

Open Research Online

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

The long and winding road towards the EU policy of support to Member States public administration reform: History (2000–2021) and prospects

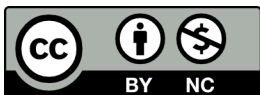
Journal Item

How to cite:

Ongaro, Edoardo (2022). The long and winding road towards the EU policy of support to Member States public administration reform: History (2000–2021) and prospects. Public Policy and Administration (Early access).

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© 2022 Edgardo Ongaro



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

Version: Version of Record

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1177/09520767221117689>

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

The long and winding road towards the EU policy of support to Member States public administration reform: History (2000–2021) and prospects

Public Policy and Administration

2022, Vol. 0(0) 1–24

© The Author(s) 2022



Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/09520767221117689

journals.sagepub.com/home/ppa**Edoardo Ongaro** 

Faculty of Business and Law, The Open University, Milton Keynes, UK

Abstract

This paper provides an account of how the European Union (EU), and notably the European Commission (EC), has become an actor in its own right in the field of the reform of administration and public services management in Europe, by developing an approach to support Member States in their initiatives to improve public administration and public services. We qualify this process – occurred over the period 2000–2021, with a tremendous acceleration in the second decade – as a twofold paradigmatic change: because (i) this is a novel field of action for the EU itself; and because (ii) the very logic driving the EU role shifted dramatically from a logic of conditionality (or compliance with aspects of the *acquis*) in the early phase to a radically different logic of enabling and facilitating administrative reforms, on the ground, in a later phase and prospectively. We interpret the paradigmatic shift that has occurred through a combination of theoretical perspectives: policy learning; policy entrepreneurship within the Commission; the opening of an opportunity window for policy change to occur; and the consolidation of a new policy sub-system in the field. We deem this change to constitute a step forward in the process of European integration.

Keywords

Europeanisation, European integration, EU-driven public sector reform, multi-level governance, policy entrepreneurship, public administration reform

Corresponding author:

Edoardo Ongaro, The Faculty of Business and Law, The Open University, The Open University Business School, Milton Keynes MK7 6AA, UK.

Email: edoardo.ongaro@open.ac.uk

Introduction and rationale

A twofold paradigmatic shift occurred in the governance of the European Union (EU) as regards the reform of public administration in the Member States and across the European administrative system (a political science notion which we use to refer to the administrative dimension of public governance in the EU, following [Bauer and Trondal, 2015](#)). Over the course of two decades, the EU and notably the European Commission (EC), has become an actor in its own right in the field of administrative reform and public management, by developing a targeted approach of support to the Member States in their initiatives to improve public administration and public services management, which we may label the *EU policy for support to public administration reform*. In this paper, we identify such change to have occurred over two decades; the seminal causes for change were laid in the decade 2000–2010,¹ while change manifested itself in the second decade, 2011–2021.

We qualify this process as a twofold paradigmatic change, both because it involves the EU supporting the Member States in a novel field of action for the EU itself, and because the very logic driving the EU shifted dramatically from a logic of conditionality to a radically different logic of on-the-ground support, facilitation and enablement of administrative reforms and public services management development in and by the EU Member States. The EU intervention in this field was initially fragmentary and different according to the sector and funding line supporting it, and for some Member States, it occurred notably through loans that were provided to countries which had run into fiscal sustainability problems on strict fiscal, financial, and structural reform conditions (which included reforms of the public sector). The clearest examples of a fiscal-based approach can be identified as Greece ([Kickert and Ongaro, 2019a, 2019b](#); [Hardiman et al., 2019](#); [Spanou, 2020](#)) and Cyprus.² The EU approach later took a radically different stance: under circumstances of a lower degree of urgency and based on learning from the Greek experience, the intervention of the EU moved towards supporting cross-cutting modernization of the administrative system as a whole. This “new” role for the EC, and more generally for the EU, was institutionalized notably with the establishment of Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support (SRSS).³ If the former shift – that is, the EU acquiring a de facto role in Member States’ reform of public administration – has already been investigated in the scientific literature (see [Ongaro and Kickert, 2020](#)), the latter development, which manifests itself in the EU having adopted a supporting, facilitating and enabling role rather than a conditionality-driven role, is under-investigated: it is this latter development (which has not, to our knowledge, so far been examined in the scientific literature) which is accounted for in this paper.

As regards the process whereby the EU acquired a role in the Member States’ reform of public administration, [Ongaro and Kickert](#), in their introduction to a special issue published in the journal *Public Policy and Administration* devoted to the study of the influence of the EU on administrative reforms in the EU Member States under conditions of economic and fiscal crisis during the 2010s, minted the notion of *EU-driven Public Sector Reforms* to capture the phenomenon of a key role played by the EU in some Member States in the dynamics of public sector reforms at large and administrative

reforms specifically (Ongaro and Kickert, 2020): countries like Greece (Spanou, 2020), Italy (Badell et al., 2019; Di Mascio et al., 2020) or Ireland (McCartaigh and Hardiman, 2020). In this initial phase, the role of the EU entailed also a coercive element to directly reform the public administration, as part of a framework of direct or indirect EU support to public finances (fiscal consolidation). And yet, in those same works, the authors of the special issue also noticed that, notably since the second half of the 2010s and with growing intensity over the period 2018–19, a major policy learning conducive to a paradigmatic shift was underway, towards a conception of the role of the EU in creating the conditions for the Member States to develop a stronger and more sustainable economic growth, a role which was becoming (much) less coercive and (much) more enabling and supporting in its fundamental thrust; moreover and crucially, the shift was from the EU supporting specific and localized administrative capacities development to the EU supporting overall and comprehensive *reforms* of public administration.

In this scenario, the EC maintains its statutory role of “Guardian of the Treaties”,⁴ but the EC, and other institutions of the EU more broadly, progressively built upon this institutional role and compounded it with the novel approach, deeming the two roles would usefully complement one another. The change was ultimately a change of paradigm - by which we mean a constellation of principles, formal and informal rules, and operating procedures whereby a given international policy regime functions and ticks (following e.g. Young, 1997): a shift from a logic which has come to be called ‘austerity’ and that was driven by conditionality in a strict rule-abiding approach and for which the polar star was fiscal consolidation, towards a logic of complementary support to growth and sustainable development, which requires the development of administrative capacities and public services management. Given the timing of the 2020 special issue, it was not possible in that collection of works to include into the analysis also the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the response that the EU provided to it, which has implications also for the dynamics of administrative reforms in the Member States (see Ongaro et al., forthcoming).

Overview of the main changes occurred

In order to better qualify the kind of change to which we refer in this paper, we should specify that ours is a political science and organization science perspective, and it is from this theoretical perspective that we qualify the change that has occurred as a paradigmatic shift. From a legal standpoint, the competencies of the EU in the Public Administration and Governance policy area are clearly defined by the Treaties that address it directly through two main Articles: Article 197 and Article 298. Article 197⁵ represents what could be considered as the legal basis of the EU to act in this domain. The article indicates that quality public administration is necessary for the “effective implementation of Union law by the Member States, which is “essential for the proper functioning of the Union” and innovates by indicating the “common interest” in this respect. The same article indicates also the *possibility* for the EU to support the Member States in this area, recognising the value added of the support but also clearly setting the non-obligatory nature of the support. The article also points to the quality of the Member States’ public

administration to enable them to fulfil their obligations under the Treaties. Article 298⁶ addresses the obligation for the European institutions to adhere to quality standards as regards their own administrations. This article is of a lesser direct impact for the purpose of this article; still, it introduces in the Treaty for the second time the concept of quality of *Public Administration and Governance* (PAG).

Other legal bases can be identified in the cohesion policy instruments, such as the European Social Fund, the European Regional Development Fund, FISCALIS 2020, Customs 2020, the LIFE programme and other sector instruments. In addition, the EU has adopted several initiatives in the area of research, such as Horizon 2020, aimed precisely at promoting the reinforcement of the quality of PAG in the Member States.

In terms of organisational and managerial change within the Commission, the paradigmatic shift gained traction in 2018 when the then Secretary General, Martin Selmayr, gave the mandate to the SRSS to coordinate the Commission activities in the area of PAG and to link this coordination effort with the newly created financial tool, the Structural Reform Support Programme (the SRSP),⁷ whose general objective is to contribute to public administration and governance (PAG) reforms.⁸ Eventually, the shift came to completion in 2020-21 with the establishment of DG REFORM and the new EU funding line to support public administrative reforms⁹ in the Member States, i.e. the Technical Support Instrument¹⁰ (the TSI).

The TSI¹¹ aims to provide tailor-made expertise (technical support) on the ground to help Member States design, develop and implement growth-enhancing reforms in a wide range of policy areas, including in the PAG one. It covers the whole reform cycle, from identifying reform needs to implementing, monitoring and evaluating the outcomes of such reforms. Through the TSI, the Commission provides expertise on how to carry out reforms, which can take the form of strategic or technical advice, studies to assess the need for a reform or possible solutions, and training and in-country missions by experts. Under the SRSP,¹² the Commission managed over 1000 projects in support of all Member States with a budget of EUR 222.8 million. With the TSI,¹³ the amount increased fourfold compared to its predecessor, to EUR 864.4 million. Support in the area of PAG ranges from digitalising the internal operations of public administration and the delivery of public administration services to providing methodologies to better gear public spending towards green or gender issues.

After the adoption of the TSI, three important elements were added to the edifice of PAG in the EU. A first and major concomitant evolution has been the adoption of the Recovery and Resilience Facility¹⁴ (the RRF) which is the instrument at the heart of the mechanism put in place by the EU to counter the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis and ensure resilience. The RRF clearly established the link between reforms and investments (Article 4), and the possibility to use technical support under the TSI (Article 7), precisely to reach the milestones and targets of the national Recovery and Resilience Plans (RRPs), as adopted by the European Council. In terms of policy tools, through the RRF the EU clearly indicated that, whatever the policy area, beyond an initial advance payment of 13%, all further reimbursements would be done only after the attainment of milestones and targets on the agreed reforms and investments: this creates a new set of dynamics in the dialogue between the Commission, the Council and the Parliament, and

the Member States centred on achievement of results (a management by objectives logic). This logic of tangible achievements of milestones and targets occurs also in the area of PAG, pushing therefore the Member States to design and deploy those reforms needed to improve on a more permanent base the quality of their PAG. The tools of TSI and the RRF are therefore closely integrated in their workings.

Another set of changes occurred in terms of alignment of the administrative reform “discourses” between the European and the national level. Firstly, in the adoption by the Commission of its Staff Working Document (SWD), a core task was identified in “Supporting public administrations in EU Member States to deliver reforms and prepare for the future”.¹⁵ In the document, the EC services have, for the first time, jointly identified and communicated about the major challenges that the EU administrations have to face, but also the possible means to address them, be they legal, financial or in terms of “moral suasion”. Secondly, the EC promoted and organised, in November 2021, a large conference aimed at probing how the analysis undertaken through its SWD chimed to the ears of public administration experts. This event enabled, at least to some extent, the “brokerage” – to adopt the notions and terminology of the social mechanisms analysis¹⁶ – between EU and national administrative reform discourses; in plainer terminology, it can be said that participants clearly supported the EC in its analysis and encouraged it to go beyond the role played till then - in the full respect of the Treaties - by promoting the dialogue and the reflection on PAG and using in full the TSI to support the efforts of the Member to modernize their PAG. Thirdly, after this reflection and “validation” phases, a venue for the structured dialogue with Member States and other key actors in the policy field of public administration was set up at the end of 2021, when the EC adopted its decision creating its Expert Group on PAG,¹⁷ the first expert group in the EU in this policy area. The Expert Group is an advisory body to the EC with the overall scope to “support the implementation of Union legislation and policies, as well as coordination and co-operation with the Member States and relevant stakeholders in the area of public administration modernisation taking into account the work of existing thematic networks in the area of public administration.” The group has also the ambition to advise the EC on issues related to public administration reforms, and to facilitate information exchange.

Interpretation

In our theoretical interpretation, these changes amount to the attainment of a novel institutional equilibrium in this area of public governance in the EU and provide for the establishment and consolidation of a system in which institutional actors, encompassing both the EU and the national levels of governance, interact with each other in the field of the reform of the public administration in the EU Member States. Such system binds together a range of actors in the field of administrative reforms, and it is capable to produce a set of consistent decisions and courses of actions over time: in the conceptualization and terminology introduced by the prominent public policy scholars [Baumgartner and Jones \(1993\)](#), the system reached a new ‘punctuated equilibrium’, whereby a novel policy subsystem capable of producing a flow of consistent policy decisions over time developed and consolidated. In plainer words, this is a novel policy

embedded in a novel institutional setting and driven by a logic of enabling and supporting the Member States to build administrative capacities for the ultimate objective of strengthening European public governance in its administrative dimension and effectively implementing European public policies against the wider scope of reinforcing the EU.

This paper contends that this change represents a very significant story about a twofold paradigmatic change which resulted in the consolidation of an EU policy for support to public administration reform. Such change has contributed to the development of the institutional landscape of the EU in an important area, namely public administrative reform, and as such it amounts to a form of European integration (here classically intended, echoing Lindberg's works, as a process whereby political-administrative actors at the national level shift their expectations and political activities to encompass also a new supranational level of governance in their course of action).

How did this significant change unfold? What were the key events leading (at least in our interpretation) to such a new state of affairs in the field of public administrative reform? In the next section we provide an account of the key events and delineate the storyline.

Storyline and key events

We start the period of observation from the year 2000, when the negotiations for the accession to the EU of the countries from Central and Eastern Europe commenced. This enlargement process paid, for the first time, specific attention to public administration in the EU public and policy debate: candidate countries had to undergo significant changes in their administrative systems as part of accession criteria. The initial accession strategy did not cover explicitly public administration issues: the pre-existing so called "Copenhagen criteria" (1993) and the "Madrid criteria" (1995)¹⁸ addressed key elements of democratic governance, respect of human rights, freedom of media and accountability of police and military services; these were part of the general political criteria for accession. Specific administrative arrangements in the candidate countries were reviewed only in the sectoral chapters of the negotiations; these related to issues such as separation of functions, separation of policy and control functions, independence of oversight institutions, accountability, transparency, professionalism were usually assessed to the extent that concerned the implementation of the EU body of principles (*Acquis Communautaire*) in the specific area or the capacity of the administrative bodies to operate (proper resources and knowledge).

The foundational event for the integration of administrative reforms - the PAG dossier - as part and parcel of the and EU policy occurred when such dossier was first raised and then gained prominence in the accession talks between the EC, on behalf of the EU, and the candidate countries. The file was handled mainly by DG ADMIN¹⁹ at the time which, thanks to the initiative of dedicated officials (Daniele Dotto, Ciresica Feyer and Madalina Gligor) and supported by ELARG (now DG NEAR) and OECD/Sigma, introduced the Public Administration Reform (PAR) concept in the discussions with the candidate countries, through the design and adoption of the so-called PAR checklist.²⁰

Administrative reforms in accession countries were supported by the PHARE programme.²¹ This assistance package led to administrative modernisation in the candidate countries; yet, administrative reforms tended to be low on the governmental agenda of both the EU and accession countries, as the attention of policymakers was drawn to the massive economic restructure and political change in the concerned countries. The monitoring and evaluation of this programme (EC, 1999 and 2001) furnished evidence that such sectoral approach produced very limited systemic change.²² In an attempt to remedy this shortcoming, at the late stage of the negotiations with Bulgaria and Romania (which joined later, in 2007), public administration was added to the general (political) criteria for accession. However, post-accession reviews showed that many of the reforms were not sustained, were stalled, or sometimes even reversed after accession (Dimitrova, 2007; Meyer- Sahling, 2009, World Bank, 2006).

The dynamics of the accession process led DG EMPL to acquire some remit as regards administrative issues since the EU programming period 2007–2013, when the EU encompassed also the twelve new EU Member States. In fact, the slow progress in modernising administrative systems in the countries that joined the EU over 2004–07 triggered the introduction of the notion of “institutional capacity building” as a funding priority of the European Social Fund (ESF, an EU fund devoted to human capital development) in the financial period 2007–2013. This was a first important step in the change of tack in matters of EU support to administrative reforms: traditionally, the Structural Funds and the other EU instruments had provided only technical assistance, which is a sectoral support confined to reinforcing the administrative capacity of the authorities working in a specifically supported policy area (for example, certification authorities, employment services, etc.); instead, the new objective of enhancing institutional capacity was intended as an investment in the human capital of public administration as a whole, and it opened the way to the EU assisting and supporting horizontal administrative reforms in those Member States with weaker institutions. Smart administration, strengthening of human resources management, improving administrative digitalisation and public services management came to be considered as an underlying requirement for economic and jobs growth (also in line with the renewed Lisbon agenda, 2005). In 2007–2013, fourteen Member States benefited from support under the ESF objective for about EUR 2 billion: the funded programmes had to follow up the implementation of the reforms designed in the accession process of the country. In 2010, DG EMPL conducted a mid-term assessment (ECORYS, 2011) on the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of the related ESF interventions, which found out a highly varied degree of implementation of the reforms: most notably in Eastern and Southern Europe, with some Member States advancing with administrative modernisation and others either stalling in small incremental improvements or even reversing the changes made in the pre-accession time. The assessment suggested that the EC should have a more active role in providing mutual learning and dissemination of practices across countries but also in supporting specifically individual Member States that were lagging behind. This mid-term evaluation confirmed the need for more general, horizontal EU support for PAG.

In the meantime, in 2008 the financial crisis triggered an economic and then, for some countries, a fiscal crisis (Kickert and Ongaro, 2019a). These contemporaneous events shaped the temporal context in which the changes in the administrative reform policy recounted here occurred. EU institutions responded through a series of measures. In 2011, the so-called Six Pack (five regulations and one directive, 2011) was approved, later followed up by the Fiscal Compact (2012) and the Two-Pack (two regulations, 2013): jointly, these provisions embodied the initial response of the EU to the Euro crisis burst in 2008–2010 (an initially financial crisis, which then turned into an economic crisis and, for some countries in particular, into a fiscal crisis about the sustainability of public finances). Overall, the new regulatory framework aimed at enhancing the coordination and surveillance of the fiscal and economic policies of the EU Member States, notably of those that had adopted the Euro.²³

For three Euro-zone Member States, a package of dedicated loans was set up, most famously in the case of Greece, where a dedicated task force within the EC - the Task Force for Greece (TFGR), operating alongside the Support Group for Cyprus and the one for Portugal - was established in July 2011, at the request of the Greek Prime Minister, and devoted to the support of reforms, notably those identified between the Greek authorities and the Troika (composed of the European Central Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the European Commission). As part of the TFGR remit there was also advising the Greek government about the reform of the public sector. The mandate of the TFGR was to identify and coordinate technical assistance to Greece, upon demand, with the objective to deliver on commitments undertaken in the context of the economic adjustment programmes of the country and to provide technical assistance for spending more efficiently the EU funds. The TFGR mobilised expertise or relevant support from the Member States, international organisations and other specialist bodies that had relevant experience in implementing similar reforms. The TFGR concluded its mandate at the end of June 2015. From the onset the TFGR focused on administrative reforms aimed at achieving sustainable changes in Greece. The experience of the TFGR showed the need to address the reform of PAG as a preamble to almost all other reforms: without strong public administrations most reforms in other areas of the economy and society are unsustainable. In terms of working methods, it also pointed to the value of hands-on approach by all operators for sustainable administrative reforms and it corroborated the lesson learnt that availability of funding or top-down prescriptiveness by themselves are most unlikely to produce sustainable reforms.

Overall - and aware that there is some degree of oversimplifying here - this period of the fiscal and economic crises can be qualified as the phase of “coercive” public sector reforms (to which Kickert and Ongaro, 2020; refer to as “EU-driven public sector reforms), whereby the EU – the European Commission and the European Central Bank (with and IMF in the cases of Greece, Ireland and Portugal, Hardiman et al., 2019; Kickert and Ongaro, 2019b) - leveraged on the conditions attached to the loans to push through reforms of the public sector. More broadly, the framework of fiscal consolidation across the Member States and the Semester (see below) points to a logic of conditionality – in essence if not in legal form – as driving the influence of the EU on public sector reforms in the Member States over this period.

However, very soon a process of reflection and learning commenced, notably in the aftermath of the conclusion of the works of the TFGR (and the support groups for Cyprus and Portugal). Central to this reflection was the recognition of the limits of the ‘coercive’ approach to public sector reforms, which led to elaborating on the compelling political and policy case for a different approach to be adopted. Organisationally, this learning process was supported by the transformation of the TFGR and the other support teams into a permanent structure, i.e. the Structural Reform Support Service (SRSS), in a clearly identified Directorate General initially embedded into the Secretariat General. The mandate of the SRSS was to support the development of sustainable administrative reforms in the Member States. The European Parliament ([European Parliament, 2016](#)) also strongly endorsed this new model: whereas the TFGR started its operation using limited funds available under the ESF and the ERDF and other funds made available by the European Parliament as a “preparatory action”, the SRSP benefited of the allocation of dedicated funds, doubled for its last 2 years of operations, thereby clearly indicating the support by European lawmakers for the novel approach, including in the area of PAG.

One key moment of this re-thinking which drove the transition from the task-force to a permanent, dedicated service to support administrative reform was an internal seminar at the European Commission held with the management of the TFGR and other stakeholders in 2013 in which an academic invited speaker, Edoardo Ongaro, presented his comparative research work on administrative reforms in countries in the so-called ‘Napoleonic administrative tradition’ (for which see [Ongaro, 2008, 2009 and 2010](#) – and a later entry for the Oxford encyclopedia of politics and public administration: [Ongaro, 2018](#)). During the seminar, Ongaro was notably queried about why significant differences in administrative performance (e.g. performance difference between France and Greece) could be detected in the presence of a similar configuration of the state and administrative apparatus (both France and Greece share the key features of the Napoleonic model of public administration): “what does the scientific literature say about it? What explains such variation in performance?” The short answer was (and is, in the opinion of the authors of this piece): “because context matters!”. That is, the cultural and political-administrative context is a major source of differentiation and variation in administrative performance and in the very dynamics of the processes of reforming the public sector. Only reforms of public administration which are context-sensitive may lead to sustainable development of administrative capacities and public services.

Another contemporaneous change played a role in developing an EU administrative reform support policy. In fact, in 2011 a periodic assessment, called the European Semester (“Semester” hereafter), was set up as a yearly coordination cycle between the EU and the Member States and it includes the issuing of recommendations (Country Specific Recommendations - CSRs) and the requirement to develop reform plans by each Member State (National Reform Programs), as part of the process to attain the objectives of a programme called Europe 2020. The initial Semester Reports included quite stringent indications about reforms of public administration to be pushed through, more evidently and precisely for certain Member States than for others (see e.g. for Italy the account in [Di Mascio et al., 2020](#)). Specifically, modernisation of PAG was identified as one of the five key challenges for the EU in the Annual Growth Surveys. Between 2011 and 2015 as many as 20 Member

States received recommendations related to PAG. In 2014 the Semester approach was revised to focus explicitly on the financial crisis and limit the number of recommendations: with that intervention the number of PAG-related recommendations dropped. However, PAG was acknowledged as an integral part of the Semester assessment.

In the budgetary period 2014–2020, the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) were designed to serve as a catalyst for achieving the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy and a key tool for the implementation of the CSRs,²⁶ notably, the functioning of ESIF required the definition of a joined set of priorities (called thematic objectives), and Thematic Objective 11 (TO11) was aimed at enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders and efficient public administration.²⁷ The adoption of TO11²⁸ contribution to moving high in the policy agenda the quality of PAG in the Member States.²⁹ The coordination of the PAG file, however, was mainly driven by the policy entrepreneurship of individual officials – notably Florian Hauser and Mina Shoylekova – who interpreted these dynamics as a pathway to developing an EU-driven administrative policy proper. However, the concept of administrative reform as a policy agenda item maintained its focus on either the EU application process and the partnership with the EU for prospective new Member States, or to the single issue of better absorption and use of EU Funds by the Member States.

The allocation of such substantial funds to administrative reforms and the strong result orientation of the 2014–2020 period also posed an important question to the EC services, and especially DG EMPL which was main responsible for TO11: in the absence of an EU policy on PAG, what practices and approaches would be effective and lead to a sustainable enhancement of the administrative systems in the supported Member States? The findings of a research project on administrative reforms across Europe, COCOPS, funded by the EU research programme FP7³⁰ and developed during 2011-14, pointed to modest improvements in the capacity of public services across Europe to address the needs of citizens and business (see e.g. [Pollitt and Dan, 2011](#)). Moreover, reforms of the previous decades, often though not always inspired by the doctrines of the New Public Management, were often implemented as “packaged models that don’t take you very far”, in the words of Christopher Pollitt. While the diagnosis of root causes is vital, more often there had been a “rush to prescription”. The success of reforms depended on the ability to integrate expert consultancy with “local hands-on knowledge and independent research”. These findings proved highly influential lessons for EC services.

In 2013, DG EMPL designated 1.5 full time equivalent officials to work on the issue of how to systematically support administrative reforms in the Member States and an outcome was to set up an Inter-Service group on Institutional Capacity and Administrative Reform (renamed in 2015 to Inter-Service group on Public Administration quality and innovation – IGPA, managed by DG REFORM at the time this paper goes to press). IGPA’s initial aim was to bring together the Departments managing the ESIF funds or related sectoral themes (public procurement, tax administration, anti-corruptions, etc.), for purposes of interservice knowledge exchange and eliciting a better understanding of the multitude of the EC’s activities in the area of PAG, as well as to enhance the EC capacities and country knowledge, as a basis for better implementation of EU policies. In 2014, the IGPA produced the Toolbox for practitioners “Quality of public

administration”,³¹ a compendium of principles and examples aimed at encouraging administrations modernisation (an extended and updated version of the Toolbox was published in 2017). To develop its country and thematic knowledge, DG EMPL eventually launched the EUPACK (European Public Administration Country Knowledge) project, now managed by DG REFORM. As a first step, EUPACK developed a comprehensive and consistent overview of the characteristics of the administrative systems in the then EU28.

The 2018 EUPACK final conference - organised by the Commission with the participation of representatives all EU28 Member States, researchers and Commission staff - was a major gathering of three communities: EC staff; Member States’ networks of public administration specialists; and the European academia. The aim of the event was to explore in a participative manner the various approaches to achieving - ultimately - excellent public administration in Europe. The conference, attended by about 140 participants, explored issues such as managing successfully public administration reforms, measuring capacity and performance of public administration, tackling present and future challenges in civil service reforms and crucially what role the EC could play to support and to add value to the Member States’ efforts for reforming. The event allowed several only loosely coupled networks to connect: the internal IGPA, the ESF transnational cooperation network on PAG, the researchers involved in EUPACK, and the two learned societies EGPA – the European Group for public administration - and NISPAcee - the Network of institutes and school of public administration in Central and Eastern Europe.

At the conference, Edoardo Ongaro – at the time also serving as the President of EGPA – was called to act as a discussant of the findings of the project. He conveyed the message that the EC was rightly paying due attention to the centrality of PAG in its new approach, and to getting beyond conditionality and leveraging on the cooperation of all the academic and professional communities operating in the field of PAG across the EU. Ongaro also pointed out that, functionally, all national public administrations are part of the multilevel governance system of the EU, which facilitates and enables the transfer of good administrative practices, both vertically and horizontally, while stressing the need to recognise contextual differences and the need to preserve administrative diversity across the EU. Culturally, there is an obvious European identity which combines with the national ones and underpins the notions of “European public administration”. Importantly, the EU as an institutional framework enables comparative analysis in an unparalleled way. Vladmir Kvaca, moderator of the ESF network, noted that the big challenge in mutual learning is to ensure that learning is disseminated further in the participating countries. For that, the recommendation is that organisations are represented by teams, not by individuals: teams going back home will have a bigger dissemination power and be able to support internally for testing of ideas or transfer of experience. The then President of NISPAcee, Juraj Nemeč, underlined that the dialogue between the academia, administration and politicians was not truly established, despite the fact that there is need for more policy than politics, that the need for evidence-based policy making is even stronger. From these considerations it stemmed the clear recognition and awareness within the EC of the centrality of a context-sensitive approach to reforming public administration, to be coupled with a much stronger sense of ownership of the

reforms by elected and tenured officials alike at both the national and the local level in the country and jurisdiction where reforms are being carried out (Hardiman et al., 2019).

Another important step was the organisation, 1 year earlier in 2017, of an internal EC seminar dedicated to PAG, in the course of which more than thirty departments, including several Cabinets, got together for an open dialogue on how the EC could achieve more and work better on PA efficiency, both internally and with the Member States. The event was organised by IGPA and welcomed around seventy participants. The combination of experienced practitioners, managerial players as well as participants with political awareness provided for a rich discussion and helped build engagement on the issue. Jean-Eric Paquet, then Deputy Secretary-General, highlighted that effective delivery of the European Union calls for PAG enhancements, including "...in our own house...". In acknowledging that various strands of work had to come together - such as the European Semester, the structured dialogue or financial support and incentives - he also made reference to President Juncker's State of the Union address and to the wider debate on the Future of Europe and he suggested that core services for PAG should take the lead in formulating a comprehensive and actionable roadmap for a way forward. Other Directors General further stressed the need for an EC common and less fragmented approach to PAG development, results-focused and supported by increased political commitment.

As an outcome of this learning process and set of events which in hindsight we can claim they closely interconnected with each other, a new vision of the role of the EU, and notably the EC, in relation to the administrative reform policy of the Member States started to be envisioned in the Commission: intra-organisationally as well as policy-wide, learning occurred that enabled a strategic re-thinking of the role of the EU and the EC specifically. The paradigmatic shift proper occurred through the following subsequent key events which (in our interpretation) institutionalized and consolidated change, translating it from the ideational to the institutional level. The first tangible step was a decision taken on 13 June 2018³² by the then Secretary General Martin Selmayr to appoint, in an unprecedented move, a service tasked with the coordination of the PAG file. Based on the ground that "strong institutions and a high quality public administration in Member States are important pre-requisites for successful delivery on EU objectives and policies" and that "Several services in the Commission contribute to improving governance and public administration in Member States from their respective policy perspectives" he decided that "[G]iven its mission and experience in supporting Member States on public administration issues,... the Structural Reform Support Service would be best placed to perform [such] a coordinating function."

With this decision, and based on the existence of the dedicated SRSP, the times seemed to be ripe for the subsequent evolution, that is, the transformation from a Directorate General within the SG into a fully-fledged and independent Directorate General, the new DG REFORM. Such change took place in January 2020, upon arrival of the new College of Commissioners chaired by Ursula von der Leyen. The latter invited, through her mission letter, Commissioner Ferreira, responsible for cohesion and reforms, to "... support Member States' structural reforms aimed at speeding up growth-enhancing investment. You will also be responsible for the work of the Structural Reform Support Service, offering technical and financial support for reforms. You will coordinate the

technical support given to Member States that are preparing to join the euro” indicating also that “... a new Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support will support you in your work.”³³ Eventually, in June 2020 Mario Nava was appointed Director General. Nava, through his first annual work programme, deliberated a specific objective (1.4) for the DG, which states that among the key activities of the DG would appear the “[I]mproving, steering and coordinating knowledge on Public Administration and Governance as part of the European Semester and in the context of the technical support to Member States”.³⁴

Then the “black swan” (external shock) occurred, namely Covid and the EU response to it: the RRF supporting financially the RRP. This major and transformative process led to a broader range of changes in the EU governance, some of which have implications also for the processes of public sector reforms at the national level (see also [Ongaro et al., forthcoming](#)). These changes in a sense transformed - to further reinforce it - the very context within which the paradigmatic shift in the EU-supported administrative reform policy would occur. The RRF in fact foresees that the national RRP would use loans and grants to undertake reforms and investments with a view to enhancing and supporting recovery first and resilience after and cross references were made in the Regulations underpinning legally the RRF and the TSI that allow Member States to ask for technical support to undertake the necessary reforms, including in the area of PAG. In short: PAG support gets further reinforced, at least in terms of funding available, by the presence of the RRF. It thus appears the work initiated on PAG two decades before had found its way into the RRP in a structured manner, in a case of pre-institutions shaping the form that novel policies will take.

After its establishment as a distinct DG, the management of DG REFORM adopted its strategic approach based on three guiding ideas: “define”, “double-check” and “debate” as defined by the Head of the European Commission Competence Centre for PAG. First, the EC services defined in a holistic manner, in the EC Staff Working Document, the issues at stake and the approach to address them in the area of PAG, and to commit to work closely with the Member States to that purpose. In November 2021, DG REFORM undertook another step in its approach of the PAG dossier by promoting its largest conference till that moment on PAG.³⁵ The Conference was seen as a key opportunity to discuss with stakeholders and experts the DG’s vision of PAG in a strategic fashion. The Conference was titled “Fit for recovery and transition - Supporting Quality of Public Administration in the European Union Member States” and it brought stronger political attention to the way in which the Commission and the Member States can better manage administrative reforms and the support function provided by the Commission. The conference brought together some 700 participants among high-level public officials and practitioners from the EU institutions and the EU Member States, leading academics, think tanks, and international organisations. The conference provided consensus and strongly corroborated the novel Commission approach to public administration development.

This event and the already described related event of the establishment of the Commission’s Expert Group on Public Administration, occurred in December 2021, conclude the period of observation covered in this paper. Comparing the state of affairs in the field of the EU support policy to administrative reforms in the year 2000 (the

beginning of the observation period) and 2021 (end of the observation period), we observe a radically different state of affairs to be in place, one in which the EU deploys a supporting and facilitating role towards administrative reforms in the Member States, enabled by a novel and radically different institutional setting centered around DG REFORM and its IGPA network, and SG RECOVER. The identification of clear responsibilities to promote and steer the modernization of PAG in the Member States (DG REFORM), combined with the design of dedicated tools for reforms (TSI) and for reforms and investments (RRF), have created a new and radically different state of affairs, which is the outcome of the twofold paradigmatic change process accounted for in this paper. The high level of political attention to PAG reforms and the EU administrative reform support policy by the political level of the institution (Commission President and Commissioner Ferreira in primis) as well as high-level tenured officials complete the picture.

Discussion, conclusion and prospects

As the unfolding of the events recounted in the previous section show, the paradigmatic shift towards the forming and configuring of what we have called the EU Public Administration Reform and Development Support Policy, and the embedding of this policy into the EU administrative system and the institutionalization of it, started modestly to then gain some momentum – albeit clearly constrained and limited – in the decade 2000–2010, and then quite quickly gained traction and took deep roots in the period 2011–2021. These events were made possible by some dynamics – which acted in a combined way as the final, the efficient, the formal and the material cause for change to have happened (see [Ongaro, 2020](#), chapter 4) - which we see as the key “building blocks” for the change process to have occurred and be sustained.

The first building block is substantive policy learning occurring within the EC ([Dunlop and Radaelli, 2018](#)), with internal staff acting as the ‘carrier’ of the novel vision who coalesced around the adoption of dedicated instruments to support the reforms of PA in the Member States. Policy learning was coupled with equally substantive organisational learning occurred within the EC, in a relatively small group of staff initially scattered across different units in the Commission and in a later stage a grouping of staff into the Unit “Governance and Public Administration”³⁶ in DG REFORM (also referred to as the “EC Competence Centre on PAG”), and the important institutionalisation function performed by the IGPA.

Learning would not have sufficed on its own without the opening of opportunities to push change through (opportunity windows), at first within the EC through sequential discussions with the countries candidate to accession, then with the Member States facing critical situations either from the fiscal crisis or to absorb EU Funds, and then in the broader EU politics and policy, which shifted towards greater cross-EU solidarity as the response to the COVID-19 pandemic took shape dramatically over the year 2020, thus providing a novel political and ideational context for the paradigmatic shift described in this article to occur (second building block: change in the ideational context). Public administration reform became a “policy problem” which required attention at the highest level ([Jones and Baumgartner, 2005](#)).

Leadership of the change process also proved crucial: policy entrepreneurship from within the EC enabled this policy sub-system to grow and consolidate over time. It is not anodyne to consider that the current state of affairs is the product of the strenuous and highly resilient – we may well say sometimes stubborn – conviction by a small group of people, who at first operated separately in distinct organizational silos (DG HR, DG EMPL) but then rapidly understood the merit of combining forces together around a shared vision which can be summarized as: “quality of PAG in the EU cannot be a secondary dimension, it cannot be a “hobby” for some well-intended officials,³⁷ it is part and parcel of success, or failure, of the EU project”. These key people who acted as true policy entrepreneurs (Kingdon, 1984) for PAG have been Daniele Dotto, who supported and promoted the dossier since his stint in DG HR when dealing with the reform of PAG in the candidate countries in the early 2000s, flanked by the equally resilient and entrepreneurial action of the already mentioned Mina Shoylekova and Florian Hauser.

These policy entrepreneurs would not have been able to succeed without an enabling authorizing environment (Moore, 1995): the heedful oversight of the dossier in particular by certain top managers, including Martin Selmayr and Jean-Eric Paquet, who supported the file from their respective positions as Secretary General and Deputy Secretary General; Gertrud Ingestad and Mario Campolargo, who supported the file from their respective positions as Directors General of HR and DIGIT; Horst Reichenbach – Head of the TFGR; Maarten Verwey and Mario Nava as Directors General of the SRSS/DG REFORM. To set this part of the story in perspective, it is useful to recall that policy entrepreneurship has a long history and strong roots in the EC as the engine of EU integration, and the story accounted here shows that policy entrepreneurship is not only a story applicable to recount the ‘pioneering and epic’ past of the beginning of the European integration process, rather it continued well into the 2010s and beyond. Public leadership and policy entrepreneurship is therefore the third building block in explaining the change process accounted for in this article.

The EC has thus become an actor in its own right in the field of administrative reform and public services management in Europe, and the logic guiding its action in this field is one of support to Member States in their initiatives to improve public administration and public services, acting as facilitator and enabler of processes of reform. In terms of theoretical perspectives, the change that has occurred can be read through the lenses of the following approaches, in a combined way:

- (i) policy and organizational learning, at first within the EC and then throughout the policy community in the field of public administration and public management, thereby encompassing also the academic pan-European scholarly community (Bouckaert, 2018; Bouckaert and Jann, 2020; Ongaro, 2019a; Ongaro and Van Thiel, 2018);
- (ii) active policy entrepreneurship within the EC, making change happen; these dynamics reinforce the established view that a key factor in the dynamics of European integration continues to lie in the entrepreneurial function performed

- by the EC: this applies nowadays as much as it did decades ago, at the dawn of the European integration journey;
- (iii) the opening of an opportunity window for a broader policy shift to be effected at the EU governance level, with the response to the pandemic via the RRF having created a partly novel ideational context (*zeitgeist*, or ‘spirit of the time’) within which the kind of transformative change recounted in this paper could unfold;
 - (iv) the institutionalization of a new policy sub-system (Baugartner and Jones, 1993), which has contributed to the consolidation the new state of affairs (‘freezing’ change, in Lewin’s memorable metaphor).

The EU-supported administrative reform policy, now a key policy in the portfolio of DG REFORM, could and should also be seen within the broader policy field of which it is part, namely public sector reforms writ large in the Member States. DG REFORM provides the Member States with technical support to prepare and implement growth-enhancing institutional and administrative reforms in all policy areas of the EU. This technical support helps the Member States build more effective institutions, stronger governance frameworks and efficient public administrations. Importantly, this change can also be seen as a small but transformative in nature kind of change of the overall configuration of the European Administrative System (Bauer and Trondal, 2015) and a step in European integration.

From a scholarly viewpoint, the consolidation at the EU level of governance of an administrative reform and development support policy entails that national level administrative reforms cannot and should not in the future be studied in isolation from their embeddedness into the EU Multi-Level Governance.

From a policy-implications viewpoint, this new state of affairs has a number of ramifications with practical implications. These include a closer and complementary link between the various policies and tools available at the EC to support the modernization of PAG in the EU. Taking stock of its activities at the time this paper goes to press, DG REFORM is endowed with significant resources to supports projects across the Member States. In the area of PAG, the DG has supported, through its previous tools and configuration, 271 projects for an amount of 101 Mio€. In its configuration as of 2021 and using the TSI (first two rounds), it has engaged in 85 projects for an amount of 46.5 Mio€. In the same reference period, the DG has financed 1574 projects in total for an amount of 545,5 Mio€. Of these, 447 projects for a total of 237 mio€ were financed under the TSI instrument. This important increase of support can indicate that the increased attention for the PAG related reforms in the Member States, as an outcome also of the enhanced dialogue with the EC, the better target of the terms of the cooperation between the EC and the Member States and the overall increased awareness of the importance of the quality of PAG for the recovery and the creation of resilient societies.

In this respect, it is noteworthy to refer to the national RRP (Resilience and Recovery Plans) and in particular to the attention paid to PAG within these plans. Overall, twenty-six RRP have been adopted at the date of publication of this paper, seventeen RRP contain specific reforms and investments in the area of PAG. A total of 251 reform

measures are identified in the RRP, for a total amount of 4.4 Bln€. If we consider the largest RRP, the Italian one, we see that the component PAG (both reforms and investments) weighs 9,7Bln€ (28 PAG reform measures - 565 Mio€), i.e. 5% of the ca. 191 Bln€ of the whole RRP. Never before had a Member State allocated so much money to the reform of its public administrative system, in such a short period of time.

These dynamics also imply that the EC can better use the knowledge and the analytical capacity that it has developed to, on the one hand, anticipate the future evolutions in the area of PAG and, on the other hand, better use this knowledge for informing the projects aimed at supporting modernization in the Member States. This will be particularly important to identify and deploy concrete ways to anticipate challenges, to address them and thus contribute to making administration in the EU much stronger and fit for purpose, i.e. the purpose of supporting the EU project and reinforcing the EU as an area of peace, rule of law, and sustainable development.

At the ideational level, another ramification engendered by the new state of affairs is enabling to take stock of and hence further the collective reflection about what the distinctive European administrative values are. This for example may entail a reflection on the OECD-EU SIGMA Principles of Public Administration³⁸, principles which have been guiding OECD SIGMA policy advice in matters of good governance and public administration over the 2010s, and which might possibly be revisited in light of an expanded application in both the EU Member States and the countries of the EU Neighbourhood Policy. The academic collective reflection has also significantly stressed what is distinctive of the European identity: think of the notion of ‘European Public Administration’, that is, the study and practice of public administration that starts from the European specificities to then move towards the general and generic levels (Bouckert, 2018); or think of the launch of ambitious forward-looking projects, like the European Perspectives on Public Administration project, which had as one of its overarching goals to ‘project the voice of Europe in Public Administration on the global stage (Bouckaert and Jann, 2020); or think of large-scale stock-taking exercise about the state-of-the-art knowledge on public administration and management in Europe, like the 63 chapter long *Palgrave Handbook of Public Administration and Management in Europe* (Ongaro and Van Thiel, 2018).

At the interface between public institutions and society, notably social and epistemic actors, the growing osmosis of the EU with scientific and societal actors in the field of the public governance and administrative reform policy is worthy of note. Think of the interrelationships with leading pan-European learned societies like the EGPA: the book *Public Administration in Europe: The contribution of EGPA* provides an in-depth account and takes stock of the parallel yet interconnected developments of European integration, on one hand, and the emergence and consolidation of a pan-European community of public administration scholarship (as opposed to the pre-existent country level and often inwardly-focused national scholarly communities of the 1950s and 1960, often more connected with the US scholarship than amongst themselves), whose developments are accounted for in multiple chapters in an edited book (Ongaro, 2019a). Or think of the descriptive-prescriptive analytical approach for future-proofing public management in Europe elaborated by the School of Transnational Governance of the

European University Institute (Radaelli, 2021). Or think of the developments occurred at institutions which play a central function in the education and training of European public management, like the College of Europe or the European Institute of Public Administration.

This novel state of affairs ultimately prefigures an exciting – however challenging – future for the study and the practice of administrative reform across Europe in the 2020s and onwards. In a decade (or two, or five) from 2021, scholars and practitioners of PAG reform may be able to go back to the 2010s and early 2020s and fully appreciate, and critically appraise, the kind of changes this decade brought about in the field of the administrative reform policy. From the vantage point of hindsight, beholders looking back at the 2010s will be in the position to sift what lasted and what did not. Yet already since now we can argue that the significance of the paradigmatic change that occurred, fraught with implications for how the public sector and public services across Europe will reform and develop in the next years and decades, can hardly be overestimated. It is by all means extremely important that the process be designed and developed jointly by all relevant EU stakeholders and in this respect the EC seems to have adopted an effective approach to address public administration and public governance matters in the EU.

Acknowledgements

This editors commissioned article has been conceived and developed together with Daniele Dotto and Mina Shoylekova of the European Commission, who provided invaluable knowledge and insights into the events here narrated. This article has been informed by their treasure trove of knowledge, which they have been willing to share, and it would have not seen the light of the day without the contribution of Daniele and Mina, to whom I wish to express my deep gratitude. Responsibility for any errors lies with the author.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD

Edoardo Ongaro  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4431-1508>

Notes

1. The European Social Fund funding for enhanced administrative capacity in the 2007–2013 and 2014–2020 funding cycles was the first attempt of the Commission to support MS in their endeavour to improve Public Administration and Governance (PAG).

2. In the case of Cyprus, for instance, it is stated: “The economic adjustment programme addressed short- and medium-term financial, fiscal and structural challenges faced by Cyprus. The key objectives were [...] to continue the fiscal consolidation process to correct the excessive government deficit through measures to reduce current primary expenditure, and maintain fiscal consolidation in the medium-term, in particular through measures to [...] improve the functioning of the public sector” – see https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/economic-and-fiscal-policy-coordination/financial-assistance-eu/which-eu-countries-have-received-assistance/financial-assistance-cyprus_en
3. The SRSS was first established as part of the Secretariat General. It eventually became an independent department and, in a third phase, it became DG REFORM.
4. https://ec.europa.eu/info/about-european-commission/what-european-commission-does/law_en
5. TITLE XXIV
ADMINISTRATIVE COOPERATION
Article 197
 1. Effective implementation of Union law by the Member States, which is essential for the proper functioning of the Union, shall be regarded as a matter of common interest.
 2. The Union may support the efforts of Member States to improve their administrative capacity to implement Union law. Such action may include facilitating the exchange of information and of civil servants as well as supporting training schemes. No Member State shall be obliged to avail itself of such support. The European Parliament and the Council, acting by means of regulations in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure, shall establish the necessary measures to this end, excluding any harmonisation of the laws and regulations of the Member States.
 3. This Article shall be without prejudice to the obligations of the Member States to implement Union law or to the prerogatives and duties of the Commission. It shall also be without prejudice to other provisions of the Treaties providing for administrative cooperation among the Member States and between them and the Union.
6. Article 298
 1. In carrying out their missions, the institutions, bodies, offices and agencies of the Union shall have the support of an open, efficient and independent European administration.
 2. In compliance with the Staff Regulations and the Conditions of Employment adopted on the basis of Article 336, the European Parliament and the Council, acting by means of regulations in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure, shall establish provisions to that end.
7. Regulation (EU) 2017/825 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 May 2017 on the establishment of the Structural Reform Support Programme for the period 2017 to 2020 and amending Regulations (EU) No 1303/2013 and (EU) No 1305/2013
8. More in detail: The general objective of the SRSP was “to contribute to institutional, administrative and growth-sustaining structural reforms in the Member States by providing support to national authorities for measures aimed at reforming and strengthening institutions, governance, public administration, and economic and social sectors in response to economic and social challenges, with a view to enhancing cohesion, competitiveness, productivity, sustainable growth, job creation, and investment, in particular in the context of economic governance processes, including through assistance for the efficient, effective and transparent

use of the Union funds” (article 4). The SRSP Regulation clearly indicated among the specific objectives of the Regulation, the support to “institutional reform and efficient and service-oriented functioning of public administration, including, where appropriate, through the simplification of rules, effective rule of law, reform of the justice systems and reinforcement of the fight against fraud, corruption and money laundering.” (Article 5).

9. By public sector reforms we here mean deliberate attempts to reconfigure the public sector, or significant portions of it, broadly intended – like the regulation and organisation of public services at large (thereby including social security, taxation, economic regulation, utilities, etc.) -, in order to make the public sector work better, according to given criteria of ‘goodness’ and ‘improvement’; by administrative reforms we refer to a narrower in scope (yet equally significant for its impact) set of intervention aimed at reconfiguring the public administrative system of a given jurisdiction and its processes and procedures; finally, by public management reforms we refer to reforms of the structures and processes of public sector organisations – their management systems. The supporting and enabling role of the EU encompassed under the label of EU Public Administration Reform and Development Support Policy focuses notably the areas of administrative and public management reforms.
10. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/240>
11. Whose political-legal basis is in the Legislator’s indication that - elaborating on the achievements of the SRSP (“This Regulation is designed as a continuation of that programme, which has been positively received by Member States, while incorporating relevant adjustments...” (Whereas 4); “...Member States have increasingly taken up technical support under the Structural Reform Support Programme” (Whereas 5)) - the efforts of the EC to support the Member States (“Therefore, this Regulation should establish a technical support instrument with a view to continuing and enhancing support for Member States in the implementation of reforms...(Whereas 5)») should include the area of PAG, thus witnessing an EU-wide support for this area of development. The TSI, like the SRSP, is based also on Article 197 - Article 197/2 -, and it provides the legal base for the provision of technical support to the Member States.
12. Time horizon: 2017–2020
13. Time horizon: 2021–2027
14. https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/recovery-coronavirus/recovery-and-resilience-facility_en
15. https://ec.europa.eu/info/departments/structural-reform-support/supporting-public-administrations-eu-member-states-deliver-reforms-and-prepare-future_en
16. On the use of social mechanisms analysis for the study of public administration reform, see Ongaro (2019b).
17. https://ec.europa.eu/info/news/commission-decides-set-group-experts-public-administration-and-governance-2021-dec-17_en
18. https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/enlargement-policy/glossary/accession-criteria_en
19. Currently DG HR.
20. No longer in use.
21. Created in 1989 as the “Poland and Hungary: Assistance for Restructuring their Economies” programme and extended to all candidate countries in 1999. It focussed entirely on the accession priorities highlighted in each country’s Accession Partnership. The PHARE support

included facilitation of twinning, complemented as necessary by short-term assignments and training; provision of specialist technical advice on the acquis, through the Technical Assistance and Information Exchange instrument (TAIEX); and help to develop facilities for training the public administration at central and regional level.

22. MWH Consortium Thematic Evaluation, 2007 – see: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/system/files/2019-01/cbc_thematic_final_may_2007_en.pdf
23. Specifically, the Six Pack strengthened the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) on fiscal governance and introduced the Macroeconomic Imbalance Procedure (MIP) covering several areas of economic governance such as private debt, export performance and unemployment. Both the SGP and the MIP provide for enhanced surveillance and potentially financial sanctions for Eurozone countries not meeting their budgetary requirements. The Fiscal Compact, applying to Eurozone countries only, committed these countries to strengthen their budgetary institutions and to introduce a balance budget clause, preferably with constitutional legislation. With the Two Pack, Eurozone members committed to further reporting requirements on and coordination of their fiscal policies.
24. https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/1195-Evaluation-of-the-technical-assistance-provided-by-the-Task-Force-for-Greece-TFGR-2011-2015_en
25. See https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/economic-and-fiscal-policy-coordination/eu-economic-governance-monitoring-prevention-correction/european-semester/thematic-factsheets/public-administration_en
26. See <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=7932&furtherPubs=yes> and Publications catalogue - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission (europa.eu)
27. More in detail, under the CSRs and TO11, the Commission published a set of Position Papers which, building on the CSRs and the related Staff Working Documents, identified the specific investment priorities in each area, including public administration. These proposals were expected to be incorporated into the Partnership Agreements and the operation programmes and seventeen Member States programmed support to address their challenges in the area of PAG under TO11 for a total of about EUR 4.2 billion. The investment in the human capital of public administration was oriented towards better policy making and administrative service delivery, more efficient organisational processes, modern management, and motivated and skilled civil servants and magistrates.
28. https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/guidelines/2014/thematic-guidance-fiche-institutional-capacity-building-thematic-objective-11
29. Another novelty of this period was the introduction of the ex-ante conditionality: a set of overarching requirements that had to be in place before the Member States could start using the EU financial support. The ex-ante conditionality in the area of PAG included presence of analysis and strategic planning of the reform actions, the development of quality management systems, actions for administrative simplification, human resources strategies, the development of skills at all levels of the professional hierarchy and the development of procedures and tools for monitoring and evaluation (Details available at: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/informat/2014/guidance_fiche_thematic_objective_11_en.pdf - page 19 in particular). The guidance provided by the EC indicated the ambition to support strategic, cross-cutting and results-oriented reforms that would create a positive effect for the entire

administrative system (vs. boosting the administrative capacity for individual institutions). This represented the first “consolidated” approach by the EC to tackling the gaps in administrative performance across countries. A review of the functioning of the ex-ante conditionality approach, however, showed different views between the EC and the Member States as to agreeing what had to be achieved.

30. <https://cordis.europa.eu/programme/id/FP7>
31. See [Quality of public administration - Publications Office of the EU \(europa.eu\)](#)
32. Ares (2018)3122985 - 13/06/2018
33. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/sites/default/files/commissioner_mission_letters/mission-letter-elisa-ferreira_en_0.pdf
34. https://ec.europa.eu/info/system/files/management-plan-reform-2020_en.pdf
35. https://ec.europa.eu/reform-support/public-administration-and-governance-policy-making/eu-public-administration-fit-recovery-and-transition_en
36. The Unit was set up along two complementary pillars, aimed at respectively studying and coordinating the developments in the PAG area and designing and deploying projects in the Member States. This two-pillar approach is based on the recognition by the management of the unit that policy and practice must complement one another: a major learning drawn from the two consecutive crises experienced, fiscal and then epidemic. The evolution from a temporary task force dealing with PAG in Greece to an institutionalised and permanent lead service in an independent DG is the acknowledgement of the importance paid by the EC to the area of PAG.
37. This is how the file has been defined at a point in time
38. see www.sigmaweb.org

References

- Badell D, Di Mascio F, Natalini A, et al. (2019) Too big to fail? The dynamics of EU influence and fiscal consolidation in Italy and Spain (2008-2016). *Public Management Review* 21(9): 1307–1329.
- Bauer MW and Trondal J (eds), (2015) *The Palgrave Handbook of the European Administrative System*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave.
- Baumgartner FR and Jones BD (1993) *Agendas and Instability in American Politics*. 2nd edition. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- Bouckaert G (2018). In: Ongaro E and van Thiel S (eds.) (2018) *The Palgrave Handbook 'Tous Les Savoirs du Monde' (All the Knowledge of the World)*, Edoardo Ongaro and The Palgrave Handbook of Public Administration and Management in Europe. London: Palgrave.
- Bouckaert G and Werner J (eds), (2020) *European Perspectives for Public Administration*. Leuven: Belgium: Leuven University Press. *The Way Forward*
- Di Mascio F, Natalini A, Ongaro E and Stolfi F, (2020) Influence of the European Semester on Public Sector Reform under Conditions of Fiscal Consolidation: The Policy of Conditionality in Italy 2011-15. *Public Policy and Administration* 35(2): 201–223.
- Dunlop CA and Radaelli CM (2018) *Policy Learning and Organizational Capacity*. London: Palgrave, pp. 595–620.
- ECORYS (2011) *Assessment of Administrative and Institutional Capacity Building Interventions and Future Needs in the Context of European Social Fund*. ECORYS.

- European Commission (1999) *An Evaluation of Phare Public Administration Reform Programmes*. European Commission.
- European Commission (2001) *Assessment of the European Union Phare Programmes: Thematic Report on Public Administration Reform*. European Commission.
- European Commission (2006) *Thematic Evaluation Support to Public Administrative and Judicial Capacity in Bulgaria and Romania*. European Commission.
- European Parliament (2016) *Public Sector Reform: How the EU Budget is Used to Encourage It*. European Parliament. Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/572696/IPOL_STU\(2016\)572696_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/572696/IPOL_STU(2016)572696_EN.pdf)
- Hardiman N, Spanou C, Araújo Filipe J, et al. (2019) Tangling with the Troika: ‘Domestic Ownership’ as Political and Administrative Engagement in Greece, Ireland and Portugal. *Public Management Review* 21(9): 1265–1286.
- Jones BD and Baumgartner FR (2005) *The Politics of Attention – How Government Prioritizes Problems*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kickert W and Ongaro E (2019a) Influence of EU (and IMF) on domestic cutback management: A nine-country comparative analysis. *Public Management Review* 21(9): 1348–1367.
- Kickert W and Ongaro E (2019b) Influence of EU (and IMF) on domestic consolidation and reform: Introduction. *Public Management Review* 21(9): 1261–1264.
- Kingdon J (1984) *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policy*. New York: HarperCollins.
- McCartaigh M and Hardiman N (2020) Exploiting Conditionality: EU and International Actors and post-NPM conditionality in Ireland. *Public Policy and Administration* 35(2): 179–200.
- Meyer-Sahling J-H. (2009) *Sustainability of Civil Service Reforms in Central and Eastern Europe Five Years after EU Accession*. OECD - SIGMA.
- Moore M (1995) *Creating Public Value – Strategic Management in Government*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Ongaro E (2008) Introduction: Public management reform in France, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain. *The International Journal of Public Sector Management* 21(2): 101–117.
- Ongaro E (2009) *Public Management Reform and Modernization: Trajectories of Administrative Change in Italy, France, Greece, Portugal, Spain*. Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar.
- Ongaro E (2010). In: Painter M. and Peters, B.G. (eds). *The Napoleonic Administrative Tradition and Public Management Reform in France, Greece Tradition and Public Administration*. Portugal, Spain”Basingstoke, UK: ItalyPalgrave MacMillan, pp. 174–190.
- Ongaro E (2014) The relationship between the new European governance emerging from the fiscal crisis and administrative reforms: Qualitatively different, quantitatively different, or nothing new? A plea for a research agenda. *Halduskultur – Administrative Culture* 15(1): 10–20.
- Ongaro E (2018) *‘The Napoleonic Tradition in Public Administration’*, Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Politics. Oxford University Press.
- Ongaro E (ed), (2019a). *Public Administration in Europe: The Contribution of EGPA*. London: Palgrave.
- Ongaro E (2019b) Advancing the Theory and Practice of Public Sector Reform through the Analysis of Social Mechanisms. In: Capano Gliberto, Ramesh M and Howlett Michael (eds), *Making Policies Work: First- and Second-Order Social Mechanisms in Policy Design*. Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, pp. 154–171.

- Ongaro E (2020) *Philosophy and Public Administration: An Introduction*. Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA: Elgar.
- Ongaro E and Kickert W (2020) EU-driven Public Sector Reforms. *Public Policy and Administration* 35(2): 117–134.
- Ongaro E, Di Mascio F and Alessandro N 'How the European Union Responded to Populism and its Implications for Public Sector Reforms', Forthcoming in *Global Public Policy and Governance*.
- Ongaro E and van Thiel S (eds), (2018) *The Palgrave Handbook of Public Administration and Management in Europe*. London: Palgrave.
- Pollitt C and Dan S (2011) *The Impacts of the New Public Management in Europe - A Meta-Analysis*.
- Spanou C (2020) External Influence on Structural Reform: Did Policy Conditionality Strengthen Reform Capacity in Greece? *Public Policy and Administration* 35(2): 135–157.
- World Bank (2006) *Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Unit, Europe and Central Asia. Report Number 36930-GLB.EU8: Administrative capacity in the New Member States- the limits of innovation?* World Bank.
- Young O (ed), (1997) *Global Governance: Drawing Insights from the Environmental Experience*. Cambridge, MA and London, England: The MIT Press.