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**Working Title: Georgia's Local Governance in the wake of paused EU accession process: EU requirements and Georgian Reality**

**Abstract:**

Local governance in Georgia, an EU candidate country, faces significant challenges related to self-governance and citizen engagement. Although a legal framework supporting local self-governance exists, its practical application remains limited, particularly in terms of power-sharing with the opposition and citizen involvement in local governance.

This paper presents a single case study of Georgia, which is particularly relevant as the topic is relatively understudied. The study combines descriptive analysis with empirical research to argue that: (1) intergovernmental relations in Georgia reveal an imbalance of power that favors the central government and the ruling party, undermining local self-governance; (2) this concentration of central authority weakens democratic accountability and hinders effective local governance in line with the principle of subsidiarity; and (3) the lack of both horizontal coordination and vertical decentralization creates gaps in local governance practices, which do not align with the existing (albeit imperfect) legal framework.

The paper's main research question is: how does the hybrid form of democracy affect the state of local self-governance and democratic accountability in a candidate country? The research puzzle explored in this paper is that, despite the high conditionality during the EU accession process, Georgia's local governance has actually declined over time. This decline is often overlooked in EU reports, reflecting a phenomenon of "doublespeak" in public administration (Riggs, 1964), which requires clearer analysis and understanding. Most EU studies literature focus on ex ante and ex post pull of the EU. However, this paper argues that the regime type is a more significant determinant of the quality of PA than the conditionality.

The empirical focus of the study will be on the role of regional coordination councils (RCCs) in Georgia, an area where no prior academic research exists. The expected outcome is that the RCC's low involvement of interest groups and the general public, along with its lack of transparency, negatively impacts the quality of local self-governance.

This case study will contribute to the literature on democratic backsliding and public administration (Peters, 2023; Bauer et al., 2021), offering insights into the impact of authoritarian practices on public administration. In particular, it will contribute to comparative studies of bureaucracy, and the influence hybridity of democracy has on the nature of public administration and local governance.