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### **Abstract**

This investigation explores the conditions under which the EU state-building model is most likely to help produce substantive democratic political reform in the Western Balkans. Data gathered in 2008 and 2009 in Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Macedonia suggest that the priority, clarity, and full conditionality of EU rules, together with weak domestic political opponents of reform, help maximize EU leverage over reforms in several policy areas: public administration and local governance reform in the Western Balkans. Interviews find that South East European officials frequently view the EU's aid process as too over-bureaucratized, partial in its conditionality, and not well focused on reforms domestic leaders prioritize for state-building to help concretely build institutional capacity in public administration and local governance. Finally, Bosnia demonstrates that the EU lacks the capacity to deal with states whose key political elites still appear to place EU accession as secondary to their aim of preserving their power.