Decentralization in the Czech Republic: The European Union, Political Parties, and the Creation of Regional Assemblies

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This study begins with an exploration of the external (European Union) and internal (Czech political parties) forces that shaped the creation of regional assemblies in the Czech Republic. The institutional and administrative requirements of EU regional policy served as a catalyst for the creation of Czech regional governments. Domestic struggles over decentralization, particularly among Czech political parties, are reflected in the number and boundaries of the regions as well as in the slow transfer of policy competences from the national government to regional governments. This study also examines the November 2000 regional elections and places the results in the context of the 2002 parliamentary elections. Party support clustered by region, but the position that parties took on the creation of regional assemblies did not impact electoral success in the regional elections, nor did party success or failure in the regional elections forecast electoral fortunes in the parliamentary elections. The regional and national elections reflected low voter turnout, relatively strong support for the Communist party, and a dramatic rise and fall of party coalitions.

Many Central and Eastern European countries created regional governments in preparation for accession to the European Union (EU). Countries such as Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia are rebuilding their regional levels of public administration. In building a new system of regional governance after 1992, the Czech Republic did not have much of a tradition of political decentralization to draw upon. Emerging from the ruins of the Austro-Hungarian Empire after the First World War, the newly independent Czechoslovakia organized itself territorially into four administrative regions, or “lands,” based on historic ethnic and cultural divisions: Bohemia, Moravia-Silesia, Slovakia, and Ruthenia.1 This territorial system was abolished under the abbreviated

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1Janík and Zdeňka Hnedíková, Dějiny správy v českých zemích do roku 1945 [The History of Administration in the Czech Lands until 1945] (Prague: SPN, 1989), p. 347. See also, Jiří Čepík, "Správní ústrojí na Moravě od novomoci české vlády" ["Administrative organization in Moravia was influenced by a long development"], Mladá fronta Dn, 6 November 2000, p. 10.

Second Republic (late 1938-March 1939) and the Nazi occupation. After a brief restoration of the pre-war system in 1945, the communist regime that took power in 1948 dissolved the lands in favor of a centralized system of administrative regions that lacked any substance of self-government. Following the Velvet Revolution of 1989, these regions were quickly abolished along with other vestiges of the communist system.

Despite this limited tradition, or perhaps because of it, political decentralization was a popular goal in the early post-communist period. In Czechoslovakia, as in other Central and Eastern European countries, decentralization was widely regarded as an important aspect of democratization and a necessary repudiation of the overly centralized communist state. There was considerable disagreement, however, over the direction that decentralization should take: whether self-governing powers should be located at the regional or the local level, and if the former, what design the new regions should follow. Decentralization also had its opponents, including those who favored a more centralist approach to government and feared the disintegrative forces that could be unleashed by political devolution. Such fears were reinforced by Slovak demands for autonomy and the resultant "Velvet Divorce" of 1992-1993.

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While there were strong indigenous pressures for decentralization, an important role in this process was also played by the prospect of European Union membership and EU entry requirements. Before candidate countries can join the EU, they must adopt and implement the full body of EU rules and legislation (the so-called acquis communautaire), including the institutional and administrative requirements of EU regional policy. One such requirement is a regionalized system of administration, with the existence of competent regional bodies that can serve as partners of the Commission—the EU's central administrative body—and national governments in the management of EU Structural Funds programs.

Although it requires regionalized administrative structures, the EU does not clearly define these, nor has the EU sought to impose a uniform model or template for regional governance on its member states. Instead, the EU takes the position that this is an internal matter in which it has no legal competence. National governments have thus been given wide latitude in the design of regional administrative systems, and they have also been

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3On this point, see John Fitzmaurice, Politics and Government in the Visegrad Countries: Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia (New York: St. Martin's, 1998), pp. 85-93.

3EU regional policy consists chiefly of the Structural Funds, money given primarily to poor or underdeveloped regions with a per capita GDP under 75 percent of the EU average (Objective 1 of the Structural Funds). In 2003, Structural Funds expenditures accounted for more than 30 percent of the entire EU budget. See European Commission, General Budget of the European Union for the Financial Year 2002 (Brussels/Luxembourg: January 2003), p. 8.

3The requirements for EU regional and cohesion policy are detailed in European Commission, Enlargement of the European Union: Guide to the Negotiations Chapter by Chapter (Brussels: DG Enlargement, 2002); http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/negotiations/chapters/negotiationguide.pdf
allowed to designate the appropriate regional authorities for partnership in accordance with national conditions, traditions, and constitutional frameworks. This approach has generally been followed in the EU's pre-accession advice to the candidate states as well. The Commission merely requires that "appropriate" systems of regional administration and governance be in place by the time of accession, without trying to define these in any concrete way. However, in its regular progress reports on the preparation of individual candidate countries for accession and through other means, the Commission also has made clear its preference for democratically elected regional governments that possess a substantial amount of financial and legal autonomy.5

In the early 1990s, EU membership remained but a distant goal. The government of Czechoslovakia signed an association agreement ("Europe Agreement") with the EU in 1991,6 but the Czech Republic did not formally apply for membership until 1996. Formal accession negotiations did not begin until 1998, and took four years to complete. Nonetheless, EU accession (along with NATO membership) was from the beginning a top-priority objective of the Czech government and a key element of its strategy to "rejoin Europe." Thus, awareness of EU membership requirements clearly influenced Czech politicians and government officials as they designed their new governmental system in the early post-communist period. As will be seen below, a key Commission report in 1997 played an important role in spurring agreement on regional reform, while the accession negotiations and regular Commission "progress reports" beginning in 1998 exerted pressure on the Czech government to fully implement regional reform measures.

The process of regionalization in the Czech Republic can thus be analyzed through the theoretical lens of "Europeanization," an approach which examines the impact on domestic (national) policies and political systems of EU policies and processes.7 This theoretical perspective is usually applied to current member states, but has been increasingly extended to candidate countries in the pre-accession period as well.8 Interestingly enough, much


6Following the split with Slovakia, a Europe Agreement was signed between the EU and the Czech Republic in October 1993.


of the literature on Europeanization stresses the role of domestic politics and national conditions in interaction with EU pressures and forces, with the result that diversity rather than convergence is often the outcome of exposure to common EU rules and processes. A similar conclusion is reached in much of the literature that focuses more narrowly on EU regional policy and regionalization. As many of these studies have shown, the impact of EU regional policy on the domestic politics and governance of the member states has varied considerably, in accordance with such factors as member-state size, governmental traditions, and existing territorial arrangements. The Czech case confirms the important role of domestic politics and conditions in shaping regional reform within the context of EU pressures and requirements. In the following section, the key role of the political parties is examined.

THE POLITICAL PARTIES AND REGIONAL REFORM

Responding to both internal demands and external pressures for decentralization, the 1993 Czech Constitution declares: "The Czech Republic is composed of municipalities which are the basic territorial administrative units and regions which are higher territorial administrative units." The authors of the Constitution reportedly viewed decentralization and the diffusion of power as a major democratic goal, while the existence of regional bodies would also satisfy an important EU condition for accession. Because of disagreement about the nature and extent of decentralization, however, the Constitution was intentionally vague about the form and content of any new regional system. The number and boundaries of the regions, as well as the precise powers or competences of the regional governments, remained to be established.

In the initial debate on regional reform in Czechoslovakia, some early support existed for self-government of the historic lands of Bohemia and Moravia-Silesia. In fact, Moravian parties advocating greater regional independence from Prague enjoyed some initial success in the early 1990s. Such demands were undercut by the separation from Slovakia, however, which not only reduced the political strength of forces advocating ethnic...
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or culturally based regional autonomy, but also increased fears of further political disintegration. Many Czechs, and most political parties, felt that a dualistic, two-lands, organization of the Czech Republic might produce the same sort of divisions that doomed the ill-fated Czech and Slovak Federation. Such fears were underscored by external developments, especially the political disintegration and war in the former Yugoslavia. As a consequence, support for the pro-autonomy Moravian parties declined sharply by the mid-1990s, evidenced by their poor performance in the 1996 elections for the Chamber of Deputies.13

In the debate on regional reform after 1993, therefore, issues of functionality and political interests and criteria other than historical identity played the leading role. The debate initially focused on the number and boundaries of the new regions, and later the powers or competences of regional governments and how regional representatives would be elected. The concept of political decentralization enjoyed broad support among citizens, who generally favored the idea of moving government closer to the people. The legislative debate, however, was dominated by the major political parties, which often had their own interests in mind more than democratic principles or the requirements of governmental efficiency.

Among the major parties, Prime Minister Václav Klaus' Civic Democratic party (ODS) was perhaps the most skeptical about the merits of regionalization.14 This was mainly because of its centralist preferences and liberal economic ideology. Both the ODS and Klaus felt that centralized administration would be more efficient, and they were concerned that the creation of regional authorities would significantly increase bureaucracy and financial costs. Perhaps even more important, they were concerned that regionalization would undermine the control of the major parties and central government authorities by establishing independent regional bases of political power. The Klaus government (1993-1998) was thus in no hurry to create a new regional system, and lack of movement on this question corresponded with high levels of popular support for the government.15

Klaus' government-coalition partners—the Christian Democrats (KDU-CSL) and the Civic Democratic Alliance (ODA)—were both more strongly supportive of decentralization, and favored a speedy creation of regional authorities and a second national chamber (Senate) to represent regional interests. They mainly differed on the number of regions, with the Christian Democrats favoring the creation of nine regions and the Civic Democratic Alliance, thirteen. The Christian Democrats had a natural interest in promoting regionalization because the bulk of its electoral support was in Moravian parties did not even receive one percent of the vote, thus falling well short of the 5 percent threshold necessary for entering the Chamber of Deputies. For the 1996 election results, see Czech National Office Election Server, "Chamber of Deputies 1996": http://www.volby.cz/pls/ps1996-win/v63.


15Confidence in the government ranged from 50 to 60 percent most of the time. See Jiří Večerník and Petr Matějič, Ten Years of Rebuilding Capitalism: Czech Society after 1989 (Prague: Academia, 1999), p. 332.
Moravia. According to the Civic Democratic Alliance, decentralization would provide for a more effective administration of public affairs, while enhancing democracy by limiting the power of the state.\textsuperscript{16} Among the main opposition parties, the Social Democrats (CSSD) supported regionalization, as they sought to capitalize on growing unemployment in structurally weak regions through an emphasis on EU-style regional development policy, while the Communists were opposed.\textsuperscript{17}

Debate initially focused on the number of regions to be created in fulfillment of the Constitution’s mandate. Those favoring a larger number of regions, including opponents of decentralization such as Klaus and the Civic Democratic party, wanted to minimize the political importance of the new regions by inflating their number and reducing their size. Some self-interested regional and local politicians, wanting to maximize the number of new political positions, also favored creating a larger number. Those advocating a smaller number of larger regions argued that this would be more effective, while also being more aligned with EU regional policy requirements regarding the compatibility of administrative and “cohesion” regions. The average population of EU NUTS\textsuperscript{18} II regions—the basic territorial unit eligible for Objective 1 assistance under the Structural Funds—was 2.5 million. In strict accordance with this criterion, only 4-5 self-governing regions would be necessary for a country of 10.5 million people.

In June 1994, the Civic Democratic party proposed converting the existing 75 administrative districts into regions. This proposal was strongly rejected by its coalition partners. A subsequent ODS proposal to create 17 regions was rejected by the Parliament in June 1995. The CSSD, which voted against the Civic Democratic party proposal, backed the Christian Democratic idea of creating nine regions. President Havel also sided with the proponents of decentralization, while refraining from providing any detailed position on this issue.

The stalemate on regional reform persisted until after the 1996 parliamentary elections. A key role in finally achieving a breakthrough was played by the EU Commission’s June 1997 “Opinion” on the Czech Republic’s application for EU membership, which castigated the Czech government for its lack of regional policy and the administrative and legal structures for implementing one. In particular, the Commission criticized the absence of “elected” bodies between the central state and commune (local) levels.\textsuperscript{19} Other than this statement, the Commission refrained from

\textsuperscript{18}La Nomenclature des Unités Territoriales Statistiques, the EU’s system of statistical classification used for implementing the Structural Funds.
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Map 1
The Czech Republic: Self-Governing Regions (kray)

1 Prague
2 Středocesky Region (Central Bohemia)
3 Jihoceesky Region (South Bohemia)
4 Plzensky Region (Pilsen)
5 Karlovarsky Region (Karlsbad)
6 Ustecky Region
7 Liberecky Region
8 Královéhradecky Region
9 Pardubický Region
10 Vysocina Region
11 Jihomoravsky Region
12 Olomoucky Region
13 Moravskoslezsky Region (North Moravian/Silesian)
14 Zlinsky Region

Source: Czech Government Ministry for Regional Development

direct public intervention in the Czech debate on regional reform, limiting itself to informal warnings and funding studies of regional systems in other countries by a Czech policy-planning group.20

The Commission's Opinion invigorated the debate on regional policy, and an agreement on regional reform was finally reached among the government parties and the Social Democrats in October 1997. The resulting "Constitutional Act on the Formation of the Regions" called for dividing the Czech Republic into 14 regions, or kraj, each with its own elected assembly (see Map 1). Only the Communists, the radical right-wing party of Miroslav Sládek,21 and some Social Democrat deputies voted against the law.22 The 14 regions, with an average population of 800,000 each, were much smaller than the average EU NUTS II region, and would have to be combined into larger "cohesion regions" for the purposes of EU regional policy.23 The boundaries of the new regions were also controversial, with

21Association for the Republic-Republican Party of Czechoslovakia.
22Saradin and Sulik, Krajske volby 2000 [Regional Elections of 2000], p. 18.
23An October 1998 government resolution (No. 707) established, in line with EU methodology, eight NUTS II regions. This was done by grouping together the fourteen new kraj, which were designated NUTS III territorial units.
some drawn across historical Bohemian-Moravian lines in an attempt to undercut potential pro-autonomy sentiment.\textsuperscript{24}

According to the new law, each of the regions elects, for a four-year term, a unicameral assembly consisting of 45, 55, or 65 members, depending on the population of the region. The assemblies elect, from among their members, a president (hejtman), who chairs the regional council and represents the region externally, and is responsible to the assembly. The regional council is composed of the president, one or more vice-presidents, and 9 to 11 council members, depending on the size of the region. The council members are each assigned responsibility for one of the region’s areas of policy competence (see below), and are assisted in their work by a small secretariat and specialized commissions. The administrative bureaucracy of the region is the regional authority, which implements the decisions of the assembly and council. The regional governments can only act in those areas in which they are legally competent.

The law creating the new regions was supposed to take effect in January 2000. However, delays in approving the necessary legislation on elections and state administration reform meant that the first set of regional elections did not take place until November 2000, and the new regional authorities thus did not begin functioning until January 2001. The Civic Democratic party, while declaring its acceptance of the law, did little to implement it in its remaining months in government.\textsuperscript{25} The minority Social Democratic government that took power following elections in April 1998 was more sympathetic to regionalization, but was somewhat constrained by its “opposition treaty” with the Civic Democratic party.

An initial government proposal for an electoral law for regional elections was put forward in August 1999. This excluded independent candidates and mayors from running in regional assembly elections, however, and greatly disadvantaged small parties.\textsuperscript{26} It was thus widely viewed by its opponents as an effort by the Social Democrats and the Civic Democratic party to create an electoral system biased in favor of the two large parties, with the goal of creating a two-party system in the Czech Republic. A revised version that was approved in March 2000 responded to the criticism of the Christian Democrats and others by allowing mayors to be candidates in regional elections, although it still discriminated against smaller parties and forced them into alliances to have any chance of success.\textsuperscript{27} One outcome

\textsuperscript{24}Edward Moxon-Browne and Eva Kreuzbergova, “The Ambiguous Effects of EU Regional Policy on the Applicant States: The Case of the Czech Republic” (paper presented at the Conference on EU Regionalism of the EU Center of the University System of Georgia, Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA, April 2001), 15-15.


\textsuperscript{26}Saradin and Sulák, Krajské volby 2000 [Regional Elections of 2000], p. 29.

of this law was the consolidation of the Christian Democrats, the Union of Freedom (US), the Civic Democratic Alliance, and the Democratic Union (DEU) into a new electoral alliance known as the "Four-Party Coalition." Four-party agreements were signed in all regions, establishing common electoral programs and lists of candidates. Entering the regional elections, the Four-Party Coalition appeared to be the only viable electoral alternative to the Social Democrats and the Civic Democratic party.\(^{28}\)

There were also delays in reaching agreement on the transfer of competences to the new regions. Immediately following the November 2000 elections, new laws entered into force giving regional governments powers in the areas of education (establishment and management of day-care centers, kindergartens, and primary and secondary schools), culture (establishment and management of theatres, museums, galleries, and zoos), regional development (coordination of the development of the region, approval of development programs, and oversight of planning and zoning documents), transportation (ownership and maintenance of second-class and third-class roads), environment (protection from deterioration, possibility to influence the location and quality of utility facilities, and management of protected areas and parks), and health and social care (establishment and management of hospitals, nursing homes, and facilities for physically and mentally disabled adults and children). Additional responsibilities include cooperation with other regions within the country as well as abroad. An important prerogative of regional councils is their right to submit bills to the Chamber of Deputies of the national Parliament and proposals to the Constitutional Court for the repeal of legislation believed to contradict the law. Regional governments must not encroach on the rights of municipalities and are not superordinate to them.

Debate continued over the precise delineation of competences between national, regional, and municipal authorities, although greater clarification was achieved with new legislation in 2002 and the abolition of district offices and the transfer of their competences to regional and municipal authorities in January 2003.\(^{29}\) Even several years after their inception, the regions still face difficulties when attempting to fully take up their role as key actors in the Czech political system. The continued reluctance of the national government to transfer the competences and corresponding financial instruments to the regions has significantly limited the capabilities of the regions to finance major regional-development projects. These limitations led the regions to narrow their operational focus to low-cost, non-investment projects.

\(^{28}\)Petr Hlaváček and Pavel Šaradin, "Čtyřkoalice ve výsledcích krajských voleb 2000" ["4-Coalition in the results of regional elections 2000"], Parlamentní Zpravodaj [Parliamentary Newsletter], January 2001, p. 36. For analysis of the Four-Party program for the regional elections, see Pavel Šaradin, "Obáhová analýza programů Čtyřkoalice a ODS v krajských volbách" ["Content analysis of programs. 4-Coalition and ODS in regional elections"], Parlamentní Zpravodaj [Parliamentary Newsletter], December 2000, p. 21.

activities, including strategic planning and partnership-building. The regions have also intensified their joint cooperation in order to put pressure on those national ministries still withholding their competences. This pressure has in some instances even taken the form of legal actions against the central-state bodies. Some regions have filed constitutional complaints with the Czech High Court to win competences in the areas of education (i.e., primary and secondary schools) and health care (i.e., hospitals).

Disagreement also persisted on financing arrangements for the new regions, with the Commission expressing considerable concern about this issue in its 2001 progress report.30 In its 2002 report, however, the Commission noted substantial progress in this area, with regional governments having been granted a fixed share of tax revenues and the abolition of limits on their ability to run debts, thus giving them increased financial and decision-making autonomy. However, the Commission noted that some questions remained regarding the financial capacity of regional governments to exercise their new competences.31

THE 2000 REGIONAL ELECTIONS

The creation of regional governments introduced an important new level of politics in the Czech Republic. How would regional politics affect and be affected by national politics, and what would be its impact on the Czech party system? We will not know the answers to these questions for quite some time, but some initial indications were provided by the inaugural regional elections in November 2000, which were followed by national parliamentary elections in June 2002.

The emergence of the Four-Party Coalition and public concerns about the "opposition treaty" between the Social Democrats and the Civic Democratic party set the stage for the elections of 12 November 2000. The regional elections coincided with the election of one-third of the Senate. Using a proportional election system, 675 deputies were elected for 13 regional assemblies.32 The fourteenth region of Prague elected its regional legislature in November 2002 because the region was temporarily under a different electoral act in 2000.33

Turnout for the regional elections in November 2000 was low. Turnout ranged from a high of 36.5 percent in the Pardubicky region to a low of 28.4 percent in the Karlovarsky region. Turnout for all the regions averaged 33.6 percent.34 When the election for the regional assembly in Prague was

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finally held in November 2002, the level of voter turnout (35.3 percent) was roughly in line with the other regional elections.\textsuperscript{55} Turnout levels in the regional elections were positively associated with the percentage of residents age 60 and older, but voter participation was negatively related to the unemployment rate and level of urbanization.\textsuperscript{56}

Before turning to an examination of party support, several hypotheses can be articulated to guide the analysis. First, the Civic Democratic party should do well in prosperous regions based upon its support for free-market principles. Second, the Social Democratic party and the Communist party should excel in economically distressed regions because of their calls for more expansive social-welfare programs. Third, the percentage of the vote for the Communist party should increase as the percentage of the population age 60 and older rises in a region. Elderly voters may be more likely to look upon the Communist era with a sense of nostalgia. Finally, the Four-Party Coalition, anchored by the Christian Democratic party and its strong base of support in southern Moravia, should receive high levels of support in rural regions of the Czech Republic.

Levels of party support by region are summarized in Table 1. The Civic Democratic party won the most votes in a majority of the regions holding elections in 2000: Stredocesky, Jihocesky, Plzensky, Karlovarsky, Liberecky, Kralovehradecky, and Moravskoslezsky. Civic Democratic party candidates won 185 seats in the November 2000 regional elections.\textsuperscript{57} The Four-Party Coalition won the most votes in five regions: Pardubicky, Vysocina, Jihomoravsky, Olomoucky, and Zlinsky. Four-Party Coalition candidates (i.e., Christian Democrats, the Union of Freedom, the Civic Democratic Alliance, and the Democratic Union) won 171 seats across the 13 regional assemblies.\textsuperscript{58} The Communist party won the most votes in the Ustecky region of northern Bohemia. The Communist party recorded remarkable success with the election of 161 deputies.\textsuperscript{59} Table 1 reveals that the Communist party received a larger percentage of the vote than the Social Democrats in all 13 regions holding elections in November 2000. The percentage of the vote for the Social Democrats ranged from a low of 11.47 percent in the Vysocina region to a high of 17.24 percent in the Ustecky region. The election of only 111 deputies representing the Social Democratic party was a big disappointment for the ruling party.\textsuperscript{60} Finally, Table 1 reveals that

\textsuperscript{56}Pearson’s r = .703 between voter turnout and percentage of the population age 60 and over (statistically significant at p<.01). The correlation between voter turnout and the unemployment rate was -.466. Urbanization (percentage of the population living in cities) had a modest correlation of -.40 with voter turnout.
\textsuperscript{57}Pilar and Smid, "Social Democrats Thumped in Regional Elections," 2.
\textsuperscript{58}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{59}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{60}Ibid.
Independents did particularly well in three regions: Plzensky, Olomoucky, and Liberecky. This success can be attributed to several well-known candidates seeking elected office as Independents in the aforementioned regions. Independents and small parties won a total of 47 seats in the November 2000 regional elections. A total of 41 parties competed in the regional elections, although many ran in just one region.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Civic Democratic Party</th>
<th>Four-Party Coalition</th>
<th>Social Democratic Party</th>
<th>Communist Party</th>
<th>Independents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prague</td>
<td>35.54</td>
<td></td>
<td>14.66</td>
<td>10.83</td>
<td>3.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stredocesky</td>
<td>28.76</td>
<td></td>
<td>15.84</td>
<td>21.93</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jihocesky</td>
<td>28.84</td>
<td></td>
<td>13.43</td>
<td>19.44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plzensky</td>
<td>24.17</td>
<td>16.69</td>
<td>14.94</td>
<td>21.02</td>
<td>10.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karlovarsky</td>
<td>27.82</td>
<td>19.10</td>
<td>16.39</td>
<td>22.37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ustecky</td>
<td>26.75</td>
<td>13.73</td>
<td>17.24</td>
<td>28.22</td>
<td>4.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberecky</td>
<td>24.81</td>
<td>14.79</td>
<td>15.09</td>
<td>16.29</td>
<td>6.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karlovehradecky</td>
<td>26.85</td>
<td>26.23</td>
<td>15.18</td>
<td>17.99</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pardubicky</td>
<td>24.54</td>
<td>29.37</td>
<td>13.37</td>
<td>17.46</td>
<td>4.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vysochina</td>
<td>18.85</td>
<td>25.46</td>
<td>11.47</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jihomoravsky</td>
<td>18.22</td>
<td>31.64</td>
<td>13.45</td>
<td>20.80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zlinsky</td>
<td>18.46</td>
<td>31.36</td>
<td>15.12</td>
<td>16.50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moravskoslezky</td>
<td>26.51</td>
<td>16.77</td>
<td>15.56</td>
<td>24.98</td>
<td>3.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source for party vote by region: Czech Statistical Office Election Server http://www.volby.cz/

Table 1 also summarizes the results of the November 2002 regional election in Prague. The Civic Democratic party secured more than one-third of the vote, while the Social Democratic party trailed with 14 percent, and the Communists only mustered 10 percent of the vote. No electoral support is reported for the Four-Party Coalition in the Prague regional election because the coalition unraveled between the 2000 and 2002 elections. Out of a total of 70 seats in the Prague regional assembly, the Civic Democratic party won 30, the Social Democrats secured 12, and the Communists received eight.

A clear regional pattern is evident in Table 1. The Civic Democratic party did best in those regions located in the western part (Bohemia) of the Czech Republic. Prague and the surrounding regions have been the base of support for former Prime Minister Klaus and the Civic Democratic party. The Four-Party Coalition excelled in the East (Moravia). The success of the Four-Party Coalition in Moravia can largely be attributed to the strong...
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Table 2
Correlates with Party Support by Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socio Economic Characteristics</th>
<th>Civic Democratic Party</th>
<th>Four-Party Coalition</th>
<th>Social Democratic Party</th>
<th>Communist Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Population</td>
<td>.295</td>
<td>-0.002</td>
<td>.232</td>
<td>.098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population Density</td>
<td>.637*</td>
<td>-.064</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td>-.006*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urbanization</td>
<td>.733**</td>
<td>-.677*</td>
<td>.249</td>
<td>-.222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% 60 and older</td>
<td>.227</td>
<td>.620*</td>
<td>-.311</td>
<td>-.691**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Agriculture &amp; Forestry</td>
<td>-.572*</td>
<td>.399</td>
<td>-.500</td>
<td>.130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>-.480</td>
<td>-.322</td>
<td>-.922</td>
<td>.468</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Industry Employment</td>
<td>.600*</td>
<td>.007</td>
<td>.150</td>
<td>-.511</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Services Employment</td>
<td>-.182</td>
<td>-.279</td>
<td>.599*</td>
<td>.775**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Unemployed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per Capita Income</td>
<td>.710**</td>
<td>-.194</td>
<td>.133</td>
<td>-.485</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cell entries are Pearson correlation coefficients

*p<.05
**p<.01

levels of support for the Christian Democrats in the southeastern regions. Finally, the Communist party did well in the decaying industrial regions of northern Bohemia and northern Moravia.

The November 2000 elections were hardly a referendum on party support for the creation of regional assemblies. Despite the initial opposition and foot dragging of the Civic Democratic party to the creation of regional governments, the party's candidates were not punished by the electorate in the first regional assembly elections. The Four-Party Coalition, which enthusiastically supported the creation of regional governments, also did very well in the elections. Finally, the Communist party with its reservations about creating regional governments surprised many observers with a strong showing in the regional elections.

Table 2 reports the correlations between several socio-economic characteristics and the percentage of the vote for each political party by region. All 14 regions are analyzed in Table 2 to provide a complete picture of the election results. Admittedly, some measurement error is introduced by including the Prague elections which were held in November 2000 compared to the other 13 regional elections in November 2000. For socio-economic characteristics by region, see Petr Danek, "Kraje a jejich sociální, ekonomická a demografická charakteristika: Pohled očima politického geografa" ("Regions: social, economic, and demographic characteristics: political geographer's view"), Krajské volby 2000. Fakta, názory, komentáře (Regional election 2000: Facts, opinions, commentaries), ed. Ladislav Mrklas (Prague: Cevro, 2001), pp. 34, 35, 42. Unemployment (4th quarter of 2000) and per capita income (average monthly gross wage for 2000) data are derived from the Czech Statistical Office; http://www.czso.cz. For party support by region, see Czech Statistical Office Election Server, "Election into Regional Councils 2000: Votes Cast for a Political Party, Movement, Coalition"; http://www.volby.cz/pls/krajewin/kam?jazyc=EN&datum=20001112.
the Civic Democratic party: urbanization, per capita income, population density, and percentage of the workforce employed in services. Support for the Civic Democratic party is negatively associated with percentage of the workforce employed in agriculture and forestry. As hypothesized, the Civic Democratic party received higher levels of support in wealthier and more urbanized regions. Given the powerful base of support for the Civic Democratic party in Prague, none of these findings are surprising. Table 2 also reveals that as the level of urbanization increased in a region (measured as the percentage of the population living in cities), the percentage of the vote for the Four-Party Coalition declined. Voter support for the Four-Party Coalition was positively associated with the percentage of the population age 60 and older. These findings reflect electoral support for the Christian Democrats among older and rural voters.

As expected, the Social Democrats and Communists did very well in regions with a high level of unemployment. The Communist party also did well in less densely populated regions. In contrast to the original hypothesis, the percentage of the vote for the Communist party declined as the percentage of the population age 60 and older increased in a region. The correlation coefficient is not only in an unexpected direction but it is also statistically significant. Several factors might account for this finding. Prague has the highest proportion of the population age 60 and older (21 percent) but it also has the lowest unemployment rate (4.2 percent) of any region. Moravskoslezsky has the lowest proportion of the population age 60 and older (16 percent) but one of the highest unemployment rates (14 percent) of any region. The Communist party received its second highest level of support in the Moravskoslezsky region and its lowest level of support in Prague. It may be that economics trumps age. Furthermore, data in this study is aggregated by region. Surveys of individuals such as exit polls would provide a more accurate description of the link between age and voting behavior. Finally, it just might be that individuals who lived most of their life under communism are unwilling to support the party in contemporary elections.

DISCUSSION

Voter turnout in the regional elections (33.6 percent) was very low, especially in comparison to previous elections. Turnout was twice as high in elections for the lower house of Parliament, the Chamber of Deputies, in 1996 (76.4 percent) and 1998 (72.7 percent). Municipal elections also witnessed higher turnout rates of 60.7 percent in 1994 and 45 percent in 1998. The skepticism of certain political parties such as the Civic Democratic party about the creation of regional assemblies as well as voter confusion about
the purpose and functions of the new regions may have contributed to the low turnout rate in the inaugural regional elections. General voter distrust in the political process might be the key culprit. Low turnout in the regional elections does not appear to be an anomaly. Elections for the Chamber of Deputies in June 2002 generated a turnout of 58 percent, which was the lowest level for a parliamentary election since 1989. More than half of the electorate (53 percent) in the Czech Republic is distrustful of political parties, and another 25 percent is skeptical.

The creation of regional governments has the potential to transform a country's political party system. For example, political parties in Germany have often rebuilt their strength in regional elections. Such elections can serve as a springboard for the parties to reassert themselves in national elections. Regional elections in 2000 and parliamentary elections in 2002 provide a first look at the relationship between the new regional system and the political party system in the Czech Republic. The 2000 regional elections hardly served as a predictor of party success in the 2002 elections for the Chamber of Deputies. The Social Democrats rebounded from a disastrous performance in the 2000 regional elections, while the Civic Democratic party failed to capitalize on its strong showing. The Four-Party Coalition quickly unraveled after the 2000 elections, and the Communist party found itself isolated in the political wilderness after the 2000 and 2002 elections.

Although the Social Democrats failed to win a plurality in any of the regional elections, the party won the largest share of the vote (30.2 percent) in the 2002 parliamentary elections. The party's comeback can be attributed to privatizing the three largest banks in the country, getting the nation back on track for EU accession, and restoring the economy to a moderate rate of growth by attracting the largest amount of direct foreign investment of any country in Central and Eastern Europe. Furthermore, the election of Vladimir Spidla as the chairman of the party in the spring of 2001 helped to restore the credibility of the party.

While the Social Democrats ascended in the wake of the regional elections, the Four-Party Coalition went into a downward spiral. The Four-Party Coalition not only excelled in the regional elections but also secured 39 of the 81 seats in the Senate by the end of 2000. The initial success of the Four-Party Coalition demonstrated the ability of political forces to mobilize against the efforts of the Civic Democratic party and the Social Democrats to create a two-party system. By the time parliamentary elections

48 Kraus, "The Czech Republic's First Decade," 54.
49 Ibid., 59.
50 Ibid., 60.
were held in June 2002, the coalition had contracted to just two parties. The debt of the Civic Democratic Alliance, one of two minor parties in the coalition, reached 70 million crown. The Christian Democratic party was particularly concerned about the future of the Four-Party Coalition if the debt remained unresolved. The financial dispute and a debate over the top positions on the candidacy lists resulted in the Civic Democratic Alliance withdrawing from the coalition in January 2002. The Democratic Union, the other minor member of the coalition, merged with the Union of Freedom. Although the coalition of the Union of Freedom and the Christian Democrats only received 14.3 percent of the vote in the 2002 parliamentary elections, the coalition joined with the Social Democrats to form a precarious 101-seat majority coalition government in the 200-seat Chamber of Deputies.

Since the 2000 and 2002 elections, the Communist party has been isolated. The Civic Democratic party and the Four-Party Coalition rejected any cooperation with the Communists in the regional assemblies. The Social Democrats flirted with the Communists but no coalitions emerged. All the regional governors were distributed between the Civic Democratic party and the Four-Party Coalition. Although the Communist party secured a remarkable 18.5 percent of the vote in the 2002 parliamentary elections, the Social Democrats once again avoided forming a coalition with the Communists.

The Civic Democratic party failed to capitalize on its strong showing in the 2000 regional elections. With less than a quarter of the vote (24.5 percent) in the 2002 parliamentary elections, the Civic Democratic party found itself "consigned to play the role of a true opposition party for the first time since its creation." Although Vaclav Klaus resigned as chairman of the Civic Democratic party at the end of 2002, he had no intention of riding into the political sunset. After much political wrangling, parliamentary deputies elected Klaus as the second president of the Czech Republic by a razor-thin margin (142 of a possible 281 votes) in February 2003.

Even though Klaus expressed reservations about the Czech Republic joining the European Union, voters approved a referendum on entry into the EU in June 2003. In each of the 14 regions, more than 73 percent of voters approved the referendum. Voter support ranged from a high of 80.5 percent in the Zlinsky region to a low of 73.8 percent in the Liberecky region. The only bad news was the anemic voter turnout of 55.2 percent. Undeniably, external pressure from the European Union played a major role in the creation of regional assemblies in the Czech Republic, but it is

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52 Kraus, "The Czech Republic's First Decade," 50.
54 Kraus, "The Czech Republic's First Decade," 54.
55 Ibid., 59.
56 Ibid., 64.
57 "Results of the Referendum on Entry into the EU," iDNES.cz, 14 June 2003; http://spravy.idnes.cz/eunie_ref_txt.asp.
58 Ibid.
equally critical to understand the role of domestic politics, particularly the jockeying among the various political parties. The large number of regions and the failure to draw their boundaries along historical lines reflect a clear attempt to limit the power and influence of the new regional governments. Throughout the 1990s, Klaus’ Civic Democratic party (ODS) viewed the creation of regional assemblies as a threat to administrative control from the center and a challenge to the power of ODS. The Czech Social Democratic party and Civic Democratic party attempted to use the electoral law on the regional assemblies as a vehicle to establish a two-party system. The Four-Party Coalition emerged as a counter response to this initiative. Despite their success in the regional elections, the Four-Party Coalition was unable to remain united. Given the shifting party coalitions, strong presence of the Communist party, lack of a dominant party, and voter distrust of the political parties, it may be many years until regional elections serve as a useful guide for party success in parliamentary elections.

For scholars of intergovernmental relations, regional governments in the Czech Republic will continue to serve as a valuable unit of analysis for future studies. Now that the Czech Republic is a full-fledged member of the European Union, regional governments will play a key role in the administration of EU Structural Funds. The funds are designed to redress regional disparities in wealth. The task is particularly daunting in the Czech Republic. Only the Prague region can boast of a per capita GDP that exceeds the EU average. For the remaining regions, per capita GDP ranges from 50 to 64 percent of the EU average. Furthermore, the regional assemblies will continue to grapple with new powers in the areas of education, regional development, transportation, environment, and health care. Finally, future regional elections provide an opportunity to examine shifting party coalitions, party platforms, and campaign strategies.
