CHALLENGES OF COALITION BUILDING IN POLAND: EXPERIENCES OF CENTRAL AND REGIONAL POLITICS

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Abstract
The article investigates central and regional level coalition building in the evolution towards a multi-level system. Polish politics are still predominated by the national perspective and although the role of local and regional levels is gradually increasing. It has not yet developed into multi-level governance. A certain critical moments local or regional politics do come to prominence. The most important example was the conflict over Warsaw’s local government which was a crucial factor in the of collapse of the government in 2000.

Introduction
The watershed in the path towards the creation of multi-level politics in Poland was the 1999 reform of regional administration which led to the formation of 16 powerful regions (formed out of mergers between 49 then existing then regions). Moreover, direct election to regional assembles took place for the first time. The establishment of elected regional institutions can be seen as an important opportunity for the development of democratic regional politics. Nevertheless, the institutional framework is only a precondition for its development, not a factor automatically leading to radical changes and the blossoming of regional politics. For example, Putnam’s (1993) analysis of the development of regionalism in Italy underlines its gradual character spread over nearly 20 years (1970-1989), since regions initially gained some power. The most striking feature of Italian regional reform was that it brought stability and pragmatism and eased the process of overcoming the narrow partisan perspective. Similarly, in Poland, the formation of multi-level politics with regional and local coalitions having some autonomy not directly reflecting the national perspective can be seen a positive phenomenon for both regional and national politics. Additionally, in the case of Poland, one can expect it to be a stabilising factor in the process of overcoming one of its serious problems that is the fragmentation and fluidity of national political parties.

Finally, in Poland, there are still serious factors hindering the development of regionalism. First, decentralisation of competencies to regional authorities was not assisted by concomitant decentralisation of finances. Second, after more then forty years of socialist centralisation regional politics is not attracting wide-social interest. It is seen as secondary compared with national politics.

In addition to an analysis of the regional coalition making of Polish regions, this article will also present developments in local government in the form of the capitals of sixteen regions. The introduction of the direct election of mayors in the 2002 local elections encouraged some prominent national politicians to stand in the elections in the main cities of Poland (mostly regional capitals). The direct election of town mayors in 2002, especially the bargaining over the position of mayor of Warsaw, where 14 competitors stood led to strong political interest compared to concomitant regional elections, where interest was limited to ticking the relevant political party on the ballot paper. Moreover, the financial prowess of regional capitals is sometimes similar to that of regional authorities and thus, these cities have become quite important actors on the Polish political scene.

Historical developments
Until the 1999 reform, regions were more or less seen as reflecting central level politics – in a top down approach. This illustrates the expectation of ruling in the period 1993-1997 Peasant Party (PSL) and post-

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2 The multi-level perspective of decision making in Poland, is also interesting in the context of entering the European Union. It is widely recognised that the EU affects – “Europeanise” the administration of member states. (Europeanisation is understood as efforts of member states to gain more access and influence in Brussels [Wessels, Journal of European Public Policy, June 1998], not, as argued by federalists or neo-functionalists – a shift of loyalty or withering of member states). Politico-administrative studies of members states also emphasise that European policy promotes and up-grades regional policy making (Benz and Eberlein 1998). Thus, it is of particular importance to diagnose the starting point of Polish politics directly preceding enlargement.
A similar approach was taken after the 1997 parliamentary election by Jerzy Buzek’s government. The senior coalition partner, the Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS) proposed candidates for regional governors and the junior partner, the Freedom Union (UW) for their deputies (except in 12 out of 49 regions where UW regional governors were to be appointed with AWS deputies). However, Buzek’s government engaged in territorial reform, which changed the institutional regional framework. After the introduction of regional reform (and assisting it regional and local elections in which support for the UW was rather limited) the balance of power within the ruling coalition changed as the proportion of AWS regional governors increased.7 However, the primary result of the reform was that the main regional actor became the regional assembly with the regional marshall (marszałek) elected by it. Since then there has been dual power at regional level: first, the representative of central government – wojewoda, and second the regional marshall regional assembly representing regional society.

At the same time regional coalition building has also been affected by the traditions of local coalition-building, formed since the collapse of communism especially influence of main Polish cities. The first local elections in

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3 This approach to division of regional pool of spoils illustrate policy of Prime Minister Waldemar Pawlak, although a leader of the PSL, was the junior partner in the post-communist coalition, and nevertheless ensured that the PSL gained 19 regional governors posts while only two went to supporters of the SLD. Such an uneven distribution of posts violated the earlier agreement dividing regional governors positions within the coalition and he most flagrant violation of the agreement occurred in the two regions of Wrocław and Katowice, where the SLD had twice as many votes as the PSL.

4 Details on the first period 1989-1993 when post-Solidarity coalitions ruled were omitted due to their complexity. (There were four successive governments and as many as eight parties formed some of these governments). However, the main reason was that details on particular political parties, which before the 1997 parliamentary election integrated into the Electoral Solidarity Action, are not necessary to show the general trend and enrich knowledge of regional coalitions after 1998. The only main party present from the beginning of transition was the Freedom Union (named the Democratic Union, before it merged with the Liberal Democratic Congress in 1994).

5 After the collapse of the coalition on 1 March 2003, Miller’s government became a minority government

6 Before the 2001 parliamentary election, the AWS began to gradually disintegrate and finally disappeared from the political scene in 2001 after failing to reach the 8% parliamentary threshold. Before this election, new parties appeared or rose to prominence, among them the centrist Citizens Platform, and Law and Justice, both having post-Solidarity origins, as well as the Christian fundamentalist League of Polish Families. The new phenomenon was the appearance of populist parties: Self-defence and the League of Polish Families.

7 The predominance of AWS increased as they took all sixteen positions of regional governors (49 weak voivodships were merged into 16 much stronger regions) and the junior coalition partner UW took only position of deputies. Similarly, after, 2001 parliamentary election in coalition Miller’s government positions of regional governors were treated as pool of spoils; the SLD predominated and the PSL junior coalition partner had only 11 deputy regional governors (they did not even had deputy regional governor in each of the 16 regions).
1990 were non-partisan elections; 40% of seats went to independents and another 40% to the Solidarity social movement (Civic Committees). Moreover, councillors were mostly elected for the first time (77%). Such a good rating by Committees was a result of the fact that the main feature of this election was that the electorate were mostly registering a vote against the communists and political parties were only in the initial stage of its formation (Swianiewicz 2003).

In the next election in 1994 the role of political parties increased, especially in the bigger communes. In general, 30% of councillors belonged to political parties but in cities their proportion reached 60% (Halamska 2001). In these elections, especially in the main cities, three main political blocks could be distinguished: the Democratic Union [UD] (at that time the main parliamentary post-Solidarity party); electoral coalitions of right-wing post-Solidarity parties; and a new powerful actor appeared in the form of the post-communist SLD (often in coalition with the PSL).

The fundamental division of national political scene, which existed since beginning of transition and only in current parliament elected in 2001 is partially limited was on post-communist and post-Solidarity side. It seems that only currently historical divisions are weakened and economic are becoming to be more important. Nevertheless, Rydlewski (2000) argues that the fact that under socialism the Solidarity opposition was persecuted at this caused that these division were deeper than in Western countries where opposition was legal. (This feature is not observable in other post-communist countries, for example in Hungary, already in 1994 this “historic” division was overcome as the Alliance of Free Democrats formed coalition with the Hungarian Socialist Party).

These elections were also seen as a test of support for the national parties (in particular right-wing parties, which due to their fragmentation were not represented in parliament). Nevertheless, as Swianiewicz (2003) suggests, it was often hidden politicisation as councillors only unwillingly admitted their membership, seeing it as a factor which could be evaluated negatively. They were trying to use local electoral committees’ names instead of national parties and only coalitions formed in the main cities (capitals of 49 regions) were interpreted more in terms of central politics. In general, local coalitions’ reflection of national level political divisions and government coalitions was limited by two factors. First, in smaller communes (below 40,000 inhabitants) it was due to the crucial role of local electoral committees. Second, in he main cities there was more expectation to reflect national politics. Nevertheless, local councillors were more “politically flexible” and post-Solidarity parties and post-communist coalitions were sometimes observable.

It was quite rare for one party or local electoral committee to have such good results that it could rule alone in a city (Katowice – right-wing local electoral committee being an exception). In the other main cities, local coalitions were created sometimes breaking up post-Solidarity versus post-communist unbreakable at national level divisions. Despite initial declarations by post-Solidarity parties that they would avoid coalitions with the SLD, this proved impossible. Sometimes, these coalitions with post-communists were also formed due to the inability of the UD and other right-wing parties and rightist local electoral committees to cooperate despite the electoral results enabling such coalitions. This was the case in Lublin and Warsaw, which led to UD and SLD coalitions and in Poznań, a right-wing local committee and the SLD, (Rzeczpospolita, 12 Oct. 1998). But there were also broad right-wing post-Solidarity coalitions aimed at isolating the SLD (Bydgoszcz, Gdańsk, Kraków, Łódź and Szczecin), (Piasecki 2002: 187-188).

The 1994-1998 term was positively evaluated as a period of pragmatism and stability, even when coalitions were made with the oppositional SLD. The divisions in local government were not according to political lines and there were often divisions within individual political camps; for example, whether to buy new buses (Rzeczpospolita, 12 Oct. 1998). Piasecki (2003: 145) emphasizes the maturity of local government and the ability to reach compromises that enabled them to overcome political divisions and take common actions.

The beginning of coalition politics at regional level
Since, the introduction of the 1999 regional reform, elections to regional assemblies have taken place twice (in autumn 1998, preceding the 1999 reform, and in 2002). The political composition of directly elected assemblies influences the shape of regional politics, determining the formation of regional coalitions. This can be seen as the symbolic beginning of multi-level governance in Poland. Nevertheless, there are still strong signs that regional and local politics are treated as supplement and to national politics as they do not have substantial autonomy.

1. The first interim term; 1999-2002
The 1999 –2002 term can be defined as the interim period when national politics had direct influence on its functioning and only some minor symptoms of local and regional autonomy were seen. Finally, the conflict over
the mayor of Warsaw suggests that sometimes the local dimension had an impact on national politics although it was mostly seen at critical moments and its role can be evaluated as enhancing political crises.

The direct influence of national politics at the regional level is related to the composition of the political scene at that time, which was previously fragmented but evolved into two stable blocks: post-communists (the Alliance of Democratic Left – SLD) and post Solidarity (the main parties of the right were Solidarity Electoral Action [AWS] and the weaker Freedom Union [UW]). The fourth party present in the local elections was the centrist Peasant party (PSL). The 1998 regional elections and (even local ones) were the first elections to be predominated by national political groupings instead of local electoral committees. As a consequence of this fact, Szcerbiak (1999, Journal of Communist and Studies and Transition Politics, vol. 15, no., 3 Sept, p.89) interpreted these new local election results as an opportunity to make judgements on the future shape of the party system. Moreover, he interpreted them as confirmation of consolidation of the political system, which was first observable at national level preceding the 1997 parliamentary election.\(^8\)

Compared to the previous local elections of 1994, which Swianiewicz called “hidden politicisation”, in these local and regional elections, political cleavage was seen. Local elections were predominated by local electoral committees, but in the regions national parties were full blown (Wawrzecka, Rzeczpospolita 5 June 1998). In the communes, where as 68% of those elected were independents and local electoral committees, this proportion decreased at county level to 25% and at regions to only 2% (Rzeczpospolita 24-25 Oct. 1998 and Paradowska Polityka, 19 Dec. 1998). The rise of the role of national politics was caused by the introduction of electoral law favouring bigger parties; the d’Hondt method was used for seat allocation (in addition to a 5% threshold). The presence of national parties was sometimes evaluated positively as bringing clarity to the political scene. The presence in previous elections of local electoral committees of artificial names was creating difficulty for their political identification. Nevertheless, the main political parties often stood behind them (Macieja and Stachura, Wprost, 25 Oct. 1998). Majcherek (Tygodnik Powszechny, 25 Oct. 1999) adds that political membership creates predictability of agendas, enhances co-ordination and defends against radical individualism. However, Surążka (Rzeczpospolita, 1999, 1 Feb.) suggests that councillors began to be subordinated to the central headquarters of their parties rather than to the interests of local communities.

The predominance of national politics also indicates changes in the position of town mayors; voters’ sympathies towards national parties shifted from the left towards the right. As a result of local elections, a nearly complete replacement of incumbents of mayoral positions took place. This reshuffling of mayors (indirectly elected at that time) reflected the change of town councils compositions and especially of their leaders – representing the main political party. According to Swianiewicz (2002: 187) in cities with population over 40,000 two thirds of mayors were replaced. This trend was even more radical in the largest cities over 300,000, where all but one mayor lost their positions. Swianiewicz suggests a much more radical local change in 1998 than in 1994 when some elite continuity was present. In contrast, to the 1994 local elections the role of political parties increased in 1998 and the new mayors were those who had gained the support of the main political parties. In this context, 1998 local elections can be treated more as a reaction to acceptance or rejection of central government than voting on certain policies presented by local units of political parties. Local issues and leaders were almost entirely absent in the electoral campaigns. Finally, more than one hundred MPs stood in the local and regional elections (AWS 21; SLD 51; UW 10), (Piasecki 2003: 151-152).

The most important event in the term 1998-2002, which shows the impact of local politics on national ones and in particular the lack of co-operation between the coalition partners of Jerzy Buzek’s government, was the conflict over the Warsaw city coalition and the position of mayor. Despite the fact that local elections redefined and strengthened bi-polar divisions into a post-communist and post-Solidarity bloc of political parties at national level, in smaller cities and villages there was a certain political autonomy similar to that which existed during first two terms of local government (first term 1990-1994 and second term 1994-1998). This autonomy of local politics was also expressed in the various political coalitions not following the unreachable principle of national politics that is based on historical division and there were sometimes coalitions between the SLD and UW or AWS.\(^9\)

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\(^8\) The second feature of Polish national politics, which also has a serious impact on its regional and local dimension is the fragmentation of post-Solidarity parties, which leads to its worse electoral results and decreases the chances for successful local and regional right-wing coalitions. The 1997 consolidation preceding the national election and observable before the regional and local elections in 1998, proved to be only a temporary phenomenon.

\(^9\) Similar trends are observable in other post-communist countries. For example, Bernáňová et al. (2001: 243) write about local coalitions in Slovakia, that are “very strange from the viewpoint of national politics".
However, in the case of Warsaw, it was more difficult for this type of coalition to be accepted. Despite a national agreement between coalition partners (prime minister Jerzy Buzek, representing the senior coalition partner AWS) and acceptance to support the candidature of Paweł Piskorski from the UW for the position of mayor of Warsaw, the councillors from the AWS withdrew their support. In consequence, the UW decided to look for support from the SLD, offering in return for this favour the position of the head of the largest borough of Warsaw, “the City” (gmina Centrum) for the post-communist Jan Witeski. The AWS councillors tried unsuccessfully to obstruct Witeski’s election and when their efforts proved unsuccessful, the regional governor, Antoni Pietkiewicz, annulled it. This decision was well beyond of his remit. The next step was that prime minister Buzek installed on the position of head of this borough with direct supervision by government (zarząd komisaryczny). This solution was supposed to last for the next two years until the local election expected to take place in 2002. The prime minister’s decision was made under political pressure by the AWS and was strengthened by the fact that this town borough was the richest commune in Poland and offered on attractive pool of spoils. Nevertheless, the appointment of government officials was suppose to take place only in exceptional circumstances, such as when a serious breach of law was taking place in local government, and such action was not advised by government legal experts (Dudek 2002: 475-476 and Subotić, Rzeczpospolita 5 June 2000). The conflict in Warsaw local government was one of several conflicts between coalition partners. The UW, tied of the prolonged crisis decided to withdraw its minister from government. this culminated in the break down of the coalition and the AWS formed a minority government in May 2000.

Despite the fact that the role of the regional coalition in its first term 1999-2002 had a rather limited influence it is worth investigating it from the perspective of the gradual rise of regional politics. In the regional capitals the AWS could rule alone in just three cities (Gdańsk, Kraków and Rzeszów) and the SLD had similar results had (Bydgoszcz, Kielce and Łódź). In other cities, local coalitions had to be formed (Macieja and Stachura, Wprost, 25 Oct. 1998).

In the regions; the AWS won 40% of seats and the SLD 38.5% but the AWS won in eight regions and the SLD in seven. In one region, both parties had the same results. The SLD had a good rating in regions whose formation was seen as due to its intervention. Initially it was planned to divide the country into only 12 regions but the AWS-UW government coalition did not have a sufficient majority in parliament to pass the bill and the number was increased to 16. The AWS had control of half of the 16 regions, in three of which it ruled alone. In five regions it governed as senior coalition partner, forming in all of them regional coalitions with the UW, repeating in this way the government coalition. However, in three out of these five regions the additional partner was the PSL (formally Social Alliance, but this party predominated in the Alliance) and in one region the fourth coalition partner was the German minority organisation (Szczersiak, 1999, Journal of Communist and Studies and Transition Politics, vol. 15, no., 3 Sept, p.89).

After, the elections the leader of the AWS, Marian Krzaklewski, declared: “Our government, our local (and regional) government”, demanding that the same type of coalitions should be at regional and local levels and the UW should be loyal and not opt for coalitions with the SLD. Aleksander Hall, one of the AWS leaders, argued that voters choice should be respected and thus such coalitions were unacceptable. He declared that the voice of voters is more important than that of politicians (Bogusz and Macieja, Wprost, 8 Nov. 1988). Nevertheless, there was a famous case where this principle was broken by the AWS, in the small town of Racibórz. Krzaklewski, commenting on the AWS and SLD coalition, declared that if AWS councillors insisted on it, they would be eliminated from the party, as AWS does not need politicians who show no loyalty (Rzeczpospolita, 21 Oct. 1998). However, according to Piascek (2003) the main reason was that neither of these parties: the AWS and SLD was able to elect its own members to the most senior positions in the local government. However, the other AWS leader Janowski, (who was both an MP and a regional politician having been elected to the regional assembly) argued on the specificity of local and regional elections as it is more important to build bridges than to become entrenched over personal divisions based on political labels (Rzeczpospolita, 21 Oct. 1998).

These declarations are of particular importance as national political leaders were initiating coalitions at the regional level (Bogusz and Macieja, Wprost, 8 Nov. 1988). The role of some MPs was also often important in the consultations of regional coalitions and those in regional capitals (Kulik Wprost, 20 Dec. 1998). According to Piasceki, this pyramid of influence was repeated at lower levels: with regional leaders supervising the formation of district coalitions and district leaders supervising the local coalitions (Piasceki 2002: 195). The role of central politicians and the co-ordination of coalition making (in regional capitals and districts) can be seen in the case of Lublin. The SLD won and signed a coalition with the sympathising UW local electoral committee. It was signed

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10 In districts, the AWS had 30.5% of seats and the SLD 27.5%.
by SLD MP (Ryszard Zbrzyzny) and chairman of the local committee Dariusz Mika as it was argued by the SLD that it did not make sense to form a different coalition. On the contrary, Bogusz and Macieja (Wprost, 8 Nov. 1998) argue that below regional level “nobody controlled the situation” and personal sympathies and antipathies counted not political logos. On the complexity of local and regional political map, Paradowska, (Polityka, 31 Oct. 1998) comments on the post-electoral situation in Mazovia region calling it a “multi-level cohabitation” as the regional governor was from the ruling coalition (AWS-UW), but the regional assembly was in opposition to him. In districts parties of the ruling coalition dominated but sometimes also oppositional parties were elected.

Local and regional elections also caused the balance of power within the ruling government coalition to change. At national level due to parliamentary election results the proportion among coalition partners AWS and UW was 1:3 but in local and regional elections it increased to 1:5 in favour of the AWS (Macieja and Stachura, Wprost, 25 Oct. 1998). These local and regional elections caused the UW, which last year was junior coalition partner but was strong and influential to lose its clout and, as a result its political bargaining power (Subotić, Rzeczpospolita, 2 Nov 1998). For example, its demands to receive a few positions of regional governors in new regions became unrealistic. Rather, the poor UW results caused bipolar party system (Subotić Rzeczpospolita, 2 Nov 1998). In consequence, the UW, endangered by arrogance and the possibility of domination by a much stronger coalition partner, became more open in its policy towards coalition making. One of its leaders, Lityński, suggested specificity of local elections, indirectly advocating possible coalitions with the SLD (Bogusz and Macieja, Wprost, 8 Nov. 1998).

In 2002 the AWS and UW regional coalition in Silesia split. The UW representatives left the regional board and the possibility of them forming an alternative coalition with the SLD was considered. However, this fact went almost unnoticed (compared to the conflict in local government in Warsaw). The UW was dissatisfied with the dismissal of its representatives from regional institutions (the Regional Fund of Environment Protection and Regional Agency of Economic Restructuring). The unsuccessful negotiator between the coalition partners was Marek Kempski, the regional governor and one of the most influential politicians of AWS (earlier one of the candidate for position of prime minister) (Dziadul, Polityka, 2000). His interventions are interesting as they show on the one hand the politicisation of the position of regional governor and on the other hand, that the regional reform of 1999, which assumed separation of competencies between public administration (represented by the regional governor) and regional self-government was not working. This did not promote administrative effectiveness. The second interesting phenomenon observable in the regional coalion, was the difficulty of cooperation due to the repetition of the government coalition and parliamentary conflicts as 10 MPs were at the same time regional councillors. Dziadul suggests that as a result, regional debates were neglected and parliamentary issues predominated. The alternative coalition between the UW and SLD was not formed, and it was undoubtedly crucial was that the change of regional marshal demanded 3/5 of voices which the proposed new coalition would not have.

The second main national party at that time, the SLD preserved control of seven regions. In one it ruled alone and in six, the SLD had as its junior coalition partner the PSL. This mirrored the government coalitions in the period 1993-1997. the post-communist SLD was still politically isolated and had difficulty finding a coalition partner. In the 1998 elections the PSL was kingmaker, attractive to both the SLD and AWS (2 regions) wishing to take power in the regions. Thus, despite being the junior partner it ruled in eight out of 16 regions and demanded a high price in the regional pool of spoils. At the same time, the bi-polar party system with two main parties the AWS and SLD, and the PSL in the centre, which was going into coalition with the right and left was blurring political divisions.

Finally, analysing regional coalition making after the 1998 elections, it is seen that various approaches were taken by four main actors (the AWS, UW, PSL and SLD). On the one hand, they were driven by political ideological assumptions that coalitions between the AWS and SLD were not politically accepted. On the other hand, the policy of regional coalition making was driven to a very large extent by electoral results. For example, the PSL, which was an attractive partner on the right and left, advocated a strategy of locally brokered coalitions which was supposed to increase its positions by enabling various types of political coalitions. Similarly, weakened by local and regional elections, the UW was more open to coalitions with the opposition, and the opposite approach was declared by the AWS for which the similarity between government and (regional) local coalitions was strengthening the party.

1. The 2002 - ... in a state of flux;

The 2002 local and regional elections brought three interesting developments in relation to the development of local politics and the formation of regional coalitions. First, the direct elections of town mayors; second in regional elections, the rise of populist parties, which in consequence also affected the shape of regional
coalitions; and third, the political map in certain regions is very complex – with “multi-level cohabitation” due to different electoral methods in elections in cities and in regional elections.

Surańska, (Rzeczpospolita, 14. Nov 2002) suggests that in the case of the 2002 local elections political considerations were taken into account but to a lesser extent than in the case of parliamentary elections. More important was the managerial ability of mayors. In ten main cities, which had strong economic development the continuity of the elite was present and in some cases, electoral support enabled mayors who had enough votes to win in the first round. The opposite was the case in the twelve worst developing cities, where the replacement of mayors was much more frequent. She suggests that the winners were mayors who were good managers and who also quickly learned to be popular politicians. Thus, for her, electorate were not voting for the left or the right. In the main 26 Polish cities half of the 20 mayors seeking re-election were re-elected.

Nevertheless, the first direct elections of mayors also showed a significant shift from party politics toward the individuality of candidates. In a situation of choice between independents and party representatives, voters’ anti-party sentiments were fully expressed and local committees candidates’ were the winners and became the incumbents of mayoral positions, choosing local electoral committees’ (despite that being disciplined AWS members four year earlier that were in an advantageous position. This trend was not repeated in the regions and city councils where electoral procedures favoured political parties. It must be added that in cities, party representatives came mostly from the post communist SLD, so these election results have to be interpreted as a rejection of the left.

In cities, it was the centre right and right that won. According to Zukowski (2002: 10-12) out of 106 cities, in 26 the SLD-UP won 11, in three the PO won. In 75% local electoral committees won (which in reality represented the main political parties, mostly the centre-right and right in the form of various local coalitions). The same political proportions were seen in 16 regional capitals: in 11 the centre-right and right committees won, in four the left won and in one it was more difficult to precisely define the political leaning of the politician (former Solidarity underground activist). The left won in the traditionally rightist regional capitals of Cracow, Rzeszów and Toruń (Rzeczpospolita, 12 Nov 2002).

The victory of the SLD mayoral candidates was interpreted as a result of the division of right-wing parties and individual virtues of left-wing candidates identified with the SLD, but not presenting themselves as their hard-core (Zukowski 2002). For example, in Cracow, Jacek Majchrowski the proposed SLD candidate emphasised his apolitical character. His counterpart, former UW mayor Józef Lassota, was not that positively evaluated as a manager. Moreover, he did not receive support in the second round from other right wing parties (LPR, PiS and PO), (Paradowska Polityka, 23 Nov. 2002). Interestingly, Majchrowski had no representative of his local electoral committees in the council. In addition, the SLD had only 10 seats so he needed to co-operate with the opposition in the 43 seat council (Rzeczpospolita, 12 Nov. 2002). Also, in two other cities with left-wing mayors, Rzeszów and Toruń, they had to co-operate with right-wing councils. The opposite situations existed in Łódź, Kielce and Bydgoszcz; where there were right wing mayors but predominately by left-wing town councils.

Different methods of voting in local elections brought different results: in the case of councils it was voting for parties but in mayoral elections it was personality that counted. Voting on party labels was advantageous for the SLD and in mayoral elections, right-wing candidates proved successful. According to post-electoral calculations this raised a serious fear of paralysis of local governments, especially as political conflict of mayors with the opposition in councils was expected to take place in one third of local governments (Macieja, Wprost, 10 Nov. 2002).

The mayoral elections in Łódź, the city from which the prime minister Leszek Miller came showed particular characteristics. The city was the traditional heartland of the post-communist left, and the above-mentioned results showed the council was predominated by the SLD. Nevertheless, voting for the mayor had a strongly national dimension as voting went against the prime minister. Thus, the new mayor became the right-wing politician, Jerzy Kropiwnicki (Paradowska Polityka, 23 Nov. 2002). In the context of national politics the elections in Warsaw were interesting case. In the direct mayoral elections fourteen candidates stood among whom popular national politicians predominated, although they were without local government experience. The position of Warsaw was seen as the first step towards the presidency. However, currently there is scepticism about this type of career perspective for Mayor Kaczyński.

11 In the 2001 parliamentary election the SLD ran the electoral committee with the tiny left party the Labour Union (UP). The same coalition was repeated in the local and regional elections in autumn 2002.
Finally, winning town elections was seen as more prestigious for right-wing parties (UW and PO) than regional elections. There were also different approaches to coalition-building in these two institutions: in local elections the SLD was resented as the political enemy but in the case of regional assemblies “political compromise” with the SLD was seen as acceptable. While, the PSL, went it alone in regional elections, in the case of towns, in which the position of the peasant party was weak, the party was open for any electoral coalitions (Paradowska, Polityka, no. 35, 2002).

In the case of regional assemblies procedures were ‘favourable for parties’ as voters voted on party labels. The SLD received 22.7% of seats and emerged as the largest single party in 13 out of 16 assemblies. In just one region, however it was able to rule alone (Lubuski region). The junior government partner the PSL rated very poorly in elections winning only, 10.3% of seats. In general, the coalition with the PSL was not sufficient to guarantee taking power. Thus, despite the initial declaration that it would be the natural partner, for example, in the opinion of the chairman of Sejm, Marek Borowski (Borowski, Koalicje na szczeblu wojewodzkim) the SLD was not attracted to this option. Coalitions resembling government coalitions were formed in only three regions: Kielce region and Great Poland (although in this case as a minority coalition due to the informal support of the PO) and after political bargaining, in Kujawsko-pomorskie region (Piasecki 2002: 198:199). In other regions, electoral arithmetic meant that coalitions of government partners were not sufficient to guarantee a majority, and loyalty between coalition partners relaxed.

For the first time the issue of different coalitions at central and regional levels raised the serious question of cooperation within the political scene; how to work out relations with the party with whom one is in coalition at regional level and in opposition at the centre? How should one co-operate with the central level junior coalition partner?

In relation to government coalition developments in the regions two are particularly interesting: Lublin and Mazovia. In the former region, the minister of justice, Grzegorz Kurczuk, at the same time performing the function of regional leader of the SLD, invited the populist Self-defence party to negotiate over the formation of a coalition for Lublin region, surprising other national SLD leaders, who tried to distance themselves from Self-defence party. Kurczuk incited these negotiations, omitting the SLD supposed natural partner the PSL. The official argument given for beginning negotiations was that the Self-defence party, which had eight seats, was sufficient to guarantee a coalition majority in contrast to a coalition with the PSL. However, that PSL had only one seat less than the Self-defence party. However, in reality, this potential coalition was aimed to isolate the PSL. The PSL branch in the region was headed by Zdzisław Podkański, who was in opposition to the government coalition of the SLD and PSL and was also seen as a very difficult partner to co-operate with. The PSL reaction was to offer an alternative coalition to the right and the regional board composed of the PSL, PiS and the LPR. However, a month later in January 2003, power was taken by the SLD and Self-defence with the support of some PSL councillors (Biały, Gazeta Wyborcza, 19. Nov.2002 and Gazeta Wyborcza, 10. Jan.2003).

The conflict between coalition partners is also seen in the formation of a regional coalition in Mazovia region. In Mazovia, the PSL, substantially weakened in other regions, received a good rating and became the kingmaker, and could choose between partners from the left and the right. Two factors became decisive in the PSL decision. The first, it was related to national politics; reserve towards the results of government negotiations with the EU in relation to agriculture and party doubts over whether to leave the government coalition. The second factor, was more pragmatic: which option would guarantee a greater share of the pool of spoils. Coalitions with the right meant vacancies for several positions, which, until then, were occupied by sympathisers of the SLD. Finally, it also offered the most attractive post in the region, of marshal to a PSL candidate, Adam Struzik, which was decisive in choosing this option (Gazeta Wyborcza 18. Nov. 2002 and PSL odwraca się od SLD).

In regional elections, in addition to the SLD and PSL there were three other important actors: the PO-PiS coalition 18%, and Self-defence party and the League of Polish Families 16.4%. The populist Self-defence party significantly increased its support compared to the parliamentary elections in 2001, when it received 10.2% of votes. A similar trend was also seen in the case of the League of Polish Families, which received 7.87% of votes in 2001. The real winner of these elections was the Self-defence party, which entered coalitions in eight regions. The right wing parties (the PO-PiS and LPR) formed coalitions only in the Cracow and Pomerania regions.

In six regions, SLD-PSL and Self-defence coalitions were formed (Lódz, Lower Silesia, Podlasie, Western Pomerania, Warmińsko-mazurskie and Podkarpackie). In the last region they had just one seat more than the opposition. In the seventh region, Silesia the coalition was additionally extended to the Self-governing Union. The SLD also ruled in Opole, where it formed a coalition with the German minority, without conducting any negotiations with the PSL (Piasecki 2002: 198:199 and Rzeczpospolita 18.Nov. 2002).
The fact that the SLD decided to enter coalitions with the Self-defence party in six regions was the most discussed issue in the recent political debate. The Self-defence party was isolated at the central level. Attempts to “socialise” it were short-lived and its leader, Andrzej Lepper was dismissed after less than a month from the position of deputy chairman of the Sejm. The problems of entering a coalition with the Self-defence party are vividly illustrated in the functioning of the Padkarpackie region (Wilczak, Polityka, 15 Feb. 2003) where some of the regional elite of that party had criminal records. Others were accused of tax evasion and, finally, the overwhelming role was played by Maria Zyrowska MP, who was deciding on the division of the pool of spoils among her kin and colleagues. The same extreme nepotism was also characteristic of the regional Self-defence branch of Łódź region, where purges of local activists were made to vacate places in regional party lists for the family of the regional leader Zbigniew Łuszcz (Paradowska, Polityka, 16 Nov. 2002). Nevertheless, features such as nepotism and the election of candidates, who had committed various financial and criminal offences had appeared for the first time on such a scale a year earlier with the election of this party to parliament. Finally, the fact that the authoritarian leader of the party Andrzej Lepper, questioned democratic principles raised serious questions over entering a coalition with this party at regional level. The SLD leader in Lower Silesia Janusz Krason, argued that regional leaders of the Self-defence party could not be compared to its MPs, as that would be unfair to them. However, could this be true in the case of the party. Whose leader tried to completely control the formation of regional coalitions? This even raised resistance within the party. For example, Leon Żero in Podlasie region selected by Lepper for the position of deputy marshal candidate lost the election as his party colleagues voted against him (Cwikowski, Gazeta Wyborcza, 26.02.2003).

Nevertheless, in 2002 the direct election of mayors in main the cities received more attention was on election than in the regions. however, the role of regional actors is likely to rise in the near future. As a result of entering the EU, regional authorities will decide on the division of Structural Funds, but until then the financial resources available to them will remain rather limited (Rzeczpospolita, 20.Nov. 2002). The EU enlargement had a limited effect on the formation of regional coalitions, despite president Kwaśniewski appealing for “pro-European coalitions”, which meant breaking the historical divisions and co-operation of the SLD with the right-wing parties of the Citizens Platform (PO) and Law and Justice party (PiS). This option was also supported by SLD leaders, the chairman of the Sejm, Marek Borowski, and prime minister Leszek Miller, who was in favour of such coalitions and appealed to the PO and PiS (Borowski, Koalicje na szczeblu wojewódzkim). However, this type of coalition was formed only in one region of the Great Poland, where a minority coalition between the SLD-UP and PSL was formed. Its creation was preceded by the signing of the Pro-European Agreement for Great-Poland by the coalition partners-to be and the right wing Citizens Platform. This enabled the isolation of the populist parties which had, with its 39 seats in the regional assembly a good rating: the Self-defence party won seven seats and the League of Polish Families only one seat less. However, also in this case the “historical division” was preserved as the PO did not decide to officially enter a coalition with the “post-communist forces” (Borowski Gazeta Wyborcza, 18.Nov. 2002). In other regions, these coalitions were rejected due to PO and PiS attitudes.

The important event of the regional elections in 2002 was the electoral coalition between the PO and PiS. As Paradowska (Polityka no. 25, 2005) indicates, it was more of a technical agreement due to electoral law being favourable to bigger parties, than a compromise over its political agenda. Despite, their similar political origins and the fact that they were rather centrist parties apolitical compromise was not achieved. The agreement was limited to a declaration that both parties would not enter a coalition with the SLD or with the Self-defence party. These two parties presented a common list in 15 out of 16 regions. This electoral coalition attracted wide social attention and is seen as a possible government coalition after parliamentary elections, scheduled for 2005. Nevertheless, from the beginning there were serious cracks on its surface. The PO and PiS presented separate lists in Mazovia region and the same was in the case in Warsaw (the capital of Mazovia region). The twin brother of PiS leader, Lech Kaczyński fought for the position of mayor of Warsaw with the PO represented by Andrzej Olechowski. The personal ambitions of party leaders were a serious challenge to that coalition from the beginning.

However, after the elections the PO changed strategy and in each region potential partners were considered separately. Płażyński one of the PO leaders rejected any possibility of entering a coalition with the SLD and Self-defence party but its other leaders were considering possible coalitions with the SLD. Despite the SLD appeal that the best for Poland would be pro-European coalitions with the PO and PiS, in the meantime its efforts to build coalitions with Self-defence party in Lublin region caused the PO attitude to become even more flexible. Its earlier proposal of forbidding regional coalitions with the populist the Self-defence party and the League of Polish Families was withdrawn (Gazeta Wyborcza 13 Nov. 2002).
The symbolic end of the PO – PiS coalition can be interpreted as the breaking of the Warsaw city coalition in February 2004. The mayor of Warsaw Lech Kaczyński, from the beginning of this tenure attacked the former city board formed by the PO. The PiS attacks culminated in Kaczyński’s efforts to dismiss from the position of the chairman of the city council the previous PO mayor, Wojciech Kozak (Szpala and Fusiecki, Gazeta Wyborcza, 16 Feb. 2004). The PiS began to be much more interested in closer co-operation with the league of Polish Families and the perspective for the potential centrist coalition of the PO and PiS began to be much more uncertain.

In addition, to the fact of forming coalition with the extremist Self-defence, the situation became even more complex as different electoral methods in local elections in cities and in regions led to “multi-level cohabitation”.

Conclusion

Despite, issue concerning central and regional coalitions, interactions seem to have lost some importance in defining current political actions due to the break-up of the central coalition (SLD-PSL) in March 2003 and the formation of a minority government thereafter. However, the complexity of central and regional level coalitions seems to be an important factor for the future. The 1999 regional administration reform substantially increased the importance of regional politics, although its potential is not yet fully developed. The formation of multi-level governance is a long-term process. Polish politics at regional level is often directly influenced by national dimensions, coalitions formed at that level or are autonomous, and political linkages and co-operation between partners of various levels are somewhat undeveloped. There are rather critical moments when local or regional politics come to prominence; the conflict over Warsaw local government or the experience of local and regional coalitions of the PO and PiS and their impact on negotiations over the formation of a government coalition after the next parliamentary elections.

Nevertheless, the first positive symptoms appeared during local and regional elections in 2002. For the first time, a new phenomenon was seen as famous national politicians ran in local elections. The chasm that had existed between national and local politicians, with local positions seen as second-rate, was thus eliminated. The primary question for the future will be what factors should decide the formation of central and regional coalitions? Should they be formed by the same partners or should they be distinctive? How independent should regional coalitions be? Sometimes, it is argued that regional and local politics are more pragmatic as they also include parties which are in opposition at the central level. For example, the unbridgeable divisions between post-communist and post-Solidarity parties is sometimes overcome at lower levels. Finally, Putnam’s study of Italian regionalism indicates positive political developments, the effects of which only fully blossomed after twenty years of a gradual rise to prominence of regional units.

Post-script

In April 2004, the new regional coalition between the Self-defence party, PSL and LPR was formed in Łódź. Regional governments had a rather limited role in the functioning of central government, but it seems that Łódź has begun to be treated as a training ground for potential coalitions for after the next parliamentary elections (especially as it is expected that early elections will be called in a few days time). The former regional coalition of the SLD and Self-defence party broke down, as declared by the authoritarian chairman of the Self-defence party, Andrzej Lepper. There were conflicts from the beginning of the coalition over dissatisfaction with the division of the pool of spoils for the Self-defence party. As a consequence of recent voting against regional budgets, the SLD demanded the dismissal of two deputy marshals from the Self-defence party, who instead of coming to office participated in political blockade. The Self-defence party, decided first to break the coalition, using the slogan of the SLD using force against protesters and declaring that their political agenda was not realised.

The new coalition is not seen as stable and effective, as they have the same number of seats as the opposition. Furthermore, this coalition, shows the rise of populist parties, which until recently seemed not to be able to form a coalition. The LPR is Christian fundamentalist and it emphasized rightist values; the Self-defence party was rather distanced from the Catholic Church and leftists, but the common ground became national and anti-European sentiments. These values also recently began attractive to the PSL, which used to be centrist. The coalition agreement was signed in Warsaw by the party leaders Lepper (Self-defence party), Giertych (LPR) and Wojciechowski (PSL). In the secret document it was written that this regional coalition will be a test for central level co-operation in the future. Only the chairman of the PSL, Wojciechowski was sceptical about the future post-electoral government coalition as earlier the Self-defence party was seen as the main enemy of the PSL, taking over voters from villages, which was the main base of this party (Gazeta Wyborcza, 23. April 2004 and http://www.wybory.com.pl).
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