

**Power and coordination:
Decision-making and influence in post-communist governments**

By

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1. Replacing the party state

With the collapse of communist governments in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the structure of decision-making that had characterized the communist system was severely challenged and altered. Reflecting a combination of the balance and character of the political forces on a historical background, the countries embarked on the project of changing the formal structure of government by writing and adopting new constitutions, thus creating new avenues of power, influence, coordination and decision making (Johannsen, 2000). The Communist Party, who behind the formal communist constitutional structures had de facto been the coordinating center of government, was thrown out of power. So not only was the formal system of influence and decision making changed; changing realities on the ground created a completely new environment in which the state had to operate.

Reflecting a natural development, the focus within the social sciences upon these processes has changed in the last decade. A first, explaining the sudden collapse of communism and the resulting struggles for democracy had primacy, as reflected in the deliberate writing of constitutions (Geddes, 1996; Frye, 1997; Johannsen, 2000). Second, once democracy had been established and having exhausted the long discussion over actor-driven democratization, fresh insights into the development of civil society and its relation to the state were published. The authors used a variety of data gathering methods and analytical tools, not only in the debate over the consolidation of democracy but also, and increasingly, in discussions about state capacity (Gibson, 2001; Bernhard, 1996; Howard, 2000). Finally, reflecting concerns not only about the 'withering away of state' but also the more mundane issues of how to turn policy into reality, interest was redirected towards the state administration. Penetrating contributions in a special issue of the *Journal of European Public Policy* (Goetz & Vollmann, 2001; Zubek, 2001; Evans & Evans, 2001, Meyer-Sahling, 2001; Goetz, 2001) have sought to discover administrative reform trajectories and decision-making processes as well as their feed back into the reform process by identifying communalities and differences, ultimately providing solid policy advice (see also Nunberg, 2000). The debate over cabinet composition, executive structures and administrative reform has in particular highlighted the Europeanization process, a process by which east European public administrations become 'modern', with much western assistance and pushed by the conditionality of the enlargement process of the European Union.

Combining these three bodies of literature, the explorative purpose of this paper is an attempt to model the patterns of power and coordination within the post-communist governments as they have developed in the last decade. Based on a survey of more than 900 core executives in 15 post-communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union,¹ the paper uses a three tiered perspective on the state and its administration. The first reflects influence and decision-making fora at executive legislative level. The second examines the coordinating center within the executive at departmental level, and the final tier looks into

the issue of external relations to non-state actors and the degree of openness within the administrative system and toward non-state actors. Specifically, the paper addresses: (1) where the most relevant decision-making forum is located. (2) The degree to which coordination within the government is centralized in one agency, and (3) which external actors the executive prefer to rely upon and how concerned interests are coopted into the process of policy formulation. Balancing the debate between constitutional properties and Europeanization, we will throughout the paper focus on the superstructure of the constitution (the formal choice between presidential or parliamentary systems) and whether the countries are becoming members of the European Union.

2. Influence and power

We asked the respondents to identify the most important *formal* decision-making forum and then followed up by asking them to name the most *relevant* decision-making forum. The recoded answers are reported in Table 1, showing a marked difference between countries that report the circle around the president/or the presidential administration as the most relevant forum and those where the presidency is less important but where relevance is instead located within the government. Thus, for example, more than half of the Kazakh respondents believe the presidency to be the relevant forum, whereas this option was not chosen in Estonia, Latvia and Hungary. In these countries the government cabinet or the PM’s office seems more relevant. In Poland no less than 86 percent assign relevance to the government and correspondingly few assign relevance to the parliament and even fewer to the presidency.

Table 1: The most relevant decision- making forum

	Estonia	Latvia	Lithuania	Hungary	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Mongolia	Poland	Georgia	Armenia	Azerbaijan	Moldova	Slovenia	Czech R.	Bulgaria
Pres.	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.0	54.0	51.9	21.9	1.1	51.9	46.3	51.7	43.8	7.2	0.7	7.5
Gov.	65.5	70.4	78.9	75.5	31.5	35.0	56.3	86.8	21.5	41.4	36.1	31.5	79.6	66.4	70.3
Parl.	25.6	22.5	17.9	16.5	12.4	6.4	19.6	6.8	6.7	6.5	4.7	17.6	10.2	22.4	20.6
Other*	8.9	7.1	2.7	8.0	2.0	6.7	2.1	5.3	19.8	5.8	7.6	7.1	2.8	10.5	1.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.1	100.0	99.9	100.0	99.9	100.0	99.9	100.0	100.1	100.0	99.8	100.0	100.0

**other covers for example ‘Gray Cardinals’ and various political & economic clubs*

Nonetheless, both the presidency and the government are seats of executive power and the overall pattern is that in relation to the executive structures the legislature tends to be downplayed as a relevant forum for decision-making. There are important distinctions in the perceived relevance of parliament as a decision-making forum, however. The parliaments appear to be much more relevant in the Baltic States, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Bulgaria,

Moldova and Mongolia than in Poland and the Caucasian countries. The pattern is evidently neither related to the size of the country, nor straightforwardly related to multipartism or to the process of ‘returning to Europe (EU)’.²

Table 2: The Most relevant decision-making forum by constitutional choice

	Parliamentarism	Presidentialism (incl. semi-pres.)	Total
President (Administration)**	1.6	33.1	22.6
	5	10	15
Government**	71.5	48.9	56.5
	5	10	15
Parliament**	19.4	11.9	14.4
	5	10	15

** *Difference in means is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed) - One Sample T - Test*

Table 2 compares the averages of relevance score by type of constitutional system.³ It is perhaps not surprising that the presidency is more relevant in presidential than in parliamentary systems. Furthermore, reorganizing data in this way reveals the overall dominance of the executive structures. There is less than a 10 percentage point difference between the two types of constitutional systems in the relevance of these two ways of organizing executive power. Conversely, the perceived relevance of the parliament is considerably lower, but there is an important difference in that parliament is perceived as being more important in parliamentary systems than in presidential systems.

This analysis not only points to the correspondence between the choice of constitution, to some degree confirming the formal structures, but perhaps even more interesting, paints a pattern of overall executive dominance that reflects the popular perceptions of parliaments as ‘debating clubs’, as reported in the New Democracies Barometers and New Baltic Barometers.⁴ For example, in 1996 more than 60 percent of Lithuanians preferred a strong leader over parliamentary rule. This preference was shared by 49 percent of Latvians, 44 percent of Estonians and 32 percent of Poles, while ‘only’ 13 percent of the Czechs preferred a strong leader. Moreover, by the mid 1990’s only Slovenians expressed more trust than distrust in their parliament.⁵

3. Co-ordination and Control: New coordination centers within the administration

Focusing on the second tier we asked which department or agency should be considered to be the core within the administration. We asked that the interviewees name it and gauge to what extent a ‘supreme’ agency or department with cross-cutting responsibilities existed. This question partly corresponds to the second aspect of critical areas of administrative performance formulated by Nunberg (2000: 2), that is, whether the necessary institutional infrastructure exists at the center of government to coordinate policy formulation and policy making.

Table 3 shows that in the majority of the countries, 11 out of 15, the Ministry of Finance is considered to be the core, probably as a function of both financial oversight and assistance and because (if not in all, then) a majority have experienced severe financial distress and shortages of resources. However, the frequency with which the Ministry of Finance is mentioned varies a great deal. Thus, among Czech and Polish respondents more than 9 out of 10 point to the Ministry of Finance as the core within the administration, whereas less than half of Georgians do so. In three of the remaining four countries the respondents name the presidential administration, whereas the ticket is evenly divided in Armenia between the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Justice and the Presidential Administration.

Table 3. The effective number of core agencies with the administration.¹

	% highest	Effective number	Core Ministry
Estonia	87.8	1.28	Ministry of Finance
Latvia	88.2	1.28	Ministry of Finance
Lithuania	84.3	1.40	Ministry of Finance
Hungary	83.9	1.39	Ministry of Finance
Kazakhstan	47.6	2.61	Presidential Adm.
Kyrgyzstan	66.7	2.04	Presidential Adm.
Mongolia	62.7	2.16	Ministry of Finance
Poland	91.2	1.20	Ministry of Finance
Georgia	48.0	3.31	Ministry of Finance
Armenia*	17.9	4.73	MOF, MOJ and Presidential Adm.
Azerbaijan**	26.0	2.52	Presidential Adm.
Moldova	50.0	3.18	Ministry of Finance
Slovenia	60.8	2.40	Ministry of Finance
Czech R.	95.7	1.09	Ministry of Finance
Bulgaria	77.6	1.64	Ministry of Finance

1. There are problems in the data reported. In Azerbaijan, for instance, 56 percent of the respondents have not directly identified a core agency. If we assumed that all of them would have name the presidential administration, the effective number of core agencies would decline from 2.52 to 1.45, indicating that the presidential administration plays a larger and more central role in policy co-ordination.

*Other: 33.3 %, **Other: 56.0 %. Alternate calculation with "Other" as Presidential adm.: 1.45

When standardizing the responses to gauge the extent of overall coordination and oversight, it is possible to calculate the ‘effective number of core agencies’ using the formula

$$N_{CA} = 1/\sum p(i)^2$$

where N_{CA} is the effective number of core agencies, p_i the fractional share of the i -th component (agency named, in our case) and Σ (sigma) the summation of all components.⁶ Where responses are divided among many agencies, the summation of all components will tend toward 0, and when many have named the same agencies, the summation will tend toward 1. As the effective number of core agencies is calculated as 1 divided by the summation, a high concentration will

be reflected and approximate 1. A hypothetical example is where three agencies are named equally often (each by 1/3 of the respondents). This will result in an effective number of core agencies of 3.

The second column in Table 3 reports the effective number of core agencies, offering a measure of how concentrated co-ordination is within the administrative system of each country. Corresponding to the high degree of respondents naming the Ministry of Finance in the Czech Republic, the effective number here is calculated to be 1.09, whereas oversight is split between more than 3 agencies in Moldova. The concentration into a single or a few coordinating core agencies is associated with attitudes to interdepartmental exchange of information. A correlation between N_{CA} and the index that measures whether the executives consider exchange of or requests for information acceptable shows a significant correlation; accept declines with a rising effective number of core agencies.⁷ While this was to be expected, as a core cannot function effectively without being fed by other departments, the result also lends credence to the argument upon which Nunberg (2000) has based her analysis. Furthermore, a simple means analysis shows significant differences between the countries about to join the European Union in 2004 and those that so far remain outside the EU. In the first case, the flow of information is deemed more acceptable than in the latter case.

However, returning to Table 3 it appears that the concentration is not related to the size of the country, but two competing explanations remain to be tested (Table 4). Thus, this time we find a significant difference with regard to both constitutional format and the EU status of the countries in question.

Table 4 shows significant differences according to EU-status and chosen constitutional form. The core is on average much more concentrated in EU countries and in parliamentary systems than in non-EU and presidential systems. However, subjecting these results to a stronger test (GLM-univariate)⁸ with the effective number of core agencies as the dependent variable gives a puzzling picture. In general, the analysis seems to confirm the EU effect. So, on the one hand EU-status appears to override the effect of the constitutional format, turning this insignificant, but on the other hand, the interaction between the two variables demonstrated that parliamentarism may indeed be associated with the same effect. However, this effect can only be estimated as the sample of cases does not include non-EU parliamentary systems (Table 4).

Table 4 raises a number of questions concerning the effect of Europeanization with its attendant call for administrative oversight and conditionality enforced and supported through the enlargement process and various EU and World Bank projects with technical assistance to transfer and model administrative reforms. However, had it not been for the Slovenian case, a control with a generalized expression for modernization would probably render the EU and/or the constitutional effect insignificant. Thus, the issue of causality may be questionable in the sense that a majority of the countries that are to become members of the EU have adopted

parliamentary systems and the EU entrees are also by far the wealthiest in our sample. To develop the issue of Europeanization requires further detailed comparative case studies. Here it is recommended to include Poland and/or Lithuania – the only two EU-countries that have adopted (semi) presidential systems.

Table 4: The effective number of core agencies by constitutional form and EU-Status

	Parliamentary	Presidential	Total*
EU	1.49	1.30	1.43
	5	2	7
Non-EU	N/A	2.77	2.77
	0	8	8
Total*	1.49	2.48	2.15
	5	10	15

* *Between group difference in means is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed) - One Sample T – Test.*

Note: A Scheffe post-hoc test shows significant differences between parliamentary EU countries and presidential non-EU countries at the 0.05 level.

4. Meeting the society: openness and the external agents

The state does exist nor act in a vacuum. This insight comes not only from the state literature found in development studies (Evans,1995) or from the related literature on state capacity (Weiss, 1998), but is evident in new archive studies that show that even Stalin’s Soviet Union have to factor in demands and responses from society (Kulavig, 2004). Thus, while it may be fruitful to employ the perspective that some states can be more or less embedded in, or more or less autonomous from society and distinguish between states having more or less capacity, we find beneath these concepts and analytical distinctions at least two fundamental premises: (1) the praxis of cooperation with (concerned) interests in society, and (2) the way in which this cooperation is institutionalized in relation to the state apparatus. Furthermore, agencies or decision makers do not always have sufficient information to process an analysis in-house but have to rely on information from external agents.

Multiple questions were asked to tap into the relation between the state and society. Table 5 paints a picture of decision makers who prefer to rely on information from academic specialist instead of basing decisions on information from NGOs, political advisors and political parties. Academic specialist – probably favored for their independence as much as for the knowledge and the legitimacy associated with them – come handy in Eastern Europe. Thus, between 59 percent (Georgia) and 92 percent (Slovenia) of the executive prefer to rely on or have relied on academics for advice. The preference, or rather lack thereof, for advice from the political parties is hardly surprising, but the use of government advisors certainly is. More than a fifth mention political advisors, so it would seem that either in-house capacity is developing or – alternatively – that political appointees abound. Driving a stake through the argument that the non-state sector is without influence and civil society not yet fully up to speed, it should be noted that

Table 5: External actors relied upon/prefer to rely upon for information. Pct. (N)

	Estonia	Latvia	Lithuania	Hungary	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Mongolian	Poland	Georgia	Armenia	Azerbaijan	Moldova	Slovenia	Czech R.	Bulgaria	Total	
Political Advisors (gov. employ)	13 26.0	19 38.0	15 28.3	8 24.2	7 23.3	11 30.6	8 7.8	5 13.9	33 33.0	23 23.0	24 24.0	16 20.3	6 11.8	0 0	11 13.8	199 20.9	950
Political Parties	22 44.0	12 24.0	4 7.5	17 50.0	0 0	4 11.1	1 1.0	1 2.8	17 17.0	3 3.0	10 10.0	4 5.1	9 17.6	5 10.2	5 6.3	114 12.0	951
Academic Specialists	36 72.0	36 72.0	46 86.8	27 79.4	18 60.0	16 44.4	84 81.6	27 75.0	84 84.0	59 59.0	55 55.0	59 74.7	47 92.2	37 75.5	59 73.8	690 72.6	951
NGO specialists (NGO employ)	22 44.0	20 40.0	26 49.1	16 48.5	3 10.0	13 36.1	31 30.1	12 33.3	52 52.0	31 31.0	16 16.0	40 50.6	19 37.3	27 55.1	46 57.5	374 39.4	950

Table 6: Praxis for cooperation by form of cooperation with concerned interest is the process of policy formulation

		Institutional forums			Total	
		Permanent	on ad hoc basis	depending on character of the case	(N)	Pct.
Praxis for cooperation	0	50.0	25.0	25.0	(12)	100.0
	1	25.4	22.5	52.1	(71)	100.0
	2	30.6	25.9	43.5	(170)	100.0
	3	31.9	26.8	41.3	(254)	100.0
	4	42.6	34.3	23.1	(169)	100.0
	5	40.0	23.6	36.4	(55)	100.0
Total	(N)	(251)	(202)	(278)	(731)	100.0
	Pct.	34.3	27.6	38.0	(731)	100.0

Note: Gamma: -0.164; Asymp. Std. error: 0.044; Approx. T: -3.709; Approx. Sig.: 0.000

many – ranging from 10 percent (Kazakhstan) to fully 57 percent (Bulgaria) – mention NGO specialists as a source of information and advice.

The role of the non-state sector is further questioned in Table 6, which shows that almost a third have established a permanent forum for discussion and cooperation to bring non-state actors into the process of policy formulation. Three out of 10 would bring in non-state actors on an ad hoc basis, while almost 4 out of 10 readily concede that this ‘depends on the case’. Asking further questions about the praxis, i.e. factual experience with cooperation, one would expect that situations with permanent bodies also imply more experience. However, even if there is a significant correlation, it is evidently not very strong, indicating that established and permanent fora might after all not lead to cooperation in praxis.

Table 7. Praxis for cooperation by constitutional system and by EU-Status.

	Parliamentarism	Presidentialism (incl. semi-pres.)	Total
Level of practice of cooperation	3.20	2.89	3.00
	5	9	14
	EU	Non-EU	
Level of practice of cooperation**	3.25	2.81	3.00
	6	8	14

** *Difference in means is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed) - One Sample T - Test*

When the actual praxis for cooperation is checked against the question about form of government and EU-status, only the difference in means between new EU-members and those remaining outside is significant (Table 7). The difference hence appears insignificant even if parliamentarism is associated with more experience than presidentialism.

However, some effect may be ascribed to the constitutional system. In the first section we saw that the prime locus of influence was found within the government in the parliamentary systems. Subjecting the praxis for cooperation to a stronger test (GLM-univariate), the EU effect disappears, leaving government as the decision-making center the remaining explanatory variable.⁹ This is an important finding as it implies that presidential systems are more closed than parliamentary systems, in which the role of the government provides access to decision making. Presidential systems may therefore provide access for peak interests, while access or praxis for cooperation is more widespread in parliamentary systems.

5. Tentative trajectories

It has proved difficult to provide a clear description of whether influence, coordination and cooperation in the post-communist countries can be seen to be properties of the constitution or

part of the Europeanization process. This analysis gives a mixed picture but also points to common trajectories.

First, we found an overall dominance of the executive as decision centers and that the parliaments played only a limited role – in particular in presidential systems. For post-communist countries in general the dominance of the executive is thus a common pattern showing only a moderate effect of constitutional system. Second, we found that the core agency with cross-cutting responsibilities tended to be the Ministry of Finance. Such cross-cutting functions tended to be concentrated among fewer agencies in the new EU member states, and furthermore, we found that among countries with many coordinating centers our respondents were also less inclined to accept and volunteer information to other government agencies. However, even if it does call for further analysis, this pattern probably reflects the process of Europeanization rather than the form of government. Finally, we found that establishing institutions for cooperation with non-state actors, for example through tripartite structures, does not guarantee access. Executives also prefer to rely on advice from academics rather than political advisor or NGO specialists. Furthermore, while the new EU-members experience a higher degree of cooperation with non-state actors, this is more associated with having governments rather than presidential administrations as the decision-making center.

In summary, the domestically driven choice of constitution and the resulting format does affect where the decision making center is located and the degree of openness towards and cooperation with non-state actors. Conversely, the modernising Europeanization effect is limited to the establishment of a coordinating infrastructure with cross-cutting responsibilities within the government, followed by a readiness to share information.

Notes

1. For more information about the surveys and questionnaires, see www.demstar.dk.
2. A comparison of the perceived relevance of the parliament between the group of countries that enters EU in 2004 with the remaining countries (i.e. non-EU) showed an insignificant difference.
3. See appendix (table A1) for the classification of constitutional system.
4. See <http://www.cspp.strath.ac.uk> for more information about the surveys and publications.
5. Author's calculation made on NBD IV from 1995 and NBB III from 1996.
6. For all practical purposes, the formula for the effective number of core agencies corresponds to the Laakso and Taagepera calculation for the effective number of political parties. For more information on the effective number of political parties, see Taagepera and Shugart, 1989.
7. Pearson correlation: -0.672; Sig. (2-tailed): 0.006.
8. A full factorial model (Adjust R²: 0.379; model significance: 0.023; EU significance: 0.038; Constitution significance: 0.784) with the expected signs. A parallel test was run using IPA (see appendix) instead of the simple distinction between parliamentary and presidential system. This test confirmed the first model.
9. Model significance: 0.012; Adjusted R Squared = 0.473.

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Appendix 1. Constitutional system

Table A1. The formal constitutional arrangement

	Parliamentary	Semi-Presidential	Presidential	IPA
Estonia	*			11.63
Latvia	*			11.46
Lithuania		*		38.84
Hungary	*			20.98
Kazakhstan			*	47.77
Kyrgyzstan		*		63.39
Mongolia		*		35.00
Poland		*		49.11
Georgia		*		45.54
Armenia		*		43.30
Azerbaijan		*		41.07
Moldova		*		47.50
Slovenia	*			19.20
Czech Republic	*			11.83
Bulgaria		*		45.09

Appendix 2. Indexes

The indexes were constructed as simple additive indexes. They both range from 0-5.

A) The index measuring whether it is acceptable to give information to others consists of the following questions:

- “Should civil servants in one ministry be permitted to provide information to other ministries without prior permission?”
 - “Strongly Agree” coded as 2
 - “Agree” coded as 1
- “If other ministries tried/try to influence proposals in your own ministry, causing you to lose competence or resources, how would you perceive it?”
 - “Generally acceptable” coded as 1
- “Have you experienced cases where other ministries/departments tried to influence proposals in your ministry?”
 - “Yes” coded as 1
- “When other ministries or parties interfered in your business, could it be that a third party outside the realm of politics has interfered in the decision-making?”
 - “Agree” coded as 1

B) The index measuring the level of the practice of cooperation consists of the following questions:

- “Is it common practice that ministerial officials had/have close relationships with significant organizations within the field of the ministry?”
 - “Yes” coded as 1
- “Have you ever felt under pressure from outside actors (NGOs, non-state organizations, peak level business, etc.) to initiate new legislation?”
 - “Often” coded as 2

- “Often, but only concerning important issues” coded as 2
 - “Sometimes” codes as 1
- “Do the civil servants in your ministry have close working relationships with major interest organizations within the ministry’s resort?”
 - “Yes most of the time” coded as 2
 - “Yes, but only concerning important issues” coded as 1