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“The European Semester and its Implications for Administrative Policy”

Beitrag für die 13. Jahrestagung des Forum Junge Staats-, Verwaltungs- und Policy-Forschung (FoJuS) „Zukunft der Verwaltung, Verwaltung der Zukunft“, 27. und 28. Februar 2020, Helmut-Schmidt Universität Hamburg

Zusammenfassung:

The European Semester is an instrument for coordinating and monitoring the economic and fiscal policies of the EU member states. Since its introduction in 2011, the European Semester has attracted considerable attention in political science literature. However, the academic debate on the European Semester has focused primarily on questions of the effectiveness of the new governance mechanisms, democratic legitimacy, and the economic and socio-political implications of the European Semester. Another important aspect that has been almost completely neglected so far concerns the European Semester's implications for the Member States' public administration. This finding is surprising, since the European Commission explicitly emphasizes the importance of the countries' public administration for Member States' economic growth and the well-being of their citizens. With regard to the European Semester, it therefore seems reasonable to assume that the Member States' public administration are the object of the main priorities, analyses and country-specific recommendations, similar to fiscal, social and economic policy.

This article therefore examines the administrative policy ideas and reform proposals of the European Commission by analyzing all 993 annual country-specific recommendations addressed to the 28 EU member states between 2011 and 2019 under the European Semester. Drawing on theoretical considerations about administrative policy ideas and reform proposals in the context of the European Union, we develop a coding scheme for the analyses of the annual Country-specific recommendations, which satisfies both theoretical requirements and the European Union's priorities in terms of good administration. We distinguish between six main categories to cover all conceivable issues and aspects of administrative policy that might be included in the Country-specific recommendations.

Applying quantitative text analysis to all CSRs during the investigation period reveals that the European Commission is indeed using the instrument of country-specific recommendations to submit reform proposals specifically addressing the EU Member States' public administrations. Out of the 466 reform proposals identified, more than half were related to either the management of public finances or the administrative structure in the member states. Looking at the entire period under study, the share of the individual categories of administrative reform recommendations has partly shifted. While the share of reform proposals on “Public finance management” and the “Administrative structure” has fallen, the importance of the topics “Judicial system” and “Ethics, openness, anti-corruption” has grown considerably. The reform proposals with an administrative policy reference are highly unequally distributed among the EU member states, indicating a different need for reform in the countries from the perspective of the European Commission. A closer look at the country-specific reform proposals reveals an administrative paradigm represented by the European Commission that refers to economic efficiency, competitiveness and the contribution to economic growth as benchmarks for assessing a country's public administration.

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