott (2020), modern states were simultaneously built as statistics was coined as a science of the state.

The balance between ‘knowledge’ and ‘power’ was part of the entire development process that generated the governing apparatus of modern states:

‘In all the aspects of government work, two forces are entwined: knowledge and power. The rise of specific technical knowledge can be traced to the transformation of the state from the personal possession of a sovereign to an institution whose purpose is to protect and care for its citizens. Once governing started to be about something other than the person of the sovereign (‘the prince’), it required collecting and analyzing information about the population for the state to be effective in carrying out its primary duties. The word ‘statistics’ dates from the emergence of the state’s need for accurate knowledge. Knowledge without power, however, is helpless. The state has to have the power to shape its population and the factors impinging on it so that society runs well. Citizens become, in a sense, natural resources for the fashioning of an effective state. Bringing knowledge effectively to bear requires means-ends calculations, which put statistical information and analysis to work to achieve the goals of the state. Governing is no longer about the prince and his skills and wisdom (or lack of them); now it is about knowledge and power as they are put into practice by a governing apparatus’ (Stivers, 2008, p. 110).

Therefore, the rationalization of governmental practices throughout time has required, on the one hand, a consolidation of the knowledge and power couple, and on the other, a separation between expertise and decision (Weingart, 1999, pp. 151–161; Maasen and Weingart, 2006). As Theodore Lowi (1992) observes, in a democratic society, social



scientists and civil servants, both categories possessing non-political knowledge, must not stop to speak truth to power to correct populism and even a lack of technical knowledge of politicians. One can say that knowledge and power are in a relationship of checks and balances, of reciprocal control and complementarity.

*Techne* expertise belongs to bureaucracy, and it requires general, growing, societal development, while the political decision in a democratic regime corresponds to *Phronesis* in terms of political and practical knowledge of the body politic. Set as the antithesis to authoritarian and totalitarian regimes that are by definition anti-liberal, the democratic regime takes from political liberalism the need to master public administration that usually forms a common body, automatically reproducing itself, and tending to empower itself, etc. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, public administration did not only grow in size but also in attributes and increasingly technical areas of specialization (Aligica, 2017, pp. 537–538), gaining not only greater knowledge but also increasing informal, political power, summed up in the famous neo-Weberian expression ‘the power of the powerless’, which describes public administration’s capacity to influence political decisions (Kim, 2021).

Political knowledge is a necessarily unmediated knowledge of *Episteme* or *Techne*, as well as a *Phronesis*-type knowledge, acquired following a continuous confrontation with the electorate as well as and following a vast process of societal knowledge through continuous interaction with experts, CSOs, academics, international organizations, etc. The politician is not seeking *Episteme Knowledge*, but rather the production of a practical consensus, the representation of the body politic as an indivisible entity and assumes the risk of acting in the name and place of others. As highlighted by Max Weber (1917/1958) one century ago, politics is a profession and vocation that must be exercised as part of the function of the ethics of responsibility and can be found in tension with science as a vocational approach for the permanent investigation of truth, similar to religion (Tribe, 2018, pp. 125–136).

In turn, the politician tends to form a caste, even hereditary and inter-generational, which is not prepared to relinquish power, and is constantly oriented towards gaining public offices, both political as well as administrative, until he manages to become the most notable and influential figure in the country: ‘All ruling classes tend to become hereditary in fact if not in law. All political forces seem to possess a quality that in physics used to be called the force of inertia. They have a tendency, that is, to remain at the point and in the state in which they find themselves’ (Mosca, 1961, p. 599). As such, the biographies of many Western politicians who maintained their political reputation due to successful governing include not only constancy in political activity but also young age when entering politics: Winston Churchill and Margaret Thatcher joined the Conservative Party at the age of 25, while Tony Blair joined the Labour Party at age 22.

On the other hand, bureaucracy is also a caste that tends to isolate itself from other social realities, in the form of an organism that self-reproduces, from the moment civil servants recruit other civil servants (Etzioni-Halevy, 2010/1983, pp. 54–62) and develops a technical language that is increasingly inaccessible to the wider public and politicians (Farmer, 1995). Finally, the distinction between the politician and the bureaucrat is based



on how the two types relate to public policies:

‘The characteristics that distinguish the bureaucrat’s setting from that of the elected politician should lead to different ways of looking at policy and different behavioral styles. The politician gives policy general direction inspired by principles or interests or sometimes both. The bureaucrat, on the other hand, gives to policy concrete meaning derived in part from an understanding of its technical aspects and in part from negotiation with those interests immediately affected by administrative interpretation’ (Aberbach, Putnam and Rockman, 1981, p. 85).

In one of the oldest pieces of research dedicated to technocracy/technocrats, Jean Meynaud (1964, pp. 21–69) defines the technocrat as a less public figure with a clear ideological orientation, who is not just looking for validation but also public influence through accession to high government circles and the use of his technical or academic expertise. Meynaud claims that the technocrat/expert turns into a technocrat when he becomes a part of the political power apparatus, making a distinction between the technician as a person who has notable realizations in his area of expertise under political control or in the absence of political control, or the technocrat when the expert exercises executive political power. Alfred Stepan (1978, pp. 57–58) believes that technocrats behave like chameleons and rapidly change their attitude and convictions based on their political master.

Giovanni Sartori (1987, p. 433) interprets the presence of experts in political functions as a pathology of democracy: ‘...how much power [are we] prepared to entrust to the expert? So long as he proposes and advises, this is only a necessity’. Stivers (2008, p. 112) carries forward the argument in this same vein, namely that professional expertise is a resource without which the modern state cannot operate, but only if it is not used incorrectly:

‘First, professionals tend to assume that the kind of knowledge they possess is not only necessary but outweighs other knowledges in importance—for example, the knowledge ordinary people have about common life facts. Second, as Michel Foucault argued, government professionals play a major role in shaping the self-understanding of the state’s citizens. They shape us as clients of government, recipients of benefits, applicants for permits, taxpayers, students, patients, prisoners, foster children and parents, payers of child support, users of recreation facilities, residents of public housing, and so on. Residents of modern states derive a lot of their sense of self from their relationships to government; according to Foucault, the point of the activities of governing is to encourage people to understand themselves in ways that promote their obedience to the state. He insists, however, if that were all there is to governing, we could simplistically conclude that government oppresses everyone. That aspect is not all there is to it: We need to escape from the dilemma of being either for or against. One can, after all, be face-to-face [with a government], and upright. Working with a government doesn’t imply either a subjection or a blanket acceptance. One can work and be intransigent at the same time. I would even say that the two things go together.’

Public legitimacy and the credibility of the technocrat (Alexiadou and Gunaydin, 2019; Alexiadou, Spaniel and Gunaydin, 2021) are often reasons enough to call on them, and this consists of scientific knowledge often accompanied by a certain rejection of policies in general, an area associated with material and moral corruption (Centeno, 1993, p. 313). The technocrat also has a highly rationalized mentality (believing in science and rationalization), in the sense that scientifically measurable truth must be above political truth, the latter the result of inert popular thinking (of commoners, plebs), considering that ‘technics must replace politics and define his role in apolitical terms’ (Putnam, 1977, p. 385).

Technocrats are mainly not sensitive to democratic values, considering that commoners do not have access to scientific truth (Ribbhagen, 2011, p. 24). In authoritarian regimes, technocrats are ‘individuals with a high level of specialized, academic training which serves as a principal criterion based on which they are selected to occupy key decision-making or advisory roles in large complex organizations—both private and public’ (Collier, 1979, p. 403).

Often, when the government does not deliver public policies that maintain a balance between legitimacy and effectiveness, populist voices appear or technocratic-type solutions are invoked (Mair, 2013), especially in periods of crisis, when public opinion believes that the solutions proposed by political parties are partisan and scientifically unfounded and that objective measures are needed. In such cases, calling on technocrats lends an extra output legitimacy (Scharpf, 1999) to the government in crisis situations, as was recently the case during the COVID-19 pandemic (Lavezzolo, Ramiro and Fernández-Vázquez, 2022, pp. 1123–1129).

Technocrats are often invited to take ministerial positions as sort of populist ‘scape-goats’ (Semenova, 2020), saviors in situations seen as unpopular. While technocrats believe that there is a single rational solution for a public, political problem, populists consider that there is a single authentic and popular will (Muller, 2021, p. 137). Technocrats and populist politicians are both anti-pluralist and even anti-political in their approach. The technocrat conception of the politico-administrative system includes the fact that ‘politics is understood as a series of problems to be sorted out; what matters is finding the correct solution’ (Muller, 2021, p. 86), a position opposed to liberal democracy, for which the capacity of the state to represent the dynamic popular will is the most important virtue of the political regime (Manin, 1997).

Giovanni Sartori observed in the 1980s, during the height of neo-liberal expansion, that democratic regimes tend to turn into ‘technological sophocracies’ (Sartori, 1987, p. 433), ever more oriented to reaching certain technical goals that lose track of the common sense of the people. By co-opting technocrats, liberal democracy tends to create room for a deliberative type of democracy, which rather imitates the decision-making process from the private environment, where the role of deliberations is that of selecting the most efficient way of resolving problems. On the other side, in a liberal democracy, the stake is on identifying the best public policy, its resolution being no longer the attribute of politicians, but rather of the body of experts who have *Techné* (Korosenyi, 2005, pp. 371–373).

However, we must consider that not all government portfolios are suited to technocrats. For instance, while it is very easy to identify financial and economic technocrats (Christensen and Mandelkern, 2022, pp. 133–257), this is not the case in culture. Here, cultural management would be the closest specialization in the area of cultural governing, but in Romania's case, this expertise is so new that there is no consistent base for recruiting except among managers of major cultural institutions (theater, opera, etc.). Likewise, it is difficult to identify technical expertise that can qualify someone for the position of minister of the Interior, because ministers in this position handle such a vast domain, including the police, gendarmerie, as well as the national census, and a country's border security.

## 5. Main findings

According to the research objectives stated above, we have divided this chapter in parts: 1. Main findings on the conceptualization of 'technocrat' and 2. The statistical analysis of the database from a comparative perspective between technocrat, bureaucrat, and politician. In order to understand the meaning of the term 'technocrat', we have systematized in the Table below, in a comparative approach, three portraits of the politician, the technocrat, and the bureaucrat. While this paper is not intended to compare the bureaucrat with the politician and technocrat, we opted to do a systematic comparison between these three types to synthesize an operational definition of the technocrat more easily: trimitere\*\*\*

Bertsou and Caramani (2020) propose three characteristics for the technocrat: elitism, anti-pluralism, and an eminently scientific approach. Therefore, the technocrat is an elitist, at least different from the commoners, a part of a group that 'knows best', and who distinguishes himself from the political class whose meritocracy he does not recognize in any form. The technocrat is also anti-pluralist because he has a monolithic view of society and opts for a scientifically informed dichotomy between 'right/correct' and 'wrong/mistaken'. The technocrat believes in objective truths, neutral from an ideological point of view, 'in the existence of an optimal solution or truth, which can be discovered through careful and objective analysis of scientific evidence. It prioritizes output, efficiency, and optimal outcomes over other types of legitimacy and views society as a machine with many moving parts that need to operate' (Bertsou and Caramani, 2020, p. 94).

Therefore, any operational definition of the technocrat circumscribed to a public administration approach must consider the element of the legitimacy of the technocrat in a cabinet of politically appointed ministers by a majority vote in Parliament. The appointment of a technocrat minister is thus an exception, which, on the one hand, confirms the rise in the need for public administration expertise, and on the other hand represents a pathology of young democracies in which political parties are unable to co-opt quality human resources from among their senior members to whom to entrust the governing of different areas. Thus, a technocrat is a person without a partisan, political background, often highly politically socialized, with a good public and professional reputation, who carries out the function of minister for a short period to offer the governing team some added

**Table 1:** Goals and perceptions of the Technocrat, Bureaucrat, and Politician

<i>Knowledge</i>	<i>Technocrat</i>		<i>Bureaucrat</i>		<i>Politician</i>
	<i>Techne and Episteme</i>		<i>Techne</i>		<i>Phronesis</i>
Is mostly interested in...	Policies	Maintaining his status	Politics		
Electoral legitimacy	Weak or none	None	High or some		
Weaknesses	Disconsidering the will of the people	Inertia, corruption	Populism, corruption		
Performance evaluation	By stakeholders	By superiors	Through the ballot box		
Values	Efficiency, transparency	Loyalty	An imperfect form of social justice/ righteousness		
Career goals	Returning to their professional environment with higher influence	Stability	Re-election, permanent higher offices seekers		
What do they mainly do?	Playing the victim of the political and bureaucratic system	Try to be the main decider on public policies	Distributing resources		
Who do they feel is their superior?	Their original professional Environment	The bureaucratic top senior level	The political party		
How do they explain their legitimacy?	Knowledge and expertise	Through stability and institutional loyalty	Elections and a high degree of public performance		
How do they govern?	According to science/ professional training	According to procedures	According to the party agenda		
Public perception	Honest and professional	Lazy and too numerous	Corrupt and greedy		

**Source:** The authors

legitimacy or to put a set of public policies in place that mainstream politicians would not commit themselves to.

Considering the second research objective, to interpret the data collected, we must first foray into Romanian post-communist political history. Immediately after the December 1989 Revolution, many government posts were offered to experts in different areas who were not members of political parties (Barbu, 2009). Throughout the entire period analyzed, Romania had a high level of government instability and fragmentation. None of the cabinets formed were supported by a single political party that had an absolute majority in Parliament, and there was always a need for coalition governing (Ștefan, 2018). Negotiations between political parties that formed governing coalitions sometimes even included the offering of ministerial posts to persons who were not members of a political party and around whom coalition parties created consensus. Another characteristic of the post-Communist period is linked to the fact that some ministries were run by persons recognized for their expertise or influence in a specific area, irrespective of their political background (Barbu, 2016). As such, at no time in the 30 years analyzed was the position of Minister of Education carried out by anyone but a teacher, that of Minister of Foreign Affairs by anyone but a diplomat, or that of Minister of Health (with one notable exception) by anyone but a physician.

The outcome of the research must be interpreted in the context of a political regime in the process of democratization and consolidation of the organizational capacity of political parties, but that did not effect a change of significant paradigm within public administration, a reform that would have generated a separation between the careers of politicians and bureaucrats. Another relevant observation specific to Romania was that, except for Sorin Grindeanu, no other former Prime Minister returned to the position of minister in the period analyzed.

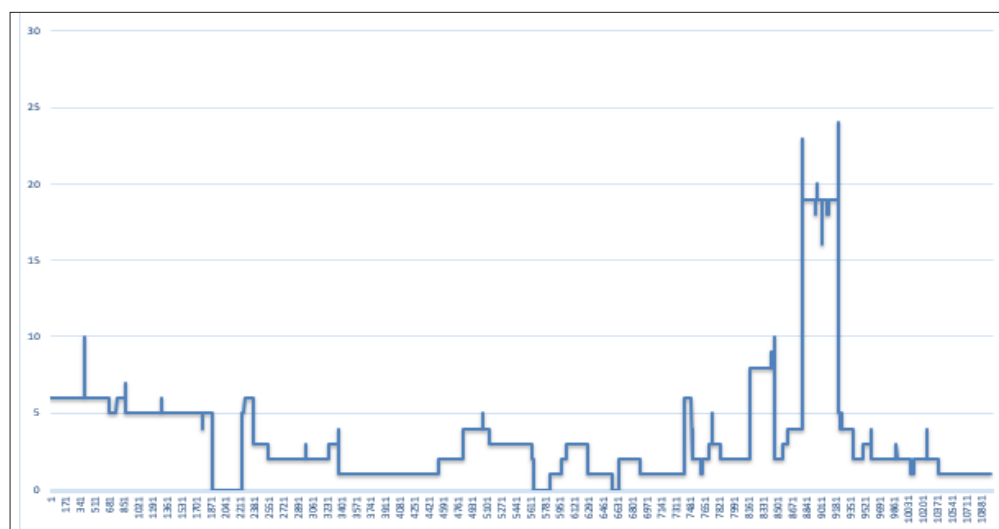
In the 10,999 days of governing taken into consideration (from 16 October 1991 to 25 November 2021), Romania had 567 ministerial mandates, with the appointment of 386 different persons, resulting in an average of 430.66 days for each ministerial mandate. Of the 567 ministerial mandates, 461 were political (81.3%), 97 were technocrats (17.1%), and 9 (1.6%) in which the technocrat became a politician during his mandate.

Previous research, in which it is analyzed only the 1991–2014 period based on similar data, so before the swearing-in of the first entirely technocratic cabinet (run by Dacian Cioloș), shows the following statistical data: 392 ministerial mandates, with the appointment of 277 different persons, of which 332 political appointments (84.6%), 53 technocrats (13.5%), and 7 (1.7%) mandates initially assumed by technocrats, who later became politicians. For the 1991–2014 period, the average duration of a ministerial mandate was 473.8 days or 32.3% of the entire duration of a mandate (1,465 days), which is only 3% greater than in the 1991–2021 period (29.39%) (Raiu, 2015).

We also tested the secondary hypothesis, according to which technocrats are offered mainly technical ministries that implement public policies whose outcomes are not directly or immediately noticed by the electorate, such as Internal Affairs, Transport, Industry,

Environment, etc., dividing ministries into those that deal predominantly with the governing of people and those who govern things.

In this case, the hypothesis is invalidated as the difference between the more technical portfolios versus the more human ones in terms of the appointment of technocrats is imperceptible. Therefore, the number of appointments of technocrats for portfolios relating to the governing of things is only by 6 greater than the portfolios relating to the governing of people between the period of 1991–2014, or only by 5 higher for the period 1991–2021. However, the most important result of the research is that relating to the graphic distribution of the presence of technocrats in the positions of ministers in the 1991–2021 period, presented in Figure 1.



**Note:** The distribution of technocrats within the Government of Romania. The number of technocrat Ministers is represented on the vertical axis, while the horizontal axis shows the 1991-2021 interval in terms of number of days.

**Figure 1:** Technocrats 1991–2021

**Source:** Authors' own work

These results show that the Romanian democratic regime is characterized at the top level of public sector by instability and fragmentation and that there is no continuous coherent presence of technocrats in ministerial positions, as in most other European countries. Although very few ministerial cabinets have been without technocrats, having become tolerated and a for-granted form of governing, there is no causal connection between the number of technocrats and major political events.

The consistent and high presence of technocrats since the beginning of the 1990s corresponds to the years during which political parties were built and the regime's need for legitimacy was very high. There is also a higher presence of technocrats after 2014 and it could be explained by the neo-liberal advance, characterized among other things also by a

boost of economic technocracy in states where there is a need for a rapid transition to a free market (Kiely, 2017, p. 726 and p. 737) and to a Good Governance paradigm.

## 6. Conclusions

The conclusions of the research show that both types of relations with technocrats are present. There are reminiscences of a Communist past that include a disjunction between ‘doing politics’ (limited to electoral campaigns, the creation and dissolution of political alliances, and the conquest of public offices) and ‘governing’ (limited predominantly to satisfying the external demands and standards, such as the acceptance into the European Union, access to the Schengen area, etc.) as rather technical and non-partisan actions.

It is not possible to speak of technocracy or even economic technocracy in Romania (Kiely, 2017, p. 737) as an antidote, even marginal, to economic problems, but rather of isolated experiments by which various technocrats were co-opted into ministerial positions, a trend similar in other European States. Moments in which technocrats were called upon to govern are not necessarily associated with episodes of political crisis, except for the installation of the technocrat Cabinet led by Dacian Cioloș, when there was major discontent in society and a lack of general trust in politicians following the tragic Colectiv nightclub fire (31<sup>st</sup> October 2015), and also as an electoral tactic, when most political parties approved and embraced the proposal of Romanian President Klaus Iohannis, to accept a completely non-political and technocrat cabinet for a limited period of approximately 14 months. The population’s trust in a technocrat cabinet subsequently dropped sharply (INSCOP, 2016).

Nevertheless, the co-opting of technocrats into the cabinets of the Romanian Government is fairly frequent to confirm the hypothesis according to which Romania is part of a European trend of government paradigm change which moves its center of gravity from an ideological commitment to a new type of managerial proceduralism specific to bureaucracy and technocracy (Pabst, 2010), which is rather interested in the ‘how it is done’ (mostly through the rule of law and expertise) rather than the ‘what is done’ (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2020, pp. 44–45). The change in the administrative theory paradigm takes place within a government whose orientation is social consensus and political representativeness to a New Public Management government, and even a post-democratic regime that offers technical responses to political problems. Furthermore, the impact of this trend on public sector is two-fold: on one hand, we are witnessing the decline of the neo-Weberian dichotomy politician versus bureaucrat, as a new player takes different roles in the public sector: the technocrat, often described as an outsider, with good reputation and great expertise that assumes, on short terms, different roles in public offices. This trend leads to a second conclusion that the separation of careers, between politicians and bureaucrats, explained and promoted by the Weberian school of thought is becoming more blurred.

This research opens the way to other future working hypotheses and research lines, especially concerning a detailed analysis of ways to recruit technocrats to junior ministerial/state secretary positions. Such an analysis could highlight certain patterns of ‘technocrat’



profiles based on several indications that have come out of this research. For instance, is there a certain common recruiting area for technocrats? The university or business environment? Are there instances of fake or *façade* technocrats, namely public experts strategically placed in public administration by political parties who manage to gain experience and reputation, so if the moment comes when the respective parties require a technocrat minister they appoint that person (*a priori* coming from the political sphere) and present her/him as a technocrat? Such research questions are meant to offer an even deeper analysis of the relationships between knowledge and power in public administration while identifying not only instruments to co-opt technocrats into political functions, but also profound reasons behind this approach.

## References:

1. Aberbach, J.D., Putnam, R.D. and Rockman, B.A., *Bureaucrats and Politicians in Western Democracies*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981.
2. Alexiadou, D. and Gunaydin, H., 'Commitment or Expertise? Technocratic Appointments as Political Responses to Economic Crises', 2019, *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. 58, no. 3, pp. 845–865.
3. Alexiadou, D., Spaniel, W. and Gunaydin, H., 'When Technocratic Appointments Signal Credibility', 2021, *Comparative Political Studies*, vol. 55, no. 3, pp. 386–419.
4. Aligica, P.D., 'Public Administration and the Classical Liberal Perspective: Criticism, Clarifications, and Reconstruction', 2017, *Administration & Society*, vol. 49, no. 4, pp. 530–551.
5. Barbu, D., *Au cetățenii suflet? O teologie politică a societăților post-seculare* [Do Citizens Have Souls? A Political Theology of Post-Secular Societies], Bucharest: Editura Vremea, 2016.
6. Barbu, D., *Die abwesende Republik*, Leipzig: Frank & Timme, 2009.
7. Bertsou, E. and Caramani, D., *The Technocratic Challenge to Democracy*, Routledge, 2020.
8. Brunclík, M. and Parížek, M., 'When are Technocratic Cabinets Formed?', 2018, *Comparative European Politics*, vol. 17, pp. 759–777.
9. Burnham, J., *The Managerial Revolution. What is Happening in the World*, New York: The John Day Company, 1941.
10. Centeno, M.A., 'The New Leviathan: The Dynamics and Limits of Technocracy', 1993, *Theory and Society*, vol. 22, no. 3, pp. 307–335.
11. Christensen, J. and Mandelkern, R., 'The Technocratic Tendencies of Economists in Government Bureaucracy', 2022, *Governance*, vol. 35, pp. 233–257.
12. Collier, D., (ed.) *The New Authoritarianism in Latin America*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979.
13. Crouch, C., *Post-Democracy after the Crises*, John Wiley & Sons, 2020.
14. Etzioni-Halevy, E., *Bureaucracy and Democracy. A Political Dilemma*, revised ed., London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 2010 [1983].
15. Farmer, D.J., *The Language of Public Administration: Bureaucracy, Modernity, and Postmodernity*, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1995.
16. Foucault, M., *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège De France. 1977-1978*, Palgrave-Macmillan, 2007.

17. Foucault, M., *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, 1970.
18. Hamren, R., 'Natural Resources in Central Europe. Legal Framework', 1996, *New Law Journal*, vol. 146, pp. 1235–1245.
19. Helms, L., 'Why Do Parties Select Non-Partisan Ministers? The Paradox of Ministerial Selection in Austria', 2022, *Representation*, vol. 59, no. 3, pp. 1–18.
20. Ilonszki, G. and Ștefan, L., 'Variations in the Expert Ministerial Framework in Hungary and Romania: Personal and Institutional Explanations', in Costa Pinto, A., Cotta, M. and Tavares de Almeida, P. (eds.), *Technocratic Ministers and Political Leadership in European Democracies*, Palgrave-Macmillan, 2018, pp. 203–233.
21. INSCOP, 'Doar 38,5% dintre români mai preferă un guvern de tehnocrați' [Only 38.5% of Romanians Still Prefer a Government of Technocrats], April 12, 2016, [Online] available at <https://www.inscop.ro/12-aprilie-2016-revista-22-inscop-doar-385-dintre-romani-mai-prefere-a-un-guvern-de-tehnocrați/>, accessed on March 3, 2023.
22. Kaltenegger, M. and Ennser-Jedenastik, L., 'Who's Fit for the Job? Allocating Ministerial Portfolios to Outsiders and Experts', 2022, *European Political Science Review*, vol. 14, no. 4, pp. 618–634.
23. Kiely, R., 'From Authoritarian Liberalism to Economic Technocracy: Neoliberalism, Politics and De-democratization', 2017, *Critical Sociology*, vol. 43, no. 4-5, pp. 725–745.
24. Kim, J., 'Rethinking Public Administration and the State: A Foucauldian Governmentality Perspective', 2021, *International Review of Public Administration*, vol. 26, no. 2, pp. 175–191.
25. Korosenyi, A., 'Political Representation in Leader Democracy', 2005, *Government and Opposition*, vol. 40, no. 3, pp. 371–373.
26. Lavezzolo, S., Ramiro, L. and Fernández-Vázquez, P., 'Technocratic Attitudes in COVID-19 Times: Change and Preference over Types of Experts', 2022, *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. 61, no. 4, pp. 1123–1142.
27. Lowi, T.J., 'The State in Political Science: How We Became What We Study', 1992, *American Political Science Review*, vol. 86, no. 1, pp. 1–7.
28. Maasen, S. and Weingart, P. (eds.), *Democratization of Expertise?: Exploring Novel Forms of Scientific Advice in Political Decision-Making*, Sociology of the Sciences Yearbook series, vol. 24, Springer Science & Business Media, 2006.
29. Mair, P., *Ruling the Void: The Hollowing of Western Democracies*, Verso, 2013.
30. Manin, B., *The Principles of Representative Government*, Cambridge University Press, 1997.
31. Mansharamani, V., 'Keep Experts on Tap, Not on Top', *Harvard Business Review*, July 23, 2012, [Online] available at <https://hbr.org/2012/07/keep-experts-on-tap-not-on-top>, accessed on March 3, 2023.
32. Massingham, P., 'An Aristotelian Interpretation of Practical Wisdom: The Case of Retirees', 2019, *Palgrave Communications*, vol. 5, DOI: 10.1057/s41599-019-0331-9.
33. McDonnell, D. and Valbruzzi, M., 'Defining and Classifying Technocrat-led and Technocratic Governments', 2014, *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. 53, pp. 654–671.
34. Meynaud, J., *Technocracy*, New York: Free Press, 1964.
35. Migchelbrink, K., 'Public Sector Workers' Support for Technocracy. Comparative Evidence from 25 European Countries', 2023, *Governance*, DOI: 10.1111/gove.12777.
36. Mosca, G., 'On the Ruling Class', in Parsons, T. (ed.), *Theories of Society: Foundations of Modern Social Theory*, New York: Free Press, 1961.

37. Muller, I.W., *Democracy Rules*, Penguin Random House, 2021.
38. Overeem, P., 'The Value of The Dichotomy: Politics, Administration, and The Political Neutrality of Administrators', 2005, *Administrative Theory & Praxis*, vol. 27, no. 2, pp. 311–329.
39. Overeem, P., *The Politics-Administration Dichotomy: A Reconstruction*, 2010, Doctoral Thesis, [Online] available at <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/14560>, accessed on March 3, 2023.
40. Pabst, A., 'The Crisis of Capitalist Democracy', 2010, *Telos*, vol. 152, pp. 44–67. DOI: 10.3817/0910152044.
41. Pastorella, G., 'Technocratic Governments in Europe: Getting the Critique Right', 2015, *Political Studies*, vol. 64, no. 4, pp. 948–965.
42. Pinto, A.C. and Tavares de Almeida, P., 'The Primacy of Experts? Non-partisan Ministers in Portuguese Democracy', in Costa Pinto, A., Cotta, M. and Tavares de Almeida, P. (eds.), *Technocratic Ministers and Political Leadership in European Democracies*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, pp. 111–137.
43. Profiroiu, C.M. and Negoită, I.C., 'Public Administration Reform in Romania: Assessing the Past and Looking into the Future', 2022, *Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences*, Special Issue, pp. 150–168.
44. Putnam, R., 'Elite Transformation in Advanced Industrial Societies. An Empirical Assessment of the Theory of Technocracy', 1977, *Comparative Political Studies*, vol. 10, no. 3, pp. 383–412.
45. Raiu, C., 'The State of Science. A Statistical Analysis on Romanian Ministerial Population', 2015, *South-East European Journal of Political Science*, vol. III, no. 1, pp. 63–74.
46. Ribbhagen, C., 'What Makes a Technocrat? Explaining Variations in Technocratic Thinking among Elite Bureaucrats', 2011, *Public Policy and Administration*, vol. 26, no. 1. DOI: 10.1177/0952076709357979
47. Runciman, D., *Confronting Leviathan: A History of Ideas*, Profile Books, 2021.
48. Sánchez-Cuenca, I., 'Neoliberal Technocracy: The Challenge to Democratic Self-Government', in Bertsou, E. and Caramani, D. (eds.), *The Technocratic Challenge to Democracy*, Routledge, 2020, pp. 44–60.
49. Sartori, G., *The Theory of Democracy Revisited. Part Two: The Classical Issues*, Chatham: Chatham House Publishers, 1987.
50. Scharpf, F., *Governing in Europe: Effective and Democratic?*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
51. Schmitt, C., 'The Age of Neutralizations and Depoliticizations (1929)', *Telos*, vol. 1993, no. 96, pp. 130–142.
52. Schmitt, C., *Legality and Legitimacy*, Duke University Press, 2004.
53. Scott, J.C., *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, Yale University Press, 2020.
54. Semenova, E., 'Expert Ministers in New Democracies: Delegation, Communist Legacies, or Technocratic Populism?', 2020, *Politics and Governance*, vol. 8, no. 4, pp. 590–602.
55. Souliotis, N., Klironomos, N. and Karoulas, G., 'The Rise of Technocrats in Greek Ministerial Elites: Evidence from 1989 to 2021', in Kakepaki, M. and Kountouri, F. (eds.), *Parliamentary Elites in Transition. Political Representation in Greece*, Palgrave Macmillan Cham, 2023, pp. 205–229.

56. Ștefan, L., 'Recruitment of Technocrats in Romanian Cabinets', in Vogel, L., Gebauer, R. and Salheiser, A. (eds), *The Contested Status of Political Elites. At the Crossroads*, Routledge, 2018, pp. 140–159.
57. Ștefan, L., *Pathways to Cabinet: Selecting Ministers in Post-Communist Romania*, Vienna: SFB, 2009.
58. Stepan, A., *State and Society*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978.
59. Stivers, C., *Governance in Dark Times: Practical Philosophy for Public Service*, Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2008.
60. Tribe, K., 'Max Weber's 'Science as a Vocation': Context, Genesis, Structure', 2018, *Sociologica*, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 125–136.
61. Vittori, D., Paulis, E., Pilet, J.-B. and Rojon, S., 'Do Technocrats Boost the Acceptance of Policy Proposals among the Citizenry? Evidence from a Survey Experiment in Italy', 2023, *Electoral Studies*, vol. 81, February 2023, 102566.
62. Weber, M., 'Science as a Vocation', 1958, *Daedalus*, vol. 87, no. 1, pp. 111–134.
63. Weingart, P., 'Scientific Expertise and Political Accountability: Paradoxes of Science in Politics', 1999, *Science and Public Policy*, vol. 26, no. 3, pp. 151–161.
64. Zulean, M., Andreescu, L., Gheorghiu, R., Roescu, A.M. and Curaj, A., 'Romanian Public Administration Reform 2.0: Using Innovative Foresight Methodologies to Engage Stakeholders and the Public', 2017, *Foresight*, vol. 19, no. 3, pp. 261–279.