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## **ABSTRACT**

Territorial decentralization of government has been an important part of the democratic reforms in East Central Europe after 1989. In the paper, some aspects of the decentralization efforts in Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland are discussed - their political and intellectual background, expectations they have caused, results they have so far delivered and problems they have created or visualized. Territorial decentralization of government did not materialize as expected, and the reforms were halted half-way, particularly in Czech Republic and Poland. While decentralization to the local level was mostly successful, it is pending on the regional level in these two countries and recently more centralist policies have been re-introduced. The author argues that both an insufficient decentralization on the regional level as well as an excessive fragmentation of government on the local level are the problem.

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## INTRODUCTION

In this contribution we shall examine how territorial problems were approached in the reforms of public administration launched in the former Communist countries of East Central Europe after 1989. The study reflects the situation as of the end of 1996. Our focus will be three countries of the region - Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland. For the sake of brevity and with a certain licence, the three countries will be referred to here as "*East Central Europe*", which is obviously inaccurate as there are more countries in the region which, anyhow, is poorly defined. For practical reasons - and much to our regret - we were not able to include Slovakia, the fourth member of the family of East Central European countries, where the reform has taken its own specific shape.

Before moving to the East Central European agenda we shall, however, briefly discuss the territorial aspect of public administration reforms on a more general level. This should remind the reader that, in spite of all contextual differences, such reforms, whatever the country or the time period, have to tackle similar problems.

### 1. TERRITORIALITY IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORMS

All systems of public administration have a territorial dimension due to the fact that public administration deals with societies that are territorially defined and differentiated. Leaving aside a more general discussion concerning the different ways territoriality enters social and political life, we can describe the locus of the territoriality issue in public administration as *the territorially contingent structuring of administrative functions and institutions*<sup>1</sup>.

The following four properties of sociospatial systems are particularly relevant to the territorial structuring of public administration. The first one is the *hierarchical character* of such systems manifested, for example, by the nodal pattern of settlement structures or the micro-macro scale of sociospatial processes. A system of public administration, when developing its own hierarchies, cannot ignore these objective hierarchical arrangements. The second property is the *co-existential character* of territorial systems: as a rule, a given territory is shared by a plurality of different actors (economic, political, social, cultural) whose activities must be "horizontally" coordinated to render the co-existence possible and to prevent disruption. Third, the co-existence of different subjects in space facilitates their *integration*, so that territorial units tend to develop distinctive political, social and cultural identities which have to be respected by public administration. Fourth, the different economic, political and social actors operating within a territory have different action-spaces, and also the different societal processes occur in different spatial frameworks. Public administration, to be effective in dealing with such actors and in regulating such processes, must account for their diverse *spatial contexts*.

Indeed, in administrative reforms, the search for an optimum vertical territorial structuring and for optimum territorial areas of public administration has always been a highly relevant issue. As a rule, institutions of public administration are designed so as to act at more than just one geographical level - they are organized

into several territorially defined tiers. Beside the national administrative institutions, there exist also institutions operating at sub-national levels - typically a regional (intermediary) level and local level. Hence the term "*local government*" is used in this paper to denote the governments operating at the lowest level of the territorial administrative structure, i.e. in the rural and the urban municipalities, while for the governments in districts, counties, regions, provinces the term "*intermediary government*" is applied.

The numbers of tiers differ, depending on the size of the country, its political system and other factors. The need of such a multi-tier structure has been supported by two lines of arguments, each referring to a different aspect of a modern state [Taylor 1993: 317-318]. Firstly, governments as bureaucratic organizations, have to *deconcentrate* some of their functions along the geographical scale in order to attain higher efficiency. By 'deconcentration' is understood a process whereby governmental functions are shifted downwards within the hierarchical system of state bureaucracy, yet without weakening the vertical hierarchy of the system: deconcentrated territorial units remain to be vertically subordinated to central authorities. Both internal administrative efficiency and efficiency of service provision are supposed to be improved by deconcentration. Deconcentrated government units, being nearer to the field of their operation than the core units, can act with a better knowledge of the situation, can better communicate with the parties involved and are better disposed to implement administrative decisions.

Secondly, central governments *decentralize* some of their functions to subnational governments, primarily in order to support their legitimacy. Decentralization means devolution of the state's functions to autonomous territorial governments which can act, within the scope of decentralized functions, on their own behalf, without recourse to higher-standing authorities. Local or regional autonomy is introduced, referring sometimes to the existence and traditions of local or regional society (local or regional communities) which is then institutionalized by what some have called a "*local or regional state*" [Cockburn 1977] and is represented by a local or regional government. Arguments for decentralization may be drawn from two alternative theoretical contexts, each expressing a different philosophy. One kind of arguments is the above-mentioned top-down reasoning which views local and regional government as derived from central authority and enjoying only that much autonomy as was granted to it by the central state. Alternatively, the existence of "*local state*" can be explained and supported by federalist bottom-up arguments: local state as a political form of local or regional community is primary, while any higher-level governments are derived from it and enjoy discretions ceded to them from below.

It is, therefore, both the *efficiency* and the government *legitimacy* concerns which stand behind territorial deconcentration and decentralization of the government. The balance of the two concerns is different in individual public administration systems and it may also change over time, depending on the prevailing political philosophies. The two concerns are functionally coupled as they reinforce each other: efficiency is a factor enhancing the government's legitimacy and vice versa - legitimacy may be

an important factor in bolstering governmental efficiency. Neither decentralization nor deconcentration of government are, of course, absolute values in public administration reforms; they have to be weighed against functional and contextual factors and it is their optimum level to be attained rather than their maximum or minimum<sup>2</sup>.

The relevance of the territorial aspect in public administration, as far as decentralization of government and local autonomy are concerned, has been challenged in the last three decades by pointing to the progressing *globalization* of economy, politics and culture. It has been suggested that the subnational tiers of government (and, in fact, also the national governments themselves) are losing importance, as the inter-regional economic and sociocultural differences are being smoothed out and the most relevant decisions concerning local and regional issues are taken outside the communities and regions involved, by corporate actors and supranational organizations, instead of governments [cf. Mlinar 1990 and other contributors in Kuklinski 1990]. It has been claimed that a process of "*detrterritorialization*" is under way in societal development and that communities based on territoriality will be substituted by "*communities without propinquity*" [Webber 1967].

Better informed and more balanced approaches did, however, show that the process of globalization has had a dialectical character and while in some respects economy and society are indeed being globalized, localization occurred in other respects. Mlinar in one of his more recent writings expressed the opinion that

*"local government and local democracy are becoming complementary, rather than an alternative to the central, higher levels of decision making"* [Mlinar 1995: 156].

Decentralization itself is not losing sense, but it is the scope of decentralized government that may change a lot in the future.

Irrespective of the kind of their theoretical and political underpinnings, administrative reforms have, as a rule, to tackle the following two principal issues concerning the territorial aspect of public administration (beside these two principal issues, there is, of course, a great number of other problems that have to be approached in the reforms):

- 1) *Territorial tiers of government* - their number, character, competences and mutual relations (inter-governmental relations).
- 2) *Territorial units* (government areas) representing each tier - their character, number and concrete delimitation.

It is mainly these two issues on which we are going to focus in this contribution when discussing territorial aspects of public administration reforms in East Central Europe. The issue of territoriality in the reforms is, of course, wider: one could as well discuss territorial contexts of individual agendas of public administration, the way they are or can be deconcentrated etc. Such issues have been intentionally

omitted in this contribution in order to make it more focused and also because of lacking information.

Given the widely different contexts within which reforms are designed and implemented in individual countries and in different historical periods, no fixed general rules can be formulated as how to proceed in solving the above tasks. However, certain methodological principles can be suggested [cf. Barlow 1992: 63-66], based on the properties of territorial social systems (cf. above) as well as on functional requirements concerning both the internal as well as external functioning of public administration.

1. The "*natural area*" principle demands that some correspondence should be maintained between territorial structure of public administration and that of society. Delimitation of areas of government has to correspond to their functions. More concretely, each government area should extend over a territory that contains the activity systems which relate to its functions and to the problems it has to deal with. Components of the activity systems may be demographic potentials (e.g. sufficiently large populations for schools, hospitals and other institutions to be able to function), infrastructure, sets of activities etc. To use a metaphoric language, government areas should be "*natural*" in a functional sense. Which implies that they should be "*natural*" also in the economic sense, i.e. they should take in consideration the existing economic spatial relations and should have a sufficiently diversified economical basis to avoid monofunctionality.

An important organizing factor of public administration is the settlement system which has basically a hierarchical nature. Therefore, in designing structure and functions of government it is important to consider the character of the settlement unit or of the settlement subsystem which constitutes the government area [Bennett 1992: 144-145].<sup>3</sup> The diversity of settlement systems calls for a corresponding diversity of government types [van der Wusten 1992: 58].

A government area should, as far as possible, contain a population that has shared interests and a sense of community, i.e. the area should represent a unit which is "*natural*" in a social and cultural sense. If possible, it should be designed so as to take into account as much as possible the existing cultural regions, linguistic patterns, regional self-identity of the population. Observation of historical territorial structuration may contribute to this goal.

A government area should also be designed so as to make administrative services reasonably accessible for the majority of citizens. Geographical distances to administrative centers and frequency of citizens' contacts with different administrative services play a role. No areas and no parts thereof should be chronically handicapped by being isolated from administrative centers. This means that the geographic character of the region should be considered as well as the existing transportation networks.

2. The *sustainability* principle recalls that government areas should be designed so as to be able to mobilize sufficient resources for performing their functions and also to remain stable for a reasonably long period of time. In particular, they should

be able to generate a major part of revenue which is necessary in relation to the expenditures associated with the respective government's functions (it is assumed here that inter-governmental transfers should be minimized). Typically, this can be the matter of creating a sufficient local tax-base. A government area should also be large enough to guarantee rational performance of the administrative functions assigned to it. It should be able to afford properly qualified administrative personnel, specialized departments and necessary equipment.

Delimitation of government areas - the *administrative regionalization* of the country - should be as stable as possible. Any potential merits of its re-designing should be carefully balanced against incurred economic, political and social costs: beside the administration itself, regionalization is also relevant to the structuring of services, political institutions, civic associations and the like, and it has, therefore, considerable relevance to people's everyday lives. Any change of government areas destabilizes a much broader set of phenomena than just the operation of government. Stability needs, of course, to be combined with a reasonable amount of flexibility [Hesse 1995a].

3. The *intergovernmental relations* principle. A government unit should be designed in such a way that co-operation among units at the same territorial level should be facilitated and relations with higher and lower-level units should be made manageable. This requirement is easier to fulfil if government units at the same territorial level have approximately the same geographic and population size. The intergovernmental principle acquired a new dimension due to the proliferation of European inter-regional co-operation: higher-level government areas should also be designed so as to be able to participate in the European-scale inter-regional co-operation and to be compatible with participating regions from other countries.

The above principles (not all of them would pass uncontested) express rational criteria which *ideally* should be applied in designing and evaluating public administration structures. Their practical implementation is, however, complicated by two sets of circumstances. Firstly, some of the principles are *mutually incompatible* and their practical application must, therefore, be a compromise, unless one criterion purposefully gets the priority. For instance, solutions founded on the demand for socially and culturally natural regions or on the accessibility principle favour small-sized government areas, while the sustainability principle would rather support large areas of government. There is also a contradiction between solutions favouring universal administrative areas intended to accommodate different administrative functions within the same territorial framework and profiting from the "*economy of scale*" (increasing thus the user's comfort), and solutions proposing functionally specific and, therefore, mutually different areas in which the efficiency of individual services may be higher. Also, the delimitation of territorial units suitable for the performance of self-government (smaller and "natural" government areas) often does not overlap with that which is functional for an efficient performance of state administration (larger areas following the "sustainability" principle). Compromises must be sought if the same territorial structure has to accommodate both functions; an alternative would be to allow for two different territorial divisions - one for self-government, the other for state administration.



Secondly, in decisions concerning territorial aspects of administrative reforms, primacy usually belongs to *political* considerations. Criteria of the geographic, economic, administrative and sociotechnical rationality are, as a rule, of secondary importance and it depends on political decisions, if, when and how they are activated. This should be no surprise, because the reforms of public administration, by modifying administrative division of the country and the central-local relations, can influence territorial distribution of political power. Political actors may design the reforms of public administration with implicit political intentions as, for example, to:

- achieve a certain territorial distribution of votes that would bolster the position of some party or would prevent another party from getting the majority,
- achieve an intended ethnic composition of a government area so as to guarantee some ethnic group the upper hand in local government or, on the contrary, to prevent such a situation,
- prevent or facilitate regional separatism, or formation of a strong regional government that would challenge central authority,<sup>4</sup>
- weaken or strengthen the position of regional power elites,
- guarantee independent administrative status to a particular territory in order to create administrative posts for political clients, to reward supporters or to get support from local voters.

After this introduction, and using some of the approaches elaborated here, we shall move to the reforms of public administration in East Central Europe.

## **2. THE CONTEXT OF THE REFORMS OF TERRITORIAL ADMINISTRATION IN EAST CENTRAL EUROPE AFTER 1989**

Transformation of the territorial structure of government was considered an important task in the process of re-building political and administrative systems in East Central Europe after 1989. Reforms of territorial administration followed closely after the collapse of the Communist regimes and after the transformations of the constitutional bodies and of the central government in 1990. In the following paragraphs we shall discuss different aspects of these reforms in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland. As far as possible, we shall approach the situation summarily in the three countries, although, in reality, three individual, not entirely identical national reforms are concerned. This approach is reasonably justified as all three countries share similar legacies of the Communist past - and also some legacies of a more distant history<sup>5</sup> - and also face similar post-Communist transformation tasks.

Beyond the general trends in public administration, inspiration from Western democracies and transfer of institutional models therefrom, four sets of specific contextual factors have influenced in particular the territorial reforms in East Central Europe:

1. legacies of the Communist era - political, administrative and cultural, and also legacies of the pre-Communist time,
2. political context of the reforms,
3. expectations toward decentralization,
4. geographic factors. In some respects such factors were common to the three countries, in other respects they were country-specific.

## 2.1 The legacies

Communist regimes in East Central Europe considered it a priority task to seize political control of territorial governments when they were coming to power in the 40s. This goal they accomplished in two stages: the first stage took place during the few years between the defeat of the Germans and the Communist takeovers of 1947 and 1948, under the pretext of democratization and purging of quislings (one should be aware that sovietization of territorial government began well before the Communists actually seized power), the second soon after the takeovers. In the process, territorial governments were re-moulded according to the "*soviets*" model to become Councils - "*Národní výbory*" (National Councils) in Czechoslovakia, "*Tanács*" (Councils) in Hungary, and "*Rady Narodowe*" (People's Councils) in Poland. Territorial governments were established on the local level (rural and urban municipalities), district level and regional (provincial) level. Their organizational structure copied that of the '*soviets*' in the USSR and was therefore much the same in all East Central European countries: an elected Assembly, an executive Board elected by the Assembly and headed by a Chairman, Committees composed of the deputies, and a administrative apparatus. At each level, executive Boards and the apparatuses were subordinated simultaneously to the respective organs of the higher territorial tier and to their own Council (the principle of "*dual subordination*").

As an integral part of the system of Communist political power in East Central Europe, the new territorial governments respected two basic doctrinal rules of this system: the principle of "*democratic centralism*" and that of "*homogeneous state authority*". Main features of the system can be characterized as the following [cf. Vidláková and Zářecký 1989, Illner 1991a: 23-24, Swianiewicz 1992, Coulson 1995b: 5-9, Baldersheim and Illner 1996a, Elander 1995: 5-7]:

- *It was undemocratic*. The elected bodies (assemblies) were created more by nomination than by true elections. Although elections were held regularly and a democratic facade was maintained, in reality they were a formal affair, more a manifestation of political loyalty than voters' choice. The lists of candidates were prepared formally by a convention of official political and social organizations, but in reality by Communist Party committees. The lists were pre-structured according to centrally prescribed quotas, setting percentages of candidates according to sex, age, social group and political affiliation. There were no competing candidates and the way the ballot was organized rendered secret voting impossible. Also, negative votes were rarely cast.

- *Real decision-making power resided with the Communist Party bureaucracy.* Territorial governments, their functionaries and personnel were under the permanent control of Communist Party bodies which instructed them how to act on important and politically sensitive issues and which could intervene at any moment in the decision-making process. The posts of councillors and territorial government officials belonged to the "*nomenklatura*", which meant that the persons occupying them had to be approved by the responsible Communist Party authorities.

- *The system was centralist, any authentic territorial self-government was excluded.* Important issues of local and regional development were decided and financed by higher-level territorial administrations or by central ministries. Higher levels of authority could suspend decisions or even dissolve a local council (see the principle of "*double subordination*").

- *Territorial government lacked economic and financial foundation.* Local finances were part of the state budget, the bulk of local revenues represented central grants and the powers and financial resources left in the hands of territorial governments were extremely restricted. Communal property did not exist - lands, buildings and infrastructure were just part of state property administered by territorial governments.

- *Public administration and self-government were amalgamated* into a single system based on the ideology of "*democratic centralism.*" According to this ideology, no contradictions could, by definition, arise between the "real interests" of the state and of its territorial subsystems, because they were all supposed to express the interests of the working class. A single political and administrative body - the local version of the "*soviets*" - was, therefore, made locally responsible for advocating both local and central interests.

- Regional level and sometimes also local level *administrative areas were mostly artificial.* After seizing power, Communist regimes re-designed the territorial structure of public administration so as to break away from pre-Communist territorial system and, in this way, to destroy traditional social networks and loyalties. This, at least, was one of the implicit aims of the territorial reform in Czechoslovakia in 1960.<sup>6</sup> Also later territorial reforms - in Poland in 1975 and in Hungary in 1984 - followed implicit political aims.

- *Horizontal integration within and among administrative areas was weak.* This was due to the preponderance of vertical relationships both in politics and in economy where also a sectorial perspective was far the most important. As a result, a territorial unit was administered more as an aggregate of local or regional outposts of individual economic and administrative agencies than as a complex socioeconomic organism. The consequences were a vertical segmentation of territorial units and little co-operation among them, developmental disparities and strains as well as non-systemic solutions of local problems. The following quotation from the Czechoslovak 1969 Constitution illustrates the philosophy and the political status of territorial government in that period:

*"National Committees will respect the principle of superiority of interests of all people of Czechoslovakia over particular or local interests. The whole performance of National Committees will aim at teaching citizens in conscious and voluntary fulfilling of their duties to the society and the state."* [The Constitution of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (1969), Head 7, Article 93, Paragraph 2].

As it was pointed out by some authors [cf. Elander 1995: 6-7, Coulson 1995b: 9], there was, of course, a difference between the official ideological model of territorial government under Communism and its real-life face. Three examples can be mentioned. One concerns some smaller rural municipalities where a certain degree of *genuine representation* of local governments was maintained due to the neighborhood effect which eroded the external political control and preserved some accountability of the councils [Illner 1993]. The second example has to do with the *erosion of territorial administration by economic organizations*. In spite of the formal competences of territorial governments who, by law, were responsible for a *"complex economic and social development of their territories"*, the vertically organized and centrally controlled economic structures (industrial and other enterprises and their associations as well as economic ministries) assumed a strong and sometimes decisive influence in local and regional issues. Enterprises, which frequently commanded much greater resources than territorial governments, assumed a wide range of public-sector responsibilities commonly belonging to the territorial administration. In some places enterprises even became the main sponsors of local development, making territorial authorities ultimately dependent upon them. The political and economic relevance of territorial government was thus undermined not only by centralism but also by the increasing strength and patronage of the economic organizations [cf. Illner 1992, Benzler 1994]. The third example concerns *degeneration of the centralist command system* into a clientelistic structure. As elsewhere, the bureaucratic system of vertical subordination in territorial government proved ineffective and degenerated into a system of networking and negotiation where lines of personal influence and negotiating skills played an important role [Coulson 1995b:9].<sup>7</sup> As noted by Ill,s [Ill,s 1993], there has been a widespread trend in Hungary to represent local and regional interests within the Communist Party and state apparatus through fellow townsmen and through other methods of extensive lobbying. In all East Central Europe contributions to municipal and regional infrastructure and services were usually negotiated informally, either within the local nomenclature as a trade-off between its various groups, or with the higher-level political and administrative bosses [Tarkowski 1983: 47-73, Illner 1992: 42]. Although theoretically there should have been no room for local and regional interest representation within the system, in reality it constituted its major characteristic [Illés 1993].

Neither was the system of territorial government entirely static during the forty years of communist rule. In each of the countries several *reform steps* were introduced, intended to adapt the system of territorial government to a shifting political climate as well as to newly emerging functional needs. The reforms featured both centralist and decentralist tendencies. For example, the Czechoslovak reform

of 1960, the Polish reform of 1973-1975 and the Hungarian reform of 1984 have fundamentally changed the territorial structure of public administration, contributing to its centralization (see note 6). On the other hand, some other reforms introduced modest elements of decentralization and democratization: the first attempts at decentralization started in Hungary in 1971 (the Act on the local councils issued in that year mentioned "*self-administration*" as one of their functions, which, however did not show in everyday practice - cf. Szabó 1990), in Poland in 1983, with Czechoslovakia following. Yet the changes were never such that would touch upon fundamentals of the system. Still, discussions on the contours of a serious systemic reform of territorial government were under way in all three countries already some time before 1989: in Hungary draft legislation was in preparation since at least 1987 [Davey 1995b: 57-58], in Poland and Czechoslovakia discussions took place since 1988. It would thus be misleading to view the forty years of the Communist regime as a monolithic period without any internal dynamism and differentiation as far as the territorial government is concerned.

The territorial structure of public administration in East Central Europe in 1989, at the end of the Communist era, was the following:

*In the Czech Republic* there existed a three-tier system of territorial government:

1. Municipalities (villages and towns), altogether 4,104 units
2. Districts, 76 units (including three cities with a district status)
3. Regions, 7 units plus the capital which had the status of a region.

*Hungary* had a two-tier system:

1. Municipalities (villages, joint villages, great villages, joint great villages, towns, joint town-village municipalities, county towns, joint towns), altogether 1,542 units
2. Regions (counties), 19 units.

In *Poland* there were two tiers:

1. Municipalities (rural, urban, joint urban-rural), 2,383 units (in 1988)
2. Regions ("voivodships"), 49 units.

Beside this *institutional and political legacy* of the Communist system of territorial government, the post-1989 reforms faced also a legacy of political culture characterized by

- separation of the private and the public spheres, popular distrust of institutions, of any political representation, and of formal procedures as well as citizens' unwillingness to get involved in public matters and to hold public office,
- paternalism consisting in the belief that local needs should be and will be taken care of by extra-local actors, usually by higher standing authorities

- the state or the region - and that the proper strategy to have the needs attended is to mobilize support of external patrons,
- the popular feeling of being chronically disadvantaged, of one's own community being neglected by authorities, be they central, regional or whichever, and handicapped vis-a-vis the neighbors.<sup>8</sup>

This set of attitudes, well documented by research [cf. Rose et al. 1995], temporarily receded during the 1989-1990 wave of public participation, but was partly restored thereafter. Among the difficult cultural legacies also the *administrative culture* of the Communist public administration should be mentioned. There is unfortunately little empirical evidence on this issue.

Beside the legacies of the Communist system, also the older *pre-Communist traditions* of public administration played some role in the 1990 reform. Territorial government has quite a long history in all three East-Central European countries and the pre-Communist system has been an inspiration for the reformers. In the territories which belonged to the former Austro-Hungarian monarchy (the Czech Lands, Hungary, Galicia), modern territorial administration was founded in 1862 by the Imperial Communal Code (das Reichsgemeindegesetz). The Code established a model of administration and a structure of organs on the municipal and regional (district) levels based on the dual-responsibility system of government: territorial units performed - through the same administrative bodies - both self-government and state administration and their competences were correspondingly composed of the "own" and the "transferred" competences. Local administrations were thus subordinated both "horizontally" to the local councils as well as "vertically" to the higher standing administration [Janák and Hledíková 1989: 349-359]. In the years that followed 1862, further legislation introduced the general Code in the individual parts of the Empire: 1864 in the Czech Lands, 1871 in Hungary. With modifications, this system was maintained in both countries until 1945 and it served again as the point of reference in the recent reforms. In Poland, which was partitioned until 1918 between the three neighboring imperial powers, elements of the Austro-Hungarian, Prussian and Russian legal systems co-existed after re-unification until the 30s. And it were mostly the Austrian and the German systems of territorial administration which inspired the reform of 1990.

## 2.2 Political context of the reforms

As already mentioned, the reform of territorial administration, or rather its first stage,<sup>9</sup> was an essential component of the over-all political transformation in East Central Europe after 1989 which closely followed the regime change. *Decentralization, deregulation and de-etatization* of public administration were its dominant aims, territorial self-government had to be introduced and separated from state administration [Hendrych 1993]. *Expediency* was an important situational factor in the implementation of the reform measures: the need to build a new system of territorial administration in the post-communist countries of East and Central Europe was viewed as a political task that could not be postponed. A delay would have hindered the economic and political components of the transformation. The

reform and the new local elections were intended to facilitate displacement of the old local and regional political elites and thus to undermine remnants of the Communist power in the provinces.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the reform had a strong symbolical meaning, as it was a way to legitimize the new power, to demonstrate that "*things have moved away from the previous circumstances*". Little or no time was, therefore, allocated for testing optimum solutions,<sup>11</sup> and the risk of taking wrong steps was consequently high. Political concerns were primary and the administrative and economic rationality were of secondary importance in this context.

While the over-all function which the reform fulfilled in the political transformation was more-or-less the same in the individual East Central European countries, its more immediate situational contexts were different in each of them. In *Hungary* the reform was preceded by several years of discussions and preparatory legislative work that took place since 1987, still under the Communist regime, and were supported by the reform wing of the Communist Party [Péteri and Szabó 1991, Wollmann 1995: Chapter III], as well as by relatively bold reform attempts of the regime. The post-Communist reform of territorial government was a continuous, negotiated and relatively well prepared one, implemented mostly by consensus. It was marked by a well elaborated economic component.

The situation differed in Poland where the reform was a battleground between the opposition and the Communist authorities. Establishing a "*self-governing Republic*" was a programmatic goal of the "*Solidarity*" movement in its struggle against the Communist regime in the 80s - cf. below and also Benzler 1994: 315-317. It was the strategy of the opposition to erode the regime from the bottom level. Ideas concerning the system of local self-government were developed in discussions among intellectuals during the 80s and were supported by numerous empirical studies undertaken within the research programme "*Local Poland*". Democratization of local governments and free local elections were among the key issues in the 1988/89 "*Round Table*" negotiations between Solidarity and the Communist authorities. While the negotiations on this issue ended in a stalemate, they helped to clearly define the position of "*Solidarity*". This helped to prepare the agenda for the new Senate which was democratically elected in mid-1989 and immediately began to draft the new legislation on local self-government [Benzler 1994: 318].

The situation yet again differed in the *Czech Republic* where no serious steps toward decentralization were taken before the fall of the Communist regime in November 1989. However, discussions among experts and intellectuals did take place, a critically motivated research of the local administration was undertaken [cf. Illner and Jungmann 1988, Premusová 1989], some half-hearted ameliorations of the territorial government were made by the Communist authorities, yet no consistent reform policy was either formulated nor implemented. The reason was the rigidity of the regime which, after the occupation of the country by the Warsaw Pact armies in 1968, was much more hard-line than in the other two countries. There was no thawing period after 1968 which would allow to open the decentralization issue. It has been stated that among the three countries of East Central Europe, Czechoslovakia was the least prepared for institutional reform in 1989 [Davey 1995a: 42]. Preparation of the reform had to be compressed into the

nine months between the fall of the Communist regime and the local elections in November 1990.

### 2.3 Expectations toward decentralization

The 1988-1990 years, when the reforms were contemplated and their first stage implemented, were the time of euphoric expectations concerning democratization, reparation of earlier injustice and the fulfillment of diverse political and social ideals and ambitions. Many such expectations and values were associated with the reform of public administration and some of them influenced its concept.

*Localism, regionalism and communitarianism* were among such influential streams whose source were different:

- Localism and communitarianism were an ingredient in the thinking of some groups among the anti-Communist opposition who had envisaged the future post-communist society to be composed of different kinds of self-governing units applying direct democracy and thus escaping bureaucratization as well as the traps of party politics.<sup>12</sup>
- Some anti-Communist opposition groups, particularly in Poland after Jaruzelski's coup of 1980, had hoped that the change of the regime may start from the local level, because the top-down process seemed forlorn<sup>13</sup>  
- see above.
- Localism was reaction of the population and of the local elites to the centralism applied by the pre-1989 regime, particularly to its effort to streamline the settlement structure by a reckless application of the central place system. Many rural municipalities lost their administrative status since the 60s as amalgamations were forced upon them from above,<sup>14</sup> antagonizing their inhabitants.
- Old territorial feuds and perceived injustices (many of them had originated in the pre-Communist times) concerning the acknowledgement and boundaries of administrative areas, the seats of local and regional governments,<sup>15</sup> fuelled the localistic and regionalistic attitudes. The reform was viewed by local and regional elites as an opportunity to re-open and re-negotiate such old issues.<sup>16</sup>
- One root of localism was a (conservative) reaction to the modernization processes and their concomitants. This reaction was expressed in the radical ecological thinking and the social movements associated with it, in the "*small is beautiful*" ideology, anti-urban and ruralist values etc.

Localism and regionalism were manifested by a strong desire for local and regional autonomy and self-government, by the high value attributed to local community and local things in general. It generated many unrealistic expectations toward the potential benefits of decentralization, autonomy and territorial self-government and was co-responsible for the fragmentation of the territorial structure of government that took place particularly in the Czech Republic and in Hungary



(see below on this issue). Commenting on the Polish situation, G. Gorzelak identified six such "myths" on local government in the post-socialist countries shared by the public or by the local politicians [Gorzelak 1992]:

1. the *myth of local autonomy* (unrealistic expectations toward the potential of local autonomy, rejection of any central inference in local affairs),
2. the *myth of prosperity* (belief that economic autarky will guarantee prosperity of local communities),
3. the *Myth of property* (belief that restoration of municipal property will in itself guarantee local development),
4. the *myth of omnipotence* (belief that municipalities are both entitled and capable of deciding all local problems by themselves),
5. the *myth of eagerness* (belief that zeal can compensate for knowledge and skills in local politics and administration),
6. the *myth of stabilization* (belief that stable conditions is what local governments should and can attempt to reach).

Gorzelak's observations, exaggerated in order to become more explicit, have pointed to stereotypes which were recognizable, although to a different degree, in all three countries of the region.

## **2.4 Geographic and demographic context of the reform**

Several parameters of a country's geography and demography are of importance for the structuring of public administration: size of the country (both in demographic and spatial terms), characteristics of its settlement system (population density, number and size distribution of settlements, their spatial distribution and the level of metropolization) and territorial distribution of ethnic groups. The three East Central European countries are both similar and dissimilar from these criteria. As for their *size*, the Czech Republic and Hungary, each with a population of about 10 million, are small countries compared to Poland with its 38 million inhabitants. Theoretically, in a larger country more tiers of government could be functional and more territorial units could exist on each level.

The East Central European countries also differ as far as their *settlement systems* are concerned. Far the most scattered is the network of settlements in the *Czech Republic*, with its dense net of villages and small to medium-sized towns, more-or-less evenly distributed over the whole territory of the country and with a low level of metropolization (the number of settlements - irrespective of whether they have the status of municipalities - reached 15,131 in 1991). There are only a few big cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants (cf. Table 2 below) and the dominant position of the capital Prague (population 1,2 million) is not challenged by any other city, with the exception of the Ostrava agglomeration in North Moravia (the primacy rate of Prague is 3 : 1). Population density in the Czech Republic is 131 inhabitants per square km (in 1993).

*Hungary's* settlement structure is organized along two axes: 1. Budapest and the rest of the country, 2. the North-East/South-West axis. A great part of the population of Hungary - some 20 % - is concentrated in the capital Budapest (population 2 mil. in 1994) and some 25 % in the Budapest agglomeration. The rest is dispersed, yet rather unevenly, in a fragmented structure of settlements composed mostly of villages and small-to-medium-size towns. There are only few big cities and none of them approaches Budapest in size and importance; the primacy rate of Budapest reached the extraordinary value of 9 : 1. Two main regions can be distinguished as far as the character of the settlement system is concerned: the Great Hungarian Plain, with relatively larger villages and towns, and the Transdanubian and Northern part of the country with a relatively dense net of smaller villages [Péteri 1991b: 32]. Population density is 111 inhabitants per square km (in 1990).

The settlement system of *Poland* differs from that of the Czech Republic and Hungary by the polycentric character of the urban network. Beside the capital Warsaw (population 1,7 mil), there is a net of large cities, all approximately of the same order, and several agglomerations. Unlike Budapest and Prague, the capital does not enjoy, a highly dominant position; its primacy rate is 2 : 1. The regional distribution of population is relatively even, except for the Upper Silesia agglomeration with its high population density. The level of urban development has a gradient from South-West (the highest level) to North-East (the lowest level)- cf. Gorzelak 1995: 61. Population density is 122 inhabitants per square km (in 1993).

The variability of settlement structures calls for a corresponding variability and flexibility of the administrative organization; this requirement was only partly reflected in the post-1989 reforms, as it will become clear from the next paragraphs.

In none of the three countries there are large enough spatially compact *ethnic groups* whose administrative autonomy would be an issue in designing territorial administrative structures. Poland is ethnically the most homogeneous of the three cases and it would be indeed very difficult, if not impossible, to find any ethnic background for territorial cleavages. There are some very small spatial concentrations of ethnic minorities in Hungary and a larger concentration of a Polish minority in the Czech Republic, but these minorities are not numerous and have not demanded administrative autonomy. Such autonomy was, however, claimed in the Czech Republic for Moravia - the Eastern part of the state, by regional political groupings for whom its attainment was their *raison d'etre* (cf. note 16).

One facet of the reform is its supranational "*European*" dimension. All three countries of East Central Europe endeavor to be integrated into West European international and supranational institutions, chiefly the European Union. It is acknowledged that the structural adaptation of these countries to the West European standards is one of the most important prerequisites to successful integration. As far as the territorial-administrative structures of these countries are concerned, it has been frequently mentioned that particularly the regional level should be designed so as to be compatible with the regions in Western Europe (size and competences of regions were meant to be the relevant factors). This is important for their ability to co-operation within the framework of Euroregions, to

participate in European regional programmes and to compete with regions of the EU. The vision of the future "*Europe of the regions*" has been fuelling such considerations and has produced another strong set of expectations concerning the decentralizing effects of the reform. The practical conclusion relevant for the design of intermediary government is that the new regional units should be large and equipped with strong competences.

### **3. THE REFORM - COUNTRY PROFILES** <sup>17</sup>

#### **3.1 Czech Republic** <sup>18</sup>

Developments in the Czech Republic will be given relatively more space in this overview compared to the other two countries due to the larger wealth of data and background materials available to the author on his own country. In many instances, the Czech situation can be viewed as illustrative of the more general tendencies typical for the whole region.

Local governments were at first reconstructed in April 1990, well ahead of the 1990 municipal elections. The aim of the reconstruction was to break the power monopoly of the Communist Party in local governments. Round-table negotiations were held among local political groupings, notably between the *Civic Forum* and the Communist Party, about the new distribution of seats in municipal councils. The agreed change was then brought into effect by resignation of some of the Communist deputies and by co-optation of new representatives. Communist councillors lost their majority in local councils and almost everywhere new non-Communist mayors were elected.

The reform of local government and territorial administration was performed in 1990 and local elections were held in November 1990. The reform instituted local self-government, separated it from state administration, introduced a new structure of local organs, redefined and extended their discretions and brought a new regulation of their resources. The general legal framework for the reform was laid down by a Federal Constitutional Law of 18 July 1990, <sup>19</sup> the more concrete legal basis was provided by subsequent Republican legislation. <sup>20</sup> Additional constitutional basis for the new system of territorial government was provided by the Constitution of the Czech Republic adopted in December 1992, on the eve of the split of Czechoslovakia. The Constitution mentions communities and "*higher-level territorial administrative units*" - "regions or lands" consisting of communities, as two types of self-governing territorial units in the Czech Republic. Elected representations of the higher-level territorial units will have a public corporate status. The Constitution avoided further specification of the numbers and competences of these units.

The new municipal system was inspired by West European local government systems as well as by the pre-war system of local authorities in the Czech Republic, the foundations of which were designed in the 19th century (see above). The main aim of the reform was to break away from the soviet-type system of territorial administration and to institute a democratic local government. Public administration was separated from the self-government of territorial units. The existing three-level

system of the *National Committees* was abolished and substituted by a two-tier division of the Czech Republic, with the third tier pending. In urban and rural municipalities territorial self-government has been introduced (municipalities are the only level on which the territorial self-government has been established). The reform has instituted a new structure of municipal organs and a new regulation of resources. The new system of territorial government and administration is based on:

1. *Municipalities - the lower level.* 6,233 rural and urban municipalities in 1996, some 6 % of which have the status of towns or cities. On average (Prague excluded), a municipality has about 1,500 inhabitants (in the year 1993) and is typically composed of several spatially separated "*local parts*", mostly separate settlements. Thirteen major cities enjoy the administrative status of "*statutory cities*". The extraordinary position of Prague is reflected in the fact that the internal territorial organization and administration of the capital is regulated by a separate Act on the capital Prague.

Municipality is an independent legal subject - a juridical person that acts in its own name in juridical relations and bears the responsibility resulting therefrom. The law distinguished between independent competence and transferred competence of municipalities. Independent competence expresses the fact that municipality is an independent subject and that in exercising its functions it is bound only by Acts and by legal regulations issued to exercise them. The transferred competence represents the locally performed action of state administration within the extent set down by a special act. In these matters local state administration is bound to observe also the decrees of the government and the instruction of the ministries. Municipalities establish their organs for performing their competences. The highest is the *Municipal Council* (local parliament) directly elected by the citizens for a period of 4 years. The executive of the council is the *Municipal Board* headed by the Mayor elected by the Council from its membership. The board is responsible for the performance of independent as well as of the transferred competences of the municipality. Municipal matters are managed by the *Municipal Office* which performs public administration and also makes relevant administrative decisions. When performing transferred functions, it is controlled by the District Office, which is the organ of state administration. Secretary of the Municipal Office is superior to all administrative officers. In several hundred larger municipalities Municipal Offices are commissioned to perform some tasks of state administration within broader territorial areas covering the neighboring small municipalities (*Commissioned Municipal Offices*).

The municipality has its own financial resources and manages them independently. Among the *revenues* of the municipality the most relevant are 1. state grants (special grants and equalizing grants), 2. taxes,<sup>21</sup> 4. local and fees and dues<sup>21</sup>. Reinstatement of municipal property was one of the most important steps introduced by the 1990 local government reform. Concrete steps providing for the real transfer of state-owned real estate property back to municipalities were later enabled by further legislation.<sup>22</sup>

Two local elections have taken place in the Czech Republic since 1989. The first local elections after the fall of the communist regime took place in November 1990, the second in 1994. The electoral system followed the rule of proportional representation.

2. *Districts - the higher administrative level.* The country is divided into 77 districts<sup>23</sup> plus the capital Prague. Other cities are either parts of districts or have the district status. A district has on average (Prague excluded) about 120 thousand inhabitants and covers about 1,000 square kilometers. The population size and areas of districts vary considerably. Districts perform state administration, they have no role in self-government. State administration is performed by the *District Office*, the head of which is appointed by the republican government. The District Office is an appellate body as to the administrative decisions of municipal authorities and it supervises activity of Municipal Offices. To superintend over the activity of the District Offices, to approve their annual budgets and also to decide about the distribution of state grants among municipalities, *District Assemblies* are elected by Municipal Councils in the respective districts from their members. Municipalities are represented in the Assembly proportionately to the size of their population. District Assemblies cannot be considered as organs of self-government, but rather as a provisional institution bridging the period before genuine regional self-government is constituted.

3. *Regional (provincial) or land authorities* as the highest tier of territorial government and administration. Their establishment has been foreseen by the Constitution of the Czech Republic, but has not so far been enacted.<sup>24</sup> As already mentioned, the regional (provincial) authorities that had existed before the reform were abolished in 1990, as yet without any substitution. However, the old regions themselves as a subdivision of the state territory, continue formally to exist and specialized deconcentrated field offices of ministries and of other central bodies (such as the Czech Statistical Office, the Supreme Auditing Office, employment agencies, boards of social and health insurance, Finance Offices etc.) exist in the districts and in other territorial units. The "*decos*" do not constitute part of the corresponding district offices.

#### *The pending continuation of the reform*

Although a thoroughgoing change, the new system of territorial government has left several reconstruction tasks unfinished. Without them being solved, the reform cannot be considered as completed. The steps accomplished up to the present can thus be viewed as only the first stage of the reform.

The most important missing component in the transformation of the public sector is the still absent reform of the intermediate level of government and the establishment of the regional (provincial) governments and administrations [Hesse 1995c, Baldersheim and Illner 1996b]. While former regional (provincial) governments and administrations were abolished in 1990 (a step that, in the retrospective, seems too hasty and, perhaps, not quite inevitable), the old system of district state administration has remained largely intact. The administrative bodies of

the former "*District National Committees*" now operate under the new label of "*District Offices*", but with no elected counterparts (the above-mentioned District Assemblies cannot fulfil this role). District Offices which, because of their ambivalent nature, were called "quasi" - governmental institutions by Hesse [cf. Hesse 1995c: 8] thus tend to become uncomfortably strong arms of the central government and vehicles of centralism. On the other hand, the higher-level regional government (of the order of the former regions (provinces)) is missing, although, as already mentioned, the establishment of "*higher-level territorial government units*" - "provinces (kraje) or lands" has been foreseen by the Constitution of the Czech Republic.

It was argued [Hesse 1995c: 7-16, Zářecký 1996] that the absence of regional (provincial) government is detrimental both for functional as well as normative reasons.

1. There is a number of regional problems which cannot be properly treated at the district level and need a wider territorial framework - for instance many environmental issues and issues of regional and physical planning.
2. The absence of regional-level administration justifies existence of the "*decos*" which complicate the inter-governmental relations and partly duplicate the existing district offices [Hesse 1995a]. The proliferation of the "*decos*" has also contributed to an excessive growth of employment in public administration during the last years.
3. Moreover, the reform of public administration was designed as a system including also the upper tier of territorial self-government, and without this element its architecture is incomplete.
4. The provisional situation when an integral part of the Constitution fails to be enacted questions the authority and legitimacy of the present arrangement, creates a state of liability and may induce legal nihilism.
5. The absence of regional-level self-government contributes to the growth and over-load of central bureaucracies and to excessive etatization of the public sphere.
6. Failure to establish regional authorities frustrates regional elites, is source of political tension and fuels the popular stereotype of "*pragocentrism*".<sup>25</sup>

The unresolved problems of the pending regional reform have posed some broader questions concerning the regional (provincial) tier that have been under discussion since 1993, still without conclusive results. Should the former regional division of the country (the provinces) be re-adopted or should new regional units be defined? In the latter case, how should the new regional division be designed and how should it relate to the existing districts? Should historical and cultural divisions or the contemporary socioeconomic regionalization of the country be taken as the basis for the new regions? Which political criteria are relevant in the regional reform, given the negative experience with dualism in former Czechoslovakia and also the need to re-integrate the border regions?<sup>26</sup> Should regions be sites of both state administration and self-government or just of one of the two? Should regional units

of the state administration overlap with those of self-government? What will be the competences of the regional governments? What will be their revenues and how taxes should be distributed among the different levels of government? And also the most fundamental issue of all: should the regional tier be at all created?

While options have already been formulated, their analyses performed and several alternative pieces of legislation drafted, the above issues are still contested on the political arena.<sup>27</sup> In 1991-1993, political energy that was needed for the reform of regional government was spent on conflicts concerning the Czecho-Slovak cleavage, the splitting of the Federation and organization of new state. Yet even later political will to make a decisive step forward has been missing. The resentment of the Czech ruling party (The Civic Democratic Party - winner of the parliamentary elections in 1992 and 1996) against continuation of the territorial reform and against instituting regional-level governments (although such goals were incorporated into this party's election programmes) has a deeper political and ideological background.

*"Pragmatically motivated fears of societal fragmentation and loss of central control in a still transforming society have been mixed with ideological arguments casting doubts on the relevance of any political institutions that stand between a citizen and the state, apart from political parties"* [Baldersheim and Illner 1995b].

Fears that extension of territorial self-government to the intermediate level could pose a challenge to the current distribution of political power in the country is one of the factors that stand in the background of the apprehensive attitude [Hesse 1995: 15]. In 1996, the then newly appointed republican Government incorporated establishment of intermediary territorial governments into its programmatic statement. Since then it has been hesitatingly moving toward that goal. However, the necessary legislation has not been passed as yet and the nearest realistic date of regional elections is the year 2000.

Irrespective of the delays and hesitations accompanying establishment of the official *"higher-level territorial units"*, several kinds of semi-formal regional structures have emerged spontaneously. Two types can be singled out as the most relevant: regional *associations of municipalities* and trans-border regions (the *"euroregions"*). Numerous associations of municipalities have been formed to promote regionally defined interests, be it tourism, environmental protection, development of infrastructure and the like. The level of their institutionalization is usually rather weak. Efforts to establish *"euroregions"* was inspired by the models of trans-border cooperation between regions in Western Europe. The majority of the new Euroregions were founded along the Czech-German frontier. In the years 1991-1992 five euroregions were established in the border regions between the Czech Republic, Germany and Austria.<sup>28</sup> The content of cooperation was directed by individual projects and day-to-day activities according to local circumstances. Trans-border cooperation focused mainly on cooperation among the communities in the fields of culture and education, the improvement of mutual understanding and the development of good neighborly relations, the development of tourism, of the

region's economic resources, on the protection and restoration of the environment and cultural and historical monuments, on the development of transportation and border crossings and mutual assistance in case of disasters.

On the positive side, trans-border cooperation contributed to establishing contacts, increasing mutual understanding and improving neighborly relations. It created the preconditions for the development of future cooperation, and activated authorities in the communities involved and brought new impulses into public life. On the other hand, certain *problems* were revealed on the Czech side [Zich 1993, Illner and Andrlé 1994]:

1. The different situations and experience, and the asymmetry of economic possibilities, on both sides of the border were not sufficiently appreciated.
2. The spontaneous activities of the *euromregions* collided with similar activities on the part of central governments. The regional bodies sometimes exceeded their jurisdiction in relation to foreign partners and in organizing new regional structures. Their activities were sometimes viewed as endangering the interests and integrity of the state.
3. The legal framework for *euromregions'* activities was insufficient or missing. Sometimes this activity found itself in conflict with existing legislation.
4. The activities concerning the establishment of *euromregions* were confined to a relatively narrow set of local leaders, meaning that the population was neither sufficiently informed nor participated much.

The conclusion was drawn that the pace of institutionalizing trans-border cooperation has to be coordinated with the progress in eliminating the substantial economic, legal and institutional differences between the neighboring societies. These gaps sometimes seriously complicated fruitful cooperation. Trans-border contacts on the level of euromregions must be underpinned by lower level contacts of border towns, communities, individual organizations and citizens and such contacts should be promoted by the *euromregions*. Fundamental external links will remain responsibility of the central governments.

### *Overcoming territorial fragmentation*

As already mentioned, the Czech Lands have always had a highly fragmented settlement structure and a correspondingly fragmented structure of local government. The number of local governments (municipalities) was more-or-less stable during the first half of this century until the 50s when it began to fall, due to depopulation of rural areas, territorial expansion of cities and, mainly, to forced administrative amalgamation of smaller places. This process has been radically reversed since the beginning of the 1990s. The post-1989 localism (see above), together with the liberal provisions of the new 1990 Act on Municipalities (enabling an easy separation of those parts of the existing municipalities which have decided for administrative independence) contributed to a far reaching spontaneous fragmentation of the existing territorial administrative structure. Many municipalities



which had been amalgamated in the earlier years split again into their original parts. The previous amalgamation was rejected as an act of centralism by the municipalities involved and the renewal of their political and administrative identity was viewed as a priority task in the restoration of local democracy. Typically, *two types of dissociation* were taking place: either formerly independent villages, which had been amalgamated into large compound municipalities, regained their administrative and political identity, or suburban places separated from urban centers. Criteria of economic and organizational rationality did seldom play any role in such decisions.

Table 1 shows this rather dramatic and uneven change. The number of municipalities increased by 51 % during the period of 1989 - 1993 and reached 6,196 on January 1, 1993. The process of fragmentation has continued also after 1993, though at a slower pace and the number of municipalities reached 6,233 in 1996.

**Table 1 Number of municipalities in the Czech Republic in 1950-1993**

Year	Number of municipalities	
	<i>n</i>	<i>index (previous year=100)</i>
1950	11,459	-
1961	8,726	76.1
1970	7,511	86.1
1980	4,778	63.6
1989	4,104	85.9
1991	5,768	140.5
1993	6,196	107.4
1996	6,233	100.6

Sources: Obyvatelstvo, bydlení a bytový fond v územích České republiky 1961-1991. Definitivní výsledky sčítání lidu, domů a bytů 1991. Obce-analýza. Praha: Terplan 1994. Illner 1991a. Perlín and Vozáb 1996.

Of the 6,196 municipalities that existed in the Czech Republic in the beginning of 1993, about 90 % were villages of less than 2,000 inhabitants, and 60 % were extremely small places with fewer than 500 inhabitants - see Table 2 for the size structure of municipalities.

**Table 2 Municipalities in the Czech Republic according to population size in 1989 and 1993**

Population	Number of municipalities
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size	1991		1993	
	n	%	n	%
- 499	3,283	40.7	3,700	59.7
500 - 1,999	1,871	43.0	1,889	30.4
2,000 - 4,999	347	9.4	345	5.6
5,000 - 9,999	131	3.3	129	2.1
10,000 - 19,999	71	2.0	68	1.1
20,000 - 49,999	41	1.0	41	0.7
50,000 - 99,999	17	0.4	17	0.3
100,000 +	7	0.2	7	0.1
Total	5,768	100.0	6,196	100.0

Source: Obyvatelstvo, bydlení a bytový fond v územích České republiky 1961-1991. Definitivní výsledky sčítání lidu, domů a bytů 1991. Obce-analýza. Praha: Terplan 1994, Tables 1 and 3.

The increase of the number of municipalities during 1991-1993 concerned almost entirely the category of the smallest villages whose number as well as share sharply increased. It is the small to very small, predominantly rural communities where the problematic consequences of fragmentation can be observed. The importance of this phenomenon could easily be overestimated if judged only on the basis of the municipalities' size distribution. In terms of the share of population involved, small communities with less than 2,000 inhabitants represented just 24,8 % of the total population of the Czech Republic and the very small places with less than 500 inhabitants accounted for 7,8 %. On the other hand, cities with 20,000 and more inhabitants represented 46,4 % (all data are for 1991, source Terplan 1994: Table 2). Viewed from this perspective, the bulk of local government issues lies clearly within the urban sphere. Also, in spite of the fragmentation, there still exists a substantial difference between the settlement structure of the Czech Lands and the territorial structure of local government. The number of settlements (15,731 in 1991) far supersedes that of local governments [Terplan 1995: Table 2]. An average municipality, even in the category of small units under 2,000 inhabitants, is composed of two or more settlements. The potential of administrative disintegration is consequently far from exhausted.

### 3.2 Hungary <sup>29</sup>

The reform of territorial government in Hungary is the outcome of a relatively long-lasting, continual and systematic preparatory work which had already commenced before 1989 and was made possible by the Hungarian brand of reform communism. A constitutional foundation of the reform was laid by constitutional amendments of 1989 regarding local government. According to them, local communities of voters in villages, towns and counties shall have the right to freely administer local affairs (Constitution, Section 42). The reform itself was instituted in

1990 by the Act on Local Self-Government and subsequent legislation.<sup>30</sup> The main principles of the reform were the same as those mentioned above for the Czech Republic: to do away with the soviet-type council system and to decentralize, deregulate and de-etatize public administration, to introduce self-government of territorial units and to separate it from state administration. However, the Hungarian reform was more comprehensive and went farther than analogical reforms in the Czech Republic and Poland. In Davey's opinion the local government legislation in Hungary is the most liberal in Europe [Davey 1995b: 58]. The reform tried to establish a system of local government that is non-hierarchical and decentralized, similar to the British or Scandinavian models [Szabó 1992: 7-8]. Any hierarchical relationships between tiers of government were abolished, supervisory powers of the higher tiers were restricted and local governments were given the right to levy their own taxes. It was particularly the system of local finance where the reform was very advanced and elaborate. Major changes concerning the system of intergovernmental relations were introduced by further legislation in 1994 (amendment of the 1990 Act on Local Self-Government Act). Their main aim was to strengthen the meso-level (regional) government and to streamline intergovernmental relations.

The lower tier of territorial government are *municipal governments in villages and towns*. In 1995 there were 2,920 village communities and 173 cities in Hungary plus 22 large cities with county rights (see above) and the capital Budapest with special status, divided itself into 23 districts. 36.5% of the Hungarian population lived in the rural communities, 43.7% in cities and 19.5% in Budapest [Public Management Profiles 1995: 104-106]. Local elections took place in 1990 and 1994, electoral systems in large and small municipalities somewhat differed. Municipalities may undertake any task related to local affairs which is not specifically the duty of another public body and which does not violate the law. The competences are divided into mandatory and optional ones. Organs of local government are *councils* elected for a term of 4 years by local citizens, *committees* established by the councils, and *mayors* elected either directly by local citizens (in municipalities below 10,000 inhabitants) or indirectly by the councils (in municipalities over this threshold). Mayors are not required to be council members. The mayor has a dual role - he is the executive of the council and also carries out delegated tasks of state administration. Local governments establish *administrative offices* headed by chief administrators. The offices are usually organized into departments and staffed with hired personnel which, under the civil service legislation, has the right of tenure. The office is responsible for execution of resolutions and decisions taken by the council and the committees, and also for providing state administrative functions delegated by law to the municipality. However, its departments are not subordinated to the ministries, and central organs can influence the office only through legal regulations

Municipalities have their own budgets where the main sources of revenue are state grants, shared revenues (personal income tax and some other taxes), local taxes (property tax, communal tax, local business tax), and revenues from privatization as well as from municipal property.

The upper (regional) tier of self-government are counties of which there are 19 plus the capital Budapest [Navracsics 1996]. The number and the territories of counties have been stable for a long period. County government is headed by the *Chairman of the County Assembly*, the Assembly being elected by the county's population, excluding those who live in towns with county rights. County governments execute tasks laid down by law and which are not mandatorily prescribed for municipal government. They mainly provide public services of a regional character (in education, culture, welfare administration, communal services, regional development, protection of environment etc.) - such that municipalities have not decided to provide themselves (the principle of subsidiarity is applied). County self-governments have no supervisory power over municipalities and they do not play any role in distributing state grants among them. As mentioned, the position of counties was substantially strengthened by new regulations in 1994 and 1995, so that it was possible to speak about the "*renewal of the meso-level*" or the "*resurrection*" of the county [Navracsics 1996:293-294]. Beside self-government, there exist also *Public Administration Offices* in the counties, heads of which are appointed by the Minister of the Interior. The Offices are invested with expanded authority vis-a-vis local government as far as control of legality is concerned and they also provide professional assistance to them. The regional administrative offices replaced the former controversial institution of the *Commissioners of the Republic*.

The Act on Regional Development and Physical Planning adopted in March 1996 introduced *County Development Councils* as a new institution on the county level. Main responsibilities of the Councils are to examine and evaluate the social and economic situation of the counties, elaborate and approve the long-term regional development concepts and programmes as well as to elaborate financial plans to support their implementation. County Development Councils are independent of county self-governments as well as of county Public Administration Offices. Their members are the *President* of the County General Assembly who is also the President of the Development Council, Mayors of the largest cities in the county which have county status, a representative of the Minister responsible for the implementation of the regional development, representatives of regional Chambers of Commerce, of subregional development associations and of the County Labor Council.

Beside the municipalities and the 19 counties, there are also about two dozen towns (with some exceptions, all over 50,000 inhabitants) which have county rights. The towns with county rights are not parts of the counties on whose territories they are situated and this has been a source of tensions in their mutual relations. A special status equivalent to that of a county has the capital Budapest.

Apart from these two-tiers of territorial self-government, the system includes also deconcentrated branches of state agencies - the "*decos*" situated mainly on the county level (but operating outside the control and the budget of county governments).<sup>31</sup>

*Unresolved issues of the otherwise successful reform*

The Hungarian reform of territorial government was the *best prepared, the most comprehensive and also the most liberal* among the territorial reforms in the post-Communist East Central Europe. It was the only reform which introduced self-government on both the local and regional levels.<sup>32</sup> In spite of that, several issues remained outstanding.

Similarly as in the Czech case (see above), overcoming the consequences of *territorial fragmentation* is one of such outstanding issues. Many settlements reasserted their rights to local self-government in 1990, so that the number of municipalities nearly doubled in a short time (from 1,607 municipalities prior to the reform to 3,108 in 1993). Also the causes of fragmentation were the same as those already mentioned for the Czech case; the splitting of municipalities was mainly reaction to the earlier forced amalgamation.<sup>33</sup> To visualize the motion of the amalgamation-separation pendulum, Table 3 shows the changing numbers of villages with own councils in 1962 - 1995

**Table 3 Number of villages with own Councils in Hungary 1962 - 1995**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of villages</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>index (previous year=100)</i>
1962	2,854	-
1966	2,292	0.80
1973	984	0.43
1977	747	0.76
1988	663	0.89
1991	2,902	4.38
1995	2,920	1.01

Source: Péteri and Szabó 1991: 73; Public Management 1995: 106.

For the first 25 years since 1962 the number of villages with their own councils was decreasing - most sharply at the end of the 60s. The trend was completely reversed after 1990 and within a short time the number of independent villages was back where it used to be in 1962. In Hungary, settlements were completely free to form a self-government authority if they decided so. As a result, more than one half of the total number of municipalities are now small places with less than 1,000 inhabitants. The size distribution of Hungarian municipalities in 1993 is shown in Table 4.

**Table 4 Municipalities in Hungary according to population size in 1993**

<i>Population</i>	<i>Number of municipalities</i>
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size	n	%
- 999	1,688	54.3
1,000 - 9,999	1,282	41.2
10,000 - 49,999	117	3.8
50,000 +	21	0.7
Total	3,108	100,0

Source: Local Governments 1994: 87

The operational difficulties caused by fragmentation have already been described. One can doubt whether the small municipalities are really capable of performing all the functions which they were assigned by the generous reform.<sup>34</sup> Hungarian legislation provided for several methods how to cope with fragmentation [Davey 1995b: 69-70] through *inter-municipal co-operation*. One of them is compulsory: the smallest local authorities are required to set up joint administrative offices which are obliged to employ qualified *notaries*. Others are optional: municipalities can combine into general purpose and specific-task associations; they may set up joint councils; they can unify their budgets; they can operate joint services. It seems, however, that these instruments are not applied as they should and that local governments display a rather negative attitude toward inter-municipal co-operation and integration [Illés 1993: 6]. Administrative fragmentation thus remains to be a major problem.

Fewer problems than in the Czech Republic are clustered around the *intermediary, i.e. regional-level government and administration* after the competences of county self-governments have been somewhat upgraded in 1994, the institution of the *Commissioners* abolished and substituted by county *Offices of Public Administration* and after inter-governmental relations were streamlined.

Until recently, analysts of the Hungarian situation agreed that to reduce its main problems, at least a modest territorial reform was needed and that it should assume the form of partial adjustments rather than that of radical measures [Hesse and Goetz 1992/93: 343]. Above all, the need to establish a strong intermediate government was mentioned [Szabó 1992:14].<sup>35</sup> Davey listed several measures that were proposed for enhancing the role of the counties and for specifying inter-governmental relations [Davey 1996b: 73-4]: incorporating the "*decos*" into county administration, allocating the counties clear responsibility and resources for institutions serving more than one municipality, giving counties an explicit role in promoting and supervising inter-municipal co-operating, entrusting them with planning and coordinating local development, substituting direct for indirect election of county assemblies; encouraging the mergers of localities and increasing the supervisory powers of state administration were mentioned as other forms of the adjustment [Hesse and Goetz 1992/93: 343].

After many of these measures have been actually adopted in 1994, it can be said that the Hungarian system of public administration has once more proved to be the

most flexible among the three countries. Which is not to say that all its problems have disappeared. Still, it remains to be seen if the present competences of the county councils are sufficient, given the fragmentation of local governments that counties should, at least partly, compensate. Relationships between counties and towns with county rights may still be a source of some problems. Moreover, the proliferation of deconcentrated state agencies strengthens the central state power and contributes to segmentation of territorial administration. Critics also point out that the devolution of competencies to municipalities has not been accompanied by a corresponding decentralization of financial resources. As the result, municipalities cannot cope with some of their responsibilities.

### 3.4 Poland<sup>36</sup>

As elsewhere in East Central Europe, also in Poland the main thrust of territorial reform was to establish local self-government on the municipal level. This priority was supported by the "Solidarity's" programmatic idea of a "self-governing society" that had to be built in Poland bottom-up, beginning at the local level and proceeding therefrom to the regional and central levels [Benzler 1993:315-316, 322-323]. A constitutional prerequisite to the reform was an amendment to the Polish Constitution approved in spring 1990 which stated that the Republic of Poland

*"guarantees the local self-government a share in the governing power as well as freedom of action to other forms of self-government".*<sup>37</sup>

This was later complemented by the Constitutional Act on the Mutual Relations between Legislative and Executive Institutions of the Republic of Poland and on Local self-Government - the so-called *Little Constitution*. The reform itself was instituted by the Act on Local Self-Government from March 1990, and a package of other bills that followed.<sup>38</sup> Local elections took place in 1990 and again in 1994. A dualist system of local government was adopted, inspired by the German and Austrian models, distinguishing the own and the transferred competences of local governments.

The system of territorial government and administration has two basic levels - the local and the provincial (regional) ones<sup>39</sup>; in this respect, as far as the territorial division of the country and number of units at each level is concerned, the reform did not bring any changes and the structure established already in 1975 was mostly retained. The lower tier are *municipalities* (2,452 units in January 1993, cf. Local Governments 1994:148) of which there are three types - *rural* (1,618 units), *urban* (299 units) and joint *urban-rural* municipalities (a rural area integrated with a small town - 535 units). Only on the level of municipalities there exists self-government. As mentioned before, there are two basic types of responsibilities of a municipality distinguished by the regulations: their own (obligatory) - that may be allocated to the local governments by parliamentary acts or, in specific cases also by the central government, and delegated functions. Within its own competences a municipality has the right to freely administer local affairs unless separate legislation stipulates otherwise. Local councils are elected for the term of four years, the electoral

systems are different in municipalities with less than 40,000 inhabitants and in those above that size. Local elections took place in 1990 and 1994. The local council elects the *board* as its executive body, consisting of the *mayor*, his deputies and other members. The mayor is elected by the council but not necessarily from its members. The council also elects *committees* from its members and transfers some of its powers to them. Administrative affairs are run by a *municipal office* divided into departments and managed by the chief administrative officer under the supervision of the mayor. The capital Warsaw has a special status governed by a special law.

Municipalities have their own budget with four principle kinds of revenues:

1. state grants (bloc grants and earmarked grants),
2. shares in central budget revenues (in personal income tax and in business income tax as the most important sources),
3. local taxes, fees and charges (property tax and road tax as the most important revenues),
4. revenues from municipal property.

The upper tier of territorial government are *provinces* (in Polish "*voivodships*") of which there are 49 (since the reform of 1973-75 when the traditional 17 provinces were substituted by the present regional division). Provinces are regional level units of state administration only, no local government has operated on this level since 1990. They mainly provide public services of a regional character like health care, secondary education, culture. The head of the provincial administration is a prefect ("*wojewoda*") appointed by the prime minister and representing the central government in the province. He is not superior to municipalities, but plays some role in the relationship between central and local government and has the competence to control as well as co-ordinate the implementation of legal acts in the province. As a quasi self-governmental organ, a *provincial assembly* is elected in each province by municipal councils. Its responsibilities are of a rather auxiliary character - monitoring performance of local authorities, disseminating information on the experience of their activities, mediation and arbitration in disputes between local authorities, overseeing the functioning of the state administration in the province etc. As deconcentrated auxiliary units of provincial administrations into which provinces are subdivided, administrative regions (in Polish "*rejons*") were established by the 1990 reform (267 units in January 1993), with territories corresponding to the districts ("*powiats*") that had been abolished in 1975. Officially, the regions do not constitute a separate tier of administration, but in reality they may be considered as such. As in the other two countries, deconcentrated agencies of central government, not controlled by provincial administrations, proliferated within different subnational territorial frameworks (also within territories of the former districts). In 1993 the number of the "*decos*" was estimated at approximately 200 [Local Governments 1994: 150].

### *The unfinished reform*



Most commentators agree that the Polish reform of territorial government was halted half-way and that its continuation is pending [Hesse 1995a: 254] . While on the local level, the transformation of government has been mostly completed and the new local governments can be considered successful, the situation on the intermediary level as well as the structure of inter-governmental relations deserve further attention. In fact, the necessary measures were already under preparation before the reform process was frozen by the government in 1993 (see below on the "powiats").

Unlike in the Czech Republic and Hungary, fragmentation of local governments has not been much of a problem in Poland. Number of municipalities remained more-or-less stable during the last twenty years (2,452 units in 1993 compared to 2,375 units in 1975) and a wholesale disintegration did not accompany the reform. Also the size of municipalities is greater than in the other two countries and is more acceptable in terms of the sustainability criteria. On average a Polish municipality consists of 17 separate settlements (villages, in Polish "*solectwa*") which indicates a relatively high level of administrative concentration (the data are for 1993). The villages have they own sub-communal bodies - a general village assembly, a village head ("*soltys*") and a council head, the latter two elected by the population. Analogical organs can be set up in towns for their quarters [Public Management Profiles 1995:177-178]. A rural municipality's average population size was 6.9 thousand in 1991 (cf. Swianiewicz 1991a:43). Poland, a country with the population four times larger than that of the Czech Republic, had less than one half of the Czech number of municipalities. Still, there are rural municipalities in Poland which are handicapped by their small size. To overcome such limitations, municipalities are free to associate for the attainment of different purposes; on the province level, formation of a Provincial Chamber of Local Self-Governments is obligatory. Even so, according to S. Benzler, Polish municipalities, as the only level of self-government, are politically too weak to be able to defend their interests against the central state [Benzler 1994a: 325].

The sore point of the Polish reform is rather the *intermediary level* where two main mutually interconnected issues are on the agenda. One is the reform of contemporary provinces, established in 1975 by the Communist government, mainly for political reasons, and more-or-less untouched by the 1990 reform.<sup>40</sup> Reduction of their number (proposals ranged between 9 and 20 units instead of the present 49) and increase of their territories have been proposed [Hesse 1995a]. In re-drawing boundaries of provinces, it is recalled that more attention should be paid to historical traditions and territorial economic relations.

The other issue is a plan to re-introduce districts ("*powiats*") as a second level of territorial self-government<sup>41</sup> and as another tier of territorial division of the state. According to this plan, districts would assume responsibilities at the expense of the present administrative regions ("*rejons*") in education, health services, roads and public transport etc. They would have their own organs - elected councils and executive boards headed by chairmen. Their establishment was already announced in 1993 but later on, after parliamentary elections, withdrawn by the new government, together with the pilot programme intended to introduce the first stage

of the reform. This, understandably, caused an outcry among adherents of the reform and created an atmosphere of instability as far as further development of territorial administration is concerned. In 1995/96 the district issue was re-opened during the drafting of a new constitution, but to no avail. In addition, contradictions and ambiguities exist in legislation as far as the delimitation of responsibilities and co-operation between municipalities and provinces are concerned [Benzler 1994: 323-324].

J. J. Hesse and K. H. Goetz concluded their analysis of the Polish reform of local government by stating that while local government and administration have gone through major upheavals, territorial organization of local governance remained largely unchanged and implementation is lagging behind legislation [Hesse and Goetz 1993/94: 25].

#### **4. Conclusions**

The three territorial reforms we have just described have many common traits, but they also differ in many respects. Table 5 visualizes similarities and differences between the territorial administrative structures of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland.

**Table 5 Areas of government in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland after the reforms of 1990 - a synoptic table**

<i>Types of government areas</i>	<i>Authorities</i>		
	<i>Czech Rep.</i>	<i>Hungary</i>	<i>Poland</i>
<u>A. Local tier</u>			
Rural municipalities	SG	SG	SG
Town-rural municipalities	-	-	SG
Town (city) municipalities	SG	SG	SG
Cities with county rights	SA	SG	-
Capitals	SG	SG	SG
<u>B. Regional tier</u>			
Districts	SA	-	SA
Counties (regions, provinces)	-	LG, SA	SA

Explanations: SG ... self-government  
SA ... state administration

It is the common heritage of a totalitarian institutional structure in the three countries, their parallel effort to get rid of this burden and to establish a democratic territorial administration, as well as their cultural and social proximity, which explain the commonalities. And it is the different geographies, different histories, including the different national brands of Communism, different circumstances of exiting from Communism and also the divergent elements of their political and social systems as well as of their cultures which account for the differences. In the following paragraphs we shall concentrate on some of the common traits.

In all three countries the *most successful* part of the public administration reform was that concerning local government. As mentioned by Baldersheim and Illner (1996a:4), local governments proved to contribute in four different ways to the democratization process in East Central Europe. One, they provided opportunities for large segments of the population to participate directly in government through elective offices or more indirectly through local elections and through watching government at work at close quarters. This certainly helped the diffusion and learning of new political roles and practices. Second, local governments provided opportunities for the development of new elites at the local level who could learn political skills and roles required to participate eventually in national political life. Third, local governments - those in large cities and also associations of local

governments - acted, to some degree at least, as a check or countervailing force to national governments. Fourth, devolution of competencies to local governments prevented overload developing at the center. Hungary seems to have been so far the most successful of the three countries in promoting decentralized governance.

Establishment of local self-governments in villages, towns and cities, two rounds of democratic local elections (in 1990 and again in 1994), increased local activism as well as the generally approving attitudes of citizens toward the new local authorities witness to this fact. Sociological surveys indicated that confidence in the new local governments and satisfaction with their activity prevailed.<sup>42</sup> In the Czech Republic and Hungary the territorial restructuring of local authorities brought about their fragmentation which, in the most cases, satisfied the "*natural area*" principle of administrative regionalization (in its social and political sense).<sup>43</sup> Splitting of municipalities manifested that change was achieved after 1989, it fulfilled local ambitions, brought decision-making nearer to the citizens, enhanced local initiatives and local feelings. It redressed the damages caused by earlier forced amalgamations and was an understandable, perhaps also unavoidable component of the democratization process.<sup>44</sup>

In spite of the obvious advantages of smaller local governments, there are also *reservations* to be mentioned. Fragmentation of municipalities became or can soon become a source of major problems in Czech Republic and Hungary and, unless compensated, may jeopardize the success of the reform. Fragmentation, while supporting the "*natural area*" principle, violated at the same time the principle of "*sustainability*" of government areas. As pointed by Illner 1991a, Barlow 1992, Hesse and Goetz 1992/1993 and Hesse 1995a, Davey 1995a and others, the tiny units are as a rule too small to operate efficiently, to mobilize financial, personal, organizational and political resources, to be able to launch developmental projects and to have a diversified local political life. Economy of scale cannot be achieved within the framework of very small communities, too narrow municipal boundaries constrain or impede provision of municipal services which are thus frequently duplicated and difficult to co-ordinate. With a fragmented structure, inter-municipal differences in the provision of services increase and it is difficult to attain equity [Barlow 1992: 62-63]. What in the small rural communities seems to be a well functioning neighborhood, might in reality become an oligarchic rule of few families or of a small bunch of local influentials. Small communities are usually far too weak partners in negotiations with regional state offices and their weakness facilitates centralist tendencies.

Overcoming territorial fragmentation of local governments will be probably the prerequisite to further success of the reform. The size-dependent effectiveness of local authorities in the provision of services and stimulation of local development may prove critically relevant for this success. However, the consolidation of local governments cannot be achieved within a short period and it cannot be decreed; any externally imposed amalgamation would be politically untenable. Territorial administrative systems in East Central Europe have to put up with a prolonged existence of small local governments. The issue is to strike a proper balance between the participatory aspect of local government which speaks for the smaller

municipalities, and the aspect of economic and administrative efficacy of local governments as well as representative democracy which favours larger units. Any change can only be stepwise and has to be carefully prepared in a democratic way. A feasible way to overcome the extreme fragmentation is to design, encourage and support *inter-municipal co-operation* (co-operation targeted on specific goals, establishment of common organs, of special districts etc.) which might later lead to genuine amalgamation and to stimulate such co-operation by state subsidies, fiscal policy, advice etc. It is only indirect methods that can be used for this purpose. Some of these methods can be made obligatory. Hungarian legislation is quite inspirational in this respect.

An important aspect of the "*natural area*" principle - the requirement that there should be some correspondence between the hierarchical organization of the settlement system and the territorial structure of public administration was not paid enough attention in the reform. The existing system of local government in East Central Europe *is not sufficiently versatile* to accommodate the different types of the settlement structures. In several instances, the same legal framework applies to rural as well as urban, to large as well as small municipalities. With some exceptions (e.g. the town-rural municipalities in Poland, the Warsaw metropolitan government and the few Czech district-cities), the system does not offer a wide enough variety of administrative forms to accommodate settlement structures like city regions, agglomerations and metropolitan areas, although such structures are gaining in importance and are a natural matrix for an intensive inter-municipal co-operation.<sup>45</sup>

Surveys also indicated that the population's initially favorable acceptance of the new local governments as an opportunity for political participation has been somewhat limited. While confidence in local governments has so far persisted (cf. note 42), *the willingness of citizens to actively participate in the local councils has been low* and also skepticism prevailed as far as relevance of local politics and sense of local political efficacy (a possibility to influence local affairs) are concerned.<sup>46</sup> Also participation in the local elections was rather low in Hungary and Poland and diminished over time (turnouts in 1994 and 1990 compared) in all three countries.<sup>47</sup> Alienation of citizens from politics and their reluctance to participate in public life is part of a syndrome inherited from the previous regimes. It has been a formidable obstacle to building a functioning democratic territorial government. Such attitudes have been changing only very slowly - much more slowly than the institutions of territorial government themselves. Also, negative phenomena occurring sometimes in the contemporary local politics - non-transparent decision-making, clientelism, corruption, interpenetration of politics and business, politicking, petty quarreling etc., may strengthen the alienation of citizens. Inefficiency of many local governments, of those too small to guarantee local development, may contribute to preservation of such a stereotype. It may turn out that, in the long run, political success of local government will be determined more by its ability to provide services for local populace and to bolster local development than by the opportunity it offers for citizens' participation.

While the part of the reform which dealt with the local governments was a success (with the reservations mentioned above), the same cannot be said about

*the reform of the regional level administration.* Much fewer innovations were introduced on this level during the first reform wave in 1990 and it was understood that a second stage of the territorial reform is to follow which will tackle the regional level administration. Yet this has occurred only in Hungary where the second wave of the reform materialized in 1994 and the gap was at least partly filled in. In the Czech Republic and in Poland continuation of the reform is still pending.

Several *reasons* can be mentioned why in the Czech case the reform of regional government has encountered a formidable opposition; some of the reasons may have relevance also in the other two countries:

1. The pre-1990 intermediary authorities were the most discredited element of the Communist territorial administration and were the target of fiercest criticism after the regime collapsed; resentments still bloc their reconstruction.
2. The momentum of the territorial reform was lost after most of the post-revolutionary enthusiasm had been spent on the reform of local governments; time is no more on the side of decentralization.
3. The reform of regional-level administration has been perceived by political actors as more relevant for the distribution of political power than was the local reform and it became, therefore, more disputed; conflicts have lead eventually to a political stalemate that blocked further progress.
4. The central government delayed or even torpedoed continuation of the reform at the intermediary level because of fears that it will have to give up some of its prerogatives and will lose control of the country's development. A re-born centralism (some authors have sensed a tendency toward administrative recentralization in the three countries - cf. Elander 1995), supported sometimes by doctrinal arguments <sup>48</sup>, may have played a role in such a stance. It is, in particular, the idea of regional self-government which antagonizes the centralists.
5. It is difficult to design the regional tier of public administration unless the shape of the local tier has been stabilized. Given the highly fragmented and, therefore, still unstable structure of local government in the Czech Republic, it may be premature to fix the regional-tier administration.

The extended provisorium as far as the regional-level administration is concerned, does not permit to finalize the over-all architecture of the public administration reform and perpetuates the existence of many gaps and vague points in the legislation as well as a mess in inter-governmental relations. It contributes to the proliferation of the "*decos*" in the vacuum created by the non-existence or weakness of the intermediary administration. And, last but not least, it creates political tension fomented by dissatisfied regional elites. An interesting aspect of the discussions concerning the regional tier are the frequent claims to restore ancient government areas that had existed before the Communist takeover or even before World War II. <sup>49</sup>

However, beside doctrinal arguments, power interests and the not-so-surprisingly sceptic attitudes of bureaucrats, some *well founded concerns* stemming from the specific situation of the transforming countries were mentioned which caution against a too radical and swift decentralization on the regional level [cf Elander 1995]:

- central governments need to maintain control of the economic and political development in the country during the still volatile situation of post-Communist transformation and they have to control distribution of scarce resources in the circumstances of transformational stress,
- economic and social differences among territorial units have to be controlled and kept within tolerable limits by central state, using redistributive mechanisms, so as to prevent marginalization of some regions and the resulting social and political tensions,
- national integration must be maintained in the general atmosphere of societal fragmentation and vis-a-vis the tangle of conflicting interests, concomitant of the transformation processes; it is feared that existence of strong provinces may encourage centrifugal tendencies,
- the reform of regional level government is insufficiently prepared - some of its crucial parameters are not clear, the necessary legislation is not in place, improvisation would discredit the whole project.

Moreover, in the Czech context, the establishment of regions (provinces) and of the regional authorities is not considered a priority task by the general public and, indeed, its popular support has been steadily falling during the last five years. Advocacy of regional reform cannot be therefore expected by political parties to mobilize much electoral support. Citizens are insufficiently informed about the potential benefits of regional self-government and are confused by the protracted and controversial political discussion on this subject. The majority have adopted an opinion that while decentralization of government is in general desirable, establishing regional (provincial) authorities will be an excessively costly project, that would strengthen the already inflated state bureaucracy.<sup>50</sup>

Table 6 shows the diminishing support for the new regional authorities.

**Table 6 Perceived urgency of establishing self-governing regions (provinces) in the Czech Republic in 1992 - 1997**

	<i>Month/ Year</i>				
	<i>9/92</i>	<i>4/93</i>	<i>3/94</i>	<i>2/95</i>	<i>2/97</i>
Percentage of people who considered establishment of the new regions an "urgent" or "rather urgent" task	45	37	30	27	20

Source: Institute of Public Opinion Research, Survey Information 97-06, Praha: 1997.

Note: data from representative national sample surveys of adult population.

Nor do Czech municipal governments show many sympathies for establishing the new regional authorities as they (unjustly) fear that this would mean a reduction of their own competencies and of their financial resources.

As already mentioned, there *do not exist any strong ethnically founded regionalisms* in the three countries that would push for the autonomous regions. Unlike in many other countries, there are no ethnic minorities, forming large enough spatial concentrations and at the same time demanding territorial autonomy.

None of the above reasons and circumstances cautioning against a too radical assertion of regional autonomy in East central Europe can be easily dismissed. The reforms of regional government deserve thorough planning. Particularly any change of the territorial administrative structure concomitant of the reform is a deep and lasting intervention into the political, economic and social life of a country and, as such, has to be carefully prepared. There is no space for improvisation and additional fine-tuning in this field (cf. the *"sustainability"* principle in public administration reforms). Yet, at the same time, caution must not be an excuse for inactivity and for permanent postponement of any practical steps toward the reform as has been the case in Czech Republic.

Obviously, neither decentralization nor centralization of government are absolute values. One-sided approaches - the centralistic ones, be they a legacy of the former regime, or a temptation of the new power-holders, or the decetralistic ones, be they dreams of the communitarians and Greens, or a war cry of localists and regionalists, are hardly acceptable. The levels of decentralization and centralization have to be weighed against functional and contextual factors and their optimum rather than maximum, is to be sought. Both an insufficient as well as an excessive decentralization could be a problem. As the matter stands now in East Central Europe, decentralization on the regional level is still an issue and further decentralizing efforts are pending. On the local level, decentralization has advanced



considerably and the crucial issue is now to balance resources of local governments with their responsibilities and to correct the excesses of fragmentation in some countries.

We can end with just one conclusion. The reform of territorial government has not been finished in East Central Europe. A second stage is pending in the Czech Republic and Poland and less so in Hungary which should primarily tackle the intermediary tier. Further administrative decentralization (which cannot be substituted by deconcentration) is the prerequisite to democratic and efficient government. Although delayed, questioned and contested, the reform of public administration in East Central Europe will eventually proceed to its second stage, not the least with the view of the future accession of the respective countries to the European Union, and in this context it will have to tackle the territorial issues mentioned in this contribution.

## NOTES

- 1) Territorial dimension of the public administration reform cannot be, of course, separated from its substantive functional and structural aspects. In fact, there is nothing like a purely territorial agenda of the reform, just as in general, there do not exist any purely territorial phenomena.
- 2) There are instances when decentralization is clearly dysfunctional. Such as when the government is decentralized to territorial units so small they cannot operate efficiently or when decentralization serves the central government to pass the financial burden to lower tiers which, however, cannot cope with it. Cf. also van der Wusten 1992: 59.
- 3) The following four main types of settlement units (subsystems) can be distinguished in developed countries, each of which may require a different form of government [Bennett 1992: 144-145]: a) large cities, usually composed of several local parts; b) metropolitan areas (agglomerations, city regions), composed of a large urban center together with a number of smaller units functionally related to it, where both separate identities of the cities, towns and villages should be preserved and co-ordination among them facilitated; c) rural areas with central place settlement systems (villages of different size interspersed with towns); d) rural areas without any larger settlement units nor any obvious hierarchy, i.e. a dispersed rural settlement system.
- 4) As noted by van den Wusten, this was the case when départements were created in France during the Great Revolution. There was an explicit intention to design them as purely geographic units, deprived of any historical and cultural connotations that might link them with the pre-revolutionary society. Cf. van der Wusten 1992: 56.
- 5) Some cultural commonalities between the Czech Lands, Hungary and Galicia - the south-eastern part of Poland - can be traced back to the earlier times. Until 1918, these territories belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, sharing similar institutions and elements of a similar cultural climate.
- 6) The Czechoslovak reform of 1960 introduced a new administrative regionalization of the country, reducing the number of regional-level units (districts and regions) and increasing their size, and shifted many competences to the ministries. The Polish reform of 1973-1975 and the Hungarian reform of 1984 abolished the intermediary units, i.e. the districts, and introduced a two-tier system of territorial administration. Also in Czechoslovakia a possibility of introducing a two-tier system was discussed in the 80s but was never brought to life.
- 7) Coulson remarked that "The centralized Stalinist system gradually collapsed into something more akin to a network of baronial fiefs, consisting of party bosses each engaged in the pursuit of their own ends." This, in his opinion, reflects a political culture that has older roots than communism in some countries of East and Central Europe [Coulson 1995b: 9].

- 8) This political culture is the product of a much longer development than just the forty years of the Communist regime. In the Czech Lands, it was also shaped by the Nazi occupation, by the inter-war democratic regime and by the long experience of suppressed national existence within the Habsburg empire. A greater part of this historical experience consisted in coping with external pressures of some kind and adapting to them.
- 9) We prefer to view the measures of 1990 as the first stage of a more comprehensive reform of territorial administration which continued, or is yet to continue, in the subsequent years and has not yet been finished.
- 10) Abolition of the provincial tier of government in Czechoslovakia in 1990 may serve as an example. Its main purpose was political - to uproot the strong Communist establishment in the provinces. In terms of administrative rationality this step was not justified. The regional tier of government is missing as a proper level for the implementation of several public administration agendas (e.g. the protection of environment, regional planning, administration of higher-order health, educational and cultural services and others).
- 11) As mentioned, there was a difference between the three countries in terms of the preparation of the reform. In Hungary, with its relatively liberal atmosphere, serious discussions about the reform began as early as 1987, in Poland the discussion followed one year later. In Czechoslovakia, the reform had to be prepared within a few months in 1990.
- 12) Both for ideological and pragmatic reasons, the project of a "self-governing Republic" was one of the key concepts in the program of the Polish "Solidarity" movement in the 80s. Self-governing structures had to be established wherever possible - in the enterprises as well as in the territorial units - the subjectivity of which had to be strengthened [cf. Benzler 1994: 315-317]. Based on a more philosophical grounding, this kind of thinking was close to the group of Czechoslovak dissident intellectuals grouped around Václav Havel.
- 13) High expectations of the social and political impact of localism were frequently expressed in the late 80s and early 90s by Polish social scientists grouped in the research program "Local Poland". Cf. the contributions in Jalowiecki 1989.
- 14) In the Czech Republic, all settlements were categorized in 1971 according to their centrality into five categories and for each category a certain level of development was foreseen. Housing construction and the development of infrastructure were regulated to comply with the categorization. In the case of the least preferred category of settlements their development had to be suppressed and gradual depopulation was expected [Decree of the Government of the Czech Socialist Republic No. 283/1971].
- 15) B. Jalowiecki in his study on the 1990 Polish local elections mentions several examples of such ancient and persistent territorial feuds [Jalowiecki 1990: 136-137].
- 16) In the Czech Republic, the issue of regional autonomy was raised after 1989 by Moravian political movements and parties. Moravia is the Eastern part of the

Czech Republic that used to have considerable autonomy within the former Czech Kingdom. The background of the claim is regional, not ethnic. In discussions concerning the reform of regional-level government, these parties demanded that Moravia becomes an autonomous administrative and political unit and that it should be called a "land". This was supposed to restore the historical status of this region. Such aspirations have not found sympathy in the government which feared that the Czech-Slovak schism may be replayed in the case of Moravia.

- 17) The following description of the systems of territorial government in the individual countries tries to be as much up-to date as possible. However, the author cannot exclude that some more recent developments have escaped his attention.
- 18) The new system of territorial government in the Czech Republic was described and analyzed by a number of social scientists, notably by Baldersheim et al. 1996b, Davey 1995a, Dostál and Kára 1992, Dostál and Hampl 1993, Hendrych 1993, Hesse 1995a,b,c, Hesse and Goetz 1993/1994, Illner 1991a,b, Kára and Blažek 1993, Local Governments 1994, Pomahač 1993, Vidláková 1993, Wollmann 1994. As for the pre-1990 system of local administration see the brief information in Dostál and Kára 1992, Illner 1991a, Vidláková and Zářecký 1989. Some of the above contributions belong to the "grey zone" literature which is not distributed through commercial networks.
- 19) Constitutional Act No. 295/1990 CoL which amended and completed Constitutional Act on the Czechoslovak Federation and reduced the term of the National Committees.
- 20) Act No. 367/1990 CoL on municipalities (on the municipal system); Act No. 425/1990 CoL on District Offices; Decree of the Government No. 475/1990 CoL on the Commissioned Municipal Offices; Act No. 418/1990 CoL about the capital Prague; Act No. 368/1990 CoL on municipal elections; Act No. 565/1990 CoL on local fees; Act No. 500/1990 CoL regarding the transfer of some assets owned by the Czech Republic into the property of municipalities; Act No. 172/1991 CoL on property transfer from the Czech Republic to municipalities. Act No. 298/1992 CoL on municipal elections and local referenda. In the subsequent years most of this funding legislation was amended and updated and also further completing legislation followed.
- 21) There are at present two sorts of state grants distributed to municipalities from the state budget: 1) special grants used to finance mainly the costs of providing social welfare benefits and the costs of state administration performed by the municipality (a bloc grant), and 2) equalizing grants which redistribute financial resources to economically less prosperous municipalities. Municipalities receive four kinds of taxes as part of their revenues: 1) Income tax collected from independent entrepreneurs (physical persons) and available to municipalities according to place of residence of tax payers. 2) Tax collected from incomes of dependent employees. The tax revenue is divided between the state, the District Office and the municipalities. 3) Real estate tax which goes fully to the

- municipality on whose territory the real estate is located. 4) Legal persons' income tax: 20 % of the national revenue are redistributed among municipalities according to population. The first two of the above four taxes are the most important component of municipalities' own revenues. Municipalities have no freedom to influence tax rates nor to introduce any specifically local taxes.
- 22) Assets that were transferred to municipalities involved a) historical property owned by municipalities until the end of 1949, b) property for which municipalities have management rights - administrative buildings, schools, housing units etc., c) some additional property held earlier by the state - sewage networks, cultural facilities, social care facilities etc.
  - 23) The contemporary district structure remained more-or-less stable since 1961 when it was introduced. The only important change after 1989 was establishment of a new district in North Moravia effective since 1996.
  - 24) The Constitution of the Czech Republic from December 1992 decreed in Chapter VII that Czech Republic is divided into municipalities which are basic self-governing territorial units, while lands or regions (provinces) are higher level self-governing territorial units.
  - 25) The extreme centrality of the capital Prague has been a frequent source of regional discontent. The natural weight of Prague in Czech economy, society and culture was further supported by centralism of the Communist totalitarian regime whose key ruling institutions were located in the capital. As the consequence, the image of Prague as a city oppressively dominating the rest of the country has become widespread. After 1989, the centrality of Prague has been boosted again.
  - 26) Most of the regions along the Czech-West German and Czech-Austrian borders became marginal areas during the Communist rule. They were insufficiently integrated into the Republic's territory (both in the economic as well as sociocultural sense). Two factors combined to this effect: 1. the "iron curtain" which meant special military and security regime, evacuation of population and destruction of buildings in the more immediate border belt, limited of economic development, discontinuation of any cross-border relations, and 2. expatriation of the former German population from these regions after World War II which left many of the regions under-populated. Cf. Illner and Andrlé 1994. Re-integration of these areas into the economic and sociocultural fabric of the state is one of the criteria that are relevant in considering the project of regional (provincial) level governments.
  - 27) A large part of the discussion focused on the number of future regions (provinces). In principal, two kinds of solutions were proposed: the first kind foresaw restoration of lands that had existed before 1949; the second type proposed to introduce a modified version of the regions (provinces) that had existed until 1990, splitting some of them into two. Different alternative options were formulated as far as the status of capital Prague was concerned. The resulting proposals demanded establishment of 2, 3, 8, 9, 11, 13 or 14 lands or

regions respectively. An overview of the earlier history of the so far unsuccessful efforts to create the intermediary tier of government in the Czech Republic is given in Hesse 1995c: 7-16.

- 28) 1. Euroregion "Egrensis" in the Western part of Czech Republic and extending into Bavaria and Saxony. This was the first of the Euroregions and its experience was widely used in establishing trans-border cooperation in other areas. 2. Euroregion "Ore Mountains" (Krušné Hory, Erzgebirge) in the North-West of the Republic, including the districts on the Czech and Saxon sides of the Ore Mountains. 3. Euroregion "Labe" (Elbe), comprising Saxon and Czech districts situated along the Labe river. 4. Euroregion "Nisa" (Neisse, Nysa), consisting of the Eastern part of Saxony, South-Western Poland and some north Bohemian districts. 5. Euroregion "Šumava-Bavorský les" (Bayerischer Wald-Muhlviertel), which includes parts of the Czech Republic (in the South and Southwest), Bavaria and Austria. In addition, there were projects under way to develop and to institutionalize cooperation between the regions of South Moravia and Upper Austria [Houžvička 1997].
- 29) Social science literature on the Hungarian reform of territorial government is abundant, although - just as in the case of the Czech Republic - a part of it are the "grey zone" publications. Without any ambition to be exhaustive, we list some of the English and German written sources: Ágh and Kurtán 1996, Baldersheim et al. 1996, Davey 1994b, Hajdú 1993, Hesse 1993, 1995a, 1995b, Hesse and Goetz 1992/93, Horváth 1991 and 1994, Illés 1993, Kaltenbach 1990, Lengyel 1993, Local 1994, Navracsics 1996, Péteri 1991b, Péteri and Szabó 1991, Szabó 1990, Wollmann 1994, Wollmann 1995 ,
- 30) Act No. LXIV/1990 on the Election of Representatives and Mayors of Local Self-Governments; Act No. LXV/1990 on Local Self-Government; Act XC/1990 on the Legal Status, Office and Certain Tasks of the Commissioners of the Republic; Act No. C/1990 on Local Taxes; Act No. XX/1991 on the Tasks and Range of Competences of the Local Governments and Their Organs, Commissioners of the Republic and Some Organs Under Central Control; Act No. XXIV/1991 on Local Self-Government in the Capital City and its Districts; Act N. XXXIII/1991 on the Transfer of Certain State Properties to the Ownership of Local Self-Governments. All quoted after Local Governments 1994: 89. The changes of 1994 were instituted by Act LXIII amending the 1990 Act on Local Self-Governments. The County Development Councils were introduced by Act XXI/1996.
- 31) In 1996 Navracsics mentioned the existence of as much as 36-38 deconcentrated organs employing 45,000 public servants, i.e. more than in local governments altogether and twice as many as in the whole of central administration [Navracsics 1996: 299].
- 32) Davey concluded his account of the Hungarian reform by the opinion that "Local government reform has gone faster and further - a great deal further - in Hungary than in the other former socialist countries of Europe. Indeed, it could

be said to be the only country in Central and Eastern Europe with a fully fledged system of local government already in operation" [Davey 1995b: 74].

- 33) Péteri and Szabó stressed that the original idea of amalgamation was rational: to create more efficient local administration. Yet, the amalgamation was implemented by the Communist regime in a wrong way and mistakes were made with grave political consequences. The seat villages of joint Councils were too dominant at the expense of other settlements. They developed, while the small villages declined and were depopulated, which antagonized their inhabitants against the consolidation scheme. Cf. Péteri and Szabó 1991: 74.
- 34) While many small settlements regained their lost self-governmental status, they were not able to make up for the irreversible consequences of the modernization processes that were taking place during the last 40 years, irrespective of the administrative structure of the country. Urbanization and industrialization drained rural population to cities and to local centers and the regional structure of the country became much more interconnected. Although independent again, small settlements cannot play the same role they used to have in the 40s any more.
- 35) The downgrading of the counties by the 1990 reform was a price that had to be paid for their retention as a tier of territorial government. During the discussions of the reform in Parliament there was a strong pressure to abandon the counties altogether as they were considered and, indeed, were the strongest territorial link of the political and administrative system of the Communist state. Cf. Davey 1995b: 70. By retaining counties the Hungarian reform differed from the Czech one.
- 36) In literature, the Polish reform of territorial government is probably the most frequently analyzed and commented upon among the post-Communist reforms in East Central European countries. This is due more to the dramatic circumstances under which the changes were first negotiated during the Round Table discussions, to the importance attributed by Solidarity's strategists to transformation on the local-level and to the large number of scholars (both domestic and foreign) monitoring the Polish scene, than to a particular comprehensiveness or consistence of the Polish reform (in this respect the uncontested primacy belongs to Hungary). We mention some social science contributions commenting on the Polish developments: Baldersheim, Illner et al. 1995, Benzler 1994, Cielecka 1995, Gorzelak and Mularczyk 1991, Grochowski and Kowalczyk 1991, Hesse 1993, 1995a, 1995b, Hesse (ed.) 1993, Hesse and Goetz 1993/94, Jalowiecki 1989, Jalowiecki and Swianiewicz 1991, Local Governments 1994, Maurel 1989, Regulska 1993a, 1993b, 1995, Swianiewicz 1991a, 1991c, 1992, Taras 1993, Wollmann 1994, Wollmann 1995.
- 37) Act 94/1990 on Changes in the Constitution.
- 38) Act 95/1990 on Local Self-Government; Act 96/1990 on the Election of Representatives of Local Self-Government; Act 123/1990 on the Territorial Branches of State Administration; Act 198/1990 on the Division of Competence

Between the State Administration and Local Self-Government; Act 200/1990 on the Local Self-Government of Warsaw, and its 1994 amendment; Act 301/1990 on the Transfer of Certain State Properties to the Ownership of Local Self-Government; Act 518/1990 on the Municipal Revenues in 1991 and similar Acts to follow; Act 31/1991 on Local Taxes and Fees; Act 473/1991 on the Local Referendum. All quoted after Local Governments 1994: 149.

- 39) There exists an implicit third level of territorial administration in Poland - administrative regions (in Polish "rejony") into which provinces were subdivided - see below.
- 40) The Polish 1990 reform of territorial government was a "half-reform" since the beginning: its focus was local self-government, while provincial administration was left aside. S. Benzler explains that this was caused by the constraints which the opposition faced during the "Round Table" talks with the Communist government. This halfheartedness constitutes up to now the main weakness of the reform process [Benzler 1994: 322-323].
- 41) Districts ("powiats"), 300 of them, had existed in Poland until 1975 when they were abolished.
- 42) In spite of some fluctuations, citizens tend to have confidence in the new local authorities and have been mostly satisfied with their activity. In the Czech Republic the ratio of those who had confidence in local governments to those who had not was 48 % : 43 % in 1993, 46 % : 44 % in 1994, 57 % : 25 % in 1995, 55 % : 26 % in 1996 and 48 % : 31 % in 1997 (Institute for Public Opinion Research, Survey Information 97-05, all data for mid-years). Local governments have enjoyed a relatively high confidence compared with other political institutions (43 % against 54 % had confidence in the central Government and 27 % against 54 % in the Parliament in the beginning of 1997). In Poland the same indicator was 65 % : 30 % which too put local governments among the institutions enjoying the greatest public confidence (data of the Polish State Center for Public Opinion Investigations, quoted after Cichocki and Cielecka 1995:190, time of the surveys was not given). As for satisfaction, Czech data indicated that the ratio of those satisfied with local authorities to those unsatisfied was 50 % : 26 % in 1994 (data from the Czech part of the ISSP 1994 module). More recent data on satisfaction of citizens with the performance of Municipal Offices were similarly positive: 48 % satisfied compared to 33 % dissatisfied at the end of 1996. Over time, this ratio was more-or-less stable (Institute of Public Opinion Research, Survey Information No. 9611).
- 43) However, in some cases, as was the separation of suburban settlements from the adjacent urban municipalities, the splitting of municipalities violated the "natural area" principle.
- 44) A. Coulson expressed the benefits of administrative independence for small communities in the following words: "For small communities the key change from earlier years was to have a mayor in post who was independent of higher levels of authority, and who could represent the interests of the village or town..."



these mayors were immediately legitimated in a way never possible in the Communist years. They proceeded to speak and lobby for their areas and to administer basic local services..." [Coulson 1995b: 2].

- 45) The settlement structures in developed countries are going to be increasingly composed of systems of interconnected cities, towns and villages instead of individual settlements; networks are going to be the functional units instead of nodes, and administrative regionalization will have to take this trend in consideration.
- 46) Data from Czech surveys indicate that the percentage of citizens willing to stand as candidates in local elections was 11 % in 1992 and 8 % in 1993. Between 1992 and 1993 the proportion of those who thought it advisable not to get involved in public affairs and better to mind only one's own things grew from 29 % to 39 % and the number of people who disagreed fell from 52 % to 40 %. Within the same interval the percentage of those who thought they had no influence on local affairs increased from 66 % to 80 %. Also the proportion of citizens who thought they were not concerned with the decisions of local councils grew from 33 % to 49 % in 1993. The data are from two representative surveys organized by the Institute of Sociology, ASCR. The distance people feel toward local governments contrasts with their relatively high confidence in this institution and with their fairly high satisfaction with its performance (see note 42).
- 47) In the Czech Republic, participation in local elections was 75 % in 1990 and 62 % in 1994. In Hungary, the turnout was 40 % (the first round) and 29 % (the second round) in 1994 and 43 % in 1994. In Poland the turnout was 42 % in 1990 and 34 % in 1994.
- 48) Neoliberal argumentation was fuelling Czech debate on decentralization. Opponents of decentralization maintained that (because of their organic nature) the only legitimate units of territorial self-government at the sub-national level are municipalities. Any higher-level self-governing territorial entities can - according to their opinion - originate only as spontaneous bottom-up associations of municipalities. Any administrative reform that would introduce an intermediary structure as a top-down operation should be rejected. Regional authorities, if they were ever established, would be an unnecessary extension of the state, limiting private initiative and restricting individual freedom [Jakl 1997].
- 49) In all three countries there has been a tendency to restore some of the old, sometimes even pre-Communist government areas. Most visible has been this tendency in the spontaneous restructuring of municipalities - councils were renewed where they had been years ago. But the same trend characterized also the efforts at regional restructuring: in Poland there are influential voices which want to return to the traditional districts ("powiats") and to the old provinces ("voivodships"). In the Czech Republic, the options for the new administrative regionalization include a restoration of the abolished regions (provinces) or of the pre-1960 regional structure. Some insist on returning to the system of lands that was abolished immediately after the Communist takeover.

This historicism, while understandable, is sometimes misleading. Spatial patterns of economy and of social life may have changed in the meantime so profoundly as to render the restoration of historical units illusory. Such historical units might be now dysfunctional and unsustainable. This would be e.g. the case with Silesia, one of the historical Czech lands: the post-war development of the Ostrava industrial agglomeration that extends over a large part of both Silesia and North Moravia smoothed out the boundaries between the two historical entities and created a new regional system. Neither Silesia nor Moravia can any more be reconstructed within their historical confines.

- 50) While 72% agreed in June 1997 that it is preferable to decentralize decision-making concerning regional issues (9% disagreed), 68% considered establishment of new regional (provincial) authorities too expensive (13% disagreed), 45% thought that this level of government is not necessary (33% disagreed). Opinion concerning expediency of the new regions for an improved functioning of state administration was split half-by-half, while at the same time about one third of respondents had no opinion at all (data from a June 1997 opinion poll, Institute of Public Opinion Research, Survey Information 97-06).

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