GOVERNMENT SUPPORT STRUCTURES IN COALITION
GOVERNMENTS: TOWARDS AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

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1. Introduction

1.1. Coalition Governments in Central and Eastern Europe

In their recent and comprehensive study about governments in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) Blondel and Müller-Rommel summarised that the cabinet form of government has become generally adopted in sixteen observed countries\(^1\) (2001: 2). Fourteen out of sixteen CEE countries are governed by majority coalitions; Czech Republic had a coalition government during 1993-1997 and since 1998 there has been a single party minority government; government types in Bulgaria have varied considerably during 1990s, and since 2001 there is a single party majority government.\(^2\) Government is a collective body and in the majority of countries prime ministerial leadership has been remarkably well established (Ibid.: 2-5). Socio-economic conditions are diverse; hence the real contours of cabinet setting and functioning largely depend on practice.

To be successful, cabinet government has to overcome two hurdles, that of party system fractionalisation and weak leadership. If these are not overcome, governments are likely to be very unstable and the regime may collapse (Ibid.: 3). There are misgivings about the efficiency of the governmental machinery almost everywhere - overloaded of cabinet meetings, inadequate support by the secretariat, and rapid turnover of personnel (Ibid.: 4-5). When adding an experience from Western Europe – single party cabinets and majority cabinets are more stable than minority and coalition cabinets, and the larger the number of parties in the cabinet, the more conflictual is decision making (Ibid.: 194) – the circumstances indicate that instability of post-communist governments is very likely. Cabinet works better if the leaders are sufficiently well informed to be able to build consensus or to manipulate the process in the preferred way (Weller 1991: 376).

1.2. Leadership and support structures

A fundamental argument is that government has become too complex for politicians to handle effectively and this lack of expertise means that advising staff and civil servants will shape the policy (Peters 2001: 4). As government support structures assist the top of the executive, they can easily mediate interests to the leader or to the cabinet and shape the attitudes. Therefore, support structures form an important ground for opinion forming and conflict management. Well-organised top with professional expertise and proficient coordinating capacities seems to be an important feature of the leader. Support structure are considered to be a precondition for effectively functioning top, is an instrument of executive leadership, it protects the top against external criticism and prevents emergence of competing power centres (Müller-Rommel 2000: 100). Analysing this staff could therefore give us a thorough understanding how the policy is made in the very top of the executive.

\(^1\) The comparative study includes Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova, Albania, Macedonia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia and the new Yugoslavia. The notion Central and Eastern Europe is used in general meaning in this paper to denote all these countries, if not otherwise stated.

Literature about supporting structures is rather limited when comparing for instance to other aspects of the executive, such as executive leadership, executive-legislative relations, coalition politics etc. It has been rather neglected topic in comparative politics, and only recently it has begun to draw the attention of researchers. Wide variations appear to exist in the extent to which the secretariats and the Prime Ministers’ (PM) Offices are able to control a flow of proposals coming to and originating from cabinet meetings. But their role is recognised everywhere as being essential to ensure efficiency in cabinet decision-making (Blondel et al. 2001: 10).

Support structures may easily turn up to be one of the main power sources of the leader, especially in these countries, where the PM does not have extensive constitutional powers, or when the premier is limited by the coalition parties (Velthut 2000). Analysing support structures has several potentials: better understanding about policy-making with emphasis on murky political processes; increasing awareness of behaviour of the leader and his or her sources of authority; identifying contingent factors, which would not be unmasked by analysing institutional factors and formal arrangement of decision-making process.

1.2.1. Defining support structures

The notion supporting structures denotes the units, which directly advise or serve the government (Velthut 2001: 12). The structures that advise single ministers are not included here. As the tasks of supporting staff vary from technical organization to profound policy advice, it would be helpful to make distinction between administrative and coordinating staff. The former is mostly occupied with routine and technical matters, and does not contribute substantially to coordination and policy advice. The latter is associated with main policy areas of the government, it operates as an important source of information, and can shape the agenda of cabinet meetings (Velthut 2000: 9). We can make a formal distinction between staff working for the leader and those assisting the government as a whole. In reality, this division is not that clear and often, the substantial subunits of a government secretariat are acting more on behalf of the PM than the whole government (see also Peters et al. 2000: 4).

Peters, Wright and Rhodes used the notion summit, by which they referred to the leadership of the executive powers; similarly, administration of the summit indicates to the support staff that advises and helps the head of the executive (Ibid.). Goetz and Margetts employ the term Centres of Government, “the body or group of bodies that provides direct support and advice to the head of government and the council of ministers” (1999: 426). Typically, the support structures carry out a wide variety of tasks – political and administrative, routine and innovative (Ibid.) –, such as:

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3 See for instance Peters, Rhodes, Wright (eds.) (2000) Administering the summit, or Page and Wright (eds.) (1999) Bureaucratic elites in Western Europe; about CEE countries: Goetz et al. (1999, 2001). In addition to these data-rich works some studies of politico-administrative relations have sporadically included these issues - Verheijen (2001), and Blondel and Müller-Rommel (2001) contain also some information about support staff.

4 Here we mean the units dealing with coordinating important policy areas and analysts.
⇒ systemic management (general oversight of, and often intervention in the international interests of the country);
⇒ policy coordination (especially in countries which lack collegiality);
⇒ ensuring good governance (promoting an image of competence and coherence, looking after smooth running of government);
⇒ policy advice (giving objective advice to the leader, defining priorities, formulating policies and making sure that the rest of government supports ensuring supports those initiatives);
⇒ personnel management and appointments in the state apparatus (only in some countries);
⇒ political management (relations with parliament, coalition parties, and pressure groups);
⇒ monitoring and control (whether the government decisions are implemented by the executive apparatus) (Peters, Wright, Rhodes 2000: 11-14; Blondel 2000: 6).

The notions support structure and summit staff are used as synonyms in this paper. When speaking about supporting units, we predominantly mean coordinating staff, not technical-administrative personnel.

1.3. Aims of the paper

The paper focuses on government support units in parliamentary coalition governments, it does not cover Westminster-type majority governments or (semi)presidential systems. The papers intends to…:
⇒ …bring some clarity into the issues discussed and not discussed in the literature;
⇒ …argue about the analytical difficulties and value of studying support structures;
⇒ …identify key elements for understanding functioning of the support structures with reflection to developments in CEE countries;
⇒ …hypothesise about the effect of specific context upon operation of support units.

The paper does not have theoretical aspirations; rather the aim is to consider the issue of support structures from a different angle and conclude with some ideas about more plausible analytical framework.
2. Understanding government supporting structures

2.1. Existing knowledge

2.1.1. Issues of interest

The main topics of interest in the literature have been structure, organisation and size of the support units, personnel characteristics, recruitment patterns and functions of the staff; several country studies have given an account for historical development of these units, some have shown influence of the staff organisations, personal leadership styles of key actors, and few have revealed realpolitik in the summit. Often the case studies have been similar to an overview of government decision-making practices and have, therefore, contributed to understanding how the process progresses. One can also find normative elements in the country-studies, for instance regarding to structural arrangements and also political-administrative relations.

2.1.2. Observations and possible trends

Country studies give evidence of considerable variation in the degree of formality and in central roles of support structures, convergence has not ironed out country specificities and universal socio-economic trends, political or structural changes have not followed any consistent pattern (Peters et al. 2000: 22; Page and Wright 1999: 266-7). The particular composition of support structures can be explained by cultural-historical, institutional and behavioural factors; studies have also mentioned the importance of contingent factors, such as ambitions and management style of the leader and the head of the support structure5.

Support and advice for the leader and for the cabinet as a collective decision-making body are typically carried out within the framework of single institution under a common umbrella (Goetz and Margetts 1999: 426, 437). Advice to prime ministers has tended to be a combination of partisan and career officials and guidance has predominantly been short-term, policy-oriented and individual (Weller 1991: 376).

In general, the stated trends seem to fall into the question of political authority – that of politicisation and centralisation, also institutionalisation and growth of support units (Peters et al. 2000). If there seems to be little obvious convergence in many aspects of development and running of support structures, how do we know that these trends are of any analytical or informational value for describing summit staff? Politicisation and centralisation tendencies have been detected in various studies; impact of international organisations, demands for democratic accountability and effective governance are some examples of the contexts where similar observations can be made. Detecting these tendencies in the context of support structures could just give us additional confirmation about occurrence of the trends (i.e. politicisation and centralisation), but does not necessarily reveal changes or developments in the initial object of the study (support structures).

5 See: Müller-Rommel 2000: 81
2.1.3. Puzzles in the literature

Existing works say little about causal relations, but it is perhaps just a matter of time as abovementioned descriptive works give a useful ground for more elaborate and methodologically accurate studies. Hopefully these works will help to solve the puzzles, which now seem to be crucial. **First** dilemma is about the capacity and actual utility of supporting structures. Do they really help the summit (Hood 2001: 290)? It not only allows us to have a better understanding about leadership, but would also reflect development of the political system and culture in post-communist countries. Weller argues that policy advice to the prime minister needs special qualities – it has to relate the specific to the broader picture, allow the PM to concentrate on the disputed points, let the leader intervene in some area in an informed and effective way, and bring a different perspective into understanding the issues (1991: 376-377). This list of qualities refers to the need for highly capable, innovative and analytical staff. We can further rise the issue of effectiveness and political influence of the support structure – are these two compatible?

(a) Influence of support structure: does it constitute a clear power centre and are there competing ones in the political system as well? To what extent the leader relies on other sources of advice and information besides the support structure?

(b) The question of effectiveness of the support structures relates to two issues – running the machinery and shaping policy (Page and Wright 1999: 269). Capacity of policy making and advice giving depends on expertise and experience of the staff (Ibid.). It is clear that smooth management and coordination reflects the office’s influence, but is the influence on the governing apparatus always indispensable in case of substantial policy advice? Now we come to the question about the genuine goals of the supporting units – is the summit staff necessarily visible and prestigious?

The **second** puzzle concerns relation between the supporting structures and the quality of democracy. It was argued that the way the summit is administered affects the quality of democracy (Sotiropoulos 2001: 192). If the majority party happens to wield the power, there is a threat that other political institutions may become responsive mainly to the needs of the party leadership and, as a consequence, can restrict the development of democracy (Ibid.). But the case study does not ask whether it is the effect of functioning of summit or a explicable consequence of particular characteristics of political system?

And **finally**, the question asked and not answered by Peters et al. - does the format of serving chief executives really make a difference? Answering this question requires careful methodological consideration; is it altogether possible to compare format and effectiveness of supporting units in different institutional settings in a meaningful way?

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6 Greek case study suggests the latter – the Prime Minister wields more power than any other West European head of government, he is relatively unchallenged to shape the composition and define the functions of the Prime Minister’s Office (Sotiropoulos 2001). In these circumstances the premier can control the executive and shape the support units according to his personal preferences.
2.2. Studying supporting structures

2.2.1. What is explained?

Could studying administration of the summit tell us something unobvious or enables to explain something what is hard to capture? Perhaps is depends what we want to study.

We can ask, what accounts for particular developments in support structures? In this case we are interested in support structures themselves, for example why are they arranged in a particular way or how they are internally organised? Considering summit staff as a dependent variable would probably mean ending up with identifying a traditional array of institutional and constitutional, cultural and historical factors. Administering the Summit is an example of colourful detailed description, which uses a mixture of approaches. The emphasis was on identifying the causes of the particular arrangement through structural, cultural, historical and behavioural accounts. Though, concluding that supporting structures are more influential in Germany than in Italy or Denmark gives us little knowledge about internal logics of summit staff, but reflects other factors of the political system.

Alternatively, we may ask what do support units account for? Considering support structures as an independent variable could perform as a fruitful prism for analysing something else – interest groups, politico-administrative relation, use of power, values and attitudes et cetera. Here the emphasis is upon deeper understanding of contemporary political realm and the aim is not to conclude with some kind of laws or to show the events to be instances of general uniformities or regularities. The analysis moves towards profound underlying principles of running mission and values of support structures.

2.2.2. How to tackle the puzzle questions?

Before discussing useful approaches to address unexplained issues in the literature, it would be reasonable to consider some general problems of analysis. First problem relates to reliable and sufficient data. How plausible would it be for political scientist to get a relevant picture about informal and confidential discussions? It is not easy to get satisfactory data, because of secrecy and political sensitivity of the field. Second problem is about basis for evaluation. There is no agreed measure for deciding effectiveness or democratic accountability of the support structures. This would probably remain the matter of relative estimation. Now we reach the third problem – the aim, value and feasibility of comparison. What kinds of comparisons are reasonable to undertake and what could be the additional value of these studies? Three broad kind of comparisons can be done: (a) cross-country comparisons; (b) comparisons over time; (c) comparison across sub-national units.

Cross-country comparisons – as support structures reflect the classical variables in political studies, we would be able to conclude variation over countries with reference to different

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7 By comparison we do not mean a general logic of inquiry opposed to, for instance, experimentation. Political science can hardly be an area of experimental tests and the “art of comparing” is one of the most important cornerstones in studying politics and society (Pennings, Keman, Kleinnijenhuis 1999:3). By comparative studies we primarily point to analyses of similar processes and institutions in a limited number of countries, or development of typologies about some phenomenon covering a range of countries or components of political system (Peters 1998: 10). A study can also be comparative within a single country (across different institutions, level of government etc) or across the time.
national environment. Still, it is not possible to relevantly explain support structures when ignoring contextual factors. But a threat about broad cross-country studies is that the emphasis would be on these institutional-contextual factors, and probably not enough energy would be put into going beyond these factors to reveal the internal logics of operation of support structures.

A single country study over time would be a good starting point for explaining this logic. In this case, errors and extraneous variance are more probable to control weight against cross-country analysis. Hence, studies relying on historical institutionalism promise some understanding about how the developments in support units have corresponded with other events and processes in the top executive. This explanation needs to cover at least a decade to be a basis for thick historical account.

Utility of support structures can be evaluated only in relation to the specific contextual needs of the particular government (what is the best the supporting units can do). There is not only considerable variation across countries, but also between different governments in one country. Comparison across sub-national units could be helpful here. Literature does not specify in which sense summit administration is unique. Are there for instance differences between values, attitudes, politico-administrative relations between summit units and top executive of the ministries, i.e. top bureaucracy in general? The distinctive feature of summit units is their location, but does it automatically make them more important, visible or political? Country studies do not suggest a common pattern, but variations in leadership qualities (such as authority, personal characters and management style of the leader) have impact on staff; but isn’t the same thing happening in the ministries and in other places, where politicians rule?

Seems that studying government support structures is, first and foremost, reasonable for in-depth country-studies, but contributes little to comparative politics. The puzzles of efficiency and democratic accountability of summit staff could be elucidated when we were aware of the foundations of support units. Question whether the format of summit staff matters can be only discussed once we have understood the other two puzzles.

All puzzle questions tend to lead us towards thick, historical or behavioural analysis to perceive the specific character of the government. Wide range of governments exists (Blondel 1982) and we can assume that coalition government support structures are in some respect different, for instance, from administration of the summit in presidential systems. The next part of the paper focuses on likely differences in coalition governments with reference to developments in CEE and suggests key factors for understanding the essence of functioning of summit staff.

3. Capturing the essence of support structures

3.1. Varieties in coalition governments

Limiting our focus on coalition governments we can reduce some variance in institutional and constitutional settings, which establish general features of the executive leadership, and consequently, frame operation of support staff. For instance it is apparent, that in coalition governments there are fewer possibilities for one party dominance or emergence of
powerful leader than in single-party cabinets. Even if we are only speaking about majority coalitions, there is still considerable variation depending for example on motives of the coalition parties (Laver and Schofield 1991: 61), ideological connection (ibid.), degree of collegiality or hierarchy (Blondel 1982), and strength of parties (Blondel and Golosov 2000: 11).

For the sake of simplicity, a rough distinction is made between party-dominated coalitions and consensus-dominated coalitions. The former is the result of bargaining between parties, who have their own political interests, and once in power, the partisan concerns of coalition members remain visible. The coalition is above all a political deal for gaining power. Collegiality is primarily a tool for maintaining government unity, not that much a reflection of ideological connection or aggregation of societal interests. The latter is predominantly a cooperative and consensual body. Although retaining party preferences, it relies on basic agreed values and collegiality is perceived as a productive way of policy-making, not only as a tool for keeping government unanimity. In this type of government collegiality is a mechanism for achieving consistency between different interest and segments of society.

Dubious trends and difficulties in drawing feasible conclusions in Administering the Summit emerged from not considering the features of government as framing forces for support units. It would make more sense to compare structure and operation of summit staff for instance in Sweden and Denmark than Italy and Sweden.

Literature outlines dominance of political aspects of cabinet life in CEE (Blondel and Müller-Rommel 2001; Peters 2001; Goetz and Wollmann 2001); there have been many attempts to reform administrative systems and forcefully generate new patterns of relationships between politicians and top officials (Verheijen 2001). Coalition governments in CEE tend to fall into the category of party-dominated coalition. What does it tell us about where to put most attention while studying support structures in CEE? Governments need to put lot of effort in building unity to avoid conflicts that can easily lead to collapse of the coalition. Party dynamics is crucial for understanding these governments, because conflict between parties and coalition instability generates the need for simpler, more reliable and predictable ways of reaching policy agreements. Supplementary corporatist relations can be the solution to the problem emerging from the disorganisation of political parties. Norms of trust and reciprocity and stable party system will make managing the succession of one party to another easier and it is more likely to produce something similar to “village” (Peters 2001: 12).

Though, it would be naïve to assume a single common pattern in CEE countries despite of some similarities in the type of coalition. A recent study of Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria and Czech Republic give evidence of substantial variance (Goetz and Wollmann 2001). We are arguing that there are two key elements in understanding party-dominated coalitions in

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8 For further precision, a difference between Scandinavian type of collegiality and consociational consensus could be made.

9 For instance, Hungary and Poland seem to be more hierarchical, there has been a development towards prime-ministerialism and in both cases the leader has remoulded the government support structures to serving him rather than the whole government (Ibid: 869-72). Conversely, for instance Bulgaria and Czech Republic are more collegial and supporting structures are mainly serving for the whole cabinet (Goetz et al. 2001: 872).
CEE – strength of party and trust between politicians and top bureaucrats. Focusing our attention on these two would allow us to get substantially closer to understanding the underlying principles of work and actual mission of support structures.

3.2. Key factors for analysing support structures

Support structures reflect features of coalition and, presumably, work along necessities of the government. Looking at institutionalisation of parties and accumulated trust between politicians and top bureaucracy would at least partly allow us to identify the necessities of the particular coalition. Main argument is that support structures principally develop along these needs; moreover, governments are quite free to alter the composition of coordinating support structures.

Party stability is an indicator of support structures’ focus. It shows whether the support units are primarily serving the leader or the government as a whole? Two central features of coalition parties deserve attention – party discipline and durability of government. The general logic of arguing is that more disciplined parties together with longer-lasting coalitions make the emergence of the leader more likely and discourage the feeling and need for consensus in the cabinet. Conversely, weaker party discipline and danger of coalition breakdown tends to exaggerate government unity and stresses avoidance of disagreements. These circumstances are likely to promote equality and there is not much leeway for emergence of the powerful leader.

General ethos of trust is an indicator of scope and roles of the support structures. Trust in the administration between politicians and top civil servants contributes to open channels for informal communication, which makes it easier for the staff to achieve coordination tasks. In case of mistrust, relationships and networks between summit staff and top civil servants in the ministries and agencies are not only less likely to develop, but there would also be limits for information flow. As a result, supporting staff is impeded to coordinate policy, monitor implementation, get good oversight and run the government smoothly.

Besides indicating the focus, scope and roles of summit staff, we are insisting that trust and strength of parties also account for two broad categories of tasks support structures have to cope with. Party stability reflects the focus of support structures and accounts largely for achievement of political goals. Trust reflects scope and roles (not operational functions!) of the support units and accounts for achievement of successful government. It can mean that in case of stable coalition with disciplined parties, but without substantial trust, it is likely that coordinating support structure is mostly able to perform political tasks. These can be management of relations with interest groups, legislature, and coalition parties (especially with the party of the leader), or appointments to top positions, which in the longer run could also mean building trust. Conversely, if a coalition is unstable and party cannot

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10 Here we are meaning general trust in the governing apparatus (mainly in the top of ministries and executive agencies), not between cabinet and support staff.

11 Definition of substantial trust is relative to the specific context. Discussion about the problems of defining trust goes beyond the scope and aims of this paper.
control its members, but relations of trust are established in the system, there would be a tendency for depoliticisation of government.

3.2. Putting the parts together – building a bridge or an ivory tower?

It was argued that features of political system establish the basic characteristics of the executive and of the support structures, but these are not sufficient conditions for understanding the logics of functioning of summit staff. Focusing on stability of coalition parties and general trust between politicians and top bureaucrats would allow us to understand the main mission and essence of support units. In other words, these two factors generate a space, where support structures are evolving. It was reasoned that depending on the particular configuration, this space could be around the leader or the cabinet, and indicated that the summit staff could get more or less hold of different networks. Figure 1 illustrates how the context shapes the space of operation of support structures and suggests the central role of support staff.

Figure 1.

(A) PARTY DISCIPLINE AND STABILITY

(FOCUS OF SUPPORT STRUCTURES)

(A1) Strength  
Favours emergence of the leader  
Leader; development of PMO

(A2) Weakness  
Favours cabinet equality  
Government; PMO remains latent

(B) TRUST

SPAN and ROLE OF THE STAFF UNITS

(B1) Trust between politicians and top civil servants
Networking inside the governmental apparatus; good basis for coordination; facilitation of coherence in the core executive.
Support units ⇒ tendency to build bridges.

(B2) Distrust between politicians and top civil servants
Networking outside the government; focus on selective relation building with interest groups;
Support units ⇒ tendency to build ivory tower.

While party factor can account for the main locus of support units, trust could reveal what the summit administration tends to do – build bridges or fortify the ivory tower. From this basis we can explain why support structures are functioning in a certain way, which helps us to evaluate and consider their effectiveness and democratic accountability. For instance

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12 Prime Minister’s Office
Ivory tower type of support structure can easily drift away from democratic accountability because of selective networking.

Building the study up in this way helps us to focus on crucial aspects of support structures and leads us towards perceiving the underlying mechanisms of support structures. We are not arguing that features of coalition, party and trust are all we need to study; in contrast, this framework could operate as a starting point for understanding fundamental qualities of support structures while viewing operational tasks, structural aspects and personnel characteristics in these units. This prism is meant to work as an analytical basis for evaluating latent features of summit units – for instance relative effectiveness and democratic accountability. This approach can give some explanation why the staff is not functioning in the most effective way – because of weakness of party or mistrust. The main value of this discussion is that now we better positioned to estimate the efficiency of support structures in relation to their environment. If not understanding environmental space as a framing condition, we would not be able to analytically distinguish between efficiency of the government and efficiency of the support structures. Now we can revisit the third puzzle – would it make sense to argue about significance of format of support structures? We may be able to identify some patterns of structure and logic of functioning of support units, but it would be doubtful to assume that it is the effect of format, what determines, for instance, effectiveness of support units.

It is a first attempt to systematically link these concepts and should be therefore considered as a hypothetical modelling, not the final formula. Moreover, it is not a complete explanation, because internal features of support structures are not viewed. Immaturity of this reasoning comes apparent, for instance, when asking about capacities of support structure to reshape this space. The qualities of personnel would affect how the support units can operate in the space created by the environment. Now, it would be interesting to analyse, whether support units are under some conditions able to ignore the shape of the existing space. The other weakness of this reasoning is that technical personnel, who is not involved in coordinating, policy advice, networking or agenda setting activities, is not considered here. It is not adequate to ignore them completely because bureaucratic pressures are not marginal. It would also be challenging to analyse how the concept of public service bargains (Hood 2000) relates to the values and principles of loyalty to summit staff. Support staff does not have direct implementation power, focus of advice can put the meaning of bargain and dimensions of costs to politicians under different conditions.

4. Conclusions

This paper is built on earlier works about government support structures and argued about possible analytical values and dilemmas of these studies. However, from the above we can guess that attempting to draw cross-country comparisons is a complicated task, which could give us little new knowledge. Literature does not suggest law-like common patterns of either organisational arrangement or influence of support structures. The main value of analysing support structures seems to lie in thick historical and behavioural country-studies, where it contributes to understanding government decision-making and could illuminate latent relationships in the summit. It was argued that support structures do not develop in
isolation; their main characteristics depend on more or less specific features of political system. Ignoring support structures in core executive studies would mean overlooking one of the most controversial, potentially informative and influential parts of the apparatus.

What matters about government support structures? It is not so much a formal structure and a format of serving government, but the supporting structure’s ability to serve for the needs of the political system. The main interest of the paper was to understand the underlying goals, in other words, the essence of functioning of support structures. The support structure reflects the features of government and tends to operate according to the necessities the coalition generates. Literature insisted that CEE governments tend to be party-dominated rather than consensus-dominated.

It was reasoned that the two key factors – strength of party and trust between politicians and top bureaucrats – could serve as a foundation for understand the essence of support units. Party stability reflects the focus of support structures and accounts for achievement of political goals. Trust reflects scope and roles of the support units and accounts for achievement of successful government. These two factors generate a space, where support structures are evolving. For instance, party discipline and stability of coalition tend to be favourable conditions for emergence of the leader, while weak parties promote government equality and collegiality as a mechanism for retaining unity and preventing coalition breakdown. Trust between politicians and top civil servants gives good opportunities for the support staff to create networks and, consequently facilitates coordination and coherence in the executive. As a result, government support units are functioning as bridge builders. Mistrust leaves more opportunities for the support structure to communicate with external groups and build different, probably not balanced, but biased networks. In this case, the support structures are fortifying the ivory tower, rather than building bridges.

This argumentation helps to explain why support structures are functioning in a certain way and it facilitates evaluating and considering their effectiveness and democratic accountability in a more relevant way. The main value of this discussion is that it allows estimating efficiency of support structures in relation to their environment. If not understanding environmental space as a framing condition, we would not be able to analytically distinguish between efficiency of the government and efficiency of the support structures. It is a first attempt of developing an analytical framework for studying government support structures in a productive way, still more explicit conceptualising needs to be done.

Some interesting issues for further research can be raised – is the support structure just operating in the space created, or can it alter this space? Assuming that support units carry some institutional inertia, how would they react to the changes in government? As we can see, the questions about support structures meet the issues of politico-administrative relations.
References


