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How politics matters for EU funds' absorption problems – a fuzzy-set analysis

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the role of politics for member states' absorption problems of European Union (EU) funds. Existing research relies solely on the influence of administrative capacities, but more recent evidence points at the additional relevance of politics as the party politicization of the implementation process. Drawing on this evidence, I argue that parties alternating in control of EU funds change implementation priorities and even management staff according to their preferences. These changes interrupt implementation, weaken capacities, and thereby also contribute to absorption problems. The argument is tested in a fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis of 17 operational programmes building large infrastructure in the new member states of the EU. The results strongly support a role of frequent party alternation and low capacities leading in conjunction to absorption problems. Low capacities are found to be an important, but crucially not a sufficient condition for absorption problems.

KEYWORDS:

Absorption

Central and Eastern Europe

cohesion policy

enlargement

EU funds

Europeanization

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Notes on contributor

Christian Hagemann is a post-doctoral research fellow and lecturer in policy analysis at the Bavarian School of Public Policy at the Technical University in Munich, Germany.

Notes

1. The missing 2007 entrants Bulgaria and Romania had no prior implementation experience and are thus expected to have only 'absent/rudimentary' (D) capacities.
 2. INUS refers to a condition that is an 'insufficient but necessary part of a condition which is itself unnecessary but sufficient for the result' (Mackie [1965](#): 245).
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