

## Impact case study (REF3)

<b>Institution:</b> University of Nottingham		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 19 Politics and International Studies		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Improving civil service management in the Western Balkans for EU accession		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2007 – 2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b> Jan-Hinrik Meyer-Sahling	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b> Professor of Political Science	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b> Since 2004
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 1 August 2013 – 31 December 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> No		
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Professor Meyer-Sahling's research influenced civil service reform and management in the Western Balkans, transforming the way public administration operates and helping countries to progress on their path to EU accession. His collaboration with international organisations, in particular, the Regional School of Public Administration (ReSPA) and OECD-SIGMA delivered new evidence and actionable recommendations. The research became instrumental (1) for the change of civil service laws, especially merit recruitment policies in three countries (Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro), (2) the adoption of capacity-building measures to improve the quality of implementing recruitment policies in all six Western Balkan countries, and (3) the design and application of novel assessment methodologies and regional cooperation initiatives for the diffusion of best practices by international organisations and civil society organisations to help Western Balkan countries advance towards EU accession.</p>		
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Professor Meyer-Sahling is an internationally-leading expert in the study of civil service reform and management in post-communist Europe, including the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia).</p> <p>The prime objective of civil service reform in the Western Balkans is the establishment of merit recruitment to overcome legacies of party patronage and nepotism in public personnel management. Merit recruitment is the hallmark of professional civil services. It is associated with economic development and helps prevent corruption in the public sector.</p> <p>Recognising these benefits, the European Union (EU) made civil service professionalisation a condition for accession and provides support and assessments of reform progress. Meyer-Sahling conducted research in collaboration with international organisations to assess reforms in accordance with EU conditions and develop strategies to professionalise civil services.</p> <p><b><i>Assessing civil service professionalisation and its consequences</i></b></p> <p>Meyer-Sahling conducted surveys of civil servants, human resources (HR) managers and external observers to measure the extent to which civil services in the region are successfully professionalising. Research funded by OECD-SIGMA (Support for the Improvement of Governance and Management, a joint initiative of the OECD and the EU) [P1] in 2010/11 and ReSPA (Regional School of Public Administration) [P2] in 2015 showed that Western Balkan governments had continuously invested in civil service reforms. However, institutional frameworks often remained incomplete and implementation patchy. As a consequence, politicisation, party patronage and nepotism remained widespread in public administration.</p> <p>In the context of a British Academy/DFID funded project on the consequences of civil service management, Meyer-Sahling – together with Professor Christian Schuster (UCL) and Doctor Kim Sass Mikkelsen (Roskilde) – demonstrated that politicised and nepotistic recruitment practices are associated with less work motivation, less public service motivation and more corruption in the public sector workforce [P3]. The findings qualified Meyer-Sahling's earlier research on civil service politicisation and corruption [P4], thereby placing a premium on identifying strategies that help curb politicisation and nepotism in civil service recruitment. Meyer-Sahling developed three strategies that focus on:</p> <p><b>(1) Getting institutional designs right</b></p>		

Meyer-Sahling's research showed that written examinations and public advertisement of job vacancies are associated with less politicisation and less nepotism in recruitment and, by implication, better performance and less corruption in the civil service [P3]. Based on robust evidence, he gave actionable recommendations to Western Balkan governments on how to best design merit recruitment procedures.

### **(2) Getting implementation capacity right**

The research conducted with ReSPA demonstrated how digital technology increased the efficiency, consistency, transparency and user-friendliness of recruitment policies [P2]. It further emphasised the need to develop professional competencies of key agents such as the staff of central civil service agencies, personnel units and senior civil servants across public administration by, for instance, training members of selection commissions [P2]. The recommended capacity-building measures improved the quality of implementing merit recruitment policies.

### **(3) Getting international support right**

Meyer-Sahling's earlier OECD-SIGMA funded research on EU member states in Central and Eastern Europe questioned the effectiveness of EU conditionality in achieving sustainable results after accession [P5]. Instead, he stressed the importance of complementing EU conditionality with lesson-drawing activities and initiatives to enable policy learning by key agents [P6]. Such activities, he recommended, are best coordinated by organisations such as ReSPA, OECD-SIGMA and regional and local networks of civil society organisations whose mission it is to promote regional cooperation in the field of public administration reform, build local ownership by stakeholders in governments, and diffuse best practices for EU accession across the Western Balkans.

### **3. References to the research**

[P1] Meyer-Sahling, J.-H. 2012. [Civil Service Professionalisation in the Western Balkans](#). SIGMA Paper Nr 48. Paris: OECD. (Funded by OECD-SIGMA. 2010-12. Title: Civil Service Professionalisation in the Western Balkans. PI. EUR175,000. UoN portion GBR41,343.27).

[P2] Meyer-Sahling, J.-H., et al. 2015. [Improving the Implementation of Merit Recruitment Procedures in the Western Balkans: Analysis and Recommendations](#). Danilovgrad: ReSPA.

[P3] Meyer-Sahling, J.-H., C. Schuster, and K.S. Mikkelsen. 2018. [Civil Service Management in Developing Countries: What Works? Evidence from a Survey of 23,000 Civil Servants in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America](#). London: British Academy/DFID Anti-Corruption Evidence Programme. (Funded by British Academy. 2016-18. Title: Civil Service Reform and Anti-Corruption. PI. GBP399,553).

[P4] Meyer-Sahling, J.-H., and K.S. Mikkelsen. 2016. '[Civil Service Laws, Merit, Politicization, and Corruption: The Perspective of Public Officials from Five East European Countries](#)'. *Public Administration* 94(4): 1105–1123. (Funded by OECD-SIGMA. 2007-09. Title: Post-Accession Sustainability of Civil Service Reforms. PI, EUR178,000. Consultancy).

[P5] Meyer-Sahling, J.-H. 2009. [The Sustainability of Civil Service Reform in Central and Eastern Europe Five Years after Accession](#). SIGMA Paper Nr 44. Paris: OECD. (Funded by OECD-SIGMA, see P4 for details).

[P6] Meyer-Sahling, J.-H., K.S. Mikkelsen, and C. Schuster. 2018. [How to Improve the Quality of Public Administration in Europe? Lessons from and for Civil Service Reform](#). EUPACK Topical Paper. (Funded by European Commission. 2016-18. Title: European Public Administration Country Knowledge. Horizontal Expert. EUR1,700,000. Consultancy).

### **4. Details of the impact**

Professor Meyer-Sahling's research generated new evidence that became instrumental for the improvement of civil service management, in particular, merit recruitment policies and practices, in the Western Balkans. The changes that directly resulted from his research transformed the way public administration works, helping Western Balkan countries to advance on their path to EU accession.

#### **(1) Change of civil service laws, in particular, recruitment policies and practices, helping reduce civil service politicisation and advance towards EU accession**

In 2015, Meyer-Sahling completed a ReSPA Regional Study on merit recruitment in the Western Balkans [P2]. The study concluded with 61 actionable recommendations on how to

improve institutional frameworks and the capacity to implement recruitment policies for follow up by national governments. It was translated into three foreign languages (Albanian, Bosnian/Croatian/Montenegrin/Serbian, Macedonian) and presented by Meyer-Sahling to decision-makers in national capitals at workshops organised by ministries of public administration and civil service agencies. By 2018, more than **60% of the recommendations were adopted** by the six Western Balkan countries [A, B]. Nearly 70% of the adopted recommendations were fully implemented. The uptake varied from 18% in Bosnia and Herzegovina to 85% in Albania and Montenegro [C]. Most notably, in Serbia, Kosovo and Montenegro, reform working parties used Meyer-Sahling's Regional Study [P2] as guidance to change civil service laws with the aim of strengthening merit recruitment policy and practices.

The new/amended civil service laws are in force in all three countries. A survey commissioned by ReSPA identified a **positive trend towards professionalisation of civil service recruitment practices and a reduction in civil service politicisation** in Serbia and Montenegro [C]. The positive impacts of the changes were '*recognised in the EU Progress Reports that are published annually by the European Commission and has helped these countries to advance on their path towards EU accession*' [D].

The impacts were achieved in **Serbia** after Meyer-Sahling's Regional Study [P2] was used by the 'Special Working Group' chaired by the Minister of Public Administration and Local Self-Government in 2017 and 2018 to prepare an amendment of the Law on Civil Servants. '*The Special Working Group adopted more than 70% of the recommendations put forward by Professor Meyer-Sahling*' [E]. The amendment was adopted by Parliament in December 2018 and has been implemented since January 2019. The incorporation of Meyer-Sahling's recommendations [P2] led in **Serbia** to the '**introduction of competency-based examinations [...]**. *These written entry examinations are compulsory for all civil servants. Since the beginning of 2019, the new examination method has been applied to more than 600 advertised positions and more than 2000 candidates have sat the competency-based exam administered by the Human Resources Management Service*'. Thanks to the new examination procedure, selection commissions are able to '*pick candidates that are most qualified for the positions in government*'. Moreover, the changes '*helped the Government of Serbia to progress on the road to EU accession and to meet its strategic objective of becoming an EU member in the future*' [E].

In **Kosovo**, Meyer-Sahling's studies [P2, 3] directly '*informed the official Working Group during the preparation of the Law on Public Officials between May 2017 and October 2018*' [F]. The Law was passed by Parliament in January 2019 and has been in force since July 2020. The most significant change resulting from his recommendations was '*the revision of the civil service recruitment procedure to strengthen the merit principle*' [F]. The '*European Commission Staff Working Document Kosovo\* 2020 Report emphasizes that "the legal framework for the merit-based recruitment [...] improved with the adoption of the Law on Public Officials [...]"*. *The positive evaluation of the civil service provides significant help for the Government of Kosovo to meet the conditions for accession to the European Union*' [F].

In **Montenegro**, his Regional Study [P2] influenced the 'Working Group' that designed a new Law on Civil Servants and State Employees. The Working Group included the Ministry of Interior, Human Resources Management Authority, Ministries of Finance and of Justice. It '*took on board the recommendations that Meyer-Sahling and his team had formulated in the ReSPA Study on Merit Recruitment*' [G]. The Law, passed in 2017, has been in force since July 2018. The Law led to the **introduction of 'a competency framework and written entry examinations for senior officials'** and '*the requirement to include external experts from academia, civil society and the wider public sector on recruitment and selection commissions*'. [G]. The European Commission arranged for an independent assessment of the institutional framework, concluding that '*there has been a notable contribution to the promotion and strengthening [of] human resource management and the civil service system more generally and [that] there is evidence of transformative effects on the way in which public administration operates, particularly, from a human resources perspective*' [G].

**(2) Adoption of measures to build capacity for implementation of merit recruitment policy, improving transparency and competitiveness of recruitment processes**



In addition to problems of institutional design, the Meyer-Sahling's Regional Study [P2] innovated by proposing measures that mitigate problems of implementation. These include complex, inefficient application procedures and a lack of professional competence of human resources managers and members of selection commissions.

In **Serbia**, the Human Resources Management Service changed regulations in 2019 in accordance with Meyer-Sahling's recommendations [P2] to make the recruitment procedure *'more user-friendly and less costly for the applicants'*. For instance, the new procedure requires the submission of a smaller number of certified official documents and *'has allowed more qualified candidates to participate in the competitions'*. The Human Resources Management Service confirmed that the new regulation *'has led a **significant increase in the number of qualified candidates** who have applied for various positions across public administration'* [E].

In **Montenegro**, the uptake of his recommendations helped *'increase equal opportunities and transparency of civil service recruitment, such as [the provision of] information on the website, daily newspapers, Instagram, Facebook and online consultations in order to better support potential candidates in the process of recruitment'*. The changes further involved the introduction of *'electronic testing of civil service candidates by the Human Resources Management Authority'*. The Human Resources Management Authority *'explained that with the transparency and equal representation, we increased the quality of applicants. Now, recruitment is much more competitive, as we get more qualified candidates with better knowledge and skills than before'* [G].

Most notably, *'all Western Balkan countries developed and implemented trainings for members of selection commissions'* [A]; one of the key recommendations of Meyer-Sahling's 2015 Regional Study [P2]. As a result, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 600 civil servants and experts were trained since 2018. Similarly, in Montenegro, 200 senior civil servants and 70 external experts were trained in 2019 and early 2020 to raise the skills and competences of commission members [G, I]. In Serbia, *'the Human Resources Management Service has trained more than 600 commission members and employees in HR units'* since 2019, which *'helped increase the professional competences of commission members'*. [E].

### **(3) Development of novel methodologies and regional co-operation initiatives to help diffuse best practices for progress towards the goal of EU membership**

Following the completion of the ReSPA Regional study [P2], Meyer-Sahling helped develop the **current ReSPA Strategy** [H]. Based on a briefing note he prepared after a workshop he co-led in Tirana in May 2017, ReSPA adopted a Strategy that incorporated his proposed regional activities to *'improve professionalisation and depoliticization of the civil service'*. The Strategy was adopted in 2018 by the ReSPA Governing Board. The Strategy commits EUR200,000 per year for activities to professionalise civil service systems [H]. *'The activities related to the improvement of merit recruitment and performance appraisal in the Western Balkans have since been successfully implemented'* [A].

A key element of the ResPA Strategy included the deployment of **'mechanisms to promote regional cooperation and the exchange of good practices in the area of public administration reform in the Western Balkans'**. As explained by the ReSPA Director, the *'implementation of these activities has helped ReSPA Members to move closer towards the goal of joining the European Union in the future'*. Relevant examples are *'financial and logistical support for the development of online tutorials and videos for applicants to civil service positions in Albania, support for the establishment of online recruitment tools in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and [...] support for the Human Resources Management Service in Serbia to develop strategic planning capacities of HR units in the central public administration.'* [A].

ReSPA also asked Meyer-Sahling in 2019 to develop a novel self-assessment methodology to help Western Balkan countries strengthen merit recruitment policies [P6]. **'It complements the assessments conducted by OECD-SIGMA and the European Commission to support the progress of Western Balkan countries towards EU accession. The self-assessment frameworks have been successfully completed by all ReSPA Members.'** [A, I]

In addition to the collaboration with ReSPA, Meyer-Sahling acted as an advisor for **OECD-SIGMA** on a project that incorporated his research [P1, 2, 4] and led to the publication of

SIGMA Paper Nr 55 on *Senior Civil Service Professionalisation* in 2018 [J]. It explored strategies to overcome the politicisation of the senior civil service in Western Balkan countries. Meyer-Sahling made a 'valuable' contribution 'for the preparation of the conceptual framework as well as in synthesising the findings and preparing recommendations'.

SIGMA Paper Nr 55 '**triggered the revision of SIGMA's Principles of Administration insofar as the recruitment, selection and appointment of senior civil servants in EU accession and neighbourhood countries are concerned**' [J]. The SIGMA Principles provide **authoritative guidance for nearly 20 countries** in the Western Balkans, Eastern Europe and North Africa in the context of the EU's Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance and the European Neighbourhood Policy, on 'how to better reconcile the principles of competence and political responsiveness when selecting senior civil servants' [K]. At the national level, SIGMA Paper Nr 55 opened the discussion with governments to develop innovative policies to mitigate politicisation through the modernisation of senior civil service training. In Serbia, specifically, the initiative '**cumulated in the adoption of a Training Programme for the Professional Development of Senior Civil Servants**. The programme is being implemented by the National Academy of Public Administration' [K].

Finally, in 2016 Meyer-Sahling became Member of the Advisory Council of the Western Balkans Enabling Project for Civil Society Monitoring of Public Administration Reform (WeBER) thanks to his work with OECD-SIGMA, ReSPA and DfID [P1, 2, 3, 5]. WeBER was implemented by the **Think for Europe Network (TEN)**, which consists of think tanks and civil society organisations in the region. Meyer-Sahling's 'research experience subsequently influenced WeBER's conceptual and methodological approach and significantly contributed to the overall success of the entire initiative' [L]. His advice was instrumental for the development of the PAR Monitor: a new methodology for the measurement of public administration reform progress from the perspective of citizens and civil society.

The '**successful implementation of the WeBER initiative has significantly strengthened the role of civil society organizations in monitoring public administration reforms in line with the requirements of the EU accession process**'. For example, the 'European Commission opened channels for consulting civil society organisations within the institutionalised policy dialogue between the EU and candidate countries in the PAR area (known as Special Groups on Public Administration Reform)' [L]. The programme was relaunched in 2019 as WeBER 2.0 with a value of EUR1,450,000. Meyer-Sahling continued in his advisory role, which involved the institutionalisation of the PAR Monitor and its expansion to the local public administration. WeBER now connects 22 organisations with national reach in Western Balkan countries and more than 130 local civil society organisations through the activities of the WeBER Platform, thus having '**significantly strengthened regional cooperation among civil society organisations in the Western Balkans**' [L].

#### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- A. ReSPA Testimonial.
- B. [ReSPA Annual Report 2018](#). Page 22.
- C. [ReSPA Report. 2019. Merit Recruitment in the Western Balkans: An Evaluation of Change Between 2015 and 2018](#). ReSPA Publications.
- D. European Commission. Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations. Testimonial.
- E. Human Resources Management Service. Government of Serbia. Testimonial.
- F. Department for the Management of Public Officials. Government of Kosovo. Testimonial.
- G. Human Resources Management Authority. Government of Montenegro. Testimonial.
- H. [ReSPA Strategy 2019-2024. Building Together Governance for the Future](#). Pages 36-42 and 18-20.
- I. [ReSPA Report. 2020. Making Merit Recruitment Work: Lessons from and for the Western Balkans](#). ReSPA Publications.
- J. [SIGMA. 2018. Analysis of the Professionalisation of the Senior Civil Service and the Way Forward for the Western Balkans](#). SIGMA Paper Nr 55. Esp. pages 7-10, 16, 21, 32-33.
- K. OECD-SIGMA. Testimonial.
- L. Centre for European Policy. Testimonial.