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**Civilizing the State Bureaucracy:  
The Unfulfilled Promise of Public Administration  
Reform in Poland, Slovakia, and the  
Czech Republic (1990–2000)**

*Conor O'Dwyer*



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## INTRODUCTION

Throughout the 1990s, post-Communist governments in Eastern Europe have struggled with public administration reform. Often, such reform efforts have been heralded by sweeping calls to remake the state. For example, in 1998 the Polish government introduced its public administration reform program as the natural continuation of the 1989 revolution against Communism: “Between 1990 and 1993, governments led by the political forces that emerged from the Solidarity movement fundamentally restructured the Polish economy. Now, the post-Solidarity milieus have returned to power to complete this process by thoroughly reforming the Polish state and administrative structures” (Chancellery 1998: 7). Similarly in Slovakia, and as recently as 1999, the government undertook (for the second time) an ambitious public administration reform — a reform which it saw as defining “what kind of state” the Slovak Republic should be (Plenipotentiary: 3). While the problems of the post-Communist state administration are considerable, the unlimited scope of reform called for in this rhetoric suggested that public administration reform can quickly become a Pandora’s box of unexpected political outcomes.

This essay will scrutinize the politics of public administration reform in the post-Soviet region to understand why, despite the ambition and scope of these reforms, their results have been disappointing and sometimes even counterproductive. It will compare the genesis, implementation, and political consequences of policies to reform the state administration in Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia. The analysis is divided into two sections. The first lays out the theory of public administration reform — its rationale, goals, and favored policy instruments. The second examines the translation of public administration reform in theory into public administration reform in practice. This comparison then forms the basis for some concluding reflections on the difficulties of state-building after Communism.

## **PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM IN THEORY**

Public administration reform may sound like a vague policy program to the outside observer. In post-Communist politics, however, it is the frequently cited priority of governments as well as international advisory organizations active in Eastern Europe, such as the European Union, NATO, and the OECD. In this context, public administration reform is a self-consciously articulated policy package addressed at (1) increasing the effectiveness of the state administration; (2) increasing the accountability of the state administration; (3) reducing the size of the state administration, especially in terms of personnel (Gilowska 2000; Koral 2000; Gorzelak and Jalowiecki 1999; Chancellery of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland 1998; Plenipotentiary 1999: 7–8).

These are goals that might fruitfully be pursued in any political system. In the post-Communist context, however, they have particular urgency because of the legacy of the Leninist model of the state. Deficiencies of the state administration today have their historical roots in the Soviet model of public administration, which subordinated the state bureaucracy to that of the Communist Party. Because in the Leninist model of the state, political control (and not organizational efficiency) was the principle goal, Soviet administration inverted many of the classic attributes of bureaucracy, such as professionalism, the primacy of formal rules and procedures, the separation of office and office holder, and autonomy from external lobbying (Silberman 1993; Weber 1946). Instead, this administration was often characterized by a lack of professionalism, arbitrary policy-making and implementation, personalism, and corruption. The 1989 revolutions in Eastern Europe disrupted the state administration in many ways. The status of the state official plummeted. The most qualified people left for more lucrative positions in the private sector. Both decommunization and simple reorganization erased any semblance of stable, predictable career paths for junior bureaucrats. Opportunities for corruption expanded in the tumult of economic and political reform. Finally, the absence of clear

boundaries between elected politicians and the state bureaucracy meant that the latter became fertile ground for patronage politics. For all of these reasons, public administration reform, far from being a vague concept, is seen as necessary and practical.<sup>1</sup>

As practiced in post-Communist Eastern Europe, public administration reform usually includes the following policies: deconcentration; decentralization; the establishment of an official civil service; and (less often) the cultivation of a sense of esprit de corps in the state bureaucracy. In their own way, each of these policies furthers the goals of public administration reform mentioned above.

First, consider decentralization and deconcentration. From the viewpoint of public administration reform, decentralization and deconcentration may either be substitutes for or complements to each other. They both aim at increasing accountability, responsiveness to local needs, and administrative rationalization, though they go about these goals using different, but not mutually exclusive, means. Decentralization is a means of increasing accountability by linking certain public services to electoral competition. Jonah Levy defines deconcentration as “a shifting of power within the state, from [for example] Parisian ministries to provincial branch offices — in contrast to ‘decentralization,’ which entails a transfer of power away from the state, to independent, elected local authorities... From the government’s perspective, deconcentration offers the best of both worlds: on the one hand, the flexibility and rapidity of response associated with decentralization..., on the other hand, the preservation of central state control” (1998: 17). In theory,

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<sup>1</sup> The dynamics of European integration also add a sense of urgency to public administration reform in Eastern Europe. Each of my cases is in the process of accession negotiations with the European Union, negotiations which for the most part revolve around evaluating the success of the Eastern candidates in adopting legislation and institutions compatible with those in the EU. A number of scholars have argued that these international pressures are reshaping and reforming the domestic institutions of the candidate countries (Nunberg 2000; Bachter, Downes, and Gorzelak 2000). If, however, the promise of EU membership is helping reshape the public administration, it is far from clear that it is reforming it. Very often, the EU is used by political elites as a justification for policies that are not in fact necessary for membership. Public administration reform has not been foisted on unwilling applicants by the EU; it seems more accurate to say that EU accession has been pressed into service to legitimate public administration reform.

decentralization and deconcentration may be complementary: both policies are directed at improving the “flexibility and rapidity of response” of the public administration. In practice, however, there are tensions between the two policies, particularly, the danger that deconcentration will take the steam out of decentralization since the “preservation of central state control” contradicts the principle of decentralization. When public administrations are weak, as they are in post-Communist states, it is not only feasible but necessary to build up capacity of both the state’s branch bureaucracy and regional self-government. Even here, though, the inherent tensions between deconcentration and decentralization will always be a factor.

Second, the establishment of an official civil service is intended to increase effectiveness by introducing meritocratic selection and promotion procedures into the public administration. This is important in post-Communist Eastern Europe not because these states lack an administrative apparatus — in fact, they have inherited large administrations from the Communist regime. The problem is that the norms and legal codes governing these administrations are also from the Communist era even though the political context has changed completely. After 1989, each of these states had an administrative apparatus, not a civil service. What is the difference? From a legal standpoint, the administrative apparatus lacked legally protected autonomy from political intervention by non-state groups — most notably political parties but also business interests, regional cliques, and so on. State officials could not challenge “political” appointments made from outside the state bureaucracy. Moreover, the administrative apparatus lacked internal norms of meritocratic selection into, and promotion within, the state. A civil service has both of these attributes: legally defined autonomy from political influence in the form of outside appointments and a system of meritocratic selection and advancement. Both are necessary for the creation of professional, politically independent, career bureaucrats.

Third, a survey of state-building in other paradigmatic cases — for example post-war France with its elite bureaucratic school L’Ecole Nationale d’Administration — suggests that success is greatly facilitated by policies that restore a sense of status and corporate identity to the bureaucracy, in short, to cultivate a bureaucratic esprit de corps.<sup>2</sup> Such policies aim to create a tightly knit class of career bureaucrats — bureaucrats that have been pivotal in other cases of state-building. The idea is to create a cadre of officials for whom the title “state bureaucrat” is invested with some measure of status. In addition to improving state capacity, these policy mandarins’ very existence lends prestige to the state bureaucracy and to civil service careers. One cannot say that such pro-state officials do not exist in Poland, Slovakia, or the Czech Republic, but they are isolated examples and the exception rather than the rule. Policies that promote bureaucratic esprit de corps would be especially helpful in Eastern Europe given the deep stigma that still taints the state administration as a result of its role as collaborator with the Communist Party during the previous regime.

## **PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM IN PRACTICE**

Not surprisingly, much is lost in the translation from public administration reform in theory to public administration in practice. As the following comparison of the Czech, Slovak, and Polish cases will show, the problem is not simply that certain elements of the original reform text were lost in the policy translation. In the cases of Slovakia and to an extent Poland, it often seems that these elements have been willfully mistranslated. As is usual in such cases, the mistranslation has served the translator, which in these cases means the government sponsors of public administration reform.

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<sup>2</sup> Historically, this has been done through academies or through the association of the bureaucracy with the military, as when bureaucratic ranks correspond directly to military ones. Of course, given the current model of civil-military relations, the latter policy is not really practicable in post-Communist Eastern Europe.

### ***Deconcentration***

Deconcentration has been a prominent feature of the development of public administrations in each of my cases. In both the Czech Republic and Poland, however, deconcentration was never the stated goal of the government. The ad hoc expansion of ministerial branch offices over the course of the 1990s — the piecemeal cumulation of unrelated, localized, bureaucratic decisions in the absence of a clearly articulated strategy of state-building by the government — amounted to deconcentration in fact if not in name. Evidence of this development can be found in the expansion of the so-called territorial administration of the central state. In both countries, this process resulted in the disadvantages of deconcentration without the advantages. It increased centralization without increasing central control. It expanded the number of bureaucrats employed by the state without a systematic analysis of where they would be best employed. That this was the case can be deduced from the fact that the first order of decentralization in both cases was to scale back the territorial administration — in Poland, by reducing the number of regions and in the Czech Republic by eliminating the district offices.

Slovakia also experienced significant deconcentration, but here the policy was self-conscious and systematic. Unfortunately for Slovakia's opposition parties, it was also inextricably linked to the patronage strategy of the dominant government party, the nationalist Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) headed by the country's authoritarian-minded, three-time Prime Minister Vladimir Meciar. In 1996, the HZDS-led government decided to appropriate the opposition's goal of public administration reform. Rather than understanding this goal in terms of establishing regional parliaments (decentralization), as the opposition had, the government decided instead to create new regional administrations, which were directly appointed by the government. Moreover, a number of other policy areas that had previously been under the control of ministries were transferred to the newly established regional administrations. The government also expanded the number of districts in the country, which were the administrative units below

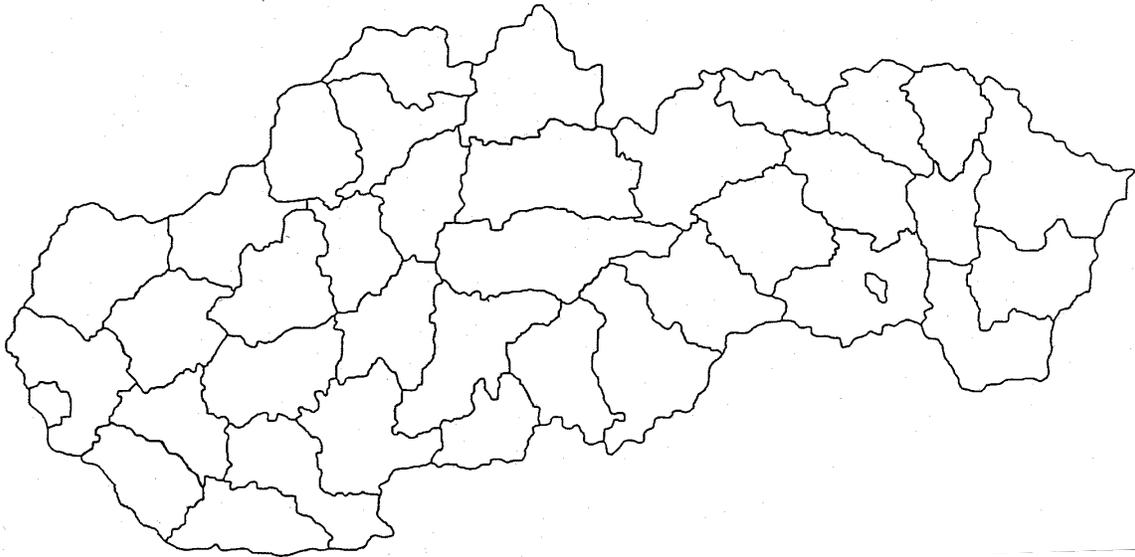
the regional level. These changes were strongly resisted by the opposition parties, but Meciar's government had a parliamentary majority and did not see the need to make concessions.

Thus, the chosen policy of public administration reform in Slovakia in 1996 was deconcentration. It did not, however, bring many of the advantages of deconcentration, such as greater state capacity or the rationalization of administrative structures, because the political-electoral considerations of HZDS and its coalition partners took primary importance in implementing the policy of deconcentration. First, the government parties needlessly expanded the territorial administration in order to reward their members and supporters with appointments. This expansion is depicted in Figure 1 (below), which maps the boundaries of Slovakia's public administration before and after 1996. The 1996 policy of deconcentration created eight regional-level offices appointed by the government and expanded the number of district offices, also appointed by the government, from 38 to 79 (Falt'an and Krivy 1999: 107). Thus, the policy added one new layer of state bureaucracy and doubled the extant bureaucracy at the district level.<sup>3</sup> Slovakia is a small country, and if the addition of eight regions was questionable, then the addition of eight regions accompanied by a two-fold expansion of its districts was excessive. Together these additional levels of administration expanded the territorial administration by several thousand positions.

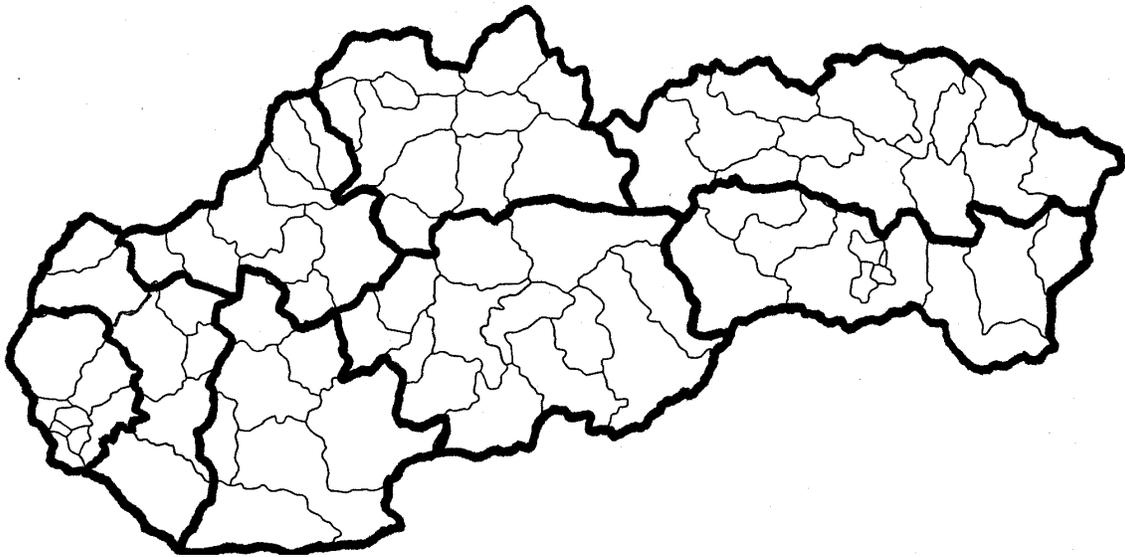
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<sup>3</sup> Under the Communist system of administration, there had been regional (*kraj*) offices in Slovakia (as well as in the Czech Republic). These offices had been abolished in both republics in the spring of 1990 under the Act on the Reconstruction of the National Committees (Falt'an and Krivy 1999: 105). The Czechs did not follow the Slovaks in recreating them a few years later.

**Figure 1: A Map of the Slovak Public Administration Before and After Reform (1996)<sup>4</sup>**



*Before Reform (districts only)*



*After Reform (regions + districts)*

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<sup>4</sup> In these maps and those that follow, the darker lines represent the borders of regions, and the lighter lines represent district borders.

Unfortunately, there is no systematic documentation of the exact numbers involved, but it is common knowledge in Slovakia that the staffing opportunities created by the 1996 policy of deconcentration directly benefited the HZDS party and its partners in the government coalition. To quote a description of this period from a country report on Slovakia in a recently published volume on public administration reform in post-Communist Eastern Europe:

The current policy of recruiting personnel, not only for top posts in the new regional and district levels of administration, fits into a more general political and clientelistic style of holding power — what is more, it prefers candidates to hold similar views to those of the ruling parties. (Falt'an and Krivy 1999: 110)

There is even evidence of the government parties' penetration of the state bureaucracy from those parties themselves. An internal party document of the HZDS entitled "The Main Tasks of HZDS" was leaked to the press in 1996. It recommended that "HZDS should work to strengthen its position within Slovak society by continuing to reshuffle personnel within the state administration and diplomatic corps" (Quoted in Krivy 1998: 59). Finally, even the leaders of HZDS made statements confirming the party's attempt to recruits its supporters into the state bureaucracy:

Asked whether the HZDS knows that state administration employees are being approached and asked to join the parties of the government coalition in order to secure their remaining in the state administration, the HZDS deputy chairman [Marian Huska (HZDS), then the vice-chairman of parliament] replied: "Yes, the governing parties are expanding their membership base in this way, whether anyone likes it or not." (Quoted in Krause 2000: 38)

The second way in which Slovakia's deconcentration policy under Meciar reflected the principle of political patronage was in the redrawing of district boundaries necessitated by the increase in their number. This redrawing was taken by the government parties as an opportunity for undisguised electoral gerrymandering (Krause 2000; Falt'an and Krivy 1999; Krivy 1998). To quote again from the country report cited above:

Apart from strengthening the position of Meciar's party in state administration, in connection with the establishment of new regions and districts, the recently introduced division has some other partisan connections. The new territorial-administrative division of the Slovak Republic has significantly multiplied the number of districts in which the HZDS achieves electoral success, so that they now outnumber the districts in which support for HZDS is low. Under the previous administrative structure, this was not the case. (Falt'an and Krivy 1999: 115)

The gerrymandering of district boundaries was especially pronounced in Slovakia's ethnic Hungarian areas, whose boundaries were redrawn to minimize the Hungarians' voting power (Krivy 1998). Ethnic Hungarian parties have formed the best organized and most stable political opposition to HZDS throughout the 1990s, and these areas were their strongholds. In short, deconcentration was an instrument for expanding the patronage resources of the dominant political machine.

In all, Slovakia's deconcentration in 1996 provides a classic case of state-building in a machine-style party system. A dominant political party uses the project of state-building to increase its patronage resources *and* is able to exclude other parties from this state-derived patronage. The HZDS advertised its deconcentration policy as "bringing the state to the people" More accurately, HZDS used deconcentration to bring their people to the state.

## *Decentralization*

Decentralization has been pursued with the greatest energy and has produced the greatest disruption in Poland, even though it has been pursued there in the absence of general popular support, or even interest.<sup>5</sup> In Poland, decentralization has failed to define clear boundaries for the state bureaucracy vis-à-vis the elected governments, especially the subnational governments. Rather, it has increased the size of the public administration as a whole while introducing new ambiguities and competitive dynamics between the state administration and elected officials.

In 1998, the Polish government enacted a radical reorganization of the public administration centered on the principle of decentralization. The administrative boundaries before and after Poland's decentralization are illustrated in Figure 2. Before 1998, the administrative map of the country had consisted of the central government, 49 governmental<sup>6</sup> regions, and elected local governments. After the reform, the administrative map contained the central government, 16 regions with separate governmental and elected administrations, and 373 elected district governments.<sup>7</sup> The pre-existing, elected local governments were left unchanged. In all, the reorganization created 324 new units of subnational state administration. In terms of elected subnational governments, the decentralization established 324 of them, which amounted to 12,469 new elected positions (GUS 1999).

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<sup>5</sup> According to public opinion polls conducted in Poland from 1990 to 1998, in which the same questions were used to gauge popular support for decentralization over time, the percentage of the public who considered decentralizing the public administration an urgent priority never exceeded 9 percent. Moreover, the same polls showed that was never a time when a majority of respondents did not consider such reform something that should be postponed for later or that was unnecessary altogether. See Falkowska (1999: 282).

<sup>6</sup> I use the term governmental here to indicate that these administrative units were directly subordinate to the central government and headed by that government's appointed representatives.

<sup>7</sup> Sixty-five of the new districts were larger cities. Their status changed as a result of the reform because they took on the powers of district governments in addition to those of local governments.

The first thing to notice about the 1998 policy of decentralization, then, was a massive increase in the size of the public administration, in terms of both appointed and elected posts. In the commotion of reorganization, roughly 50,000 positions were either created or reassigned.<sup>8</sup> If these statistics suggest that the 1998 decentralization policy led to an inflation of administration, an examination of the process leading up to the policy — from the experts' first policy proposals to the final voting by the parliament — shows just how that inflation occurred.

The leitmotif running through this process was one in which a fragile coalition of government reformers attempted to buy off opposing parties, as well as potential opposing parties, in order to win a parliamentary majority to enact reform while the political conditions were still favorable.<sup>9</sup> The list of parties bought off in this fashion included virtually the whole parliamentary spectrum. From the opposition, it included the post-Communist SLD and Peasants' Party (PSL). From the fractious government coalition, it included the Christian Nationalists, the post-Solidarity Electoral Action Solidarity (AWS), and more. In this political horse-trading, each party got a little piece of the spoils. In terms of policy results, an optimist might term them a diluted reform of the public administration. A pessimist would call them a crisis of the public administration. The Polish handling of the territorial dimension of public administration reform differs, of course, from the Slovak one, where the benefits went to the dominant political machine rather than being shared among all parties.

To appreciate the bidding war described above, it is helpful to review the stages of the decentralization program, from proposal to parliamentary enactment. Consider first the question of the number of regions (*kraje*) to be established by the policy of

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<sup>8</sup> Author's calculations using the 1999 and 2000 Polish Statistical Yearbooks.

<sup>9</sup> Much of the information in the following paragraphs comes from the author's personal interview with Michal Kulesza, former Government Plenipotentiary for Public Administration Reform. Warsaw, October 1999.

**Figure 2: A Map of the Polish Public Administration Before and After Reform**



*Before Reform (regions only)*



*After Reform (regions + districts)*

decentralization. The expert community working on this problem since the beginning of the 1990s agreed on the number 12 as the ideal number of provinces.<sup>10</sup> The criteria urging this number of regions were the following: fitness for receiving outside funds (especially EU structural funds), economic self-sufficiency, diversified industrial profile, cohesive infrastructure, culture, the presence of an academic center, the presence of a hub city (Kerlin 2001: 16). The more politically popular alternative, however, was to set the number of regions in the range from 15 through 17. Despite lobbying within the coalition for more regions, the policy experts prevailed initially, and the government's proposal to the parliament placed the number of regions at 12.

As happened with the question of the number of districts, however, once this part of decentralization policy passed from the technocratic arena to the political one the inflation of units and personnel began — as well as the dilution of the policy's original intent. First, grass-roots protests appeared in those regional seats slated for abolition (Jalowiecki 1999). Second, the post-Communist parties — that is, the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) and the Polish Peasant's Party (PSL) — opposed the government's number, both because it encroached on their organizational advantages in the regions and because it was seen as a way of undercutting the government. Finally, it soon became apparent that even within the government coalition there were many who preferred 15 to 17 regions for reasons of party patronage; therefore, the government could not count on a majority within its party coalition (Kerlin 2001: 16).

The government reformers decided to make concessions to their opponents in order to get the reform passed quickly. First, they agreed that the reduction of the number of regions should not force those already employed in the regional administrations out of

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<sup>10</sup> One group of policy experts, favored maintaining the 49 regions established in 1975. However, this group was closely tied to the Peasant Party (PSL), who opposed the reform primarily because they saw it as a threat to their electoral strongholds in the country. This group was the exception in policy circles (Gorzelałak and Jalowiecki 1999).

their jobs if their region was abolished. Such employees were offered the option of transferring to a new regional or county administration. For the most part, the most vociferous reaction to the government's 1998 decentralization proposal came from regional political elites, particularly from elites in those regions slated for amalgamation into one of the bigger regions on the administrative map. At first glance, the protests that the government's plan called forth would seem to indicate that it had brought to the surface regional identities and solidarities that had been hidden during the communist and immediate post-communist periods. A closer look at these cases, however, reveals a general pattern: in all cases, these protests were concentrated in the cities that had been the governmental seats of the old regions. Outside of these cities, there was almost no organized protest against the government's decentralization plan. In these regional capitals, the protests attracted above all those who, in the words of Polish specialist on regional politics Bogdan Jalowiecki, "had a direct interest in preserving the existing situation...persons enjoying advantages from the fact of the presence of a voivodship [regional] office in a given city, that is, employees, activists from political groups counting on a place in the voivodship government, persons enjoying advantages arising from their informal connections to officials, meaning, suppliers and contractors counting on winning profitable deals" (1999: 36). As Jalowiecki writes, "The movement to retain the voivodship offices in particular cities is rather a rebellion of their elites than an expression of regionalism or regional identity" (1999: 38).

The expansion of administration at the regional level mirrored developments in the districts. One of the primary causes of public sector growth in the 1998 decentralization policy was the re-establishment of the sub-regional districts (*powiaty*). What was the "district," and why was it restored? The district was a unit of government that had existed since before the first partition in 1795 and then later in the interwar Polish Republic. Historically, there had been 300 districts. The Communists abolished the districts in 1975, as part of a reorganization of the territorial administration. In the minds of the technocrats

designing the 1998 policy, regions were the most important element of decentralization, but as several observers have pointed out, in the minds of everyone else, the districts were crucial for emotional reasons (Kerlin 2001). The districts were linked in the popular, political conception with the Polish nation's pre-Communist past. Some commentators suggest even that the districts were seen as "small fatherlands" (*male ojczyzny*), though, given the weakly developed regional identities in Poland, it would be safer not to attach too much importance to this sentiment.<sup>11</sup> In short, districts were not an administrative necessity.

Once the decentralization policy crossed from desks of the technocrats to the public arena of parliamentary debate and societal discussion, however, the districts became a major element of decentralization and the inflationary spiral began. Initially, the expert opinion prepared for the government by the Ministry of Finance proposed a total of 150 districts, which number it argued would yield economically viable districts capable of delivering public services with the optimum degree of efficiency. The government team came up with a formula to govern the drawing of district boundaries, the 5-10-50 formula, which meant that each district would comprise at least five municipalities (*gminy*), have at least 10,000 inhabitants in the district seat, and have an overall population of at least 50,000. Municipalities were then allowed to declare which district they would like to join. From the originally envisioned 150 districts, the political process drove the number up to 373 districts in all. This final number included 71 counties that did not fulfill the 5-10-150 formula. The Finance Ministry team objected, drawing up a list of districts that should not be created because they would be unviable economically and administratively (Kerlin 2001: 14).

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<sup>11</sup> For a detailed discussion of the weakness of regional sentiments in Poland, see Jalowiecki (1999).

By now, however, political considerations were more important than technocratic ones. The government's plenipotentiary for public administration reform, Michal Kulesza, wanted to push through some form of decentralization as quickly as possible, before the political situation could. The conviction that speed should be the paramount concern was the result of Kulesza's personal experience.<sup>12</sup> Under the first post-Solidarity governments of the early 1990s, Kulesza and other experts had largely worked out a plan for decentralization. When the post-Communist parties took over the government in 1993, they conspicuously ignored these plans, which then died a quick, mostly unnoticed, death. To avoid a repeat of this experience, Kulesza decided to make concessions with whatever group necessary in order to get their support in the parliamentary voting.

With whom were these concessions made? First, local politicians were eager to form small districts under their control, not only for the new offices and posts that would be so created but also because they believed the new districts would be the conduits of central government funds. From this perspective, a small district close to home controlled by politically like-minded people would mean more state resources without the need to share them with neighbors not filling these criteria. It is true that according to the reformers' plans for fiscal decentralization, smaller districts would not mean more money from the national budget at the local level, but the mental habits of a long-centralized system public finances were deeply ingrained.<sup>13</sup> This local lobbying was directed toward the respective national MP. The government reformers used districts as coinage to buy the votes of recalcitrant MPs for the reform as a whole. As one parliamentarian confessed to an academic in an interview about this process:

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<sup>12</sup> Author's personal interview with Michal Kulesza. Warsaw, October 1999.

<sup>13</sup> In fact, the fiscal decentralization promised by the reformers has yet to materialize in Poland. The public finances are as centralized as ever.

There are also too many counties [districts] because we succumbed to blackmail so [that] representatives would support the reform. We bought representatives. If a representative was not in favor of the reform — was going to vote against it — we gave them a county [district] in their region in exchange for their vote. Representatives would say they would not vote in favor of the reform unless they were given a county [district] in their region...It was a compromise — a worse solution for the reform in exchange for the reform to happen at all. It was the price we had to pay for the reform.<sup>14</sup>

The reform's proponents also decided to accommodate disgruntled interests in cities that had served as regional seats in the former 49 regions. These cities wanted their status as gatekeepers between the provinces and the central government; moreover, they wanted to protect the administrative jobs that came with this status. To buy off this interest group, the reformers introduced an amendment conferring larger cities with district status — in addition to their status as municipalities. One parliamentarian noted about this decision, “We also knew that allowing the creation of cities with county status was not sensible. Here again we succumbed to blackmail. We had to give in to the demands of former provincial capitals for county status so that they would support the new number of provinces.”<sup>15</sup>

It is telling that in the quotations above even supporters of decentralization such as Sekula admit that the parliamentary horse-trading led to the creation of districts whose viability was an open question. In particular, the creation of cities with district status led to the phenomenon of so-called “donut districts,” in which the districts surrounding larger cities are cut off from the infrastructural and economic core of the area. Just how much pork was attached to the creation of districts between the conception of this policy and its enactment into law by parliament? It is, of course, difficult to say which of the new

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<sup>14</sup> Miroslaw Sekula, Chair Polish Parliamentary Committee on Administration and Internal Affairs. Quoted from a personal interview with Kerlin (2001: 14–15).

<sup>15</sup> Miroslaw Sekula, Chair Polish Parliamentary Committee on Administration and Internal Affairs. Quoted from a personal interview with Kerlin (2001: 15).

districts were primarily, or purely, political creations, but if the Finance Ministry's original plan for 150 is taken as a baseline, the political bargaining multiplied the number of district by a factor of 2.5.

The new, elected positions also provided a means to build party organizations at the subnational level. Until 1998, most Polish parties had very weak subnational organizations because of insufficient financial resources.<sup>16</sup> That the new district and regional councils would be salaried posts provided parties with resources to build up lower-level organizations — provided they could win elections, of course. Moreover, the extensive influence of outside groups, especially political parties, concerning the selection and promotion of administrative staff meant that the 1998 reorganization was a bonanza for political parties at all levels of government. The central government parties had a free hand to radically “reorganize” the governmental, regional administrations, as they consolidated staff from the previous 49 offices to 16. In each of the new regional and district councils, the victorious party or party coalition was in the position to set up its own executive administration. As a result, the opportunities for patronage were bountiful, and they were enjoyed by all parties — or at least those parties that could win elections at any of the now four levels of government.

Thus far, I have emphasized the expansion of offices in my analysis of Poland's policy of decentralization. In this sense, at least, decentralization in Poland has certainly not achieved the goal of reducing the size of the state, which was given as a goal of public administration reform not only in my definition above but also in the Polish government's policy program. The question of evaluating the reform is, of course, more complicated. The crucial analytical question is whether this expansion of offices furthered the other goals of public administration reform, namely, greater effectiveness and accountability and

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<sup>16</sup> The exceptions to this rule were the post-Communist parties, the Alliance of the Democratic Left (SLD) and the Peasants' Party (PSL), both of which had kept many of the organizational resources of their predecessors in the Communist regime.

less widespread corruption. Early indications suggest that decentralization has not met these goals. Noting the difficulties of evaluating the 1998 decentralization policy so soon after its implementation, the noted Polish expert on public finance Zyta Gilowska made the following assessment:

The new units of territorial self-government [the regions and districts] are weak, and the central government has not gotten any stronger. There still has not been a reorganization of the central administration of the state, which had been considered one of the main goals of the decentralization reform. It seems that the opinion as to the weakening of public power during this stage of the transformation is justified. The real course of reform has been rather a process of chaotic scattering [of offices and tasks] than of the coherent decentralization of public power. (2000: 37)

I quote Gilowska's assessment because it is blunt and succinct, but this analysis is echoed by numerous other Polish policy experts (See Sepiol 2000, Koral 2000, Zagrodzka 2000).

What are the shortcomings of the 1998 decentralization policy? First, the decentralization of offices and policy tasks was not matched by the decentralization of public finances. In 1998, the central government transferred the lion's share of its tasks in health care, education, and regional policy to subnational, elected governments, but the financing of these tasks still occurs through the national budget, which is designed by the central government and ministries and approved by the parliament. To the skeptical observer, the 1998 decentralization looks more like a ruse by the central government to transfer blame to lower-level governments without giving up the real, decision-making powers. Because it controls almost all the financing of the subnational government's activities through ear-marked grants, the central government can easily decide what "decentralized" policies look like in practice. The subnational, elected governments have just enough "own revenue" to pay their own salaries and those of their administrations. From a public finance view, then, the decentralization policy did not result in a more effective or more accountable public administration.

A second major problem with Poland's 1998 decentralization is the way it divided tasks and powers between the subnational self-governments and the branch administration

of the central state. The new regions have a dual institutional structure that seems designed to create conflict (Tryanski 1999). On the one hand, there is an elected regional parliament (*sejmik*). On the other hand, the central state retains an appointed regional prefect (*wojewoda*), who represents the central state in the region. This prefect is appointed — and can be recalled — by the Prime Minister. In order to ensure smooth passage of their decentralization proposal, government reformers in 1998 left the actual division of power between the regional prefect and the regional parliament ambiguous; according to the law, the prefect is supposed to monitor the activities of the regional parliament to ensure their compatibility with national-level laws and policies. In regions where the centrally appointed prefect is of a different party than the government of the regional parliament, the two are often in open conflict. Even in regions where the two are of the same party, or of like-minded parties, a competitive dynamic is emerging which leads to duplication of offices without any gains in effectiveness (Tryanski 1999). For example, after decentralization the policy area of regional policy was supposed to have been devolved from the office of the prefect to the regional parliaments. The prefects were loathe to surrender this power, however. They have used their oversight responsibility to justify maintaining, in some cases even expanding, their pre-existing regional policy sections at the same time that regional parliaments are setting up their own regional policy offices.<sup>17</sup> Coordination between the two is difficult, and regional policy suffers as a result.

A final problem with Poland's decentralization as a means of public administration reform is that it may in fact exacerbate official corruption. There are many indications that the problem of corruption in Poland is even more widespread at the level of local government than at the central level (World Bank 2000). It is worth mentioning in this regard that much of the anti-corruption regulation that Poland does have — in, for

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<sup>17</sup> Author's interview with one of the vice-wojewodas of the Malopolska region (name withheld). June 2000.

example, public procurement or bureaucratic hiring — are often binding only on the national-level administration, not the subnational ones.

**Table 1: The Polish Public’s Evaluation of Decentralization a Year After Its Implementation**

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How do you rate the current situation of the public administration?	Percentage of respondents
Better than before the reform.	17
About the same.	34
Worse than before the reform.	27
Hard to say.	22

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Source: *Rzeczpospolita*, January 25, 2000.

Finally, public opinion provides further evidence as to the low effectiveness of the 1998 decentralization policy. The general public’s opinion of the public administration a year after decentralization was more critical than approving. As Table 1 (above) shows, only 17 percent of Poles rated the reform as an improvement on the previous system. The same survey found that the number of avowed opponents of the reform outnumbered supporters (26 percent vs. 21 percent).

Before moving on to consider the genesis and implementation of decentralization in the Czech Republic, it would helpful to review the case-study analysis thus far. In Slovakia, what began in the early 1990s as a call for decentralization by the soon-to-be-opposition parties was coopted and transformed into a policy of administrative deconcentration by the dominant political machine HZDS and its two junior coalition partners. Because of its dominant position in the party system, HZDS was able to expand

the state bureaucracy considerably and to increase its own penetration of that bureaucracy — despite loud criticism from domestic rivals and international observers. In Poland, a decentralizing strategy of public administration reform led to a dramatic expansion of the public administration without evident gains in effectiveness. In the Polish case, however, the dynamic of runaway state-building had a different political logic. It occurred because a fragile reform coalition in the government had to buy off a host of critical parties to get an ineffective decentralization reform. The patronage from decentralization was not dominated by any one group of parties.

By comparison, the territorial dimension of public administration reform has been an heated issue of party debate in the Czech Republic since 1993, but it has not led to the same runaway state-building as in Slovakia and Poland. This is because the main actors in the debate have been two strongly organized, programatically rooted, competing political parties, the Social Democrats (CSSD) and the conservative Civic Democratic Party (ODS). The Social Democrats support decentralization, believing that regional governments can help lead economic development, whereas the ODS oppose regional governments as a form of creeping state interventionism. Thus, in the Czech Republic, decentralization is a battleground between two deeply entrenched political rivals, each of which has the organizational strength to survive without being in the government. Neither party ever has enough of an upper hand to impose its own solution on the others, as in Slovakia. On the other hand, each can form strong enough governments that it need not scramble to buy off a host of other parties to enact its policies, as in Poland. To the observer, the politics of public administration reform in the Czech Republic often looks like perpetual gridlock, and the current enacted version of decentralization has all the half-steps of a political compromise. On paper the Czech framework for the decentralization is much less radical than Poland's, but it also less chaotic in practice.

In December 1997, the Czech Republic undertook to decentralize its government. Though the constitution had mandated the creation of regional governments years prior to

1997, the conservative government of the ODS party had opposed this policy. When the Social Democrats came to power in 1998, they made decentralization one of their priorities. After considerable wrangling, the parliament came to a compromise that pleased neither the proponents nor the critics of decentralization, but which also avoided the pitfalls of runaway state-building. As the map in Figure 3 shows, the policy established 14 regional parliaments in the Czech Republic, consisting of 685 elected positions and exercising as yet vaguely defined powers in education, culture, and regional policy. The public finance system remains quite centralized because ODS feared that granting the regional governments too much discretion would invite expansionary fiscal policies. To address the conservatives' fears that decentralization would swell the size of the public administration, the decentralization policy will abolish 76 government-appointed district administrations by 2002. It is difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of the Czech Republic's decentralization at this time because not much has happened so far. One difference from the other two cases is striking, however. Namely, decentralization has not expanded the public administration. A comparison of the "before and after" maps for each of my cases (Figures 1, 2, and 3) shows that Czech public administration reform was the only one that simplified the administrative map rather than complicating it.

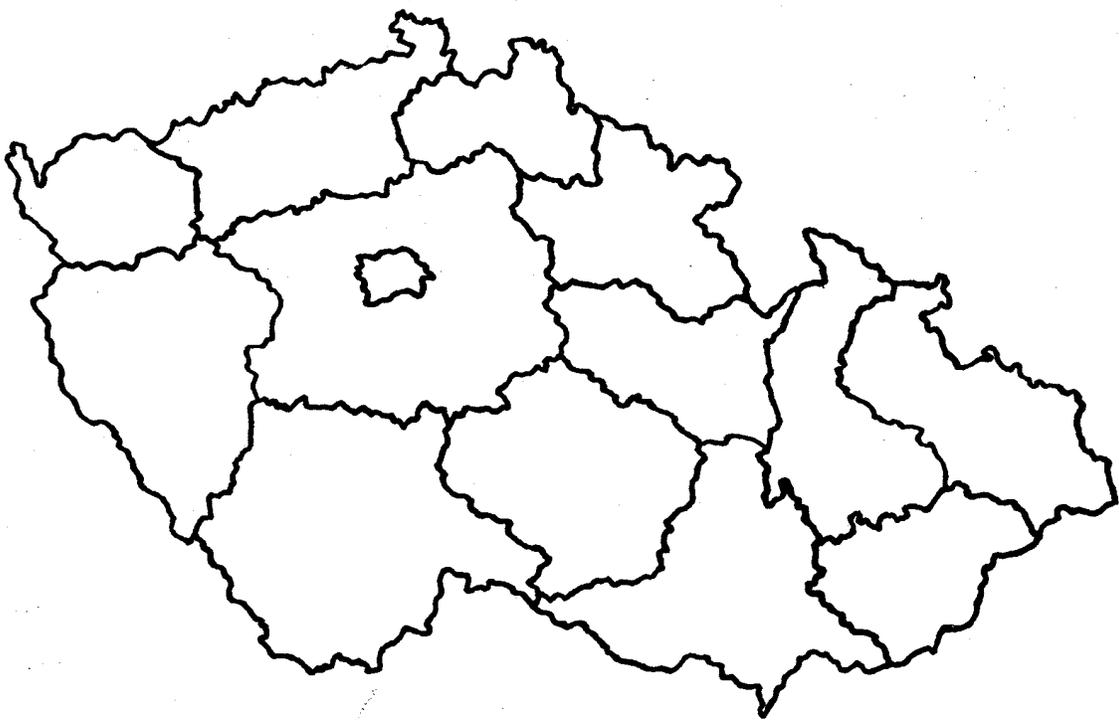
To appreciate the mutual checking and balancing in the Czech party system that prevented the cooptation of decentralization for patronage politics and, hence, runaway state-building, consider the legislative battle over decentralization during the 1990s. In 1993, the Office for Legislation and Public Administration made two proposals concerning the reform of the state administration, the first calling for 13 regions and the second for eight. Elections to the new regional parliaments would be held in 1995. Though the government coalition had agreed to approve legislation for setting up the new regions no later than 1994, the main government party, Klaus's ODS, scuttled these proposals, instead offering a counterproposal that it knew would be unacceptable to the other parties. Indeed, the proposal met with opposition in the parliament. A counter-proposal to create 9

regions by one of the other government parties came close to passing, but was blocked by ODS (Brizova 1999: 3).

The situation began to change after the 1996 parliamentary elections, which saw greatly increased support for the Social Democratic Party (CSSD) and an erosion of ODS's position in parliament. A coalition for public administration reform led by CSSD formed over the issue of creating the regional parliaments. ODS remained opposed. Klaus argued that decentralization would lead to the "atomisation" of the state, that it would impede the reform of the economy, that the loss of control over regional budgets would lead to inflation (Brizova 1999: 4). On December 3, 1997, the parliament took the initiative and passed a constitutional act creating 14 new regions, arguing decentralization could not be postponed any longer. ODS succeeded in keeping the regions weaker than the Social Democrats would have liked, but it was no longer able to block their creation. As I mentioned above, ODS was also able to exact the concession of eliminating the district level public administration in exchange for creating regional parliaments.

Finally, it should be noted that Slovakia recently legislated a form of decentralization in August 2001. This policy established elected regional governments using the (gerrymandered) administrative boundaries from HZDS's 1996 deconcentration policy and existing alongside those state offices. Unlike the Czech Republic, there was no concomitant reduction of the branch state administration to compensate for the new regional governments. Needless to say, it is too early to judge the results of this decentralization, but all indications suggest that this policy was intended primarily to placate the European Union, which encourages the idea of regional government in the applicant countries of Eastern Europe, rather than benefit Slovakia's regions and localities. The laws passed in July preserve the powers of Slovakia's extensive branch administration and place very strict limits on the power of the eight new regional governments. There has been no decentralization of public finances. The most vivid illustrations of the disappointing character of the recently passed laws are the following two incidents, which

**Figure 3: A Map of the Czech Public Administration Before and After Reform**  
*Before Reform (districts only)*



*After Reform (regions only)*

happened immediately after the final voting. The government plenipotentiary for decentralization who designed the original proposal for the law (his proposal was entirely rewritten by the parliament) resigned from his post in protest, and the party most enthusiastically behind decentralization left the government.<sup>18</sup>

### *Establishment of a Civil Service*

So far, I have focused on deconcentration and decentralization because these areas have absorbed most of the effort at public administration reform in my cases. These are, after all, the most politically rewarding policies from the viewpoint of parties since their implementation offers considerable opportunities for patronage. In contrast, policies to establish a civil service and to cultivate bureaucratic esprit de corps have received less attention in each of my country cases. Not surprisingly, their results have been lackluster.

While turf battles regarding the units of public administration have been a persistent feature of politics since the early 1990s, the problem of meritocratic selection and promotion procedures in the state bureaucracy has become gained its more limited prominence only in the last few years. Much of the credit for raising the issue must go to international organizations active in Eastern Europe, in particular the European Union, which has pressured each of the candidate countries to establish a legally defined civil service. In each country, this has been difficult to accomplish because the major political parties suspect their rivals of tailoring the policy to lock-in the positions enjoyed by their appointees and clients in the state bureaucracy.

Poland was the first of my cases to adopt a law on the civil service; it did so in 1997. The law defined certain positions in the state bureaucracy as civil service posts, which would be filled on the basis of specified credentials and written tests. These civil posts would not be political appointments, and their occupants could not be replaced by

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<sup>18</sup> This was the Hungarian minority party, the SMK.

political nominees. If the objectives of the law sounded pure, its timing was suspicious, coming just months before parliamentary elections that the government was widely expected to lose. In the run-up to the elections, the government quick-marched a host of its top officials through the civil service competitions over loud criticism from the opposition parties (Paradowska 2001). The government did, in fact, lose the elections. Its successor repealed the civil service law, replacing it with its own version in 1998. It was not an auspicious beginning for a policy designed to insulate the state bureaucracy from party politics, particularly the kind associated with changes of government (Matys 2001).

The second (1998) law on the civil service designated a number of top posts in the central state bureaucracy<sup>19</sup> as civil service positions (*sluzba cywilna*), whose holders would have to win them in advertised, open competitions on the basis of specified professional credentials and their performance on a civil service exam. The law also established a system of promotion to the civil service for bureaucrats in posts that were not mandated as civil service posts. This promotion system is based on a combination of seniority, educational and language qualifications, and professional exams. On paper, the Polish civil service looks good — both meritocratic and politically independent. It has aroused considerable hopes among some state bureaucrats. One bureaucrat in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted, “We were very lucky that the law passed in the Sejm. The Ministers protested because they considered that it would tie their hands...Politicians of all stripes were criticizing the law. They were afraid they would no longer be able to freely nominate their own people. Taking that step doesn’t fit with their mentality” (Matys 2001).

The reality is less flattering. In the almost four years since the passage of the second law, there are only about 560 civil servants out of an approximately 110,000 eligible state bureaucrats (Paradowska 2001). According to the 1998 law, those in the

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<sup>19</sup> Positions in regional, district, and local level administrations were not covered by the law. They are still not regulated by any standardized selection and promotion procedures.

state administration who do not pass the qualifications to become civil servants — that is, members of the *sluzba cywilna* — are now members of the so-called civil corps (*korpus cywilny*). In reality, the civil corps is nothing more than a change in name, conferring no new protections or advantages. The requirements for joining the civil service — in particular the second-language requirement — were defined too stringently for most of the current state employees to pass the exams. Moreover, many of the mandated civil service posts have still not been filled with civil servants and are occupied by “acting directors” who may be political appointees and who have none of the job security of civil servants. It may be that the situation will improve with time, but already there is talk of amending the law again (Paradowska 2001). As the eminent Polish journalist and political commentator Janina Paradowska has written, much of the civil corps are not eager to join the civil service because its advantages are inconsiderable and its dangers are unknown:

Better to have safe membership in the large, virtual civil service (that is, the civil corps) than to put oneself on the front lines. The typical Polish bureaucrat has already passed through more than one storm. Above all, he can see that personnel in the administration are still governed by politicians. What else can a bureaucrat think, even one in an uncertain post, when he sees that it’s darkest under the spotlight?” (Paradowska 2001)

The phrase “darkest under the spotlight” in this passage, refers to the poor example of undercutting the civil service law set by the very government that enacted it. The Prime Minister dismissed the director of the Office of the Committee for European Integration, who was a bona fide civil servant and who occupied a much sought-after post. He replaced her with an appointee who was not a civil servant without calling a competition for the post — both of these actions contravening his own government’s law.

In terms of establishing a civil service, the Czech Republic has been a laggard, drawing much criticism from the EU. As of this writing, there is still no legislation in this area. The previous ODS government maintained that not only was such a law unnecessary, it was dangerous because it would make it impossible to reduce the size of the public sector. The current social democratic government has taken a different line, supporting a

civil service law. Since it came to power in 1998, however, the current government party has not been successful in passing such a law. Its draft is still only a government proposal.

Until very recently, Slovakia also lacked a law on the civil service. Prior to this law, there were no positions legally protected from outside appointments and no internal norms of meritocracy in the state administration. Indeed the rapid growth of the state administration in Slovakia over the course of the 1990s has meant that the absence of stable, predictable career paths. It is very common for top posts to be filled by people who have not worked their way up from lower positions or who have no experience in administration at all.

The parliament passed a civil service law in summer 2001, but among my interviews with Slovak bureaucrats and policy experts in August 2001 the opinion prevailed that this law was a formality designed to satisfy the European Union. The provisions of the law do not seem to have been designed with meritocracy in mind. The law extends life tenure to current employees in the state administration<sup>20</sup> who satisfy certain minimum requirements. Unlike the Polish civil service law, which set the bar too high for the civil service protections to be extended to most state administrators, it seems that the Slovak law sets the bar too low. It extends (as yet untested) guarantees to civil servants, which protect against replacement by political appointees but which do not motivate civil servants to meritocratic advancement. The skeptics maintain that, in addition to placating the EU, the law's main accomplishment is to lock-in the position of the current government's appointees and clients.<sup>21</sup> This government is also widely expected to lose the upcoming parliamentary elections in the fall of 2002.

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<sup>20</sup> It does not cover local administrations.

<sup>21</sup> Further evidence for this interpretation can be found in a recent political scandal regarding lifelong stipends for MPs. Recently, a number of current government parties, who are widely expected to lose the upcoming Fall 2002 parliamentary elections, have been trying to introduce legislation guaranteeing lifelong stipends to MPs who fail to gain reelection. At two times the average nominal wage, the stipends are very generous by Slovak standards (Pisarova 2002).

### *Cultivation of a Bureaucratic Esprit de Corps*

In this area, the record of my cases has been singularly unimpressive. In general, their versions of public administration reform have not seriously employed this kind of policy. Only Poland has created a national school for the education of bureaucrats, and as I shall describe below, its results have been equivocal.

In 1991, the Polish government established a National School of Public Administration (KSAP).<sup>22</sup> As the then Prime Minister Bielecki announced to the students at the school's opening, "You will be our best representatives, who will build a professional, Polish state" (Quoted in Matys 2001). The school was to build a cadre of highly-trained, select, bureaucrats and diplomats to transform the Polish state. The school's director claimed the French L'Ecole Nationale d'Administration as KSAP's model. Like the French school, entrance was to be selective and on the basis of exams. Not only was the education to be free, but students at the school received three times the normal national stipend, and housing for out-of-towners was free. As in France, the school ranked its students in terms of their performance in classes and exams, so that the highest scorers would get the best state positions after graduation. In return, graduates were bound to work for the state for a minimum of five years (KSAP 1999, Matys 2001).

Initially, the school generated considerable excitement, but over the course of the 1990s its profile has gradually diminished and its impact has been minimal. First, there have been too few graduates to make a difference, about 400 over the first ten years (KSAP 1999). Moreover, these few graduates have been spread scattershot across the state administration, often depending on the largesse of particular politicians to find positions, certainly not the ability of the school to place its graduates where it deemed they would be most effective. For example, almost half of the school's first class found employment in the Supreme Accounting Office simply because its Minister had viewed the

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<sup>22</sup> The acronym is formed from the Polish name for the school, *Krajowa Szkoła Administracji Publicznej*.

school more favorably than had other ministers.<sup>23</sup> He had offered them positions, and other Ministers had given them the cold shoulder.

Second, graduates of the school often encountered hostility or indifference from the rest of the public administration. One graduate from the first class of KSAP described his first contact with the state administration when he began his first job there after finishing his degree:

Almost everywhere we [graduates] appeared we became the objects of aggression. We were effective and willing to work. We represented a threat to the old cadres. *We didn't have support from anyone because we were not tied to any political party.* My chief used me to write correspondence against his enemies. (Matys 2001; emphasis added)

Other KSAP graduates even came to the conclusion that their school credentials were holding back their careers, one graduate working at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs commenting in an interview, “I was close to the thought that KSAP was only an albatross around my neck. I had the feeling that we were being kept on the sidelines. We were set to work, yes sure, but as far as possible from important affairs” (Matys 2001).

In addition to hostility and indifference, the KSAP graduates also discovered the influence of party politics in the state administration and that their own political independence could work against them. To quote again from one of the school's graduates working in the state administration, “Before the elections in 1993, the staff in my office began to put together files of accusations against their colleagues. They knew that a new management would be coming and would bring its own candidates for work with them. They wanted to avoid losing their own jobs, so they pointed out others for firing” (Matys 2001). Another graduate of the class of 1993, second in her class, was sent on unpaid vacation after the 1993 elections and her position at the Office of the Council of Ministers filled by an older official associated with the ascendant post-Communist party. She stated,

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<sup>23</sup> Author's interview with one of the members of KSAP's first graduating class (name withheld). Warsaw, June 2001.

“I don’t know if politicians need bureaucrats who aren’t tied to anyone...Every political party has its own bureaucrats in the administration, and we [KSAP graduates] didn’t belong to anyone. That was our chief problem” (Matys 2001).

The influence of party politics not only worked against KSAP’s graduates on an individual basis but against the school itself, systematically. The post-Communist SLD-PSL governments from 1993 to 1997 conspicuously ignored the school. When the last of these governments formulated legislation establishing an official civil service in 1997, the law’s provisions effectively barred KSAP graduates from all management positions in the state administration. The law stipulated that all positions from that of department director on up could be filled only by bureaucrats with seven years of experience in the state administration, of which four of those years had been in a management position (Matys 2001). Besides providing a huge advantage to officials from the old regime, most of whom sympathized with the post-Communists, this provision would have excluded KSAP from having any presence in management positions until 2004 at the earliest. When the following post-Solidarity government passed its law on the civil service in 1998, however, the situation was completely reversed; from being institutionally handicapped in their careers, KSAP graduates went to being institutionally advantaged. Under the 1998 law, KSAP students automatically attained the status of civil servants on graduation.

Finally, it must be noted that the career paths of the graduates of KSAP have not been any more stable or predictable than those of their colleagues. Graduates of the earliest classes have found that they have rarely been assigned to the senior positions in the state, and their career paths since graduation have zigzagged between various state agencies and even the public and private sectors. In a recent article, one of the graduates of the school’s first class tracked down seven of his 34 classmates to follow their career paths (Matys, 2001).<sup>24</sup> Three of the seven had left the state administration for the private

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<sup>24</sup> KSAP lacked any information for one-third of its first graduating class. Presumably, these graduates were no longer in the state administration (Matys, 2001).

sector. All of them had bounced around from various assignments in the eight years since graduating school, often vacating posts to make way for politically favored candidates. The reassignments did not have the character of clearly progressing upwards to positions of greater responsibility.

As spotty as the Polish experiment of using professional academies to foster bureaucratic esprit de corps has been, it is more impressive than the experiences of Slovakia and the Czech Republic. In the early 1990s, Slovakia too opened a national school for public administration, but the school was later shut down (Verheijen 2001: 30). The Czech Republic never had such an academy at all.

## **CONCLUSION**

Public administration reform has not lived up to its promise in post-Communist Slovakia, Poland, and the Czech Republic. In Slovakia, public administration reform was turned back on itself so that, instead of reducing political patronage in the public administration, it has been used to deepen and even institutionalize it. The Slovak “reform” policies were fewer in number than the Polish ones, but both countries put more policies in place than the Czech Republic. The benefits (read patronage) of Slovakia’s version of public administration reform flowed chiefly to one party, the HZDS, the party that executed it. In Poland, too, it seems that public administration reform has not successfully addressed the core problems or has done so in an inconsistent manner. In many cases, it has created new ambiguities and opportunities for political parties to harness the public administration to their patronage practices. Unlike Slovakia, however, the benefits of reform have not flowed so asymmetrically to one party, or group of parties. It seems instead that every party benefited in its own way. No one has wholly controlled the shape of public administration reform and no one has enjoyed all of its benefits.

Public administration reform in the Czech Republic differs from that in the other two cases. The Czech reforms have not raised as many ambiguities and loopholes as in

Poland — ambiguities that can be exploited by parties as patronage — but it is also true that the Czech reform has been substantially less ambitious than the Polish one. In particular, the more measured, even reluctant, approach of the Czechs in the area of decentralization — though it has drawn criticism from outside observers like the EU and the Council of Europe — has been the most important factor in limiting the expansion of administration in the Czech Republic. The Czech Republic's lackluster performance in other areas of public administration reform, most notably the creation of a civil service and of a bureaucratic esprit de corps, are missed opportunities to develop the state bureaucracy, but at least they do not push the process backwards. Poland's greater efforts in these other two areas could not make up for the difficulties posed by its version of decentralization. The Polish case demonstrates that, even if proposed with the best intentions, decentralization is a Pandora's box in political systems where state and party institutions are weak. It seems an irony of post-Communist politics that at times lack of reform can be a virtue.

Looking over the case studies, it is also clear that politicians have shown the greatest interest in public administration reform in those areas where patronage possibilities are most conspicuous and most sizable. This simple observation explains both the appeal of decentralization and deconcentration as well as apathy towards policies to establish a civil service, and build bureaucratic esprit de corps. It is not that elected politicians find adding new levels of subnational government a more effective way of reforming the state than, say, training state bureaucrats in an elite academy. Rather, it is that the latter has nothing to offer them personally, whereas the former does.

Finally, this analysis suggests an important question: Do the risks of short- and medium-term policies pursued under the aegis of public administration reform outweigh the potential benefits of these policies? In other words, do the risks of reform outweigh the benefits of simply letting generational replacement and economic development slowly

reshape in the state administration over the long-term?<sup>25</sup> The analysis presented here suggests two lessons. First, the state bureaucracy has not improved significantly in Poland, the Czech Republic, or Slovakia as a result of public administration reform. Second, policies employed in the name of public administration reform have proven too open to political cooptation. The one relative success story of these three cases, the Czech Republic, is the case where a much more modest reform was undertaken because political compromise necessitated it. In the other two cases, the technocratic intentions of reform's authors disappeared in the political processes of enactment and implementation. It seems that, at least in the short term, there are deep tensions between democratic party politics and the development of an autonomous, accountable, and effective state bureaucracy.

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<sup>25</sup> Needless to say, such a policy has its own risks as well, particularly that the status quo of the present would deepen with time.

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