

# Silent professionalization: EU integration and the professional socialization of public officials in Central and Eastern Europe

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## Abstract

This paper applies theories of international socialization to examine the impact of European Union contact on the professional socialization of public officials in Central and Eastern Europe. Based on a survey of officials in seven new member states, the paper finds that daily work on European Union issues is associated with favourable attitudes towards merit-based civil service governance. The distinction between types of European Union contact shows that officials dealing with ‘reception’-related European Union activities such as the transposition and implementation of European Union policies develop more meritocratic attitudes. By contrast, ‘projection’-related activities that involve personal contact with European Union officials have no effect. The paper concludes that the small but consistent impact of European Union contact on professional socialization promotes the silent professionalization of public administration in Central and Eastern Europe.

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## Keywords

Attitude change, Central and Eastern Europe, Europeanization, public administration, socialization

## Introduction

What is the impact of the European Union (EU) on the professionalization of public administration in Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs)? Research on the Europeanization of public administration in post-communist CEECs has long focused on the impact of EU conditionality (Camyar, 2010; Dimitrova, 2005). The development of administrative capacity was one of the conditions for EU membership (Dimitrova, 2002). Proponents of EU conditionality stress a considerable degree of formal institutional change such as the adoption and revision of civil service laws by CEEC governments (Dimitrova, 2005). In contrast, skeptics point to problems of ‘shallow Europeanization’ due to the failure of CEEC governments to properly implement the new formal rules (Goetz, 2005). Moreover, research into the post-accession sustainability of administrative reforms has identified risks of reform backsliding and the persistence of formal rules as ‘empty shells’ (Dimitrova, 2010; Fink-Hafner, 2014; Meyer-Sahling, 2011).

This article develops an alternative perspective on the relation between the EU and public administration in CEECs. It focuses on the effect of the EU on the professional socialization of public officials in CEECs. Specifically, we examine the effect of EU contact on the attitudes of public officials towards non-political, merit-based civil service governance.

The establishment of meritocratic civil service systems has been at the center of debates on the reform of public administration in CEECs. Both practitioners and academic research stress the importance of professional, depoliticized civil service systems for the successful implementation of EU policies at the national level and progress during the EU accession process (Falkner and Treib, 2008; Hille and Knill, 2006; The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 1999). More generally, the quality of a country’s bureaucracy – in particular, recruitment on merit and promotion of staff – is commonly regarded as essential for economic development, the successful consolidation of democracy and the curbing of public sector corruption (Dahlström et al., 2012; Evans and Rauch, 1999; Linz and Stepan, 1996).

Theoretically, our study builds on the insights of studies of international socialization (Checkel, 2005; Risse et al., 2013). In the European context, this research has examined the socializing impact of EU institutions on the attitudes of national and supranational officials towards modes of EU governance (Beyers, 2005, 2010; Hooghe, 2005, 2012).<sup>1</sup> In relation to third countries, theories of international socialization have been applied to study the impact of EU contact on democratic attitude change among state officials in the Southern neighborhood of the EU (Freyburg, 2011, 2015). For CEECs, the application of this body of theory has focused on democratic socialization in the context of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) enlargement (Flockhart, 2004; Gheciu, 2005).

Our article shifts the focus of attention to the relation between European integration and professional socialization in public administration, which we understand as a positive attitude change of public officials towards merit-based civil service governance generated through EU contact. Focusing on EU contact in the work context, we first examine the general EU influence on professional socialization by comparing public officials who deal with EU issues on a daily basis and those who do not. Subsequently, we examine the effect of different types of EU contact on the meritocratic attitudes of public officials in order to gain a better understanding of the mechanisms underlying EU-inspired professional socialization.

The empirical analysis is based on a survey of public officials employed in the central government ministries of seven CEECs that joined the EU in the context of the 2004 Eastern enlargement. The data set includes information regarding the careers, job activities and evaluation of different principles of civil service governance.

Our analysis shows that day-to-day work on EU issues has a small but consistent impact on the professional socialization of public officials. Looking more closely at the type of EU contact that matters for professional socialization, we find that the daily application of EU rules and procedures in the context of the transposition and implementation of EU policies (so-called reception-related EU activities) has a positive effect on attitudes towards merit-based civil service governance. In contrast, direct, interpersonal contact with officials from EU institutions and other member states (so-called projection-related EU activities) does not appear to affect officials' meritocratic attitudes.

The positive impact of EU contact on professional socialization provides an alternative perspective on the relation between the EU and public administration. Our study shifts the focus of attention from the level of formal rules to the level of attitudes and, in particular, from the level of countries to the level of individual public officials. It therefore opens the debate around the micro-foundations of the Europeanization of public administration in CEECs. Substantively, our findings raise the prospect that public officials develop more meritocratic attitudes as a result of bringing CEECs closer to the EU. Thanks to integration into the European Administrative Space, professional socialization thus presents the potential to promote the silent professionalization of public administration in CEECs.

## **The professional socialization of public officials in CEECs**

Mechanisms of socialization have remained largely unexplored in relation to the Europeanization of public administration in CEECs. Checkel (2005: 804) has defined socialization as 'a process of inducting actors into the norms and rules of a given community' (2005: 804). For him, the essence of socialization is a change in the logic of action from a logic of consequences to a logic of appropriateness. Checkel (2005) argues that this change can manifest itself in two ways.

First, type I socialization refers to role-playing when actors consciously accept the norms of behaviour associated with a given situation or position and behave accordingly. Role-playing assumes that actors know what is expected from them and they choose to behave in the appropriate way. Second, type II assumes deeper socialization, in that actors are persuaded by the 'rightness' of a norm associated with a given position. They do not question their behaviour in relation to the position nor do they need to think much about what is expected. Rather, the behavioural expectation has acquired 'taken-for-grantedness' (Checkel, 2005).

In this article, we are mainly interested in type I socialization, which is especially relevant for the context of public administration. When entering public administration, officials in most countries have to pass an entry examination, they receive induction training and will receive an introduction to their specific job responsibilities. Such training usually covers a range of general issues such as constitutional and administrative law, the budget process, civil service law and the rules and procedures within their own institution.

The steps and items covered during preparatory training aim to contribute to the professional socialization of officials into public administration, as they learn what is expected from them as civil servants in their institution and specifically within their position. Indeed, the very notion of 'induction' training neatly resonates with Checkel's (2005) definition of socialization provided above. As civil servants perform their job on a day-to-day basis, they are then expected to routinize the application of rules and procedures expected of them *qua* their position as a public official.

Throughout, it is not required that officials progress from type I to type II socialization and hence that they develop an emotional attachment to their job. It is sufficient that they understand the norms and rules associated with their job, accept them and behave in accordance with them. To paraphrase Checkel (2005) and Beyers (2005), they are merely required to play a role in their job.

The distinction between role-playing and internalization (type I and II socialization) is well captured by conceptions of socialization as attitude change, which has recently been introduced by Freyburg (2015) to the debate on international socialization. Social psychologists commonly distinguish an affective and a cognitive dimension of attitudes (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993; Smith and Mackie, 2007). Internalization, then, emphasizes affective attitude change, while role-playing merely requires change on the cognitive dimension of officials' attitudes. The latter implies that officials are subject to learning processes that expose them to new knowledge and subsequently lead to a change in attitudes as the outcome of socialization.

This understanding of socialization has implications for the conditions under which EU contact might contribute to the professional socialization of public officials in CEECs. First, we essentially define professional socialization as a positive change of attitudes towards the principle of merit-based civil service governance thanks to EU contact.

Second, we focus on professional socialization in the context of an official's day-to-day job. This means that we do not study professional socialization in the context of education and training prior to joining public administration, even though these might be important periods for the professional socialization of civil servants.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, we do not focus on EU initiatives to directly 'promote' the professionalization of public administration in new member states. The European Social Funds (ESFs) are a recent example here. Since the period 2007–2013, they include projects that aim to strengthen administrative capacity; for instance, via funding provided for the training of public sector employees. For the pre-accession period, we might refer to Twining as an instrument that came close to an external public administration professionalization program for CEECs (Papadimitriou and Phinnemore, 2004).

Our perspective differs in that we focus on EU-related professional socialization that might occur in the context of day-to-day activities. Specifically, we are interested in the effect of routine jobs that involve contact with the EU and have professional socialization as a by-product rather than an intentional consequence.

Third, our focus on the cognitive dimension of attitude change implies that for EU contact to have an effect on professional socialization, officials must have an opportunity to acquire new information that involves direct or indirect references to merit-based civil service governance. This condition is not easily met because the EU has no *acquis communautaire* on civil service management, which remains a prerogative of member states, and there are hence no EU directives and regulations that would stipulate the institutionalization of merit-based civil service governance in CEECs.

The question therefore arises how contact with the EU in the context of officials' day-to-day work provides information that would allow them to update their attitudes regarding personnel management. In the remainder of this section, we discuss two types of EU contact that involve references to the principle of merit-based civil service governance. The first type of contact focuses on information involved in handling EU rules and procedures. The second type of contact refers to information resulting from interpersonal contact with EU officials and colleagues from other EU member states. We will conclude the discussion with one general and two specific hypotheses on the impact of EU contact on professional socialization.

### *Two types of EU contact and their impact on meritocratic attitude change*

When looking more closely at the daily tasks of officials who work on EU policies, it quickly becomes evident that they do not merely deal with the substantive content of policies, but they also have to pay a great deal of attention to their procedural aspects. The concept of the European Administrative Space, for instance, implies that EU legislation embodies principles such as public administration based on the rule of law, legal accountability, transparency and efficiency, as well as basic principles of civil service governance such as impartiality, political

neutrality, openness and meritocratic recruitment and promotion (Hofmann, 2008; OECD, 1999; Trondal and Peters, 2013).<sup>3</sup>

The importance of the procedural dimension of the implementation of EU policies is recognized by studies of EU external governance (Freyburg et al., 2009). These studies emphasize the implications of EU contact stemming from regular work with EU directives for the transfer of democratic norms to non-member countries. Our article takes a similar perspective, in that we focus on the administrative dimension of the contact that national officials have with the EU *acquis*.

In the context of their job, officials first come into closer contact with European principles of public administration when they start working on EU issues; that is, when they are given their new job description. The job induction as provided by their superior gives the official new information that has the potential to lead to a change of attitude. The daily work on EU policies subsequently reinforces interaction with information that embodies principles associated with the European Administrative Space.

To be sure, EU legislation varies in the extent to which it has the potential to inform officials in relation to the appropriateness of meritocratic civil service management. In some cases, EU directives are fairly explicit. For instance, directives that address the establishment of regulatory bodies and the employment of inspectors tend to refer to the need for 'qualified staff', which resonates closely with the principle of meritocratic recruitment. More importantly for our argument, there are many directives that provide indirect cues for the appropriate methods of selection and promotion of staff. For instance, the EU's public procurement directives, which cut across the entire public administration of member states, clearly lay out the principles of equal treatment, transparency and non-discrimination to determine the award of contracts.<sup>4</sup>

Our argument assumes that officials will use this kind of information to update their evaluation of different approaches to personnel management. That is, officials are expected to make an inference from the appropriate selection of contracts in the area of procurement – as one high-profile example – to the appropriate management of personnel in public administration. As a consequence, it is not necessary for EU legislation to stipulate the principles of meritocratic recruitment and promotion, but it is a requirement that the execution of EU policies, even after transposition into national law, is based on principles that are compatible with merit-based civil service governance.

We further assume that the transmission of information supports change in the direction of more (rather than less) meritocratic attitudes. The bureaucratic hierarchy and the nature of the job description require officials to take in the new requirements of their day-to-day work. Officials also have an incentive to actively learn to operate the new rules, as the ability to do so is likely to affect their advancement in the job. Moreover, social psychologists refer to various mechanisms of attitude change including the 'repetition effect', which assumes that continuous exposure to a message will gradually lead to familiarization and hence an

updating of attitudes in accordance with the message (Cacioppo and Petty, 1979; Eagly and Chaiken, 1993). The continuous work on EU issues should therefore facilitate meritocratic attitude change and reinforce support among those who are already relatively meritocratic in their attitude profile.

Our second type of EU contact focuses on the experience of officials whose job involves regular personal contact and direct exchanges with EU officials and officials of other member states; for instance, in the context of participation in working group meetings organized by the European Commission and the Council (Beyers, 2005; Egeberg, 1999). The importance of interpersonal contact has been explored in studies of international socialization and European identity formation. Freyburg (2015), for instance, shows that participation in trans-governmental networks in the context of the EU's twinning program had an important effect on democratic attitude change among Moroccan state officials. In contrast, Sigalas (2010) examines the impact of interpersonal contact in the context of the ERASMUS student exchange program. He finds that participation in the exchange program does not promote identification with the EU. Instead, it even appears to reduce support for European integration.

Even if the impact of interpersonal contact may be contested, the 'contact hypothesis' suggests that officials whose job involves regular personal contact, communication and exchange with EU officials and officials from other member states might develop more favourable attitudes towards merit-based civil service governance than officials who lack this kind of contact. This expectation rests on the assumption that the information acquired via personal contacts with EU officials and officials from other member states in the context of bilateral coordination and participation at EU-level meetings entails references to professional standards in public administration. These references may consist of conversations about ways of doing things in public administration and simple observations about how public administration is managed at the EU level and in other member states.

Our two types of EU contact are well captured by the distinction between 'reception-' and 'projection'-related EU activities proposed by studies of the Europeanization of central government (Bulmer and Burch, 2009; Mastenbroek and Princen, 2010; Meyer-Sahling and van Stolk, 2015). 'Reception' is comparable to the notion of 'downloading' (Boerzel, 2002), in that member states transpose, implement and adapt to EU policies at the national level. In this regard, it primarily captures contact with EU rules and procedures in the context of officials' day-to-day job. Professional socialization then primarily takes place in the form of learning via interaction with formal rules and procedures that originate at the European level.

'Projection', by contrast, resonates closely with the notion of 'uploading' (Boerzel, 2002), which is associated with activities such as the preparation of national positions at the domestic level, the participation in EU-level decision making and the coordination of positions with other member states (Egeberg, 1999). Projection-related activities also involve a procedural dimension, but they differ from reception in that they further include a significant element of

interpersonal contact with EU officials and officials from other member states within the EU framework.

Summing up, we distinguish three hypotheses. The first hypothesis refers to the general impact of EU contact on the professional socialization of public officials in CEECs. It addresses the difference between officials who work on EU issues and officials who do not do so without considering the kind of EU-related work they are involved in. The second and the third hypotheses directly address the distinction between our two types of EU contact in order to identify which, if not both, of the two mechanisms matters more for EU-inspired professional socialization of officials.<sup>5</sup>

*H1:* Public officials demonstrate more favourable attitudes towards merit-based civil service governance if they work on EU policies ('EU work hypothesis').

*H2a:* Public officials demonstrate more favourable attitudes towards merit-based civil service governance, the more important reception-related EU activities are for their daily work ('EU reception hypothesis').

*H2b:* Public officials demonstrate more favourable attitudes towards merit-based civil service governance, the more important projection-related EU activities are for their daily work ('EU projection hypothesis').

## Data and operationalization

The empirical analysis relies on a survey of ministerial civil servants in CEECs that was designed by the authors on behalf of the SIGMA unit of the OECD (Meyer-Sahling, 2009). It was conducted in 2008 by the authors and generated 2586 responses from seven countries that joined the EU in 2004, namely: Estonia (384), Hungary (172), Latvia (300), Lithuania (203), Poland (427), Slovakia (743) and Slovenia (357).

The survey was conducted as a web-based survey in local languages. Hence it was difficult to control precisely which persons completed the survey. In order to minimize problems in relation to determining survey respondents, we adopted the same approach for the distribution of the survey in each country. In the context of a research mission to each country, we explained the purpose of the survey to the heads of central civil service management institutions. They distributed the survey link together with a short explanation to the responsible HR managers of eight preselected ministries, who were then asked to distribute the link to all civil servants employed in the core structure of their ministry. Based on the insights of studies of the Europeanization of central government (Mastenbroek and Princen, 2010), we included a mix of ministries that we expected to focus more or less on European policies.

The target of eight ministries was not reached in Hungary, while more than eight ministries were eventually included in Estonia, Latvia, Slovakia and Poland.

The differences largely result from the inability to perfectly control the distribution of the survey link. It is also impossible to specify the response rate, as it is not known how many civil servants were on the email list that was distributed within the ministries. However, checks against the size of ministries indicate that between 10 (Hungary) and 30 (Slovakia) percent of the staff employed in the targeted ministries completed the survey. In order to mitigate the effects of survey non-response, we collected personal and contextual data about the respondents and control for them in the statistical analyses.

The survey consists of items with regard to the personal background of civil servants, their attitudes towards various principles of civil service governance, and their contact with EU policy making and implementation. Responses were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale. In order to ensure that translations were accurate and that the meaning of survey statements was unambiguous, we relied on cognitive pretesting of the survey by local experts and representatives of civil service departments (or equivalent).

For the operationalization of the dependent variable, we rely on four items from the survey to derive an index of public officials' support for merit-based civil service governance. The items focus on (a) open competition such as the open advertisement of job vacancies, (b) the recruitment of the best and brightest candidates as a proxy for the principle of merit-based recruitment, (c) promotion on the basis of performance as an indicator of merit-based promotion and (d) the absence of political connections in determining promotion decisions to indicate the principle of depoliticization. The precise formulation of the questions can be found in Online Appendix 1.

The items were chosen based on their scalability. The survey included 24 questions that sought to capture the attitudes of respondents towards principles of civil service governance. We used Mokken's procedure to identify the scaling properties of these items (Mokken, 1971; van der Ark, 2007). The strongest scale includes the four items mentioned above. The scale has a high degree of concept validity, in that the four items are commonly regarded as essential for a non-political, merit-based civil service (Dahlström et al., 2012; Evans and Rauch, 1999).

We measure attitudes towards merit-based civil service governance on a standardized scale that was constructed from factor scores from an ordinal Item Response Theory model (Baker and Kim, 2004; Samejima, 1969) normalized to have a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. The dependent variable is therefore interpretable in terms of standard deviation units of meritocratic attitudes.

While the standardized scale eases the interpretation, it abstracts away an important insight: public officials are in general very favorably positioned towards merit-based civil service governance. A simple average of the four merit questions scored from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*) assigns the highest score of 3.62 to Hungary and the lowest score of 3.19 to Slovakia. This is in itself an important finding, as it has frequently been argued that (politicized and non-meritocratic) attitudes and 'mentalities' associated with the communist-type administration have

persisted in CEECs (Verheijen, 2010). Yet there is also considerable within-country variation, suggesting that there is information in the responses despite the possibility of officials responding in the 'socially desirable' manner to the survey questions.<sup>6</sup>

Online Appendix 2 shows the mean support for merit-based civil service governance values for the region as a whole and for the seven countries individually. They range from 0.52 in Hungary to -0.38 in Slovakia. The differences between countries are likely to account for a relatively large amount of attitudinal variation. These country differences also provide a baseline for the interpretation of effect sizes for the individual-level variables. Nevertheless, the contents of Online Appendix 2 should not be over-interpreted, as country samples differ in size and in the number and kind of ministries that are included in the analysis.

For the operationalization of the independent variables, we concentrate on individual-level data taken from the same survey. These are: whether or not an official's work is affected by the EU and, for those where it is, the importance they attach to 'projection' versus 'reception' activities. The first question was deliberately kept broad in order to distinguish officials who do not deal with EU issues from those who do (regardless of the amount of time involved). Overall, 53% of the respondents answered positively, though this varied from 40% in Slovenia to 62% in Estonia.

In order to examine the projection and reception hypotheses, we constructed two additional indices based on six items from the survey. These questions were only answered by the subset of respondents who first answered 'yes' to the question about whether the EU affects their work. The sample for the assessment of this hypothesis is hence smaller (1375). Officials were asked to rank the influence of the EU on their tasks from very unimportant to very important, and responses demonstrated that officials attach different degrees of importance to these kinds of activities. The projection index includes items that provide an opportunity for public officials to engage in direct, interpersonal contact with officials from the EU and other member states. The items refer to the preparation of national input for EU-level meetings, participation in meetings organized by the European Commission and the Council and consultation with public officials from other EU member states in the context of the EU framework.

The reception index also consists of three items, which focus on procedural aspects of policy making and implementation at the domestic level. They refer to the transposition of EU policies into national legislation, the practical application and enforcement of rules that originate at the EU level, and, generally, the need to take EU policies into account at the level of national policy making and implementation. Again, we used Mokken's (1971) procedure to check the scalability of the items and constructed two measures capturing the type of EU contact, normalizing Item Response Theory (IRT) factor scores as before.

In order to control for factors that may have influenced sample selection and to improve the precision of our analysis by modeling other factors that might affect meritocratic attitudes, we control for the sex and the age of officials, whether they

have managerial responsibilities and how many years of experience they have in public administration. The latter, like many of the control variables, is measured in bands. For these, the results below show the dummy variable formulations in accordance with the categories that were provided by the survey, except the level of education, for which we reduced the number of categories. While the survey distinguishes whether a degree program has been completed or merely started but not completed, we assume here that a respondent's experience at each level of education is the relevant causal factor rather than the attainment of the degree itself. We therefore code officials who completed and those who started, but did not finish a degree in the same category.

We also include the number of West European foreign languages that respondents know well enough to be able to work in as a control variable. In the survey, these are restricted to English, French, German, Italian and Spanish. The number of working languages is intended to capture the increased possibility of or actual exposure to other, perhaps more meritocratic working practices, alongside accessibility to Western public policy debates and to West European media in general (for reference, see Freyburg, 2015; Kern and Hainmueller, 2009).

We further control for education at a foreign university. The impact of study abroad is subject to debate in studies of democratic socialization (Atkinson, 2010; Freyburg, 2015). In our context, it is conceivable that study abroad, particularly at Western European universities as the main destination of students from CEECs, has brought officials into contact with a potentially more meritocratic culture before they entered public administration. For the analysis, we used a survey question that asks whether or not a public official has studied abroad. The question does not distinguish the country in which the respondent studied and therefore merely provides a proxy for contact with Western culture during their university education – and hence the potential for EU-related socialization before embarking on a career in public administration.

Finally, as indicated above, the effects of country and ministerial working context are likely to be considerable. This control takes into account the findings of studies of European socialization (Beyers, 2005; Hooghe, 2005, 2012). Sectoral factors might include policy types and support through EU assistance projects such as the twinning program in the years before accession (Papadimitriou and Phinnemore, 2004). Country-level factors include national administrative traditions, the structure and content of civil service laws and the structure of political competition (Grzymała-Busse, 2007; Neshkova and Kostadinova, 2012; Painter and Peters, 2010). Since the primary focus of our study is the effect of EU work on meritocratic attitudes at the level of individual officials, we do not explicitly model country- or sector-level features, but instead model them as fixed effects. Moreover, because the number of countries included in the analysis is relatively small, it would be difficult to make meaningful generalizations at the country level. This also explains why we did not use a multilevel perspective for our analysis. Finally, the survey contains selective non-response, leaving up to 10% of some variables missing.<sup>7</sup>

**Table 1.** Impact of daily EU work on support for merit-based civil service governance.

		Model 1	Model 2
EU work		0.16*** (0.04)	0.20*** (0.05)
Time in public administration	1–2 years	0.23*** (0.08)	
	3–5 years	0.14* (0.07)	
	6–10 years	0.07 (0.08)	
	11–15 years	0.04 (0.09)	
	More than 15 years	0.05 (0.09)	
Manager		0.04 (0.05)	
Education	Professional	0.17 (0.20)	
	BA	0.10 (0.14)	
	MA	0.28* (0.14)	
	PhD	0.25 (0.15)	
	Other	–0.04 (0.14)	
Educated abroad		0.03 (0.05)	
Languages		0.02 (0.03)	
Age	21–30	–0.05 (0.31)	
	31–40	–0.04 (0.32)	
	41–50	–0.06 (0.32)	
	51–60	–0.02 (0.32)	
	Over 60	–0.01 (0.34)	
Female		0.06 (0.04)	
R <sup>2</sup>		0.13	
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>		0.11	
Num. obs.		2586	2586

Note: Two models of the effect of working on the EU on meritocratic attitudes. Model 1 is a linear regression model with fixed effects. Model 2 is a matching analysis using propensity scores and targeting the average treatment effect. Standard errors are from Abadie and Imbens (2006).

\* $p < 0.05$ . \*\* $p < 0.01$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

EU: European Union.

## Results

Table 1 shows the results of fixed effects regressions predicting officials' levels of support for non-political, merit-based civil service governance. The models enter the categorical questions as dummy variables. The baseline categories for time in public administration, age and educational level variables are subjects who 'have been in place for less than one year', are 'under 21' and whose highest level of educational attainment is 'finishing high school', respectively.

The models provide evidence for the assessment of our three hypotheses. Models 1 and 2 address the effect of daily work on any kind of EU issue on officials' meritocratic attitudes. Working on the EU is reliably associated with increased levels of support for merit-based civil service governance. If the combination of fixed effects for country and institutional contexts and individual covariates is sufficient to remove or mitigate confounding, we can interpret the positive coefficient of EU work as being its effect on meritocratic attitudes. Table 1 summarizes the estimated effects of EU work.

In model 2, we attempt both to reduce regression misspecification and to balance covariates by applying a matching analysis using propensity scores (Ho et al., 2007).<sup>8</sup> These scores are taken from the specification shown as model 5 (Table 3), which we discuss further below.<sup>9</sup> In addition to providing another more flexibly specified estimate of the average treatment effect, matching allows us to distinguish the effect of EU contact on officials who would have been candidates for working on EU matters, whether or not they in fact did so – the average effect of treatment on the treated (ATT); and also the effect on those who would likely not have worked on the EU, whether or not they did so – the average effect of treatment on the untreated or 'control group' (ATC). While the three effect estimates suggest that those initially more likely to work on the EU exhibit slightly larger effects than those unlikely to do so, these are not statistically reliable differences. In all cases, the matching estimates are consistent with those of the regression models.

In addition, models 1 and 2 show that experience in public administration is associated with more meritocratic attitudes. Officials who have between one and five years of service have more meritocratic attitudes relative to those who have been in service for less than one year. This suggests that professional socialization takes place in the early years after joining public administration.

Table 1 further shows that officials with six and more years of experience in public administration do not have more meritocratic attitudes than officials with less than one year of experience. We can only speculate here why this group appears to be less supportive of merit-based civil service governance. However, most officials from this cohort effectively joined the administration in the early 2000s and earlier, i.e. before civil service laws were either passed or brought into line with European principles (Dimitrova, 2005). Hence they were not exposed to merit-promoting information in the initial phase after recruitment. While plausible, we would need more and other data to substantiate this kind of cohort argument.

Models 3 and 4, shown in Table 2, test how different types of EU work affect the attitudes of officials towards merit-based civil service governance. When distinguishing projection- from reception-related EU activities, the models show that only reception is associated with meritocratic attitudes. Like meritocratic attitudes, projection- and reception-related activities are constructed using normalized scores. Model 3 therefore suggests that a one standard deviation change in how important reception-related activities is associated on average with a little under a 10th of standard deviation change in meritocratic attitudes. This effect is small but reliable.

**Table 2.** Impact of two types of EU contact on support for merit-based civil service governance.

		Model 3	Model 4
EU work	Projection	0.00 (0.03)	
	Reception		0.08*** (0.03)
Time in public administration	1–2 years	0.28*** (0.10)	0.28*** (0.10)
	3–5 years	0.21* (0.09)	0.20* (0.09)
	6–10 years	0.12 (0.10)	0.10 (0.10)
	11–15 years	0.19 (0.12)	0.18 (0.12)
	More than 15 years	0.13 (0.13)	0.11 (0.13)
Manager		0.05 (0.06)	0.04 (0.06)
Education	Professional	0.25 (0.43)	0.24 (0.42)
	BA	0.12 (0.25)	0.07 (0.25)
	MA	0.38 (0.25)	0.33 (0.25)
	PhD	0.34 (0.26)	0.28 (0.26)
	Other	0.07 (0.26)	0.02 (0.26)
Educated abroad		0.04 (0.06)	0.05 (0.06)
Languages		0.02 (0.04)	0.02 (0.04)
Age	21–30	–1.28 (0.68)	–1.20 (0.68)
	31–40	–1.32 (0.69)	–1.24 (0.68)
	41–50	–1.48* (0.69)	–1.41* (0.69)
	51–60	–1.35 (0.69)	–1.28 (0.69)
	Over 60	–1.34 (0.70)	–1.29 (0.70)
Female		0.02 (0.05)	0.01 (0.05)
R <sup>2</sup>		0.12	0.13
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>		0.10	0.10
Num. obs.		1375	1375

Note: Two models of the effect of the importance of projection or reception activities on meritocratic attitudes for those respondents working on the EU.

\* $p < 0.05$ . \*\* $p < 0.01$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

EU: European Union.

At first glance, this finding might be surprising. However, it is plausible when one considers the nature of the information that officials are exposed to. In the case of reception-related work, the contact of officials with the EU is primarily based on rules and procedures. The information is highly formalistic. In many respects, it is selective and formulated as an instruction that officials are supposed to learn and follow.

In contrast, officials who work on projection-related issues are likely to have access to more, and conceivably also more critical and more diverse, information.

**Table 3.** Propensity to work on EU issues.

		Model 5
Time in public administration	1–2 years	0.04 (0.04)
	3–5 years	0.07 (0.03)
	6–10 years	0.06 (0.04)
	11–15 years	0.08 (0.04)
	More than 15 years	0.12** (0.04)
Manager		0.09*** (0.02)
Education	Professional	–0.14 (0.09)
	BA	0.05 (0.06)
	MA	0.16** (0.06)
	PhD	0.27*** (0.07)
	Other	0.10 (0.07)
Educated abroad		0.09*** (0.03)
Languages		0.11*** (0.01)
Age	21–30	0.12 (0.15)
	31–40	0.14 (0.15)
	41–50	0.12 (0.15)
	51–60	0.04 (0.16)
	Over 60	0.08 (0.16)
Female		–0.09*** (0.02)
$R^2$		0.13
Adj. $R^2$		0.12
Num. obs.		2586

Note: Propensity score model predicting whether a respondent works on EU matters. In this linear model (Angrist and Pischke, 2008), coefficients are interpretable directly as predicted increase in the probability of working on the EU for a one unit change in independent variable. Results do not differ with logit or probit specifications.

\* $p < 0.05$ . \*\* $p < 0.01$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

EU: European Union.

Even when taking into account a highly structured work context such as the EU, personal relations with EU officials inevitably involve informal exchanges that might not always fit the expectations associated with formal rules and procedures. Personal relations with colleagues will also provide information with regards to the diversity of administrative practices across EU member states. Moreover, officials are expected to negotiate and hence question rules and procedures in meetings at the EU level rather than merely follow them.

Models 3 and 4 also support the role of experience in public administration as an additional individual-level determinant of support for merit-based civil service governance. At the same time, these two models suggest that formal education,

knowledge of foreign languages and education at a foreign university are not significant predictors of meritocratic attitudes.

If we consider the propensity score model (model 5) used to compute the estimates in model 2, then the role of these individual-level covariates becomes clearer. Table 3 shows that officials with a masters or a PhD, officials who have studied abroad, and officials who know a greater number of foreign languages are more likely to work on EU issues. Further, Table 3 shows that female officials are less likely, while those at a managerial level are more likely, to deal with EU issues.

These results are consistent with a two-part explanation of meritocratic attitude change: Initially, officials select themselves or are selected for EU work on the basis of their abilities. When in post, a subset of these abilities moderates the effects of contact with EU rules and procedures. On this account, model 5 suggests that in order to be selected for work on EU issues, a high level of educational attainment, study abroad and a working foreign language are all important. Once an official then starts to work on EU topics, more causally proximate information related to day-to-day EU contact contributes to the development of meritocratic attitudes as examined in models 1 to 4.

Clearly, we cannot confirm the details of this interpretation without longitudinal information such as panel data. However, the account appears theoretically reasonable and the data are sufficient to demonstrate a significant and positive association between working on EU matters and favourable attitudes towards merit-based civil service governance.

## Conclusion

This article has examined the impact of EU contact on professional socialization in CEECs. It has concentrated on public officials' change of attitude towards merit-based civil service governance. Based on a survey of ministerial officials in seven CEECs, our analysis has shown that daily work on EU issues is associated with more meritocratic attitudes. The analysis has further shown that officials who work on so-called reception-related EU activities involving the transposition and implementation of EU policies at the domestic level are more supportive of merit-based civil service governance.

We did not find consistent support for the hypothesis that regular personal contact with EU officials and officials from member states – for instance, in the context of regular participation in Council and Commission working groups at the EU level (i.e. so-called projection-related activities) – are associated with more meritocratic attitudes. However, for the prospects of professional socialization in response to EU contact, this finding need not be taken to imply bad news, because a much larger proportion of officials tends to work on reception-related activities compared to projection-related activities; the latter usually being performed by a minority of officials.<sup>10</sup> As public administrations of CEECs are integrated into the European Administrative Space, we should therefore expect the professionalization of staff attitudes steadily and silently to increase.

Our findings complement studies of democratic socialization in the European neighbourhood: While we confirm a positive effect of EU contact, we do not find support for the argument that regular interaction with officials from the EU and its member states promotes attitude change (Freyburg, 2011, 2015). However, these studies focus on interpersonal contact in the context of EU twinning projects. The contact is hence project based, takes place 'at home' (i.e. mainly in the recipient country rather than in Brussels), and the advisory role of officials from EU member states in relation to officials of non-member states tends to imply a teacher/tutor–pupil/student relation (for details see Freyburg, 2015). The context of interpersonal contact in studies of democratic socialization in the European neighbourhood therefore differs in important respects from the kind of contact that projection-oriented officials experience in our study. In fact, the context of twinning projects shares many features with our understanding of reception-related activities, though evidently extended by an element of personal contact with officials from EU member states.

While the analysis has confirmed a positive effect of EU contact on professional socialization of public officials in CEECs, we must recognize that the effect is fairly small. Moreover, it is difficult to say how long it takes for public officials to take on more meritocratic attitudes in response to EU exposure, and whether they persist once they have been acquired. The separate analysis of the impact of experience in public administration suggests that public officials change their attitudes within a relatively short period of time after joining the civil service. If the same logic applies to the impact of EU contact, one might expect a positive but small impact within a relatively short period of working on EU issues.

The positive impact of EU contact on the professional socialization of officials comes with a number of qualifications. While knowledge of attitudes towards public administration provides important cues with regard to administrative behaviour, favourable attitudes towards merit-based civil service governance do not necessarily imply that management practices are equally meritocratic. Studies of state transformation in CEECs routinely refer to persisting problems of party patronage and state exploitation (Grzymala-Busse, 2007; Kopecky and Spirova, 2011). Yet the focus on attitudes indicates that public officials are generally very supportive of merit-based civil service governance. This implies support from public officials for administrative reforms that seek to institutionalize the merit principle further. However, the relation between officials' attitudes and management practices is an area that requires more empirical research in the future.

It also remains to be seen to what extent the socializing role of the EU is similar for other regions and to what extent we might be able to attribute a similar effect to other international organizations. The research on EU external governance mentioned above suggests that one might expect similar patterns of EU-induced professional socialization for candidate and potential candidate states from the Western Balkans and possibly also countries in the Eastern and Southern neighborhood. For the old member states, there has been much emphasis on the

resilience of public administration due to the strength of administrative traditions and national institutions (e.g. Knill, 2001). In CEECs, administrative traditions tend to be less entrenched (Meyer-Sahling and Yesilkagit, 2010; Zubek and Staronova, 2012). Public administration in CEECs might therefore be more receptive to the socializing influence of the EU than it is in the old member states. However, whether or not the EU has a differential effect on the professional socialization of public officials will have to be the subject of future research.

Future research might also want to examine the extent to which the socializing effect of the EU differs from that of other international organizations. NATO enlargement, for instance, has been studied with regards to democratic socialization (Gheciu, 2005), but it remains to be seen whether a similar effect can be identified for the professional socialization of officials such as the civilian staff of defense ministries. The scope of NATO exposure is much smaller than for the EU, as a result of which we might find pockets of professionalization as long as we can identify similar mechanisms of socialization through contact with rules and procedures stemming from NATO membership. Similar questions might be asked for the impact of other international organizations such as the OECD and the World Trade Organization. While smaller in scope and potentially different in mechanism, it will be a matter of future research to assess their impact on the professional socialization of public officials in CEECs and elsewhere.

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### **Notes**

1. Egeberg (1999) and Trondal et al. (2008) also broadly fall into this strand of research.
2. The role of pre-socialization has received plenty of attention in studies of European socialization (Beyers, 2005; Hooghe, 2005, 2012).
3. The meaning of European Administrative Space (EAS) remains subject to debate. Trondal and Peters (2013: 295) refer to EAS as the 'institutionalization of common administrative capacity at a European level'. It includes the 'co-optation' of administrative sub-centers, including national administrations, into a 'multi-level, nested network administration'. This formulation is compatible with our focus on legal principles, rules and regulations that originate at the European level and from interaction between the administrations of EU member states.
4. For details, see Directives 2004/17/EC and 2004/18/EC. They have recently been revised (2014) and will have to be transposed by member states. The change does not affect the argument developed in this paper.

5. Our hypotheses concentrate on the impact of ‘types’ rather than the ‘degree’ of EU contact on professional socialization. The focus takes into account findings by Beyers (2005, 2010) who examined in detail the impact of the intensity, duration and frequency of EU contact. He concluded that the quality rather than quantity of contact matters for socialization.
6. We acknowledge that responses may be upwardly biased for reasons of social desirability. However, it should be noted, first, that answers differ considerably both within and across countries and second, that our effects depend only upon this variation and not its absolute level. Moreover, while we see contextual variation in response levels, our fixed effects prevent these from affecting our overall socialization effect estimates (see also below).
7. In the analyses, missing data were imputed using the Amelia II software for R (King et al., 2001) and quantities of interest are reported by combining estimates from five imputed datasets according to Rubin (1987).
8. The *matching* package for R (Sekhon, 2011) was used for the analysis.
9. For model 2, separate propensity score models are estimated for each of the multiply imputed data sets and only the final estimates are combined.
10. For details, see Mastenbroek and Princen (2010) and Meyer-Sahling and van Stolk (2015).

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