

Newcomers' prospects in and around the political arena – The case of Hungary

Employment opportunities and career models for young political science graduates
in and around the political arena in Hungary

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Introduction

Employment opportunities of young graduates are in the centre of public attention all across Europe. This is the case also in Hungary where the registered unemployment rate of the age-group under 25 was above 20% in November 2005, compared to a national unemployment rate of 7.3%.¹ According to the survey published by the Public Employment Service in April 2006, 61842 job-seekers were unemployed in the category “under 25” - 35016 of them as school-leavers - which means that one in ten job-seekers was younger than 25 years old.² On the other hand - as expert studies regularly stress it and the recent debates in France around the bill on the *contrat première embauche* proved it again – the question of work experience is a key element of this complex problem.

Political science has got some special characteristics in the world of social sciences. Many discussions arise from these peculiarities, concerning - among others - relations between theory and practice or between political science and politics. From this paper's point of view, the interdisciplinary nature of this scientific domain and the importance of bridges between theory and practice in politics should be underlined. A profound knowledge about the flesh and blood of the functioning of the political system and personal experiences about the everyday institutional practice are therefore of the greatest importance for researchers but even more for political advisers, consultants, analysts, officials and media workers in and around the political arena.

As political science is a relatively new discipline among social sciences and a relatively new university specialization in Hungary, professional identity of students is often underdeveloped, the number of available stagiaire positions – providing basic professional experience – is very limited and stage opportunities found by motivated students are rather individual and accidental. On the other hand, undergraduate work experience forms – or should form – an integral part of a wider set of ideas and plans concerning young graduates' professional career.

¹ Source: web site of the Ministry of Employment and Labour, www.fmm.gov.hu

² Source: web site of the Public Employment Service, www.afsz.hu

Based on this approach, this paper concentrates on the relation between work experience and employment prospects of young political science graduates in Hungary in the light of typical career models in and around the political arena, with keeping in mind the aforementioned interdisciplinary nature of political studies, which may open up completely different vistas for some of them, but also with regard to the situation and the role of political science in Hungarian higher education.

I set up three general categories and I describe eight career models:

Observative role - researcher

Participative roles - politician, political adviser, civil servant, EU official, lobbyist

Intermediate roles - consultant, media worker

In the main body of my paper I give a brief overview, as a background, on the current situation of political science among social sciences and in higher education in Hungary and I examine the required qualifications and skills, ways of access, promotion opportunities, career turning points and possible personal strategies available for young graduates related to the aforementioned roles and career models.

I also point out five major challenges universities and political science undergraduates have to face, such as

- adapting themselves to the new requirements after the introduction of the Bologna-system in Hungarian higher education;
- better adjusting the content of curricula and educational services provided by universities and colleges to the requirements of the labour market;
- providing more opportunities for undergraduates to gain professional experience as an integral part of their university studies;
- familiarizing actors on the labour market, especially in and around the political arena, with the content of political studies and the value of such a diploma but also
- showing more responsibility by the students themselves when it comes to their future professional career.

The findings of this paper are based on interviews with political science undergraduates, graduates, PhD students, university lecturers and professors, on public databases about the Hungarian labour market and higher education and on personal experiences, with an outlook to the introspective literature of modern Hungarian political science in the past one decade and a half.

Political science in Hungary in the transition period and nowadays

The birth and the institutionalization of political science and the transition period after the change of regime were closely interlinked in Hungary. The roots of modern Hungarian political science should be discovered in the critical attitude of reform communist and opposition intellectuals engaged in political debates in the late 80's. At that time, those 400-500 people who maintained regular contacts with the Hungarian Political Science Association (HUPSA) were mainly lecturers of a political economics, scientific socialism, law, sociology, history or philosophy department of a university faculty or

researchers in an institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. (Tóké, 1988: 16) Many of them were “double-tied heroes”: scientists on the one hand but employees of a state-financed university or academic institute on the other. (Bihari, 1986: 108) From another point of view, they were at the same time both observers and active participants of a political experiment. (Tóké, 1988: 30) This was the period when the first representatives of the “logocracy” - a group of new-type intellectuals, independent thinkers and political advisers, backroom observers of public debates around the reform proposals - have also emerged. (Gombár – Lengyel, 1986: 119)

The year 1991 was a landmark in the history of modern Hungarian political science. Both ELTE Budapest University and Budapest University of Economic Sciences have started their political science specializations for senior and postgraduate students; “Századvég” School of Politics launched its first training courses aimed at instructing experts for political parties, interest groups and NGOs but also politicians; the Institute of Political Sciences of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the editorial board of *Politikatudományi Szemle* – the representative journal of political science in Hungary - have been established; several important foundations have been set up; and HUPSA was preparing itself for a renewal. (Szabó: 1992, 234-236)

Hungarian political science made considerable efforts and progress in the field of professionalization in the 90's. The main objectives were to establish and to strengthen the institutional framework, to introduce and integrate political science into the club of social sciences, to eliminate the consequences of the historical discontinuity and to perform well in transitology researches. (Balogh: 1999, 131-132) As a result of these efforts, nowadays not only the critical function but also the cognitive and discursive functions of Hungarian political science are performing better and better.

On the other hand, partly in consequence of the characteristics of the pioneering years, political scientists still hold a controversy with each other on the dividing line between political science on the one hand and everyday political discourse on the other. Many of them underline the lasting impact of the aforementioned close connection between the change of regime and the emergence of modern Hungarian political science, which has resulted in a “comfortable mixture” of scientific and political aspects and has significantly contributed to the current shortcomings in this scientific domain. (Becskeházi, 1994: 162) Nevertheless, as *István Schlett* stressed it in an interview, “consequence” has a different meaning for a politician – or a political adviser – and a political scientist. While the decision is the main outcome for the former, well-founded findings, a profound description of a political phenomenon or an authentic scientific interpretation means the success for the latter.³ At this point, with special regard and reference to the frequent appearance of political scientists in the Hungarian media, the difference between the scientific attitude and the logic of the media should also be emphasized, this latter putting conflicts in the forefront, even when it comes to political analyses.

³ Nagy József: Szerepcseré. Schlett István a tudományról és a politikáról. In: 168 Óra. 2004. 1. p.16-17.

The lack of well-determined dividing lines between politics and political science and also between roles performed by political scientists in the scientific field on the one hand and in the political arena or the media on the other, which is an important aspect but certainly not the biggest challenge Hungarian political science has to face, largely contributes to the low prestige of the discipline in Hungary. (Fritz, 1994: 168-169) However, as *Tibor Löffler* pointed it out in a recent essay of his, the complete separation of political journalism on the one hand and academic political science on the other may also be dangerous, as it may result in an isolation of this latter, exerting negative effect on the future prospects of this young scientific domain. (Löffler, 2006: 175)

At the same time, another interesting and contradictory set of phenomena may also be observed in the Hungarian society where both a feeling of being overpoliticized and a strong anti-political attitude - resulting in a “depoliticized elite-democracy” – are present and are closely interlinked. (Löffler, 2006: 173) This anti-political climate in the public opinion has a strong impact not only on the position occupied by political science among social sciences but also on the reputation of the diploma obtained by political science graduates.

To sum it up, we may agree with *András Láncki* and *Gábor Török* that the situation of contemporary Hungarian political science is determined by four main factors:

- views and opinions - political journalism - are more lively than researches and studies;
 - the prestige of the discipline is sadly low and political science is the pariah of social sciences;
 - the restricted number of researchers makes the evolution of a real professional-critical scientific community impossible in many fields of research and
 - political science has not found its way in Hungarian higher education yet.
- (Láncki-Török, 2003: 26)⁴

Political science in Hungarian higher education

The year 2006 marks an epoch in Hungarian higher education, following the adoption of a new law and the introduction of the Bologna-system.⁵ The challenges related to the restructuring of political studies curricula may provide a unique opportunity to rethink the aims, the character and the system of political science specializations and courses.

⁴ In his essay published in 1994, *Tamás Fritz* pointed out the mixing of political science and politics, the lack of a generally accepted scientific terminology, an “overpeaceful” or even indifferent coexistence of various scientific approaches, provincial scientific theory and methods, an extravagantly West-oriented - often “American-type” – method of analysis and the uncertainties concerning scientific genres as the main problems of modern Hungarian political science. (Fritz, 1994: 168-173) On the other hand, in 2001, *András Láncki* mentioned the domination of “political gurus” and the “political kitsch”, the dominance of comprehensive textbooks over partial studies and the consequences of the influence of American political science as the main obstacles Hungarian political science has to face. (Láncki, 2001: 159)

⁵ The *Act on Higher Education* (2005. évi CXXXIX. törvény a felsőoktatásról) was adopted by the Hungarian Parliament in 2005.

Alike the heritage of the pioneering years still determines the conditions of Hungarian political science as a whole, this is also true for the situation of political studies in higher education. As *Attila Becskeházi* wrote it in the mid-90's, "Hungarian political science had been institutionalized, they had already taught and researched it, before it could become a real science indeed." (Becskeházi, 1994: 162) The first years of the transition period were characterized by a rapidly increasing demand but an insufficient supply in political studies courses. As a result of the historical discontinuity, the vast majority of university political science departments were successors - but also descendants - of former "scientific socialism" departments or have been established by professors and lecturers from other academic areas – mainly from history, philosophy, law, economic science, scientific socialism or political economics - which is one main reason of the sometimes poor theoretical and methodological background of the discipline in Hungary. (Lánczi, 2001: 165)

The first significant steps taken by political science in Hungarian higher education were the specializations introduced by ELTE Budapest University and Budapest University of Economic Sciences in 1991. At that time, another new feature was the appearance of the training courses organized by "Századvég" School of Politics, aimed at instructing experts for political parties, interest groups and NGOs but also politicians. Later on, other universities and colleges have also set up or have strengthened their political science departments and some of them have started their own specializations, as well. Their teaching programmes followed divergent directions based on their institutional capacities and on the former research experiences of their professors and lecturers rather than on the requirements of the discipline or of the labour market. A good example of divergent curricula was the teaching programmes worked out and put into practice by two faculties of the same university: the Faculty of Law and Political Sciences and the Faculty of Arts and Sciences of ELTE Budapest University. The Faculty of Law put special emphasis on legal and constitutional theory aspects while the Faculty of Arts and Sciences paid particular attention to the historical background and to theory of politics. At the same time, Political Science Department of Budapest University of Economic Sciences did a pioneering work by introducing a public policy aspect and an applied science approach to Hungarian political science. Nevertheless, these differences still may be observed by taking a glance at the list of entrance exam subjects required by various faculties (*see Table I*).

In 2006, the first year of the Bologna-system in Hungarian higher education, six universities and one college (and "Századvég" School of Politics, in cooperation with Corvinus University of Budapest) are going to start BA- and MA-level specializations in political science:

University / College	Diploma	Degree	Semes- ters	Students	Subjects of the entrance exam
Central European University, Department of Political Science	Political Science	Postgraduate MA	10 months		short written exposition of a problem in Political Science
Central European University, Center for Policy Studies	Public Policy	Postgraduate MA	12 months		written work demonstrating analytical and argumentation skills
Corvinus University of Budapest, Faculty of Social Sciences	Political Science	BA	6	55	History + English or Literature or Mathematics
Corvinus University of Budapest, Faculty of Social Sciences	Economist - Political Scientist	Graduate diploma	4-5	50	Political Science
ELTE Budapest University, Faculty of Law and Political Sciences	Political Science	BA	6	105	Literature + History
ELTE Budapest University, Faculty of Law and Political Sciences	Political Science	Postgraduate BA	6	30	Literature + History
“Századvég” School of Politics	Political Expert (specializations: public policy, political communication)	Postgraduate MA or BA	4		written and oral exams on general and political subjects
University of Miskolc, Faculty of Arts	Political Science	BA	6	147	Literature or Social Studies or History (two of the three)
University of Miskolc, Faculty of Arts	Political Science	Postgraduate BA	6	50	-
University of Pécs, Faculty of Political and Legal Sciences	Political Science	BA	6	50	Literature or Mathematics or Social Studies or History or a foreign language (two of them)
University of Pécs, Faculty of Political and Legal Sciences	Political Science	BA	6	30	general oral exam
University of Szeged, Faculty of Science	Political Science	BA	6	80	Literature + History
University of Szeged, Faculty of Science	Political Science	Postgraduate BA	6	40	-
King Sigismund College, Institute of International and Political Studies	Political Science	BA	6	262	Literature or Mathematics or Social Studies or History or a foreign language or introductory studies

Table 1: Political science specializations in Hungarian higher education, 2006 (Bologna-system), source: web sites of National Higher Education Information Centre, Central European University and “Századvég” School of Politics

To sum it up, we can conclude that the challenges – and, in the first place, the problem of a rapidly increasing demand and a limited supply in political studies courses, deriving mainly from the discontinuity in the discipline's history in Hungary – that political science departments of universities had to face in the mid-90's have left their long-lasting mark on the situation of political science in Hungarian higher education. The lack of a well-balanced development is responsible for the uncertain aims and character of many university curricula in this field and the distortion of teaching programmes, failing well-prepared researchers and lecturers in several research areas. Educational services are still determined by narrow capacities rather than real demands. These are the main reasons why many graduates' professional identity remains limited and why university political science departments are neither capable to establish an active and stable cooperation with the main actors on the labour market in and around the political arena nor able to provide undergraduate stage opportunities for the vast majority of their students.

Observer or participant? – Career models in and around the political arena in Hungary

Although undergraduate work experience forms – or should form – an integral part of a wider set of ideas and plans concerning one's future professional career, solutions found by motivated students to this problem are rather individual and accidental, and no well-established and well-functioning mechanisms can be mentioned in this field. This paper concentrates therefore on the relation between work experience and employment prospects of young political science graduates in Hungary primarily in the light of typical career models in and around the political arena, with keeping in mind the interdisciplinary nature of political studies, which may open up completely different vistas for some of them.

My findings are based on the following approach:

- although political science curricula have significantly matured in the past one decade and a half and they have managed to achieve a certain stability, ways how to make use of such a university degree are still unclear for many, as political institutions and parties, international organizations, public administration, public education and the private sector are not prepared for taking a multitude of young political science graduates into their service. As a response to this problem, university faculties have started to put more emphasize on public policy-oriented and communication-oriented subjects in their political studies curricula, which may improve the situation but cannot solve this problem in itself (Balogh, 1999: 138);
- the diploma in political science issued by Hungarian universities is a degree of high value, certifying valuable and exploitable knowledge and offering good career opportunities for well-prepared and highly qualified young experts. On the other hand, it is also true that, according to many employers on the labour market, such a diploma has a limited prestige as a result of the mistrust deriving from the uneven standard of political science specializations and the lack of knowledge about the real content of political studies but also as a result of politics being a sphere full of personal dependencies and

being considered the hotbed of corruption, which has a negative impact on the reputation of its wider milieu, as well;

- there are no crystallized career models in this area, as political science is a relatively new specialization in Hungarian higher education and recruitment mechanisms in and around the political arena have completely changed in the transition period, and are still undergoing a transformation. The key categories in this field are *confidence* – including both personal confidence and political reliability – and *competence*, based on professional expertise and credibility. This latter seems to be more and more relevant, also with regard to the growing importance of professional specialization among both politicians and political advisers. This is why public policy studies are gaining ground in political studies curricula and why political science undergraduates must pay particular attention to their specialized lectures;
- there is a sensitive dividing line between observer and participative roles in this sphere. This duality is the attribute of several other disciplines – as economic sciences, law etc. - as well. However, in our case, according to many, these roles seem to be irreconcilable.

I set up three general categories and I examine eight typical career models:

Observative role	researcher
Participative roles	politician, political adviser, civil servant, EU official, lobbyist
Intermediate roles	consultant, media worker

Among these, political science researchers play – or, according to many, should play - a purely observative role by staying outside the political arena; politicians, political advisers, civil servants, EU officials and lobbyists are directly participating in political-decision making or they are exerting considerable direct influence on the outcome of such procedures; while consultants and media workers have only an indirect - but quite often a significant - effect on political and public policy decisions.

Máté Szabó wrote in his overview on the situation of Hungarian political science in 1991: “For some years, politology will provide a favourable labour market situation for young and qualified researchers while in other social sciences competition is already very tough.” (Szabó, 1992: 239) Those times described by the professor have already passed away and nowadays political science graduates have to fight really hard to find their way in their professional environment.

[Researcher]

Although several hundreds of political science graduates leave university faculties each year and the number of young graduates attending PhD courses is continuously increasing, the problem of the emergence of a new researcher generation has not been solved yet. At the same time, the limited number of researchers, which is a clear consequence of the poor financial conditions of this small scientific community, significantly hinders the further development of the discipline in Hungary. This situation

results not only in contra-selective recruiting mechanisms, to the advantage of the private sector and to the disadvantage of the academic sphere, but also in a deeply fragmented scientific community where an in-depth discussion is almost impossible in a series of research areas simply because of the lack of debating parties.

Political science, as a young discipline, has been extremely open towards other scientific areas - as e.g. history, philosophy, law, economics and sociology - in the past fifteen years in Hungary. Most senior university and college professors and lecturers have arrived from these fields. This tendency even intensified in the mid-90's when, for lack of political science graduates, PhD courses were filled up with students from other scientific areas and these - generally well-prepared – young researchers were competing for a few unoccupied academic seats.

This situation has completely changed after the first generation graduated in political science specializations. Then universities have started to pay more attention to PhD courses, as well. Nevertheless, some universities had to face a new problem at this point. They had to notice that their best political science graduates were sometimes less keen to attend PhD courses because of two main reasons. First, many of them had become a political science student simply because they had not managed to pass the entrance exam for other studies – in law or in economics in general - so they had accepted this discipline but they remained less interested in doing in-depth researches related to it. Secondly, in many cases, best graduates received good job offers from the private sector – mainly from consulting or communication agencies – or from the political or public sphere, offering better working and living conditions compared to those of a PhD student.

PhD courses in Political Science

University / Faculty / Department	Specialization
Corvinus University of Budapest, Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Political Science	Political Science
ELTE Budapest University, Faculty of Law and Political Sciences, Institute of Political Science	Political Science

Other PhD courses with a specialization in Political Science

University / Faculty	Specialization
University of Pécs, Faculty of Humanities	Interdisciplinary PhD School in Humanities with a specialization in Political Science
University of Pécs, Faculty of Economics	Multidisciplinary PhD School in Social Sciences with a specialization in "regional policy and economy"
Széchenyi István University, Faculty of Law and Economics	Multidisciplinary PhD School in Social Sciences with a specialization in "economics, law, regionalism and society in Central Europe in the process of integration"
University of Szeged, Faculty of Law	Theory of the State and of Law with a specialization in Political Science

Table 2: *Political Science in PhD courses in Hungary, 2006, source: National Higher Education Information Centre*

Ways for entering the academic sphere require more or less the same efforts in Hungary than in other European countries. Interested undergraduates have to show and prove their skills by preparing good papers for seminars, being active in internal scientific debates, joining basic research activities, participating in undergraduates' scientific competitions and in the activities of a prestigious undergraduates' college for advanced studies,⁶ joining a department of their faculty as an undergraduate assistant, winning the support of a prominent senior professor and establishing a wide network of personal contacts with professors, researchers and other promising students both on a national and on an international level.

However, the first step that has to be taken by a motivated young graduate is to apply for a PhD course in Hungary or abroad in order to start his/her doctoral studies. At this stage, he/she should be ready to spend at least some months abroad, in a foreign professional environment, and to establish a basic network of international professional contacts, even if this requires considerable efforts and resources. They often have to answer a serious dilemma, too. As doctoral studies provide a new professional status and may open up new vistas, many of them have to make up their mind and decide to stay in a purely scientific area or mix their scientific performance with other professional activities, or even to leave the academic sphere. Those choosing the first way usually join a university department or an Academy institute, prepare scientific researches and publications, start to be involved in managing scientific journals, become active members in professional associations and make considerable efforts to step out to the international scene. If they decide differently, they still have a good chance to join a consultant, a communication or a lobbying agency, or to enter the internal circles of the political arena. At last but not least, they can also decide to mix the two areas and reduce their scientific ambitions to some publications and the status of a visiting professor at a university.

The main advantages of an academic career in Hungary nowadays are a high degree of personal and professional autonomy, a relatively high social prestige and limited existential risks deriving from the characteristics of a university lecturer or an academic researcher status - above a certain level in the scientific hierarchy, of course. On the other hand, some disadvantages, as limited incomes and the frustration caused by a discrepancy between self-estimation and social appreciation, frequently mentioned by lecturers and researchers in the course of personal interviews, should also be pointed out.

[Politician]

Surprisingly, political career is not an attractive perspective at all for most political science graduates. On the other hand, this is one of the hardest career models to describe, which may also be proven by the curricula vitae of MPs sitting in the Hungarian Parliament. According to these CVs, four typical ways for entering party politics are currently available in Hungary. The first one is leading through local public and political

⁶ Undergraduates' colleges for advanced studies are exclusive self-governing societies formed by a limited number of undergraduates aimed at organizing in-depth scientific activities and debates in co-operation with prominent senior professors.

activities; the second is based on being involved in politics as a teenager or a young adult - primarily but not exclusively in a youth association of a party -; the third is to become an assistant or a political adviser in a party administration, at the secretariat of a parliamentary group or to an MP; and, at last but not least, one can become a politician also by taking advantage of his/her former professional career and prestige in a given public policy area.⁷

This latter solution is, of course, not available for most young graduates but the former three are open to them. We may find good examples of any of these. University students and young political science graduates are present among youth organization leaders, many of them are involved in party politics on the local level and some are personal assistants to an MP, a State Secretary or a Minister. Their role and activities turn the spotlight also to the shortcomings in expertise in the political arena in Hungary, especially in the case of Parliament where financial resources available to MPs to “buy” professional information and knowledge are insufficient but even these limited resources are in many cases misspent both by political groups and by MPs.

This is also true that aversions to politicians have considerably increased in the past one decade and a half in Hungary. The epoch of political heroes has passed away and only the democratic disillusionment in politicians has remained. On the other hand, MPs' salary is relatively low, the myth of the “impecunious politician” and a strong antipathy towards wealthy politicians have survived the transition period - even if the success of a new generation of political leaders with a business background, as Socialist Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány or Liberal Minister of Economics János Kóka, has tinged this picture - and the egress leading out from the political arena to the “real” world is still completely missing. These are the main elements which are responsible for the counter-selection mechanisms dominating political recruitment in Hungary.

The typical career model of young politicians starts in the student association of a university, in the youth organization of a party or as an assistant to a politician. Those thinking of a long-term political career are often advised to develop and strengthen their local hinterland and to become member of a local or regional legislative body as young as possible. The next step in most cases is to win a deputy mayor position on the local level or a parliamentary mandate on the national one, usually without leaving the already obtained local position. The office held on the local level or the seat in the Parliament can be converted later to a mayor position or a senior parliamentary function and – after the triumph of the party at the general elections – even to a governmental position. However, with regard to the characteristics and the practice of contemporary Hungarian politics, motivated and talented young politicians have to pay particular attention to some fundamental factors at the beginning of their career. They have to build up a stable local political or a strong and highly specialized professional background but they also have to enter national politics as soon as possible.

⁷ Would-be politicians may profit also from the training courses organized by the Faculty of Political and Legal Sciences at the University of Pécs (6 months), the “Századvég” School of Politics (2 years) or the Delta School of Politics (10 months) established by the leftist Demos Hungary Foundation. See a report on these schools: Krug Emília: Politikusképző. In: 168 Óra. 2006. 16. p.26-27.

At the same time, we have to pay attention to a new phenomenon in Hungarian politics, as well: this is the appearance of young politicians who have decided to build their political career on their European experiences and reputation to be achieved as an MEP in the European Parliament. Such young politicians can be found in all major political parties: *Alexandra Dobolyi* and *Gábor Harangozó* among Socialists, *Viktória Mohácsi* among Liberals, *Péter Olajos* in the Hungarian Democratic Forum, or *Zsolt Becsey* and *András Gyürk* in Fidesz.

At last but not least, a key question related to this career model we certainly have to raise is: does a profound knowledge of political theory mean any advantage for a young politician or a benefit for the society as a whole? My answer is, unfortunately, basically negative, as expertise in the basic principles and in the functioning of the political system seems to be less useful and important for a politician than proficiency in a given public policy area, which offers advance opportunities and provides a channel of communication to a special social sphere. We should therefore underline again that political science university studies significantly differ from courses organized for would-be politicians.

[Political adviser]

The recruitment of political advisers is usually based on personal contacts and/or former political activities. It comprises a double criterion: personal-political confidence on the one hand and professional credibility on the other. Political reliability is a basic and indispensable requirement in general, even to the detriment of expertise sometimes.

There are several ways how to become a political adviser.⁸ A typical one is to begin as an assistant to a politician in the Parliament or in the government. Political science graduates are welcome also in party administrations both on a national and on a local level – especially during the campaign before general or local elections –, secretariats of political groups in the Parliament and in the political staff (advisory cabinet) of a mayor, a State Secretary or a Minister - usually as a political or a communication adviser.

The key question of this career model is progress and promotion. Career opportunities of political advisers are difficult to forecast because of two main reasons: personal dependency on the one hand and the semi-feudal nature of the everyday functioning of the Hungarian political system on the other, often resulting in a distortion of working relations. Therefore, in most cases, a political adviser has to decide at a certain moment of his/her career to stick to a given politician or to become a “freelancer” on the - restricted – “political labour market”. The former decision may promise a bigger opportunity to the “great leap” but is risky because of a strong dependence on another

⁸ Would-be political advisers may profit also from the postgraduate training courses organized by “Századvég” School of Politics, in cooperation with Corvinus University of Budapest. The participants of these courses receive – pending their specialization and the level of their first degree - an MA/BA in Public Policy or an MA/BA in Political Communication after two years of studies. In the first year students get acquainted with the history and the theory of political science, constitutional law and the basic elements of the Hungarian political system. The second year focuses – among others - on practical skills and subjects as interest representation, public opinion-research, various public policy areas, rhetoric and communication.

persons' political success. Another crucial decision the vast majority of senior political advisers have to take is to become a politician, or not. This decision usually means the moment of leaving the political arena or of accepting a professional stagnation for those rejecting this idea. Others, giving a positive answer to this challenge, enter a new phase in their professional career – or, to be more precise, start a new career as a politician.

At last but not least, another major difficulty related to this career model for many is the lack of an egress leading out from the political arena. The main reasons of this shortcoming, threatening both politicians and political advisers, are the lack of rival organizations in the arena with an absorption capacity and that far-reaching political activities and networking are often accompanied by superficial professional skills and little expertise. Moreover, the private sector is basically suspicious about the public - and especially the political – sphere, which is very often resulting in a double stigmatization of political advisers by highlighting the differences between a competitive business environment and the “comfort-loving public sector” but also by questioning their professional competences and labelling them simply as party agents.

To sum it up, the main advantage provided by this career model is the far-reaching personal network which is, according to many, still the most valuable asset in the Hungarian society but being a political adviser means a lot of disadvantages, too, as e.g. a precarious living in the long run, doubtful promotion, personal dependency and political pigeon-holing.

[Civil servant or EU official]

It seems that civil servant positions have become more and more attractive from young graduates' - and also from political science graduates' - point of view in the past few years. This is mainly the consequence of the characteristics of the status of civil servants, providing an almost impenetrable legal protection, but also of the recent significant increase in wages in the public sector. However, political science graduates are rarely the best of all possible applicants to a civil servant position. Ministries and public offices usually prefer well-prepared specialists in their field of activities, in law or in areas related to their everyday functioning (HR, accounting etc.). It is not surprising therefore that political science graduates, who are rather generalists, can be found typically at the secretariats and in the advisory cabinets of top management officials and politicians – as political advisers.

Advantageous conditions - a relatively high initial salary for a school-leaver, special benefits related to such a status, favourable working conditions, the aforementioned strong legal protection and a relatively balanced workload - attract many graduates to the public sphere and render the access to this sector extremely difficult. Unlike the administration of the EU and several European countries, there are no entrance competitions organized by public offices in Hungary (except the concours of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Admission to the public administration is therefore rarely merit-based and generally depends on one's personal contacts and good luck.

It is also true that civil servants have to accept some unfavourable conditions, as well. They form part of a rigorous hierarchic system where their performance is strongly influenced by other actors and their promotion depends on many factors unrelated to their working capacity. Moreover, after several years in work, the disparity in salaries of a civil servant on the one hand and of an employee or a freelancer in the private sector on the other may become significant, to the disadvantage of the public sphere. At last but not least, after a certain age of life, mobility channels between public and private sector seem to turn one-way roads, blocking the stepping out of civil servants to the wider labour market.

EU institutions are more open towards political science graduates than Hungarian public administration. This is partly a consequence of the nature of their activities. Contrary to national administrations, EU institutions deal mainly with complex supranational issues, which raise the value of the capacity to obtain a comprehensive view on a certain area. Nevertheless, EU administration seems to be even less accessible for young graduates than national offices. General access points are the stages regularly advertised by all EU institutions. If one manages to become a stagiaire, he/she has a considerably bigger chance to find a contractual or a temporary agent position. However, if somebody wants to become an official, he/she has to pass the competition organized by EU institutions. Those being winners of such concours still have to hunt after an empty seat in the institutional labyrinth. On the other hand, it is also true that those reaching the end of this procedure become part of Europe's best-qualified administration with a salary which is relatively high from "old" Member States citizens' point of view, as well.

Living and working in an international environment is also a key point for many would-be EU officials. But the reality is much more complex, especially for young staff members from "new" Member States, who often have to face a distrustful and sometimes condescending environment and have to fight hard for professional appreciation and promotion. At the same time, EU officials very often lose contact with their original professional milieu in their home country, which makes the homecoming almost impossible or at least very difficult. Other frequent and serious difficulties are related to family relations. The number of divorces among EU officials is definitely high. This is generally the consequence of a long-lasting separation of the couple or the new status of the partner who is supposed to reorganize his/her life in a completely new environment without having a regular feedback and reinforcement his/her spouse enjoys in work.

To sum it up, we can conclude that conditions provided by EU institutions are attractive and favourable from both a financial and a professional point of view but one should always keep in mind the discrepancy between the image of EU administration from several hundreds of miles away on the one hand and the reality on the spot on the other. The world of EU institutions is neither as glittering nor as solitary as many imagine.

[Lobbyist]

Politics are, according to many, the battlefield of social interests. These interests are transmitted to the political decision-making arena by the mezo-sphere of the political system (political parties, pressure groups and lobbyists). In this context, lobbying is a method of interest representation, which can be used both by interest groups and by professional lobbyists - or “guns for hire” as they are usually referred to in American political science - and which means influencing a political decision by a selective intermediation of information with respect for the rule of law and those ethical norms and standards relating to lobbying activities.

Lobbying is a widely accepted practice of interest representation in the pluralist political system of the United States and it is not surprising therefore that it has been in the limelight of American political science for a long time. Lobbying has also gained ground in the institutional arena of the European Union, in particular since the adoption of the Single European Act, and nowadays forms an integral and legitimate part of the decision-making procedures. This was the main reason why European political science has paid increasing attention to this phenomenon in the past two decades, especially in the field of EU studies.

Lobbying and lobbyists have appeared in the Hungarian political arena in the transition period after the change of regime. The first lobbyists arrived from an American environment or had at least some experiences in American-type lobbying. Tricks of the trade have been introduced by them and by multinationals with an American background. On the other hand, as lobbying has remained on the margins of political life for a long time, Hungarian political science has turned its attention to this phenomenon only recently. In the meantime, Hungarian companies and businessmen have also realized the importance of informal interest representation and nowadays also Hungarian public relations and communication agencies, and even some Hungary-based lobbying agencies, are active in this field. These novelties have opened up politicians' eyes to lobbying, which resulted in the adoption of the *Act on Lobbying* by the Hungarian Parliament in February 2006.⁹ Nevertheless, lobbyists still have to face several serious obstacles relating their professional activities and hindering professional lobbying in winning acceptance in the society and gaining ground in the political arena. The main obstacles are: the small and closed political elite, an overpoliticized society and a restricted market. These are the reasons why still so few professional lobbyists are operating in Hungary.¹⁰

⁹ 2006. évi XLIX. törvény a lobbitevékenységről

¹⁰ Although, according to the aforementioned Act on Lobbying, only a diploma of any kind is needed in order to be registered as a lobbyist, several Hungarian universities offer training programmes in lobbying. The best-known of these are the postgraduate courses organized by the Political Science Department of Corvinus University of Budapest since 2001. In the meantime, also Pázmány Péter Catholic University and King Sigismund College have started their postgraduate degree courses in this field, while the training programme to be organized by Central European University Business School will start in September 2006.

It is difficult to specify the most important skills a young graduate has to obtain if he/she wants to enter the “world of bargaining”. According to *Rinus van Schendelen*, a lobbyist must be a research-minded person with a strong sense of realism and a critical or discriminating mind. A lobbyist must have a good sense of diplomatic psychology and a lot of patience and tenacity to cope with the long and difficult matches but also a broad curiosity and a basic sense of humour and optimism. As van Schendelen underlines it, if advertised, this ideal profile would certainly attract a number of applicants. But expertise is always a scarcity, the reason being that this is a match of talents and skills to a specific role. However, skills are easier to develop and to improve than talents and talent without skills means a person has high potential but is not a top player. (van Schendelen, 2003: 235-237)

But even if a young graduate is in possession of the aforementioned skills, he/she may have a limited chance to enter this business sphere. This is the case partly because of the restricted number of lobbying agencies and the strict and imperative business logic they have to follow, based on a rigorous rationality and focused on competitiveness and profitability. On the other hand, the value of a lobbyist is determined by two main factors: his/her network of personal contacts and his/her expertise in a given policy field. These requirements could hardly be met by most young graduates, of course. This is why career-starters in this area often complain about their job, saying that they miss the spirit of professional independence, real challenges and a real opportunity to gain experience on the spot.

It is true indeed that professional promotion in this sphere is relatively slow and risky for many but it largely depends on one's own performance, while professional and financial prospect are continuously improving by the growing network of personal contacts and by the increasing experiences. The main advantage of this career model is therefore that one's professional prospects depend first and foremost on his/her own performance on an expanding market but it seems that this sector often provides slower progress opportunities and relatively risky conditions for career-starters.

[Consultant]

Consultants' career model shows a lot of similarities to that of lobbyists', with some basic differences. Consultants have started to operate in two main fields in the mid-90's in Hungary: as public-opinion researchers and as campaign-communication advisers. The dominance of foreign companies and experts could and still can be observed in both fields. Leading companies have managed to defend their positions on the market to this very day and the influence of American campaign-advisers is still determinant in pre-electoral periods.

In the meantime, other “classical” consultant agencies have also emerged, providing a broader circle of services as information monitoring, political analyses, general political advising, public-opinion researches, project management, communication and public affairs advising, advocacy and lobbying - based on a mid-term or a long-term cooperation with the “customer”. This sector is definitely dominated by young experts and political

analysts, which is both an advantage and a disadvantage from young graduates' point of view. The good side is that they enter an open and competitive environment where real professional skills and performance are more important than political nexus, mutual favours or informal agreements. On the other hand, relatively young firm managers and leading experts have already laid down the main lines of this market, which reduces the chance of a rapid growth and opens up new vistas only pending the expansion of the market as a whole.

The fundamental requirements in this area are high-standard analytical skills, a high-level descriptive talent, good communication skills both in oral and in written, and a good command of both business and political logic. The main advantages of this career model are a high-class intellectual challenge, relatively high salaries and promising long-term professional prospects. On the other hand, this is an extremely competitive environment where – above a certain level - one has to be good in conflict management and has to accept a stressful life.

[Media worker]

The role of the media in the everyday life of Hungarians has considerably increased and has fundamentally changed in the past fifteen years. Information is a key factor both in an autocracy and in a democracy. State-controlled channels of information flow and restrictions in access to information were basic components of the regime before 1989. This situation reduced the level of professionalization in the media and neglected university courses in this field. As freedom of speech is a fundamental principle of democracy, the metamorphosis of this sector was a basic element of the transition period. It is not surprising that Hungarian higher education took notice of the new situation as well, and a series of universities and colleges have established their specializations in communication or in journalism.

On the other hand, with regard to the nature of democracy and to the importance of political subjects on the media agenda, the question of bridges between political studies and the sphere of media came to the forefront, too. As *Máté Szabó* wrote it in 1992: “With regard to international experiences, I consider relations between the instruction of journalists, tv-radio editors and media specialists on the one hand and politology on the other as a neglected aspect. ... Although current political tensions around the press and the mass media are no help of a rational and future-oriented approach, I think that both in the further training of the current staff and in the future instruction of media specialists an increased and a more institutionalized opportunity should be provided for the acquisition of knowledge in politology.” (Szabó, 1992: 237) Since then, the presence of political science and political scientists in the instruction of journalists and other media specialists has considerably increased and – on the other side – also political science specializations have paid more attention to communication-oriented courses.

Political science is present in the media in two different ways. One is the appearance of political science graduates in the staff of the mass media. In these cases, generally the humanities-oriented aspects of political studies are appreciated by the employers. On the other hand, neither significant aspirations among political science graduates to become media workers nor a considerable intention to employ such young experts by media companies can be observed. Moreover, the presence of political science graduates in political programmes in the mass media or in the political columns of newspapers is not notable either. Nowadays – for lack of special ways and strategies available for them – political science graduates usually follow the same career models and mount the same hierarchical ladder as anybody else in this unique sphere. With regard to the characteristics of the functioning of this sector, communication skills above the average both in oral and in written, a strong professional commitment, a good capacity for self-adaptation, patience and good luck are needed in order to be successful in this area. Nevertheless, the appearance of young journalists with a political studies background in the media could contribute to the stepping up of the professional standards of the press when it comes to political subjects.

The other way political science has made a raid into Hungarian media was the appearance of political scientists and analysts in the electronic and in the printed media. Both senior and junior university lecturers and academic researchers yielded to temptation and accepted the opportunities and benefits provided by media publicity. Some of them have turned step by step to a mouthpiece of a political party while others have managed to maintain their image of being politically independent. Other political scientist-entrepreneurs have taken advantage of their relative popularity and the reputation they achieved by their appearances on the screen and have converted these to business potential in the private sector around the political arena. Nevertheless, the aforementioned disparity between the scientific and the business logic should be underlined again, even if the scientific and the advising activities do not necessarily paralyse each other. However, it is true that only few are able to keep distinct between the two.

Conclusions

Political science is a relatively new discipline among social sciences in Hungary. The roots of modern Hungarian political science can be discovered in the critical attitude of reform communist and opposition intellectuals engaged in political debates in the late 80's. The birth and the institutionalization of this discipline were closely linked to the characteristics of the transition period, which situation has exerted a long-lasting influence on the development of modern Hungarian political science. The uncertain borders of this scientific domain, the low prestige of the discipline, the lack of a strong scientific community and the problems political science has to face in higher education have an unfavourable effect on the professional identity of political science graduates but also on the value of their diploma.

Political studies are present in Hungarian higher education. Several BA and MA specializations are available for students. Would-be politicians, political advisers and lobbyists can find their specialized training courses, as well. On the other hand, when it comes to university-level political science specializations, knowledge and experiences about the flesh and blood of the functioning of the political system still seem to be crucial shortcomings from young political science graduates' point of view.

With regard to this situation, five major problems to be solved by universities and political science undergraduates together should be pointed out. These challenges are:

- adapting themselves to the new requirements after the introduction of the Bologna-system in Hungarian higher education;
- adjusting better the content of curricula and educational services provided by universities and colleges to the requirements of the labour market;
- providing more opportunities for undergraduates to gain professional experience as an integral part of their university studies;
- familiarizing actors on the labour market, especially in and around the political arena, with the content of political studies and the value of such a diploma but also
- showing more responsibility by the students themselves when it comes to their future professional career.

My paper is aimed at supporting these efforts by describing the main typical career models available for young political science graduates in and around the Hungarian political arena.

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