

# The Foundation of EU Integration: Ukraine's Public Administration Reform

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## Executive Summary

Ukraine's public administration reform (PAR) is a strategic political choice, an anti-corruption instrument, and a fundamental precondition for EU integration. Despite visible progress in areas such as digitalisation and service delivery, reforms aimed at strengthening the internal functioning of government, including policymaking capacity, policy coordination and professional civil service management, have been limited. Addressing these gaps will require restoration of competitive civil service recruitment, improved policy coordination within government and audits of the key ministries involved in the accession process, with enhanced support from European partners. Paying insufficient attention to PAR or treating it as a box-ticking exercise risks undermining the accession process.

## Introduction

Ukraine's public administration reform ([PAR](#)) refers to efforts to strengthen institutional capacity, improve policymaking and service delivery, professionalise the civil service and ensure accountable, effective governance in line with European standards. Public administration reform is sometimes seen as a technical, procedural requirement of the EU integration process – a box to be ticked alongside digitalisation, enhanced administrative services or regulatory alignment. This perception is misleading.

PAR is not just technical, but political. It is closely linked to anti-corruption efforts and to the country's capacity to deliver on its accession obligations. Even in wartime, public administration reform is the backbone of the state's ability to govern, legislate and negotiate accession effectively. Increased political resolve and enhanced European support will be necessary to implement PAR. Without a functioning, professional and politically supported public administration system, Ukraine will undermine the credibility and sustainability of its EU integration process.

## Technical in form; political in nature

While some elements of PAR are technical and bureaucratic, such as reform of civil service recruitment and management, policymaking procedures and administrative processes, as well as the digitalisation of public services, their implementation still requires political will. In addition, decisions on policy formation, the organisation of ministries and the functioning of the Cabinet of Ministers involve political and strategic choices, and are not mere technical adjustments.

The absence of sustained political commitment is an obstacle to progress on PAR in Ukraine, as demonstrated by the limited advances made on several reform initiatives, the uneven implementation of decisions of the Coordination Council on Public Administration Reform, and the redistribution of political responsibility for PAR.

The frequent reshuffling or merging of ministries without any capability assessment further illustrates the political nature of this problem. Structural changes are often driven by short-term political considerations or personnel decisions rather than by an evaluation of institutional effectiveness. As a result, even well-performing reforms risk becoming fragmented or unsustainable. Recent [assessments](#) by the OECD/SIGMA Programme and by the European Commission have highlighted the importance of stronger and more consistent political ownership of the reform process.

Finally, Ukraine's progress on PAR has thus far been confined to visible and politically safe areas, such as digital transformation and service delivery, while reforms targeting the internal policymaking capacity of the state have stagnated. The European Commission has [noted](#) that improvements in policymaking capacity, strategic planning and coordination across government institutions are less visible.

In sum, public administration reform is a strategic choice about the kind of state Ukraine is seeking to build – one capable of governing in a transparent, coordinated and accountable manner. The political commitment to deliver is still lacking.

## PAR and anti-corruption

A weak system of public administration directly undermines anti-corruption efforts. While Ukraine has invested significantly in building specialised anti-corruption institutions, the risk of corruption persists where public administration lacks transparency, clear procedures and professional human resource management processes.

Key elements of PAR, such as open recruitment, adequate remuneration, clear mandates and institutional autonomy, are essential anti-corruption safeguards. When competition for civil service positions is suspended or politicised, when appointments are discussed behind closed doors or when institutional responsibilities are blurred, opportunities for undue influence multiply.

Recent corruption scandals and discussions around ministerial appointments demonstrate how political interference in public administration fuels systemic risks. In such an environment, anti-corruption policy cannot be treated as a standalone reform. It must be embedded in a broader framework of public administration reform that ensures integrity, professionalism and accountability across the state apparatus.

For European stakeholders, this linkage is particularly important. Supporting anti-corruption initiatives without addressing the underlying weaknesses of public administration risks treating symptoms rather than causes. Strengthening PAR is a prerequisite for making anti-corruption policies effective and sustainable. It is also essential for attracting private sector investment to the country.

## The foundation of EU Integration

Ukraine has completed the screening process and entered a phase in its EU accession process that requires intensive legislative development, coordination across ministries and consistent implementation of the EU acquis. These tasks cannot be fulfilled effectively without a capable public administration.

EU integration is not only about adopting legislation; it requires the ability to draft quality laws, conduct meaningful consultations, coordinate across institutions and implement policies at the central, regional and local levels. Current shortcomings in policy formation and coordination pose a systemic risk to Ukraine's accession trajectory.

While digital transformation has delivered visible progress and positive [assessments](#) in certain areas, it is no substitute for the core functions of public administration. Digital tools are instruments, not foundations, of governance. Overreliance on digitalisation risks masking deeper institutional weaknesses, particularly in strategic planning and legislative coordination.

PAR constitutes the institutional infrastructure of EU accession. Without it, Ukraine's ability to meet its obligations in accession negotiations across all clusters will remain limited, regardless of political declarations or formal compliance efforts.

## From strategy to practice

Ukraine's public administration reform must shift from strategy-writing to practical implementation. One priority area will be to restore openness and competitiveness in civil service recruitment, including through adoption of the necessary legislative amendments to fully resume merit-based competitive selection procedures for civil service positions. Without transparent competition, the state cannot attract or retain the professional expertise required for accession-related work.

Improving policy formation and coordination within the government is equally crucial, including by strengthening institutional arrangements for policy development and strategic coordination within the Cabinet of Ministers and in line ministries. European partners could support these efforts by placing greater emphasis on policymaking capacity in their technical assistance programmes, and supporting reforms aimed at improving coordination and evidence-based decision making. Ministries must be evaluated not only on their political leadership, but also on their capacity to deliver complex EU-related legislative tasks. Ministerial reshuffles have highlighted the risks of prioritising political expediency over institutional effectiveness.

Consultation and communication processes also require a rethink. EU integration cannot be communicated solely through public messaging; it must involve substantive engagement with different levels of administration and affected stakeholders, including at the [local](#) level – particularly in technically complex policy areas such as agriculture or environmental regulation. Best practice in EU candidate countries has demonstrated the value of structured consultation platforms and sectoral working groups that bring together public authorities, local government, business representatives and civil society during preparation for and implementation of EU-related reforms. Similar platforms have been established in Ukraine but their functioning has varied in terms of levels of activity across policy areas, irregular meeting schedules and, in some cases, rather formalistic discussions.

## Functional audits of key ministries

One step in PAR implementation would be to initiate functional audits of the key ministries involved in the accession process. These audits would assess the mandates, internal structures, staffing needs and capacity of ministries to carry out accession-related tasks. The first ministry to go through such a functional audit could be the Ministry of Justice. Its responsibility for coordinating various complex and politically sensitive reforms in areas such as the rule of law and the functioning of democratic institutions makes this ministry central to the EU accession process.

Rather than attempting a comprehensive reform all at once, starting with functional audits would allow Ukraine to build a realistic picture of institutional capacity ministry by ministry. If public authorities lack the capacity to conduct such audits, Ukrainian civil society and analytical centres could initiate these assessments independently, provided that they receive political backing and access to information.

EU member states could support and engage in these audits by complementing existing local expertise with external technical assistance and sharing experience from EU administrations. European partners could also support civil society organisations capable of conducting such assessments, both through financial assistance and by facilitating dialogue with the Ukrainian authorities, thereby helping to identify systemic bottlenecks and promote practical institutional reforms in ministries involved in the accession process.

## Conclusion and recommendations

Paying insufficient attention to PAR or treating it as a mere box-ticking exercise risks undermining the entire accession process in the long run. By reframing PAR as a core reform that defines the state's capacity to govern, and by linking it explicitly to anti-corruption and EU accession outcomes, Ukraine and its European partners can refocus attention on the foundations of the country's readiness for membership: a professional, accountable and politically supported public administration. To advance PAR, the following steps are recommended to Ukrainian and European policymakers.

### ***For Ukraine***

1. Restore merit-based civil service recruitment by adopting the legislative amendments needed to fully relaunch open and competitive selection procedures for civil service positions.
2. Strengthen policymaking capacity and coordination within government, including clearer institutional arrangements for policy development and strategic coordination within the Cabinet of Ministers and in line ministries.
3. Conduct functional audits of the key ministries involved in the accession process to assess the mandates, internal structures, staffing needs and institutional capacity required to deliver EU-related tasks.
4. Strengthen structured consultation mechanisms by ensuring regular and substantive engagement with local authorities, sectoral stakeholders and civil society during the preparation and implementation of EU-related reforms.

### ***For European partners***

1. Prioritise public administration reform in EU assistance programmes and political dialogue with Ukraine, placing greater emphasis on policymaking capacity, institutional governance and coordination across government, including through consistent political messaging on the importance of PAR for the credibility of the EU accession process.
2. Align support for Ukraine's anti-corruption work within a more holistic framework for public administration reform, thereby strengthening preventive measures and proactively limiting systemic risks.
3. Support Ukrainian civil society and think tanks to conduct independent institutional assessments, including through financial support and facilitation of dialogue with the Ukrainian authorities.



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