

# THE QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORMS IN POST-COMMUNIST COUNTRIES<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

*In this article we describe the adoption and execution of public administration reforms in Central and Eastern Europe between 2008 and 2013, as well as examine whether post-communist countries differ from other groups of European countries in terms of the substance of reforms and their implementation process. Instead of following popular Western administrative theoretical frames, we adopt the policy process approach. We focus on the role of policy actors during reform policymaking and implementation at the level of policy subsystems. More specifically, we employ the rational-comprehensive and garbage can perspectives to understand the reform processes in the post-communist region. Our research is based on the statistical analysis of survey data and two case studies of reforms initiated by the 2008-2012 Lithuanian government. The article concludes that countries in Central and Eastern Europe share some common characteristics: they focused on the issues of civil service and public or administrative services, their reform policy was often formulated on a top-down basis, and its execution often lacked adequate capacities. Despite a rational reform façade in these countries, the implementation of governance change appears to be quite erratic, as anticipated in the garbage can perspective. This can have negative consequences on the effectiveness of public policy, continuing to generate public distrust in post-communist state institutions.*  
**Key words:** public management reforms, public policy process, Central and Eastern Europe, Lithuania.

## INTRODUCTION

New Public Management (NPM) is frequently employed as a reference point in the studies of public administration reforms (PAR) in different countries, including those from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) (Peters, 2008; Nemeč, 2010; Drechsler and Randma-Liiv, 2014; Dan and Pollitt, 2015; Huxley, Andrews, Hammerschmid and Van de Walle, 2016). These studies could be associated with the broader approach of international regimes, which emphasizes the influence of international (supranational) doctrines, regimes, or actors on governance change in various regions and countries.

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The frequent application of this fashionable doctrine to explain PAR in post-communist countries can be problematic. Relying on specific administrative doctrines or concepts as a theoretical approach can produce a heuristic and static understanding of governance change. In practice, these changes are usually the result of complex and dynamic relationships among various factors, including external conditionalities (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2005), financial crises (Kickert, Randma-Liiv and Savi, 2015), changes of governments (Meyer-Sahling and Veen, 2012), or the interactions among policy actors in particular policy subsystems (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1999). Depending on specific combinations of these factors, countries exhibit a variety of reform trajectories.

Also, recent empirical research has indicated that the reform trajectories of countries in CEE diverge substantially from Western doctrines. Post-communist decision makers tend to embrace specific homegrown (pragmatic, populist, or even illiberal) solutions to perceived administrative problems (Hajnal and Rosta, 2016). These decisions are the outcomes of domestic policy processes which should be thoroughly assessed to explain governance change in post-communist countries.

The existing literature almost unanimously acknowledges two major PAR trends that emerged in post-communist countries (Drechsler and Randma-Liiv, 2014). In the 1990s, the process of transition from communism to democracy and a market economy shaped these countries' institutions and their interactions with societal actors. For instance, in order to break from the communist past when party bureaucracy was superior to state administration—which was both under-politicized in terms of policymaking and over-politicized regarding personnel—post-communist countries had to professionalize their civil service systems and build up their policymaking capacities (Goetz and Wollmann, 2001).

In the 2000s, the EU-accession process allowed EU institutions to influence governance changes in CEE. The EU wielded a combination of hard-governance instruments, like the conditionality of EU membership, and soft-governance mechanisms, such as naming and shaming or sharing best practices (Grabbe, 2001; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2005). Compared to the changes experienced by older EU member states, the scope of Europeanization was wider in post-communist countries (Meyer-Sahling and van Stolk, 2014). Despite this, the conditionality of EU membership was not very effective, and the EU's political impacts were rather limited in the new EU member states (Epstein and Jacoby, 2014).

After all of the post-communist countries from the region of CEE joined the EU or embarked on the process of EU accession, it is important to determine if the trends of transition and Europeanization still shape PAR in this region and whether post-communist public administrations have become similar to other European administrations. Previous research found some differences in agencification within CEE and between those countries and Western European countries, which appeared to be related more to the timing of state reforms and EU accession requirements (van Thiel, 2011). The increasing variance in reforms among countries in CEE (De Vries and Nemeč, 2013; Liebert, Condrey and Goncharov, 2013) should be explored by identifying which factors determine governments' decisions and their implementation during the policy process.

In this context, the main purpose of this article is to describe the main characteristics of PAR policy in post-communist countries and to explain the adoption and execution of these reforms between 2008 and 2013. Also, we seek to determine whether (and how) post-communist countries differ from other groups of European countries in terms of their reform content and process.

Given the weakening hegemony of NPM as the dominant approach to PAR, alternative approaches to theory and practice of reforms should be explored (Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff, 2015). It was argued that there is a need to improve the understanding of PAR by focusing not on a single mechanism or a (dominant) process but following several (disjoint) processes of change (Olsen, 2016, p. 23). Due to the complex and dynamic nature of reforms, we argue that to understand PAR, it is necessary to move beyond administrative doctrines, such as NPM. One possibility for advancing reform theory lies in drawing on appropriate approaches of the public policy process. These studies focus on the policymaking and implementation processes where different conditions and their configurations determine governance change.

Methodologically, PAR studies can also be advanced by combining quantitative data with qualitative evidence, as we do in this examination of reforms in the region of CEE. This enables one to exploit the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative approaches within a single research project (Castro, Ellison, Boyd and Kopak, 2010). Our first source of information was quantitative data from a 2013 survey of the European Public Administration Network (EUPAN) participants on reform trends in thirty-five European countries. A sample of countries from CEE (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Kosovo, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Serbia, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia; N=14) was drawn for statistical and comparative analysis.

Our second source of data is qualitative data on two major policy reforms undertaken by the 2008-2012 Lithuanian government led by Prime Minister Andrius Kubilius: civil service reform and the restructuring of healthcare organizations. Lithuania's case is interesting because the country undertook ambitious PAR in response to the 2008 global financial crisis and the country's change of government at the end of 2008. The selected cases correspond well to the most common objectives of reform agenda in CEE (see the second section of this article) and offer the opportunity for an in-depth analysis of policymaking and implementation processes. The integration of these case studies into our research design sought to provide detailed accounts of reform experiences necessary for understanding the original "real-world" context of governance change in post-communist countries.

This article argues that during the period of 2008 to 2013, the global financial crisis and Europeanization shaped the policymaking of PAR in post-communist countries whose agendas were dominated by fiscal consolidation objectives and EU policy initiatives. We also found that both the content and implementation of PAR in post-communist countries differed from those of other European countries. Post-communist countries followed ambitious and comprehensive reform agendas, but their reform decision making was top-down and they lacked sufficient capacities to implement reforms. Despite their rational reform façades, the implementation of reforms in CEE appeared to be stuck in the garbage can model.

We present our key findings in a few sections of the article. The first section provides a short literature review, elaborates our theoretical framework for analysis, and outlines our research methodology. The second section of the article analyzes the main characteristics of PAR in post-communist countries and the different stages of the policy process. This empirical section is divided into quantitative and qualitative subsections with statistical analysis and two case studies respectively. Finally, the article concludes with a summary of our research findings, theoretical contribution, and suggestions for future research.

## 1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

### 1.1. *Framework for analysis*

Our review of the relevant literature revealed three salient factors of recent reforms in Europe, including countries in CEE. First, several new reforms emerged as a response to the 2008 global crisis. Previous research revealed that the worse the financial and economic situation was in a particular country, the more ambitious reforms were undertaken (Kickert, Randma-Liiv and Savi, 2015).

Second, the EU continued to influence reforms in CEE through the new EU 2020 strategy and the Annual Growth Survey, European Social Fund support to administrative capacity building, as well as different EU accession conditionalities and instruments. The EU's influence should vary across different groups of European countries, exerting its strongest impact on new member states and (potential) candidate countries striving to meet EU-membership requirements.

Third, election cycles, party politics and changes of governments affect PAR (Tompson, 2009; Meyer-Sahling and van Stolk, 2014). Although appropriate electoral mandates and government policies can promote reform, the desire to win elections may prevent governments in CEE from effectively implementing PARs, as illustrated by Bulgaria and Romania's attempts to fight corruption (Spendzharova and Vachudova, 2012).

Despite their importance, factors such as the economic crisis, the EU's influence, or the change of government after elections may be necessary but not sufficient conditions for making reform decisions and implementing them. Also, all of these conditions are exogenous to policy subsystems, where reform decisions are formulated and carried out. Since designs of reform research should capture the characteristics specific to public administration as a policy domain (Barzeley and Gallego, 2010), it is necessary to analyze mechanisms of the policy process and grant a proper role to policy actors operating in various policy subsystems.

Actor-centered approaches have already been employed to studying PAR in different European countries. They revealed, for instance, that the reorganization of state territorial units, which was one of the most salient reform issues on the governmental agenda in France and Spain from the mid-1980s to the early 2000s, achieved little success due to blocking games by different policy actors (Bezès and Parrado, 2013, p. 31–32). Such approaches are also very appropriate to the study of governance change in post-communist countries.

While analyzing relations between different actors in the qualitative part of our analysis, we focus on advocacy coalitions composed of various policy actors and engaged in adversarial

competition with each other in different policy subsystems (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1999; Weible, Sabatier, Jenkins-Smith, Nohrstedt, Henry and deLeon, 2011). Since it was recognized that policy brokers can mediate conflicting strategies from various coalitions to find compromise (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1999), frameworks for reform analysis need to incorporate the conduct of political decision makers and their leadership (Weible, Sabatier, Jenkins-Smith, Nohrstedt, Henry and deLeon, 2011; Barzeley and Gallego, 2010). This is essential to studying major or comprehensive reforms whose decision making often requires parliamentary action to pass new laws or amend existing legislation.

Furthermore, any analysis of policy processes should explicitly adopt a clear approach to the different phases of the policy process (agenda-setting, policy formulation, and implementation). In this article, we employ the rational-comprehensive and garbage can perspectives, which represent two opposite theoretical approaches to decision making. These approaches have been used to examine major reforms in the US and Norway (Aberbach and Christensen, 2014) and should reveal insights on PAR in countries in CEE.

The rational-comprehensive perspective assumes that political and administrative leaders behave rationally as they deal with public issues and attempt to achieve policy objectives (Ham and Hill, 1984). These actors also know how to organize and control the process of reform decision making and policy action (Aberbach and Christensen, 2014, p. 4). Therefore, policy agendas should be comprehensive and state clearly defined goals. Also, from a rational-comprehensive perspective, policymaking should be characterized by strong hierarchical control, which leads to the formulation of policies with coherent links between problems and solutions. Finally, the rational-comprehensive perspective holds that policy implementation should occur in the stable environment where a high level of trust exists between involved policy actors, and implementation agencies have adequate capacities to deliver expected organizational results.

In contrast to the rational-comprehensive perspective, the garbage can perspective emphasizes the fragmented and chaotic nature of decision making. According to this approach, it is difficult to conceive policy decisions and results because of an unpredictable coupling of problems looking for solutions and solutions looking for problems (Cohen, March and Olsen, 1972). As a result, policy agendas can be dominated by ad hoc issues and unclear goals discovered through policy action. In this perspective, policy actors, constrained by their limited attention, participate fluidly in the policymaking process and pursue trial-and-error methods, which result in public policies with incoherent links between problems and solutions (Aberbach and Christensen, 2014, p. 5). Also, dysfunctionalities in interinstitutional trust (Oomsels and Bouckaert, 2014) can exist in the policy process. In terms of implementation, the garbage can perspective highlights how implementation agencies, which face substantial capacity problems, operate within a constantly shifting policy environment, with new or modified solutions emerging during the execution process.

In Table 1, the rational-comprehensive and the garbage can perspectives are compared according to the three main phases of the policy process: agenda-setting, policy formulation, and policy implementation. If the rational-comprehensive perspective predicts a comprehensive approach to reform, the garbage can perspective anticipates ad hoc reform efforts.

In terms of policy formulation, the former perspective suggests strong hierarchical control during the process of reform formulation. In contrast, the latter perspective anticipates fluid participation as reform policies are developed. Finally, one approach perceives a stable policy implementation environment, and the other characterizes the implementation environment as fragmented.

TABLE 1. The rational-comprehensive and garbage can perspectives to public administration reforms

Phase of the policy process	Rational-comprehensive perspective	Garbage can perspective
Agenda-setting	- comprehensive reform - clear policy goals	- ad hoc reform - unclear policy goals
Policy formulation	- strong hierarchical control over reform formulation - coherent links between policy problems and solutions	- fluid participation in reform formulation - incoherent links between policy problems and solutions
Policy implementation	- stable policy environment - cooperative policy actors - adequate implementation capabilities	- changing policy environment - conflicting policy actors - inadequate implementation capacity

SOURCE: the author of this article based on desk research.

If policymaking in CEE countries is shaped by external factors—such as Europeanization and the economic crises—rational and well-structured reform agendas would emerge as a result of these pressures. In contrast, since EU institutions were more successful in influencing formal decision making rather than actual implementation (Meyer-Sahling, 2011)—and as implementation is often dominated by domestic institutions and professions guarding their interests (Olsen, 2016)—it is reasonable to expect fragmented reform delivery. The garbage can perspective anticipates this fragmented reform implementation, occurring as a result of subsystem developments specific to particular states and regions, such as CEE. Therefore, our overarching hypothesis is that the rational-comprehensive perspective offers the best explanation for reform agenda-setting in post-communist countries, while the garbage can perspective gives the best account of the implementation of these reforms, with policymaking processes in these countries falling somewhere in between these two perspectives.

### 1.2. Methodology and data

In order to explore reform processes, we analyzed both quantitative and qualitative data. Our quantitative source was data from the 2013 EUPAN survey which was commissioned by the Lithuanian Presidency of the EU Council to identify recent PAR trends in EU Member States and other European countries. Thirty-eight directors general representing their respective European country in the EUPAN network, and their deputies, were invited to take part in the survey. The response rate of 92% was reached with thirty-five respondents completing the survey questionnaire. With the exception of the UK, all of the EU member states—and Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Kosovo, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland, and Turkey—participated in the EUPAN survey.

Taking into account both the number of responses and the United Nations' classification of European countries, we grouped these countries into three sets of geographical and cultural regions:

- 1) Western European countries involving the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden), countries of Continental Europe (Austria, Belgium, Germany, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Switzerland) and Ireland;
- 2) countries of Southern Europe including several EU member states—Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, and Spain—and one aspiring EU member state, Turkey, which lacks a post-communist legacy; and
- 3) Eastern European countries including Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Kosovo, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Serbia, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

Our analysis controlled for differences between the fifteen longstanding EU member states (EU-15) and the thirteen EU member states that joined the EU relatively recently in 2004, 2007, and 2013 (EU-13).

The EUPAN survey defined PAR as deliberate changes to the structures and processes of public sector organizations with the objective of getting them to run better (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011). The main variables of our statistical analysis were: the salience of reform objectives on the governmental agenda ("How important were the following public administration reform objectives in your country in the period 2008-2013?"), the salience of factors affecting reform policy formulation ("How important have the following factors been driving the development of public administration reforms in your country over the past six years?"), and the salience of obstacles to reform execution ("Which of the following obstacles have been most important during the implementation of public-administration reforms in your country over the past six years?"). Since the survey measured the subjective perceptions of participating EUPAN representatives, it was important to supplement our survey data with additional desk research.

Various tests of descriptive and inferential statistics were applied in our analysis. To assess statistical differences among group means, we used the chi-square test (when both dependent and independent variables were categorical) and ANOVA (when the dependent variable was continuous). A level of significance was set at 0.05 for all of our statistical tests, which were performed with SPSS 19.

Furthermore, this article draws on the two case studies of the key performance priorities of the 2008-2012 Lithuanian government: civil service reform and the restructuring healthcare organizations.<sup>2</sup> In analyzing this data, we focused on reform policymaking and implementation underlying governance change in respective policy subsystems, while taking into account the influence of the financial crisis, the Europeanization processes, and the change of the government and its ministers in Lithuania.

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<sup>2</sup> These case studies were carried out as part of the research project "Performance priorities of the Lithuanian Government: implementation process and results" (No. MIP-084/2014) that was funded by the Research Council of Lithuania.

While executing the case studies, we collected empirical evidence by analyzing key government decisions, legal acts, and implementation information. We also interviewed reform stakeholders representing various advocacy coalitions. Six of these interviews—with members of parliament, government ministers, vice-ministers, advisors, and representatives of state institutions—were included in this article (See Appendix 1 for an anonymized list of interviewees).

## 2. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

### 2.1. *Quantitative analysis*

Based on the survey data, this section of the article analyzes the agenda of PAR and the processes of policymaking and implementation in the region of CEE.

#### *Reform agenda in CEE*

Many governments in CEE pursue wide-ranging reform agendas. In response to the exigencies of EU policies and complex public administration problems, the EU-13, candidate countries, and potential candidates frequently designed comprehensive reform strategies that bundle various reform initiatives (Nakrošis, 2015). Examples of such strategies are the Strategy for Public Administration Reform in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, or Kosovo; the Public Governance Improvement Program in Lithuania; the Public Administration Development (*Magyary*) Program in Hungary; the Smart Administration Strategy in the Czech Republic; and the Effective, Reliable and Open Public Administration Program in Slovakia (EUPAN, 2013).

According to the survey data, the most important objectives of PAR in countries in CEE included in the scope of our analysis were reduction of government spending, improving efficiency in public administration, and fighting corruption in the public service (100% of all respondents from CEE who agreed that these objectives are very important). Other favored objectives related to improving public services, transparency, and business regulation (93.3% of respondents supporting these statements), as well as e-government, human resource management, and central government structure (86.7% of respondents) (see Table 2).

The 2008 financial crisis strongly affected the reform agendas of post-communist governments. The survey data indicated that 93.3% of respondents from CEE estimated that the financial crisis had a large or medium influence on PAR. The fact that countries in CEE prioritized reduction of government spending and improving efficiency in public administration indicates the strong pressures of fiscal consolidation on post-communist countries.

In addition, the high importance of issues related to public services, business regulation, e-government, and human resource management on the reform agenda of post-communist governments reflects the EU's influence in this region. First, the European Commission made public administration a priority in 2013. The Commission encouraged "further deploying e-government services and increasing the use of ICT by public administrations" and "simplifying the business environment, reducing red tape through the introduction of lighter processes and regulatory regimes" (The European Commission, 2013). Second, European



TABLE 2. Importance of public administration reform objectives in European countries in the period 2008-2013 (percentage of respondents who replied "very important")

	Countries in CEE (N=14)	All European countries (N=35)
Reduction of government spending	100.0	88.6
Improving efficiency in public administration	100.0	91.4
Fighting corruption in the public service	100.0	71.4
Increasing quality of public services	93.3	77.1
Improving access to public services	93.3	74.3
Transparency and openness of public administration	93.3	85.7
Improving regulation and reducing administrative burden for citizens/businesses	93.3	82.9
Digital or e-government	86.7	80.0
Modernizing human resource management in the public service	86.7	62.9
Rationalizing the structure of central-level government organizations	86.7	68.6
Focusing on outcomes and results	80.0	70.6
Improving coordination of public policies and government organizations	78.6	58.8
Increasing collaboration and cooperation among different public sector actors	73.3	60.0
Improving competences of public servants	66.7	57.1
Reducing the size of workforce in the public service	60.0	54.3
Engaging citizens/service users in decision making/service delivery	60.0	48.6
Rationalizing the structure of subnational governments	60.0	52.9
Privatization and/or contracting out	33.3	37.1
Re-integration of previously privatized or externalized government functions	13.3	11.4

SOURCE: analysis of the 2013 EUPAN survey data.

Social Fund support for capacity building in new EU member states (including all the countries in CEE that joined the EU in 2004, 2007, or 2013) was used primarily to develop or further improve the set-up of procedures and rules of procedures in governmental organizations, the establishment and quality of public services, as well as human resource development actions (ECORYS, 2011). Accordingly, these issues were found to be relatively high on the agenda of post-communist governments when the survey was conducted in 2013.

Furthermore, the survey data highlights interesting differences in the main reform objectives between different groups of the European countries. First, unlike Western European countries, countries in CEE (together with those from Southern Europe) focused on fighting corruption (ANOVA,  $F=11,940$ ,  $p=0,000$ ), one of the most pressing challenges for post-communist countries (Liebert, Condrey and Goncharov, 2013). The only statistically significant difference between the EU-15 and EU-13 countries emerged with regard to this reform objective, which was more important on the agenda of the latter group of countries (ANOVA,  $F=9,707$ ,  $p=0,005$ ).

Second, countries in CEE were more frequently engaged in modernizing human resource management (ANOVA,  $F=4,039$ ,  $p=0,027$ ), rationalizing the structure of central-level government organizations (ANOVA,  $F=4,004$ ,  $p=0,028$ ), increasing quality of public services (ANOVA,  $F=3,793$ ,  $p=0,033$ ), and improving regulation and reducing administrative burden (ANOVA,  $F=3,727$ ,  $p=0,035$ ) compared to Western European countries. This difference reflects both the specific nature of public administration problems in post-communist countries and the EU's reform agenda. For instance, while developing their public administrations, some post-communist countries expanded the state provision of public services as its scope had been much smaller than elsewhere in Europe (Huxley, Andrews, Hammerschmid and Van de Walle, 2016). Also, given deficiencies in their business environments, it seems that most of the post-communist governments responded to the EU's initiative of better regulation (The European Commission, 2013).

Overall, the findings of our quantitative analysis indicate that the reform agendas of governments in CEE can be well understood according to the rational-comprehensive perspective. Governments in these countries adopted comprehensive reform strategies, and their reform goals matched their problems or EU policies, as anticipated in this theoretical approach. This is related to the strong pressures of Europeanization and fiscal consolidation on PAR content.

#### *Policymaking of public administration reforms in CEE*

Our survey data also enabled us to analyze the policymaking of reform policies in CEE. The main factors driving the development of PAR in these countries were: political priorities of the governments (93.3% of all respondents from CEE considered it very important or rather important), new laws and regulations (93.3%), new EU policies and initiatives (86.7%), institutions responsible for reforms (80.0%), and the crisis situation (80.0%). The involvement of government organizations, local and regional governments, NGOs, and citizens was perceived as somewhat less important during this policymaking process (see Table 3).

While acknowledging the important role of Europeanization and the financial crisis, these findings pointed to the salience of internal reform determinants of political, legal, and administrative nature in the policy development process. Also, the survey data suggest the top-down nature of reform development in post-communist countries whose decision makers are less responsive to reform initiatives from below. We collaborated these observations with qualitative evidence. For instance, one Hungarian case found that even subnational governance reforms can be conceived of and initiated in a centralized and top-down manner (Hajnal and Rosta, 2016). Policy research in the Czech Republic demonstrated that extreme policy solutions tend to be imposed from the top due to the underdeveloped culture of political negotiation in this country (Potůček and Rudolfová, 2016).

In terms of reform development, countries in CEE differed statistically significantly from other European public administrations in two main respects. First, new policies and initiatives from EU institutions related to public administration was a very significant driver of reforms in these countries compared to the group of Western European countries (ANOVA,  $F=12,132$ ,  $p=0,000$ ). Second, the greater importance of new laws and regulations (ANOVA,  $F=9,879$ ,

TABLE 3. The main factors driving the development of public administration reforms in European countries during the period 2008-2013 (percentage of respondents who replied “very important” and “rather important”)

	Countries in CEE (N=14)	All European countries (N=35)
Political priorities of your governments	93.3	94.3
New laws and regulations related to public administration	93.3	71.4
New policies and initiatives from EU institutions related to public administration	86.7	57.1
Active role of institutions responsible for public administration reforms	80.0	74.3
Severity and dynamics of the financial crisis in my country	80.0	74.3
Fiscal austerity conditions introduced by the European Union, European Central Bank, or International Monetary Fund	78.6	70.6
Involvement of government organizations in developing these reforms	71.4	72.7
Involvement of local and regional governments in developing these reforms	64.3	59.4
Initiatives of citizens and non-governmental organizations	57.1	40.6

SOURCE: analysis of the 2013 EUPAN data.

$p=0,000$ ) in CEE indicates the legalistic nature of reform policymaking in post-communist countries. This is in line with the results of previous research, which revealed that legalism prevails in the post-communist administrative culture (Liebert, Condrey and Goncharov, 2013). Similar, but somewhat less statistically significant differences were observed between the EU-15 and EU-13 countries, which reflect a high share of post-communist countries in the EU-13 group (eleven of the EU-13 member states are in CEE).

Overall, these findings suggest that both the rational-comprehensive perspective and the garbage can perspective are useful to understanding reform policymaking in CEE. A combination of exogenous and endogenous factors jointly shape the development of reform policies with varying results in individual post-communist countries. More specifically, post-communist governments follow a top-down and legalistic approach to policy formulation, limiting the engagement of policy stakeholders and their cooperation in the process of governance change.

### *Implementation of public administration reforms in CEE*

Finally, we analyzed the EUPAN data to explore reform implementation in the region of CEE included in the scope of our analysis. Administrations in CEE faced a variety of difficulties in the delivery of PAR, most of which were more salient in this region than in Europe as a whole (see Table 4). Among survey respondents in CEE, 66.7-46.7% reported that the “most important” and “rather important” obstacles to the reform execution process were: lack of coordination among different reform initiatives, inadequate financial resources, poor cooperation among responsible institutions and other government organizations, changes of government during reform implementation, and insufficient administrative capacity.

There were statistically significant differences between the three groups of European countries in terms of a lack of coordination among various reform initiatives (Pearson chi-square,  $p=0,008$ ) and inadequate financial resources to reform implementation (Pearson chi-square,  $p=0,011$ ). The obstacles were found to be the most disruptive in post-communist countries. Some of these countries suffer from fragmentation and limited capacities in the center of government institutions (e.g. Kasemets, 2015) and face significant fiscal pressures (Kickert, Randma-Liiv and Savi, 2015). This evidence points to substantial difficulties in implementing reform commitments in post-communist countries.

TABLE 4. The main obstacles to the implementation of public administration reforms in European countries during the period 2008-2013 (percentage of respondents who replied "very important" and "rather important")

	Countries in CEE (N=14)	All European countries (N=35)
Lack of coordination of various reform initiatives	66.7	40.0
Lack of financial resources to reform implementation	60.0	40.0
Insufficient cooperation among the institutions responsible for public administration reforms and other government organizations	46.7	34.3
Changes of government during reform implementation	46.7	31.4
Insufficient administrative capacity to implement public administration reforms	46.7	28.6
Resistance from interest groups and various stakeholders (trade unions, employees, etc.)	33.3	28.6
Insufficient motivation of public servants to implement reforms	33.3	20.0
Lack of political leadership to support reform implementation	33.3	28.6
Insufficient monitoring and evaluation of the implementation process	26.7	25.7
Wide-ranging and ambitious nature of public administration reforms	26.7	25.7
Uncertain and quickly changing economic situation	20.0	31.4
Insufficient communication of public administration reforms to some stakeholders	13.3	20.0

SOURCE: analysis of the 2013 EUPAN survey data.

Overall, the findings of our quantitative analysis with regard to policy implementation indicate that, in contrast to the reform agenda and, partially, policymaking, the implementation of reforms in countries in CEE countries is better understood according to the garbage can perspective. Also, a lack of cooperation, insufficient stability, and capacity problems can make it difficult for post-communist administrations to translate comprehensive reform strategies into good policy results.

## 2.2. Qualitative analysis

Our qualitative article analyzes the agendas, policymaking, and implementation of two major Lithuanian reforms: civil service reform and the restructuring of healthcare organizations. The 2008-2012 Lithuanian government led by Prime Minister Kubilius launched these reforms in

its government program. In reaction to the financial crisis, an anti-crisis plan and a list of long-term structural reforms were laid out in this document (The Parliament of Lithuania, 2008).

Lithuania's was among the worst hit economies in the world; due to the 2008 economic crisis, Lithuania's real output fell by almost fifteen per cent in 2009 (Nakrošis, Vilpišauskas and Kuokštis, 2015). The start of the financial crisis coincided with the country's parliamentary elections at the end of 2008, which brought into power a ruling coalition of four parties—the Homeland Union-Lithuanian Christian Democrats, the Lithuanian Liberal Movement, the Liberal and Centre Union, and the National Revival Party.

### *The reform agenda*

The main aims of the civil service reform were to increase the effectiveness of the Lithuanian civil service and decrease corruption in the public sector. Among other things, this reform sought to increase flexibility in the country's civil service and add elements of a position-based system to the existing (career-based) civil service model (The Government of Lithuania, 2010). The government intended to adopt amendments to the Civil Service Law passed in 1999, when a professional career-based civil service was established partly due to the need to demonstrate Lithuania's progress in this area and start EU accession negotiations. This legislation was substantially revised in 2002, when a new version of the Law was passed, but between 2002 and 2008 no major amendments to the Civil Service Law had been passed.

In contrast civil service reform, efforts to restructure healthcare organizations were motivated by the need to optimize health expenditures during the financial crisis and to improve the quality of healthcare services available to citizens. The first phase of restructuring started in 2003, when the restructuring program was adopted. The program's second-phase run from 2004 to 2008. These programs, implemented by the governments led by the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party, focused on primary healthcare and its decentralization, but failed to reform the extensive network of healthcare organizations or reduce a strong reliance on inpatient care in Lithuania's healthcare system. Therefore, in the face of falling contributions to the state health insurance fund during the financial crisis, the new 2008 to 2012 ruling coalition called for system-level changes and prepared a third-phase of the restructuring program that involved merging hospitals and other structural changes (The Government of Lithuania, 2010).

### *Formulation and adoption of reform policies*

As outlined in our theoretical framework, reform policies are formulated in policy subsystems that are organized into different advocacy coalitions competing to influence policy decisions (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1999; Weible, Sabatier, Jenkins-Smith, Nohrstedt, Henry and deLeon, 2011). There were two advocacy coalitions competing in the policy subsystem of civil service reform. One of these reform coalitions—made up of the Liberal and Centre Union, the Homeland Union-Lithuanian Christian Democrats, the Ministry of the Interior, and the Prime Minister's Office—believed that Lithuania's civil service needed to be de-sovietized, stripped of its special status, and based on managerial principles. In contrast, the opposing

coalition, comprised of Social Democrats, the Civil Service Department under the Ministry of the Interior, and civil service unions, backed the hierarchical concept of civil service and the preservation of the career-based model.

In June 2010, the government adopted a concept paper outlining a comprehensive civil service reform drafted by the Prime Minister's Office. Having scored an early victory in the Parliament in the same month—the introduction of four-year term limits for heads of government agencies and heads of agencies under ministries—the reform coalition continued to pursue a comprehensive civil service reform agenda. In October 2010, the Ministry of the Interior, led by Minister Raimundas Palaitis delegated by the Liberal and Centre Union, drafted a new Civil Service Law based on the provisions of the concept paper. This legislative proposal implied ambitious changes to the civil service system, including a major overhaul of the existing remuneration system. For instance, the reform coalition suggested civil servants' bonuses based on performance results instead of length of tenure.

This proposal met strong opposition from the competing coalition in the legislature. In November 2010, a conference on civil service reform was organized in the Parliament, during which some members of the opposing coalition rejected what they alleged were destabilizing changes that would demotivate civil servants (interview with a former politician 1, 2014). The fact that the Lithuanian authorities cut civil service salaries by 8–36 per cent (with the deepest cuts experienced by top managers) during the crisis had already weakened the confidence of civil servants in new reform initiatives (interview with a former deputy head of institution, 2015). Having received negative feedback and anticipating that the proposed legislation would be blocked in the Parliament, the reform coalition decided to mitigate its radical provisions and seek a wider, inter-institutional consensus on their content by engaging responsible parliamentary committees.

While trying to change its action strategy in order to collaborate more closely with the parliament, the reform coalition faced a political leadership deficit. After the opposing coalition defeated the first reform attempt, Minister of the Interior Raimundas Palaitis lost interest in civil service reform and redirected his attention to security matters. The latter issues dominated the agenda of this ministry during the rest of Palaitis' political term in office (interview with a former head of institution, 2014). In order to continue implementing civil service reform, Prime Minister Kubilius tasked his office's technocratic team with further formulating the government's civil service proposals. In spring 2011, this team prepared a somewhat less radical version of the Civil Service Law, which still contained major changes to remuneration in the Lithuanian civil service. Also, given the absence of strong political leadership, no one engaged with members of parliament or the heads of parliamentary committees to mobilize support for the policy and new legislative amendments (interview with a former deputy head of institution, 2015).

In the ensuing political situation, the opposing coalition continued to be adamantly against the proposed civil service reforms, alleging that the policy would destabilize and demotivate Lithuania's civil servants. Even some influential members of the leading Homeland Union joined this course of action. Four parliamentary committees issued a joint statement concluding that

further public discussion of civil service reform could damage the civil service and threaten its stability. Furthermore, President Dalia Grybauskaitė expressed her disapproval of the reform proposals in a closed meeting with Prime Minister Kubilius (interview a former deputy head of institution, 2015). As a result, the government was forced to withdraw another legislative reform proposal in autumn 2011.

Due to strong opposition and negative feedback, a new version of the Civil Service Law was never officially presented to the Parliament for deliberation by the end of the government's term. The interpersonal trust of politicians responsible for civil service reform in the ruling majority deteriorated when the country's new parliamentary elections started approaching. The former Minister of the Interior Raimundas Palaitis publicly criticized Prime Minister Kubilius for allegedly forgetting his electoral visions. As a result, it was not possible to formulate new civil service proposals, and the fundamental civil service reform failed. At the end of 2012, the Parliament did adopt some insignificant modifications to the Civil Service Law, which were developed by the parliamentary committee responsible for public administration in cooperation with the Civil Service Department. They further consolidated the career-based civil service model in Lithuania by introducing a partially centralized selection of civil servants and strengthening the autonomy of the Civil Service Department. Overall, the government did not achieve its original goal of making the civil service more flexible and position-based.

The main advocacy coalitions in the subsystem of healthcare policy also formed around the ruling coalition and opposition parties. The reform coalition involved the Liberal and Centre Union, the Homeland Union, and larger public and private providers of healthcare services. The competing coalition centered around the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party and involved smaller, regional healthcare organizations. If the former coalition advocated for improved efficiency and competition in the health sector, the latter called for greater accessibility of healthcare services at the local and regional levels and stronger state involvement in the Lithuanian healthcare system. Discussions between the competing advocacy coalitions also revolved around the speed of healthcare reform implementation and the consequences of the reforms on the healthcare system and patients.

Faced with lengthy reform discussions, opposition in the parliament, and lobbying from district mayors protecting the interests of hospitals located in their municipalities, the Ministry of Health pushed restructuring decisions by adopting government decrees instead of initiating legislative proposals, which required parliamentary approval (interviews with a former politician 2, 2013 and a former vice-minister, 2015). Minister of Health Algis Čaplikas of the Liberal and Centre Union appointed a small task force to advise on healthcare reform. A draft program for restructuring healthcare organizations and services was developed internally by the Ministry of Health and submitted to the government at the end of 2009.

In contrast to the civil service reform efforts, this decision-making strategy proved initially successful in the healthcare policy subsystem. The minister of health was actively mobilizing support for reform in the government, where it enjoyed Kubilius's political backing. In December 2009, the government approved the new restructuring program, which involved merging of hospitals to make the delivery of healthcare services more efficient. However,

unable to influence the process of reform decision making, a group of parliament members from the policy's opposition group rejected the reform's implications for regional hospital units and referred the reform program to the country's Constitutional Court.

### *Implementing healthcare reform*

The Liberal and Centre Union, which politically controlled the Ministry of Health, was responsible for implementing healthcare reform. It was initially expected that the program would be fully executed by the end of 2010. However, the reform suffered a major setback when Minister Algis Čaplikas had to resign from office in March 2010 following a corruption scandal involving his deputy. A new minister, Raimondas Šukys, also of the same liberal party, was appointed to office. Šukys was a lawyer; he focused on the administrative details of the health policy and failed to exercise the strong political leadership necessary for continued reform execution (interview with a former vice-minister, 2015). Even Prime Minister Kubilius expressed his dissatisfaction with the performance of this minister, but he was unable to change him in office as this policy area was assigned to the Liberal and Centre Union. Therefore, the healthcare reform lost its momentum and some of the reform measures were delayed until 2011.

In addition, despite the coupling of financing from the State Health Insurance Fund to individual healthcare organizations with reform implementation, the Ministry of Health lacked the legal and administrative leverage to counter local authorities' and hospital administrations' resistance to structural and organizational reforms. The restructuring process required the owners of healthcare organizations (local authorities) to adopt optimization decisions. These professional communities had no incentive to adopt optimizations, but they did not face legal or financial sanctions for ignoring the government's reform decisions. As a result, months of administrative wrangling between the Ministry of Health and local authorities further delayed the implementation process and blocked the execution of important reorganization decisions (interview with a former vice-minister, 2015).

By the end of 2012, due to some mergers, the number of healthcare organizations was reduced from eighty-one to fifty-nine, but the reform was only partially implemented. The scale of the reform was reduced during the implementation phase due to pressure exerted by professional interest groups represented in the parliament to adjust target indicators for some health services or make exceptions for some healthcare organizations (interview with a former political appointee, 2015). Also, by the end of the government's term, the reforms had still not reached the large healthcare organizations in the major cities of Vilnius, Kaunas, and Klaipėda. Therefore, the reform neither achieved the anticipated economic savings of the healthcare-restructuring program (estimated at approximately ninety million euros), nor did it improve Lithuania's health outcomes, which remain among the poorest in the EU. In addition, at the end of 2014, the Constitutional Court ruled that the government's (rather than parliament's) adoption of the third-phase of the restructuring program was a constitutional breach, and therefore illegal. Overall, the reform coalition's strategy of bypassing parliament proved politically and legally unsuccessful.



The results of our case studies largely confirm the survey results. On the one hand, Lithuania's government initiated a comprehensive reform agenda and had clear civil service and healthcare service reform goals. These goals matched the government's policy needs given the context of the financial crisis. This case study evidence is in line with the characteristics of the rational-comprehensive perspective. On the other hand, we found plenty of evidence indicating fragmentation during reform implementation in terms of insufficient policy stability, conflicts between different advocacy coalitions, a lack of interpersonal trust in the ruling coalition, or insufficient administrative leverage—as predicted by the garbage can perspective.

Since the PAR processes in Lithuania have mixed characteristics, both the rational-comprehensive and the garbage can perspectives are needed to understand them. Although decision makers exercised hierarchical command and control over reforms in their initial phases, this top-down approach was not sufficient to achieve the reform's intended results without the active facilitation of governance change when policy action moved outside the core executive. Despite the fact that there was no government change during the 2008 to 2012 period, policymaking was very fluid, with even the responsible ministers losing their interest in reform or forced to leave their positions in office. As a result, the formulated civil service policy was never adopted and the execution of the healthcare-restructuring plan substantially deviated from its original goals.

## CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Our research results confirm our overarching hypothesis: the rational-comprehensive perspective best explains the development of reform agendas in central Eastern European countries, and the garbage can perspective is the preferred theoretical framework for understanding the implementation of PAR in CEE. In post-communist countries, there is a strong contrast between the structured development of reform agendas and the erratic reform implementation processes. In other words, there is some uncoupling of problems, choices, and implementation actions (Cohen, March and Olsen, 1972, p. 16). This is related not only to the fact that EU institutions were less successful in influencing actual implementation (Meyer-Sahling, 2011), but is also due to governance characteristics underlying the processes of reform design and execution in the region of CEE and the interactions amongst actors at the level of policy subsystems.

Our analysis of the survey data revealed that post-communist countries shared characteristics that set them apart from other groups of European countries, both in the content and implementation of their reforms. In terms of reform content, central Eastern European countries focused on civil service—on fighting corruption and improving human resource management—and on public or administrative services, with emphases on improving business regulation and advancing the quality and accessibility of public services. Even the features of reform policy processes themselves were different in CEE, where reform policies were often formulated on a top-down basis, and were frequently thwarted by inadequate implementation capacities.

Our case studies illustrate how three features specific to governance in CEE affect the formation and execution of PAR public administration in the real context of Lithuania. First, ambitious policy reforms were formulated top-down by Lithuania's core executives, often with limited input from other important reform stakeholders (such as the opposition and other actors involved in policy implementation). Second, since political leadership was weak, divided, and unstable during the reform process, reform executives were not able to mobilize their supporters to achieve consensus on major reforms—meanwhile, their opponents, fiercely protected their own interests. Third, the central administration lacked the capacity to deliver their reforms; they lacked both the involvement of the responsible institutions and the mechanisms to enforce the adopted decisions. Lithuania's limited programmatic success in achieving civil service and healthcare reform can be attributed to a combination of these three factors.

Overall, our research findings suggest significant challenges for reform implementation in Europe's post-communist countries. The mismatch between rational and comprehensive reform strategies pursued by post-communist governments and the insufficient resources available to administrations in CEE creates major implementation difficulties. Although other groups of European countries might also face gaps between policy commitments and implementations, such discrepancies are likely more pronounced in Europe's post-communist countries, where administrations address pressing policy challenges with limited capacities. This can help explain why most post-communist governments have adopted reform measures on paper, but only a few of them demonstrated at least partial success in executing reforms (Peters, 2008; Bouckaert, Nakrošis and Nemec, 2011; Liebert, Condrey and Goncharov, 2013). The limited effectiveness of public policy in post-communist countries can continue undermining citizens' trust in these countries' institutions.

These conclusions are also in line with the previous results of comparative or case study research, which assessed the sustainability of civil service reforms in the new EU member states of CEE after EU membership and the professionalization of the civil service in the Western Balkans. This research found that only a minority of the post-communist countries (namely the Baltic states) continued to invest in the professionalization of the civil service (Meyer-Sahling, 2009b), and prospects of achieving sustainable civil service professionalization were low in the Western Balkans (Meyer-Sahling, 2012). Also, although Macedonia was the first former-Yugoslav republic to adopt a comprehensive public-administration reform strategy in 1999, it was officially admitted that its implementation failed in 1999–2010 (Cierco, 2013, p. 484).

The implementation challenge in Europe's post-communist countries may be exacerbated by a top-down approach to policy formulation, which limits the engagement of policy stakeholders and their ownership of reform proposals. The Lithuanian case studies demonstrated that not only the competing coalitions opposed the proposed or adopted reforms, but also some implementation agencies, local authorities, and public service providers had insufficient ownership of change initiatives and a limited willingness to carry out necessary structural and organizational changes.

Although increasing centralization of policymaking was observed during the 2008 financial crisis (Kickert, Randma-Liiv and Savi, 2015), top-down policymaking and lack of consultation with policy stakeholders also prevailed under communism, when executive authority was the preserve of the Communist Party. This tendency towards authoritative decision making, coupled with marked differences between post-communist European countries and other groups of European countries (differences starker than those between the old and new member states of the EU) raises questions about the enduring effects of Communism on our sample of central Eastern European countries (Meyer-Sahling, 2009a). These characteristics of PAR policy can also constrain the attempts of authorities in CEE to win back public confidence in state institutions, which depends, among other things, on government openness or stakeholders' engagement in the policymaking process (OECD, 2017).

A discussion of governance characteristics specific to CEE cannot be separated from interaction of policy actors at the level of policy subsystems. As the Lithuanian case studies illustrated, reforms frequently run into trouble because of erratic policymaking and implementation occurrences, including shifting political attention, the fluid participation of change leaders, and adversarial actions undertaken by anti-reform coalitions. Also, although the reforms initially enjoyed strong political backing in the country's government, interpersonal trust among responsible politicians deteriorated during the implementation process when public policies started changing the underlying terms of power and reshaping political actors' positions. In addition to systemic characteristics of post-communist public administrations, these subsystem developments shape the complex and dynamic processes of governance change and constrain the chances of successfully implementing reforms.

Our research showed that the application of actor-centered approaches to reform processes revealed an adversarial interplay among policy actors and captured the complexity and dynamics of reform policymaking and implementation processes in different policy subsystems. This indicates the major advantages of using actor-centered explanations instead of popular Western administrative doctrines (such as NPM) that employ a single dominant (non-adversarial) mechanism of change in the study of governance change.

In broader terms, our research suggests that the approaches of national (regional) and temporal regimes, which focus on national(regional)-level features of decision making and temporal policy developments respectively, best explain reform processes (Van der Heijden, 2014, p. 43). These approaches can be contrasted with the approach of international regimes, which emphasize the impact of international (supranational) doctrines, regimes, or actors on governance change. Although the latter approach's applications, including NPM-based studies, have recently dominated PAR research in CEE, this article revealed the relevance and need for actor-centered studies of governance change.

Finally, our quantitative analysis identified the main patterns of reform agenda-setting, policy formulation, and implementation, as well as variation across different country groups. The qualitative analysis explained the relation between different factors in the process of reform policymaking and implementation at the level of policy subsystems and within the real context of reform initiatives. Combining quantitative and qualitative methods enriched

our understanding of reform developments in CEE. Future research could more systematically compare specific reform cases to explain the similarities and differences among PARs in various post-communist countries. Depending on the number of cases and research aims, this assessment could be based on statistical analysis, comparative qualitative analysis, comparative analysis, or integrative mixed-method research designs combining any of these methods (Castro, Ellison, Boyd and Kopak, 2010).

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## APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEWS

Former politician 2, 2013. *Interview on healthcare reforms*, Vilnius, Lithuania, June 10, 2013.

Former politician 1, 2014. *Interview on civil service reforms*, Vilnius, Lithuania, November 19, 2014.

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