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REGIONAL SELF-GOVERNMENT IN SLOVAKIA IN LONGER-TERM AND INTER-GOVERNMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

Introduction

- now (in 2013) more than 10 years of regional self-government functioning (since 2002) and more than 15 years of current regional borders delimitation (in 1996) in Slovakia
- rising debate - if all original expectations are fulfilled
 - whether regional self-governments efficiently intervene into development of their respective regions; in mitigation of deep social and economic disparities among regions
 - if current position of regions and regional self-government in Slovak public administration system, political life and its perception by citizens suitable
- there are arguments generating doubts and less satisfactory conclusions
- although there are signs that the importance of regions is growing - role in regional development seems still insufficient, position in political life is still non-adequate and wider acceptance of this level by citizens is still missing

Search for grounds of existing weaknesses

- more sources of existing imperfections in regional self-government functioning can be identified

two viewpoints selected

- multi-level governance and intergovernmental relations
 - other levels of government intrusion into the regional self-government functioning; “layer or marble cake” (e.g. Hooghe and Mark 2003, Entwistle et al 2012) organisation of public administration; to which extent intergovernmental relations are developing in favour of regional self-government
- regions/regional government, its stability, and spatial dimension;
 - relations between old and new regionalism, or regional spaces and spaces of regionalisation as presented for example by Paasi (2011), Griffin (2012), or Zimmerbauer and Paasi (2013)

Slovak regional government in brief

- traditional level of government
- regional government introduced after decade of debates in 2002
- led by regional chairperson, regional council – directly elected for four years
- main powers expanded during decentralisation predominantly until 2004, right to adopt by-laws in their own powers, freedom for initiative in other fields
- main powers - education (secondary), social services, regional transport (roads), regional development and planning, regional culture, health and hospitals
- their role should be important under the condition of deep social and economic disparities among regions

Slow strengthening of regional self-government after 1989

- cancellation of old 4 regions and regional institutions – 1990
- early state building since 1993 – preference given to state administration, including regional level – **regional offices of general state administration** – 1996
- later on – **introduction of regional self-government – since 2002**, accompanied by decentralisation in 2002-2004, fiscal decentralisation since 2005
- **cancellation of regional offices of general state administration – 2007**, remained numerous specialised regional offices of the state administration
- **cancellation of specialised state administration at the regional level** – announced since **2013**

outcome - regional self-government is key player at the regional level – but maybe at the first sight – but regional level remained weak

„Dual“ and „layer cake“ model and regional self-government

- general effort to build the governmental structure combining „dual“ (separate lines of state administration and self-government) and „layer cake“ model (vertically separated levels of government with clear responsibilities)
- „duality“ reduced at the regional level

reality of inter-governmental relations is also more complicated

- regional self-government is under permanent **pressure of better established and more influential levels of government** – local self-government and central state - they participate too actively, and intervene strongly into regional governance
- central state is reluctant to progress further in transfer of important powers and resources (e.g. in regional development)

Regional vs local self-governments

- interests of the local self-government are strongly presented within regional bodies and
- local governments involved in regional self-government directly and extensively – e.g. mayors **as regional councillors**,
 - *e.g. in Bratislavský region currently - mayor of Bratislava (Ftáčnik), mayor of Malacky (Ondrejka), mayor of Stupava (Slezák), mayor of Pezinok (Solga), mayors of villages (4), euroMP (Beňová-Flašíková), MPs (Vášaryová, Dostál, Šebej) – **strong penetration/intervention of earlier and better developed governments into regional government***
- all regional chairs are **former mayors** (largest cities), or **MPs**
- especially **local level tries intervene in regional self-government** decision-making and benefit from activities of this level, protect local interests directly – as well - chance for closer collaboration
- on the other hand - it confirms rising importance of regional level

One argument against - participation in regional elections (in %)



	2001	2001	2005	2005	2009	2009
<i>Region</i>	first round	second round	first round	second round	first round	second round
Bratislavský kraj	24	n.a.*	14,5	10,7	19,5	20,2
Trnavský kraj	33,7	36,9	14,5	9,41	20,5	n.a.*
Trenčiansky kraj	21,6	16,2	12,3	7,12	20,6	15,8
Nitriansky kraj	34,7	39,5	27,7	16,2	21,8	n.a.*
Žilinský kraj	23,5	10,9	15,7	9,19	23,7	n.a.*
Banskobystrický kraj	24,2	19,9	18,7	10,7	27,1	18
Prešovský kraj	25,5	18,4	19,5	13,2	26,3	19,2
Košický kraj	21,8	18,1	19,3	10,8	22,9	n.a.*
Slovak Republic	26	22,6	18	11,1	22,9	18,4

* regional chairperson elected in first round

Source Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2010. Regional election statistics.

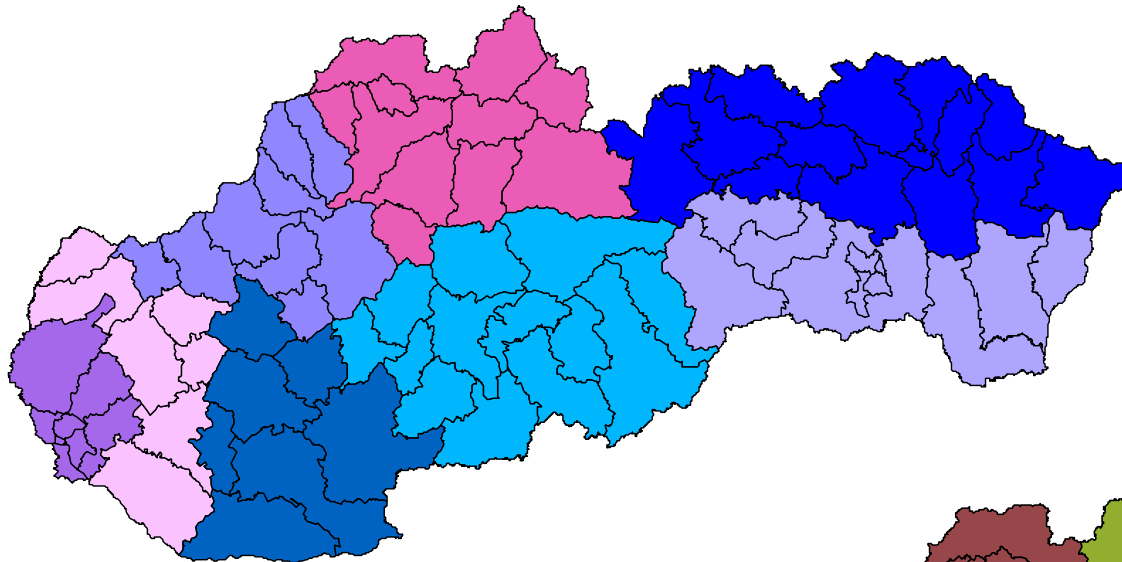
- low electoral participation confirms weaker position of regional government comparing to other levels of government – **legitimacy** challenged

Old and new regions – absence of continuity

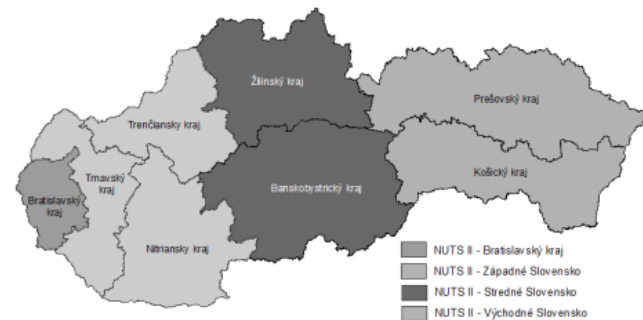
- regions – too frequently territorially, institutionally destabilised in 20th century
- **old regionalism** – traditional historical regions, **new regionalism** – unstable regions since the beginning of CSR – too deep disagreement
- since medieval period 17-21 regions on current Slovak territory, since 20th century move in favour of various „large“ regions
- especially since beginning of the communist period (mostly 3-4 regions) – economic/planning and ideological perspective, no space for issues as identity or self-government, any complex nature, with internal pressures (sub-regions, leading cities)

Borders/size/composition... of regions

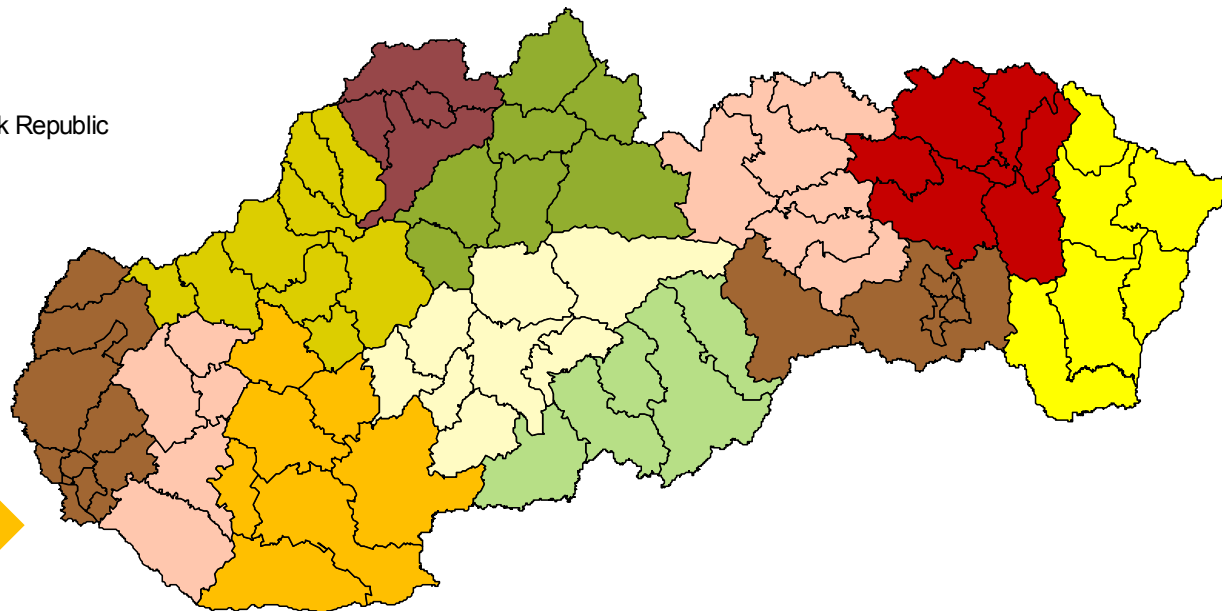
- borders of regions adopted in fact 1996, originally serving state administration
- **8 regions** – within „early state building“ process, politicised, technocratic
- administrative reform at the turn of centuries – proposed more natural **12 regions** – original wider social and political support collapsed and proposal failed in Slovak Parliament
- difficulties in identification with 8 regions, slowly build respect in political life and in public, questionable regional identity, less internal cohesion
- **not suitable time for change** – no will for potential revision – unstable government coalitions, joining EU, financial crisis - lack of political interest
- very rare calls for change during observed previous period - marginal issue



MAP Territorial administrative division of the Slovak Republic (regions and districts valid since 1996)



■ NUTS II - Bratislavský kraj
 ■ NUTS II - Západné Slovensko
 ■ NUTS II - Stredné Slovensko
 ■ NUTS II - Východné Slovensko



MAP Proposal of territorial administrative division of the Slovak Republic (prepared within public administration reform in 2000)

non adopted
administrative
division



Inconsistencies in organisation of public administration system

- reforms not completed and do not fit together, not balanced
- big vacuum between local self-governments (almost 2900) and eight large regions
- unclear role of other traditional level of public administration - districts – now 79 as statistical units
- destruction of old regions, institutions... part of post-communist processes
- attention to „tacit“ values that can be associated with regions had been underestimated
- too big disagreement between old and new regionalism – part of problem leading to less success, less developed governance, less citizens participation

Summary

- **despite strong tradition and respect to regions** – less successful, simplified, preference to less complex understanding
- **old regions** within this – obsolete, not used, suppressed, no role,
- **self-government** and autonomy – prevail concentration on obligatory tasks - although powers and right for initiative – lack of resources, lack of fiscal autonomy – still more administration and not so initiative government,
- **self-government and governance** – better developed vertical inter-governmental relations, but with diminished role of regional level, horizontal governance is less developed - there are good cases, but hardly massive application
- **regional development** – less chance for bottom up endogenous development, still dominant central state perspective and approaches, not sufficient role

Summary/epilogue

- **regions as top-down central state project** – it was and still is destabilised and deinstitutionalised - within centralised political system – regionalisation of parliamentary election system is missing – more electoral districts – more regionalisation of social and political life – less political will
- **current society only slowly have accepted regions/regional self-government** in their current composition of powers/resources as more general level of spatial social organisation – less intensive adaptation – regionalisation in other fields of life is different
- one of the most solid monuments of the controversial Prime Minister V. Meciar since nineties, not substantially reformed
- last weeks – **finally serious political response (PM, MoI)**– plans for reform of regional self-government including territorial division (3, or 3+1?) – surprising, again serving political interests (return to region applied during communism) – revitalisation of districts (72?)

Liptov - old region

Own activities in regional development and tourism

Partners:

- Thermal Park Bešeňová,
- Aquapark Tatralandia,
- Jasná Nízke Tatry
- Skipark Ružomberok
- Liptovský Mikuláš,
- Liptovský Hrádok
- Ružomberok



