

# ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITIES AND THE EUROPEAN SEMESTER: *THE MISSING LINK FOR GREATER CSR COMPLIANCE?*

EESC ECO Section Debate, 1st October 2026

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# AGENDA

- (1) Background: Compliance and implementation challenges of the European Semester
- (2) Why administrative capacities and technical support matter
- (3) Why administrative capacities and technical support alone cannot solve all problems
- (4) Outlook: Improved CSR implementation and the potential '(in-)flexibility trap'

# COMPLIANCE AND IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES OF THE EUROPEAN SEMESTER

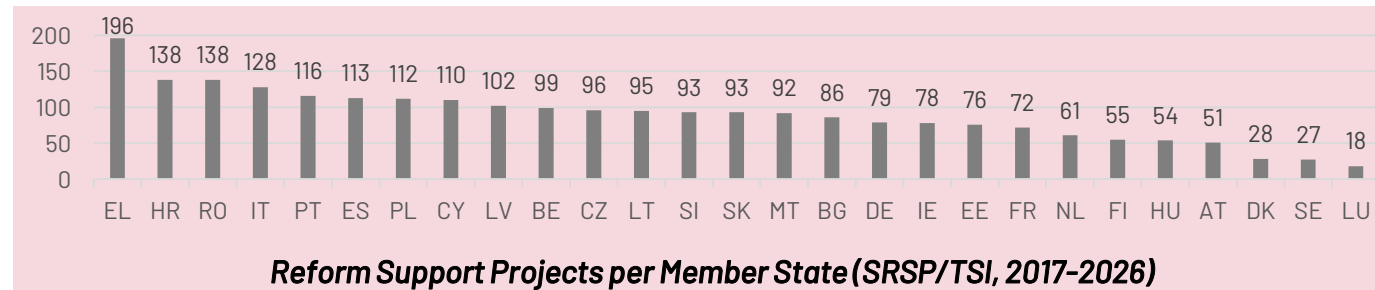
- Steering ambiguities of the Semester (cf. Gerken 2025)
- Stratification of weak enforcement tools within the Semester
- Compliance research on CSRs (cf. Efsthathiou & Wolff 2023):
  - Attested MIP imbalances do NOT increase implementation rates
  - Economic fundamentals matter (public debt; current account deficits)
  - Financial market pressure as a factor
  - “Governance quality” increases implementation probability
  - Fewer CSRs improve implementation per CSR

# WHY ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITIES AND TECHNICAL SUPPORT MATTER

- Compliance research stresses the importance of administrative capacities as key factor for the successful implementation of the Semester/CSRs
- Ambiguities call for sufficient administrative capacities
- BUT: What kind of capacities?  
(e.g., related to specific stages of the Semester / task-specific capacities)
  - Reform/technical support (SRSP/TSI) demonstrates the variety of support needs
  - Specific capacities not addressed in the current Semester-related monitoring
  - Greater pooling of knowledge within the Commission (ComPact)? (cf. Gerken/Heidbreder 2025; 2026)
- SRSP/TSI highlights positive impact of capacity-building on addressing CSRs  
(cf. SRSP ex-post evaluation; TSI mid-term evaluation)
- BUT: Only a weak link between reform support and the regular Semester (apart from RRF) & Follow-up gap (cf. SRSP ex-post evaluation; TSI mid-term evaluation)

# WHY ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITIES AND TECHNICAL SUPPORT ALONE CANNOT SOLVE ALL PROBLEMS

- Demand is unequally distributed among Member States (cf. Gerken 2026) (as are capacities?)



- More purposeful: Combination of 'compliance approaches' (e.g., Treib et al. 2022)
  - Managerialism → Administrative capacities
  - Constructivism → norm-internalisation (ownership)
  - Rationalism → Cost-benefit-arguments
- RRF as a blueprint?
  - Strong incentivisation and conditionality (cost-benefit calculation)
  - combined with strong commitment (national ownership) for the RRFs (constructivism)
  - and direct support measures from the TSI (managerialism)

# OUTLOOK: IMPROVED CSR IMPLEMENTATION AND THE POTENTIAL '(IN-)FLEXIBILITY TRAP'

- A more systematic perspective on administrative capacities and capacity-building could improve CSR implementation
  - Which capacities are needed?
  - How can capacity-building be directly integrated into the annual Semester cycle?
  - Can the ComPAct establish a cross-cutting 'competence centre' for public administration policy to build on within the Semester?
- Embedded capacity-building within a broader compliance-stimulating environment (→ compliance approaches)
- Asymmetric programming and the potential (in-)flexibility trap:
  - Multi-annual programming (RRF / medium-term fiscal-structural plans / new MFF plans?)
    - potential inflexibility (cf. Zeitlin et al. 2025)
  - Annual CSRs and annual reform support cycle
    - higher flexibility in linking annual CSRs and support; but systematically linked to plans?



**Thank you**  
*for your attention*

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