

Central and Eastern Europe on the Way into the European Union:

Reforms of Regional Administration in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia

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Summary

Many Central and East European countries are currently re-arranging their regional levels of public administration. The country studies compiled in this paper analyse administrative decentralisation and the re-creation of regional administrative bodies in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. They attempt to give a detailed picture of the regional level, its development and structure as well as the objectives, implementation and outcomes of administrative reforms. The main motives of reform are to create links between local self-government and central government, de-politicize the administration and prepare for EU accession. While these factors had a certain homogenising effect on reform outcomes, the interplay of different historical legacies, policy approaches and regionalist phenomena resulted in cross-national differences.

The introduction of this paper tries to relate these variables to reform outcomes and gives a structured overview on the developments. Particular attention is paid to the policy of the European Union in the pre-accession constellation. The Commission and the pre-accession framework appear to become catalysts for a process in which Central and East European regions increase their political salience. Although the Commission has deliberately avoided to urge for a comprehensive regionalisation, its indirect impact should not be underestimated and resembles the catalytic impact of European integration on the re-emergence of regions in Western Europe.

The study is part of a project on the integration of Central and East European countries into the European Union, which is jointly managed by the Bertelsmann Science Foundation and the Research Group on European Affairs at the Centre for Applied Policy Research. The country studies were compiled by the following partner institutes and their authors:

Institute for World Economics, Budapest;

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M.E.S.A.10 Institute for Economic and Social Analyses, Bratislava;

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Economic Policy Institute, Sofia.

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Re-creating the regional level in Central and Eastern Europe: An analysis of administrative reforms in six countries

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Introduction¹

Many Central and East European countries (CEEC) are currently re-arranging their intermediate or regional levels of public administration. Public attention and political debate have mainly focused on the territorial changes linked to the new administrative bodies. In Poland and Slovakia, for example, the number and boundaries of vojvodships and kraj were highly controversial among politicians. While the territorial aspects of regional administration reforms have become the most visible issues, the core problems of the reforms are democratic accountability and effective governance. In the framework of their joint project on the integration of Central and East European countries into the European Union, the Bertelsmann Science Foundation and the Centre for Applied Policy Research have initiated six country studies which analyse administrative decentralisation and the re-creation of regional administrative bodies in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. The studies which are compiled in this paper attempt to give detailed analyses of the regional level, its development and structure as well as the objectives, implementation and outcomes of administrative reforms. Other CEEC will be taken as occasional examples but could not be included into this study due to organisational and financial reasons.

Reforms of regional administration are driven by three main motives. First, regional administrative bodies constitute "missing links" in the entire structure of public administration which have not been touched by the public sector reforms implemented since 1990. After the political transition, the newly established democratic governments and parliaments focused on the establishment of local self-governments and local political elites with democratic legitimacy. This led to accountable and relatively autonomous local self-governments which were, however, often not appropriately embedded into the existing state administration at the local, regional and central level. The current reforms are undertaken to adapt and harmonise the existing state and self-governmental administration.

Second, administrative reforms aim at overcoming the authoritarian legacy of state administration which consisted of the strong influence of political criteria on decisions, the proficiency deficits of civil servants, the restricted professional autonomy of administrative bodies, the absence of detailed legal regulation guiding administrative action and the discretionary application of legal regulations (Goetz 1995; Hesse 1993; OECD-CCET 1996; Wollmann 1995; 1997). Struggling to improve professionalism and the rule of law, reformers at first perceived regional administrative bodies more as an obstacle to democratisation and a legacy of au-

¹ The author would like to express his thanks to Eric von Breska, Claus Giering, Lisa Mayerhofer, Wim van Meurs and the contributors to this volume for their valuable comments and information which allowed to collect and fit the single pieces of information into a comparative ensemble.

thoritarian rule than as an intermediary level facilitating local and regional self-government. This perception, the intrinsic complexity of administrative reform, and the crowded general political agenda explain why the CEEC have postponed changes on the regional level until now.

Third, the prospect of accession to the European Union has induced the CEE governments to carry on with administration reform because accession candidates are required to have the administrative capacities for the implementation of the *acquis communautaire* and, in particular, for the management of EU structural funds. In its structural policy, the European Commission attaches great importance to regions as units participating in the design and implementation of development strategies and plans. The requirements of accession are incentives for governments to create appropriate regional units.

While it was clear that a modern public administration should comprise state administration and sub-national self-governments on the local and regional level, the exact meaning of the notion of "public" has not yet been conceptually clarified in most of the CEEC. The outcomes of the current reforms also delineate this notion more precisely and thus will shape the profile of the public sector in each accession country for the future. In summarising the country studies of this volume and other available sources, this introduction tries to map differences and similarities among the institutional arrangements of these countries. It discusses various explanations for the outcomes of reform in order to understand better the rationales behind institutional choices and the national "policy styles" or "administrative cultures". The impact of the European Union is scrutinised, considering implications the administrative reforms entail for the pre-accession policy of the EU.

1. Institutional differences and similarities

Up to now, administrative reforms have progressed to a different extent in each country, leading to institutional arrangements which are still in a state of flux. An important condition and constraint of the reforms is that all the countries studied in this paper define themselves as unitary states. Only the Czech Republic and Poland have a second parliamentary chamber representing regional interests.² As a by-product of the dissolution of the Czechoslovak Federation in 1992, the Czech Senate was established in order to ensure representation for deputies of the Federal Parliament (Ziemer 1996: 156). The Polish Senate was created by the Round-Table Agreement of 1989. While half of the Sejm mandates were guaranteed for the Polish Communist Party, only the Senate had full democratic legitimacy during the first years of transition. The Polish Senate is composed of two or three deputies per *voivodship* which are elected according to party lists. Both the Czech and the Polish second chamber have not yet finally found their role within the emerging new administrative set-up. Their necessity is questioned, the public does not pay much attention to these institutions, and Senate elections in both countries usually have very low turnouts.

² Apart from the Czech Republic and Poland, Romania and Slovenia are the only states in Central and Eastern Europe which have second chambers in their parliaments. While the Romanian Senate represents the regions, the Slovenian Senate is an institution of functional interest representation with representatives from employees' and employers' associations and other organisations of civil society, similar to the Bavarian Senate (cf. Ziemer 1996: 155-157).

To date, Bulgaria and Estonia are the only countries which have not established legal prerequisites for *self-governments* at the regional level. Counties are an integral part of the state administration in both countries, although county assemblies in Estonia facilitate a participation of the delegates of local self-governments at the regional level. In the other four countries studied here, county institutions are considered as self-governments and as institutionally independent bodies of public law, performing self-governmental as well as state administrative tasks. This dual function is expressed by the dual institutional structure of the county level, consisting of a state representative (governor, vojvod, head of office) and of a self-governing organ (assembly, parliament).

While county self-governments are already working in Hungary and Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia up to now have adopted only the legal provisions on county self-governments. Hungarian county assemblies already have a certain tradition, since they were elected directly by citizens in 1994 and for a second term in 1998. In contrast, the first direct elections to Polish vojvodship assemblies took place in October 1998.

One should take into account that the size of the regional administrative bodies in the six countries studied here varies considerably. The newly established Polish vojvodships are by far the biggest units with an average population of 2,416,000 inhabitants and an average territory of 19544 km². This may explain why Poland has decided to introduce a subregional level of directly elected district self-governments, too. Hungarian and the new Slovak and Czech counties range between 537,000 and 737,000 inhabitants, Bulgarian counties are approximately half as big, and counties in Estonia have roughly the same size as districts in Poland (103,000 inhabitants). Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Slovakia increased the number of regional administrative units from 9 to 28 (January 1999), 8 to 14 (October 1997) and 4 to 8 (July 1996). Estonia and Hungary have up to now maintained their inherited administrative-territorial division of 15 (19) counties. In Hungary the first democratically elected government tried to introduce Commissioners of the Republic as regional representatives of government which implied a certain revision of the county structure since the commissioners' territorial responsibility was divided into eight regions. Only Poland reduced the number of vojvodships from 49 to 16 in June 1998, but this reduction was supplemented by the creation of a new tier of 308 self-governed districts.

Estonia, Hungary and Slovakia are currently planning to create larger regions in order to have territorial units corresponding with the level of NUTS-2 in the current EU member states.³ NUTS-2 regions of EU member states have an average population of 1.8 million and an average territory of 15700 km² and participate in the structural policy of the EU (cf. section 3 below). The legal status of the envisaged regions is still subject to discussion in these countries. While the new Polish vojvodships match the NUTS-2 level in size, the Czech Government has, in addition to the envisaged 14 counties, created eight statistical regions which would be NUTS-2 compatible.

³ The territories of EU member states are divided into five statistical units according to the so-called "Nomenclature des Unités Territoriales Statistiques" (NUTS). For example, the German Bundesländer belong to NUTS-1 and the Regierungsbezirke constitute NUTS-2. This classification is not stipulated in European Community law, but it is used in the regulation on the structural funds and by the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat).

Since specific and comparable data is missing and the scope of regional government has not yet been fully defined in most countries, the policy areas belonging to regional governments can not be compared here. The country studies of this volume indicate that supervisory powers are regulated very similarly in all countries. As a rule, local self-governments may deal with all local public affairs which are not explicitly assigned to the state administration or higher levels of self-government, based upon a law. Apart from this encompassing competence, local self-governments carry out tasks of state administration which are transferred to them (transferred competences).⁴ Usually the representative of the state administration at the county level exercises (only) the legal supervision of county (in Poland also district) and local self-governments, and specialised audit offices ensure a financial control.

With respect to transferred competences, this supervision is extended to matters of factual correctness, professionalism and appropriateness and is exercised also by sectoral state administration or sectoral ministries. Those countries which have already established (and are establishing) regional self-governments, tried to refrain from subordinating local (and, in Poland, district) self-governments to the new regional self-governments. The general intention of the reformers was to avoid a re-centralisation of powers; rather, regional self-governments usually have received (and are to receive) competences of existing state administrative bodies.

Deconcentrated sectoral state administration has been integrated into the general territorial state administration to a different extent in each country. According to the available information, the Polish vojvodship reform has resulted in a high degree of organisational integration, whereas sectoral state administration is most clearly separated from territorial state administration and local self-government in the Slovak and Czech Republics (Gadomska in this volume; Koudelka 1995). Hungary and Estonia appear to have established more coordinating institutions between self-government, territorial and sectoral state administration compared with the other countries.

The district level of administration between the county and the local self-governments differs strongly across the countries studied here, resulting from the different state of progress, and the different national concepts, of administrative reform. On the one hand, Estonia and Hungary have no districts as a level of public administration; state administrative tasks are carried out either by local self-governments or by counties. On the other hand, Poland has just introduced self-governed districts (powiaty) with directly elected assemblies and heads of districts elected by the district assemblies. Bulgaria, the Czech and the Slovak Republic also have a district level of administration which involves local self-governments to a different extent, although belonging to state administration.

Since Czechoslovak reformers abolished the large regions created by the communist regime quickly after the political transition, leaving an institutional void at the regional level, district offices of territorial state administration and district-level bodies of deconcentrated sectoral state administration have kept and gained

⁴ This distinction is a simplifying generalisation of the distinctions between "independent" and "transferred" competences in the Czech Republic, "own" and "delegated" powers in Poland, "mandatory" and "voluntary" tasks in Hungary etc., each of which has a different status within the legal-administrative system of the respective country (Cf. Baldersheim et al. 1996: 28).

importance. In contrast to the Czech Republic, Slovakia possessed a sub-district level of state administration (*obvod*) until 1996, when it was re-integrated into the district administration. In both countries there is an ongoing debate about the future role of districts after the establishment of regional self-governments, and some participants have even proposed to dissolve districts, shifting their tasks to the municipal or county level. Both countries had some form of institutionalised local self-government representation in the state administration already before the legislation on self-governed counties was passed. Until 1992, mayors in Slovakia elected the head of the subdistrict office, and in the Czech Republic district assemblies composed of delegates from local self-governments decided on budget transfers to municipalities.

Contrary to the regional level, local government reform was perceived as a priority of democratisation by the new political elites in Central and Eastern Europe (cf. Baldersheim et al. 1996). Immediately after the political transition the newly elected parliaments and governments established statutes of local self-governments and held local elections. The Czech and Slovak Republics, Estonia and Hungary have since then experienced a fragmentation of local self-governments into smaller units. Small settlements chose to become independent as a reaction to the former state socialist policies aiming at the integration and centralisation of municipalities. These initiatives were supported by regulations of local self-government funding which provided incentives for municipalities to constitute themselves as independent units. Partly as a consequence of this independence movement, the newly established voluntary associations of municipalities became important intermediaries in Slovakia and Estonia. There is scarcely any comparative data on the financial resources of local and regional self-governments. According to the European Commission's country progress reports, all CEE local self-governments are highly dependent on transfers from the central state budget. State budget transfers amount to 66 % of local government revenues in the Czech Republic (85 % in Poland).

The politics of local self-governments reflect a certain North-South difference which may also be found in Western Europe (Page 1991; Baldersheim et al. 1996: 40-41; Bullmann/Goldsmith/Page 1997). While mayors in the Southern countries are elected directly by the local communities, in the Czech Republic, Poland and the Baltic countries mayors are elected by local councils and share more powers with executive boards. The fact that mayors thus have a stronger political position in Southern countries of Central and Eastern Europe indicates that these countries seem to exhibit traits of a "broker" model of local self-government with strong elements of partisan politics and local lobbying at the central level. A broker model requires a strong political position of mayors, enabling them to control their constituencies and to bargain with state authorities. In contrast, the Baltic countries and the Czech Republic seem to lean towards a "service" model with its emphasis on legal governance, functional differentiation and consensual politics.⁵

⁵ Albeit mayors in Poland are elected by local councils, its political culture of strong civic engagement and the generally high political status of local government issues do not correspond to a "service model".

	Bulgaria	Czech Republic	Estonia	Hungary	Poland	Slovak Republic
second chamber of Parliament	-	Senate (81 seats, directly elected); participation of Senate deputies in county self-governments discussed	-	-	Senate (100 seats, directly elected in vojvodships according to party lists)	second chamber as a representation of county self-governments discussed
county level	28 counties since 1/1999, (av. 317000 inh., 3964 km ²); bodies of state administration; county governor appointed by government;	14 counties (av. 737000 inh., 5633 km ²), independent bodies of public law, assembly directly elected by citizens for four years, starting from 2000/2001; may submit bills to the Parliament	15 counties (av. 103000 inh., 3015 km ²), bodies of state administration; county assembly of delegates of local self-governments; county governor appointed by government; self-governmental functions of counties transferred to local self-gov. in 1990-92	19 counties (av. 537000 inh., 4895 km ²), independent bodies of public law; assembly directly elected by citizens for four years, since 1994 (1. 12/94, 2. 11/98), assembly elects president; county public administrative office since 1994, heads app. by gov.	16 vojvodships (av. 2.416 m inh., 19544 km ²), independent bodies of public law, assembly directly elected by citizens, since 1999 (1. 10/98); vojvod appointed by government	8 counties (av. 672000 inh., 6129 km ²), independent bodies of public law, assembly directly elected by citizens, since 1996, county office of state administration
district-level	279 districts; district governor appointed by county governor, district assembly composed of delegates of local self-governments	77 districts; head of district office appointed by government; district assembly of delegates of local self-governments	no district administration, state administrative tasks performed by local self-governments, their voluntary associations and counties	no districts as bodies of public administration, state administrative tasks performed by local self-governments and counties	372 districts; district assembly elected directly; state-administrative districts (rejon) 1990-1998	79 districts, no institutional participation of local self-governments; 121 sub-districts (obvod) dissolved in 1996; head of sub-district office elected by mayors until 1992
deconcentrated state administration	most sectoral administration separate from county administration	influential sectoral state administration, separate from self-governments	most sectoral administration integrated into county administration	most sectoral administration separated from county administration	since 1999 most sectoral administration integrated into county administration	influential sectoral state administration, separate from self-governments
local self-governments	4032; mayors elected directly, 4-year term	6242; mayors elected by council, 4-year term	253; mayors elected by council, 3-year term; strong autonomy; strong role of municipalities' associations	3071; mayors elected directly in small municipalities (<10000), by council in larger municipalities; 4-year term; strong legal and financial autonomy	2459; mayors appointed by council, 4-year term	ca. 3335; mayors elected directly, 4-year term; strong role of municipalities' associations
NUTS-2 regions		8 statistical regions since 12/1998, corresponding regional committees of delegates from local self-gov., county self-gov. and interest associations	government plans to establish 5-7 counties corresponding to NUTS-2	government plans to establish 7 regions as self-governmental and state administrative units		establishment of 4 regions as units of state administration discussed

2. Explanatory variables

The overview of the preceding section has shown that administrative reforms in the Central and East European countries display striking similarities in their general orientation, key functions and problem structures. Since the main motives of institutional reform, i.e. creating links between local self-government and central government, de-politicizing the administration and preparing for EU accession, have been present in all the CEEC, they had a certain homogenising effect on reform outcomes. This section tries to go beyond this general observation and considers which constellation of explanatory variables may account for particular similarities and differences of policy outcomes in the countries of this study. Choosing an inductive approach to structure the variance, one may distinguish three main variables: Historical legacies which provide institutional constraints for the protagonists of administrative reform and influence their choices; policy approaches, i.e. sets of beliefs and ideas guiding parties, politicians and experts; and the role of historical/ethnic regionalism for the political context and the outcomes of reforms.⁶ Such a comparison has to cope with the methodological problem of "overdetermination" (Crawford/Lijphart 1995), i.e. the difficulty of isolating "decisive" causes among various independent variables with similar effects on several dependent variables. Therefore the aim of the following section is more modest: namely to explore the explanatory value of different factors and relate them to each other.

Legacies

Historical legacies constitute important framework conditions under which administrative decentralisation is being implemented. Comparative political research on administrative decentralisation in East-central Europe distinguishes between pre-socialist, socialist and transition legacies of state administration (Wollmann 1995; 1997; Illner 1997; cf. on legacies in general: Crawford/Lijphart 1995). An important *pre-socialist legacy* is the dualist model of public administration, dating back to the Reichsgemeindegesetz of the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (1862). According to this model which was applied in the Czech lands, Hungary and Galicia, bodies of territorial administration performed functions of both self-government and state administration. They had own and transferred competences and they were responsible both to local councils and higher administrative bodies (Illner 1997:16). After 1989, the dualist model influenced the conceptual thinking on administrative reform in Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland since reforms of the regional level were framed as questions of how to balance elements of state administration and self-government. Lacking the legacy of dualism, the Estonian

⁶ In his account of the territorial dimension of public administration reform in East Central Europe, Illner (1997: 12) distinguishes four "contextual factors" which have influenced reform outcomes: pre-communist and communist legacies, the political context of the reforms, the expectations toward decentralisation and geographic/demographic factors. Hesse (1997: 121) identifies six explanatory concepts for public sector reform outcomes: stages of development like transformation, modernisation etc., cultural traditions, institutional variables, the given resource base, the degree of reform professionalisation, and policy entrepreneurship or political will. The explanatory variables discussed here resemble these factors to some extent but the article tries to spell out more detailed cause-effect relations.

reform of administration has both entrusted local self-governments and their associations with a greater range of tasks, assigned county governments to the state administration and seems to rely more on consensual and informal mechanisms of co-ordination at the regional and central level.

Apart from the mentioned authoritarian legacies of state socialist administration which posed challenges to the reformers, the territorial organisation of the states at the outset of transition represents an important *state socialist legacy*. In an attempt to modernise and centralise state administration, already the state socialist governments of Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland had embarked on reforms of the administrative division of their territories. Czechoslovakia reduced the number of districts and counties and centralised competences in 1960. With its reforms of 1975, the Polish government abolished district level bodies of administration and increased the number of vojvodships from 17 to 49 (Taras 1993: 22-23). In 1984, Hungary also abolished its districts and shifted competences to the county level. A major aim of the measures was to re-divide administrative units in order to destroy traditional regional networks and loyalties (Illner 1997: 13).

Due to the power-stabilising political intentions linked to the earlier state socialist reforms, the new democratically elected governments perceived regional level administrative bodies as relicts of authoritarian rule. As a consequence, Czechoslovak reformers in 1990 decided to dissolve the county level bodies in order to strengthen the autonomy of local self-governments. While this was facilitated by the persistence of an established district level state administration, Hungarian reformers who were faced with the same option of dissolving the county level administration could not presuppose a separate district level tier. The Polish government also refrained from dissolving the vojvodship level but re-introduced a district level in 1990 (rejon) which corresponded to the old district units of the pre-1975 period.

A different legacy results from the fact that Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and Estonia had orthodox state socialist systems until 1989, while the pre-transitional state socialist systems of Poland and Hungary are better described as liberalising authoritarian regimes. The latter two countries thus could draw from a longer conceptual debate on administrative decentralisation and local self-government. The *Solidarność* movement in Poland had traditionally emphasised local self-government as an important dimension of civil society and an instrument to build democracy (cf. e.g. Benzler 1994). Accordingly, in 1991 the National Assembly of Self-governments proposed to dissolve the vojvodships and transfer their powers to district and local self-governments.

Reform-socialist Hungarian incumbents and the country's mainly intellectual opposition circles had criticised the county's administrative tutelage over municipalities and agreed in the resolve to introduce strong democratic local self-governments (Cf. e.g. Pálné Kovács 1997a). This may explain why Hungary rearranged its regional level institutions immediately after the political transition and set up elected regional self-governments already in 1994. Hungary was much faster than Poland in implementing reforms because the successive Polish governments during the first years after the transition lacked a stable parliamentary basis and were to a larger extent preoccupied with consolidating their power.

Another explanation for the differing progress of reforms refers to the *transition legacies* constituted by the different paths of transition (cf. in general: Lynn/Schmitter 1991; O'Donnell/Schmitter 1986). Since the Polish transition was based upon a negotiated power sharing between Solidarność and the state socialist regime, the Solidarność-led government had to confine itself to the re-establishment of local self-governments, refraining from a comprehensive reform of the vojvodship level (Benzler 1994: 322-323; Illner 1997: 50). In Hungary, the early split of the opposition movement in the course of the liberalisation and transition supported a policy characterised by compromise and incrementalism. As the newly elected conservative government and the liberal opposition parties had agreed to link the law on local self-government (and other important laws) to the support of a two-thirds majority in Parliament, a compromise between the opposition and the government was required. Expecting to win the municipal elections of 1990 and thus to gain control over the public administration, the governing coalition parties accepted to weaken the county level and to shift its supervisory function to newly created Commissioners of the Republic who were, however, restricted to a merely legal supervision of self-governments (Navracsics 1996: 286-287).

The velvet revolution in Czechoslovakia provided the citizens' movement of 1989 with the power and legitimacy to quickly abolish the regional administrative level which was considered as one of the strongholds of the ancien régime (Malíková/Miháliková 1995; Illner 1997). A similarly strong political legitimacy was derived from the revolutionary path of transition in Estonia. The Estonian government thus was able to create strong local self-governments by reducing powers of the county level (Mäeltsemees 1998). Since Bulgaria experienced a delayed transition and the Bulgarian Socialist Party managed to win the first democratic parliamentary elections, the government could implement only gradual and reluctant reforms, leaving the county level by and large unchanged.

Policy approaches

The presence of legacies in the new administrative structures does not rule out the impact of intentional political design, guided by the policy approaches of political actors and experts. Among these sets of ideas and beliefs which are shaping the political positions specific actors adopt on specific issues, three cleavages seem to be particularly relevant for administrative reforms in the CEEC: centralism vs. localism, dualism vs. monism and federalism vs. unitarism. The first cleavage refers to the division of power between central and local government. A centralist approach is in favour of maintaining and / or widening the central government's financial, legal and political control over local activities. A localist approach aims at increasing the autonomy of local bodies to regulate public affairs independent of the government. While centralism is usually based upon efficiency arguments, localism is often justified with democracy and accountability reasons. At the beginning of the transition the political actor coalitions advocating either centralism or localism in Central and Eastern Europe reflected the cleavage between post-socialist parties and parties emerging from the former opposition milieu. Since then the composition of localist (centralist) policy coalitions has differed across countries and does not correspond to the familiar labels of conservative, liberal and social democratic parties either.

The dominance of a *centralist or localist policy approach* is perhaps the most obvious rationale of reform outcomes. The delayed establishment of regional self-governments in the Czech Republic can be explained with the centralist policy of the government of Václav Klaus ruling the Czech Republic and dominating its political life until 1997. The Klaus government argued that economic reform should be treated as a priority and its implementation should thus not be impeded by administrative re-arrangements. Its reluctance to share powers with other actors and institutions was rooted in an economic interpretation of civil society which differed from Václav Havel's notion of civil society (cf. Hřích/Larischová in this volume). The Klaus government questioned the relevance of any intermediary political institution in the relationship between state and citizen, including institutionally independent counties (Illner 1997: 40). This principal position was supported by the argument that only municipalities were legitimate units of territorial self-government at the sub-national level. Higher level self-governing entities should emerge from the voluntary association of municipalities in a bottom-up process, not by the artificial creation of regional bodies from above (cf. Illner 1997: 51). The centralist policy approach was also reflected in the opposition against reorganising the Czechoslovak federation and against institutionalising the co-operation between the Visegrád countries.

In Slovakia, the opposition between centralist and localist policy approaches became one of the main dividing lines in the power struggle between the Mečiar government and the opposition parties. The latter tried to strengthen local self-governments in order to create a countervailing power against the centralisation attempts of the government in most spheres of society and politics. When the Mečiar government adopted the laws on the creation of eight kraj in 1996, it decided that the territorial-administrative division of the country should precede a transfer of powers to the kraj-level self-governments that were to be established (Brusis/Nižňanský 1997). It re-designed district and county boundaries largely irrespective of the territorial units the municipalities had chosen by forming regional associations. The centralised style of decision-making provided ample opportunities to distribute resources according to political loyalties and induced municipalities to bargain at the central level. The opposition argued that the government did not intend to implement a real decentralisation of powers but rather a deconcentration.

In Hungary the broad localist coalition of mid-1990 relieved the regional administrative bodies (megye) from their state-administrative and supervisory function and confined them to a mainly consultative role, transferring only legal control powers to the Commissioners of the Republic (Cf. e.g. Navracsics 1996; Pálné Kovács 1997a). As the liberal opposition parties won the municipal elections of October 1990, the localist-centralist cleavage re-emerged between local self-governments and the central government composed of conservative and christian democratic parties. The government, faced with this power constellation, transformed the Commissioner of the Republic into a governmental control organ of local self-governments and other bodies of state administration (Navracsics 1996: 286-287). After 1994, the socialist-liberal coalition government abolished the increasingly unpopular institution of the Commissioner and tried to strengthen the megye by introducing its direct election and acknowledging it as a territorial self-government (területi önkormányzat).

Supporters of a localist approach in Poland envisaged to transfer state administration tasks to voivodship self-governments and to abandon most separate units of state administration at the local and regional level. This approach was advocated by the National Assembly of Self-Governments and aimed at a far-reaching decentralisation of powers (cf. Instytut Spraw Publicznych 1997). According to the alternative, more centralist approach, voivodship self-governments should be restricted to tasks of regional development and a separate tier of state administration should be maintained. While the parties emerging from the *Solidarność* movement advocated a more comprehensive decentralisation, the post-communist parties (SLD and PSL) were reluctant to transfer state powers to voivodships and did not undertake steps to create directly elected voivodship self-governments during their period of government. Since the return of a government affiliated with the former *Solidarność*, the legislative basis of regional self-government has been set (cf. Bondyra/Czachór in this volume). Concerns of the major coalition party AWS about a too far-reaching decentralisation induced the governing coalition to create 16 new voivodships instead of the initially envisaged 12 voivodships and to reduce the powers of voivodship parliaments.⁷

The Bulgarian reform of public administration was dominated by a centralist policy approach, originating from the fact that the post-socialist Bulgarian Socialist Party won the free parliamentary elections of 1990/1994 and managed to stay in power until 1997. The successive Bulgarian governments were pre-occupied with the deteriorating economic crisis and did not show an inclination to transfer powers to regions which bore the risks of political disintegration and obstruction (cf. Borissova in this volume; Jepson 1995).

As a distinctive feature of a localist approach and liberal political ideas, the notion of municipalities forming regions by means of their voluntary association has played a role in most of the countries of this study. These associations were founded by the newly established local self-governments in order to pool their resources and represent common interests vis-a-vis the government and the state administration. The Klaus government referred to the notion of a bottom-up regionalisation (see above), and in Hungary the Alliance of Free Democrats proposed to replace counties by voluntary associations of local self-governments (Navracscics 1996: 292). Yet none of the CEE governments decided to transform municipal associations into regional bodies of self-government. The available empirical evidence supports the impression that voluntary associations of municipalities attained a political strength and influence only in Slovakia and Estonia. The Czech Association of Towns and Communities has, according to Davey (1995: 49-50), "not achieved the continuity, cohesion and professionalism" of the Slovak association. The National Association of Territorial Self-Governments in Hungary has confined itself to the functions of interest representation and professional consulting for local self-governments.

The Slovak Association of Towns and Villages, its regional associations and the Slovak Union of Towns attained a more political role because they either became arenas of power struggles between the Mečiar government and the opposition or were mobilised to resist the centralisation policies of the Mečiar government. Only Estonia's administrative reform has assigned the regional associations of municipalities a role as partners of counties which are integral bodies of state admin-

⁷ Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung of 10 October 1998.

istration (cf. Janikson in this volume). This may be explained by the strong influence of liberal ideas in Estonia, the absent legacy of dualism, the influence of Scandinavian models, a consensual political culture and also by the small size of the country which reduced the need for a separate intermediate tier of self-government. Contrary to Bulgaria, the lack of regional self-government in Estonia is thus more due to these causal factors than a result of a centralist policy approach.

A second cleavage between a *dualist and a monist policy approach* can be identified if the focus is laid on the relations between regional and local self-governments on the one hand, territorial and sectoral state administration on the other. A (strictly) dualist model of public administration envisages that local and regional self-governments carry out only their own (genuine) tasks. The role of the territorial state administration is restricted to a legal supervision of self-government activities, units of sectoral and territorial state administration are institutionally separated from the self-governments. In a monist model of public administration, local and regional self-governments carry out their own tasks and those tasks of territorial state administration which are delegated to them, but fall, according to constitutional or legal provisions, under the competence of state administration. State administrative bodies exercise a legal and professional supervision over the delegated tasks. The distinction points to the trade-off between vertical and horizontal integration: a dualist administrative set-up implies a stronger vertical integration but may lead to segmentation into sectoral ministries, agencies and their respective administrative hierarchies. A monist model allows for a better horizontal integration of administrative units but may entail a reduction of professional control hierarchies (cf. Goetz/Hesse 1993: 304).

After the political transition, many governments chose a dualist approach of administrative reform in order to abandon the state tutelage of local self-governments and pre-dominance of sectoral policies over regional concerns. Another argument was that the separation of state administration and self-government would avoid the subsidising of self-governments from the state budget and separate the management of public companies from the supervision of these companies. Supporters of a far-reaching decentralisation or regionalisation often preferred a monist approach in order to ensure that comprehensive powers of local and regional state administration be transferred to self-governments. They considered separation as a veiled strategy of preserving old administrative hierarchies. In the view of dualists, a transfer of state administrative powers would lead to an even stronger supervisory role of the state since the state would have to ensure uniform administrative standards throughout the country.

With respect to the monism-dualism cleavage, reform outcomes are hard to classify unambiguously. In their comparison of *local* self-governments in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, Baldersheim et al. concluded that "Hungary and Slovakia are characterised by a fairly strict separation of state and municipal functions and organisations. There is one set of organisations for local self-government functions and another for local state functions. Poland and the Czech Republic have fused hierarchies, i.e. the organs of local self-government also perform some local state functions." (Baldersheim et al. 1996: 41) Davey (1995: 49-50) observed a difference between the Czech Republic and Slovakia in the fact

that Czech district offices continued to supervise most deconcentrated bodies, and district offices had closer relations with local self-governments than in Slovakia. Yet the Hungarian model does not seem to be a case of "strict separation" in so far as Hungarian mayors carry out tasks of the state administration, too.

As it has been stated in the previous section, *regional* bodies of sectoral and territorial state administration have been more integrated into self-governments in Poland than in the Slovak and Czech Republics. Hungary and Estonia seem to have maintained a basically dualist structure while trying to improve co-ordination between self-governments and state administration - through the Hungarian county-level Regional Development and Employment Councils and the Estonian Regional Development Agency (cf. Bende-Szabó and Janikson in this volume; Pálné Kovács 1997b). Yet one has to emphasise that reforms are still in progress in most of the countries and there is not enough detailed information on many countries. Concerning the *district* level state administration, Bulgaria, Slovakia and the Czech Republic have hitherto maintained their separate bodies of territorial state administration. This feature would be a typical trait of a dualist model of public administration. In contrast, Estonia and Hungary have realised models of public administration with a monist orientation since they have not created a separate tier of territorial state administration below the county level.

A third distinction which has shaped differences and similarities in policy outcomes across countries is the cleavage between *federalism and unitarism*. A federalist approach aims at transferring legislative powers to subnational units and ensuring a participation of these units at the national level. In contrast, unitarism would only enable the national parliament to adopt laws and would not restrict its powers by a second chamber representing the regions. Debates in Poland and, to a minor extent, in the Czech Republic and Slovakia were placed between the poles characterised by these approaches.

In Poland, some supporters of decentralisation proposed to take steps towards a federal model by transferring certain legislative competences to vojvodship assemblies ("delegated legislature") and transforming the Senate into a parliamentary chamber representing local self-governments (cf. Instytut Spraw Publicznych 1997). The Sejm majority rejected these proposals by defining the Republic of Poland as a "unitary structure" in the new Constitution of 1997 (Art.3). General scepticism towards federalising the state structures caused that the reform of the Polish and Czech Senates was not linked to reforms of the vojvodship and kraj level. However, in both countries the role of the Senate within the governmental system has not been finally decided and thus the second chambers may become more closely linked to the regional or local self-governments. Slovakia might introduce a second chamber deliberately to ensure a central-level representation of county self-governments, as Nižňanský's contribution to this volume and his reform proposal show.

Regionalism

The existence - or perceived threat - of regionalist political movements has been important for the political debates on regional-level administrative reforms. Theo-

retical and analytical conceptualisations of regionalism are faced with the problem of delineating precise analytic terms and identifying clear cause-effect relations (Keating 1997). While being aware of the fluid character of regionalisms and the blurred boundaries between their sources, a distinction may be made between ethnic and historic bases of regionalism. *Ethnic regionalism* emerges if an ethnic group, whose members consider their cultural identity as distinct from that of the other citizens of a state, and its political organisations link their main political demands to a subnational territorial unit, usually the territory inhabited by the group. *Historic regionalism* presupposes a territory with a particular history distinct from the rest of the country's territory. The current inhabitants of that region may not necessarily consider themselves as ethnically different from other citizens but they link their identity to their region's history and articulate, through particular organisations, political demands related to their region.

Among the countries of this study only the Czech Republic and Poland are composed of subnational territorial units with a distinct history such as Moravia, Silesia, Pomerania and Greater Poland. One may identify an Eastern and a Western historical region in Hungary (Hunnia and Pannonia), but these regions ceased to exist as distinct units before a modern Hungarian nation state was built in the course of the 19th century.⁸

After the political transition, political actors in the Czech Republic and Poland tried to claim regional interests and demands by referring to the historical regions. Moravian political movements and parties proposed to establish a regional autonomy in the Czech Republic but they did not succeed in the parliamentary elections of 1990 (Illner 1997: 45-46). In Poland, groups linked to the National Assembly of Self-governments proposed to establish autonomous regions shaped according to historical regions and to introduce federalist elements into the state structure. However, they were rejected by the majority of political parties which, reacting to these tendencies and perceived risks, reinforced the commitment to unitarism in Poland's new Constitution of 1997.

A basis for ethnic regionalism exists in those Central and East European countries which have a significant and politically active national minority.⁹ Among the countries of this study, Slovakia has an ethnic Hungarian minority amounting to 10.8 % of its population, Bulgaria has an ethnic Turkish minority (9.4 %), and approximately 30.3 % of Estonia's population are ethnic Russians. Ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia are represented by three major parties which had to join into a coalition in 1994. Ethnic Turkish citizens of Bulgaria are articulating their interests through the Movement of Rights and Freedoms. Only few ethnic Russians in Estonia have citizenship and may participate in national elections; the coalition "Our Home is Estonia" advocates their interests in the Estonian Parliament.

⁸ It should be noted that historic nation-builders in Hungary created and preserved the megye division as a device to avoid the emergence of this and other, ethnically based, regionalisms.

⁹ According to a classification proposed by Brunner (1996: 24-25), a state is no longer considered a homogenous nation state if the share of national minorities in the population is above 10%. Adapting this classification for the purposes of this article, only those national minorities amounting to appr. 10% of the population are considered significant. The following figures are taken from the census data quoted in Brunner's book.

Only the ethnic Hungarian parties of Slovakia in 1996 proposed to establish an autonomous region covering the ethnic Hungarian settlement area along the Southern border of the country, being rejected by both the government and the other opposition parties (Brusis/ Nižňanský 1997). Although the ethnic Russian community in Estonia is concentrated in the North-Eastern area of the country, their political representatives have not developed similar concepts of territorial autonomy. Since ethnic Russian non-citizens may participate in local elections, mayors of municipalities in the North-East (in particular Narva) advocate interests of the ethnic Russian community (van Meurs 1999: 29). A similar pattern seems to prevail in Bulgaria where the ethnic Turkish community constitutes local majorities in the counties of Haskovo and Rousse but has so far refrained from articulating demands for regional autonomy.

The general weakness of regionalism in Central and Eastern Europe may be explained by the incongruence of ethnic and historic regionalism: Countries with significant national minorities do not have regional units with a distinct history, and countries with historical regions lack groups identifying themselves as ethnically distinct from other citizens (see table below). The only cases among the ten Central and East European states are Romania, which has a particular historical region (Siebenbürgen) and a significant ethnic Hungarian minority, and Latvia with the distinct historical region of Latgale and a considerable ethnic Russian community. One may argue for an addition of Poland with its ethnic German minority in Silesia, but this group amounts only to appr. 0.8 % of the population and their representatives have not exerted a significant political influence on the outcomes of reform.

The incongruence of regionalisms has prevented and impeded the mobilisation of support for regionalist claims. Political actors have found it difficult to legitimise an ethnically based regional autonomy with historic reasons or, vice versa, to base claims derived from the historical distinctiveness of a region upon a distinct ethnic identity of its inhabitants.¹⁰ Governments did neither need to respect regionalist interests nor were they inclined to support regionalist mobilisation by designing regional units accordingly. As a consequence county territories in the countries of this study up to now have been designed neither according to historic regions nor with respect to ethnic affiliations. The disinclination towards triggering regionalist dynamics also led Polish and Czech governments to refrain from linking the reform of their second parliamentary chambers to the establishment regional self-governments.

¹⁰ This linkage is weaker in Latvia than in Romania because most of today's ethnic Russians were settled in the country after Latgale had lost its regional distinctiveness and nowadays the ethnic Russian community is spread throughout the country, mostly living in cities.

Ethnic and historic preconditions of regionalism

	Historic regions since 19th century	No modern tradition of regions
State with significant national minorities (> 10%)	Romania, Latvia	Bulgaria, Estonia, Slovakia, Lithuania
homogenous nation state (minorities <10%)	Czech Republic, Poland	Hungary, Slovenia

3. Impact of the European Union

Re-arrangements of regional administration in the CEEC are not only driven by the interest in overcoming authoritarian legacies and linking local self-governments with central government but also by the prospect of accession to the European Union. This section describes the policy of the European Commission and discusses whether and to what extent it has affected the political choices of accession candidates. The available empirical evidence conveys the impression that other EU institutions have not played a comparable political role in the pre-accession constellation. The Council of Europe is also neglected in this context due to restrictions of empirical research although it has acquired a strong profile with respect to administrative reforms in the CEEC. The Council has developed normative standards of local and regional self-government with its Charta on Local Self-Government (1991) and its Draft Charta on Regional Self-Government (1997) and it has formulated political-professional assessments of the reforms (cf. Nižňanský and Borissova in this volume).

The role of the European Commission needs to be analysed on the background of European integration which has led to a transfer of powers from the nation state to EU institutions, thus altering the region-centre-relationship of EU member states in favour of the regions (Bullmann 1994; Bullmann/Heinze 1997). Since more issues of relevance are being decided on the European level, regions have addressed the EU institutions directly by opening representations in Brussels, participating in the comitology and through the Committee of Regions established by the Maastricht Treaty (Kohler-Koch 1998; Keating/Hooghe 1996). The Maastricht and the new Amsterdam Treaty also allow states to be represented in the Council of Ministers by ministers of sub-national governments. The European Commission has involved the regions of the current EU member states into policy deliberation and formulation in order to gain their support for its policies and also in order to rely on the support of regions if nation states resist a particular policy initiative.

In contrast, regions of the accession countries were neglected by EU institutions and the European Commission until 1997. The Commission's White Paper of 1995, for example, only pointed to the general necessity of administrative capacity-building but did not refer to the restructuring of administration at the regional level. In March 1997 a Commission expert still suggested to eschew an overtaxing of regional administrations by restricting the participation of prospective new member states to the cohesion fund which is administered only by the national governments (Hallet 1997: 27, 29). This reluctance was grounded in developmen-

tal economics: If (since) reducing the huge welfare gap between EU member states and the accession countries is considered a priority, the catch-up process of the CEEC would be more accelerated by the removal of bottlenecks in the growth poles of a country. Backward areas could then profit from spill-over effects of rapid development in growth areas. In contrast, assisting backward regions would imply a redistribution of resources from prosperous regions and thus impede their development, slowing down the national economy's growth (Hallet 1997: 25).

However, following this suggestion and excluding new member states from the structural funds would have implied to negotiate a temporary exemption with the accession countries or to re-negotiate the general framework of structural policy. The Agenda 2000 did not opt for such an approach but reinforced the principle according to which accession candidates were to adopt the entire *acquis communautaire* at the moment of their accession, including all rights and obligations.¹¹ This implied that accession countries needed to improve their administrative capacities at the regional level in order to manage structural funds. Thus the Commission envisaged that Phare resources be used to prepare the countries for this task in the framework of pre-accession structural assistance.¹² The avis from July 1997 and the progress report from November 1998 analysed the state of administrative reforms in each country and gave some policy advice, often veiled in an opaque and diplomatic language.¹³

In its 1997 avis the Commission came to the overall assessment that Hungary, the Czech Republic, Estonia and Poland had sufficient administrative capacities to implement structural and cohesion policy in a mid-term perspective, while in Bulgaria (97/13: 68) and Slovakia (97/20: 107) significant reforms were necessary. The progress report of November 1998 maintained this assessment for Bulgaria (98/707: 40) but gave a more differentiated assessment of Slovakia, acknowledging that the country had made some progress, though only few. According to the Commission's new evaluation, Estonia and Hungary had achieved limited progress and needed more efforts for integration into structural policy (98/705: 39) (98/700: 40). Despite significant progress in the Czech Republic (98/708: 35) and Poland (98/701: 42) there were still problems ahead.

With respect to the reform of public administration, the Commission stressed in its assessments that local self governments would require sufficient financial resources make use of their autonomy. Czech local self-governments would still face difficulties in using their autonomy since two-thirds of their budget depended on state subsidies (97/14: 17). In Hungary the state budget also provided most of

¹¹ Cf. Europäische Kommission: Agenda 2000. Eine stärkere und erweiterte Union, Bulletin der Europäischen Union, Beilage 5/97, Luxemburg 1997, based upon KOM (1997)2000.

¹² Cf. the pre-print version of the Agenda 2000, Band II – Mitteilung: Intensivierung der Heranführungsstrategie, DOC/97/7: 6. A later version of this document did not specify the use of the enlarged Phare budget (Europäische Kommission: Agenda 2000. Eine stärkere und erweiterte Union, Bulletin der Europäischen Union, Beilage 5/97, Luxemburg 1997, 59.)

¹³ Cf. Europäische Kommission: Stellungnahmen zu den Anträgen der Beitrittsländer, in: Bulletin der EU, Beilage 6-15/97; Regelmäßige Berichte der Kommission über die Fortschritte der Beitrittsländer, KOM(1998) 700-712 endg. The following references contain the year of publication, number and page of the respective document. The 1997 avis on Slovakia is referred according to an earlier print version, the 1997 avis on Bulgaria is referred according to the English version.

the resources of local self-governments (97/6: 16). The autonomy of Polish local and regional governments was still restricted and should be expanded, particularly in its financial aspects (97/7: 17). In its 1998 progress report the Commission noted that the Czech Republic had signed but not yet ratified the European Charter for Local Self-government (98/708: 10). The fact that local self-governments were to a large degree autonomous in Estonia (97/11: 16) and Hungary (97/6: 16) was seen as a positive achievement.

The Commission's remarks on regional administration indicate that its preference appears to be democratically elected regional self-governments which possess a substantial financial and legal autonomy. This preference, however, is expressed only indirectly and implicitly. For example, the avis on the Czech Republic stated that the higher units of territorial self-government envisaged by the constitution were lacking (97/14: 72). The avis on Bulgaria expressed the expectation that Bulgarian counties established in January 1999 "might be granted" the right of self-government (97/13: 68). On the background of its general political complaints about the lack of democratic stability in the Slovak Republic, the Commission criticised that the newly established Slovak counties and districts received competences at the expense of local self-governments and its avis called upon the government to clarify the division of powers between deconcentrated state administration and self-governments (97/20: 17).

The country assessments of 1997 and 1998 contain only few sentences indicating an opinion of the Commission on how to structure the state territory. With respect to Poland, the Commission recommended that the division of the state territory needed to be improved in order to implement structural funds (97/7: 72). Apparently acknowledging what the Commission deemed as progress, its 1998 progress report mentioned that Estonia had initiated a reform of its territorial organisation (98/705: 38), Bulgaria planned to establish 28 counties (98/707: 39), Poland decided to establish self-governed vojvodships and districts (98/701: 9-10), and the Czech Parliament decided to establish 14 regions (98/708: 9, 35). In its official assessments the Commission did not propose that the CEEC should structure their regions according to the size of average NUTS-2 regions (appr. 15700 km², 1.8 m inhabitants). However, Eurostat, the Statistical Office of the European Communities, appears to have promoted such a structuration in its communication with the statistical offices of the accession countries (Hřích/Larischová in this volume). Estonia, Hungary and Slovakia intend to create territorial units corresponding to NUTS-2 units, the Czech Government has established statistical regions of NUTS-2 size, and the new Polish vojvodships also correspond to NUTS-2.

The necessity of such a territorial-administrative division is questionable. Firstly, the CEEC are induced to create regions which are either "oversized" in comparison with the countries' territory and population and do not fit into the inherited traditional regional structure. Or these regions remain artificial constructions unrelated to the existing regions and merely designed to maximise subsidies from the structural funds. Secondly, it is certainly true that according to the regulation on structural funds NUTS-2 regions are required in the framework of structural assistance for objective-1 areas with an average per-capita GDP of less than 75 % of the EU average.¹⁴ However, not all the current EU member states have stipulated

¹⁴ Cf. Article 8(1), Regulation (EEC) No. 2081/93 of 20 July 1993, L193/10, and Article 5(1) Regulation (EEC) No. 2082/93 of 20 July 1993, L193/22.

NUTS-2 regions: Ireland, Denmark and Luxemburg have not created a NUTS-2 level because Ireland's entire territory was qualified as an objective-1 area and the other two countries lack eligible areas. The UK, Portugal, Sweden and Greece have set up NUTS-2 regions mainly for the purpose of participating in EU structural policy (Keating/Hooghe 1996: 224; Bullmann/Goldsmith/Page 1998: 135).¹⁵

Summarising the assessments and statements, one may conclude that the Commission and the pre-accession framework appear to become catalysts for a process in which CEE regions increase their political salience. However, the Commission has been very cautious in its advice and has avoided to urge for a comprehensive regionalisation. This resembles the indirect impact the EU and the economic and political integration process had for the re-emergence of regions in Western Europe.

4. Conclusion and implications

This article has described striking similarities in the reforms of regional administration and the major factors responsible for homogenising tendencies. It has also highlighted major differences between the six countries studied here and those variables which may explain them. These differences and their explanations shall be summarised in the following points:

1. Poland and the Czech Republic are the only countries with second chambers of parliament which have originated from their path of transition. A general rejection of regionalist and federalist tendencies caused that these institutions were not linked to the new county self-governments.
2. Despite a common criticism of the administrative tutelage exerted by the regional level, only Czechoslovak reformers decided to completely abolish the old regional self-governments during the re-introduction of democratically elected local self-governments in 1990. Among the causes for this decision are the strong political legitimacy of the new government, deriving from the revolutionary path of transition, and the commitment to liberal political ideas of a direct relation between the state and its citizens.
3. Bulgaria and Estonia are the only countries without regional *self*-governments, reflecting a prevailing centralist policy approach in Bulgaria and an influential position assigned to regional associations of municipalities in Estonia. Centralist-minded governments in the Czech Republic and Slovakia have postponed the establishment of regional self-government in these countries. Stronger localist coalitions and the reform-socialist legacy led to the early establishment of regional self-governments in Hungary, while political struggles and a more intensive political

¹⁵ The EU exerts a kind of soft pressure on these countries to establish self-governed regions, as demonstrated by a recent conflict with Ireland. In 1994 the Irish Government had created eight statistical regions (NUTS-3) in order to participate in the EU structural policy. Since Ireland attained a per-capita GDP of 75% of the EU average and did no longer qualify as an objective-1 region, the Irish government redesigned its regions to enlarge the eligible area of the country. In February 1999 Eurostat rejected the inclusion of two counties into the eligible regions because sufficient county-level data was lacking and the regions did not have sufficient structures of self-government (Neue Zürcher Zeitung of 26 February 1999).

perception of the issues in Poland increased the time needed to negotiate a new administrative set-up.

4. Estonia and Hungary do not have a district level of public administration, the districts in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Bulgaria are part of the state administration, and Poland has just introduced self-governed districts. These differences may be explained by the varying size of the countries (Poland vs. Estonia), the varying progress of reforms (Poland vs. Bulgaria) but also by the cross-national differences in legacies and prevailing policy approaches.

5. While Poland appears to have realised a far-reaching integration of sectoral and territorial state administration and self-governments on the regional level, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Bulgaria have maintained a separation of these administrative bodies up to now. Hungary and Estonia have tried to improve sectoral co-ordination between self-governments and state administration within a basically dualist structure. A plausible explanation for this difference is certainly the different state of reforms in each country in combination with the monism – dualism cleavage. A dualist approach was the initial strategy to establish autonomous local self-governments against a still authoritarian state administration. A monist approach aims at a more far-reaching decentralisation, after local (and regional) self-governments have been established. The latter approach apparently has been more influential in Poland than in the other countries.

The EU and the European Commission in particular have hitherto sent different political signals to the applicant countries with respect to the regional administrative level. On the one hand, the Commission has by and large abstained from giving direct and public advice on how to structure the state territory, whether to establish elected regional self-governments and whether to divide the territory into regions compatible with NUTS-2. This restraint is guided by the principle that such questions belong to the internal affairs of EU member states and that there is no basis for such a regulatory intervention in the Maastricht or Amsterdam treaties.

On the other hand, the country assessments of the progress report of 1998 and the avis of 1997 contain formulations which suggest an EU preference for democratically elected regional self-governments with substantial financial and legal autonomy. This preference may be justified by the EU's encompassing political commitment to democratic stability and the rule of law in the CEEC which was expressed in the Copenhagen criteria for membership. Additional arguments for an active promotion of regionalisation can be derived from the general commitments to subsidiarity and a "Europe of the Regions" or from the principles stipulated in the Council of Europe's draft charta on regional self-government.

However, these rationales do not legitimate a policy advocating the introduction of self-governmental regions which correspond to NUTS-2 in size. Such regions neither exist in all of the current EU member states, nor represent appropriate structures to support the main aims of administrative reforms in the CEEC. A pre-accession policy with respect to the regional level should not encourage the CEEC to establish such regions. Instead of promoting artificial regions through semi-official channels, the EU should clarify its own role with respect to the regions and develop a more transparent policy mix of demand-driven professional support

for the administrative reforms and clear general guidelines on the accession requirements for public administration at the regional level.

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