

Czechoslovakia, Czech and Slovak Republic

MARTIN BRUSIS

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STATE FORMATION

Compared to most West European nation states, Czechoslovakia was established lately. It emerged from the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy after the First World War and existed until 1992, interrupted by the German annexation and the creation of an independent Slovak state between 1938 and 1945 (Hendrych 1996). The Czechoslovak state was composed of the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic, two territories with distinct historical identities.

The Czech part of Czechoslovakia consisted of three historical regions: Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia. These Czech lands (České země) constituted internal interface territories between the medieval city-belt of Europe and the two great powers that were able to consolidate their territories at the eastern periphery of the city-belt, Austria and Prussia (Flora, Kuhnle, and Urwin 1999). Bohemia experienced the early formation of a state centre at the end of the Middle Ages, facilitated by the Reformation and the Hussite movement. The medieval Kingdom of Bohemia comprised Moravia and Silesia, two principalities that remained under Roman Catholic cultural influence. In 1620, Bohemia suffered a military defeat against the Habsburg Empire, leading to the incorporation of the Czech lands into the Empire.

The Slovak part of Czechoslovakia has not been structured into historically distinct regions. The territory of the present-day Slovak Republic formed a landward periphery of the Habsburg Empire and saw only an incipient medieval state formation. The medieval Great Moravian Empire collapsed when Magyar tribes invaded the Carpat Basin in the 10th century. Over centuries, the Slovak settlement areas formed an integral part of feudal Hungary, the so-called Upper Lands (*Felsővidék*). Having been defeated by the Ottoman army in 1526, the Hungarian Kingdom fell apart and its Western part including the Slovak areas became integrated into the Habsburg Empire.

In contrast with Europe's protestant states of that time, the Habsburg Monarchy did not strive to achieve an all-encompassing administrative integration of its territory. Rather, the linkage between regional administrative and estate structures was retained until 1849 (Caramani 2003, 31). In the 18th century, Queen Maria Theresia and her successor, King Josef II., sought to transform the Monarchic Union of feudal states into a single unified and centralised state consisting of crown lands (Kronländer) (Brauneder 2000, 72). The Czech lands had to gradually transfer their legislative, judicial and most of their administrative powers to the Emperor who, since the Pragmatic Sanction of 1713, held the positions of a King of Bohemia, Duke of Silesia and Margrave of Moravia. In contrast with the Czech lands and their estates, the Hungarian nobility was able to preserve its statehood features against the centralizing reforms of Austrian absolutism.

The French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars as well as the rising economic power and political ambitions of the urban bourgeoisie eroded this system of political rule and its patrimonial underpinnings. The liberal movements and revolutions of 1848 induced the Habsburg dynasty to enter into a process of constitutionalisation and power sharing with the lands. The military defeat against Prussia in 1866 excluded Austria from the formation of the German Reich led by Prussia and triggered a federalisation of the Habsburg Empire (Mastny 2000, 69-71). To consolidate his rule, the Emperor co-opted the Magyar elite through the Austro-Hungarian Compromise (*Ausgleich/kiegyezés*) of 1867. The agreement assigned the Kingdom of Bohemia, the Margraviate of Moravia and the Duchy of Silesia to the territory ruled by Vienna (Cisleithania), while Slovakia fell under the Hungarian Crown (Transleithania). In Cisleithania, the division into crown lands was retained, ensuring a limited autonomy to the Czech lands. In Transleithania, the Magyar nobility developed a centralised state and tried to achieve an ethnic, cultural and linguistic homogenisation in order to create a modern nation. Except from a power-sharing arrangement with its Croat minority, Hungary's leadership refused to grant territorial autonomy to its non-Magyar nationalities.

On the background of the different historical trajectories of Czechoslovakia's territories, the Czech and Slovak national movements legitimized their claim for greater autonomy with territorial and linguistic arguments. First, the right to a nation state was derived from the historical statehood of Bohemia. According to this line of reasoning, the Bohemian estates did not voluntarily abandon their statehood, neither after 1620 nor during the absolutist period (Rychlík 1995, 99). A second set of "modern" arguments for a nation state relied on the distinctiveness of the Czech and Slovak nations manifested in their languages. Lacking a comparable predecessor territory, representatives of the Slovak national movement could base their claim only on the language argument and on the right to self-determination (Bartlová 1995, 162).

Tomáš G. Masaryk, the leading intellectual of the Czech national movement and the first President of Czechoslovakia, tried to integrate the language-based nation-state claims of Czechs and Slovaks by framing nation building as a deliberate and intended political action (Hahn 1998). This action would not just be the consequence of a common language, but would require an ethical consensus among the citizens.

By defining ethical commonalities and political will as the key to a common nation, Masaryk was able to postulate a Czechoslovak political nation that could, in theory, comprise Czech and Slovak national identities and accommodate Czechoslovak citizens of other nationalities.

On 28 October 1918, political parties of the Czech lands and Slovakia, organised in a Czechoslovak National Committee, adopted a law establishing an independent Czechoslovak state. In May 1919, representatives of the Ruthenian national movement declared their resolve to join Czechoslovakia as an autonomous territorial unit. The peace treaties between the Allied Powers and Germany, Austria, Hungary and Poland recognized the new state in September 1919. Czechoslovakia's territory comprised the historic lands of Bohemia, Moravia and a small part of Silesia together with Slovakia and Sub-Carpathian Russia (*Podkarpatská Rus*)ⁱ which both had been part of Hungary. The Constitution of 1920 enshrined the idea of a Czechoslovak nation and a unitary state.

In 1938, the German Nazi dictatorship, purporting to represent the interests of Czechoslovakia's ethnic German minority, negotiated the Munich Agreement with Great Britain, France and Italy that allowed Germany to annex Czechoslovakia's ethnic German settlement areas (Sudetenland). In 1939, Germany occupied the rest of Czech, Moravian and Silesian territory and incorporated it as a "*Reichsprotektorat Böhmen und Mähren*". Slovakia declared its independence and became a vassal state of Nazi Germany (1939-45). Sub-Carpathian Russia was occupied by the Hungarian army.

After 1945, Czechoslovakia was re-established as a socialist state in its pre-Munich borders, except from Sub-Carpathian Russia which was integrated into the Soviet Union. Although the end of the East-West conflict provided a chance to realise the federal state, established in 1969, in a democratic environment, Czech and Slovak political elites decided to dissolve Czechoslovakia on 31 December 1992 (Innes 2001; Musil 1995). Czechoslovakia's socio-economic and ethno-cultural diversity, which had posed a challenge to nation builders in the 19th century, contributed to the contestation and final disintegration of Czechoslovakia in the 20th century.

LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT

In the course of their history, Czechoslovakia, its two successor states and the Czech lands have been divided into three or four levels of government which constitute the main territorial levels in official statistics: lands or republics; regions; districts or counties; and municipalities. The two republics constituted the highest sub-state level of government during the lifetime of the Czechoslovak federation between 1969 and

ⁱ Sub-Carpathian Russia (*Podkarpatská Rus*) was the official name for the easternmost region of the first Czechoslovak Republic, inhabited by ethnic Russians, Ruthenians and Ukrainians. Other names include Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia or Carpatho-Ukraine.

1992. This division was rooted in a division into four lands – Bohemia, Moravia-Silesia, Slovakia and Sub-Carpathian Russia – during the interwar Czechoslovak Republic (1927-1939). The first two lands embodied the continuity of the Czech lands (Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia) in Cisleithania (1867-1918) and in the constitutionalized Habsburg Monarchy (1849-1867).

The regional level of government (*Kreise/kraje*) can be traced back to the state reforms of Maria-Theresia and Josef II in the second half of the 18th century. Historically, regions were rooted in the estate assemblies of feudal society. A division into regions existed until 1867 in Cisleithania and between 1949 and 1990 in Czechoslovakia. In 1949, the National Assembly established 13 regions in the former Czech lands and six regions in Slovakia. The status of Prague was regulated by a special law. In 1960, the number of regions was reduced to seven and three in the two parts of the country, and Prague formed a special territorial unit (Lacina and Čechák 2001, 99).ⁱⁱ In the course of the democratic transition after 1989, the regional level of government was dissolved. The Czech Republic re-established 14 regional territorial units in 2000, and the Slovak Republic formed eight regional territorial units in 1996.

In 1998 and 2002, the Czech Republic and Slovakia introduced regions corresponding to the European Union's Nomenclature of Territorial Statistics. The implementation of this classification system complemented the level of territorial-administrative regions by an additional level of eight (four) large regions in the Czech Republic (Slovakia) that are used for statistical and planning purposes in the context of European Union policies.

In the Czech lands, districts (*Bezirke/okresy*) were established in 1850. After a temporary increase (1855 – 1867), the number of districts remained largely stable until 1938. Transleithania, Slovakia (and Sub-Carpathian Russia) were divided in counties (*župy/megyék*) that rooted in the feudal estate assemblies and existed until 1928. Under Hungarian rule, Slovakia's territory was divided in 18 counties. In 1923, the number of counties was reduced to six and, for the first time, districts were set up in Slovakia (Schelle 2002, 289). The initial division into 79 districts was essentially retained until 1948. Between 1949 and 1960, the Czech and Slovak parts of Czechoslovakia were composed of 180 and 92 districts. In connection with the integration of regions in 1960, the number of districts was reduced in both parts of the country. Between 1990 and 1996, Slovakia's districts were subdivided into 121 sub-districts (*obvody*). The recreation of regions in the Czech and the Slovak Republic engendered the dissolution of districts in 2002 and 2003.

Throughout its history, Czechoslovakia has been characterized by a large number of settlements with the status of a municipality. In the communist system, territorial-

ii Following the creation of the federation, the Slovak National Council dissolved Slovakia's regional units in 1969, but quickly re-established them in 1970 (Lacina and Čechák 2001, 103).

administrative reforms aimed at amalgamating municipalities in order to rationalize public administration. After 1990, many municipalities split into smaller municipalities, partly to revert the previous centralization, partly driven by financial incentives. The reinstatement of regions was intended to address the administrative problems associated with this fragmentation (Illner 1998).

EVOLUTION OF TERRITORIAL-ADMINISTRATIVE UNITS

	Lands (země)	Regions (kraje)	Districts/Counties (okresy/župy)	Municipalities
1848-55	3	11 + 0	112 districts + 18 counties	appr. 12000 +
1855-67		21 + 0	308 districts + 18 counties	
1867-1922			126-141 districts + 17 counties	
1923-28	(-)*	+ 6 large counties	126-141 + 79 districts	+ 3499
1928-38	4		148 + 78	appr. 11500 + 3361 (1946)
1945-48				
1949-60	-	13 + 6 + Prague	180 + 92	appr. 8700 + 3334 (1950)
1960-68	-	7 + 3 + Prague	76 + 33	appr. 4100 + 2700
1969-90	2			appr. 4100 + 2700
1991-92		- + -	76 + 38 + 121 subdistricts in Slovakia	
1993-96				6196 (1993) +

1996-99	- + 8	76 + 79	+ 2867
2000-	14 + 8		appr. 6250 + 2880

Sources: Dostál and Kára 1992, 19-20; Jordan 2001; government data. Czech and Slovak figures are separated by +. * Territorial autonomy for Sub-Carpathian Russia envisaged by the 1920 Constitution, but not implemented.

POLITICAL-ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANISATION

(1) THE CZECH LANDS AND SLOVAKIA IN THE AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN MONARCHY

Until 1918, debates and decisions on the political and administrative structure of territorial units were intricately linked to struggles over the democratisation and modernisation of the Habsburg Monarchy. Decentralising and federalising reforms occurred on the background of the socio-economic cleavage between the emerging middle classes and the landed aristocracy on the one hand, the ethnic cleavage between nation building centres and peripheral nationalities on the other. The liberal revolutions and movements of 1848 induced the Austrian Emperor to accept a constitutionalisation of his powers. The March Constitution of 1849 for the first time assigned legislative powers to the lands. These lands included the Kingdom of Bohemia, the Margraviate of Moravia and the Duchy of Silesia. However, land powers were very limited and the land assemblies essentially remained advisory bodies to the Crown. This initial constitutionalisation was interrupted by a return to neo-absolutist rule (1849-59) that restricted self-government to the local level (Hlavačka 2014).

The powers of lands were reinstated and extended by the constitutional amendment of 1861 (*Februarpatent*) and the ensuing land statutes (*Landesordnungen*) that made every piece of land legislation contingent upon the approval of both the Emperor and the respective land assembly. The land statutes strengthened the status of the lands as units of territorial administration, defining them as “communes of the highest level” (Brauneder 2000, 157). Lands were given both genuine and delegated competences, but the land-level state administration was separated from the Land Assembly and its Executive Board, reflecting a dualist model of public administration. According to this model, the Crown was represented by a Governor (*Statthalter*) while legislative power was vested in the Land Assembly (*Landtag*) which was chaired by the Head of the Land (*Hauptmann*). The dualist model considered the powers of “self-administration” (*Selbstverwaltung*) and state administration as of separate origin and vested these powers in separate tiers of state administration and self-administration.

Since the administrative reforms of the absolutist period, state administration existed on the territorial level of regions. In 1849, the regional offices of state administration were dissolved and two levels of territorial state administration were distinguished: region and district. District offices became responsible for issues of local public order, police, property, infrastructure, business, taxation, education, poverty

administration and health inspection. Regional offices were entrusted mainly with the supervision of district offices.

The March Constitution of 1849 and the first, so-called provisional law on communes (*Gemeinden*) intended to complement the state administration tier by self-governmental bodies. The law envisaged regional, district and municipal communes, but the neo-absolutist restoration blocked its implementation. Parts of the first law survived in a new law regulating the principles of regional, district and local self-administration (*Reichsgemeindegesetz*) that was adopted in 1862. Based upon this framework law, the Czech lands adopted the statutory legislation on district and local self-administration in 1863/64 (Schelle 2002).

However, only Bohemia de facto established district self-administration with genuine competences. Both the Moravian and the Silesian Land Assemblies adopted laws on district self-administration in 1863 and 1871, but these laws were not implemented due to the resistance of ethnic German nationality representatives (Janák 1995, 64-65). In 1867 the competency for regional, district and municipal self-administration issues was transferred from the Reich to the lands. Between 1860 and 1868, the regional bodies of state administration were gradually dissolved,ⁱⁱⁱ and their tasks were transferred to the land governors and the district offices. In addition, the government separated the administrative and judicial functions performed by the district offices of state administration (Urbanitsch 1995, 95). The 1862 law and the statutory legislation of the lands provided the framework for local, district and regional self-administration until the end of the first Czechoslovak Republic, since this legislation remained in force after 1918.

Belonging to the Hungarian part of the Monarchy, the territory of present-day Slovakia was subdivided in 16 counties (*vármegye, župa*). County institutions comprised a Prefect (*főispán*) who represented the King and headed the region's key institutions, a Legislative Committee and an Administrative Committee. The Legislative Committee (*törvényhatósági bizottság*) was composed of major tax payers and elected representatives (Csizmadia, Kovács, and Asztalos 1998, 353). The composition of the Committee and the centralizing influence of the Prefect limited the power of self-government. In contrast with the Cisleithanian dualism, Hungary developed an integrated model of public administration. Counties and towns with municipal status performed self-governmental and state functions, functioning as local/ regional self-government and as offices of the local state administration.

(2) *THE FIRST CZECHOSLOVAK REPUBLIC (1918-1938)*

After Czechoslovakia had become independent, the leaders of the Czech and Slovak political parties initially decided that the Austrian and Hungarian legislation on local,

ⁱⁱⁱ In Silesia, regional offices of state administration had not been re-established after 1849 (Schelle 2002, 37).

district and regional administration should stay in force. The Constitution of 1920 established a unitary state and withdrew any legislative and administrative functions from the land assemblies.

Despite Slovak demands for territorial autonomy, the Constitution did not assign a special status to Slovakia. This was due to the concept of a single Czechoslovak nation used to construct the state and to reject similar claims of Bohemia's ethnic Germans, who formed a larger community than the Slovaks. At the same time, the Constitution envisaged a territorial autonomy for Sub-Carpathian Russia which reflected a commitment Czechoslovakia had accepted in the peace treaty negotiations. Ruthenians, the majority residents of Sub-Carpathian Russia, were entitled to elect their own parliament which was to elect a presidency and to exercise legislative competences for issues of language, education, religion and local government. Ruthenian laws, however, had to be signed and promulgated by the President of Czechoslovakia. Sub-Carpathian Russia was also guaranteed its representatives in the Czechoslovak National Assembly. This territorial autonomy was, however, not implemented until 1938. Rather, the Czechoslovak President appointed a governor to administer the territory (Schelle 2002, 296-297).

In 1920, the National Assembly of Czechoslovakia adopted a law envisaging integrated county and district bodies of public administration in order to replace the land institutions and to overcome the inherited dualism of state and self-administration. The law envisaged the popular election of County and District Representations (*župny/ okresní zastupitelstvo*). The newly established counties were to form economic associations corresponding to the territories of Bohemia, Slovakia and Moravia-Silesia. County and District representations were given competencies in humanitarian, sanitary, social, economic, transport and cultural issues of regional/ local relevance, but were excluded from dealing with "political affairs". However, since this far-reaching reform was perceived as facilitating ethnic German separatism in Sudetenland, the government was given wide discretion concerning the implementation of the law. As a consequence, the government applied the law only in Slovakia (where counties already existed as legacies of the Hungarian system of public administration) and retained the executive boards of the previous land assemblies in Bohemia and Moravia (Janák 1995, 62).^{iv} The district self-administration, which had existed in Bohemia since 1864, was dissolved and replaced by District Administrative Commissions composed according to the results of the parliamentary elections. In Sub-Carpathian Russia, the historical county administration was essentially retained. In effect, the partial implementation of the 1920 law had produced three different systems of territorial administration.

In order to unify Czechoslovak public administration, the 1927 law on the "organisation of political administration" established four lands – Bohemia, Moravia-Silesia,

iv In Silesia, the government replaced the executive board by an administrative commission that consisted exclusively of civil servants appointed by the government.

Slovakia and Sub-Carpathian Russia –, represented by Presidents and Land Representations. Moravia and Silesia were integrated into one land. Slovakia's counties and county associations were dissolved and replaced by a district level of state administration. In Bohemia, District Administrative Commissions were integrated into the district-level state administration.

In the wake of the Munich Agreement and the German annexation of a part of Czechoslovakia, the Czechoslovak government accepted autonomy statutes for Slovakia and Sub-Carpathian Russia. The country was renamed Czecho-Slovak Republic to reflect Slovakia's newly established autonomy. Under the German occupation, all bodies of territorial administration were either dissolved or centrally controlled.

(3) CZECHOSLOVAKIA DURING COMMUNISM (1948-1989)

The Constitution of 1948 endorsed Czechoslovakia's unitary statehood, while conceding that the state was formed by two slavonic nations, the Czechs and the Slovaks. A special status was assigned to the Slovak nation as the Constitution envisaged a Slovak National Council and a Board of Commissioners (*sbor pověřenců*) with executive functions. The Czech nation was not granted an equivalent special status by the Constitution.

The Slovak National Council was given legislative powers in matters of national or regional character, if (1) the material and spiritual development of the Slovak nation required a special regulation and (2) no unified regulation was needed. The following legislative powers were explicitly listed in the Constitution: the development of national culture, education, public health, funds and foundations, municipal and district administration (the merger and separation of municipalities and districts, the change and regulation of their boundaries, and topographic matters), technical questions of local infrastructure, the cultivation of soil except for matters affected by the unitary economic plan, agriculture, small business, statistics and research of particular interest for Slovaks, and issues of child care. The Council's autonomy was, however, restricted insofar as the prime minister was enabled to dissolve the Council upon the proposal of the Government.

The Board of Commissioners was appointed by the central government and entrusted with the implementation of both Slovak legislation and Czechoslovak legislation and executive regulations, except for issues of national defence, foreign policy and foreign trade. The Board was to exercise Czechoslovak government powers in the following areas: general internal administration; financial administration; health; social and labour issues; technical administration; justice; nutrition; agriculture, industry; internal trade; education; culture; information; transport; postal services.

The Constitution established a system of National Committees at the regional, district and local level. Regional National Committees replaced the historical lands. The Communist Party had promoted this system as a modern model of public administration and finally imposed it against the resistance of other parties (Kozák 2000). National Committees consisted of two main bodies, a Plenary and an Executive Board.

Integrating self-administration and state administration, the Committees were to implement state power in municipalities, districts and regions, and to safeguard rights and freedoms of the people. According to the Constitution, National Committees were entrusted with the exercise of powers in the fields of internal administration, culture, education, protection of labour, health, social and financial administration. Each Committee was subordinated to a higher-level Committee and to the Government, thus firmly entrenching central control.

The new Constitution of 1960 retained the special status of Slovakia, but limited the legislative discretion of the Slovak National Council to economic and cultural matters. The legislative powers of the Council were no longer explicitly listed and the Board of Commissioners was dissolved. The Constitution enabled the Council to propose bills to the National Assembly and to support citizens with Magyar or Ukrainian nationality. The Constitution increased the powers of National Committees in education, health care and other fields and entrusted the Committees with economic functions, such as the creation of local or regional enterprises. In addition, National Committees became responsible for supervising the work of the bodies of deconcentrated state administration (Lacina and Čechák 2001, 101).

The centralizing thrust of the 1960 Constitution and the failure of centralized economic planning to sustain high economic growth rates strengthened a reform movement among the Slovak communists that argued for the federalisation of Czechoslovakia. The transformation of Czechoslovakia into a federation became an important aim of the Prague Spring in 1968. In October 1968, the National Assembly transformed the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic into a federation that consisted of the Czech and the Slovak Socialist Republics, both enjoying equal rights and the constitutional status of sovereign states. The constitutional law listed the exclusive competences of the federal level (foreign policy, defence, currency) as well as the competences shared by the federation and its constituent republics, declaring all other issues competences of the republics. Shared competences included planning, finance, prices, foreign economic relations, industry, agriculture, transport, telecommunication, science and technics, labour and social affairs, home affairs, information. For these areas, the federal competences were specified in the constitutional law. The role and powers of the National Committees were not changed, but the right to determine the Committees' organisation was transferred to the Republics.

When the communist system was re-consolidated after the military occupation of Czechoslovakia, the federal organs were strengthened mainly in economic issues by a constitutional amendment in 1970. This constitutional and administrative framework persisted until the collapse of the communist system in 1989.

(4) CZECHOSLOVAKIA AFTER 1989

The democratic transition brought new political elites into power who differed about how to reorganise the federation and the status of its two constituent republics (Kopecky 2001; Musil 1995). In 1990, the Federal Assembly renamed the country Czech and Slovak Federal Republic to emphasize the equality and sovereignty of the two

member republics. A second constitutional amendment abandoned the category of shared competences. Most shared competences and also the previous exclusive federal competence over foreign relations were assigned to the republics. The federation retained exclusive power only over defence, currency, transport and postal service. Having been reconfirmed by the 1992 elections, Czech and Slovak political leaders decided to dissolve the federation and to create independent states. On 1 January 1993, the federation was replaced by two Republics that both were defined as unitary states. Yet the Czech Constitution of 1992 referred to the possibility of establishing lands and mentioned the historical lands in its preamble.

The institutionalisation of democratic local self-government in 1990 had induced the two Republic parliaments to dissolve the previous system of National Committees and their administrative bodies on the regional level. The dismantling of these bodies was seen as a step towards the full democratisation of the country, freeing local self-government from the previous tutelage regime (Illner 1998). The district level of state administration was, however, preserved in so far as the offices of the district national committees continued to function as district offices of state administration. The offices were complemented by assemblies of local self-government delegates in the Czech Republic, while Slovakia did not institutionalise relations between local self-government and the local-level state administration.

The Constitutions of the two Republics envisaged a second level of self-government that was to fill the institutional void left by the abolition of regional-level National Committees. The Czech Republic established regions and directly elected regional self-governments in 2000, based upon laws from 1997 and 2000. Slovakia established regions as units of its territorial structure and state administration in 1996. Legislation on regional self-governments was adopted in 2001 (Mesežnikov and Nižnaňský 2002). In both countries, the recreation of regions occurred in the context of an encompassing reform of public administration that was necessitated not only by the transition to democracy and the rule of law, but also by the preparation for membership in the European Union. EU membership has also led both countries to create planning and statistical regions corresponding to the second level of the Union's territorial classification system (NUTS). However, these NUTS-2 regions have not been institutionalised as units of subnational government.

Institutional arrangements in the two countries were generally similar, but embodied some significant differences (Brusis 2003; Koudelka 2001). Czech regional assemblies were enabled to submit bills to parliament, although the regional institutions were not linked to the second chamber of parliament existing in the Czech Republic. Whereas the Czech Republic opted for a collegiate executive (*rada*) elected by the regional representation (Illner 2012), Slovakia introduced a directly elected Head of Region (*predseda samosprávneho kraja*). The Czech Republic integrated self-administration and state administration, involving the region's assembly and executive board into the work of the regional office, while Slovakia established a fairly strict institutional separation between the regional assembly and the regional office of state administration. Regions in both countries were made responsible for the following issue areas: regional and economic development, territorial planning, regional

transport and communication infrastructure, secondary and vocational schools, regional cultural, social and health institutions, environmental protection and civil protection. The competences of regions were further strengthened and extended, since they were assigned tasks and functions from the district offices of state administration that were dissolved in 2002/04. Slovakia took further steps towards a more decentralised public administration, when it dissolved its regional offices of state administration in 2007 and 2013.

The administrative regions and regional self-government institutions created in the early 2000s have persisted in both the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The scale of fiscal decentralisation has been limited despite the incentives provided by membership in the European Union and access to its significant cohesion policy funds managed at regional levels. However, by creating regional governments with legal powers and financial resources, the two states have also institutionalised political interests in sustaining and continuing decentralisation (Brusis 2014). Regional political representatives have opposed attempts of recentralisation in the wake of the global financial crisis not only by harnessing subnational interest associations. Electoral competition for regional-level political offices has also enhanced the roles of subnational political elites within political parties, contributing to consolidate the administrative reforms.

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