

# Power Relations in Local Governments in Central and Eastern Europe

## 1. Introduction

The countries of Central and Eastern Europe threw off communism over ten years ago. Democratic transition in these countries involved both economic and political reform. Although the countries discussed in this paper differed considerably, pre-1990, in their public administration, they had one thing in common: strong state centralisation.

Thus, new local government structures had to be created. This background paper focuses on power relations within institutional structures of the local governments of ten Central and Eastern European countries, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. It intends to serve as a background analysis for the work of T-RC.

This is a comparative paper, across different actors in the local government arena, namely the Representative body, the Municipal Government or Board, the Mayor and the Chief Administrative Officer (hereinafter: CAO). The paper focuses on power relations as expressed and measured in terms of two factors. Firstly, the way in which an actor is elected or appointed, and whether an actor has power to elect or appoint. Secondly, the formal power of an actor will be analysed.

In the first place we established a classification based on the indices 'strong', 'medium' and 'weak' to describe and classify the interaction of actors in local government. In order to make this classification more systematic, however, we drew up, in the second instance, a classification on the basis of a number of competences in local government, directly related to powers of appointment and formal powers (budgetary, legislative, representative).

Together, this combination facilitates a simple comparison of the role of actors in different local government structures. However, it should be stated that this classification does not facilitate a comparison of the *relative* strength of an actor across countries. We do not attempt, at this stage, to establish the relative power of an actor, merely to sketch the power relations within different local government structures, and provide a comparison of this.

Some competences, where there was no significant variance were excluded from our analysis. Thus, the right of the Council to establish its own rules of procedure, an important competence, was put aside, as all Councils in the ten countries have this privilege. Likewise, the Council's prerogative to issue regulations and decrees; and the fact that, even if the electoral system may differ, the Council is everywhere elected by local citizens.

In terms of powers of appointment, it is important to look at the election of the Mayor, the appointment of the municipal government, the appointment of the CAO, committees and staff, and the direction of the organisation of the municipal office.

Under formal powers, the first consideration is the head of the executive and administration. Legislative power, for our purposes, is expressed in the influence on the agenda and in the chairing of meetings of the Council. Budgetary competence is considered, as is representation of the municipality.

The paper proceeds with the separation of (1) powers of appointment and (2) formal powers. It should be noted that not all areas of our analysis could be filled at the present time on the basis of available literature. In this area, as in others, the author, and Tocqueville Research Center, would welcome pertinent comments.

## 2. Powers of Appointment

Analysing powers of appointment in local governments in CEE provides a general, although simplistic picture of inter-actor power relations. If Actor Y feels beholden, or is responsible to Actor X, we can say that this increases the power relations of the latter.

### 2.1. Profile

*Is the Mayor directly elected?*

Direct elections of an individual confer substantial authority in the figure of that one person. This is accentuated on the local level when most residents would know their Mayor, and where the Mayor would generally enjoy respect in the community. Therefore, the Mayor is considered to have stronger power relations if they are directly elected, as their mandate originates in the will of the local community. In half of the local governments, the Mayor is directly elected. In Estonia, Lithuania, Poland and Czech Republic the incumbent is appointed by the Council. In Latvia, there is no Mayor, rather there is an Executive Director and Council Chair who oversee and work with the Council and the departments.

<b>Election of Mayor</b>	<b>Country</b>
Directly elected	Bulgaria Hungary Romania Slovakia Slovenia
Indirectly elected (Council)	Estonia Lithuania Poland Czech Republic
No Mayor	Latvia

*Who appoints the CAO?*

There is a reasonable variance on this question. In the majority of countries (Estonia, Latvia, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Slovenia), the Council is invested with this power. In Hungary this is important, whereas in Slovakia it is less so. This is because of the greater role played by the CAO in local government in Hungary. In Lithuania and Bulgaria, the Mayor has the right of appointment. The Board performs this role in the Czech Republic, and in Romania the CAO is appointed by the Local Prefect, who is in fact the representative of the Central Government.

<b>Appointment of CAO</b>	<b>Country</b>
Mayor	Bulgaria Lithuania
Council	Estonia Latvia Poland Slovakia Hungary Slovenia
Board	Czech Republic
Local Prefect (State)	Romania

*Who appoints municipal staff?*

The body responsible for this varies across the ten countries. In half of them, the CAO has the right to appoint staff. In Slovakia, Slovenia and Bulgaria, the Mayor possesses this power, whilst in Estonia and Romania the Council is responsible for staff. This competence is important in establishing power and influence amongst employees and the administration.

<b>Appointment of Staff</b>	<b>Country</b>
Mayor	Bulgaria Slovakia Slovenia
Council	Estonia Romania
CAO	Czech Republic Hungary Latvia Lithuania Poland

*How is the Municipal Government (Board) appointed?*

Here there is little variance. In all cases where there is a Government or Board to appoint (six), the Council is invested with this power. Thus, it is not a significant variable for this paper. However, it is interesting that through this analysis we can note that four countries (Latvia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria) do not have a Government or Board. In these countries, executive power must be concentrated elsewhere.

*Who can appoint committees?*

On this variable there is only one notable point. In the majority of countries (Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Slovakia), the Councils perform this role. But in the Czech Republic, it is the preserve of the Board, thus strengthening its political role and power vis-à-vis other actors, most notably the Council.

## 2.2. Analysis

On this basis, it becomes clear that some countries do fall into similar categories. Bulgaria has a directly elected Mayor, who appoints both the CAO and staff. Slovakia and Slovenia both have directly elected Mayors who appoint the staff. On the other hand, Estonia has an indirectly elected Mayor and the Council is responsible for the appointment of the CAO and staff. Moreover, in Hungary, Latvia and Poland, where the CAO is responsible for the appointment of the staff, the CAO is appointed by the Council.

In the following analysis, the independent variable of the election of the Mayor will be used. This is because most attention of local government studies focuses on the figure of the Mayor.

	<b>CAO appointed by...</b>			
<b>Election of Mayor</b>	<i>Mayor</i>	<i>Council</i>	<i>Board</i>	<i>Central Government</i>
<i>Directly</i>	Bulgaria	Hungary Slovakia Slovenia		Romania
<i>Indirectly</i>	Lithuania	Estonia Poland	Czech Republic	
<i>No Mayor</i>		Latvia		

Although not directly elected, the Lithuanian Mayor has the power to appoint the CAO. And the CAO does possess some important powers, such as staff appointments. This can be contrasted with the situation in Estonia, where the Council performs the role of electing both the Mayor and CAO which comes closer to a collective form of power-bargaining. Conversely, in Romania the Local Prefect (i.e. Central Government) appoints the CAO. The Mayor is also directly elected, so here you would seem to have a personalisation of power.

	<b>Existence of Board</b>	
<b>Election of Mayor</b>	<i>Doesn't exist</i>	<i>Exists</i>
<i>Directly</i>	Bulgaria Hungary Romania	Slovakia Slovenia
<i>Indirectly</i>		Czech Republic Estonia Lithuania Poland
<i>No Mayor</i>	Latvia	

The absence of a Board is understood to strengthen the position of the Mayor. It is interesting to note in this context that where the Mayor is indirectly elected, there is always a Board. However, perhaps more interesting still is the fact that in the Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia, the non-directly elected Mayor chairs the Board, whereas in the cases where there are direct Mayoral elections, he does not.

From this one can deduce that in these countries the position of Mayor is more important than that of the Board, considering that the non-directly elected Mayor will be able to influence the Board. It is also possible to conclude that where the Board exists and the Mayor does not chair it (Slovakia and Slovenia) this weakens the relative power of the Mayor, even though they are directly elected.

	Staff appointed by...		
<b>Election of Mayor</b>	<i>Mayor</i>	<i>Council</i>	<i>CAO</i>
<i>Directly</i>	Bulgaria Slovakia Slovenia	Romania	Hungary
<i>Indirectly</i>		Estonia	Czech Republic Lithuania Poland
<i>No Mayor</i>			Latvia

From this table, one notes that the Mayor has the right of appointment of staff only where they are directly elected (Bulgaria, Slovakia and Slovenia). Estonia once again falls into the category emphasising the collective nature of power. Even though the Mayor is directly elected in Hungary, the CAO has this right, limiting the Mayor's competences. In fact, in half of the countries the CAO is the holder of this power, with Romania providing the only other exception.

### 2.3. Conclusion

From an analysis of powers of appointment of actors in local government, several trends appear. The Bulgarian Mayor is in a powerful position on all counts. Slovakia and Slovenia also seem to have strong Mayors. The situation in Hungary and Romania is less clear. Although the Mayor does have powers in these areas, they are tempered by the fact that other actors also perform some roles (Hungary: CAO - staff appointments; Romania: State - appointment of CAO). On the other hand, in Estonia the Council would seem to be the most important actor. Apart from the appointment of the CAO, the Czech Republic, Lithuania and Poland appear similar, although this will have to be confirmed or otherwise by subsequent analysis. The Board has strong powers in the Czech Republic, both for the appointment of the CAO and for the establishment of committees. Latvia, because of the absence of a Mayor, must be considered separately.

## 3. Formal Powers

Legislative, executive and budgetary powers form the backbone of any governmental structure. One should additionally consider representation as an important task. Unfortunately, some countries are missing from our analysis as information was scarce.

### 3.1. Profile

#### *Council Chair*

Chairing of the Council, which in all cases is the main legislative body, increases the power of the actor who performs it. If the individual is skilful and experienced, then they can often significantly influence the Council from the position of Chair. In all countries, this role is performed by a politician, as opposed to a civil servant of the municipality.

In Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Romania, it is the role of the Mayor. In four other countries (Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia and Poland) the Chair of Council is elected from within the Council itself, so strengthening this body's power vis-à-vis other actors.

<b>Chair of Council</b>	<b>Country</b>
Mayor	Czech Republic Hungary Lithuania Romania Slovakia Slovenia
Independent	Bulgaria Estonia Latvia Poland

This categorisation essentially confirms some of the previous analysis about the role of the Mayor in some countries. However, it appears out of step that Bulgaria should fall into the second category.

#### *Influencing the Agenda*

Influencing the agenda is a powerful way to exert power over other actors. There is much variance on this point. However, it is of note that in Lithuania, Hungary, Romania and Slovenia, the Mayor performs this role, in addition to chairing the Council, accentuating their power. Conversely, in Estonia and Latvia the Council chair has almost complete control over the agenda. Interesting exceptions to this duality are Slovakia and the Czech Republic. In Slovakia, the Board influences the agenda, whilst in the Czech Republic it is the preserve of the Administration, through the Departments.

<b>Influences Council Agenda</b>	<b>Country</b>
Mayor	Hungary Lithuania Romania Slovenia
Council Chair	Bulgaria Estonia Latvia
Board	Slovakia
Administration	Czech Republic

*NB: Poland is missing from this analysis, due to lack of information*

#### *Budgetary Competence*

Submitting and approving the budget are the keys areas of competence here. And when it comes to approving the budget, in nearly all cases, the Council has this power. The exception is the Czech Republic, where the Board has competence. This emphasises the role of government, with controlling finances being one of the most important areas of competence in local government. As for submission of the budget for approval, the actor responsible varies considerably. In the Czech Republic, the Council is once again sidelined, as the Departments are responsible, whilst in Latvia, the Council is responsible itself, and in Estonia, a powerful Audit Committee, consisting of politicians, submits. In Hungary, Slovenia, Romania and Bulgaria, this is the preserve of the Mayor.

<b>Submission of the Budget</b>	<b>Country</b>
Mayor	Bulgaria Hungary Romania Slovenia
Council (including sub-committees)	Estonia Latvia
Administration	Czech Republic
Board	Lithuania

*Cessation veto*

Where there is a system of vetoes in place, this influences power relations and the need for agreed solutions to problems. Such a mechanism does not exist in all countries. Where it does, the strength of the actor invested with this right is underlined. Thus, in Bulgaria, Hungary, Lithuania and Slovakia it is interesting to note that the Mayor can reject decisions by the Council. In Romania, the CAO, appointed by the Local Prefect, has this right.

<b>Cessation veto</b>	<b>Country</b>
Mayor	Bulgaria Hungary Lithuania Slovakia
CAO	Romania
No veto	Czech Republic Estonia Latvia Poland Slovenia

*Representation of the Municipality*

The public face of the Municipality and with the power to negotiate with external bodies means that representation plays an important role. In all but two cases, the Mayor is the representative. However, in Latvia the Council chair has this right, understandable when one remembers that the Latvian system does not include a Mayor. And in Romania, the State-appointed CAO represents local government. This increases the CAO's role, and hence power, in local government in Romania.

*Head of the Executive*

The holder of this power is essentially uniform across all ten countries - the Mayor. The only exception is in Latvia, where there is no Mayor, and the CAO (in Latvia, the Executive Director) is the head of the executive. This emphasises the point that the Latvian system should be viewed as being distinct from the other local government systems.

*Head of Administration*

In Lithuania, Bulgaria and Hungary, the CAO is the head. The Mayor is the head of the administration in half of the countries (Czech Republic, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia). This suggests a larger political role for the Mayor and could be interesting to research further. However, it does not prove to be a significant variable in our analysis.

### 3.2. Analysis

From the profiles above, one notes that, as for powers of appointment, it is extremely difficult to determine a small number of types from analysing a limited, although important, number of formal powers. In the analysis below, the Chair of Council is used as the independent variable as it distinctly separates two groups of countries.

	<b>Cessation veto</b>		
<b>Chair of Council</b>	<i>Mayor</i>	<i>CAO</i>	<i>None</i>
<i>Mayor</i>	Hungary Lithuania Slovakia	Romania	Czech Republic Slovenia
<i>Member of Council</i>	Bulgaria		Estonia Latvia Poland

Two clear types are discernible from this table: those countries where the Mayor is both chair of council and has a cessation veto (Hungary, Lithuania and Slovakia); and where the Chair of Council is not the Mayor and no-one possesses a veto (Estonia, Latvia and Poland). To some extent this reflects earlier analysis regarding the central role played by the Mayor in Hungary, Lithuania and Slovakia; and the more collective nature of governance in Estonia, Latvia and Poland. The position of Romania shows the sharing of real power between the Mayor and CAO. As opposed to powers of appointment, here we note that the Bulgarian Mayor does not appear in the strongest category. The Czech Republic and Slovenia provide examples where the Mayor does chair the council but does not have any form of veto on council decisions.

	<b>Submission of Budget</b>			
<b>Chair of Council</b>	<i>Mayor</i>	<i>Council</i>	<i>Administration</i>	<i>Board</i>
<i>Mayor</i>	Bulgaria Hungary Romania Slovenia		Czech Republic	Lithuania
<i>Independent</i>		Estonia Latvia		

When the submission of the budget is looked at, Hungary once more appears in the 'strong Mayoral' position, this time accompanied by Bulgaria, Romania and Slovenia, all three often present in this category. Also repeated is the grouping of Estonia and Latvia in a non-Mayoral position. The power of the administration in the Czech Republic should be noted.

Our analysis here suffers from an absence of information about Poland and Slovakia.



	<b>Influences Council Agenda</b>			
<b>Chair of Council</b>	<i>Mayor</i>	<i>Council Chair</i>	<i>Administration</i>	<i>Board</i>
<i>Mayor</i>	Hungary Lithuania Romania Slovenia		Czech Republic	Slovakia
<i>Independent</i>		Bulgaria Estonia Latvia		

*NB: Poland is missing*

This third table confirms the first two, in that Hungary once more appears in the top-left category. In Lithuania, Romania and Slovenia the Mayor influences the agenda, as well as chairing the Council. Estonia and Latvia once again appear in the same category. They are joined by Bulgaria, where it appears that the Council has strong power relations. The Czech Republic and Slovakia emphasise their difference with the other countries, with the importance of the administration and board. Especially in the case of the Czech Republic, there seems to be a noticeable trend in this direction.

### 3.3. Conclusion

Some countries appear in similar categories in all three tables. Hungary's Mayor has strong power relations, whereas Estonia and Latvia are similar and are both characterised by collective rule. The administration comes to the fore in the Czech Republic. It is less easy to characterise Bulgaria, Lithuania, Romania and Slovenia. Bulgaria seems to have a strong Council, Lithuania to have a strong Mayor-Board duality. Likewise, Romania with the Mayor and CAO, who is responsible for the representation of the municipality. Slovenia has a strong mayor, but whose powers are well-checked by the council. Poland and Slovakia are difficult to place due to lack of information.

## 4. Conclusions

In concluding, it should be noted that this background paper did not set out to constitute a complete analysis of the institutional structures of, and power distribution in local government in the ten EU candidate countries of Central and Eastern Europe. We focussed exclusively on powers of appointment and some formal powers of an actor.

Estonia appears to give a prominent role to the Council when one studies both factors. Under powers of appointment Bulgaria clearly emphasises the role of the Mayor, whereas formal powers highlight the Council. Hungary is difficult to classify on the basis of the first analysis but clearly fits a strong Mayoral type under formal powers. Lithuania, Romania and Slovakia tend towards both Bulgaria and Hungary across a range of issues. As does Slovenia, in the sense that the powerful role of the Mayor can be seen in both categories. The Czech Republic and Poland are similar in the first analysis and more information would clarify this in the second section. Finally, although under formal powers it is similar to Estonia, Latvia can be considered apart because of the lack of a Mayor.

Future research in this area should aim to investigate additional competences, by adding new factors to enable a more general typology to be established. In particular, the supervision of the municipal administration should be considered. This would provide a more accurate and sophisticated picture of the situation in each country.

### Sources

Horvath, T (Ed.), *Decentralization: Experiences and Reforms*, Volume 1, LGI, Budapest, 2000.  
Kandeva, E (Ed.), *Stabilization of Local Governments*, Volume 2, LGI, Budapest, 2001.