Public Administration Reform in Bulgaria: the EU Funding Effect on Policy Dynamics and Priorities

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Abstract: The paper examines public administration reform in Bulgaria in the past two decades and the effect of EU funding on reform priorities. The paper argues that the EU, through its funding mechanisms, has served as the key driver for PA reform in Bulgaria and has helped ensure political commitment and policy consistency and continuity even in periods when political will was lacking. The paper examines specific reform areas and initiatives to substantiate such argument. In particular, the paper examines reform dynamics and initiatives in e-government, civil service reform, and the reduction of administrative burden. The paper utilizes data gathered for a large research project funded by the EU, as well as follow-up interviews with public officials. The paper finds that despite Bulgaria’s mixed at best record in public administration reform compared to other post-communist countries, EU funding has contributed to significant and irreversible changes in the quality of public administration and has helped the country part with old legacies and move closer to a professional, merit-based civil service.