

## 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 *obshtini* (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).<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>β</sup> 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 *obshtini*. 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.<sup>β</sup>

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).

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<sup>1</sup> Decentralization reforms have mainly benefited *obshtini* (municipalities) which, since 2003, are allowed to set the rate of local taxes (Bobcheva 2007; Nenkov 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

*Oblasti* and *oblast* development councils have no borrowing powers (Law No. 77/1991, Art. 69.1 and No. 93/2009, Art. 22; Markiewicz 2007: 45; Tchavdarova, Ivanoc, and Savov 2002: 172).

## 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.

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## Self-rule in Bulgaria

			Institutional depth	Policy scope	Fiscal autonomy	Borrowing autonomy	Representation		Self-rule
							Assembly	Executive	
Oblasti		1991-2008	1	0	0	0	0	1	
		2009-2018	1	0	0	0	1	2	

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