

The reforms, prepared by AWS-UW, were passed as part of a larger package of structural reforms, including provisions on health care, pensions, education and the judicial system. Though the reforms were all interconnected, as a package they were overly ambitious and rushed, leaving in their wake a host of unresolved problems.⁴⁹ Given that AWS was itself an alliance of some 30 political organizations and parties, it is not surprising that differences emerged over the content of the reforms. The majority of “mainstream” Solidarity parties favoured the division of the country into 12–13 regions with both self-governing and state administrative structures. Nine cities were identified as meeting the necessary criteria to be strong regional centres; three cities in the poorer eastern part of the country were added to this list in order to achieve a balanced configuration of regions across the whole country. The members of the national-catholic wing of the AWS opposed the decentralizing reform altogether. Some AWS deputies argued that the reforms threatened the unity of the state.⁵⁰ The members of the ruling coalition compromised by agreeing to restrict the rights of the new self-governing regional governments, while increasing the supervisory powers of the central government representative (*wojewoda*).

On the opposition side, the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) favoured a return to the pre-1975 division into 17 regions, while proposing an assistance programme for those cities faced with the loss of their regional status. The PSL continued to oppose the reform both at the *województwa* and *powiat* level, fearing a loss of support in the rural communities and existing regions. It argued in favour of a two-tier system based on the existing regional breakdown, with the current regions being transformed into self-governing entities.⁵¹ There was also a certain amount of opposition from employees of central ministries and the local administration in those cities which feared to lose their regional status. In the end, the government and the opposition reached a compromise over a 16-region configuration similar to the pre-1975 communist system.

As a result of the 1999 reforms, Poland now has a three-tier sub-national self-governing system.⁵² The basic units are the 2,489 municipalities (*gminy*) at the local level, 308 *powiaty* at the district level, 65 urban municipalities which have been granted *powiat* rights and the 16 *województwa* at the regional level. All three

⁴⁹ See Jerzy Regulski, *Building Democracy in Poland, the state reform of 1998, Discussion papers*, 9 (Budapest: the Local Government and Public Services Reform Initiative, Open Society 1999).

⁵⁰ Alexander Szczerbiak, “The Impact of the October 1998 Local Elections on the Emerging Polish Party System”, *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 15, 3, (1999), p. 86.

⁵¹ Glowacki, above n. 44, pp. 110–111.

⁵² For details, including the debates in the *Sejm*, see Patricia Wyszogrodzka-Sipher, “The National and International Influences on the Reform of Polish Government Structures”, Paper for the workshop “Europe, Nation, Region: Redefining the State in Central and Eastern Europe”, London, Royal Institute of International Affairs (2000).

levels of governance have a democratically elected council. The regional level is characterized by a dual administrative structure—the *wojewoda* is appointed by the Prime Minister upon the nomination of the Interior Minister, and it is his/her responsibility to protect the interests of the state and to coordinate the administrative relations between the centre and the region. Each *województwo* council elects a chief officer, the marshal (*marszatek*), who is responsible for regional development under the Polish Agency for Regional Development. The key weakness of the reform lay in its failure to devolve sufficient fund raising powers to the regional level to enable the new governments to function effectively. Critics talk of a decentralization of competences without a corresponding decentralization of finances.⁵³

The impetus for democratized regionalization predated EU enlargement conditionality in this policy domain,⁵⁴ but the timing and nature of the regionalization dovetailed with the ongoing preparations for EU membership (see Appendix 2). The 16 *województwa* correspond to the EU's NUTS II classification.⁵⁵ In the course of the Sejm debates on the new law, supporters of the regional reform maintained that strong, large regions were important if Poland was to benefit fully from its integration into the EU, thereby using the EU as a legitimating device to advance their preferences. Polish officials hoped that the responsibilities of the regional-level governments, such as the promotion of economic development; regional public services, environmental protection and the development of regional infrastructure would help to satisfy the EU's demand for "regional administrative capacity". Thus, the 1999 reform, supplemented by a law on regional development in May 2000 and the establishment of a Ministry of Regional Development in June 2000, were shaped by the criticism raised by the Commission in the 1997 Opinions and in the 1998 and 1999 Regular Reports. These reports asserted that Poland's regional administrative reform was "incomplete", complained about the lack of legal basis for the implementation of regional policy, and the absence of a mechanism of coordination of regional policy at the national level.⁵⁶ The Commission was, in fact, deeply concerned about the future management of Structural Funds, given the ambiguities in the division of responsibilities between centre and regions and by

⁵³ Grzegorz Gorzelak and Bohdan Jalowiecki, *Analiza wdrażania i skutków reformy terytorialnej organizacji kraju, Raport końcowy* (An analysis of the introduction and results of the territorial reform of the state, Final report) (Warszawa: Europejski Instytut Rozwoju Regionalnego i Lokalnego, Instytut Spraw Publicznych, 2001).

⁵⁴ In the sub-national discourse about regionalization the question of EU membership was rarely raised in the early to mid-1990s. See Tanja Majcherkiewicz, *An Elite in Transition: An Analysis of the Higher Administration of the Region of Upper Silesia, Poland 1990–1997*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, London School of Economics and Political Science (2001).

⁵⁵ Andrzej Kowalczyk, "Local Government in Poland", in Tamas M. Horvath (ed.), *Decentralization: Experiments and Reform* (Budapest: LGI Publications 2000), p. 226.

⁵⁶ European Commission, *Regular Report on Poland's Progress Toward Accession* (1998–2000).

the fact that the lack of a regional tax base severely constrained the capacity of the new *województwa*.⁵⁷

In early 2001, having encouraged the development of regional structures at the *województwo* level to facilitate the management of Structural Funds, the Commission shifted its emphasis to the importance of continued central management and of ensuring the necessary administrative capacity at the centre.⁵⁸ The 2001 Regular Report on Poland illustrates this change by stating that despite previous progress Poland's preparations for the implementation of Structural Funds had stalled, particularly as regards programming at the national level. Poland was reminded that "a clear division of responsibilities must be established at the central level, between central and regional levels and at the regional level between the *Voivods* and Marshals". The Commission now argued that "the role of the regions in the management of the funds in the period up to end 2006 requires careful consideration."⁵⁹

Hungary and Poland have adopted different approaches to the reform of sub-national governance. While Poland introduced a democratically elected tier of regional government, Hungary has—at least for the time being—restricted itself to administrative-statistical regionalization. In both cases, however, the reforms were rooted in endogenous debates and political choices made during the early transition period. The bid for EU membership, PHARE and the Commission's emphasis on regional administrative capacity influenced the shape and timing of the reforms, but mainly by crystallizing, reinforcing and fine-tuning existing trends defined by the transition process.

5. EUROPEANIZATION OF ELITE ATTITUDES

While emphasizing organizational structures, the Commission's call for administrative capacity included references to the recruitment and training of staff. For the *acquis* to be implemented, the newly established structures have to be staffed with personnel who are imbued with the appropriate norms and knowledge. Some aspects of the enlargement process were explicitly concerned with this transfer of norms and knowledge. The "structured dialogue" of the early 1990s and the accession negotiations themselves, for example, helped to acculturate the post-communist CEEC national elites into the "European" elite discourse. The rapid increase in elite interactions between the EU and the CEECs,

⁵⁷ Authors' interview with a senior official in DG Regional Policy, European Commission, Brussels, 28 March 2001.

⁵⁸ Authors' interview with an official in charge of regional policy negotiations, Polish Mission to the EU, Brussels, 28 March 2001.

⁵⁹ European Commission, *Regular Report on Poland's Progress Toward Accession* (2001), p. 79.

whether channelled through the inclusion of the CEEC national elites in EU fora and activities, through EU instruments that involved sub-national elites such as PHARE, SAPARD, ISPA, scientific and educational exchanges or “twinning”, contributed to this “socialization”. The accession negotiations were supported by a broad national elite consensus in the CEECs on the desirability of EU membership. Given the small size of the circle of national elites involved in the negotiations, we should not assume that the sub-national elite attitudes concur with those of the national elites.

The attitudes of sub-national elites are significant for three key reasons. Firstly, one of the aspects of institutional debilitation during transition is that political parties are organizationally weak, particularly as regards their penetrative strength from national to local level. Consequently, the importance of regional and local elites as gatekeepers and mediators between national elites and public opinion is enhanced. Secondly, sub-national elites occupy a central position regarding the successful implementation of the *acquis* and EU policy in the post-enlargement era. Thirdly, the regional and local elites are of normative political importance for the EU, as the notions of “partnership”, “subsidiarity” and “multi-level governance” suggest.⁶⁰ A significant divergence of norms, knowledge and attitudes between national and sub-national elites is obviously not conducive to institutional and policy coherence. The structure of the accession process allows us to predict a disjuncture between the more “Europeanized” attitudes and norms of the acculturated national elites and the largely disengaged sub-national elites.

5.1. *The Relevance and Meaning of the EU at the Sub-National Level*

Elites that are embedded in EU policy transfer or policy learning processes can be expected to have good knowledge about the activities of the EU in their own spatial or functional domain and higher levels of commitment to membership.⁶¹ Although most aspects of local and regional governance will be affected by European regulation as a result of accession, our research reveals that low levels of engagement with and poor knowledge about the European Union prevailed among the sub-national elites in the CEECs in 1999–2002.⁶² Our elite interviews in regional cities

⁶⁰ See Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks, *Multi-Level Governance and European Integration* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield 2001), p. 102 and European Commission, *White Paper on European Governance*, COM (2001) 428.

⁶¹ For an empirical proof of this hypothesis, based on research into the attitudes of Czech civil servants, see Petr Drulák, Jiří Česal and Stanislav Hampl, “Interactions and identities of Czech civil servants on their way to the EU”, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 10(4), (2003), pp. 637–654.

⁶² Our research comprised 66–76 elite interviews in Cluj (Romania), Pécs (Hungary), Katowice (Poland), Maribor (Slovenia) and Tartu (Estonia).

show that EU enlargement was not a salient issue for the sub-national elites who were primarily concerned with the social and economic problems arising from the domestic transition process. In the case of Pécs (Hungary) only 4% considered EU enlargement to be an important issue; in Katowice (Poland) less than 2.5% thought so. The focus on domestic socio-economic policy issues is understandable given the scale of the post-communist transition, but it seems to go hand in hand with a lack of recognition that EU assistance could play a role in alleviating the local problems of transition, in particular through PHARE or Structural Funds. Knowledge about local EU-funded projects serves as a proxy to gauge the level of awareness about EU activities.

Respondents were asked: Can you name (up to) three (or more) current (wholly or partly) EU-funded projects in your city? Answers were coded “good” if respondents were able to name projects and the source of funding; “poor” if respondents were unable to name any projects or sources of funding; “limited” if respondents showed knowledge of projects, but were unable to identify the source of funding (see Figure 1).

In Katowice, 55% had poor or limited knowledge of city-based EU programmes; in Pécs, the equivalent figure was 63.5%. This lack of awareness suggests that there has been a major communication and recognition problem with the way that EU programmes have been delivered at the local level. The exception to this trend were

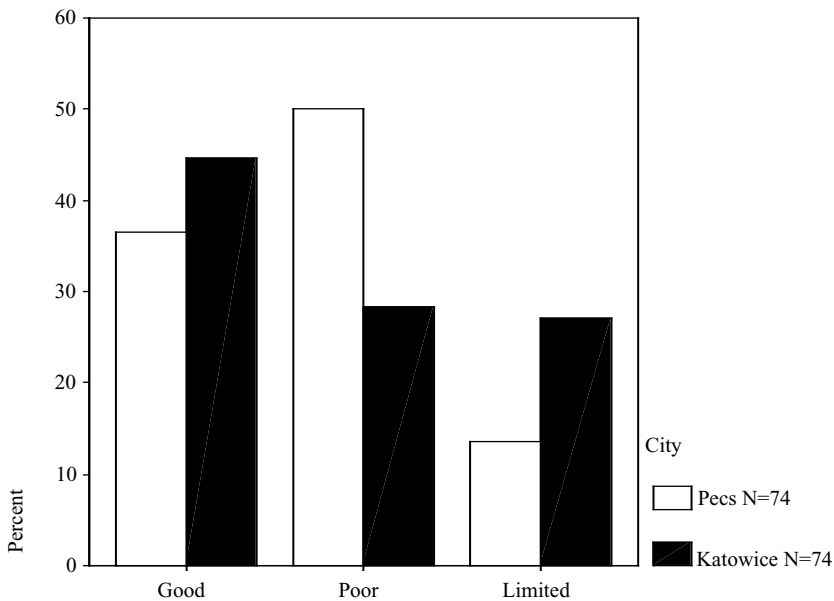


Figure 1

EU funds for major infrastructural projects, for example, new roads or waste water treatment plants. The fact that EU aid, including PHARE, is organized and funded through central ministries and rarely delivered on a territorial basis partly explains this low level of recognition. The level of correlation between the EU financial assistance that has gone into specific cities or regions and the level of elite knowledge about EU programmes is difficult to assess accurately, as the Commission does not keep records of the amount of EU aid dispersed to particular cities or regions. The somewhat higher level of elite knowledge exhibited in Katowice suggests an institutional explanation: the domestic consensus on democratic regionalization appears to have acted as an institutional vehicle for connecting the sub-national elites to the wider political process, including EU accession.

Elite attitudes towards the EU are connected to perceived benefits (or costs) of membership. In most cases, the local elites in CEE saw the benefits of EU membership accruing to the national level rather than the sub-national levels. The gap between the perceptions of the benefits of enlargement at the national versus the local level was most pronounced in Pécs: 93% of the members of the local elite thought that Hungary benefited “significantly” or “moderately” from its relationship with the EU, whereas only 20.5% felt that Pécs was benefiting “significantly” and 36% thought that Pécs was benefiting “minimally” or “not at all” from this relationship. The local elites did not seem to be aware of the potential economic benefits that the EU could bring. In Katowice this trend was reversed: 54.3% of the respondents thought said that Katowice would benefit “significantly” (as compared to 34.2% for Poland as a whole). In the next category the results were inverted, with 53.4% thinking Poland benefits “moderately” from its relationship with the EU, as compared to 37.1% describing the benefit of Katowice as “moderate”.

Theory suggests that greater connectedness to EU activities promotes norm diffusion, acculturation and the formation of a “European” identity. To gauge the level of identification with Europe among the sub-national elites in the CEECs, our respondents were asked to select and rank their identity from a list of options, including Europe, Central Europe, their country, the region, and the city. 27% of respondents in Pécs opted for “European” as their primary identity compared to 17% in Katowice. This result shows that the degree of identification of sub-national elite members with “Europe” is not necessarily indicative of their level of connectedness with the “EU”, as demonstrated through the awareness of and perceived benefits connected to EU membership. In Katowice, where the elites are among the most positively predisposed towards the EU, regional identity ranked second after a strong sense of national identity. The case of Katowice suggests a link between democratized regional government, regional identity and positive attitudes towards the EU during the accession process. Some 25% of respondents in Katowice chose the locale (whether regional or city) as their primary identity. Only 6% chose the regional identity as their first preference in Pécs (Baranya county).

SPREADING DEMOCRACY AND THE RULE OF LAW

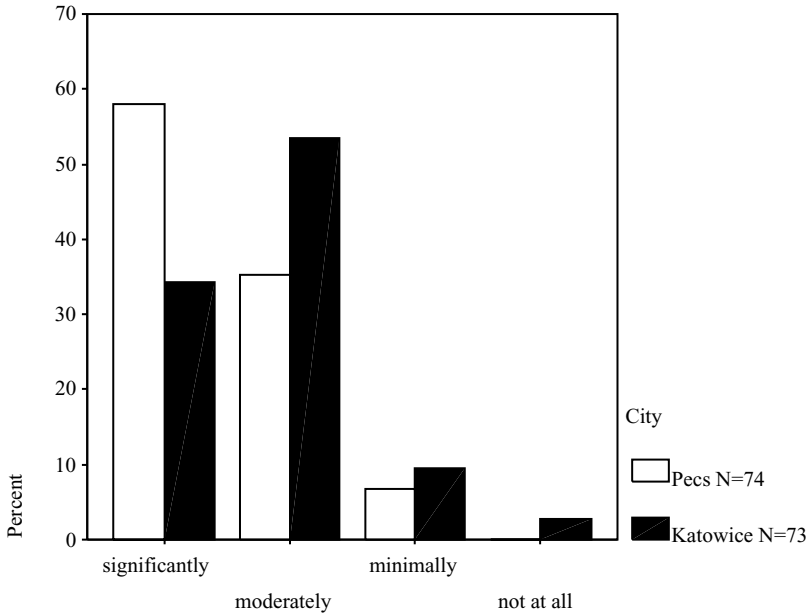


Figure 2

The latter result sits oddly with the much-trumpeted “thousand year history” of the county level in Hungary (see Figure 3).

The empirical evidence does not suggest that the sub-national elites are hostile to the EU or the process of accession. Rather as a result of their exclusion from this process, they were poorly informed about its details and implications. Despite this lack of awareness, they were in general positively predisposed to the economic benefits of membership of the EU at the macro-level. These elites have been pragmatic rather than actively Eurosceptic and are, therefore, potentially open to a greater level of engagement and connectedness with the EU. The elites generally expressed a consolidated view about the EU, with large majorities seeing the future of their country closely tied to the EU. In the cases of Pécs ($N = 74$) and Katowice ($N = 75$), 82.3% and 81.3% of respondents saw their respective country’s future most closely tied to the EU (see Figure 4).

6. CONCLUSION

The institutional design of regional governance in the CEECs is best understood as a development influenced by the interaction of a country’s domestic political trajectory of transition (including its historical legacies) and EU conditionality

SUB-NATIONAL GOVERNANCE IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

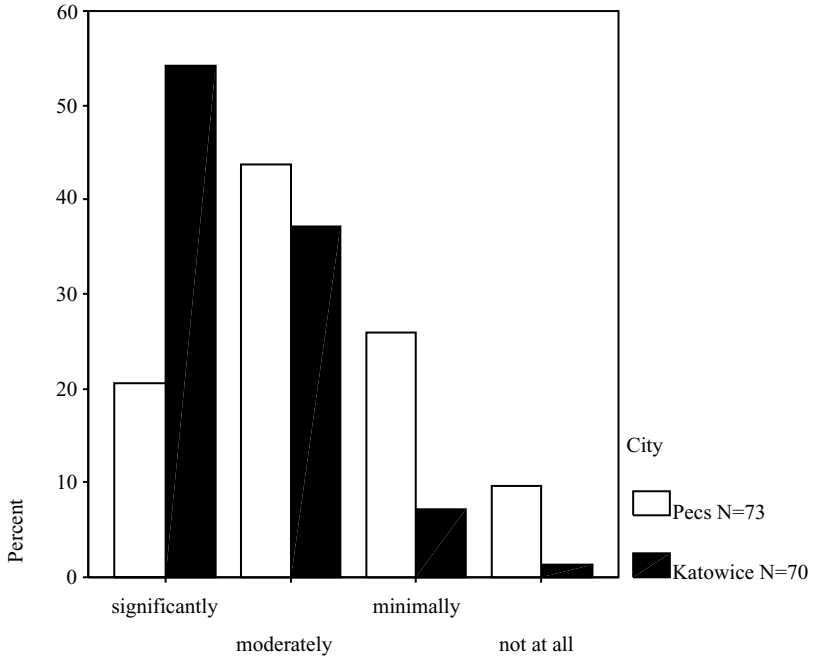


Figure 3

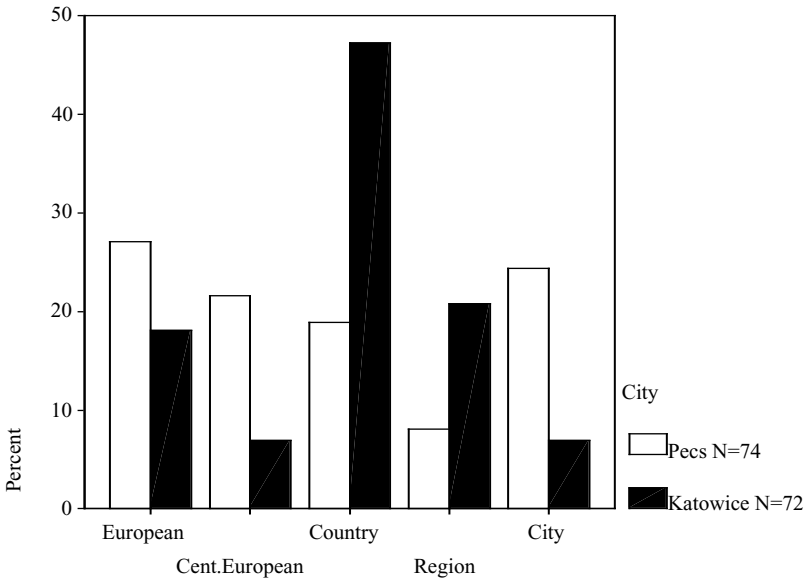


Figure 4

(understood as explicit and implicit pressures emanating from the Commission). Returning to the hypotheses formulated at the beginning, we can conclude that the scope of EU conditionality has been more limited than the unequal structure of the accession process might have suggested. With the exception of Poland, where a commitment to democratic regionalization formed part of the early transition process (and a general constitutional pre-commitment to regionalization in the Czech Republic in 1993), administrative and political regionalization became a salient issue in most CEECs within the context of EU accession. Domestic pressures for regionalization might have in any event accumulated over time, but the process of EU enlargement affected the timing and design of the reforms. Domestic debates about local and regional governance were galvanized by the Commission's Opinions of 1997, the Regular Reports and Accession Partnerships, in particular by the Commission's emphasis on weak administrative capacity.

Our comparative study of Poland and Hungary demonstrates that there has not been a uniform "Europeanizing" effect. The institutional design of regional governance in the CEECs can be broadly placed along a spectrum illustrated by *democratic regionalization* in the case of Poland, where regional institutions are elected and have significant devolved powers, and *administrative-statistical regionalization* in the case of Hungary, where regional institutions remain quangos with largely advisory status. Most of the accession states have opted for the latter, although the possibility of further decentralizing reforms to create a regional governance tier continues to be discussed in some of the candidate countries (including Hungary). As in the old Member States, the domestic institutional changes in response to the EU's adaptational pressures have varied across the CEECs, with considerable room for manoeuvre for domestic actors and institutions.⁶³ In domestic politics, short-hand references to EU conditionality became a legitimating device by means of which national-level politicians tried to circumvent potentially lengthy debates. Overall, our findings confirm the tentative conclusions drawn from the Europeanization literature, according to which political structures tend to be less "Europeanized" and exhibit less convergence than specific policy areas.

The lack of detailed explicit conditions embedded in the *acquis* was only partly and inconsistently compensated for by "soft" signposts, such as the recommendations in the Regular Reports or direct contacts with Commission officials. The ambiguity of the Commission's own preferences regarding the institutional environment of regional policy was reflected in the perception in the CEECs that the Commission favoured decentralization in the early stages of the process and shifted over time to a greater emphasis on the need for central control over funds. The apparent "conditionality gap" in a crucial area suggests that the process of enlargement needs to be disaggregated more fully in order not only to better understand how

⁶³ See Börzel and Risse, above n. 3, p. 11; Olsen, above n. 6, p. 16.

relevant EU conditionality is to specific policy domains, but also to demonstrate the interaction between the domestic political agendas and the EU. Ultimately, domestic political conditions and choices made during the early transition period were the basis of a certain resistance to Europeanization.

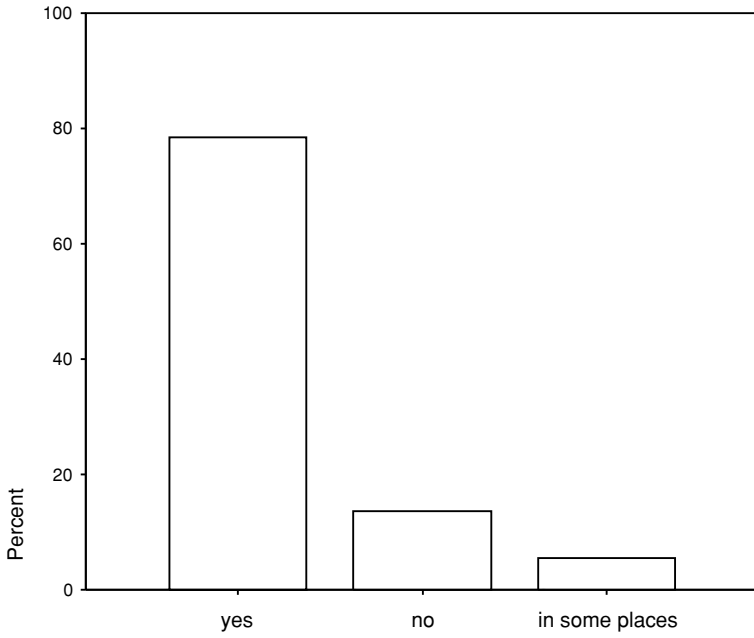
The lack of political mobilization among regional actors in most CEECs limited the need for national-level elites to consider models of democratic regionalization. The accession process also did not provide sub-national actors with any immediate political leverage. As yet it is unclear to what extent the current governance arrangements reflect sub-national preferences. The overall weak connectedness of the sub-national elites in the CEECs to the EU points to a shallow level of attitudinal “Europeanization”. EU accession has been perceived as a national-level elite project, leaving sub-national elites disengaged though not actively Eurosceptic. Despite the weak attitudinal “Europeanization” of sub-national elites, their position and functional importance guarantees their involvement in key policy areas, thereby raising doubts about effective implementation of EU policy, at least in the short- to medium-term.⁶⁴ It is conceivable that in the medium- to long-term sub-national actors in CEE will follow the example of the current Member States and increasingly use EU channels to influence policy-making at the domestic and the EU-level. As we know from the experience of the current Member States, Structural Funds are managed in a variety of ways. Thus, ultimately, the extent to which the gap between the values of national and sub-national elites in the area of regional policy will close in the CEECs, depends on the organizational structures for the management of Structural Funds and the investment of the new Member States in building capacity at the sub-national level of governance.

The decisional calculus of sub-national elites in accession states has been dominated by their focus on managing the immediate problems of transition rather than a strategic vision of European integration. The normative gap in “Europeanization” at the sub-national level did not appear to have significant ramifications for the referenda on EU accession, but we cannot similarly discount its impact on the prospects of “deep” integration. It is striking that among the elites in Katowice the evidence for the normative gap was consistently weaker. This suggests that democratic regionalization that involves significant regional self-government may *inter alia* foster a higher level of attitudinal connectedness of elites with the EU and have concomitant knock-on effects in promoting cognitive change to a higher level of commitment to European integration.

APPENDIX 1.

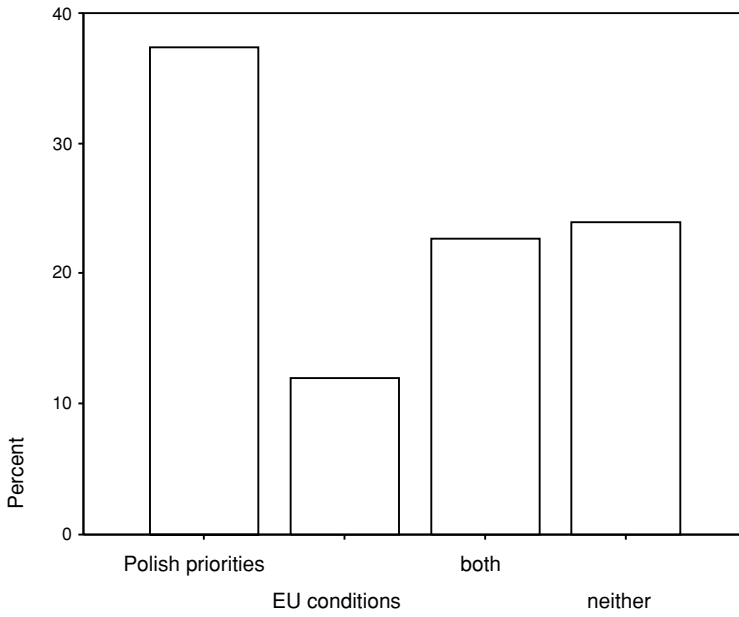
Openness to EU Influence on Sub-National Reforms (Pécs 1999)

Respondents were asked: Do you agree with the proposition that traditional administrative boundaries should be redrawn, if necessary, to comply with EU funding criteria (see Figure 5)?



$N = 72$

Figure 5



$N = 72$

Figure 6