Models of Provincial Self-government Coalitions and the Political Composition of Provincial Authorities in 1998-2014

The introduction of regional elections to various European countries and the growth of regional authorities have recently resulted in numerous regional coalition studies, as well as the evolution of coalition formation theory. The aim of this article is to investigate the impact of coalition formation on the distribution of cabinet positions in Polish regional governments and define whether they confirm ‘office-seeking’ assumptions or if they are affected by the communist heritage and/or the existence of multi-level government. Data from 1998 to 2014 indicate an evolution towards congruent coalitions and the avoidance of cross-cutting coalitions. The 2007 national election presented a turning point. The then existing coalitions were reformulated to be strictly subordinate to a multi-level government strategy and the culmination of this approach took place in 2010, when national coalition parties (the Civic Platform (PO) and the Polish People’s Party (PSL)) formed (fully or partially) congruent coalitions in all sixteen regions. The 2007 election can also be regarded as the date when the previously existing ‘regime divide’ (political cleavage between communist successor parties and parties emerging from the Communist-era opposition) determining the coalition formation became secondary, having been replaced by a new political divide. The adoption of the multi-level formation coalition strategy also made the approach of maximizing payoffs in individual regions less relevant. It became common practice to form oversized coalitions, with superfluous parties – if it was necessary to incorporate the national coalition partner. During the entire period under investigation, some parties had a lower or surplus distribution of cabinet positions in regional governments in proportion to their share of seats in regional parliaments. However, since 2007, the full-scale embrace of the multi-level strategy, introduced not by individual actors (political parties) but by coalition partners (PO and PSL), resulted in almost the complete exclusion of other political parties.

**Keywords:** regional coalitions, provincial councils, multi-level governance, post-Communist divide, job positions as loots, political parties