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## Leaders, Managers or Administrators – Mayors in Central and Eastern European Countries

**Abstract:** This paper is the first step to fill a gap in the studies on the position of mayors in European local government systems. The first part of the paper will be devoted to critical analysis of theoretical and methodological studies on the position and selection of mayors. The second part will focus on verifying the proposed hypotheses. In the conclusions, an attempt will be made to present a profile of local democracy in CEE countries.

**Keywords:** *Local Government, CEE Countries, Mayors*

### Introduction

Mechanisms which shape local politics become the object of interest for scholars all over the world. Their research concerning local authorities in the Western Europe brings many interesting conclusions. Observations on stable democracies, both theoretical as well as empirical, can be found in many book publications (Goldsmith, Page 2010, 1987; Back, Magnier&Heinelt 2006, Berg, Rao 2005; Mauritzen, Savara 2002, Hesse 1991). The literature of the subject encompasses case studies presenting elections and work of mayors in particular countries (Goldsmith, Larsen 2004; Copus 2006; Sancino, Castellani 2015; Stanford 2004; Kolk van der, Rallings, Thrasher 2004), but also comparative studies referring to a number of Western European countries (Schapp, Daemen, Ringeling 2009). However, there are very few studies on Central and Eastern Europe, comparative ones or ones that present particular countries (Kuković, 2015, Swianiewicz, 2014). The presentation is to be based on the analysis of the position of local power in OECD countries. It will focus on the variety of formal conditions determining the selection process and the range of competences of representatives of this power.

Local councils in Central and Eastern Europe have functioned for over a decade, together shaping the structures of the territorial government system. This gives us a chance of

undertaking comparative studies. Criteria that can be used in order to delineate the area of Central and Eastern Europe pertain predominantly to history, political changes, as well as unique culture which has developed in these conditions. What connects all these countries is their common past under Soviet control.

The research encompasses 16 countries which are defined as Central and Eastern European Countries (CEECs). They are: Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Montenegro, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

This study does not address South Caucasus countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia), which in fact are not in Europe, but which are often counted as CEECs in definitions of the region. This is caused by the shared experience of leaving behind the Soviet system, as well as them referring to the European cultural heritage. Moreover, these countries ratified the European Charter of Local Governments and are members of the Council of Europe.

Changes initiated in 1990s made it possible for the structures of local government to develop and evolve. The main tool instrumental in this process was the regulations of newly passed constitutions, and subsequently other legislation, as well as ratifying the European Charter of Local Governments. The whole process of forming the local government system took place in the 1990s. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a trend of selecting executive organs in direct general elections appeared and it was followed also by CEECs.

Table 1. Ratification of the European Charter of Local Governments by the countries of Central and Eastern Europe

	<b>State</b>	<b>Entry into Force</b>
1.	Albania	01/08/2000
2.	Bulgaria	01/09/1995
3.	Croatia,	01/02/1998
4.	Czech Republic	01/09/1999
5.	Estonia	01/04/1995
6.	Georgia	01/04/2005
7.	Hungary	01/07/1994
8.	Latvia,	01/04/1997
9.	Lithuania	01/10/1999
10.	Macedonia	01/10/1997
11.	Moldova	01/02/1998
12.	Poland	01/03/1994
13.	Romania	01/05/1998
14.	Serbia	01/01/2008
15.	Slovakia	01/06/2000
16.	Slovenia	01/03/1997

Source: [https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/122/signatures?p\\_auth=ECpJLn8p](https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/122/signatures?p_auth=ECpJLn8p)

The common denominator of the creation, development and functioning of territorial government in CEECs consists in their legacy of leaving behind the Soviet system of public administration and building civil society. Thanks to that, citizens gain the right to participate in public life actively. The development of self-government allowed local communities to have impact on executing power – power which is supposed to meet citizens' everyday needs, but also support their economic, civilizational and cultural development. Thus, local communities should govern themselves to a large extent. Yet, this extent has to be achieved by each community itself, as each community has to learn to use local democracy and local institutions.

All in all, four local government models can be differentiated (Loughlin et al. 2010); they refer both to ideas, as well as the style in which local government structures are shaped in a given country:

- the Franco model of Southern Europe,
- the Anglo-Saxon model,
- the Germanic model of Central Europe (later called the Rhinelandic model),
- the Nordic (or Scandinavian) model.

The data which Loughlin considers in order to categorize a country according to the above division include first of all: the constitutional position of territorial government, the degree of decentralization, the style of conducting local politics and relationships between society and the state.

Thanks to the proposed divisions, also countries of Eastern Europe could be classified. Analyzing the data from Table 2, it seems that in the discussed CEECs the model of one-tier local government is dominant. This is understandable in the case of smaller countries, such as Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Slovenia and Montenegro, in which another tier of local council would be of lesser importance. The two-tier system has been implemented in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Croatia and Romania, which is claimed to have resulted from self-government traditions in these countries. The only country in which three-tier administrative and territorial government has been developed is Poland. Here, as a consequence of the 1998 reform, there are communes (*gmina*), counties (*powiat*), and provinces (*województwo*).

Having analyzed some indicators which are significant for explaining local government models, one can apply certain variables, such as: a) functional decentralization, b) territorial organization, c) financial discretion of local government, d) proportion of horizontal powers. Territorial organization is divided into two variables: the number of tiers of elected local and regional councils, as well as territorial fragmentation. Functional decentralization is a value measured with the percentage of sub-national expenses in the GDP. Financial discretion of local government is measured with three variables: financial decentralization, the system of allocating subsidies, and local government's debt expressed as a percentage of the GDP. Horizontal relationships of power are measured with two variables: the position of mayor in the unit of territorial government and the electoral system in the unit of territorial government. On the basis of these parameters, it can be said that such CEECs as Croatia, Macedonia,

Slovenia, Albania, Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine and Moldavia are very similar when it comes to their local government system. They are all characterized by high territorial fragmentation, low functional and fiscal decentralization, as well as concentration of public power and material sources in the central public administration. Executive power is in the hands of mayors chosen in direct elections, and plays a dominant role in local politics (Swianiewicz, 2014).

Table 2. The structure of local self-government in selected CEE countries

<b>Albania</b>	<b>61 municipalities</b>	<b>12 counties</b>	<b>Two levels</b>
Croatia	550 municipalities,	22 counties	Two levels
Bulgaria	264 municipalities		One level
Czech Republic	6250 municipalities	14 regions	Two levels
Estonia	193 municipalities, 33 cities		One level
Macedonia	84 municipalities, City of Skopje		
Hungary	3175 municipalities	19 counties	Two levels
Latvia	110 municipalities, 9 cities		One level
Lithuania	60 municipalities		One level
Montenegro	21 municipalities		One level
Poland	2479 municipalities, 65 cities with county rank	379 counties, 16 regions	Three levels
Romania	2 861 municipalities 217 towns and 103 cities	41 counties	Two levels
Serbia	174 municipalities and cities		One level
Slovakia	2 792 municipalities and 138 cities	8 self-governing regions	Two levels
Slovenia	211 municipalities		One level

The aim of this article is to analyze selected countries from the region of Central and Eastern Europe, focusing on the position of the executive organ on the lowest level of local government. In order to foreground the core of the discussed issues, two research questions were formulated:

RQ1. What are the similarities in the positions of mayors in the Central and Eastern Europe countries?

RQ2. What is the position of the mayor in the municipal government?

All figures and information have been taken from official websites of the electoral bodies of the countries concerned and subjected to research using the existing data analysis method (desk research).

An ideal type of local government was presented by Mauritzen and Svava (2002) who coined four types of local governance:

- the strong-mayor form
- the committee-leader form
- the collective form
- the council-manager form

This points to a strong position of the executive power, in which the main role is played by heads of territorial government units who control local institutions and resources. They have a considerable impact on the functioning of local institutions which are important for everyday life of local political community, yet they are highly dependent on the central government and they centralize resources thanks to the control they exercise. Without the financial resources, it is really difficult to deal with infrastructure and many other projects on the local level.

In Albania, mayors (Kryetari) are designators of the municipal council's decisions. They guarantee all the decisions and obligations with their own authority. They are authorized to address the council again if a situation requires explaining or considering it anew.

In Bulgaria (Kmet) the mayor manages, coordinates and implements policies accepted by the municipal council. The mayor represents the commune and is responsible for its administration.

The mayor in Croatia (gradonačelnik) is primarily responsible for managing the activity of administrative organs and ensures that the passed regulations are implemented.

In Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, the mayor is chosen in indirect elections by the council. In the first two countries he has both executive as well as legislative powers, being the head of the municipal council.

In Macedonia the mayor (gradonačelnik) is responsible for the whole policy of the commune, administering the most important projects and taking key decisions.

An interesting example is the mayor in Slovakia (starosta or primátor), as – chosen in direct elections – he is both the head of administration as well as the chair of the council.

Seemingly different local councils are in fact very similar in a number of aspects. Czech mayors have been appointed by local councilors and they are heads of the municipal committee and administration, the same happens in Latvia, Lithuania and Montenegro. In Estonia, it is expected that the mayor cannot be the council's chair.

Table 3. Selection procedure – mayors in CEE countries

<b>Selection procedure</b>	<b>Direct elections</b>	<b>Council appointment</b>
Countries	Albania Bulgaria Croatia Hungary Poland Romania Serbia Slovakia Slovenia	Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Czech Republic, Montenegro

Thanks to personalizing the act of election, local communities identify themselves with their region more strongly, and the relationships between the voter and the candidate have become closer. This gives citizens the sense of stability and allows them to trust the

executive power of the commune, additionally increasing the effectiveness and quality of local government's functioning. The elected members of the local government have a strong position, the prestige associated with their functions is higher and decisions can be taken more easily. Generally speaking, direct election of executive organs in territorial government is supported by many. Yet one might worry that cohabitation might occur. This in turn might cause a certain conflict and preclude fulfilling the mayor's duties properly. If the mayor does not have a majority in the local council, this might lead to paralysis of the decision process. A solution to such a situation might consist in awarding the mayor more governance competences.

Examples of the presented countries show a great similarity when it comes to the length of the mayor's term. In 15 countries it is 4 years (the only exception being Hungary). No regulations mention any possible limitations in getting re-elected. Here, Poland will become an exception, as since 2018 the term of territorial government powers will be 5 years long and it will be possible to elect the mayor only for two terms in office.

## Conclusions

This analysis resulted in several conclusions. Central and Eastern European countries employ a variety of mayoral models and selection procedures from Western countries. Among them, there are two possible ways of electing the mayor, that is direct election and appointing him by the council. The direct model dominates, which gives an impression of increasing the importance of the position of the mayor and receiving greater legitimization. The mayor is most often responsible for preparing a long-term political strategy, for financial matters of the local government unit (first of all, its budget). Additionally, the mayor is the head of the municipal organization. Apart from the representative function, the position of the mayor is focused on the governance duties related to administering the local government community.

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