Leading the Way to Regionalization in Post-Communist Europe: An Examination of the Process and Outcomes of Regional Reform in Poland

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East European Politics and Societies 2007; 21; 424
DOI: 10.1177/0888325407303786

Leading the Way to Regionalization in Post-Communist Europe: An Examination of the Process and Outcomes of Regional Reform in Poland

Jennifer A. Yoder*

This article examines Poland's process of regionalization since the late 1990s. It identifies several factors that led Poland to introduce self-government at the regional level both earlier and to a greater extent than its neighbors in East Central Europe. The analysis then turns to the competences and financing of the Polish regions, or voivodeships. Although Poland has taken steps to decentralize, it remains a unitary state.

Keywords: Poland; decentralization; regionalization; regions; self-government

In 1998, the Poles elected members of new regional councils, followed by the Czechs in 2000, and the Slovaks in 2002. Not only was Poland's regionalization the first in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), it has also been the most thorough. This article explores the reasons for Poland's lead in regionalization, arguing that the presence of an actor ideologically in support of decentralization (and decommunization), namely Solidarity and its main successor, Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS), propelled regional reforms. Second, Poland's size, geographic location, and self-perception as leader of CEE countries in a united Europe are factors that led Poland to embark upon regionalization earlier and to a greater extent than other countries in CEE. Lastly, a history of meso-level territories provided a rationale for re-introducing this levelin Poland that was missing in other countries. Once it establishes the basis for Poland's lead in regionalization, the article turns to the territorial and administrative reforms themselves and outlines

* The author would like to thank Pawel Brodalka and Tomasz Zajaczkowski for their valuable research assistance.

East European Politics and Societies, Vol. 21, No. 3, pages 424–446. ISSN 0888-3254

DOI: 10.1177/0888325407303786

the relationship between this new level of self-government and the local and national levels, describes the competences of the meso-level, and compares the Polish meso to the evolving contexts in other CEE cases.

Motivations for regionalization in Central and Eastern European countries

Unlike in Western Europe, where regionalization following World War II right up to the 1980s was largely either a product of imposition (in the case of Germany), or of movements from below (as in the United Kingdom), in post-communist countries, regionalization was largely propelled by national policy makers. With few groups espousing either territorial or ethnic regionalism from below, and with a general weakness of civil society organizations to participate in the debates about regionalization, the main proponents for regional reform in post-communist countries were in either the national executive or parliament. The debate often boiled down to whether a more centralized system would provide national stability and integrity during the transition, or whether a decentralized system would be more democratic and efficient. Supporters of regional decentralization often went beyond the goal of devolving administrative authority to the subnational; they often pressed for self-government at the regional level, though in most cases, self-government at the local level was a priority (Table 1).

In general, the regionalization process has been linked closely to the larger democratization and economic liberalization processes.[1] Regional decentralization opens more avenues for political participation, brings leaders closer to citizens, and reflects the notion that civil society can more easily grow and thrive at local levels, where people have common experiences and interests.[2] In the specific case of post-communist regimes, decentralization is often seen by reformers as a necessary remedy for years of Soviet-imposed centralization around a single party, "democratic centralism." In terms of economic liberalization, regionalization may be viewed as a vehicle for increasing administrative efficiency,[3] and more accurately gathering information about the specific needs of an area and devising economic development plans to address

Table 1. *Regions in Eastern and Western Europe*

Country	Regional or Intermediate-Level Government	Type of Regionalization
Czech Republic	14 *kraje*	regional decentralization
Poland	16 *wojewodztwa*	regional decentralization
Slovakia	8 *kraje*	regional decentralization
Bulgaria	28 *oblasti*	administrative regionalization
Estonia	15 *maakonnad*	administrative regionalization
Hungary	19 *megyek* + 22 cities w/ county status + Budapest	administrative regionalization
Slovenia	58 *upravne enote*	administrative regionalization
Lithuania	10 *apskritys*	administrative regionalization
Romania	41 *judete* + Bucharest	regionalization by existing local govts
Latvia	26 *rajons* with self-governing rights	regionalization by existing local governments
Germany	16 *Laender*	federal state
Austria	9 *Laender*	federal state
Switzerland	26 cantons	federal state
Belgium	3 regions, 3 language communities	federal state
Spain	17 autonomous communities	regional decentralization
Italy	20 regions	regional decentralization
France	22 regions	regional decentralization
Portugal	2 regional governments (Azores and Madeira)	partial regional decentralization
Denmark	2 regional governments (Greenland and Faroes)	partial regional decentralization
United Kingdom	Scottish, Welsh, and Northern Irish Assemblies	partial regional decentralization

Source: Adapted from Gerard Marcou, ed., Regionalization for Development and Accession to the European Union: A Comparative Assessment (Cheltonham, UK: Edward Elgar), 21, and Michael Keating, The New Regionalism in Western Europe: Territorial Restructuring and Political Change (Budapest: Open Society Institute, Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative, 2002), 118.

those needs. Finally, regionalization is viewed as a necessary step to further the integration of post-communist countries into the European Union. Although not one of the Copenhagen criteria for EU membership or even a regulation of the large body of regulations, or *acquis,* of the EU, regionalization has been indirectly encouraged by the European Commission, especially where the structural funds (aid to poorer regions) are concerned.[4] The creation of regions and regional self-government also represents a step toward Europeanization, since not only do most countries of the EU have regions, but subsidiarity and multilevel governance are two of the fundamental principles of the EU today.

Having noted these general considerations of decentralization common to all post-communist countries, it is important to recognize that each country's domestic context shaped the debate about regionalization and, ultimately, the process and outcomes of regional reform. I now turn to the case of Poland, the country whose regional reforms occurred first and have been the most thoroughgoing.

Solidarity and its successors as advocates of decentralization

The Polish case of regionalization is distinguished by its strong commitment to decentralize, articulated most forcefully and consistently by Solidarity and its successors. Solidarity was one of the most prominent, but hardly unified, voices in Polish society, and as far back as 1980–1981, "Thesis 21" of the Solidarity Program called for free elections for subnational authorities with the power to levy taxes.[5] The decentralization theme would also figure prominently in the Round Table negotiations between the opposition and communist forces in 1989. The democratic ideology of the reformers, including elements of support for subsidiarity (especially among those closely aligned with the Catholic Church), coupled with their goal of removing communists from various levels of authority, led the first Solidarity-led post-communist government to act quickly on its commitment to local self-government. The priority of the reforms, however, was the local/municipal level, not the regional level.

In March 1990, the *Sejm* passed the Law of Local Self-Government,[6] which granted new powers of self-government to the *gminy,* numbering nearly 2,500. This reform introduced democratic elections at the local level, transferred the ownership of communal property (and thus the responsibility for privatization) from the central to local governments, and introduced local administration and local budgets separate from the central government.[7] The reform opened up new areas for political activism, gave more administrative and executive responsibility to local governments, and put the collection and disbursement of revenues in the hands of local authorities.[8]

Although popularly elected bodies were created at the local (city and commune) level, the regional-level voivodeship remained a level of central government administration.[9] The voivodeships, numbering forty-nine, still had only limited formal power; namely, they were responsible for executing legislation initiated by the central government. The economic development departments of voivodeships carried out government policy but had no budgetary funds of their own.

Meanwhile, the deeply entrenched bureaucratic powers in Poland resisted the transfer of powers to lower, self-governing bodies. In addition, financial problems and the inexperience of new personnel at local levels served to undermine the capacity of the new local governments.[10]

In 1990, a State Commission was created to come up with a proposal for territorial reorganization and suggest a way to implement reform. This commission produced a 500-page report detailing the major points for debate: the delimitation of regions, somewhere between ten and fourteen; the constitutional status of new regions, ranging from subordination to the central government to complete federalization; and the role of the intermediate level, whether self-governing, merely administrative, or a mix. Between 1991 and 1993, preparations began for administrative reform, only to be abandoned after a change in the Polish government. The new SLD (Alliance of the Democratic Left) and PSL (Peasants' Party) coalition blocked any new movement on territorial reform. The PSL was the major force in opposition to this reform, as it wanted to maintain its strength in agricultural

provinces and feared a shift in the power base to urban areas. The post-communist SLD was, as one observer noted, "unwilling to sacrifice its coalition on the altar of local government reform"[11] and went along with the PSL. Both parties used their powers of patronage to install like-minded authorities in the provincial administration.[12] The government of Prime Minister Waldemar Pawlak (PSL) defended its decision to halt the reforms by claiming order and discipline of the political administration was needed in the transition period.[13]

The lull in the administrative-territorial reform process ended with the change of government in 1997. That year, a Solidarity-based coalition, joining the AWS (Solidarity Electoral Action) and UW (Freedom Union), returned to power and immediately began work on administrative reform as well as reforms of education, health care, social security, and the courts system.

Also in 1997, the "big" or permanent constitution of the Republic of Poland was adopted, establishing the basis for local self-government and emphasizing the notions of decentralization and subsidiarity, although subject to the unitary character of the state. The issue of local self-government was considered sufficiently important to devote a separate chapter, Chapter VII, to the delineation of its basic principles. The first article of the chapter, Article 163, launches the notion of subsidiarity: "Local self-government shall perform public tasks not reserved by the Constitution or statutes to the organs of other public authorities."

A goal of Solidarity politicians since the early 1980s, decentralization represented a significant step in weakening the control of the communist-era bureaucracy. It was also seen as part of a process of changing the status quo and modernizing Poland after four decades of communism and four years of post-communist governments. The Solidarity-led government's stated intention for introducing administrative reform was to "change intergovernmental relations in Poland as well as its fiscal and territorial structure, by decentralizing control over public services and public finance to two new levels of democratically elected self-government: *powiaty* and voivodeships."[14] Moreover, the government stated that the reform was designed to "relieve the central government of the tasks that it used to administer under the old,

communist system. The redefined tasks of a modern and effective government, freed of unnecessary responsibilities, will now include strategic issues, in both economic and political terms. The Polish central government administration will now be able to focus on the elaboration of national economic, foreign and security policies, as well as on supervising the balanced and harmonious development of the whole country."[15]

The new government, led by Prime Minister Jerzy Buzek, first proposed reducing the number of voivodeships from 49 to 12 and introducing about 300 *powiaty*. Much protest followed, with some communist-era voivodeships aiming to preserve their status, some joining in protest to counterweight larger ones, and others vehemently opposing the division of their territory. The government went back to the negotiating table. President Aleksander Kwasniewski (SLD) endorsed his party's plan to create seventeen provinces, which was the number of provinces in communist Poland before the abolishment of the *powiaty* in 1975. Presumably, this plan would prevent "negative social consequences" for the provincial capitals—namely the loss of administrative jobs and also "spillover" benefits enjoyed by the economy—that a smaller number of regions would bring. The government counterproposed with the number fifteen, which Kwasniewski vetoed. The government then accepted a compromise number of sixteen provinces. In the final analysis, according to one analyst, "[t]he whole debate about the number of provinces has been nothing but a political tug-of-war: no substantive arguments of any serious weight were presented by the involved parties."[16]

Quarrels over number and borders of the regions aside, the AWS-led government was clear about the values and principles that underlay the reforms:

> [t]hese reforms increase citizens' ability to control and monitor public institutions, and to ensure that public moneys are spent effectively. By decentralizing responsibilities, the central government relieves itself of performing local tasks that it performed poorly, allowing itself to focus on truly strategic issues.

Furthermore, the government stated that these reforms were intended to transform Poland into

> a modern state, capable of using effectively its economic, social and political potential; a democratic state, whose public and private values belong to a shared European civilization; a state that functions in accordance with clear and transparent procedures, and is permanently controlled by democratically elected representatives of the people …

And as stated by the prime minister's office, among the principles underlying reform was civil society:

> The state will support citizen activities that enrich the public interest and will consider the expression of this interest as its highest goal. [Moreover,] [t]he self-governing *powiat*, together with the existing self-governing *gmina*, allows citizens to shape and control the local public institutions and policies that are closest to their daily lives.[17]

Effectiveness, transparency, openness, accountability, and flexibility are cited as principles central to the new reforms. A new system of public finance would render public administration entities "more transparent and accountable to the electorate."[18]

In contrast to the Polish experience, the motivations for regionalization in the Czech Republic and Slovakia did not have roots in the late-communist and early transition periods, but rather were rooted in the political context of the post-communist transition process. In the Czech case, regionalization was, in the second half of the 1990s, pushed exclusively "from above" by political elites, who saw regionalization as part of the more general administrative reform process. In the case of Slovakia, local elites mobilized "from below" to regionalize, viewing the process as part of a struggle against the centralization of the post-communist, but less than democratic, Meciar regime. In neither case was there a political actor as visible as Solidarity backing the reforms, although the presence of a sizable Hungarian minority in Slovakia lent an ethnoterritorial dimension to that case.[19] Moreover, in neither case was the case for regionalization made in the kinds of principled democratic terms the Solidarity-affiliated governments presented, but rather were made in the name of pragmatism.

Poland and its position in the European context

Poland has been at the forefront of East-West integration. In March 1999, along with the Czech Republic and Hungary, Poland

was among the first CEE states to join NATO. Poland was part of the first wave of post-communist countries to begin accession negotiations with the EU in March 1998. PHARE, one of the three pre-accession instruments financed by the EU to assist the applicant countries of CEE in their preparations for accession, was originally created in 1989 for Poland and Hungary.

As noted earlier, the EU's influence on democratic reforms has been felt by all of the new member states of CEE. In the case of regionalization, that influence has been largely indirect. In particular, Chapter 21 of the accession negotiations, which broke the EU *acquis* into thirty-three chapters for negotiating purposes, required the newest members to develop "programming capacity," which entails designing a development plan, instituting procedures for multi-annual programming of budgetary expenditure, and complying with evaluation and monitoring requirements of the EU's regional policy.[20] The Polish authorities were fully aware of the potential benefits of regionalization, noting that "Polish regions can become one of the leading forces in the process of Poland's integration with the European Union in the near future."[21]

To understand, however, why Poland acted earlier and more thoroughly than other countries on the EU's indirect pressure for regionalization, we might consider Poland's view of itself as a leader in Europe:

> The reforms should also allow Poles and Poland to take full part in the economic and security structures of Europe, and in the development of European and Euro-Atlantic security structures. They will help the Polish state secure its position in the arena of international politics as a fully sovereign, resourceful, and responsible partner.[22]

Poland's population of 38.2 million is the sixth largest in the EU and is larger than that of all nine other recent entrants to the EU combined. In 2003, Poland was the eleventh largest contributor to the EU's GDP, ahead of all other recent EU entrants and Greece, Finland, Ireland, Portugal, and Luxemburg.[23] Moreover, Poland prides itself on its "special relationship" with Europe's leading countries, particularly with its neighbor Germany and, more recently, with Spain, with whom it sided in negotiations over the EU's draft constitution on the issue of voting weights in

the Council of Ministers. Within the NATO alliance, too, Poland has asserted its independence and potential influence by siding with the U.S.-led coalition on the issue of Iraq and contributing 1,500 soldiers (the fifth largest number, after the United States, Britain, Korea, and Italy) to the war-fighting and postwar reconstruction efforts. For its role, Poland was given responsibility for one of the occupation zones in Iraq.

Poland also sees itself as a leader in the process of Europeanizing Central and Eastern Europe. Geographically, Poland is on the westernmost frontier of what, from 1990 to 2004, was a region outside the EU waiting to get in. It has cultivated dense cross-border ties with Germany and has been on the front lines, literally, of the East-West integration process. There are four Euroregions on the German-Polish border: Pomerania, Pro Europa Viadrina, Sprewa-Nysa-Bobr, and Nysa. Germany is Poland's major trading partner, representing 32.3 percent of Poland's total exports, followed by Italy (6.1 percent), Russia (5.5 percent), and the United Kingdon (5 percent). Poland also imports most from Germany (24.3 percent), followed by Italy (8.4 percent) and Russia (8 percent).[24] More than any other CEE country, Poland has been receptive to the idea of "Europeanization," that is, adjusting its institutions and policies to those of the EU, and it has sought to strengthen its presence and profile in Brussels. Within this drive to Europeanize, the Polish reforms can be seen as producing,

> … a state in which local and regional communities can rebuild their identities and manage their own affairs, and in which the principle of subsidiarity is respected by all levels of government; a state capable of shouldering the responsibilities and sharing the benefits of participation in supranational organizations and structures …[25]

Historical factors shaping Poland's regionalization

Historically, Poland has been a unitary state, subordinated to the authority of the center, usually a king, and since 1918, a government. For over two centuries Polish governments wielded power on behalf of occupying powers, which may explain a prevailing lack of confidence in the central government in Poland,

exacerbated under the communist regime that followed World War II. Although Poland never had a tradition of regional federalism, it must be noted that throughout history certain parts of Poland attained some degree of autonomy. As far back as the Middle Ages, the region, or palatinus, existed, and in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, from 1569 to 1795, palatinati (*wojewodztwa*) were "relatively big regions representing strong territorial identities," with twenty-two palatinati in the lands of the Polish kingdom and ten in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.[26] The palatinus (*wojewoda*) was "nominated by the king, but the dignity of the office derived from the fact that it was allocated to the members of powerful aristocratic or semi-aristocratic families dominating in the given region"[27] and remained the focus of political power in the regions for centuries.[28] During partition times, some regions like Poznan (within Prussia) and Galicia (within the Austro-Hungarian empire) enjoyed partial autonomy. The three major occupiers of Poland—Austria, Russia, and Prussia—shaped Poland's territorial, economic, and political development along three different paths.[29] Where self-government rights existed, they were enjoyed exclusively by the landed gentry.

Following World War I, upon the creation of the Second Republic of Poland, sixteen relatively large regional units were created. The palatinus in these regions was nominated by the president of the state and represented the central government. The Silesian region enjoyed a special status at that time, with a degree of autonomy.[30]

In the immediate post-World War II period, from 1944 to 1950, the territorial organization of the Polish state largely carried over from the Second Republic and was still "close to Western European traditions."[31] The territorial division of Poland between 1950 and 1973 resembled the Soviet three-tier system: while the division into *wojewodztwa* (of which there were 17), *powiaty*[32] (over 300), and *gromady* (eventually 8,000 communes)[33] was left intact, a system of councils (*rady*) was introduced and guided by the principle of democratic centralism. In effect, at each level of administration, "national councils" directly supervised the authorities and acted as instruments of the central party.

Centralization under communism was evident in the following changes to the territorial organization: Local regional self-government and communal property were destroyed, regional and local administration and their budgets were no longer separate from the state, and the laws and councils of the subnational regions could be dissolved by the central government if found to be in conflict with central policies. During this period, however, the communist party was organized at the meso, not just central or local, levels, and was seen by the center to be a threat. Thus, "in order to destroy such federalistic tendencies in the party," in 1972–1975, Edward Gierek, the new party leader, launched a significant reform of the meso/palatinatus.

Between 1973 and 1975, the Gierek reforms abolished the *powiaty*, the intermediate level between the *wojewodztwa* and *gromady,* leaving a two-tier system. The *wojewodztwa* increased in number from 17 to 49 and the number of communes was reduced to 2,500 and their name was changed to *gmina* (plural *gminy*). The purpose of these changes was to decrease the strength of the voivodeship party apparatus and to destroy the well-established district elites, as well as to destroy the emotional attachment to the *powiaty*. The reform significantly increased the centralization of the state, even though the regime claimed to be decentralizing it. The smaller, weaker voivodeships were easier for the central government to control. The territorial changes, however, created several small, economically unviable regions, whose boundaries ignored traditional ties and spatial economic, social, and cultural relations. The *gminy* were often too small and weak to assume the duties shifted to them from the abolished *powiaty*, so many responsibilities were moved up to voivodeships.

Despite these limitations, there existed under the Polish communist regime something like proto-self-governments, namely the "alternative" local elites organized around Solidarity.[34] Their presence would greatly facilitate the reform of local government after the fall of the communists. Both the intellectual wing and trade union leaders of Solidarity advanced the idea of "maximum administrative decentralization of the state."[35] By bringing the decision-making process closer to the people, the power of

Table 2. *The Territorial Division of Poland after the Reform*

	Municipalities (*gminy*)	*Powiat* level	Regional level (*województwo*)
Number of units	about 2500	308 + 65 cities of *powiat* status	16
Area (sq. km)			
Average	125	836	19500
minimum	2	13	9415
maximum	625	2987	35612
Population (thousands)			
Average	15.5	104	2420
minimum	1.3	22.2	1018
maximum	931.5	1628	5070

Source: Harald Baldersheim and Pawel Swianiewicz in Michael Keating and James Hughes, eds., *The Regional Challenge in Central and Eastern Europe: Territorial Restructuring and European Integration* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2003), 129.

central state authorities would be counteracted and the nomenclature weakened.[36]

Yet it must be noted, Poland lacked either an ethnic or a territorial dimension to regionalism, which pushed regional reform in several Western European cases in the 1970s and 1980s.

The outcomes of regionalization: The territorial and administrative dimensions

On January 1, 1999, the regional reform became effective, giving the newly elected councils three months to organize. The reform reduced the number of *wojewodztwa* to 16 and created 308 *powiaty*, while 65 urban *gminy* were given powiat rights (Table 2).

In the new three-tier system, the *gminy,* or communes, constitute the basic level of public administration, endowed with all powers not specifically reserved for other levels. They run nurseries, kindergartens, elementary schools, libraries, and cultural centers, and maintain local roads, bridges, and squares.[37] They are also responsible for land management and planning, zoning, water mains, sewage systems, landfills and solid waste disposal, electricity and heat supply, local public transport, primary health

care services, municipal housing, public markets and fairs, public order (shared with the other two subnational levels), fire protection, environmental protection, and many social welfare programs. The *gminy* have their own budgets. They are responsible for all public matters of local significance not reserved by law for other entities and levels of authority. Finally, they perform tasks relegated to them by the central government—assured by law the funds necessary to carry out delegated tasks.

The *powiaty*, or counties, are responsible for local issues which, "due to the subsidiarity and proportionality principles, cannot be ascribed to the *gminy*."[38] They run secondary education, the operation of public health services, social welfare services beyond *gminy* boundaries, and orphanages, support the disabled, maintain order, handle police and fire station administration, as well as fire and flood prevention, manage emergencies and natural disasters, construct and maintain *powiat* roads, and protect consumer rights.

The regional-level *wojewodztwo*, or voivodeship, s*ejmiki*, or councils, are responsible for the development and implementation of regional economic policies; their task is to stimulate business activities and improve competitiveness and innovation in the region. Like the *powiaty* and *gminy*, these bodies are independent legal identities with independent budgets. In addition to regional economic development, the voivodeships are also respon- sible for strategic public services such as higher education, specialized health services, and supralocal cultural activities. The preservation and "rational utilization" of the natural environment also fall under their jurisdiction, as do the modernization of rural areas and spatial development. The *sejmiki* are elected using a list system for a period of four years. As the main decision-making body at this level, they elect governing boards (comprised of five members, who may come from outside of the *sejmik*i) to exercise executive authority. These boards are headed by elected marshals. The voivodes (*wojewoda)*, on the other hand, are state-appointed officials who represent the central government at the regional level. The voivodes supervise the activities of the other levels and can annul decisions made by the self-governments if they are inconsistent with statutory law. The voivodes are also

responsible for all services related to public security. Their presence gives a dual structure to administration at this level.

The voivodeships are largely free of the central government's control and can enter into bilateral and multilateral cooperation with foreign partners. They are participants in cross-border economic development, particularly within the Euroregions, and may link with the EU in a variety of ways, including representation in the Council of the Regions.

The three types of self-government units—commune, county, and voivodeship councils—are not hierarchically arranged, that is, the commune councils are in no way responsible to county or voivodeship councils, and county councils are not responsible to voivodeship councils. Counties consist of at least five communes, and no commune (or county) belongs to more than one county (or voivodeship). As Table 2 notes, 65 of the *powiaty* are towns with county status (*miasta na prawach powiatu* or *powiaty grodzkie)*. These are urban communes, with usually over 100,000 inhabitants, which fulfill tasks of both communal and supracommunal level.[39] Most former capital cities of the abolished forty-nine voivodeships have been granted county rights in compensation for their loss of importance, while many towns with county rights are also too large to be fairly incorporated into the county network.[40]

The functions of subnational units

In the spirit of subsidiarity, the apportionment of competences between the local and regional levels of territorial self-government, and between territorial self-government and central government, is bottom-heavy. The two types of local units, communes and counties, account for about 60 percent of all distinguishable competences. The voivodeships' responsibilities lie mainly in the area of oversight, rather than in the direct delivery of services.[41]

Whereas the primary task of local self-governments is the provision of public services, regional self-government is responsible primarily for designing and implementing regional policies aimed at so-called civilizational development, and only secondarily for the provision of certain highly specialized public services aimed at a regional audience. The target audience of voivodeship

self-governments consists mainly of organizational units, particularly economic structures, and only secondarily of certain groups of the voivodeships' inhabitants.[42] In this respect, the voivodeships differ significantly from the federal states of Germany or Austria.

The voivodeships' self-governments determine the voivodeships' development strategies, specifically accounting for the following:

- nurturing Polishness and the development and shaping of the inhabitants' national, civic, and cultural consciousness, as well as nurturing and developing local self-awareness
- stimulating economic activity
- increasing the competitiveness and rate of innovation of the voivodeship economy
- preserving the environmental and cultural landscape while accounting for the needs of future generations
- shaping and maintaining spatial order

In implementing the voivodeship's development strategy, the voivodeship's self-government is concerned with

- creating conditions for economic development, including creating a job market
- maintaining and expanding the voivodeship's social and technical infrastructure
- acquiring and merging public and private fiscal funds in order to carry out tasks of public usefulness
- supporting and directing activities that increase the inhabitants' level of education
- rational usage of natural resources and shaping the environment according to the rule of balanced growth
- supporting the development of science and the cooperation between the spheres of science and economy; supporting technological progress and innovation
- supporting the development of culture and protection and rational usage of the cultural heritage
- promoting the voivodeship's advantages and its development possibilities

Compared with the competences of Poland's regional governments, the Czech and Slovak Republics' regions have roughly the same powers over regional development, transport infrastructure maintenance, secondary and vocational schools, sport, culture, and civil protection. In general, the competences of these two

countries' regions are not spelled out in the kind of detail that voivodeship functions are, and there is little mention of them playing the kind of role that Polish regions might in "shaping of the inhabitants' national, civic and cultural consciousness, as well as nurturing and developing local self-awareness," as noted above.

Polish self-governing councils at the regional level, while formulating and implementing the voivodeship's development strategy, particularly cooperate with units of local self-government on the voivodeship's territory, representatives of economic and occupational interest groups, central government administration, particularly the voivode, other voivodeships, NGOs, and colleges, universities, and R&D units. While carrying out their tasks, the *sejmiki* may also cooperate with international organizations and regions of other states, particularly neighboring ones.

Until late 2003, when the Polish *Sejm* passed a new law on the system of financing in the lower levels of government,[43] the income of the voivodeships derived primarily from general subsidies and specific, or targeted, grants from the central government. A relatively small proportion of the regions' finances came from shares in central taxes; they received 1.5 percent of revenue collected from income taxes of private persons (PIT) who live in their voivodeship and 0.5 percent of revenue collected from the tax on corporations (CIT) headquartered within their region. Prior to the 2003 change, the regions relied overwhelmingly on the central government's financing and only the communes had a limited tax-raising capability. That situation was widely criticized as preventing the regions from fulfilling their self-governing potential. The new legislation changed the financing formula for the three levels of self-government. The voivodeships' share of PIT increased from 1.5 percent to 1.6 percent and their share of CIT went from 0.5 percent to 15.9 percent. The effect of this change is depicted in Table 3. The steep rise in income from "own revenues" means that the financing of the regions has been decentralized even further.[44]

Structure of subnational councils

Members of commune, county, and voivodeship councils are elected for four-year terms in universal, equal, and direct elections

Table 3. *Sources of Revenue in 2002 and 2005*

	Communes		Counties		Voivodeships	
	2002	2005	2002	2005	2002	2005
TOTAL REVENUES	100	100	100	100	100	100
OWN REVENUES	49.6	42.3	10.8	21.8	15.7	69.4
Personal income tax	12.1	1.3	10.9			
Corporate income tax	1.1	-	1.9			
Local taxes and fees (see details)	23.4	-	-			
From property	4.3	1.5	0.9			
Other	8.7	8.0	1.9			
TARGETED GRANTS	12.2	12.8	42.3	17.8	48.5	6.8
Delegated tasks – statutory	7.7	24.2	19.7			
Own tasks	3.0	16.7	22.2			
Delegated tasks – agreements	0.1	0.1	0.1			
Agreements with other self-governments	0.7	0.9	4.8			
From targeted funds	0.7	0.4	1.7			
GENERAL SUBSIDY	38.2	44.9	47.0	60.4	35.8	23.8
Basic	5.5	-	-			
Educational	29.1	36.1	10.0			
Road	-	8.2	20.1			
Equalizing	-	2.7	5.8			
Compensating	3.7	-	-			

Source: Ministertwo Finansow, www.mf.gov.pl

by secret ballot. Elections to self-governing councils were last held on 12 and 16 November 2006. It was the third time Poles elected their self-governments—the first councils were elected on October 1998 and the second in 2002. In 2002 voter turnout was 44.23 percent,[45] which compares particularly favorably with turnout for parliamentary elections in 2005 (see Table 4).

The self-governing councils at the regional level, the *sejmiki*, have several exclusive tasks, such as drafting a charter for the region and rules for managing regional property, outlining the region's development strategy and programs, drafting a budget for the region, choosing and dismissing the region's government, and setting the salary of the marshal, among others. The

Table 4. *Elections at Various Levels in Poland*

EU referendum 2003	58.85%
European Parliament 2004	20.9%
Presidential 2000	61.12%
Presidential 2005	49.7%
Parliamentary 2001	46.29%
Parliamentary 2005	40.6%
Self-governing councils 1998	45.0%
Self-governing councils 2002[46]	44.23%
Self-governing councils 2006	45.99%

responsibilities of the regions are the same across the country and all have a self-governing council (*sejmik*), an executive arm, or board (*zarzad)*, and a marshal, or chairman of the executive board and external representative. The regions have some freedom in shaping the structures within this framework. Because the tasks regions engage in are similar, the committees within the councils are also quite similar, usually including committees for budget and finance, agriculture, environmental protection, culture, education, tourism, family and social issues, public security, and regional development. There is some variation. For example, Warminsko-Mazurski has a committee for national and ethnic minorities (but Opole, with a sizable German minority, does not) and Lubelskie has a committee for estimating the losses of the area in World War II.

Councilors may not concurrently hold the office of member of parliament, voivode, or councilor in another entity of territorial government. They are guaranteed leave from their full-time jobs.

Conclusions

Poland has taken important steps toward decentralization and regionalization. According to the statements of the Polish government, issues relating to the quality of democratic governance, the integration into the EU, and Poland's integration into the global economy were the reasons for embarking on the reforms. Official statements aside, the political debates and delays surrounding the reform clearly indicated that the process was rooted

deeply in ideological differences between the Solidarity-affiliated groups and governments, who favored decentralization, and the post-communist and peasant parties who favored the status quo, that is, centralization. The conflict must also be seen as reflective of the debate over decommunization, with decentralization viewed by Solidarity and its successors as a means for removing communist-era figures from positions of power, particularly at the local and regional levels where they were deeply entrenched. While the Solidarity-led governments saw administrative reform as a way to wrest power from entrenched political forces in the bureaucracy centered in Warsaw and in the communist-era voivodeships and *gminy*, the PSL and SLD resisted the reforms as useless reorganizations and a waste of valuable public funds. Rather than a society-wide consensus on the benefits of and necessary steps to reform, the decentralization and regionalization processes were bogged down by partisan bickering, political maneuvering, and fears on the part of some communities of lost political and economic influence. Still, Solidarity was the main advocate of regional reform and propelled it faster and more completely than elsewhere in Central Europe. Regional reforms in the Czech Republic were slower and lacked a powerful advocate who might have shaped the terms of the debate and generated public interest in the process. In Slovakia, the ethnic dimension both propelled and complicated, thereby slowing down, the reforms. Vladimir Meciar was the main obstacle to decentralization, and the mobilization of anti-Meciar civil society ultimately gave the regionalization reform the push it so badly needed. Nevertheless, in neither case was the issue of regionalization so passionately debated.

In Poland, what all major parties seemed to agree upon was Poland's leading role as a future member of the EU. This idea certainly framed the debates about regionalization and gave it wider significance in the eyes of the Polish public. In contrast, other, historical factors, such as ethnic and territorial regionalism, were relatively weak in determining Poland's regionalization path.

In the final analysis, Poland remains a unitary state, though a decentralized one, and is not likely to move toward full regionalization or federalism. Such a development would be contrary to

its historical tradition as well as public opinion. Poles remain concerned about the integrity of their national culture and identity in a unifying Europe, preferring *l'Europe des patries* rather than a "Europe of the regions."

Notes

1. The importance of decentralization in the process of democratization in East Central Europe is examined by John Bachtler et al., *Transition, Cohesion and Regional Policy in Central and Eastern Europe* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2000), Emil J. Kirchner, ed., *Decentralization and Transition in the Visegrad: Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia* (New York: Macmillan, Basingstoke, and St. Martin's, 1999), Joachim Jens Hesse, ed., *Administrative Transformation in Central and Eastern Europe: Towards Public Sector Reform in Post-Communist Societies* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), and Melanie Tatur, ed., *The Making of Regions in Post-Socialist Europe: The Impact of Culture, Economic Structure and Institutions*, vol. 1 (Wiesbaden: Verlag fuer Sozialwissenschaften, 2004).
2. For an examination of the demands "from below," that is, from regional and ethnic minorities, for decentralization as a vehicle for greater participation and identity formation, see Judy Batt and Kataryna Wolczuk, eds., *Region, State and Identity in Central and Eastern Europe* (London: Frank Cass, 2002).
3. See Wiktor Glowacki, "Regionalization in Poland," in Gerard Marcou, ed., *Regionalization for Development and Accession to the European Union: A Comparative Perspective* (Budapest: Open Society Institute, Local Government, and Public Service Reform Initiative, 2002), 107.
4. See Martin Brusis, "Between EU Requirements, Competitive Politics, and National Traditions: Re-Creating Regions in the Accession Countries of CEE," *Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions*, 15:4 (Oct 2002): 531–59, and Michael Keating and James Hughes, eds., *The Regional Challenge in Central and Eastern Europe: Territorial Restructuring and European Integration* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2003).
5. Noted by Martin Ferry, "The EU and Recent Regional Reform in Poland," *Europe-Asia Studies*, 55:7 (2003): 1097–116.
6. For details on the reform act, see Zygmunt Niewiadomski, "Die Wiedereinführung der kommunalen Selbstverwaltung in Polen durch das Gesetz über die territoriale Selbstverwaltung vom März 1990," *Archiv für Kommunalwissenschaften,* 29:2 (1990): 306–19.
7. Niewiadomski, "Die Wiedereinführung, " 306–19.
8. Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Transition at the Local Level: The Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and the Slovak Republic* (Paris, OECD, Centre for Co-operation with the Economics in Transition, 1996), 106.
9. For an analysis of the process and outcomes of this 1990 reform, see James F. Hicks and Bartlomiej Kaminski, "Local Government Reform and Transition from Communism: The case of Poland," *Journal of Developing Societies,* XI: 1 (1995): 1–20.
10. Frances Millard, *Polish Politics and Society* (London: Routledge, 1999), 53.
11. Millard, *Polish Politics*, 54.
12. Millard, *Polish Politics*, 54.
13. Karl von Delhaes, *Lokale und regionale Selbstverwaltung in Polen* (Marburg an der Lahn: Herder-Institut, 1994), 271.
14. Chancellery of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland, Government Plenipotentiary for the Systemic Reform of the State, *Effectiveness, Openness, Subsidiarity: A New Poland for New Challenges* (Warsaw, December 1998), 5.
15. Chancellery of the Prime Minister, *Effectiveness, Openness, Subsidiarity*, 5.
16. Chancellery of the Prime Minister, *Effectiveness, Openness, Subsidiarity*, 5. Jasiewicz also notes that the province given up in the compromise deal between the Buzek Government and the SLD was President Kwasniewski's native region, Middle Pomerania. With this, the SLD "scored also a point against its former leader." See Krzysztof Jasiewicz, "Poland," in

Political Data Yearbook 1999, special issue of the *European Journal of Political Research,* December 1999.

17. All quotes are from the chancellery of the Prime Minister, *Effectiveness, Openness, Subsidiarity*, 9.
18. Chancellery of the Prime Minister, *Effectiveness, Openness, Subsidiarity*, 7.
19. For more on the Czech and Slovak regionalization processes, see Martin Brusis, "Regionalisation in the Czech and Slovak Republic: Comparing the Influence of the European Union," in Michael Keating and James Hughes, eds., *The Regional Challenge in Central and Eastern Europe: Territorial Restructuring and European Integration* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2003).
20. As noted in James Hughes, Gwendolyn Sasse, and Claire Gordon in "EU Enlargement, Europeanization and the Dynamics of Regionalisation in the CEEC's," in Keating and Hughes, eds., *The Regional Challenge,* 72. See also Gerard Marcou, "Regionalization for Development and Accession to the European Union: A Comparative Perspective," in Marcou's edited volume, *Regionalization for Development and Accession to the European Union: A Comparative Perspective* (Budapest: Open Society Institute, Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative, 2002), 23–5.
21. Marcou, "Regionalization for Development and Accession," 16.
22. Marcou, "Regionalization for Development and Accession, 8.
23. Eurostat, *Portrait of the European Union*. http://epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int/cache/ITY_PUBLIC/KS-60-04-523/EN/KS-60-04-523-EN.PDF (accessed 12 Apr 2005).
24. All figures for 2002, cited in Joanna M. M. Kepka, "The Nysa Euroregion: The First Ten Years," *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 45:3 (2004): 162–89.
25. Kepka, "The Nyasa Eroregion."
26. Antoni Kuklinski and Pawel Swianiewicz, "The Polish Palatinus: Experiences and Prospects," in L. E. Sharpe, ed., *The Rise of Meso Government in Europe* (London: Sage, 1993), 183.
27. Kuklinski and Swianiewicz, "The Polish Palatinus," 183.
28. Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland,* vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 75.
29. OECD, *Transition at the Local Level,* 102. Also, Swianiewicz points to four historic regions: Galicia, the southeastern part of Poland which belonged to Austria in the nineteenth century; Kongresowka, the central and eastern area which belonged to Russia in the nineteenth century; Wielkopolska, the middle-western part which belonged to Germany in the nineteenth century; and the recovered territories, the western and northern parts of Poland which belonged to Germany until 1945. See Pawel Swianiewicz, "The Polish Experience of Local Democracy: Is Progress Being Made?" *Policy and Politics*, 20:2 (1992): 87–98.
30. Kuklinski and Swianiewicz, "The Polish Palatinus," 185.
31. Kuklinski and Swianiewicz, "The Polish Palatinus," 186.
32. The *powiat* has been the most stable feature of Polish territorial division. It has existed for over 400 years, even during periods of foreign domination. For this reason, transport networks, social infrastructure, and even emotional attachment to geographic space in Poland are organized along the *powiaty*.
33. "Der historische Hintergrund," *Dokumentation Ostmitteleuropa: Lokale und regionale Selbstverwaltung in Polen: Diskussionen und Entwicklung nach 1990*, Heft 5, 20:44 (October 1994): 229.
34. Hicks and Kaminski, "Local Government Reform and Transition from Communism," 3.
35. "Millard, Polish Politics and Society," 53.
36. "Millard, Polish Politics and Society," 53.
37. "Millard, Polish Politics and Society," 12.
38. "Millard, Polish Politics and Society," 14.
39. Jozef Ploskonska, ed., *Reforma administracji publicznej 1998–2001.* [Public Administration Reform 1998–2001]. Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration (Warsaw, August 2001), 27.
40. Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration, *Ocena nowego zasadniczego podzialu terytorialnego Panstwa, przyjeta przez Rade Ministrow w dniu 12 grudnia 2000* [Assessment of the new basic territorial division of the State, accepted by the Council of Ministers on December 12, 2000] (Warsaw, December 2000), 13.
41. Compiled from Jozef Ploskonska, ed., *Polska Administracja Publiczna po Reformie: Ustroj-Kompetencje-Liczby* [Polish public administration after the reform: Structure, competences,

numbers]. Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration, Department of Implementation and Monitoring of the public administration reform (December 1999).

42. Ploskonka, *Reforma administracji publicznej*, 40.
43. The law passed the Sejm on 13 November 2003. See Jacek Uczkiewics, Undersecretary in the Ministry of Finance, The new law on self-governance.
44. Compiled using annual reports available in the self-government section of the website of the Polish Ministry of Finance, accessed in August 2003 and February 2006, from www.stat.gov.pl/urzedy/warsz/publikacje/rocznik_woj/wykresy/05w_15_en.htm.
45. State Electoral Commission. Results of the 2002 elections to commune councils. http://wybory2002.pkw.gov.pl/grada/gw1/index.htm. (accessed 12 April 2005).
46. Turnout in the first self-government elections in 1990 was 42%, and in the second in 1994, 38%. Joanna Regulska and Jerzy Regulski, "Reforma Samorzadow w Europie Srodkowej i Wschodniej: Sukcesy i Porazki." [Reform of Self-Governments in Central and Eastern Europe – Successes and Failures], in Julita Agnieszka Rybczynska ed., *Europa Srodkowo-Wschodnia: region, panstwa i spoleczenstwa w czasie transformacji* [Central and Eastern Europe: Region, states and societies during transformation] (Lublin: Publishing house of the Marie Curie Sklodowska University, 2000), 186.