Bulgaria

Self-rule

INSTITUTIONAL DEPTH AND POLICY SCOPE

Bulgaria is a unitary state with a three-tier governance structure: the central government, oblasti (regions), and 264 obshhtini (municipalities). In 1991 Bulgaria’s first democratic constitution inherited from the communist era nine deconcentrated oblasti, but in 1999, the government redrew the boundaries to match the twenty-eight okrugi (districts) that had existed until 1986 (Council of Europe: Bulgaria 1997; Drumeva 2001).

Although oblasti have a basis in the constitution, they do not exercise autonomous authority. They are administrations that implement national and European regional policy and other national policies in the region, and that are constitutionally responsible to “ensure harmony between national and local interests” (C 1991, Art. 142; Law No. 77/1991, Art. 71; Committee of the Regions 2005).¹

The city of Sofia is the capital of Bulgaria and the city’s territorial borders coincide with those of one of the 28 oblasti but the city and oblast governments are not consolidated.² The law on the administrative territorial structure determines that Sofia and cities with more than 300,000 inhabitants shall have wards (gradski rayori) (Law No. 63/1995, Art. 10). There are 24 wards in Sofia, six wards in Plovdiv and five wards in Varna but these cities have similar authority as other municipalities (Council of Europe: Bulgaria 1997, 2011; Law No. 77/1991, Art. 8).

In 2000, in order to gain access to European Union (EU) pre-accession funds, six planning regions were set up (Vraykova 2006; Minkova 2007). The Regional Development Act in 2004 clearly stipulates that development regions “shall not constitute administrative-territorial units” (Law No. 14/2004; Yanakiev 2010). Still, the planning regions have incipient governance in the form of a regional development council which consists of representatives from eight ministries, the governors of the oblasti comprised within the respective region, one representative from each of the national employer and employee organizations, and representatives of the obshhtini. The council is chaired by the governor of one of the oblasti (Council of Europe: Bulgaria 2011; Law No. 93/2009, Art. 18; Minkova 2007; Troeva 2017). The regional representatives do not constitute a majority, and there is also no corresponding administration. These regional development councils fall short of being counted as a regional government.²

The only level with an administrative capacity is the deconcentrated oblasti (Law No. 93/2009, Art. 4). In response to EU regulations for structural funding, each oblast has a development council. The oblast development council can only deliberate and advise on policies with regard to the oblast development strategy (Council of Europe: Bulgaria 2011; Law No. 93/2009, Art. 22.4; Troeva 2017).

¹ Decentralization reforms have mainly benefited obshhtini (municipalities) which, since 2003, are allowed to set the rate of local taxes (Bobcheva 2007; Nenkove 2014; Nikolova 2011; Savov 2006).
FISCAL AUTONOMY
Oblasti are funded by the central government (Law No. 77/1991, Art. 69; Markiewicz 2007: 45). The oblast development councils are reliant on intergovernmental transfers from central and local government and the EU (Law No. 93/2009, Art. 22; Tchavdarova, Ivanoc, and Savov 2002: 172).

BORROWING AUTONOMY

REPRESENTATION
The oblast governor is appointed by the national government, and vice-governors are appointed by the prime minister (C 1991, Art. 143.2; Law No. 77/1991, Art. 69.3). Since 2009, oblast development councils are comprised of the mayors of all obshtini within the respective oblast, one representative of the municipal council of each obshtina, and a delegated representative of the national organizations of employers and of employees. The councils are chaired by the governor (Law No. 93/2009, Art. 22.2).

Shared rule
There is no shared rule for oblasti and oblast development councils.

Primary references

Secondary references


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## Self-rule in Bulgaria

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