



**A QUALITATIVE EVALUATION ON THE TRANSITION PROCESS FROM  
UNDERSECRETARY TO DEPUTY MINISTER IN THE CONTEXT OF TOP-LEVEL  
MANAGEMENT<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract**

The institution of deputy minister in the Turkish Public Administration system was introduced in 2011 through Decree Law No. 643. Criticisms arose regarding the inadequacy of the deputy minister institution in certain areas. Moreover, Following the abolishment of the undersecretary institution, there are views that the void created have not been filled. This study, which aims to highlight the pros and cons of the Deputy Minister system, was conducted in collaboration with active and retired senior ministry bureaucrats who have experienced both the old and new eras. In this research, a qualitative research design, predominantly used in social sciences, was chosen. The necessary data for the research was collected through a semi-structured interview form consisting of specific questions. After the interviews, the obtained data were categorized into themes and subthemes using content analysis technique. Additionally, descriptive analysis technique was employed to include direct quotations from the interview forms. As a result of the research, four main themes were identified: "Qualities of the Deputy Minister Institution," "Qualities of the Undersecretary Institution," "Deputy Minister and Undersecretary Institutions in Terms of Institutional Sustainability," and "Recommendations for the Deputy Minister Institution." Through thematic analysis, participants emphasized that Deputy Ministers prioritizing political affairs was the most important quality, and they positively evaluated the acceleration of the decision-making process within the ministry organization. Mastery of business processes and personnel, as well as career advancement based on merit, were identified as the primary advantages of Undersecretaries over Deputy Ministers. In conclusion, participants stressed that it would be very challenging to maintain the Deputy Minister system in its current form and recommended the implementation of new regulations that incorporate the positive aspects of the Undersecretary system.

**Keywords:** Deputy Minister, Undersecretary, Administrative udersecretary, Political udersecretary, Public aministration.

**Jel Code:** H10, H83

**Müsteşarlıktan Bakan Yardımcılığına Değişim Süreci Hakkında Üst Düzey Yönetim Ekseninde Nitel Bir Değerlendirme**

**Öz**

Türk Kamu Yönetim'i sistemine Bakan Yardımcılığı, 2011 yılında 643 sayılı KHK ile girmiştir. Bakan yardımcılığı kurumun bazı alanlarda yeterli olmadığı yönünde eleştiriler gündeme gelmiş, müsteşarlık kurumun iptal edilmesi ile ortaya çıkan boşluğun doldurulamadığı ileri sürülmüştür. Bakan yardımcılığı sisteminin artı ve eksilerini ortaya koymayı amaçlayan bu çalışma, konu ile alakalı eski ve yeni dönemi görmüş çalışan ve emekli üst düzey bakanlık bürokratlarıyla gerçekleştirilmiştir. Çalışmada, sosyal bilimlerde ağırlıklı kullanılan nitel araştırma deseni tercih edilmiştir. Araştırma için gerekli veriler, yarı yapılandırılmış sorulardan oluşan görüşme formu ile derlenmiştir. Görüşme sonrasında elde edilen veriler, içerik analizi tekniği ile temalar ve alt temalar

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şeklinde sınıflandırılmıştır. Ayrıca betimsel analiz tekniğine başvurularak görüşme formlarından doğrudan alıntılar yapılmıştır. Araştırma sonucunda, “Bakan Yardımcılığı Kurumunun Nitelikleri”, “Müsteşarlık Kurumunun Nitelikleri”, “Kurumsal Sürdürülebilirlik Ekseninde Bakan Yardımcılığı ve Müsteşarlık Kurumu” ve “Bakan Yardımcılığı Kurumuna Yönelik Öneriler” şeklinde olmak üzere dört farklı ana temaya ulaşılmıştır. Tematik analiz sonucunda, katılımcılar bakan yardımcılarının siyasi işlere öncelik vermesini en önemli nitelik olarak vurgularken bakanlık teşkilatındaki karar alma sürecinin hızlanmasını olumlu olarak değerlendirmişlerdir. İş süreçlerine ve personele hâkim olma ile kariyer ve liyakate dayalı yükselme müsteşarların bakan yardımcılarını karşısındaki en önemli üstünlüğü olarak saptanmıştır. Çalışma neticesinde katılımcılar bakan yardımcılığı sisteminin bu haliyle sürdürülmesinin çok zor olduğunu vurgularken müsteşarlık sisteminin olumlu yanlarını içerecek şekilde yeni düzenlemelerin yapılması gerektiği önerisini sunmuşlardır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Bakan Yardımcısı, Müsteşar, İdari müsteşar, Siyasi müsteşar, Kamu yönetimi.

**Jel Kodu:** H10, H83

## 1. Introduction

The most comprehensive institution with the authority to use force on behalf of society, primarily to eliminate internal and external threats and to manage societal, political, and economic demands, is referred to as the state (Kıslalı, 1987). The concept of the state, conceptualized as an abstract entity, carries out its functions through legislative, executive, and judicial bodies. While the legislative body establishes rules that address the needs of society, the executive body enforces these rules, and the judicial body oversees the implementation of these rules. The roles and weights of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of power in state governance vary depending on the political systems. In democratic states, government systems are designed in accordance with the principle of the separation of powers among the legislative, executive, and judicial branches (Nacak, 2020). The principle of the separation of powers is expressed as the balanced distribution of sovereignty power belonging to the state among the legislative, executive, and judicial bodies. Governments where the principle of separation of powers is strictly and rigorously applied are referred to as presidential, while those where it is applied more flexibly and with transition are called parliamentary governments (Özer & Iskandarov, 2022). After a long period of implementing a parliamentary government system in Turkey, a transition was made to a presidential government system similar to the presidential one in 2018. With the change in the government system, there have been some transformations in the organizational structure and functioning of ministries. One of the changes brought about was the abolition of the undersecretary institution and the replacement of the undersecretary institution with the deputy ministerial institution.

Public administration is the general term for the organizational structure created for the implementation of public policies by the executive branch (Eryılmaz, 2012). According to the 1982 Constitution, it is stated that the organization and duties of public administration will be established based on the principles of central and local administration (1982 Constitution, Article 123). In the central administration, organizations and duties are carried out by the Presidency and ministries (Özkal, 2013). Ministries established during the time of Mahmud II, within the framework of centralization tendencies during the Ottoman period, have become the fundamental structures of public administration (Saylam & Öktem, 2015). Ministries, which are established on the basis of specialization and division of labor, are referred to as "ministries" and the highest authority in the hierarchical sense (Çolak, 2021). The number and organizational structure of ministries have always been among the important agenda items of governments. Especially during coalition periods, there have often been challenges in the distribution of critical ministries. Ministers in a centralized government system having broad decision-making authority in both political and administrative terms make ministries more attractive and subject to debate. Therefore, changes in the number and scope of ministries are made from time to time. In this context, a series of changes and innovations were introduced in 2011 with Law No. 6223 to ensure the

more effective, efficient, and orderly provision of public services to citizens. The status of deputy ministry is among the innovations introduced.

The organizational structure and management style of ministries play a significant role in the effectiveness and efficiency of public services. Individuals who assist the minister in managing the structure and operation of the ministry are given titles such as deputy minister, undersecretary, advisor, and state secretary. Although the title of deputy minister is relatively new in Turkish public administration, it can be said that similar roles were performed by undersecretaries for many years. In the literature, the person assisting the minister in political affairs is referred to as a political undersecretary (siyasi müsteşar), while the one assisting in administrative affairs is called an administrative undersecretary (idari müsteşar). The first examples of deputy ministries dates back to the Ottoman period before the establishment of ministries. Political undersecretariat was first introduced in 1937 but was terminated shortly due to insufficient efficiency. During the Turgut Özal era, the deputy minister status was tested without the legal framework but could not be sustained for a long time. The current status of deputy ministers, which is currently in practice, was introduced with the Decree-Law No. 643 published in 2011 (Official Gazette-O.G., date: 08.07.2011, no: 27958). The status, hierarchical position, duties, and authorities of deputy ministers have been frequently discussed in the literature (Bölükbaşı, 2021; Gözler & Kaplan, 2012; Kemahlı & Karıcı, 2017; Uçman, 2015; Uyanık, 2012; Yılmaz, 2013). The short-lived nature of previous attempts makes these discussions even more significant and valuable. One of the reasons for undertaking this study is to evaluate the controversial phenomenon of deputy ministers from the perspective of bureaucrats.

It can be noted that the early studies on deputy ministers primarily focused on the hierarchical position within the ministry organization (Gözler & Kaplan, 2012) and the delegation of authority (Uyanık, 2012) within the framework of administrative law. Additionally, Yılmaz (2013) argues that the introduction of deputy minister appointments in 2011 would have a positive impact on the relationship between the ministry and the legislative branch, especially with regard to appointments originating from members of parliament. Dik (2013) claims that the exclusive role of a deputy minister as a mere assistant to the minister, with the ability to intervene in all the affairs, transactions, and procedures of the ministry, contradicts the traditional ministry structure. Topaca (2014) suggests that the deputy minister status is an exceptional form of civil service and requires additional regulations to support the deputy minister in assisting the minister in political matters. Furthermore, Topaca states that it would be more appropriate to link the duration of their service to the minister they are associated with, rather than the government as a whole. Tunç and Ekinçi (2020), in their research based on global examples, argue that deputy ministers are used as a tool by political parties to control, guide, and balance ministers, especially during coalition periods. Nacak (2020) suggests that with the Presidential Government System, the powers of ministers within the executive branch have been limited, and with the elimination of the undersecretary position, deputy ministers have played a more active role within the ministry organization.

According to the Civil Servants Law No. 657 which dominates public personnel management, recruitment and promotions are based on the principle of merit. However, it is widely stated that in Turkish public administration, especially senior managers are employed based on their political views. The opposite of the merit principle is called the spoils system. The spoils system, which was implemented for the first time in the United States, is also used in the literature as the spoils system, plunder system or political favoritism (Hatipoğlu, 2019:271). Contrary to the principle of merit in the spoils system, recruitment and promotions in the public sector are related to the political affiliation of the candidate rather than the quality of the job (Aydın & Akıncı, 2018). When the status of deputy minister and undersecretary in the Turkish public personnel system is evaluated within the framework

of the principle of merit and the spoils system, it can be said that the selection and appointment procedures of deputy ministers erode the principle of merit. As a matter of fact, Bölükbaşı (2021) states that while the undersecretary is appointed within the framework of career and merit principles, deputy ministers are appointed more easily through exceptional civil service.

It has been determined that most of the research on deputy ministers in the literature has been conducted primarily through document analysis. Due to the limited research on practical aspects of deputy minister positions, this study aims to contribute to the literature by conducting interviews with senior executives regarding deputy ministers. In the first section, the conceptual framework related to the deputy minister institution is emphasized, and in the practical part, data gathered through interview forms are analyzed and presented in the findings section.

## 2. Historical Development of Deputy Ministers in Turkey

In 2011, with Decree-Law No. 643, the deputy minister status was introduced within the Turkish public administration. Prior to 2011, the highest-ranking official in ministry organizations, after the minister, was the 'müsteşar' (undersecretary), who assisted the minister in administrative matters. Until the Presidential Government System was introduced in 2018, both the undersecretary and the deputy minister worked concurrently to assist the minister. However, after this date, the undersecretary institution was abolished, while the deputy minister position continues to exist. To provide clarity on the concept of deputy ministry, explanations will be given regarding the terms "müsteşar" (undersecretar), "idari müsteşar" (administrative undersecretary) and "siyasi müsteşar" (political undersecretary). Additionally, examining the historical background of deputy ministry status is considered important for making observations about current practices.

### 2.1. Undersecretary

The word "Müsteşar" (undersecretary) which has Arabic origins, is used to refer to a consulted or advisory person. According to the Turkish Language Association (TDK), it is used to describe the highest-ranking official who assists ministers or ambassadors (TDK, General Turkish Dictionary). Until the establishment of the deputy minister institution in 2011, the Müsteşar served as the minister's highest-ranking assistant in hierarchical terms, as outlined in Law No. 3046 on the Establishment of Ministries. Although there is no legal distinction in Turkish administrative legislation, it is noted in the literature that there are two types of undersecretaries, administrative and political (Bölükbaşı, 2021). The reason for differentiating into administrative and political undersecretaries in the literature can be attributed to the distinct administrative and political responsibilities undertaken by the minister.

The administrative undersecretary: The administrative undersecretary is a senior public servant who assists the minister in the implementation of administrative affairs under the responsibility of the ministry (Bölükbaşı, 2021). According to the repealed Article 22 of Law No. 3046, the undersecretary is described as "being under the command of the minister and acting as their assistant, organizing and executing ministry services on behalf of the minister and in accordance with the minister's directives and orders... responsible to the minister for the execution of the specified services". It is widely accepted that the establishment of administrative undersecretariats, along with ministries, took place during the time of Sultan Mahmud II as part of centralization policies (Eryılmaz, 2012). Administrative undersecretaries are subject to Law No. 657 on State Civil Servants and enjoy the legal protections provided by this law. They hold the status of civil servants, and they do not have any involvement in the minister's political affairs (Bölükbaşı, 2021). Administrative undersecretaries typically begin their careers by taking competitive exams, and their progression through career stages is based on the merit principle. This career path highlights the expertise within the ministry organization and ensures the continuity of the ministry's functions (Onar, 1966). The undersecretariat institution, responsible for the

administrative affairs of the ministry, had a long-standing presence during the Republic era. However, in 2018, with Decree-Law No. 703 aimed at adapting to the Changes Made in the Constitution and Some Laws and Decree-Laws, undersecretary status were abolished (Article:179, O.G, date: 10.7.2018, no: 30473).

**The Political Undersecretary:** In 1937, a regulation lasting for 8 months was implemented to assist the minister, and the political undersecretariat found its place within the Turkish administrative organization. Some argue that the creation of political undersecretaries was inspired by the ministry commissars established in the Soviet Union to oversee ministries (Gültekin, 2010). The regulation related to the political undersecretariat was realized through the Law Amending Some Articles of Law No. 3115 on the Foundations of the Administration (O.G, date: 13.02.1937, no: 3533). According to the relevant law, political undersecretaries, who are selected by the Prime Minister from among the members of parliament, are appointed by the President (Article: 2). Members of parliament appointed as political undersecretaries are intended to gain experience through this process and to be considered as ministers in subsequent periods (Turan, 1999). Although political undersecretaries do not have the right to vote, they can participate in the Council of Ministers upon the invitation of the Prime Minister. As they have the authority to act on behalf of the minister and personal and political responsibilities (Bölükbaşı, 2021), political undersecretaries can also be referred to the Constitutional Court for trial due to their political responsibilities, just like ministers (Article: 6).

The term of office of political undersecretaries, which is limited to the government's term of office, allows for their earlier removal as well (Yılmaz, 2013). According to Law No. 3117 on the Delegation of State Offices to Deputy Positions and the Duties of Political Undersecretaries, the number of political undersecretaries can be more than one. Political undersecretaries are responsible for tracking political affairs on behalf of the minister (O.G., date: 8.02.1937, No: 3537). The political undersecretariat institution was quickly abolished due to its inadequate performance on 21 December 1937 during the Celal Bayar government (Turan, 1999; Yılmaz, 2013). Although the political undersecretariat institution had a short implementation period, it can be argued that the experience gained from it was taken into account when establishing the position of deputy minister. In fact, it has been observed that the practice of selecting political undersecretaries from among members of parliament did not exist in the deputy minister system. It is possible to say that this situation was created to ensure compliance with the principle of separation of powers in the presidential system.

Political undersecretaries were elected among members of parliament to assist ministers in political affairs and were appointed as deputies when the minister was not available. It was a positive institution in terms of reducing the workload of ministers in political and administrative matters. But the perception that it placed the Prime Minister in a position to control the ministry organization led to a negative attitude towards political undersecretaries and ultimately resulted in its abolishment in a short period. However, the fact remains that even though the institution of political undersecretaries was removed from our administrative system, there is still a need for an assistant to the minister in political matters.

## **2.2. Deputy Minister**

The establishment of the deputy Ministry was implemented within the framework of Authorization Law No. 6223 in 2011. It caused comprehensive changes in the areas of responsibility, organizational structures, and personnel status of ministries (Kemahlı & Karıcı, 2017). Since the regulation related to the deputy Ministry was implemented through a decree-law, there is no specific justification. However, the purpose of Law No. 6223 is emphasized as "ensuring the orderly, speedy, efficient, effective, and economical execution of public services" which allows for interpretation

regarding the establishment purpose of the deputy ministry (Article: 1, O.G., date: 03.05.2011, no: 27923). It can be argued that the deputy ministry was established to make the bureaucratic mechanism, criticized for being cumbersome and bureaucratic, more functional. The Deputy ministry is often likened to the institution of political undersecretary (Kayar, 2013; Uyanık, 2012). In this context, the experience of political undersecretariat during the İnönü government period and the deputy ministry practices during the Turgut Özal period can be considered as predecessors of the deputy ministry institution.

There are examples of deputy ministry practices around the world, and these deputy ministers are referred to by different names and have varying responsibilities depending on the form of government and administrative structures of the countries. In France, Austria, and Sweden, they are known as "State Secretaries" (Secretaries d'Etat, "staatssekretaer," "Staatssekreterare"), in the United Kingdom and Germany, they are called "Parliamentary Secretaries," and in the United States, they are referred to as "Deputy Secretary" or "Under Secretary." Some common characteristics of deputy ministers include the following (Tataroğlu, 2016):

- Deputy ministers can be appointed from within the legislative body or from individuals who are not members of the legislature.
- During coalition periods, deputy ministers may be used to maintain the balance of power within the coalition parties and to provide oversight between the parties.
- Bridging Between Ministry and Legislature: They serve as a bridge between the ministry and the legislature.
- Deputy ministers often respond to questions on behalf of the ministry during legislative sessions.
- They participate in budget discussions and provide explanations regarding budget matters.
- They present the views and positions of the ministry in legislative committees.
- Deputy ministers may be considered as potential future ministers, gaining experience and expertise in government operations.
- They can be used within the political party to maintain internal balance.
- Deputy ministers play a role in ensuring the coordination and smooth operation of the ministry with the government's agenda.

In global examples, deputy ministers are generally regarded as a political institution that actively participates in legislative activities, maintains intra-party balances, and facilitates communication between the ministry and the legislature. It is suggested that the institution of deputy ministry in Turkey is structured similarly to German practices. In Germany, like in Turkey, the Parliamentary State Secretary is responsible to the minister, holds a hierarchical position just below the minister, and is engaged in political affairs for the duration of the government, as stated by Tataroğlu (2016). In Turkey, when the deputy minister status was first established, it was designed alongside the undersecretariat and was maintained for a period, much like in Germany. However, with the 2017 Constitutional amendment, the undersecretariat was abolished, and the deputy ministry became a unique practice of its own.

Deputy Ministers are categorized within the exceptional civil service positions under Law No. 657 on State Civil Servants (Decree Law No. 643, O.G., date: 08.06.2011, no: 27958). According to Presidential Decree No. 1 "Deputy Ministers serve under the command of the minister and act as their assistant in organizing and executing the ministry's services in line with the minister's directives and orders, the ministry's objectives and policies, development plans and annual programs, strategic plans and performance targets and service requirements in compliance with legislation" (Article:504). For this purpose, deputy ministers issue the necessary orders to the ministry organizations, excluding the

ministry's inspection board, and oversee and ensure their implementation. Deputy ministers as exceptional civil servants, "... can be appointed to their positions without being subject to the provisions regarding appointment, exams, grade progression and promotion based on their assigned salary levels" (Article: 59, State Civil Servants Law No. 657). In other words, Deputy ministers can be appointed from outside the public sector without adhering to career and merit principles.

Deputy Ministers have the authority to issue instructions to all units within the ministry, except for the inspection board, for the purpose of carrying out ministry services, under the command and on behalf of the minister. Deputy Ministers are responsible to the minister for the implementation of the ministry's services. Until the year 2018, Deputy Ministers were appointed through joint decrees (issued by the minister, prime minister, and president), but with the Presidential Government System, they are now appointed by the President. The term of office for deputy Ministers is limited to the duration of the government, and they can be removed from office before their term expires.

Regarding the legal status of Deputy Ministers, two fundamentally different approaches have been exhibited. One approach, advocated by Günday, considers deputy ministers as advisors and places them outside the hierarchy of the ministry. The other approach regards Deputy Ministers as the highest-ranking public officials within the ministry hierarchy, just below the minister, as emphasized by Gözler & Kaplan (2012). These approaches have political and administrative implications. The approach that sees deputy ministers as advisors highlights their political nature, while the approach that views them as public officials emphasizes the administrative aspect (Kemahlı & Karçı, 2017). In other words, the distinction made in the literature between political undersecretaries and administrative undersecretaries, based on the distribution of political and administrative responsibilities, is also relevant in the discussions surrounding Deputy Ministers.

The appointment requirements for Deputy Ministers, according to Article 3 of Presidential Decree No. 3, are as follows:

- To meet the general requirements specified in Article 48 of Law No. 657,
- To have at least a four-year higher education degree,
- To have worked for a minimum of five years in international organizations or in the private sector, or as a self-employed individual, subject to public service and/or social security institutions.

Before the Presidential Government era, when the undersecretary's office and the deputy ministry office operated concurrently, discussions arose regarding the hierarchical status of deputy ministers. The fact that both deputy ministers and undersecretaries had the authority to instruct the entire ministry organization on behalf of and under the command of the minister gave rise to debates about their roles and authorities (Kayar, 2013). The debate about the hierarchical status, duties, and powers of deputy ministers and undersecretaries was resolved with the abolition of the undersecretary's office (Eryılmaz, 2012). On the other hand, as reported in the press, there were opinions suggesting that even individuals with primary education could become Deputy Ministers (hürriyet.com.tr, 2011), but this was clarified in 2018 by establishing the requirement of having at least a four-year higher education degree.

During the initial implementation period, deputy ministers did not have the right to act as deputies for a minister in accordance with the provisions of the constitution (1982 Constitution, Article 113). However, this article was abolished with a constitutional amendment made on January 21, 2017, and the constitutional limitation on deputy ministers acting as substitutes for ministers was removed. There was no new regulation regarding the minister's substitution in the Constitution and the Presidential Decree. Therefore, in Presidential Decree Law No. 1, provisions on the delegation of authority opened the way for deputy ministers to act as substitutes for ministers (Article: 506). It has been argued that the

current practice is more functional in the execution of the ministry organization's tasks (Nacak, 2020). Thus, it can be said that deputy ministers have gained a bit more influence within the ministry organization.

Table 1 presents a comparison of the positions of political undersecretary, administrative undersecretary, and deputy minister based on information compiled from the literature.

**Table 1.** *Political undersecretary, administrative undersecretary and deputy minister*

Criteria	Political undersecretary	Administrative Undersecretary	Deputy Minister
<b>Type of regulation</b>	Constitution	Law	Presidential decree
<b>Appointment procedure</b>	President	Joint decree	President
<b>Parliament membership</b>	Yes	No	No
<b>Numbers</b>	More than one	One	More than one
<b>Cabinet participation</b>	Yes	No	No
<b>Acting as a deputy</b>	Yes	No	Yes, in practical
<b>Tenure</b>	The duration of government	No limit	The duration of government
<b>Political responsibility</b>	Yes	No	No

**Source:** Bölükbaşı, 2021; Kayar, 2013; Law no: 3115; Presidential Decree no:1 and 3; Nacak, 2020; Uyanık; 2012.; Yılmaz, 2013.

When examining the table 1, it can be observed that deputy ministers are less involved in political affairs and have fewer powers compared to political undersecretaries. Political undersecretaries are established at the top of the norms hierarchy by constitutional provisions, while the appointment procedures, duties, and powers of deputy ministers are regulated by the current legislation through the Presidential Decree. Political undersecretaries have consultative participation in the Council of Ministers and the authority to act as substitutes for ministers, whereas there is no explicit written document confirming the substitution rights of deputy ministers. Currently, there is a legislative gap created by the removal of the constitutional limitation in 2017 through a constitutional amendment. One of the most significant similarities between political undersecretaries and deputy ministers is that their terms of office are limited to the duration of the government. When comparing administrative undersecretaries to deputy Ministers, the key differences lie in the absence of a requirement for career and merit principles for deputy ministers and differences in their service durations. The fact that the service duration is not limited to the government, their appointment through joint decrees with the minister's signature, and their placement under the umbrella of the law have made administrative undersecretaries more impartial and independent in relation to political authorities. Deputy ministers are directly appointed by the President, and their terms of office are also limited to the duration of the government. The position of Deputy Ministers within the ministry organization appears to be more temporary compared to administrative undersecretaries.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Research Design

In this study, a qualitative research design has been chosen to thoroughly examine the experiences and perspectives of retired and active senior ministry bureaucrats who have witnessed both the old and new deputy ministry system in order to elucidate the impact of the deputy ministry system in the public sector. Qualitative research aims, through an exploratory approach, to discern the experiences, attitudes, values, and behaviors of individuals concerning the phenomenon under



investigation (Baltacı, 2019). Observation, interviews, and document analysis are considered among the data collection methods commonly used in qualitative research (Patton, 2002; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013).

The interview method was preferred in this study. Interviews are a technique used to gather data about the research topic by accessing the feelings, thoughts, and observations of the participant (Tekin, 2006). The reason for selecting the participants to be interviewed in the scope of the research is that all of them had worked in collaboration with either a deputy minister or undersecretary, and they possessed relevant knowledge and experience regarding the research topic. In qualitative research, the quality of the data obtained is emphasized more than the quantity, given the relatively small number of participants (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013).

### 3.1. Work Group

In this research, a purposeful sampling method, frequently preferred in qualitative studies, has been employed (Merriam, 2009). Within the framework of the principle of voluntarism, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 senior bureaucrats, both retired and currently in service, using a structured interview form. In this context, it was concluded that the participant sample size was adequate for this study, considering the alignment of participants with the sampling criteria and the richness of data obtained through the interviews. Sensitivity should be exercised regarding the privacy of participants in qualitative research. Therefore, to ensure the confidentiality of participants' identities, coding was used instead of their real names, such as K1, K2, K3, etc.

**Table 2.** *The profiles of participants*

Participant	Experience	Education	Ministry Name	Title
K1	21 years and above	Bachelor's degree	Industry and Technology	Head of department
K2	21 years and above	Bachelor's degree	Energy	Head of department
K3	21 years and above	Master's degree	Labor and Social Security	Expert
K4	21 years and above	Bachelor's degree	Tourism	Inspector
K5	21 years and above	Bachelor's degree	Industry and Technology	Inspector
K6	21 years and above	Bachelor's degree	Labor and Social Security	Inspector
K7	21 years and above	PhD graduate	Energy	Deputy general Manager
K8	21 years and above	Master's degree	Treasury and Finance	Expert
K9	21 years and above	Bachelor's degree	Trade	Head of department
K10	21 years and above	Bachelor's degree	Labor and Social Security	Head of department

### 3.2. Research Process

To compile data related to the research topic, an interview form was prepared by utilizing relevant literature in the field. Once the interview forms were developed, they were subjected to an assessment of their suitability. Feedback was solicited from a senior public official and an expert in public administration academia to ensure the quality and appropriateness of the interview forms. After evaluating the feedback, the interview form reached its final version. The provided interview forms in their final form were used during face-to-face and telephone interviews with participants between April 12, 2021, and March 25, 2022.

### 3.3. Data Collection Instruments

The research data were collected through semi-structured interview forms during face-to-face and telephone interviews with the participants.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

The analysis of data obtained from qualitative research demands a diligent scientific effort with a creative and original mindset (Patton, 2002). Data collected from interviews were analyzed using content and descriptive analysis methods. Content analysis involves the coding of raw data obtained through methods like interviews and document examination based on similar and common concepts to create themes (Özdemir, 2010). Utilizing codes and themes created through content analysis, the objective is to present the data in a meaningful and scientific manner (Baltacı, 2019).

Researchers conducting content analysis should pay attention to the reliability of the process. There are several measures that a researcher can take to enhance the reliability of the research. One way to increase reliability is by providing clear and detailed information about the research technique and stages (Özdemir & Nebioğlu, 2015). In this context, detailed information about the research process and methodology has been presented. Another way to ensure reliability is to provide direct examples from the data and findings from the content on which the data is based (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). In this study, direct quotations from the participants' opinions have been used to present them under relevant themes. Another method to ensure the research's reliability is having the coding process carried out by at least two different experts (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 2009). Therefore, in this research, the process of creating themes from interview data was conducted by two different researchers. Lastly, these two researchers came together to evaluate, review, and discuss the findings. After exchanging ideas about themes and sub-themes, they reached a consensus on the results.

### 3.5. Research Ethics

For this research, an ethical clearance document was obtained from the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Süleyman Demirel University on June 21, 2023, with decision number 1.

## 4. Findings

In this section, the findings obtained through research and the corresponding interpretations are presented. In the study, five questions were posed to high-level bureaucrats, aiming to inquire about the positive and negative aspects of deputy ministers, the relationship between undersecretaries and deputy ministers, the position of deputy ministers for the continuity of institutional wisdom in the management of the ministry, and the current situation of deputy ministers. As a result of the analysis of the research data, four main themes were established: "*Qualifications of the Deputy Minister Position*", "*Qualifications of the Undersecretary Position*", "*Deputy Ministry and Undersecretary in the Context of Institutional Sustainability*" and "*Recommendations for the Deputy Ministry Institution*". Below, the main themes and the sub-themes are explained separately, direct quotations are provided, and they are interpreted within the scope of descriptive analysis technique.

### 4.1. Qualifications of the Deputy Minister Position

In accordance with the participants' views, the sub-themes and frequency distribution are presented in Table 3. As presented in Table 3, the sub-theme "*priority of political affairs (f-8)*" has been emphasized by the majority of the participants. Additionally, "*lack of knowledge in bureaucratic affairs (f-5)*" and "*low institutional affiliation (f-4)*" have been cited as other negative characteristics of deputy ministers. On the other hand, it was observed that the most positive quality attributed to deputy ministers is their contribution to "*acceleration of decision-making processes (f-6)*" within the ministry organization.

**Table 2.** *Qualifications of the deputy minister position*

Sub-Themes	f	Participants
Priority of political affairs	8	K1, K2, K3, K4, K6, K7, K9, K10
Acceleration of decision-making processes	6	K1, K2, K6, K7, K9, K10
Lack of knowledge in bureaucratic affairs	5	K1, K2, K3, K6, K10
Low institutional affiliation	4	K1, K3, K7, K9

Some of the opinions supporting the sub-themes from the participants are presented as follow. Prioritization of political affairs: *"Due to its entirely political focus, the deputy Ministeries, creating a situation reminiscent of the bureaucracy's sluggishness in the Ministry." (K1) "I believe that in the changing or abolishing of the undersecretary, the narratives emphasizing that the bureaucracy directs and dominates politics have a significant impact. In this sense, deputy ministers are positions that lean more towards the political side and facilitate compromise with politics." (K3) "Deputy ministers are more involved in developing policies from a political perspective and producing services. They have a structure that mainly deals with their minister's political affairs." (K6) "Deputy minister positions seem to be functionally standing in a managerial role with a focus on political matters..." (K9) "Deputy ministers can be considered individuals who perform some of their minister's political duties." (K10)*

Acceleration of decision-making processes: *"Hence, an acceleration in processes can be observed, but one should consider that this acceleration results from prioritizing in line with the policies of the presidency." (K2) " I believe that the deputy ministry expedites the process of bureaucratic affairs." (K6) "In decision-making processes, deputy ministerial positions have a positive contribution to the formation of acceleration and efficiency." (K7) "With the deputy ministry position, the number of levels between the minister and the bureaucracy has decreased, and processes have become faster." (K9) "Therefore, there may be more positive aspects compared to the undersecretary in the fast, efficient, and effective delivery of public services." (K10)*

Lack of knowledge in bureaucratic affairs: *"Especially deputy ministers coming from the private sector may sometimes experience conflicts due to their lack of knowledge about the operation, procedures, and principles of the public sector." (K3) "Deputy ministers are generally composed of people coming from outside the public sector who may not be well-versed in the regulations. Because they are not very familiar with the regulations, they can sometimes push lower-level managers, causing processes to get stuck in terms of time, procedure, and principle." (K6) "Appointing deputy ministers from the private sector results in a lack of knowledge and experience regarding the traditions of bureaucratic affairs and procedures." (K9) Low institutional affiliation: "...their terms ending with the government, can lead to those appointed to these positions not forming an organic connection with the institution..." (K1) "The undersecretary, who mostly represents institutional affiliation, traditions, and culture, is closer to the continental European system, while the deputy ministry is closer to the American system." (K7)*

#### 4.2. Qualifications of the Undersecretary Position

As shown in Table 4, it is observed that a significant portion of the participants emphasize the sub-themes *"proficiency in business processes and personnel (f-7)", "career advancement based on merit (f-5)"* and *"political neutrality (f-5)"* as positive qualities. Additionally, it was found that the issue of bureaucratic slowness, which is the most criticized aspect of the undersecretariat by politicians, was highlighted by four participants.

**Table 1.** *Qualifications of the undersecretary position*

Sub-Themes	f	Participant
Proficiency in business processes and personnel	7	K1, K3, K4, K5, K6, K8, K9
Causing a slowdown in the processes	6	K1, K6, K7, K8, K9, K10
Career advancement based on merit	5	K1, K3, K5, K9, K10
Political neutrality	5	K1, K3, K4, K7, K9
High institutional affiliation	2	K1, K7

Some of the opinions supporting the sub-themes from the participants are presented as follow. Proficiency in Business Processes and Personnel: *"The hierarchical management relationship and skill within the institution, being able to control and maybe even take ownership of all areas of the institution, establishing strong inter-unit communication, and the competence to intervene in every stage instantly when necessary, are critical qualities of this position."* (K1) *"The undersecretary, as the highest-level executive in the public institution, is more knowledgeable about the entire operation and personnel."* (K3) *"...the undersecretary was well-versed in the subject matter of the ministry; they were the de facto minister of the bureaucracy."* (K5) Career advancement based on merit: *"I believe that having the undersecretary complete the career ladder successfully within the institution due to their greater experience will result in more effective management in terms of tasks and operations."* (K3) *"The undersecretary is an office appointed within the framework of the merit principle, having entered the institution through a competitive exam, completed the career ladder successfully."* (K9) *"The undersecretariat, in accordance with the State Civil Servants Law No. 657, specializes in its field based on the principles of career and merit."* (K10)

Political Neutrality: *"...due to not taking office with governments after elections and not leaving office when the government's term ends, they are more independent, which allows them to make more unbiased and faster decisions in their decision-making."* (K1) *"Furthermore, due to the power granted by Law No. 657 on State Civil Servants, they could resist political pressures more effectively."* (K4) *"The figure of the undersecretary, in situations of constraint like economic or security matters, tends to have a more rational side and a stronger defense of rational thinking, while deputy ministers, due to their political orientation, may lean towards irrationality."* (K7)

Causing a slowdown in the processes: *"...the failure to notice the institutional sluggishness can be considered as a negative aspect."* (K1) *"Sometimes, the undersecretary's compliance with all kinds of regulations, procedures, and principles related to tasks and operations can lead to slower progress in processes."* (K6) *"It can be said that it has an effect on processes resulting in slower outcomes in tasks and operations."* (K10) High institutional affiliation: *"The institution's long-standing cadre, even after leaving the position, remains an organic part of the institution due to its attachment and sense of belonging to the institution, which can be listed as positive aspects."* (K1)

#### **4.3. Deputy Ministry and Undersecretary in the Context of Institutional Sustainability**

As a result of the participants' views, when comparing the deputy ministry and the undersecretary institution in terms of the continuity of the ministry's institutional memory, the following sub-themes have been identified in Table 5. As seen in the table, a significant number of participants have reached a consensus on the sub-theme *"the representation of institutional tradition/intelligence by undersecretaries (f-8)"*. The undersecretaries are key figures in carrying the institutional memory and intelligence. They are effective in shaping the direction of the organization through their knowledge and experience. Additionally, some of the participants have emphasized the sub-theme *"undersecretaries are more resistant to political pressures (f-4)"*. It can be said that the legal protection provided by Law

No. 657 gives undersecretaries the strength to withstand and resist political pressures. Finally, Deputy ministers appointed from outside the ministry were stated by three of the participants as offering an important opportunity for change.

**Table 2.** *Keputy ministry and undersecretary in the context of institutional sustainability*

Sub-Themes	f	Participant
The representation of institutional tradition/intelligence by undersecretaries	8	K1, K3, K4, K6, K7, K8, K9, K10
Undersecretaries are more resistant to political pressures	4	K7, K4, K7, K9
Offering renewal opportunities by deputy ministers	3	K5, K7, K10

Some of the participants' opinions supporting these sub-themes are presented as follow. The representation of institutional tradition/intelligence by undersecretaries: *"In the context of the continuity of the strategic bureaucratic state intelligence, it seems that the management of the undersecretariat is healthier in terms of representing state tradition and intelligence."* (K1) *"In terms of strategic management and the continuity of state intelligence, I believe that the undersecretary plays a significant role."* (K3) *"In the state, the continuity of administrative tasks and processes is essential. The undersecretary, having grown within the bureaucracy for an extended period and demonstrated the required merit principle, represents an important position in terms of the continuity of state intelligence."* (K10)

Undersecretaries are more resistant to political pressures: *"Due to the stronger legal protection umbrella for undersecretaries, there were situations where they could resist or oppose the minister in tasks and operations."* (K9) *"They held a significant status within the ministry, both hierarchically powerful and influential in getting things done."* (K4) *Offering renewal opportunities by deputy ministers: "The fact that deputy ministers can be appointed from outside brings an additional experience and accumulation transfer to the ministry."* (K2) *"...for keeping up with change and capturing new trends, the addition of external knowledge and perspectives alongside technical expertise will be very beneficial for organizations."* (K7) *"Moreover, the appointment of deputy ministers from outside the bureaucratic institutions may offer some opportunities for the transformation and acceleration of the existing status quo."* (K10)

#### 4.4. Recommendations for the Deputy Ministry Institution

Based on the opinions of the participants, four sub-themes have been identified regarding the current practice of the deputy ministry institution. As seen in Table 6, a significant portion of the participants emphasizes *"The roles and responsibilities need to be reorganized (f-7)"*. In other words, the current state of the deputy ministry institution lacks clarity in roles and responsibilities. It's essential to specify and clarify these roles for better effectiveness. Fifty percent of the participants expressed the view that one of the deputy ministers must necessarily hold a higher hierarchical position. On the other hand, three participants put forth the idea that the communication and alignment between deputy ministers and the ministry's organization need improvement. The sub-theme related to the appointment procedure should be changed has received the least emphasis among the participants.

**Table 6.** *Recommendations for the deputy ministry institution*

Sub-Themes	f	Participant
The roles and responsibilities need to be reorganized	7	K2, K3, K4, K7, K8, K9, K10
One of them having more authority	5	K3, K4, K6, K7, K9
Harmonization with the bureaucratic structure	3	K1, K2, K7

Some views of participants on the sub-themes are as follows: "...it can definitely be considered a positive cadre if the duties, authorities, and responsibilities are clearly defined." (K10) "We can consider deputy ministers as structures that lack authority and work according to the minister's instructions, without producing separate policies." (K2) "I believe that the reduction of the power and hierarchical superiority that the undersecretary used to have has led to a decrease in efficiency and effectiveness in the tasks." (K4) "Therefore, to encourage deputy ministers to prefer rational thinking in their management, a structure should be established that takes into account the warnings, recommendations, and feedback from the technical and technocratic side." (K7) "Each deputy minister can cause blockages in tasks when defending their own field and priorities. Having a chief deputy minister may solve this problem." (K4) "Thus, hierarchically appointing a chairman among deputy ministers might be possible." (K7) "It would be more appropriate to maintain a balance between politics and bureaucracy in the deputy ministry system." (K2) "Currently, direct appointment by the Presidency in the deputy ministry system increases the likelihood of conflict between the minister and the deputy minister." (K10)

### 5. Conclusions, Discussion and Recommendations

In this study, the historical background of the position of deputy ministers is primarily explored, along with its relationship with the administrative and political roles of the Undersecretaries. Based on information obtained from the relevant literature and legal texts, a comparative table is prepared concerning the political undersecretary, administrative undersecretary and deputy minister positions. In the practical part of the study, the opinions of high-level bureaucrats working in the upper management of ministries regarding the deputy minister and undersecretary positions are examined, and the data collected are analyzed and presented in the findings section.

In the practical section, following the analysis and examination of the data obtained from interviews conducted with public officials working in high-level management positions, four main themes and sixteen sub-themes are identified. Based on the thematic analysis, the main themes are listed as "*Qualifications of the Deputy Minister Position*", "*Qualifications of the Undersecretary Position*", "*Deputy Ministry and Undersecretary in the Context of Institutional Sustainability*" and "*Recommendations for the Deputy Ministry Institution*."

Participants in the study mostly emphasize the unique weight and importance of undersecretary in public administration, noting their strong presence in government processes and their comprehensive understanding of the ministry's operations. They are considered to play a pivotal role in maintaining the continuity of state tradition. Additionally, the participants argue that the current regulations have failed to fill the void created by the abolition of the undersecretary position. Participants indicate that implementing regulations to empower deputy ministers with a strong political orientation in administrative affairs would be more beneficial.

When evaluating participants' views within the theme of "*Qualifications of the Deputy Minister Position*" it becomes apparent that Deputy ministers are primarily associated with political affairs and that their political aspect takes precedence. Participants suggest that although Deputy Ministers may lack knowledge in bureaucratic matters and exhibit low institutional affiliation, they are generally seen as capable of expediting the decision-making processes within the ministry. The initial design of the deputy minister's position is explicitly meant to prioritize political affairs, and the analysis confirms this observation. However, with the removal of the administrative secretarial position responsible for managing administrative affairs within the ministry, it becomes evident that deputy ministers also need to focus on administrative matters in the new era. Furthermore, deputy ministers dealing with political

affairs and possessing a political identity may contribute to considering citizen preferences in the delivery of public services and fulfilling the government's promises to the citizens. It can be argued that the bureaucratic structures primarily occupied with technical and expertise-related tasks within the ministries might sometimes neglect the citizen-oriented aspects of public services. Hence, the Deputy Minister's role can be viewed as a status that facilitates and supports the work of the minister, particularly in this context. Similarly, existing literature emphasizes the importance of Deputy Ministers in enhancing the effectiveness of elected officials (Acar et al., 2016).

When examining the views of the participants under the theme of "*Qualifications of the Undersecretary Position*" it is evident that career progression based on merit and competence, mastery of work processes and personnel, and political neutrality are emphasized as important attributes of an undersecretary. Participants also view the undersecretary as a position with a high degree of institutional allegiance, but the slowdown in the operations and processes of the ministry due to the undersecretary position has been regarded as a notable drawback. When examining the details of sub-themes, it becomes clear that under the umbrella of Law No. 657 undersecretaries having the status of secured civil servants, and maintaining control over the Ministry's organization, processes, and personnel, play a significant role in their impartiality and resilience towards political authorities. It can be said that there is a high potential for conflict when ministers and undersecretaries are from different political parties. In such cases, the appointment of deputy ministers with political roles may open the way for politics to take precedence, potentially tilting the balance of power between politics and administration/bureaucracy in favor of politics. Similarly, in the relevant literature, there are proponents who argue that the deputy minister status is a regulatory measure aimed at reducing the power of the bureaucracy (Akman, 2019; Uçman, 2015; Kayar, 2013; Lamba, 2014; ; Pank, 2017).

When analyzing the responses of participants under the theme of "*Deputy Ministry and Undersecretary in the Context of Institutional Sustainability*" it is observed that the majority of participants hold the opinion that undersecretary, in comparison to deputy ministers, are better at preserving the state's traditions, transferring them to the future, and making rational decisions in the decision-making processes. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that there is an emphasis on the need for changes in the current status quo and the potential benefits of utilizing the knowledge and expertise brought from outside by deputy ministers in terms of renewal. Adapting to changing and dynamic environmental, social, political, and economic conditions is only achievable by strengthening the capacities of organizations. Therefore, making efficient use of the transfer of knowledge and experience from the non-public sector to the ministry can potentially contribute positively to the effective and efficient delivery of public services.

Under the theme of "*Recommendations for the Deputy Ministry Institution*" participants predominantly emphasize the need for regulations regarding the distribution of duties, powers, and responsibilities of deputy ministers. This aligns with recommendations found in the existing literature (Gözler & Kaplan, 2012; Tataroğlu, 2016; Topaca, 2014; Uçman, 2015; Uyanık, 2012). Half of the participants suggest that having multiple deputy ministers creates the potential for conflicts, and to prevent such conflicts, one of them should hold a hierarchical superior position. Similarly, Bölükbaşı (2021) points out that having multiple deputy ministers may lead to confusion in duties and powers, thus emphasizing the importance of one of them holding a hierarchical superior role. Furthermore, three participants propose the need for harmonizing the relationship between the bureaucracy and deputy ministers and establishing a healthy communication mechanism. Similarly, the research findings indicate that the current structure of deputy ministers has not yet been fully embraced by the bureaucracy (Uçman, 2015). Some participants argue that the current status of the deputy minister position is not sustainable in its present form, and they believe that it cannot replace the important role played by the

Undersecretary. However, the majority of participants believe that the system should be improved through regulatory changes. They emphasize that the regulatory changes should encompass the duties of the undersecretary as well. The existing literature supports the idea that the institution of deputy ministers is feasible but needs to be improved through new regulations that combine the roles of both institutions (Bölükbaşı, 2021; Topaca, 2014).

As a result of the research, it is evident that deputy ministers have not yet institutionalized, and it is necessary to make certain legal and administrative arrangements. While the political role of ministers has decreased compared to the parliamentary system in the Presidential Government System, the literature and practical implementation have shown that the political aspect of deputy ministers remains prominent. It is believed that making the necessary regulations to prevent administrative disruptions in the ministry's organizational structure would contribute to the efficient and effective delivery of public services. Additionally, a significant portion of the participants perceive that deputy ministers are more involved in political affairs. However, with the abolishment of the undersecretariat in 2018, the responsibilities of deputy ministers within the ministry have increased. When the transformation related to the increased activity of deputy ministers (Nacak, 2020) is considered within the research framework, it appears that it has not been adequately perceived.

This study has certain limitations. The findings obtained as a result of the study are limited to the personal opinions, knowledge, and perceptions of the participants. Furthermore, finding voluntary participants for this practice-oriented study on deputy ministers has posed a challenging stage. Public servants, who also have a political side, have been reluctant to provide information regarding the deputy minister position.

As a result of the research, several recommendations related to the research topic have been presented below:

- Conducting practice-oriented research involving participants from the legislature, civil society, or the private sector in future studies related to the deputy minister's position will make a significant contribution to the literature.
- In order for the deputy minister institution to be embraced by the bureaucracy and ensure its continuity within the Turkish administrative system, a regulation should be enacted that provides more detailed, clear, and explicit provisions regarding its powers and duties within the framework of the law.
- The deputy minister institution will also fulfill the duties of the undersecretariat. The Undersecretariat represented the expert and technical aspect of the ministry organization. Creating a new deputy minister regulation that takes into account the expert and technical skills for the continuity of the ministry organization will positively contribute to the efficient and effective delivery of public services.

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