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Sustainability of Civil Service Reforms in Central and Eastern Europe after EU Accession: Findings and Lessons

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Questions & Relevance

Outcomes

- To what extent do civil service systems in CEE-8 fit the European principles of administration (cf. 'SIGMA/EC model')

Trajectories

- What happened to the civil service in the CEE-8 after EU accession?

Determinants

- Why do CEE-8 differ with regard to post-accession pathways and degree of civil service professionalisation?

Lessons

- What lessons for Western Balkan states?

Research strategy

Degree of 'fit' with European principles of administration

- Three levels of institutionalisation (depth)
 - Formal rules
 - Actual practice of management (cf. implementation)
 - Civil servants' attitudes
- Eleven domains of institutionalisation (width)
 - Reform programmes, legal basis, management, open competition, exams, senior civil service, job protection, perf evaluation, training, salaries, rights and duties

Methods

- Legal documents & reports
- Open and semi-structured interviews (>200)
- Web-based survey of civil servants (>3000)

Findings

Post-accession trajectories and state of play in 2008

Consolidation at medium/high level of fit

- Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia

Ambiguous, largely compatible re-orientation

- Hungary

Ambiguous, largely incompatible re-orientation

- Slovenia

Reversals from med/high to low level of fit

- Poland, Slovakia

Stagnation at low level

- Czech Republic

Extensions

Differences across domains

- Areas of consolidation, incremental progress, stagnation, reversals

Differences across levels

- Higher fit for formal rules than for actual practice
- Attitudes generally in favour of meritocracy and performance-oriented management

Implications for government performance

- Implementation of EU policy, economic development, public sector corruption

'Why' variation across CEE-8?

In search of determinants

Is a general explanation possible?

- Many drivers & obstacles (cf. complex causation)
 - Social, political, economic determinants
 - National and international influence
- National pathways (cf. traditions)
- Events and contingencies

Search for patterns across CEE-8 – Focus on

- Different approaches to tackling legacies
- Different political conditions to build trust between politics and administration
- Different capacity to manage reform
- Different mechanisms of EU influence

Legacies and transition



Favourable conditions for professionalisation

- 'Relatively un-usable' administrative legacy
- 'Clean break' with communist legacy
- State-building in the face of 'external threats'

Mechanisms

- Incentive to innovate and accelerate reform
- Reform to make transition irreversible
- Early investment in civil service paid off later (cf. Path dependence)

Lesson for Western Balkan

- Beyond control of international actors

Political competition



Unfavourable conditions for professionalisation

- Wholesale alternations (cf. left-right pendulum shifts)

Favourable conditions

- Predominantly partial alternations of government

Mechanisms

- Trust between politicians and bureaucracy
- Continuity of reform, implementation, personnel
- Knock-on effects of senior level politicisation

Lessons for Western Balkans

- Largely beyond international influence
- Potentially need for more communication, assistance and pressure, target political class

Management capacity



Unfavourable conditions for professionalisation

- Separate civil service office
- Management by ministries of labour, justice, etc
- Divided responsibilities

Favourable conditions

- Minister/ministry of public administration
- Management by PMOs, MFs and MIs with mixed record
- Unified responsibilities, authority, resources
- Presence of reform entrepreneurs

Mechanisms

- Political authority and incentive to reform
- Continuity and implementation capacity

Lesson for Western Balkan

- Gain pol support for suitable management arrangements

Varieties of EU influence



Favourable conditions for professionalisation

- Credible EC conditionality with regard to civil service
External incentive, agenda and empowerment effects
- Aid and assistance through Twinning, Sigma, World Bank
Learning and persuasion mechanisms
- Domestic management capacity
'Strategic usage' and 'effective downloading' mechanisms
- Post-accession incentive to continue reforms
External lock-in through sanctions, monitoring and positive incentives (EUPAN, ESF)
Domestic lock-in through judicial, constitutional, societal, political, administrative etc mechanisms

Unintended & unexpected effects of EU accession

- Functional re-orientation, institutional instability
- Rejuvenation of civil service

Lessons & conclusions



Importance of context and search for 'best fit'

- Legacies, traditions, early post-transition reforms
- Domestic political context
- Domestic policy and economic environment

Policy design

- Application of European principles ('SIGMA/EC model')
 - Rule of law based, reliable, impartial state
- Attention to adaptability and 'regulated flexibility'
 - Dynamic social, economic, policy and institutional context
- Capable domestic civil service management structures

Instruments

- Diagnosis and prior analysis of needs
- Focus on learning and assistance for reform and implementation
- Inclusion of and communication with political class
- Empowerment of stakeholders, persuasion of opponents
- Credible conditionality to back-up and empower reformers and create sense of priority