Decentralisation and Regionalisation after Communism: Administrative and Territorial Reform in Poland and the Czech Republic

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Following decades of ideological and institutional uniformity and the suppression of regional particularism under communism, East Central Europeans in the 1990s were free to embark on the important processes of decentralisation and regionalisation. Initially, reformers focused attention on the establishment of local self-government. Public sector reform at the regional level did not immediately follow. Communist-era regional bodies were perceived to be legacies of authoritarian rule whose reform would be extremely complex. In the immediate transition period these reforms fell to the bottom of already crowded political agendas.1 By the late 1990s only a few countries had embarked on regional administrative and territorial reform. Among them were Poland and the Czech Republic. These two cases illustrate how a variety of factors determine (1) whether a country embarks on regional reforms and, when it does, (2) the scope and nature of the reforms. Region building is shaped by a country’s historical legacy, the political environment at the time of its transition, the degree of regionalist sentiment in society, as well as the prospect of accession to the European Union. These factors, discussed further below, also help to explain the variation in regional reform processes and outcomes.

This analysis begins by examining the conceptual and theoretical dimensions of decentralisation and regionalisation. The focus then turns to the reform processes in Poland and the Czech Republic. Though too early to judge the impact of the reforms, the article concludes with some preliminary indications of their strengths and weaknesses and suggests areas for future research.

The background to decentralisation and regionalisation in Western and Eastern Europe

Before turning to the processes and probable outcomes of decentralisation and regionalisation in two post-communist cases, it is necessary to define these concepts more precisely. Decentralisation is a broad term covering a range of possible ways to divest the central government of responsibility to outside organisations. For the purposes of this analysis, these outside organisations will be called sub-national...
governing bodies. Hicks & Kaminski distinguish three modes of decentralisation: deconcentration, devolution and delegation. Deconcentration of central authority entails the transfer of limited responsibility to lower levels of administration. In this case a regional authority represents the prime minister at the local level but is not a legal, self-governing entity. Similarly, delegation denotes ‘the transfer of managerial responsibilities for specifically designed tasks to public organisations outside of the regular bureaucratic structure’. This may include local governments (or special agencies); however, these organisations remain agents of the central government. Devolution, in contrast, is the transfer of authority to relatively autonomous bodies outside the direct control of central authorities. Here the regional authority is a legal entity and self-governing. Popular elections are held for the regional council, and an executive is either elected or appointed by the prime minister. In short, decentralisation may entail merely the shifting of selected administrative activities to lower levels in the name of greater efficiency, or it may entail the introduction of self-government at lower units of territorial division. In the latter cases the authorities at these lower levels are ‘endowed to act in matters relating to local and supra-local problems’. In this article decentralisation will be used synonymously with devolution.

Regionalisation is a ‘procedure aiming at establishing or testing territorial divisions for the purposes of practical action, i.e. the formation of the territorial organisation of the State’. Regionalisation generally refers to a process of decentralising authority specifically to regional units at an intermediate level between the national and the local. This process takes the form of government activity from above, such as studying proposals, debating their merits, legislating reform and implementing reform. Regionalisation requires that certain internal and external conditions be taken into account. According to Chojnicki & Czyz, reforms must consider the existing internal territorial division as well as the existing ‘nodal systems of socioeconomic phenomena’—linkages such as services and infrastructure that shape the region of a town or urban agglomeration. External conditions include the size of the proposed regional units (this is especially important in a market economy where local budgets receive relatively little subsidy from the central government), their shape, population size and economic potential. These conditions are derived ‘from the assumed functions of territorial division and the necessity to accommodate the principles of good management and administration, as well as the satisfaction of people’s needs with a minimum of effort’. Other factors that influence decentralisation, such as the legacy of pre-communist and communist administrative and territorial patterns, will be discussed below. Finally, these regional units may be administrative or self-governing. Regionalisation is most advanced in federal systems, which provide for self-government at the regional or provincial level. In other words, full regionalisation is characterised by autonomous regions with their own parliaments empowered to issue legal acts and their own governments able to implement their own policies. Neither of the cases examined here has embarked on full regionalisation, for reasons that will be discussed below.

Decentralisation and regionalisation have been carried out in a number of West European countries—since the end of World War II in the cases of Germany, Austria and Spain and, in more recent decades, in France, Italy and the United Kingdom. In
some cases, like Germany and Austria, decentralisation and regionalisation have been significant and have entailed the federalisation of the country. In other countries decentralisation has been far less complete, with the transfer of some responsibilities from centre to periphery authorities but short of federalism. In these cases the nature of administrative and territorial reform depended on domestic political considerations.

Analysts of decentralisation and regionalisation in Western Europe have offered a number of explanations for these developments. One of these explanations is the existence of regionalist political movements. This explanation emphasises pressure from below, usually from particular groups defined by ethnic, religious or linguistic features, who desire a ‘return to the roots’, greater distance from and recognition by central authorities and the dominant culture, or more autonomy (and in the extreme, even separation). Another explanation focuses on economic reasons for decentralisation. In this case pressure for decentralisation may come from above, from an over-burdened central authority wishing to devolve more responsibility for provision of services, general welfare and wealth creation to lower levels of authority. Alternatively, pressure may come from below, that is, from interests at the sub-national level, usually in wealthier regions, desiring more control over economic planning, raising and spending revenues and, in the current global economy, more direct access to international markets.

Another more general explanation is that these processes are a reaction to the centralising drive of modernisation. This argument suggests that in the process of industrialisation and nation-state building, central authorities have increasingly assumed greater responsibility over citizens’ lives, making major decisions and delivering more and more services (particularly social welfare), thereby encroaching into local culture and private lives. The resulting sense of powerlessness and alienation—caused by the central government’s penetration into private spheres of activity—has created an opposite reaction: a desire for more local solutions, ‘smaller government’ and, ultimately, self-government. In this light, the rise of citizen initiatives and neighbourhood councils in Western Europe (and elsewhere in advanced industrial societies) in the 1970s and 1980s is part of a reaction to the centralising forces of modernisation. Rather than viewing decentralising and regionalising counter-forces as anti-modern, they may be seen as a ‘harbinger of continued modernisation, and of the arrival of a stage of governmental service better attuned to the differentiated needs of culturally diverse people than national government can ever hope to be’.

Some or all of the reasons cited above may lead post-communist countries to move toward greater decentralisation and possibly regionalisation. There are, however, important contrasts between the historical and contextual backgrounds of decentralisation and regionalisation in Western compared with Eastern Europe.

The institutional constraints of the legacies of history

Eastern Europe historically contained a diverse array of ethnic, linguistic and religious groups. In contrast to Western Europe, however, these groups were long dominated by outsiders and often forcibly assimilated. Few regions enjoyed much autonomy or self-governance historically, with the exception of a few lands in the former Habsburg Empire. Most countries are not able to draw on strong regional traditions to guide
their reforms, however. Another legacy of a history of domination may be a desire to ‘return to the roots’, to rediscover cultural traditions and ties with ‘kin’ separated by borders drawn by outside powers. A particularly dangerous form of ‘return’ or ‘reaction’ to years of forced centralisation under communism has taken place in the former Yugoslavia and parts of the former Soviet Union where ethnic conflict has escalated to full-scale war. Echoes of these ethnically based conflicts have been heard in places like Hungary and Slovakia, where ethno-nationalism occasionally taints political debates. Unlike these examples, most post-communist countries have set about peacefully reforming their political and economic systems. Nonetheless, the historical complexities of ethnic relations in the region could resurface in post-communist societies, as policy makers are well aware.

The legacies of the communist period of East Central European history have profoundly shaped the process of region building since 1990. It is no exaggeration to say that the forces of centralisation in the communist world were acute. The state structures inherited by post-communist leaders were highly centralised, over-bureaucratised and overburdened. Decisions (political and economic) in the old system were taken at the very top levels of the party-state and through a paradoxical process of ‘democratic centralism’, while the lower levels of the party-state apparatus carried out decisions. Sub-national institutions were mere appendages of the central government. Territorial divisions created under communism rarely reflected historical or cultural ties; rather, they were drawn with political and economic policy implementation in mind, and each sub-national unit was treated as a piece of the larger whole. No particular interests or cultural differences were taken into account when sub-national units were created. To the contrary, such particularisms were to be obliterated by the communist territorial-administrative order.

In contrast to Western Europe, moreover, Eastern European societies under communism experienced a certain kind of modernisation, what might more appropriately be termed mis-modernisation. The type of modernisation carried out in Eastern Europe after World War II was accompanied by central planning. This mode of development provided little incentive for lower-level managers and workers to take responsibility or pride in their work and stifled innovation. For the communist leadership of Eastern Europe, modernisation necessitated maintaining control at the centre and imposing uniformity throughout the periphery. The service sector and light industry, especially in the high-technology field, were neglected in favour of heavy industry. The spatial distribution of industry under communism focused on industrial-urban agglomerations, industrial ‘zones’ or ‘axes’.

Despite the communist regimes’ efforts to impose uniformity throughout their countries, regional disparities remained, and they were quite sharp in some cases. In Poland, for example, regional industrial employment shares range from 12% to 61%. In eastern Germany and Hungary significant north–south differences existed, with higher levels of industrial employment in the southern part of eastern Germany and in north-eastern and north-western Hungary. The provision of transport and telecommunications infrastructure has also been characterised by a west–east difference, with availability decreasing with distance from Western Europe. (In contrast,
the distribution of ‘social infrastructure’—for example, basic education and healthcare—was relatively even under communism, although the quality of healthcare services, in particular, was often low.) As a result of the modernisation strategy pursued under communism, ‘the Central European countries entered the challenging phase of transformation with a strongly polarised regional structure and deep spatial inequalities … [as well as] overindustrialised cities, an underdeveloped infrastructure and a polluted environment’.16

In addition to being centralised, communist systems were closed. This meant not only closure to the West but also a high degree of closure to communist neighbours. Closure was especially marked between countries like East Germany and Poland, where the more dogmatic East German communists feared their citizens would be infected with the ideas of the Polish opposition movement. A result of the closed nature of communist systems was the relative underdevelopment of border areas. Other reasons for not developing border areas included a fear on the part of communist regimes that such areas would be too great a distance from the centre, making control more difficult. Furthermore, there was also the notion that border development would drain resources away from industrial agglomerations, the heart of communist economies. As a result, there were few border crossings and almost no trans-border cooperation.

All of these historical legacies pose certain institutional constraints as well as, perhaps, incentives as reformers attempt to decentralise power and reorganise territorially. The inherited territorial divisions and their distortions, as well as the regional structures and their inefficiencies, are linked to the communist era. As such, they are perceived as deviations from tradition and as remnants of the authoritarian past.

**Political environment of the transition**

The mode or path of transition and the constellation of political actors, including their views and visions for the society, also shape the reform process. Where the transition was negotiated between opposition and old regime elites, the new regime was constrained by the communists, who wished to preserve the old administrative and territorial order and thus hold onto their power. In places where revolution swept communist leaders aside, transition actors were freer to abolish old structures.

The democratic ideas and beliefs of political actors and their preferences for the distribution of power in the new system also shaped the regional reform process. Some actors favoured more local control, making their arguments on democratic grounds, while others emphasised the need for centralised control.17 The localist versus centralist debate did not correspond neatly with the communist elite/opposition cleavage. In Poland, Solidarity favoured more local autonomy on grounds of democracy and accountability, while in the Czech Republic some of the centre-right former members of Civic Forum favoured centralism on the grounds of greater efficiency and national unity.

**Regionalism**

Administrative and territorial reforms might also represent a way of responding to
pressures from below for greater autonomy, especially in countries with significant minority populations or with a strong history of regional autonomy (such as Moravia in the Czech Republic and Silesia, Pomerania and Wielkopolska in Poland). In general, historical regionalism is weak in East Central Europe. There is a basis for ethnic regionalism in Slovakia, with its Hungarian minority (almost 11% of the population) and Bulgaria, with its Turkish minority (9.4%), but these instances of ethnic regionalism do not correspond to areas of historical regionalism. The result is that governments are less likely to respond to regionalist interests.18

Moreover, the legacy of efforts to create nation-states after World War I and the redrawing of borders following World War II, including the ethno-cultural, economic and political sensitivities that contributed to the wars in the former Yugoslavia and the break-up of Czechoslovakia, would seem to make national/regional cleavages a reason not to regionalise.

The prospect of accession to the European Union

The reasons for (and against) decentralisation and regionalisation posited above relate to the internal dynamics and legacies of a country. Domestic politics, however, cannot be separated entirely from the international arena. It is useful to explore whether efforts to decentralise and regionalise are also linked to external developments, namely European integration.19 The prospect of EU accession, particularly the need for candidate countries to adopt the entire *acquis communautaire* upon acceding, has probably influenced the reform processes in East Central Europe. In indirect ways the European Commission has implied that the accession countries needed to reform their administrative structures at the regional level to manage structural funds—and it has indicated a preference for democratically elected regional self-governments with substantial financial and legal autonomy.20 Moreover, the emphasis on multi-level governance has grown within the European Union, increasing the importance of sub-national units of authority.21

In several respects decentralisation and regionalisation contribute to a post-communist society’s integration with the western part of Europe by providing another avenue—the sub-national—for building linkages to other countries and to the EU.22 Regions, especially border regions, may seek to cultivate ties with neighbours in order to promote regional economic development, intercultural exchange and better relations after decades of communist-imposed separation. The cross-border cooperation and regional development efforts on the borders of Eastern Europe and the European Union (namely between Germany, Poland, the Czech Republic and Austria) are also relevant to integration with the EU.23 As in many West European cases where the supra-national dimension of the EU has reinvigorated the sub-national dimension of politics,24 the prospect of EU membership reinforces regionalism in post-communist Europe.

Administrative and territorial reforms will allow accession countries to take advantage of the EU’s structural funds and will also give them the opportunity to influence the EU level through the Committee of the Regions. From the central government’s perspective, decentralisation and regionalisation can promote economic revival, insofar as they offer a means to develop long-neglected border regions and
to unburden the state of some of its economic development tasks, such as promoting regional economic development.

With these ideas in mind, we now turn to the cases of Poland and the Czech Republic. These cases illustrate two different decentralisation and regionalisation processes and outcomes owing to their unique constellation of variables. For each case, the particular pre-communist traditions of administrative and territorial organisation, the experiences with reform under communism, the political environment at the time of transition from communism and the regionalist dynamics are examined. The case studies then move to the reform debates and challenges in each country as well as the eventual policy steps taken. The concluding section of the article discusses some of the likely impact of the reforms in Poland and the Czech Republic.25

The reform process in Poland

Historically, Poland has been a unitary state, subordinated to the authority of the centre, usually a king, and since 1918 a government. For over two centuries Polish governments wielded power on behalf of occupying powers, which may explain a prevailing lack of confidence in the central government in Poland, exacerbated under the communist regime that followed World War II. Poland never had a tradition of regional federalism, though throughout history certain parts of Poland attained some degree of autonomy (as far back as the Middle Ages, and local self-government existed during the interwar period).26 During partition times some regions, like Poznan (within Prussia) and Galicia (within the Austro–Hungarian empire), enjoyed partial autonomy. The three major occupiers of Poland—Austria, Russia and Prussia—shaped Poland’s economic and political development along three different paths.27 Where self-government rights existed, they were enjoyed exclusively by the landed gentry.

The OECD notes several obstacles to implementing administrative reform in Poland, including a history of underdeveloped local and regional government structures, a concern that regional economic disparities will grow, tendencies for regionalism to become ethnically-based and the fact that, with vertical economic and administrative sectoral organisation, regional thinking and decentralising efforts have been stifled.28 To this list should be added lingering suspicions about outside ideas and influence and a fear of change that might weaken the Polish nation-state. As one observer noted when the Polish regional reforms were being debated, ‘many Polish politicians are convinced that regionalisation would weaken the state and that it would be contrary to the idea of a “Europe of nations” ... Large territorial units would encourage artificial differences and inner conflicts’.29 Moreover, critics of the reforms claimed that decentralisation would pander to a ‘German’ view of Europe, with strong regional governments that would eventually transform the EU into a federation of regions.30 Although the Polish–German past certainly colours opinions in Poland, the general suspicion about outside influences and a loss of national sovereignty is not just a Polish phenomenon; it is shared by many East Europeans, such as the Czechs, as will be suggested below.

Historically, Poland was differentiated along south-east/north-west lines. The south-eastern territories were traditionally more sparsely settled, had an older popu-
lation, a smaller share of state or cooperative agriculture and a smaller share of bigger private farms. Culturally, centralism and obedience to authority were more common in the south-east of Poland than in the north-western areas, which were more innovative and influenced by Western traditions such as self-organisation and control of authority. Today, the level of industrialisation and urbanisation is also a basic differentiating factor. Some islands of modernity and relative economic health, such as Warsaw, Poznan, Krakow, Wroclaw and Gdansk, enjoy a higher 'level of modernity of regional economic structures and [an] ability to adapt to the requirements of a market, internationally open economy'.

The territorial division of Poland between 1950 and 1973 resembled the Soviet three-tier system. There were 17 wojewodztwa (provinces), over 300 powiaty (districts), and over 4,000 (eventually 8,000) gromady (communes). The powiat has been the most stable feature of Polish territorial division. It has existed for over 400 years, even during periods of foreign domination. For this reason, transport networks, social infrastructure and even emotional attachment to geographical space in Poland are organised along powiat lines.

Further reform of territorial organisation in Poland took place between 1973 and 1975, when a two-tier system was introduced. This increased the number of wojewodztwa, often referred to as voivodships in the reform literature in English, from 17 to 49, abolished the powiaty, and reduced the number of communes to 2,500, changing their name to gmina (plural gminy). The purpose of these changes was to decrease the strength of the voivodship party apparatus and to destroy the well-established district elites, as well as destroy the emotional attachment to the powiaty. The reform significantly increased the centralisation of the state, even though the regime claimed to be decentralising it. The smaller, weaker voivodships were easier for the central government to control. The territorial changes, however, created several small, economically unviable regions, whose boundaries ignored traditional ties and spatial economic, social and cultural relations. The gminy were often too small and weak to assume the duties shifted to them from the abolished powiaty, so many responsibilities were moved up to voivodships. At each level of administration 'national councils' directly supervised the authorities and acted as instruments of the central party.

Despite these limitations, in the later years of the Polish communist regime there existed something like proto-self-governments, namely the 'alternative' local elites organised around Solidarity. Their presence would greatly facilitate the reform of local government after the fall of the communists. Both the intellectual wing and trade union leaders of Solidarity advanced the idea of 'maximum administrative decentralisation of the state'. By bringing the decision-making process closer to the people, the power of central state authorities would be counteracted and the nomenklatura weakened.

The first post-communist government led by Solidarity quickly acted on its commitment to local self-government. In devising the administrative reform, the post-communist Polish authorities looked to the experience of different Western cases as well as that of Polish self-government during the pre-war period. In March 1990 the Sejm passed the Law on Local Self-Government, which granted new powers of self-government to the gminy, numbering 2,489. This reform introduced democratic elections at the local level, transferred the ownership of communal property (and thus
the responsibility for privatisation) from the central to local governments, and
introduced local administration and local budgets separate from the central govern-
ment.39 This reform opened up new areas for political activism, gave more adminis-
trative and executive responsibility to local governments, and put the collection and
disbursement of revenues in the hands of local authorities.40 Although the new reform
was fundamentally in the spirit of representative democracy, elements of direct
democracy were also introduced—namely the local referendum.41

Though popularly elected bodies were created at the local (city and commune)
level, the voivodship remained a level of central government administration.42 The 49
voivodships still had only limited formal power; they were responsible for executing
legislation initiated by the central government. The economic development depart-
ments of voivodships carried out government policy but had no budgetary funds of
their own.

Meanwhile, the deeply entrenched bureaucratic powers in Poland resisted the
transfer of powers to lower, self-governing bodies. In addition, financial problems and
the inexperience of new personnel at local levels served to undermine the capacity of
the new local governments.43 Nonetheless, ‘there was a widespread consensus that the
gminy had proved more responsive to local needs and conditions’.44

In June 1990 legislation introduced the rejon—a quasi-subdivision of voivodship
administration, with no responsibilities or tasks of its own. The rejon served as the
territorial deconcentration of the state administration for purely technical and organi-
sational purposes. Following this legislation, there were debates about future reforms
but no legislative action. By this time severe recession and fiscal problems occupied
the attention of the new regime. In this environment the central government moved
to maintain fiscal responsibility over the municipalities.

Later in 1990 a State Commission was created to come up with a proposal for
territorial reorganisation and suggest a way to implement reform. This commission
produced a 500-page report detailing the major points for debate: the delimitation of
regions, somewhere between 10 and 14; the constitutional status of new regions,
ranging from subordination to the central government to complete federalisation; and
the role of the intermediate level, whether self-governing, merely administrative or a
mixture.

Between 1991 and 1993 preparations began for administrative reform, only to be
abandoned after a change in the Polish government. The new Sojusz Lewicy
Demokratycznej (SLD) (Alliance of the Democratic Left) and Polskie Stronnictwo
Ludowe (PSL) (Peasants’ Party) coalition blocked any new movement on territorial
reform. The PSL was the major force in opposition to this reform, as it wanted to
maintain its strength in agricultural provinces and feared a shift in the power base to
urban areas. The post-communist SLD ‘was unwilling to sacrifice its coalition on the
altar of local government reform’45 and went along with the PSL. Both parties used
their powers of patronage to install like-minded authorities in the provincial adminis-
tration.46 The government of Prime Minister Pawlak (PSL) defended its decision to
halt the reforms by claiming order and discipline in the political administration were
needed in the transition period.47

The lull in the administrative-territorial reform process ended with the change of
government in 1997. That year a Solidarity-based coalition joining Akcja Wyborcza
Solidarnosc (AWS) (Solidarity Election Action) and Unia Demokratyczna (UW) (Freedom Union) returned to power and immediately began work on administrative reform as well as reforms of education, health care, social security and the courts system. A goal of Solidarity politicians since the transition began, decentralisation represented a significant step in weakening the control of the communist-era bureaucracy. It was also seen as part of the process of changing the status quo and modernising Poland after four decades of communism and four years of post-communist governments. The Solidarity-led government’s stated intention for introducing administrative reform was to ‘change intergovernmental relations in Poland as well as its fiscal and territorial structure, by decentralising control over public services and public finance to two new levels of democratically elected self-government: powiaty and voivodships’. Moreover, the government stated that the reform was designed to relieve the central government of the tasks that it used to administer under the old, communist system. The redefined tasks of a modern and effective government, freed of unnecessary responsibilities, will now include strategic issues, in both economic and political terms. The Polish central government administration will now be able to focus on the elaboration of national economic, foreign and security policies, as well as on supervising the balanced and harmonious development of the whole country.

Once again, the PSL opposed the reform, claiming this time that poor farming regions would suffer if they had to rely on locally raised taxes. The PSL also still feared that the reintroduction of the powiaty would shift the locus of power at lower levels away from their strongholds in rural areas. Some nationalist members of the AWS, the senior partner of the governing coalition, also voiced opposition to the reforms, fearing that devolution would allow regions to cooperate closely with the German authorities, diminishing Warsaw’s sway over its regions.

The new government, led by Jerzy Buzek, first proposed reducing the number of voivodships from 49 to 12 and introducing about 300 powiaty. Much protest followed, with some provinces aiming to preserve their status, some joining in protest to counterweight larger ones, and others vehemently opposing the division of their province. The government went back to the negotiating table. President Kwasniewski (SLD) endorsed his party’s plan to create 17 provinces (the number of provinces in communist Poland before the abolition of the powiaty in 1975). The government counterproposed with the number 15, which Kwasniewski vetoed. The government then accepted a compromise number of 16 provinces. In the final analysis, ‘the whole debate about the number of provinces has been nothing but a political tug-of-war: no substantive arguments of any serious weight were presented by the involved parties’.

The government’s reforms were prepared by the Government Plenipotentiary for the Systematic Reform of the State, Professor Michal Kulesza, who left the post at the end of 1998 when the reform tasks were completed. The enactment of the provisions was carried out by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration. This ministry was responsible for tasks such as monitoring reform and providing training for members of the newly elected self-government bodies. The legislative phase of the reform lasted throughout 1998.

On 11 October 1998 elections to gmina, powiat and wojewodztwo councils were
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As with elections to the Sejm at the national level, a proportional representation electoral system is used at each level (except in the least populous communes). On all levels these first elections were dominated by two parties, the AWS and SLD. Together, they won two-thirds of the vote and almost four-fifths of all seats at the województwo level. The voter turnout was the highest for local elections since the beginning of the Polish transition to democracy: 45% for the województwo councils (sejmiki) and 48% for the powiat councils (rady).

On 1 January 1999 the reform became effective, giving the newly elected councils 3 months to organise. The reform reduced the number of województwa to 16 and created 308 powiats, while 65 urban gminy were given powiat rights. In the new system, the 2,424 gminy constitute the basic level of public administration, endowed with all powers not specifically reserved for other levels. They run nurseries, kindergartens, elementary schools, libraries and cultural centres and maintain local roads, bridges and squares. They are also responsible for land management and planning, zoning, water mains, sewage systems, landfill and solid waste disposal, electricity and heat supply, local public transport, primary health care services, municipal housing, public markets and fairs, public order and fire protection, and many social welfare programmes. They share responsibility (with the powiats and województwa) for maintaining order. Environmental protection also lies within their jurisdiction. The gminy have their own budgets. They are responsible for all public matters of local significance not reserved by law for other entities and levels of authority. Finally, they perform tasks relegated to them by the central government—assured by law of the funds necessary to carry out delegated tasks.

The powiats are responsible for local issues which, 'due to the subsidiarity and proportionality principles, cannot be ascribed to the gminy'. They run secondary education, operation of public health services, social welfare services beyond gmina boundaries, run orphanages, support the disabled, maintain order, handle police and fire station administration, as well as fire and flood prevention, manage emergencies and natural disasters, construct and maintain powiat roads, and protect consumer rights.

The województwa councils, or sejmiki, are responsible for the development and implementation of regional economic policies; their task is to stimulate business activities and improve competitiveness and innovation in the region. These bodies are independent legal identities with independent budgets (like the powiats and gminy). They are also responsible for higher education, specialised health services and supra-local cultural activities. The preservation and 'rational utilisation' of cultural and natural environment also fall under their jurisdiction, as do the modernisation of rural areas and spatial development. The sejmiki are elected in general elections. As the main decision-making body at this level, they elect governing boards to exercise executive authority. These boards are headed by elected marshals. The wojewody, on the other hand, are state appointed officials who represent the central government at the regional level. The wojewody supervise the activities of the other levels and can annul decisions made by the self-governments if they are inconsistent with statutory law. The wojewody are also responsible for all services related to public security. Their presence gives a dual structure to administration at this level.

The województwa can enter into bilateral and multilateral cooperation with
foreign partners. When Poland enters the European Union, the regional governments will manage EU Structural Funds. 'Therefore, Polish regions can become one of the leading forces in the process of Poland’s integration with the European Union in the near future'.

According to the Polish government,

These reforms increase citizens’ ability to control and monitor public institutions, and to ensure that public moneys are spent effectively. By decentralising responsibilities, the central government relieves itself of performing local tasks that it performed poorly, allowing itself to focus on truly strategic issues. The reforms should also allow Poles and Poland to take full part in the economic and security structures of Europe, and in the development of European and Euro–Atlantic security structures. They will help the Polish state secure its position in the arena of international politics as a fully sovereign, resourceful, and responsible partner.

Further, the government states that these reforms are intended to transform Poland into

- a modern state, capable of using effectively its economic, social and political potential;
- a democratic state, whose public and private values belong to a shared European civilisation;
- a state that functions in accordance with clear and transparent procedures, and is permanently controlled by democratically elected representatives of the people — a state in which local and regional communities can rebuild their identities and manage their own affairs, and in which the principle of subsidiarity is respected by all levels of government;
- a state capable of shouldering the responsibilities and sharing the benefits of participation in supranational organisations and structures ...

As stated by the prime minister’s office, among the principles underlying reform is civil society: 'The state will support citizen activities that enrich the public interest and will consider the expression of this interest as its highest goal'. Moreover, 'the self-governing powiat, together with the existing self-governing gmina, allows citizens to shape and control the local public institutions and policies that are closest to their daily lives'. Another guiding principle, that of subsidiarity, the idea that policies should be carried out at the lowest level, ‘constitutes one of the foundations of the European Union. It also forms the basis of the restructured Polish state’. Effectiveness, transparency, openness, accountability and flexibility are also principles central to the new reforms. A new system of public finance would render public administration entities 'more transparent and accountable to the electorate'.

In summary, Poland has taken significant steps toward decentralisation and regionalisation. According to the statements of the Polish government, issues relating to the quality of democratic governance, integration into the European Union and Poland’s integration into the global economy were the reasons for embarking on the reforms. The official statements aside, the political debates and delays surrounding the reform clearly indicated that the process was related to the on-going conflict over decommunisation. While the Solidarity-led governments saw administrative reform as a way to wrest power from entrenched political forces in the bureaucracy centred in Warsaw and in the communist-era voivodships and gminy, the PSL and SLD resisted the reforms as useless reorganisations and a waste of valuable public funds. Rather than a society-wide consensus on the benefits of and necessary steps to reform, the
decentralisation and regionalisation processes were bogged down by partisan bickering, political manoeuvring and fears on the part of some communities of lost political and economic influence.

In the final analysis Poland remains a unitary state, though a decentralised one, and is not likely to move toward full regionalisation or federalism. Such a development would be contrary to its historical tradition as well as public opinion.

Reform in the Czech Republic

The Czech Republic claims a long tradition of public administration and local and land-level (regional) self-government that is connected with administrative developments in neighbouring Austria, Germany, Switzerland and even France.63 The two historical regions, Bohemia and Moravia, have constituted the core of the Czech state since the eleventh century. Under the Hapsburg monarchy the regions of the Bohemian Crown, the Margraviate of Moravia and the Duchy of Silesia enjoyed a relatively strong system of local and regional autonomy.64 The Slovak lands came under the Hungarian Crown and enjoyed no such autonomous or administrative tradition. When Czechoslovakia was created in 1918 as a multinational state, it was divided into the lands of Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, Slovakia and Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia. The Czechoslovak state lasted 20 years in this form, until the Munich Pact of 1938 deprived it of regions annexed by Germany. After World War II Czechoslovakia was rebuilt first as a unitary state (1945–68), next as a federation in form only (1969–89) and then as an actual federation (1990–92). There was a brief period after the war (1945–48) when the legal order was partially restored, but this was soon displaced by the imposition of the Soviet-style system.

Until December 1990 the Czech and Slovak republics had three-tier administrative structures (municipal, district and regional). The lower tiers of administration lacked legal status. The goals of communist-era administrative changes were to weaken the historical legacy of the three ancient regions—Bohemia, Moravia and Slovakia—and to replace traditional demarcations with more ‘economically functional distribution’.65 At first, the communist authorities created 19 large regions (kraje), which they reduced to 10 in 1960, plus two urban centres. The task of these regions was to administer the orders of the central government. Each region was administered by a centrally controlled national committee. The regions were subdivided into 76 districts (okres) and over 7,500 municipalities (obec).66 The federalisation of Czechoslovakia following the Prague Spring in 1968 was modeled after Soviet nationality policy: nations were constitutionally equal and given the ‘right’ to express their right to self-determination—with the understanding that such expression must conform to the regime’s goals or incur a suppression of human rights and basic freedoms.67 Federalisation under these terms meant rigid centralisation.

After 1989 the new democratically elected government turned its attention to the implementation of strong national reform policies. Centralisation, rather than decentralisation, facilitated these national reforms. In 1990 the new government abandoned the old three-tier system. The regions were abolished, as they were seen as arbitrary administrative units with no historical roots.68 The number of districts remained 76, and another was created in the mid-1990s. The responsibilities of the former regions
were transferred to the district level. The new government also eliminated the communist system of national committees. The municipal and communal authorities were recognised as the basic units of self-government.

The 6,236 municipal governments (with an average population of 1,700) can initiate by-laws and local legislation. These elected assemblies are endowed with both legislative and executive power. The first local elections were held in November 1990. A referendum was also introduced at this level. The powers of the municipal government include the following: the approval of development plans for its territory; the administration of the estate of the municipality; granting and receiving donations; preparing municipal budgets; establishing legal bodies and other local institutions; determining the types of local charges; implementing tasks in the fields of education, social and medical care, and culture that are not reserved for other authorities; and managing local public order and municipal police, as well as local environmental affairs.69

No directly elected bodies have been created at the district level. Instead, the district remains an appendage of the central government, responsible for carrying out state administration. District agencies of the republican government have the right, in some instances, to overrule the decisions of the self-governing municipal or communal governments. Among the criticisms of the new administrative structure is that there is no connection between the municipal level, the district and the republican executive bodies. Also, issues of broad, regional concern are not adequately addressed, as the system fails to take into account local traditional characteristics.70

In 1990, at the time of the above changes, President Havel and then Prime Minister Petr Pithart argued for a new administrative structure that would be based on a traditional territorial division into Lands.71 Efforts to create new territorial and administrative units, however, have been impeded by political fighting between the government and the opposition, as well as by conflicts between individual politicians.72 The issue of administrative and territorial reform is more sensitive than it was in Poland. In this case much of the sensitivity surrounds the future status of the historical Lands of Moravia and Silesia. Some fear that giving these regions special status again would lead to the kind of administrative dualism that was a factor in the Czech–Slovak split of 1992.73

In September 1990 the Czechoslovak government created a commission to examine various proposals for a new administrative arrangement. The commission studied the German, Austrian and Italian models and considered eight proposals, from which it selected four for final consideration: (1) a new administrative structure based on traditional Land structures; (2) a provincial variant, which would entail the creation of 15–30 provinces or somewhat enlarged districts and would still be highly centralised; (3) a combination of the first two, with provinces based on historic Land ties, the creation of state government and self-governing bodies at the provincial level; and (4) an overhaul of the federal system, giving the Czech and Slovak republics and Moravia and Silesia each its own constitution, citizenship status, legislative and executive bodies and judicial system. Each region would decide on its own form of government, and federal ministries would be reduced.74

Interest in the issue of administrative reform faded quickly among Czechoslovak politicians. Attention was diverted to other matters, as the commission’s work
coincided with the first round of privatisations, economic reform and worsening disputes between the Czech and Slovak republic governments. By 1992 the issue of administrative and territorial reform was completely overshadowed by the break-up of the country. In 1993 the issue resurfaced and the new Czech constitution obligated the government to set up new ‘higher self-governing units’, with assemblies elected every 4 years, and with minimum interference by state authorities. Although this provision was opposed by the Czech Prime Minister Vaclav Klaus, his party, the Civic Democratic Party (ODS), as well as its coalition ally, the Civic Democratic Alliance (ODA), it was supported by their other coalition members, the Christian Democratic Party and the Christian Democratic Union (which has strong support in Moravia). Since the Christian Democratic parties made their support of the constitution conditional on the inclusion of a provision on self-government on a higher level than the municipality, the measure passed.

According to Dusan Hendrych, it is generally assumed that the regional-level self-governments will be competent to draft and approve their own budget, manage their own property and their own financial resources, draft and approve regional development programmes, establish their own organs, establish and abolish legal entities within their territory, issue generally applicable ordinances, supervise the financial management of the municipalities and grant loans and subsidies to municipalities.

In 1993 two commissions were set up: the Office for Legislation and Public Administration, headed by Deputy Prime Minister Jan Kalvoda (ODA), and another set up by the Internal Affairs Ministry and headed by Jan Ruml (ODS). These commissions worked independently and were controlled by two competing parties. Kalvoda’s group proposed dividing the country into 12–14 Lands, or regions, with both state and self-administrative institutions. Ruml’s commission proposed eight self-governing territorial units. The debate was not resolved, so Prime Minister Klaus proposed combining the two models. He provided few concrete guidelines for achieving this goal, however, and in retrospect it is clear that Klaus and his party were opposed to regionalisation for political and ideological reasons. As Michal Illner has observed, ‘centralism of the ruling political establishment was supported by doctrinal arguments. It is, in particular, the idea of regional self-government which antagonised the opponents. Doubts were cast on the relevance of any political institutions that stand between a citizen and the state, apart from political parties. The very concepts of civil society, self-government, local democracy and even decentralisation have become contested political issues’. Indeed, decentralisation and regionalisation became one of a number of points of disagreement in the on-going debate between President Havel and Prime Minister Klaus and their supporters about the nature of democracy in their country. Havel advocated the idea of civil society, while Klaus resisted any notion that, beyond political parties, there should be intermediary representation of political and social interests. In addition, as Illner notes, the central government ‘delayed, or even torpedoed, continuation of the reform of the intermediary level because of fears that it would lose control of the country’s development’—namely economic development, about which Klaus had very clear preferences. In general, the stakes in regional administrative reform were much higher than they had been in local government reform; the central authorities stood to lose influence in the
areas of political and economic development to self-governing regions. Interestingly, the battle lines on the issue of decentralisation and regionalisation fell differently in the Polish and Czech cases. While the centre-right parties in Poland tended to favour administrative and territorial reform as a way to marginalise former communists, in the Czech case there was no significant post-communist faction to contend with and it was the centre-right that feared losing influence and therefore supported the status quo. In the Czech case, moreover, the disagreements over regional reform also touched upon the ideological or philosophical differences among political actors regarding the nature of democracy and the role of the citizen in politics.

With none of the proposals for reform acquiring sufficient support in the parliament, the debate over decentralisation and regionalisation continued in the next legislative period. In 1997 both chambers of the Czech parliament approved the Constitutional Act on the Formation of the Regions. This act provided for the creation of 14 higher self-governing units (kraje), the same number of regions that existed between 1948 and 1960, albeit with different boundaries. This act did not address the matter of the regional assemblies, and the responsibilities of the regions and their relation to local and central authorities continued to be debated. Many of the laws and regulations connected to regionalisation, including a new election law, were not passed until 2000. In the interim period local government continued to be the responsibility of 77 districts, which report to the Council of Ministers, and approximately 6,242 municipalities. The districts, however, were to cease to exist on 31 December 2002.

According to Roman Linek, deputy minister for regional development, the new regions will use their powers for the benefit of economic, social and cultural development of the territory they administer; (meaning) that their role should be comprehensive and should comprise resolution of regional economic, social [welfare] and ecological problems ... They should also draft regional budgets, approve them and check their fulfillment. Naturally, greater territorial self-governing units will join international associations of local authorities and will cooperate with self-governing regions of other states.

Linek also noted that the regions would play an important role in providing public services, especially in the areas of social welfare care, health services, transport, education and culture. He suggested that one of the motivations for pursuing regional reforms in the Czech Republic had been the emphasis the European Union placed on decentralisation: 'Considering the significance of regions in conditions of a “unified” Europe currently being born, it is necessary to lay greater emphasis on the comprehensive role of these [regional] units as subjects and entities of regional policies, territorial development, the provider of public goods and chattels, etc., and to anchor a role for it in legislation.'

In April 2000 the Act on Regions was passed in the Chamber of Deputies. Under this law the new regional assemblies elect and dismiss the region’s governor and council. They also approve the regional budget, issue bonds and submit bills to the Chamber of Deputies. Regional assemblies will have the authority to issue regional by-laws and subsidise municipalities, civic associations and other associations in the region. Another law passed in 2000 concerned the rights of the 14 newly established
self-governing regions to acquire and manage their own properties. Moreover, the law stipulated that the regions would now have the power to manage secondary schools, vocational high schools and basic art schools, all of which were previously under the control of central government. Roads, national scientific libraries as well as some galleries and museums would also fall under the jurisdiction of the regions.86

The ODS tried unsuccessfully to have the regional elections postponed to 2002 when regular local elections were to take place.87 Elections to the 14 new regional bodies were held on 12 November 2000, with 33.6% of the electorate participating. The new assemblies have between 45 and 65 members, depending on the size of the population, and are elected for a 4-year term.

The Czech experience with administrative and territorial reform demonstrated the political and philosophical concerns of various actors somewhat differently than was the case in Poland. Whereas in Poland decentralisation was linked to decommunisation, in the Czech Republic the issue boiled down to competing visions of democracy—one emphasising political parties and national-level authority and the other in favour of local democracy. As in Poland, EU membership was an important motivation for regionalisation, though, unlike the Polish authorities (regardless of party affiliation), the Czech government under Klaus bristled at what it viewed as outside pressure to carry out regional reforms. Finally, the political debates in the Czech case, at least initially, reflected fears about regionalisation. In particular, some Czechs feared that regional economic differentiation would increase and that national unity would suffer. Foremost on the minds of many Czech politicians was the 1992 break-up of Czechoslovakia. Some feared that, with greater regionalisation, Silesia and Moravia would grow more independent from the central government and, perhaps someday, seek full federalisation or even separation.

Concluding remarks and areas for further research

By and large, the initial priorities of post-communist regimes in Eastern Europe were national, namely national political and economic stability. Pursuing these goals often led officials to maintain centralisation, or at least to put off decentralisation until other priorities had been met. Decentralisation and regionalisation were also impeded by the situation of rapid change and flux that characterised post-communist societies after 1989. In such an environment it was often difficult to identify regional issues or disparities. To compound matters, most of the new political elites lacked experience with decentralisation and with market-based regional policies.

Within a few years of the collapse of communism, however, both the Polish and Czech governments began to debate the issues of decentralisation and regionalisation and link them to the broader processes of political and economic reform. The experiences of these two countries’ attempts to introduce decentralisation and regionalisation revealed several common developments.

First, the administrative and territorial reform process was clearly constrained by the institutional legacies of the past, namely the communist past. In neither case was there a (pre-communist) historical model of regional autonomy that could reasonably serve as a guide for reform discussions. The legacies of communist administrative and territorial restructuring were viewed by reformers as obstacles to democratisation, and
there was no consensus on how to proceed with reforms. Issues such as the number of regional units, their borders and even their names became burning political questions, stalling reform for months and even years. Behind such debates lay other concerns. A general criticism of regionalisation was that it could erode national identity and unity. Decentralisation, it was assumed, would encourage the development of local and regional leadership, eroding a sense of common purpose. Whereas supporters of regional reform pointed out that elected leaders at sub-national levels would be more familiar with local tastes, goals and interests than elites at the national level, critics countered that sub-national elites would thus represent local-regional concerns and would foster a sense of local-regional over national consciousness. Certain political parties, such as the PSL in Poland or the ODS in the Czech Republic, and groups, namely entrenched bureaucrats in the lower tiers of the centralised administration, feared a loss of influence in new administrative and territorial arrangements.

Second, decentralisation and regionalisation were influenced by the political ideas and visions of the political actors in the transition period. Regional reforms tended to be favoured by organisations and individuals who, before the collapse of communism, were associated with the democratic opposition. This was clearly true of the post-Solidarity parties in Poland as well as the off-shoots of the Czech Civic Forum that represented the Havel, rather than Klaus, position on democracy. What the Solidarity and Havel groups shared was a value on citizen participation, checks on power and decentralised authority.

The opponents of reform in both countries clearly feared a loss of authority to sub-national, self-governing units. In contrast to the Polish reform opponents, however, the Czech opponents were not holdovers from the communist era but had been in power since 1990 and resisted changing the post-communist status quo, which was centralisation. Moreover, much like British conservatism, the Czech brand that dominated politics for most of the 1990s is sceptical about the benefits of regionalisation and European supranationalism. Czech conservatives fear that both forces seek to undermine national sovereignty and serve to weaken the central government and national unity.

Third, the issue of greater regional autonomy for minorities had a small but decidedly negative impact on the debates about decentralisation and regionalisation. In countries with ethnic minorities or historically important regions, decentralisation and regionalisation are likely to raise fears about a weakening of national authority, the exacerbation of divisions within society and even separatism. These fears were most evident in the Czech Republic regarding Moravia and Silesia, but they were also raised in Poland over Silesia. It is important to point out that regionalism is a very weak factor in these countries. The Moravian regional movement failed to mobilise much support in the early 1990s. The Silesian minority is quite small, less than 1% of the population in Poland, and its leaders have not been able to influence policy making in any significant way. Regionalism, rather than a positive factor for administrative and territorial reform, was used by reform opponents to raise fears—illegitimate fears in these two cases—about the fragmentation of the nation.

Fourth, the prospect of European Union accession was an important factor in both countries’ administrative and territorial reform processes. The official statements of
the Polish government reflected a high level of Polish motivation to integrate into the
EU by adopting the EU principles of regionalism, multi-level governance and
subsidiarity. In comparison, there was less elite pressure, at least under Klaus and the
ODS, for administrative and territorial reform in the Czech Republic. Relative to
Poland, the Czech Republic was initially much slower to adjust its laws and
regulations to those of the European Union. Moreover, EU membership and inte-
gration into the global economy were far less prominent in official Czech statements
about regional reform. There may be a number of reasons for the initially slow,
hesitant Czech response to the processes of regionalisation and Europeanisation. One
has already been alluded to: the relative conservatism of post-communist governments
in the Czech Republic, particularly under Klaus. Another possibility is that, in
contrast to Poland, the Czech Republic is supremely confident that it ‘belongs to
Europe’ and does not need to take great pains to demonstrate that its political,
economic and social systems are compatible with the EU. Poland, on the other hand,
is bordered by Russia and may be more concerned about making its affinity with
Western Europe more evident. In recent months and years the situation has changed,
with the Czech Republic catching up to if not surpassing Poland in preparations for
full EU membership.

Another motivation for reform that was evident in official government statements
was economic development. Granting sub-national authorities greater authority over
regional economic development would presumably lessen the burden on the central
government and allow it to focus on other areas, such as foreign policy and national
security. Regional economic planning bodies preceded the development of political-
administrative and elected assemblies in both cases. Moreover, it should be noted that
discussions about the borders and size of the regions were often linked to economic
factors. It is equally important to mention, however, that many post-communist
leaders were concerned about the possibility of exacerbating regional economic
disparities through decentralisation and the redrawing of regional boundaries. They
rightly noted that disparities in the creation of wealth, access to resources and
provision of services can affect the local culture, as well as migration and foreign
investment patterns. More research needs to be done in order to assess the economic
implications of the regional reforms.

As for the impact of regional reforms in Poland and the Czech Republic, it is
simply too soon to offer a judgment. It can be said that in both countries the first
elections to the assemblies of the new wojewodztwa and kraje generated little public
interest. Since those elections there have been few indications that citizens are aware
of or interested in the activities or potential roles of the new regional authorities.
In the Czech Republic populist propaganda has fueled suspicions about the kraje, citing
the costs of reform and the distance of the new kraje authorities (as opposed to the
districts) from the people. Once Poland and the Czech Republic become members
of the EU, however, the regions are likely to assume more relevance in the public
view, as they have in other member countries.

We can, at this juncture, identify several preliminary indications of the impact of
the reforms. One of them is the continuation, if not exacerbation, of regional
economic differentiation. In Poland, regions with large cities, especially Warsaw,
have done relatively well. Increasingly, the western part of Poland has also shown
positive signs of regional development, while eastern Poland lags behind. A similar west–east gradient is also present in the Czech Republic, with the western, Bohemian regions faring better than those to the east. In addition to the different levels of economic infrastructural development at the start of the reform process, regional development also depends on the capabilities and innovativeness of the leadership of the regions. As Illner suggests, in the future,

regional development will be increasingly determined by qualitative factors—socio-cultural (such as qualifications of the population, its entrepreneurial culture, ability to absorb new stimuli and communicate with heterogeneous and frequently also foreign partners), political (political stability and political culture, competence of local governments), economic (presence of progressive and prospective economic activities—tertiary and quaternary ones, of organising and controlling powers, diversity, and competitiveness of such activities, etc.), as well as environmental.\textsuperscript{92}

A general problem with Polish and Czech decentralisation is that it is too shallow in both cases. Quite simply, the regions do not possess adequate resources to solve their own problems. As Gorzelak observes, ‘the legislation [in Poland] created [a] promising framework for the activities of the new regions, and now this framework should be filled in by concrete resources ... The legislation still needs refinement. In particular, the relations between the governmental regional administration (voivods) and the regional self-government should be further clarified’.\textsuperscript{93} These changes will affect the performance of regional authorities, which will, in turn, affect the public’s evaluation of the regional level.

In both cases the system of financing presents a basic problem for regional capability. Regions are too reliant on the central government and the national budget. While Poland’s current prime minister promises a greater share of the budget for the regions, the government in Warsaw has simultaneously introduced budget cuts which will hurt the regions. In the Czech Republic there had been no decision by spring 2002 on the regional share of national taxes, and the financial responsibilities of the regions remained unclear. A consequence of these problems is a delay in the development of regional infrastructure.\textsuperscript{94}

In the Czech case, moreover, the number of regions created by the reforms is too great and the size of the regions too small to be efficient. For the purposes of implementing the EU’s Structural Funds, for example, NUTS I\textsubscript{I} units, of which there are eight, will be used, rather than the 14 kraje.

On the positive side, as one prominent scholar of Poland’s decentralisation process has suggested, the regional reforms did succeed in filling the vacuum between the municipalities and the central government. Moreover, they have attempted to address problems and issues that no level of government previously addressed.\textsuperscript{95}

The reforms also created a new layer of political representation and thus broadened the scope of democracy in the two countries. A new regional elite was created which is increasingly viewed as an important set of political actors, even a stepping stone to national office. These elites are becoming more ‘professional’, their nominations increasingly controlled by political parties. As these new elites gain competence and confidence, they are likely to push for greater regional authority and multi-level governance in general, as well as make connections to other regional actors, foreign
investors, inter-regional associations and the EU. This development can already be seen in the Polish marshals, who have become partners for negotiating with foreign investors and for furthering cross-border contacts and projects.

Finally, regions in Poland and the Czech Republic have become arenas for lobbying. In Poland regional reforms have caused professional organisations to restructure themselves so, for example, their regional branches correspond to the 16 wojewodztwa. Regional party activity is also reportedly increasing, with parties now organising in three tiers, local, regional and national.

Future research should be done to learn more about the regional elites, their backgrounds, attitudes, types of activities they engage in to further the interests of the regions, and the linkages they make with other political, economic and social actors as well as the electorate. The development of regional party organisations is another area for future research. In the longer term research should focus on whether regional elites are ultimately successful at creating public identification with the new administrative creations and whether the regions eventually become loci of political mobilisation as well as economic development.

In conclusion, the cases of Poland and the Czech Republic offer a number of lessons for other countries seeking to design and implement reforms. Although historical ties and symbols may be evoked, and although the accession to the European Union offers certain responsibilities and opportunities, at the heart of debates over regional reforms is power. Inevitably, certain parties or groups, namely those most entrenched in the political and economic institutions of a country, will resist decentralisation and regionalisation. Arguments over the economic benefits of decentralisation, the impact on national unity and even the names of new sub-national units are largely variations of this underlying question of power.

The processes of decentralisation and regionalisation are companions to economic and political reform. They are also an important step in the spread of multi-level governance across an integrating Europe. As a second round of East European countries looks forward to EU membership, it is very likely that we will see continued efforts at, and surely more debates about, administrative and territorial reform.

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Acknowledgment

The author wishes to acknowledge the support of the Division of Interdisciplinary Studies at Colby College, the International Research & Exchanges Board, and the East European Studies/Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, which published an earlier version of this article as Occasional Paper 63.


3 Ibid., p. 5.

4 Zbyszko Chojnicki & Teresa Czyz, 'Region, Regionalization, Regionalism', in Grzegorz Gorzelak & Antoni Kuklinski (eds), Dilemmas of Regional Policies in Eastern and Central Europe (University of Warsaw, European Institute for Regional and Local Studies, 1992) p. 428.

5 Ibid., p. 434, emphasis mine.


Ibid.


Ibid., p. 126.

Ibid., p. i.


See Breska & Brusis (eds), *Central and Eastern Europe on the Way into the European Union*. They discuss the ‘policy approach’ of transition actors as a factor in the reform process.

Brusis, ‘Re-creating the Regional Level in Central and Eastern Europe’, p. 15.


Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Transition at the Local Level: The Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and the Slovak Republic* (Paris, OECD, Centre for Co-operation with the Economies in Transition, 1996), p. 102. Also, Swianiewicz points to four
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historical regions: Galicia, the southeastern part of Poland which belonged to Austria in the nineteenth century; Kongresowka, the central and eastern area which belonged to Russia in the nineteenth century; Wielkopolska, the middle-western part which belonged to Germany in the nineteenth century; and the recovered territories, the western and northern parts of Poland which belonged to Germany until 1945 (Pawel Swianiewicz, 'The Polish Experience of Local Democracy: Is Progress Being Made?', *Policy and Politics*, 20, 2, 1992, pp. 87–98 at 91.

28 OECD, *Transition at the Local Level*.
30 Frances Millard, *Polish Politics and Society* (London, Routledge, 1999). p. 55. According to Bohdan Jalowiecki, 'The Regional Question', in Gorzelak & Kuklinski (eds), *Dilemmas of Regional Policies in Eastern and Central Europe*, regionalism in Poland is backed by particular group/regions—primarily Silesia (linked to German minority, ethnic-cultural and economic dimensions) and Wielkopolska (based 'exclusively on economic and civilisational revindication claims', p. 456). He compares this to the autonomy claims of the Lombardy League in Italy. The number of Poles with German origins is disputed—Poles claim 300–400,000, Germans 400,000–million. The Socio-Cultural Association of German Minority in Opole claims membership of 180,000 (p.456). Jalowiecki reports that an organisation called the Upper Silesian Union promotes a concept of Greater Silesia, which would include all Silesian areas, including those of the Czech Republic (p. 458). In 1990 it proposed a Commonwealth of independent regions for Poland—communities of several million, naturally defined areas around historical centres—which would have the right to enact their own laws, propose country-wide laws in the Polish parliament, raise and spend revenues, and take part in international agreements and treaties.
31 Ibid.
32 Gorzelak 'Polish Regionalism and Regionalization', p. 473.
34 Hicks & Kaminski, 'Local Government Reform and Transition from Communism' p. 3.
36 Ibid.
38 For details on the reform act see Niewiadomski, 'Die Wiedereinführung der Kommunalen Selbstverwaltung'.
39 Ibid.
40 OECD, *Transition at the Local Level* p. 106.
41 See Niewiadomski, 'Die Wiedereinführung der Kommunalen Selbstverwaltung', p. 312.
42 For an analysis of the process and outcomes of this 1990 reform see Hicks & Kaminski, 'Local Government Reform and Transition from Communism'.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid., p. 54.
46 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
50 'Poland's Devolutionary Battleground', *The Economist*, 7 February 1998, p. 53.
53 Jasiewicz, 'Poland'.
54 Ibid. Jasiewicz also notes that the province given up in the compromise deal between the Buzek Government and the SLD was President Kwasniewski's native region, Middle Pomerania. With this, the SLD 'scored also a point against its former leader'.
56 Ibid., p. 12.
58 Ibid., p. 16.
59 Ibid., p. 8.
60 Ibid.
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61 Ibid., p. 9.
62 Ibid., p. 7.
64 For more on the historical lands see Elizabeth Wiskemann, Czechs and Germans: A Study of the Struggle in the Historic Provinces of Bohemia and Moravia (Oxford University Press, 1938). See also Hendrych, ‘Constitutional and Legal Bases of Czech Public Administration,’ pp. 300–301.
65 OECD, Transition at the Local Level, p. 38.
66 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
71 Obrman & Mates, ‘Subdividing the Czech Republic,’ p. 28.
72 Ibid., p. 27.
73 Ibid.
74 Ibid., pp. 27–28.
75 Ibid., pp. 29–30.
81 It should be noted here that the number of municipalities is constantly changing.
82 This change follows from the new Act on the District Offices approved in 2000.
84 Ibid.
89 For example, Illner cites data from the Institute of Pub” Opinion research. When citizens were asked their opinion on the expediency of regional reform, the percentages who viewed the reforms as urgent were: 37% in April 1993, 30% in March 1994, 27% in February 1995, 20% in February 1997 and only 18% in June 1997. See Michal Illner, ‘Regional Development in the Czech Republic: The 1993 Scenario Revisited’, in Grzegorz Gorzelak et al. (eds), Central Europe in Transition: Towards EU Membership (Warsaw, Regional Studies Association, Polish Section, 2001), pp. 264–286, p. 267. Public interest was highest in 1993, when crucial constitutional issues were being debated (whether the country should be a federation or a confederation, what the status of Moravia would be etc.).
90 Noted by Michal Illner, interview with the author, Prague, 13 May 2002.
92 Illner in Gorzelak et al. (eds), Central Europe in Transition, p. 283.
94 Interview with Illner, 13 May 2002.
95 Interview with Grzegorz Gorzelak, Warsaw, 9 May 2002.
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