

# Under pressure: 15 years of crises, pandemic and war, and their effect on European and CEE public administrations

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**Abstract:** European public administrations have experienced many changes, instigated by various government initiatives (Kuhlmann & Wollmann, 2019; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). The literature widely recognizes multiple internal and external drivers behind these transformations. Prominently, factors such as trust (Leibrecht & Pitlik, 2015; Bouckaert, 2012), characteristics of political leadership (Kettl, 2015; Dreher et al., 2009), bureaucratic entrepreneurship (Mintrom & Norman, 2009; Frisch et al., 2020), and external crises (Randma-Liiv & Kickert, 2017; Blondin & Boin, 2020) have been emphasized. Our paper delves into the concept of "change" as an intentional policy strategy, encapsulating authoritative actions by public sector entities (Nordlinger, 1981; Geertz, 1980; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). Such actions aim to modify the components and dynamics of current public administrations, and alter the structures, tasks, actors, and processes within existing public administrations, thereby challenging the prevailing status quo (EC, 2017).

In our paper we focus on external shocks, specifically the economic/financial crises, migration crises, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the war in Ukraine. To identify the specific transformations within European public administrations, we adopt two unique methodological approaches. For the economic/financial crisis, migration crises, and the COVID-19 pandemic, we base our findings on an extensive literature review. This allows us to pinpoint principal changes in European public administrations catalyzed by these external events. However, considering the paucity of research on the Ukraine conflict that began in February 2022, we leveraged interviews to discern the primary administrative shifts. Additionally, we reference formal policy documents from pertinent EU entities and select CEE member countries to enrich our perspective. Furthermore, we investigate organizational changes at the central level of selected CEE member states of the European Union by examining alterations in the labeling of organizational structures of key central governing bodies, namely ministries. Existing literature suggests that changes in the labeling of public bodies can signify heightened political attention from the leadership to specific policy issues of importance (e.g., Mortensen & Green-Pedersen, 2014; Hammond, 1993; Yesilkagit et al., 2022).

This paper thus explores the transformative impact of specific externally-induced crises on European Union public administration and governance over the past fifteen years. Drawing on academic literature and own research, it discusses how these crises have acted as catalysts for change, prompting the European Union to adapt, and innovate and crises have reconfigured sovereignty in the European Union. Special attention is given to the integration of specialized knowledge into politically sensitive decisions, and the concomitant challenges surrounding transparency in governance. The paper concludes that while crises expose vulnerabilities, they also offer avenues for administrative evolution, underscoring the importance of adaptability, collaboration, and transparent decision-making