

Waiting for Godot? Assessing the Governance of Administrative Reform in Central and Eastern Europe

This panel aims to continue the activities launched with the Panel on "The Future of EU external governance: Comparing experiences in Central and Eastern Europe" at the NIG conference 2010 in Maastricht. The focus of the Panel is to explore and reflect on the politics and governance of administrative reform in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). It aims specifically at providing new insights into the dynamics of the governance of administrative reforms in Central and Eastern Europe today, including "reform spill-over" effects on the countries in the new vicinity of the EU such as Belarus, Ukraine, or the Western Balkan. We aim to combine the understanding of the role of external, and especially European, forces in driving administrative reforms (e.g. Grabbe 2001, Lippert, Umbach and Wessels 2001, Goetz 2001) and the mechanisms through which administrative reforms are stimulated through external governance (e.g. Lavenex 2008, Lavenex and Schimmelfennig 2009, Raik 2006). The role of internal factors, such as the bureaucratic politics of domestic actors, institutional constraints or legacies of the communist regime, in administrative reforms in Eastern Europe (e.g. Meyer-Sahling 2001, Vaas 1999, Grzymala-Busse 2007) is taken into account as well.

The panel therefore aims to attract papers which examine the international politics of administrative reform in CEE and vicinity area, including normative and cultural reflections upon the reform process. The contributions will draw on a mix of methodologies, including qualitative and quantitative analysis, focus groups and discourse analysis. Contributions may offer country-specific or cross-country, issue-based or comparative empirical assessments.

The theoretical approaches which are used to analyze the role in and impact of the EU on public sector reform in Eastern Europe are External Governance and Europeanization. First, these approaches offer insights into different mechanisms through which the EU promotes its norms, including administrative standards (Olsen 2002: 923-6, Radaelli 2003, Olsen 2003). According to Lavenex and Schimmelfennig 'the notion of governance is particularly suitable to grasp "the process of rule expansion beyond formal membership in the EU polity" (2009: 795). On the one hand, external governance is executed via a 'highly asymmetrical relationship between insiders and outsiders; the imposition of predetermined formal rules, the exclusive participation of bureaucratic actors; and top-down communication structures' (Lavenex 2004: 682, Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2004, Börzel and Risse 2003). On the other hand, external governance can also take place through 'new governance' based on 'more horizontal forms of network governance and communication in which rule expansion progresses in a more participatory manner' (Lavenex and Schimmelfennig 2009, p. 796, see also Börzel 2002). Secondly, external governance and Europeanization approaches hypothesize the conditions for a successful transfer of European administrative standards: 'The more precise, binding, and enforceable EU rules are (...) the more likely they will be selected, adopted, and implemented beyond EU border.' (Lavenex and Schimmelfennig 2009: 802, see also Radaelli 2003: 37). Apart from institutionalist explanations of the role and impact of the EU on administrative reforms in Eastern Europe, however, the panel will also explore alternate propositions, such as power-based explanations/conditionality, or International Relations approaches, such as geopolitics, to compare and contrast the effectiveness with which the EU and other international actors promote (also potentially competing) standards of 'good administration' (e.g. Wallace 2000).

The panel will contribute significantly to the NIG's central theme of 'Citizens and Governance' as well as to the theme of 'Public management in a joint-up world'. Democratisation and public sector reform in CEE and ENP partner states is inherently linked to fundamental changes in the relationship between citizens and the institutions governing the public sphere of these countries. It is therefore essential to explore the effectiveness with which the EU has managed the political reform process in CEE (in comparison to ENP partners) to gain a better understanding of how and why public sector reforms in some countries are being implemented better and faster than in others.

In respect to the second theme of 'Public management in a joint-up world', the EU, for example, has made 'good governance' a leading principle in its efforts to promote political reforms in Central and Eastern Europe. The administrations in CEE, however, face significant challenges adopting and developing not only the EU's, but also other international institutions' rules for high quality public management. By focusing on the different types of administrative norms that are transferred and/or negotiated, and on testing of various theoretical approaches concerning factors contributing to the success and failure of such a transfer, we aim to highlight new approaches to achieve high quality public management in the target region, such as hybrid solutions and reciprocal learning.

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