



SUPA

Sustaining Public
Administration in
Modern Democracies

Simplifying Without Weakening

Simplification, Burden Reduction, and Policy Consequences

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Simplification Under Competing Pressures

Competitiveness

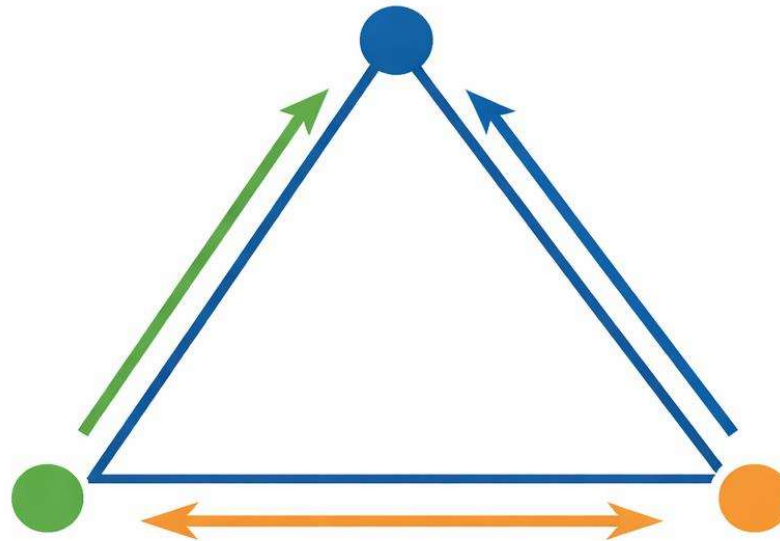
Business costs; investment; growth

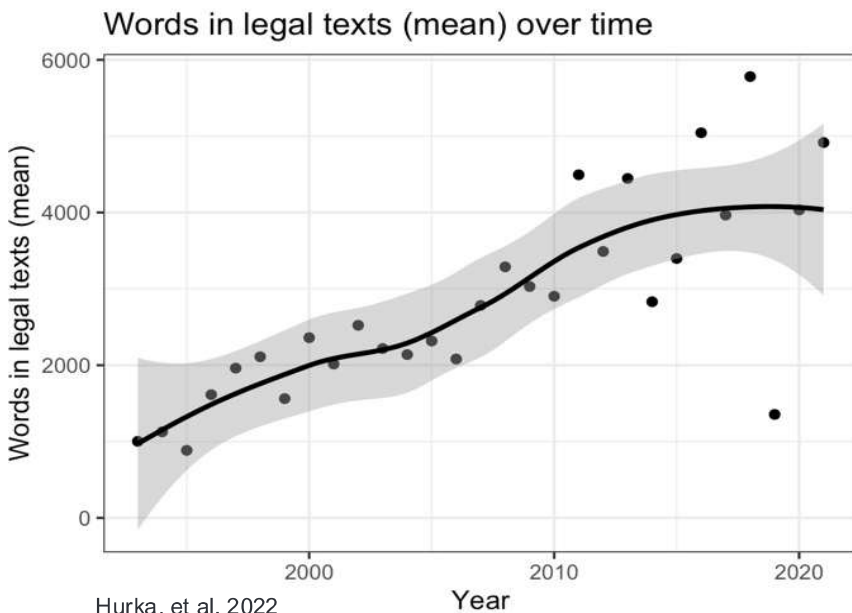
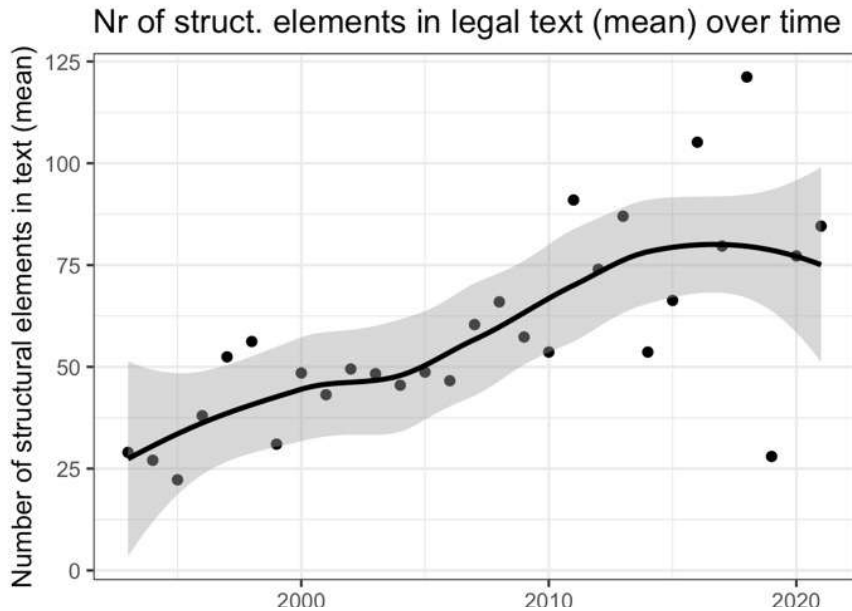
Administrative capacity

Public administration resources;
implementation ability

Policy Goals + Legitimacy

Social, environmental standards;
consumer protection





Hurka, et al. 2022

Regulatory demands have increased

- OECD: ~4× more environmental policies
- OECD: ~2× more social policies since the 1980s

EU legislation has become longer and more complex

- Average articles: ~25 (1990s) → ~75 (2021)
- Average word count: ~1,000 → ~4,000

Administrative capacity has not grown accordingly

- Little change in staffing and budgets
- In some countries: reductions after austerity

Consequences:

- Suboptimal policy outcomes
- Poor service quality
- Inconsistent implementation across regions

Sources: Fernández-i-Marín et al. (2023), Hurka et al. (2022), Salvidge (2022), Kaplaner & Steinebach (2023), Loxbo, Pircher (2025)

Different Responses to Regulatory Pressure

Simplification

Reduce procedural or administrative complexity

→ Same policy goals, less friction

Examples:

- Streamlining reporting requirements
- Standardised templates / digital reporting
- Merging overlapping procedures

Better Implementation

Improve enforcement, coordination, digitalisation

→ Same rules, better delivery

Examples:

- Digital permitting systems
- Risk-based inspections
- More guidance & support for implementers

Deregulation

Reduce or remove substantive obligations

→ Changing policy goals or protection levels

Examples:

- Lowering environmental or labour standards
- Narrowing scope of who is covered
- Exemptions from core obligations

What Is Being Done?

EU-Level: Better Regulation

Ex ante quality control

- Impact assessments
- Regulatory Scrutiny Board
- Public consultations

Ex post evaluation

- REFIT evaluations and fitness checks
- F4F platform (stakeholder input on simplification)

Quantified burden reduction / simplification

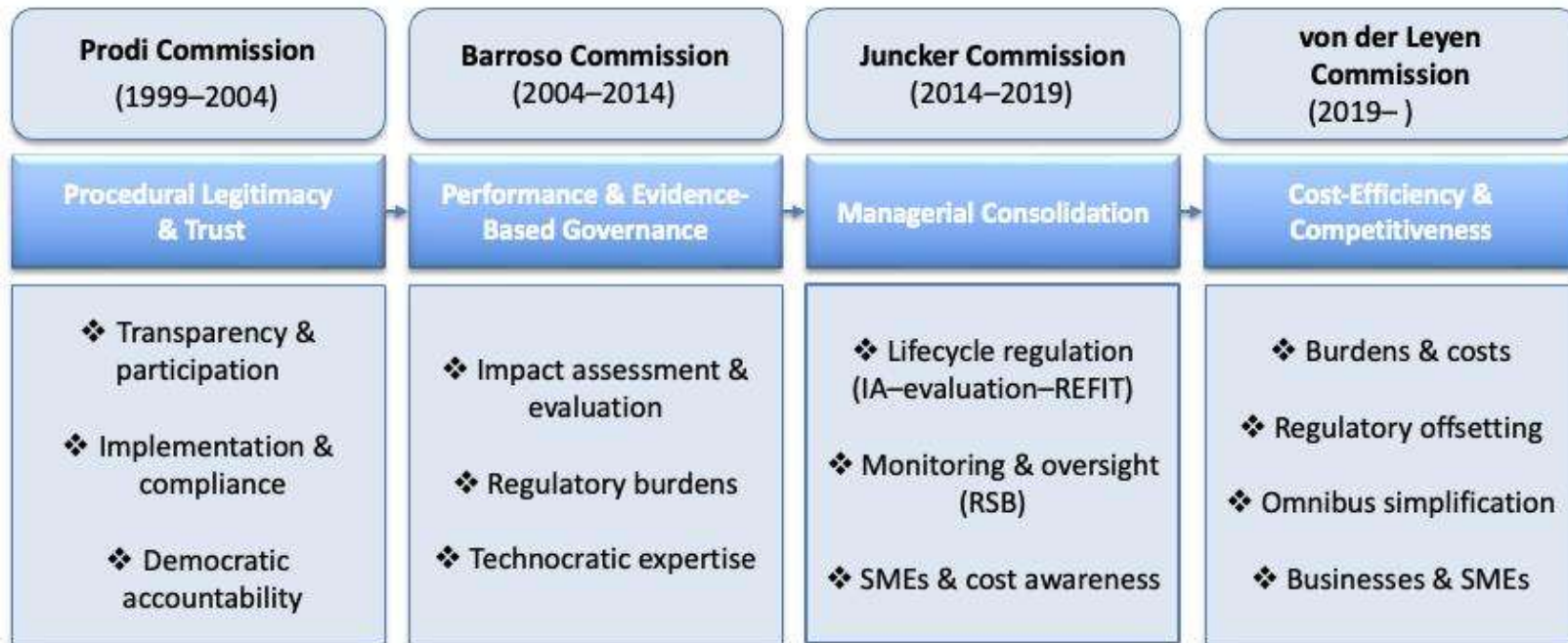
- Annual Burden Survey (ABS)
- Cost accounting
- One-in-one-out principle
- Omnibus simplification packages

Member State Level (common elements)

- National burden reduction programmes
- Regulatory offsetting rules
- Independent scrutiny councils
- Digitalisation of administrative procedures

What counts as “better” regulation today?

How Better Regulation in the EU Has Evolved



Overall shift: From procedural legitimacy → performance management → institutionalized cost logic

Regulatory Offsetting: Institutionalising a Cost Logic

What is regulatory offsetting?

- New regulatory costs must be compensated by reducing costs
- Often operationalised as *one-in-one-out* or net burden targets

Why it matters

- Institutionalises a cost logic in rulemaking
- Priority on what can be measured and counted
- Creates trade-offs between policy areas

Common patterns across European countries

- **Administrative workload largely overlooked**
Public authorities' capacity rarely included in offsetting calculations
- **Symbolically attractive, practically limited**
Politically easy to communicate, modest to no real impact
- **Reliance on standard cost models**
Measurement methods and thresholds frequently contested
- **Context-dependent effects**
Outcomes shaped by regulatory culture and level of digitalisation

Insights from Countries

Denmark

- Burden reduction, OIXO abolished
- Shift from “burden stop” to flexible, informal burden reduction
- No fixed targets

Germany

- Calculation problems and political discretion
- EU exemptions weaken efficiency logic
- Renewed political push for OI00 – OI20

Netherlands

- Strong burden reduction model with standard cost model
- Offsetting avoided; not seen as effective
- Burden reduction pursued through other instruments

How Can Europe Simplify Without Weakening?

Key Takeaways

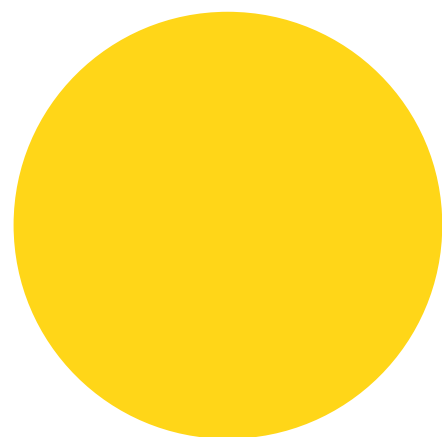
Simplification is unavoidable in today's regulatory environment

But simplification \neq deregulation

EU Better Regulation: prioritises a cost logic – cost of not regulating?

Effective simplification should consider:

- Regulatory or rule design
- Implementation capacity
- Quality of public administration + legal rules
- Policy outcomes + societal objectives



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