



Speech of Nathalie Berger
First meeting
Expert Group on Public Administration and Governance

[Importance of strong public administrations at all levels]

- Thank you Chair.
- Dear participants.
- As mentioned, the Commission - both Commissioner Ferreira and the Commission services - consider the quality of **public administrations at central, regional and local level as a critical factor for the functioning of the EU and for attaining the EU objectives.**
- **Public administrations at all levels** are the ones that deliver crisis response, provide services, implement reforms, manage investments and, more generally, manage public spending to create expected social value. They translate EU law and programs into concrete actions with long-term effects on economic, social and territorial cohesion. They are responsible for the effective and efficient uptake of the EU Funds. They play a fundamental role in preserving the EU's shared values.
- **Strong public institutions** are crucial for the EU to address the climate crisis, the economy and societal transitions outlined in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (the SDGs). The quality of institutions and the coherent implementation of policies are part of the SDGs themselves. Especially SDG 16 and 17. SDG 16 aims to promote peaceful and inclusive societies, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable, strong institutions at all levels. Addressing also a global focal point for the Rule of Law. Successful reforms and development

requires inclusive partnerships — at the global, regional, national and local levels — with shared principles, vision and goals (SDG17).

- **Public administrations are the foundation on which the EU builds its success.** This foundation needs to be inclusive, innovative and solid if the EU is to be strong.
- As Mario Nava mentioned in his introduction ‘2021 was a seminal year for DG REFORM from the point of view of public administration!’ It was a very inspirational, important and very busy year for all of us involved in this file. **From Unit B2 Governance and Public administration, to my Directorate, the DG REFORM and the Commission services.**

[PAG work at the Commission]

- On this note, I would like to detail some of this **PAG work** and elaborate on 3 key issues:
 1. Developing and disseminating **thematic and country knowledge**;
 2. Implementing and learning from **reforms with the Technical Support Instrument (TSI) and multi-country projects**;
 3. Encouraging **synergies through mutual learning and dialogue** in – as of today – the Expert Group.

[Thematic and country knowledge]

- **Having thematic and in-depth knowledge of country developments** as well as the overall European trends is important for the Commission to carry out work on some of the big files – the Recovery and Resilience Facility, the European Semester, the Rule of Law mechanism, the provision of support to the Member States under the various EU instruments. Due to its importance, public administration is an integral part of these files.
- **Just as an illustration**, there have been 170 country-specific recommendations related to public administration in more than 20 countries over the past 10 years. Notably addressing the need for a comprehensive administrative modernisation, for improving collaboration between levels of government, policymaking and professionalism, etc.
- **The Rule of Law reports** explore quality of the policymaking process, role of the oversight institutions and the NGOs, transparency and access to information.
- **The Recovery and Resilience plans** that the Member States have prepared provide for substantial investments in enhanced public service delivery - citizen-orientation, quality and accessibility of public services.
- The Commission accumulated important experience in working with the Member States on public administration and in 2021 it led to the publishing of the **Staff Working Document (SWD)** “Supporting public administrations in EU Member States to deliver reforms and prepare for the future”. The document discusses the global trends that affect public administration and summarises the challenges and opportunities. It outlines the main possibilities for the Member States to receive support and confirms the commitment of the Commission services to tailor better

their support, to aim for greater sustainability and effectiveness of the said support. The document was also the backbone for the successful **DG REFORM conference** “Fit for Recovery and Transition: Supporting Quality of Public administrations in the EU” held on November 25th, 2021.

- Internally, the **Inter-Service Group for Public Administration Quality and Innovation (IGPA)** provides a platform for Commission services' coordination and sharing of knowledge on public administration and governance. The knowledge developed here and through **EUPACK** – which is a multi-annual initiative of the Commission and Member States experts aimed at developing country and thematic knowledge – has helped to lay out **the foundations for collecting data and qualitative information on public administration**. With the support of the expert group, we would like to strengthen this process, and make the collected knowledge available for the use of the Member states, researchers and citizens.
- Data gathering was requested by the Member States in the context of the European Semester (Economic Policy Committee) to explore **the possibility for benchmarking of public administration reforms**. The Commission services have been working on a proposal that attempts to capture performance through comparable administrative data. This work is progressing and its endorsement by the Economic Policy Committee is expected later this year.
- We hope that the **Expert group will prove to be an appropriate platform** to in-depth discuss the methodological approaches, the data collection opportunities, the comparative aspects to qualitative analysis, in order **to develop better knowledge and data on public administration** that can be of use both in the Commission and in the Member States.

[Reforms through the Technical Support Instrument (TSI)]

- The **Technical Support Instrument (TSI)** helps Member States develop the necessary institutional and administrative capacity to strengthen the resilience of European economies by providing tailor-made expertise to support administrative structures.
- The support that we provide **taps on the knowledge and experience of public administrations across Europe**. By using a wide range of experts from national administrations (including through the TAIEX-SRSP Peer 2 Peer instrument), International Organisations, private firms and consultancies, or expertise directly from the Commission.
- We have carried out **projects on public administration addressing justice, digitalisation, modernisation of the state and of specific services, as well as anticorruption**. Without declaring it explicitly, these projects have also addressed the COVID-19 emergency.
- More recently, we have supported **multi-country TSI projects in the area of public administration**. The first one, initiated by Belgium and joined by 9 other countries explores the Common Assessment Framework (CAF). A second one coordinated by Greece will bring together 8 countries to work on strengthening the use of scientific evidence in policy making.
- A “novelty” in the TSI are the **flagship projects**. While TSI is a demand driven instrument, with the flagship project the Commission proposes project areas that reflect EU agenda interests. Currently there are 13 flagships in areas such as

Digital, Green and other EU priorities of which 2 relate to quality of public administration and human-centric digital government services¹.

- The multi-country and flagship projects give opportunity to **align the EU and Member States' reform priorities, and support reforms included in the national Recovery and Resilience plans.**
- We hope that the expert group will contribute with new ideas for multi-country collaboration and the design flagship projects.

[Synergies through mutual learning and dialogue]

- **Closer collaboration of the European Commission with the Member States** on public administration and modernisation can definitely support administrative transformation and could facilitate cumulative and mutual learning and dialogue.
- Until now, public administration is rarely discussed with a **holistic view**. The discussions mostly focus on specific issues and are fragmented in a diversity of fora and groups. Our aim – with this Expert Group – is to focus on: *the horizontal and holistic approaches; on the understanding of what works and what requires improvement; on developing a global picture of the state of public administrations at all levels; on exploring how to better transfer useful experiences and use the EU support to Member States to its full potential.*
- The main objective of the Expert Group is to **discuss public administration challenges, thematic and methodological issues and possible solutions, to promote cooperation and collaboration on common issues.** The group will discuss coherent and evidence informed policies with whole of government methodologies and hands-on approaches. The group can help identify and promote common administrative solutions, exchange experience, disseminate knowledge and create partnerships.
- The aim is to create a **permanent structure** that will work based on a continuous and comprehensive work programme that will be co-designed by the European Commission and the Member States. And today we want to discuss with you the approach and organisational issues, as well as the topics that would be of interest for this year.

[Conclusion]

- So, concluding, the Commission aims to help Member States achieve greater impact and sustainability of their administrative reforms. There is a wide portfolio of policies, financial and non-financial instruments to encourage and support the quality and capability of public administrations. Member States have a very diverse knowledge on public administration. By bringing the Member States, experts and the Commission together in this Expert Group we can tackle the challenges ahead with collective knowledge, learn from each other and promote successful practices.
- I invite you to take an active part in this encounter of knowledge.
- Thank you.

¹ For context, some numbers on the flagships for the upcoming TSI2022:

- 16 pre-selected projects for the regional flagship from the 34 submitted
- 11 pre-selected projects for the digital flagship out of the 45 submitted
- Currently 77 in support to public administration - 44 'on the ground' and 33 that are either 'closed' or 'evaluation'