



Analysis of Public Administration Reforms in Candidate and Potential Candidate Countries in the 2024 European Union Country Reports

2024 Avrupa Birliği Ülke Raporlarında Aday ve Potansiyel Aday Ülkelerin Kamu Yönetimi Reformları Üzerine Bir İnceleme

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the Public Administration Reforms of candidate and potential candidate countries by analyzing the 2024 European Union (EU) Country Reports. Methodologically, after addressing Public Administration Reforms and EU Country Reports, the progress of these countries was analyzed using content analysis and thematic analysis. To facilitate a comparative understanding of the analysis among countries, quantification was employed at multiple scales. The quantified findings indicate that Albania, Georgia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Ukraine have progress levels above the average, Bosnia and Herzegovina is at an average level, while Kosovo, Moldova, Serbia, and Türkiye are below the average. Additionally, the most common criticism directed at these countries pertains to meritocracy, and it is recommended that they implement regulations to eliminate nepotistic practices in recruitment, promotion, and employment rights.

Keywords: European Union, Public Administration Reform, Country Reports, Candidate Countries, Potential Candidate Countries.

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ÖZ

Bu çalışma, Avrupa Birliği (AB) 2024 ülke raporları ele alınarak, aday ve potansiyel ülkelerin Kamu Yönetimi Reformlarını incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Metodolojik olarak Kamu Yönetimi Reformu ve AB Ülke Raporlarına yer verildikten sonra ülkelerin ilerleme içerik analizi ve tematik analiz ile incelenmiştir. Ülkeler arasında komparatif olarak analizin daha kolay anlaşılabilmesi için birçok ölçekte sayısallaştırma yoluna gidilmiştir. Sayısallaştırılan bulgular sonucunda Arnavutluk, Gürcistan, Karadağ, Kuzey Makedonya ve Ukrayna'nın ilerleme durumunun ortalamanın üstünde olduğu, Bosna Hersek'in ortalama düzeyde olduğu ve Kosova, Moldova, Sırbistan ve Türkiye'nin ortalamanın altında olduğu saptanmıştır. Ayrıca ülkelere en fazla yapılan eleştirinin liyakat üzerine olduğu ve ülkelerin işe alma, terfi ve özlük hakları gibi konularda nepotik uygulamaları ortadan kaldıracak düzenlemeleri hayata geçirmeleri önerilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Avrupa Birliği, Kamu Yönetimi Reformu, Ülke Raporları, Aday Ülkeler, Potansiyel Aday Ülkeler.

1. INTRODUCTION

The European Commission publishes annual reports for both member states and candidate or potential candidate countries. These reports serve as a crucial tool for analyzing the status of countries from various perspectives. For countries applying for European Union (EU) membership, these reports hold particular significance as they shed light on the level of progress made or deficiencies identified on their path to EU accession. Additionally, they provide recommendations for addressing areas perceived as weaknesses in candidate and potential candidate countries. These reports, accessible to individuals at all levels, are published annually. In this study, Public Administration Reforms highlighted in these reports are examined specifically for candidate and potential candidate countries.

The subject of Public Administration Reforms holds substantial importance for EU membership. In this context, the European Commission annually evaluates the status of candidate and potential candidate countries regarding their Public Administration Reforms. As the EU operates as a supranational institution, it expects member states to achieve progress in various domains. Within this framework, the concept of public administration, which reflects the functioning of a state, emerges as a critical area of focus.

This study aims to analyze the Public Administration Reforms of nine candidate countries and one potential candidate country aspiring for EU membership in 2024. To achieve this, the concept of Public Administration Reform will first be explained, followed by an overview of the EU Country Reports. Subsequently, the status of candidate and potential candidate countries regarding Public Administration Reforms will be analyzed in detail.

In this context, the main question of the study is: To what extent have candidate and potential candidate countries implemented public administration reforms? In addition to this main question, the study will seek to determine which countries are above average, which countries are at a moderate level, and which countries are below average. Furthermore, the study will aim to identify the concept in which countries most require reform.

2. REFORM IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND EU COUNTRY REPORTS

2.1. Reform in Public Administration

Reform in public administration is as old as human history itself. Humans have historically organized themselves collaboratively to meet certain needs, creating structures that range from the family, the fundamental unit of society, to the state, the highest legitimate authority within a community. The state occupies a central position as the ultimate legitimate power, resolving disputes within society, producing, and managing public services. This legitimacy stems from individuals relinquishing their sovereignty to form a collective mechanism for governance and social order.

Public administration, as an extension of the state, operates under the executive branch, organized according to its policies, principles, and guidelines. It consists of public officials tasked with executing the duties assigned to them. The core function of public administration is to address the needs of society effectively and to deliver public services to citizens using the most appropriate methods. To achieve these goals, public administration must continuously renew itself. In this context, adapting to changing circumstances through reform becomes an inevitable process (Önen and Ozan, 2021, p. 522).

Several concepts are central to the discourse on public administration reform. These include privatization, deregulation, transparency, accountability, rationality, oversight, efficiency, governance, decentralization, merit, participation, professionalism, digitalization, and similar principles. In the context of this study, candidate and potential candidate countries for EU membership are examined through the lens of specific concepts such as merit, transparency, accountability, effectiveness-efficiency, participation, professionalism, reform, digitalization and supervision.

2.2. EU Country Reports

Country Reports are documents designed to assess candidate countries aspiring for EU membership based on pre-established criteria. These reports outline deficiencies, necessary reforms, and advancements in various areas. Published annually, they provide a comprehensive evaluation of the preceding year. However, as unilateral documents, Country Reports reflect only the perspectives and views of the EU (Karluk, 2003, p. 50).

Country Reports are annual documents prepared by the European Commission to evaluate the progress and shortcomings of candidate countries in aligning with the EU acquis. The Commission relies on information gathered from a wide range of sources, including EU Delegations in candidate countries, public institutions, civil society organizations, and other relevant entities, to compile these reports (Güngör, 2019, p. 79).

These reports have undergone several name changes over the years. Until 2005, they were published as "Regular Progress Reports," transitioning to "Progress Reports" until 2015, and have since been referred to as "Country Reports." For example, titles include "Turkey Regular Progress Report 2004", "Turkey 2014 Progress Report" and "Türkiye 2024 Report".

As of the date of this study, there are nine candidate countries and one potential candidate country for EU membership. The candidate countries are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Türkiye, and Ukraine, while Kosovo holds potential candidate status. Albania was granted candidate status in 2014 (Güner, 2020b, p. 166), Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2022 (D'urso and Vetrini, 2023, p. 4), Georgia in 2023 (European Commission, 2024c, p. 3), Moldova in 2022 (Bardakçı, 2024, p. 957), Montenegro in 2010 (Paralı, 2023, p. 89), North Macedonia in 2005 (Güner, 2020a, p. 11), Serbia in 2012 (Akçay, 2016, p. 74), Türkiye in 1999 (Uysal, 2001, p. 150), and Ukraine in

2022 (Atatorun and Veziroğlu, 2024, p. 24). Kosovo was granted potential candidate status in 2008 (Suluk, Büyüksarıkulak and Afşar, 2022, p. 178). In 2024, the European Commission published Country Reports for these ten countries. These reports cover 35 chapters, providing detailed analyses on a wide range of topics, from energy policy to fisheries and aquaculture. Public Administration Reforms, as one of the foundational principles of the accession process, is a key focus of the Commission. Within this context, the reports evaluate the progress and challenges of candidate and potential candidate countries. This study seeks to analyze the status of these countries in light of the findings presented in the reports.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study is a qualitative research. According to Yıldırım and Şimşek (2006), qualitative research is defined as a type of study in which qualitative data collection methods such as observation, interviews, and document analysis are used, and in which a qualitative process is followed to realistically and holistically present perceptions and events in their natural environment. In this study, content analysis will be employed as the method to answer the research question: to what extent have candidate and potential candidate countries implemented Public Administration Reforms within the EU accession process? Although this study is qualitative, content analysis can be used in both qualitative and quantitative research. By using the content analysis technique, the researcher can objectively analyze the content of selected texts, documents, and themes within certain rules. Content analysis is employed to provide an objective, measurable, and verifiable description of the explicit content of communications (Fiske, 1996, p. 176). It is a research method commonly used in social sciences and a research technique that aligns with this method (Aziz, 1990, p. 105). This study will also adopt this approach.

The EU Country Reports will be analyzed through content analysis. Methodologically, after providing general information on the concept of Public Administration Reforms and the EU Country Reports, the country reports published by the EU in 2024 for candidate and potential candidate countries will be examined in terms of Public Administration Reforms. The evaluation scales and progress status of countries have been quantified to provide clarity on their current state. Data scoring enables the researcher to convert available information into numerical values, facilitating a more comprehensive analysis (Creswell, 2020, p. 229). This process is referred to as scaling. Through the scaling method, the status of countries has been quantified, aiming to determine which candidate and potential candidate countries are performing at an average level, which are below average, and which are above average in terms of Public Administration Reforms. This quantification method has been structured in two different ways: from 1 to 5 and from -1 to 4, revealing two distinct conditions of the countries.

Subsequently, thematic analysis has been conducted. Thematic analysis is a method used to systematically organize, interpret, and make sense of qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78). In this context, eight themes have been identified, which are as follows: Merit, Transparency, Accountability, Effectiveness and Efficiency, Participation, Reform, Digitalization, and Supervision. An attempt has been made to analyze which of these themes appear in the country reports and to determine in which areas countries most require public administration reform.

4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

In this section, data will be shared to enable the analysis necessary to reveal the study's objective. These data have been tabulated.

Table 1 presents the Assessment Scales (Early Stage, Some Level of Preparation, Moderately Prepared, and Good Level of Preparation) and Progress Statuses (Backsliding, No Progress, Limited Progress, Some Progress, Good Progress, and Very Good Progress) concerning the countries.

Table 1. Evaluation Scales and Progress Status of Countries

Countries	Assesment Scale	Progress Status
Albania	Moderately Prepared	Limited Progress
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Between an Early Stage and Some Level of Preparation	Some Progress
Georgia	Moderately Prepared	Limited Progress
Montenegro	Moderately Prepared	Limited Progress
Kosovo	Some Level of Preparation	Limited Progress
North Macedonia	Moderately Prepared	Limited Progress
Moldova	Some Level of Preparation	Some Progress
Serbia	Moderately Prepared	No Progress
Türkiye	Having Some Level of Preparation and a Moderate Level of Preparation	No Progress
Ukraine	Some Level of Preparation	Some Progress

Source: European Commission (2024a; 2024b; 2024c; 2024d; 2024e; 2024f; 2024g; 2024h; 2024i; 2024j)

In Table 2, the scoring of the Assessment Scales (Early Stage, Some Level of Preparation, Moderately Prepared, and Good Level of Preparation) has been conducted on a scale from 1 to 5.

Table 2. Evaluation Scales and Corresponding Scores

Assessment Scale	Points
Early Stage	1 Points
Some Level of Preparation	2 Points
Moderately Prepared	3 Points
Good Level of Preparation	4 Points
Well Advanced	5 Points

In Table 3, the Progress Statuses (Backsliding, No Progress, Limited Progress, Some Progress, Good Progress, Very Good Progress) have been scored on a scale from -1 to 4.

Table 3. Progress Status and Corresponding Scores

Progress	Points
Backsliding	-1 Points
No Progress	0 Points
Limited Progress	1 Points
Some Progress	2 Points
Good Progress	3 Points
Very Good Progress	4 Points

In this context, the final scores obtained by countries as a result of the related quantifications are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Countries and Their Scores

Countries	Total Points
Albania	4 Points
Bosnia and Herzegovina	3.5 Points
Georgia	4 Points
Montenegro	4 Points
Kosovo	3 Points
North Macedonia	4 Points
Moldova	3 Points
Serbia	3 Points
Türkiye	2.5 Points
Ukraine	4 Points

The highest possible score is 9, while the average score is 3.5. Countries scoring above the average include Albania, Georgia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Ukraine. Bosnia and Herzegovina falls within the average range, whereas Kosovo, Moldova, Serbia, and Türkiye score below the average.

Within the scope of the study, the concepts referenced in the relevant reports and the evaluations of countries based on the principles of Public Administration Reforms are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Public Administration Reform Concepts and Countries

Public Administration Reforms / Candidate and Potential Candidate Countries¹	AL	BA	GE	ME	XK	MK	MD	RS	TR	UA
Merit	X	X		X	X		X	X	X	X
Transparency			X	X				X		
Accountability	X		X			X				
Effectiveness and Efficiency	X		X					X		
Participation		X					X			
Reform	X				X	X	X		X	X
Digitalization					X	X				X
Supervision			X							

Among the principles examined, the greatest deficiency in candidate and potential candidate countries is observed in the principle of merit. Following merit, the principle of reform is the next most significant area of weakness. In this context, improvements and regulations are needed in areas such as recruitment, promotion, advancement, and employment rights. Corrupt practices such as nepotism, favoritism, and cronyism must be eradicated.

On the other hand, the principle of participation emerges as the least criticized, followed by the principle of supervision. Despite receiving less emphasis, the development of participation and supervision principles remains necessary.

In each report it publishes, the Commission provides recommendations for improving specific categories and shares information on whether the previous year's recommendations have been implemented. The implementation status (not implemented, not fully implemented, partially implemented) of countries in applying recommendations from the previous year is presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Implementation Status of Recommendations Compared to the Previous Year

Countries	Implementation Status of Recommendations Compared to the Previous Year
Albania	Partially Implemented

¹ AL: Albania, BA: Bosnia and Herzegovina, GE: Georgia, ME: Montenegro, XK: Kosovo, MK: North Macedonia, MD: Moldova, RS: Serbia, TR: Türkiye, UA: Ukraine.

Bosnia and Herzegovina	Partially Implemented
Georgia	Partially Implemented
Montenegro	Partially Implemented
Kosovo	Not Implemented
North Macedonia	Not Fully Implemented
Moldova	Partially Implemented
Serbia	Not Implemented
Türkiye	Not Implemented
Ukraine	Partially Implemented

As observed in the table, the quantified data indicate that Türkiye, Serbia, and Kosovo, which scored below the average, have not implemented the recommendations provided in the previous year. In contrast, the remaining countries have largely implemented the suggested measures.

5. CONCLUSION

The European Commission publishes Country Reports for all candidate and potential candidate countries aspiring to join the EU. These reports provide a comprehensive analysis of various aspects of these countries. One of the key categories analyzed is Public Administration Reforms. As of 2024, the year this study was conducted, there are a total of ten countries in the candidate and potential candidate categories. These countries are assessed by the Commission using specific evaluation scales.

In the context of Public Administration Reforms in 2024, numerical analyses reveal that Türkiye lags the furthest behind, followed by Kosovo, Moldova, and Serbia. Bosnia and Herzegovina performs at an average level, while Albania, Georgia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Ukraine exhibit above-average performance.

Among the principles of Public Administration Reforms, the most criticized area is merit. Candidate and potential candidate countries are expected to abandon corrupt practices such as nepotism, favoritism, and cronyism, and to implement reforms to enhance recruitment, promotion, and employment rights.

Each year, the Commission provides recommendations across relevant categories and reports on whether these recommendations have been implemented in the following year. Countries aspiring for EU membership are expected to heed the Commission's recommendations and align their practices accordingly.

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