

ADMINISTRATIVE GEOGRAPHY OF CONTEMPORARY HUNGARY

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The change of system in Hungary amid the collapse of the bipolar world

Hungarian history in the 20th century saw an abundance of social, economic and political changes. A change of model amounts to a major correction within a system, whereas a change of system means altering the essential elements of a country's social, economic, political, and constitutional system. There is no consensus among scientists about the number of systemic changes (6–11) undergone by Hungary in the 20th century.

The last major systemic change in Hungary was facilitated by the seismic shift in international politics that followed the USSR's protracted war in Afghanistan and its defeat in the arms race with the USA. After Gorbachev came to power (11 March 1985), he set in motion major domestic reforms, but the unexpected effects of these reforms rapidly undermined his power. The USSR abandoned its collective defence system in Europe and withdrew its armed forces from the occupied Central European countries, thereby abolishing the (double) Iron Curtain. At Christmas in 1991, the Soviet empire itself also ceased to exist.

The change of system in Hungary cannot be tied to a single date. Rather, the changes took place over a period of several years. It is difficult to determine precisely when the model change in the country's communist system mutated into systemic change. The national conference of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (HSWP) in May 1988 may have marked the tipping point. From then on, the transformation of Hungarian domestic politics accelerated. Members of the HSWP began to leave the party *en masse*, and the party leadership came under considerable internal pressure. The emerging opposition movements and the nascent (and re-established) political parties were instrumental in expanding political participation. Political demonstrations were held, yet the protesters did not seek to topple the Hungarian communist government.

On 18 September 1989, the *Hungarian Round Table Talks* (with delegates from the HSWP, the Opposition Round Table, and the third side) determined the prerequisites for the country's new constitutional framework and domestic political transformation. The last communist parliament then approved these extra-parliamentary agreements, enabling the change of system in Hungary to be accomplished within a constitutional framework and without bloodshed.

The multi-party parliamentary elections of the spring of 1990 marked the culmination of the fundamental political and constitutional changes. The elections were won by the Hungarian Democratic Forum. Led by Prime Minister József Antall, the new government faced enormous tasks.

The departure of Soviet forces from Hungary (1991) laid the security foundations for the democratic transition. Since 2013, an independent research institute has been researching the history of Hungary's transition from communism to parliamentary democracy.

The new constitutional framework

Hungary's first written constitution was adopted in 1949 as *Act XX of 1949*. Following many amendments, the Act remained in force until 2011. Its provisions set out the constitutional framework in a formal sense for radically different political and economic systems.

The change of system was accomplished in Hungary through a series of legislative steps. An important symbolic event was the proclamation of the Republic on 23 October 1989, which preceded the first free elections and was thus based on a decision of the old parliament. Act XXXI of 1989 on the amendments of the constitution resulted in a complete overhaul of the constitutional system. The framers of the new constitutional provisions envisaged a temporary solution, with a new constitution being adopted later.



1 Demonstration against the destruction of villages in Romania, 27 June 1988, Budapest, Heroes' Square

Even before 23 October 1989, significant changes were made to Hungarian public law. Nevertheless, it was the comprehensive constitutional reforms of 1989 that created the public law conditions for the change of system, the democratic transition, the guaranteeing of fundamental human and political rights, and popular sovereignty. In accordance with the principle of the separation of powers, the constitutional changes regulated the purposes of the legislature, executive and judiciary, guaranteeing their independence and interdependence. The Parliament holds the constitutional power. The adoption of a constitution requires a two-thirds parliamentary majority, but there is no need for its confirmation in a referendum.

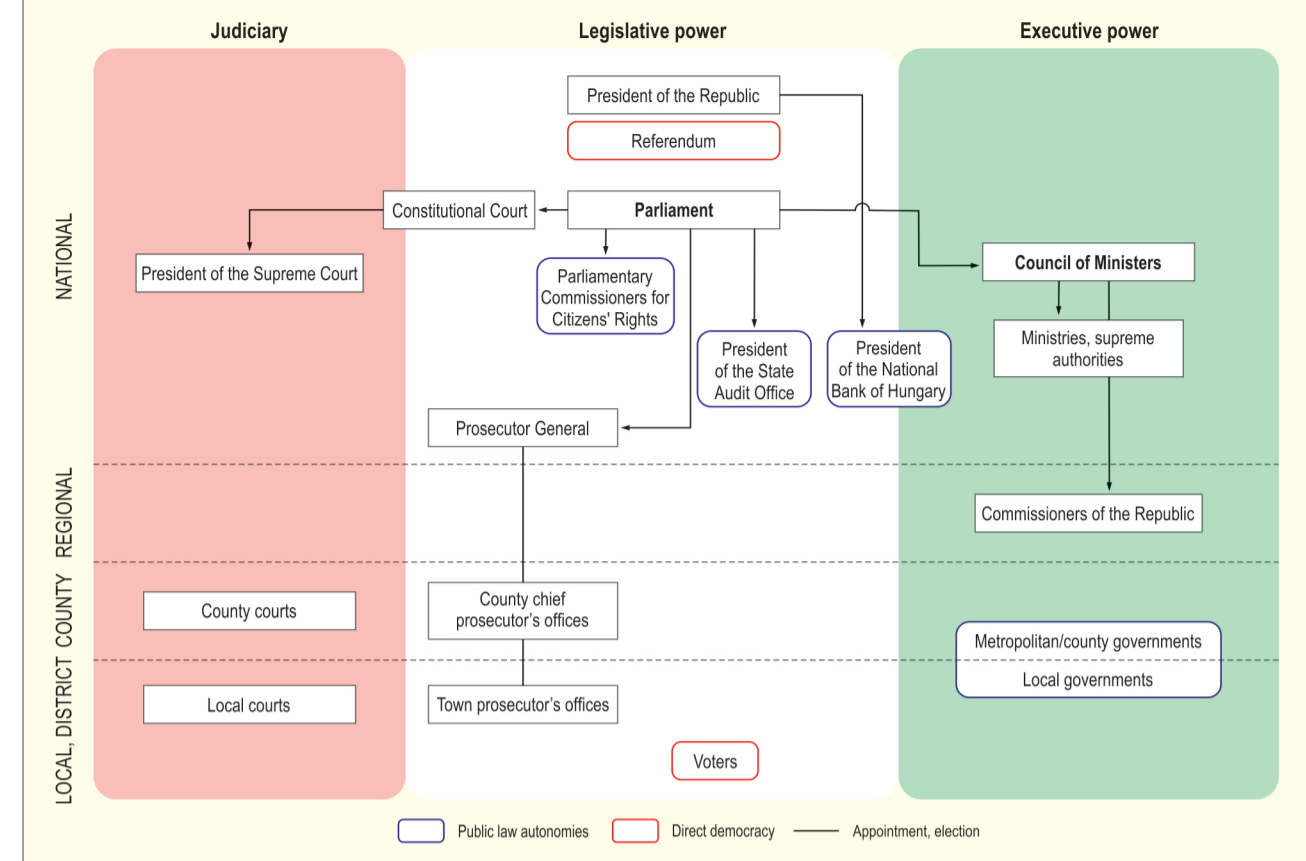
The new governance model consolidated the role of parliament by defining its legislative powers and by listing laws that require a two-thirds parliamentary majority. Alongside the three branches of government, several institutions with independent legal status serve as additional checks and balances on power: the Constitutional Court, the State Audit Office, and the Parliamentary Commissioner for Citizens' Rights.

After the four-part referendum (on the method of electing the President of the Republic, the disbandment of the Workers' Militia, an accounting of property owned by the HSWP, and the abolition of workplace party organizations) and the first free elections, further constitutional revision (Act XL of 1990) created a model that gave the government more room for action. The role of the President of the Republic was defined and regulated. The number of laws requiring a two-thirds parliamentary majority was decreased, and the government gained more room for manoeuvre and stability, especially in view of the introduction of the so-called 'constructive motion of no confidence'. (A motion against an incumbent prime minister needs



2 The Hungarian Parliament building

2 THE NEW CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK (1989–1990)



to be accompanied by the nomination of a new prime minister. In this way, the National Assembly can immediately elect the new prime minister, so there is no uncertainty.) The form of government was still a parliamentary republic, but the accumulated changes moved the governance model towards a chancellor system with a strengthening of the powers of the prime minister.

The state organization proved to be functional, and the amended constitution, which had been envisaged as a temporary solution, remained in force much longer than anticipated.

The territorial aspects of the law on local governments of 1990

A major task of the new democratically elected parliament was the adoption of an act on local governments. The legislation was needed for the holding of local elections in the autumn of 1990. Adopted after intense debate, the law represented a political compromise. It was also the outcome of efforts to align Hungary with the European Charter of Local Self-Government, to which the country had acceded in the initial stages of the democratic transition. Hungary's local governments received the right to autonomy in the political, economic management and taxation fields. They could also establish and operate organizations and form associations. The constitution defined the right to local self-government as a fundamental constitutional right of the communities of voters in rural and urban settlements, in the capital and its districts, and in the counties.

Act LXV of 1990 on Local Governments (ALG) contains the general rules of self-governance in its provisions on the local governments. The special rules governing county governments, towns with county rights, and the capital are established in other sections of the Act.

The greatest structural change in relation to the previous council system was the granting to every settlement the right to self-governance. An immediate consequence was the replacement of the former joint councils with twice as many independent local self-governments. The question arose whether the newly self-governing settlements would be able to fulfil their tasks independently. The ALG did not contain provisions for the mandatory association of local governments. Moreover, in the initial period, the local governments

were reluctant to form joint bodies. At most, they created notary districts for the joint performance of official tasks. An attempt was made to rationalize the 1990 model as part of the comprehensive local government reforms of 1994. For instance, the right to found an independent village was made conditional on a population size of 300 or more. In most notary districts, there were fewer than 2000 inhabitants. The same was true for the settlements with their own notary offices (i.e. not part of a notary district).

In the fragmented system of local self-governments, associations did not become a major element for some time. This was so despite the adoption, in 1997, of a law on the association of self-governments and the establishment, in 2004, of microregional associations, with designated boundaries and seats.

Similarly, the granting of urban status was not strictly regulated at first. The framework provisions of the ALG were only elaborated in detail in Act XLI of 1999 on regional organization, which stipulated that large villages could seek urban status where their development justified such status. After the change of system, there was a steady increase in the number of villages attaining urban status. The process slowed down only after the rules were tightened. Nevertheless, since the early 1990s, the number of settlements with urban status has multiplied, resulting in a divergence between urban status and urban functions.

A highly controversial structural feature of the ALG was the section on the counties and on towns with county rights. It was only as a result of the 1994 amendments that the ALG recognized the counties as constituting a separate level of self-government. Under the

3 NUMBER OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS, INDEPENDENT OFFICES AND NOTARY DISTRICTS (1990–2011)

Year	local self-governments		self-governments joining notary districts	notary districts
	total	with independent office		
1990	1,420	782	2,188	638
1991	3,097	1,562	1,535	529
1995	3,149	1,773	1,376	494
2000	3,158	1,762	1,396	536
2005	3,168	1,551	1,617	631
2010	3,175	1,202	1,973	768
2011	3,177	1,200	1,977	768

4 NUMBER OF JOINT LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICES (NOTARY DISTRICTS) BY SIZE (1990–2010)

Year	Population number			
	under 1,000	1,000–1,499	1,500–2,000	over 2,000
1990	13	97	115	413
1995	95	149	83	167
2000	106	163	104	163
2005	114	192	118	207
2010	121	203	156	288

5 NUMBER OF SETTLEMENTS WITH INDEPENDENT LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICES BY SIZE (1990–2010)

Year	Population number				
	under 500	500–999	1,000–1,499	1,500–2,000	over 2,000
1990	3	90	139	130	569
1995	142	395	289	225	702
2000	137	356	262	220	699
2005	62	254	243	204	687
2010	22	96	171	178	613

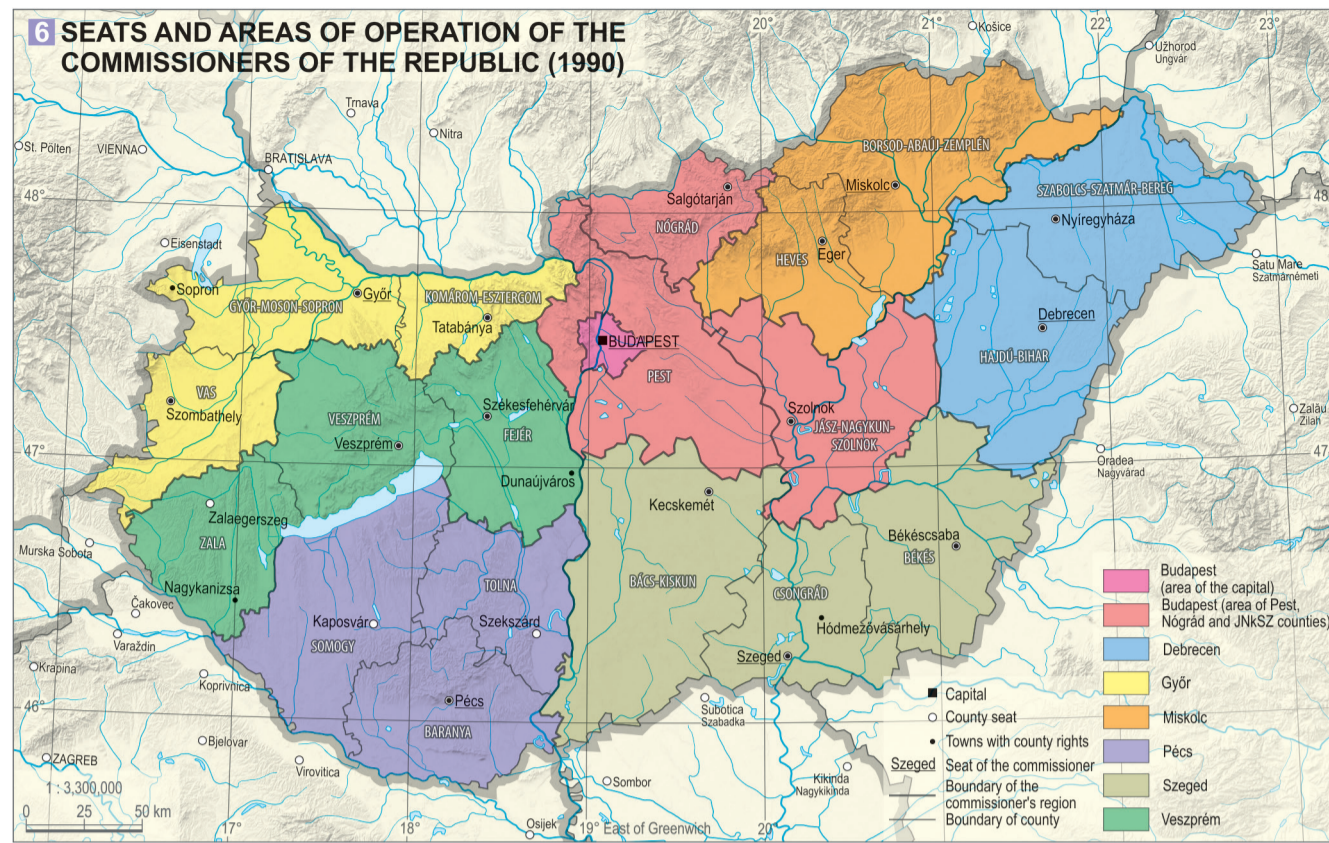
Act's provisions, the counties were limited in their powers to the maintenance of a few types of institutions. The tasks of the county governments also depended on which institutions were handed over by the local governments. The indirect election system of the county governments undermined their political legitimacy. Towns with county rights became isolated from the county assemblies where they had no representation. The self-governments of towns with county rights were entitled to exercise the powers of county governments in addition to their own powers as local governments.

The ALG included a section regulating the capital. The legal regulations gave rise to administrative divisions at two levels: the Municipality of Budapest and 23 municipal districts. There is no hierarchy between the city government and the municipal district governments; the latter have general authority. The ALG failed to resolve satisfactorily the exceptional circumstances of Budapest and its agglomeration. In 1991, a separate law was adopted on Budapest; it upheld the autonomy of the municipal districts but failed to provide a framework for institutional cooperation between Budapest and its region. Following the 1994 amendment to the ALG, Budapest was once again made subject to the general regulations. While consolidating the powers of the Municipality of Budapest, this measure failed to properly address the issue of coordination between the city and its districts and between the city and its agglomeration.

Adopted in 1996, the *Law on regional development and spatial planning* (Act XXI of 1996) created various organizational and geographical frameworks for regional planning and coordination, but these lacked durability and were limited to development policy.

The ALG introduced the post of *Commissioner of the Republic*, whose task was to perform the supervisory functions that had previously been undertaken by the old county councils. The areas of operation of the Commissioners were defined by Parliamentary Resolution no. 66/1990, which established eight regions. The ALG determined the legal status, offices and tasks of the Commissioners.

A priority task for the Commissioners was retrospective supervision of the legality of the decisions of local governments. In addition, they exercised first-instance jurisdiction in a range of matters as determined by law or government decree. They also judged legal remedies within their purview in cases of public administration where decisions had already been made at first instance and where no body of public administration was au-



thorized to act. Further, they performed the tasks of public administration assigned to them by the Government pursuant to a law or statutory authorization. The main purpose of the offices of the Commissioners was to coordinate the activities of the state administrative bodies operating in their respective regions.

In the course of their legal supervisory tasks, the Commissioners drew the attention of local governments to violations of the law. Where a local government (a municipality) failed to eliminate a violation of the law by a specified deadline, a Commissioner had the right to initiate a review of the municipal decree deemed unlawful at the Constitutional Court and, where appropriate, to seek its annulment.

The Commissioners were appointed by the President of the Republic for the period of his or her tenure and based on the proposal of the Prime Minister after a hearing in the competent parliamentary committee. The Commissioners performed their duties with the rank of titular state secretary.

Some of the regions demarcated for the Commissioners 6 coincided geographically with the territorial units that had appeared in several previous plans for regional divisions. The designated seats of the various regions were usually major regional centres. The selection of Veszprém as a seat for one of the regions reflected its relative accessibility to the three subordinated counties. In view of the considerable regional disparities in Hungary, there were significant differences between the individual Commissioner regions in terms of the number of local governments (municipalities). The Commissioners existed for a single government term; they were 'discontinued' by the new government

after the parliamentary elections of 1994. At that time, the local governments were placed under a different legal supervisory framework.

The development of decentralized bodies of public administration until 2010

Territorial public administration in Hungary has traditionally been divided into representative *self-governments* and bureaucratic *decentralized public administrative bodies* operating in a hierarchical system. Under the Soviet-type council system of the communist period, councils were able, as state organizations, to undertake various classical tasks of public administration. For its part, central government could offer direction concerning these tasks by means of the executive committees of the councils. This meant that administration at the local or regional level was less divided, and there were significantly fewer public administrative bodies functioning outside the councils. However, the new local government model brought a notable change in the structure of territorial public administration, with a clearer separation between the tasks of the local governments and the tasks of the public administrative bodies. Further, the abolition of the county councils resulted in a substantial increase in the number and scope of territorial public administrative bodies directly subordinated to government ministries.

State bodies were established at territorial level, depending on the nature of the functions performed and the services provided.

- Organizations at the settlement level were required

principally for those public administrative tasks involving direct contact with the public, or where a continuous presence is necessary (e.g. police, land registry offices, courts).

- The vast majority of public administrative bodies were established at county level until the reappearance of the districts 1.

- Notwithstanding the above, multi-county or regional assignments differing from the county division occurred relatively often 7 8.

In the period until 2004, a critique of the system was made in nine government decrees. The following weaknesses were identified: an excessive segmentation of the territorial public administrative bodies; a lack of control mechanisms and coordination; the presence of heterogeneous functions with unnecessary overlapping between the various bodies; and, therefore, an expensive and inefficient system of territorial public administration. In 1994, the government identified the creation of county public administrative offices as a means to overcome the problems.

In 1995, a reform of the system of territorial public administration was commenced. The aim was to integrate the various public administrative bodies by incorporating most of them into the county public administrative offices. However, the reforms, which started with considerable momentum, soon came to a halt, owing primarily to the resistance of the various government ministries. Three years after the announcement of the reforms, just one decentralized body, namely the consumer protection inspectorate, had been integrated into the county administrative offices. At the same time, most of the decentralized bodies falling under one ministry had been merged into a single body. Thus, the total number of sectoral-territorial decentralized organizational types had been reduced to 19 9.

The new government that was established after the 2006 parliamentary elections envisaged self-governing regions as part of a territorial reform of the system of public administration. The two-thirds parliamentary majority requirement meant, however, that the support of the opposition was needed, which was unforthcoming. By way of Act CLIX of 2006 on the amendment of acts related to the reorganization of government, the government set in motion *the regional transformation of those decentralized public administrative bodies* that had been operating at county level. Hungary had no traditions of a regional level of government. Parliamentary Resolution no. 35/1998 on the National Regional Development Concept reflected the demarcation requirements of the European Union's Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS), which, however, had been elaborated for regional development, planning and statistical purposes rather than for public administrative roles 1.

9 STRUCTURE AND AREAS OF OPERATION OF DECENTRALIZED STATE ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANS	
Area of operation (state administrative organs)	
County	offices of public administration statistical directorates regional directorates of the State Treasury branch offices of the State Treasury agricultural offices animal health and food inspection stations plant and soil protection service points branch offices of agricultural and rural development transport supervisory bodies work relations and employment centres health insurance directorates pensions directorates armed force reserve commands
County, with district sub-units	land registry offices employment centres public health and medical officer services tax and financial auditing directorates disaster management directorates police headquarters
Planning statistical region	regional offices of geological service directorates of immigration and citizenship regional youth offices examination centre directorates
Planning statistical region, with district sub-units	customs and excise boards
Region matching the county boundary	mining departments technical security inspectorates cultural heritage offices claims settlement office branches gambling inspectorates
Region and its sub-units matching the county boundary	offices of weights and measures
Special region	regional offices of communications regional chief architect offices regional tourism committees forest service directorates environmental inspectorates water directorates national park directorates
Special region, with district sub-units	border guard directorates
Special regional organs, with several locations	agricultural qualifying institutes

The first wave of regionalization began in December 2006. Several mergers took place, and the government transformed bodies operating within the county framework into regional bodies.

- Regionalization was undertaken at the following bodies: The Tax and Financial Auditing Office, the State Public Health and Medical Officer Service, the Armed Force Reserve Command, the Offices of Public Administration, the Transport Supervisory Body (renamed the National Transport Authority), the Hungarian State Treasury, the Employment Centres, and the Pension Insurance Directorates.

- The previous regional chief architect offices continued to operate within the organizational framework of the offices of public administration, with the same competences as those offices.

- The Hungarian Geological Service was abolished; its functions and tasks were transferred to the Hungarian Mining and Geological Office.

- The Gambling Inspectorate was abolished; its functions and tasks were transferred to the Gambling Supervisory Department of the Tax and Financial Audit-

ing Office. Concurrently, the existing regional inspectorates continued their activities at the same locations and in the same territorial jurisdictions.

- The National Office of Measures was abolished; its functions and tasks were transferred to the Hungarian Trade Licensing Office. The regional investigative offices of the National Customs and Excise Board, which had been so-called low-level bodies, were turned into intermediate-level bodies. Following the creation of the Central Agricultural Office and its county branch offices, several bodies were abolished, including the plant and soil protection service points and the animal health and plant inspection stations in Budapest and the counties, the State Forestry Service, and the National Institute for Agricultural Quality Control.

In September 2007, a unified National Consumer Protection Authority was created out of the Consumer Protection Inspectorate and the consumer protection bodies operating within the offices of public administration.

Despite these attempts at regionalization, little progress was made towards the integration of the decentralized bodies, a more efficient system of territorial public administration, and an increased focus on members of the public and their expectations.

Regional planning and development in the run-up to European Union membership

Act XXI of 1996 on regional development and spatial planning constituted a legislative milestone in Hungary's preparations for European Union (EU) membership. Following the adoption of the Act, its provisions were given greater clarity and meaning in the various parliamentary resolutions on the National Regional Development Concept. Meanwhile, several government decrees identified key types of regions in development policy.

The law itself created a number of spatial categories (12 in total), but only few of these were given substance.

To ensure that regional development interventions were appropriate, the regional development units needed to be delineated. A benchmark was the microregion (and subsequently the district) as demarcated by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office. The demarcation was based on regional features that could be enhanced with a view to achieving successful development interventions 10 11 12 13.

Among the various spatial categories of the Act on regional development and spatial planning, the enterprise zones were the ones given substance in practice.

The National Regional Development Concept listed the priority areas as follows:

- the Budapest agglomeration;
- Lake Balaton, Lake Velence-Vértes, Lake Tisza, Mátra-Bükk, Danube Bend, Mecsek-Villány, and Sopron-Kőszeg regions;
- Hortobágy National Park, Fertő-Hanság National Park, Aggtelek National Park, Danube-Drava National Park, Kiskunság National Park, Körös-Maros National Park, Danube-Ipoly National Park, and Bükk National Park;

The various institutional actors of regional development until 2004 were:

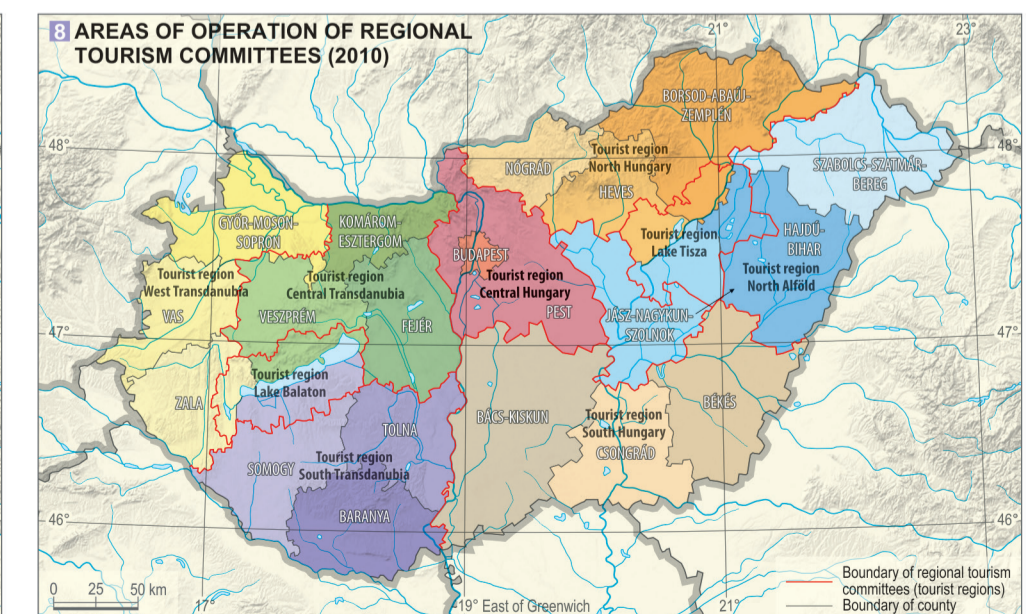
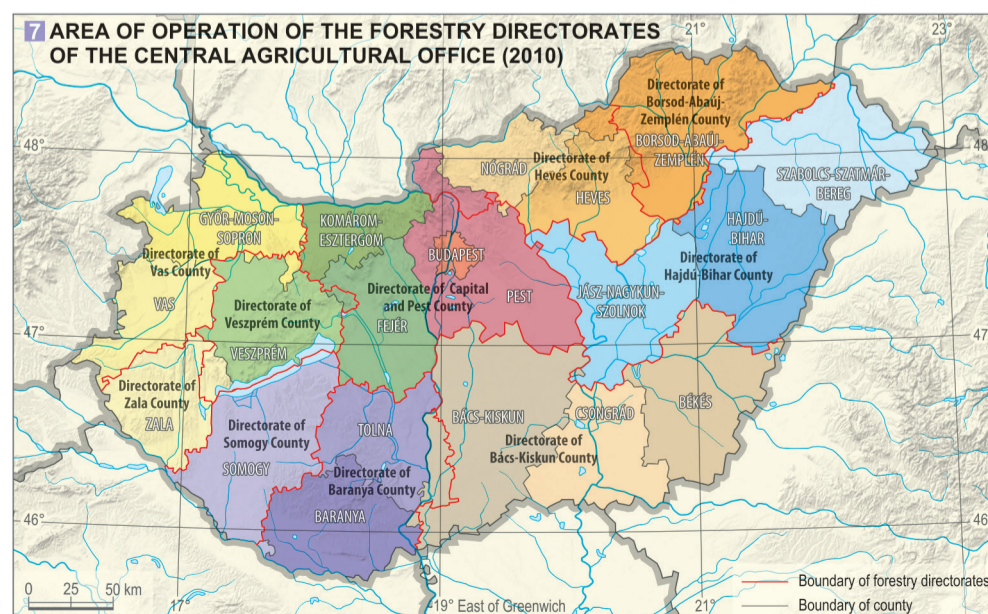
- the local governmental associations for regional development;
- the county regional development councils;
- the regional spatial development councils;
- the regional development council (from 7 November 1999)

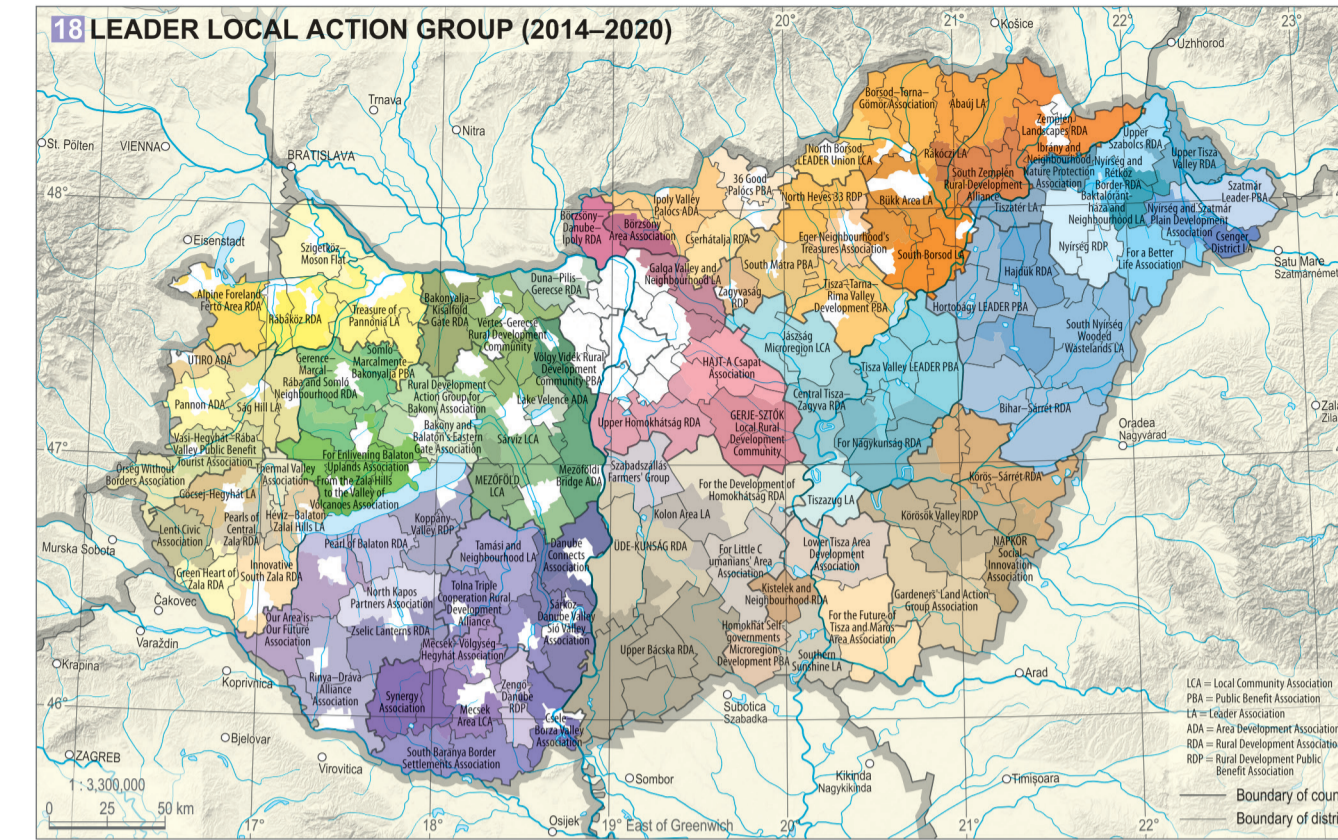
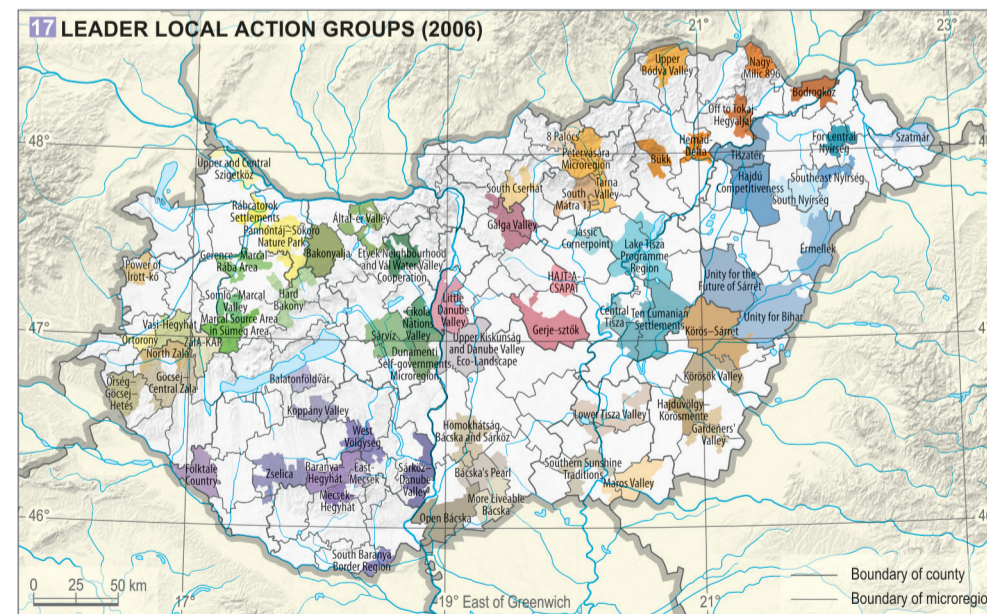
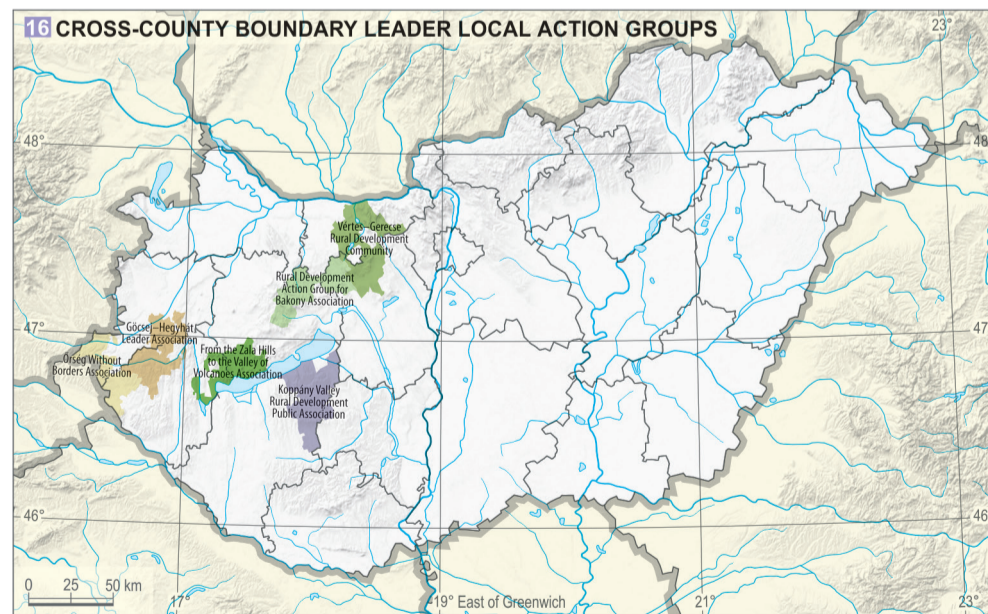
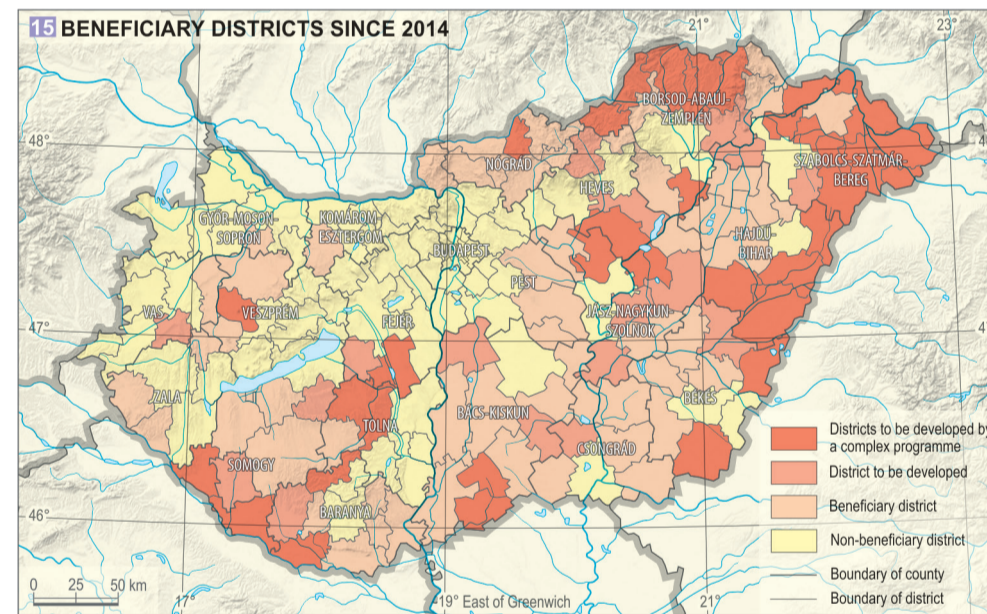
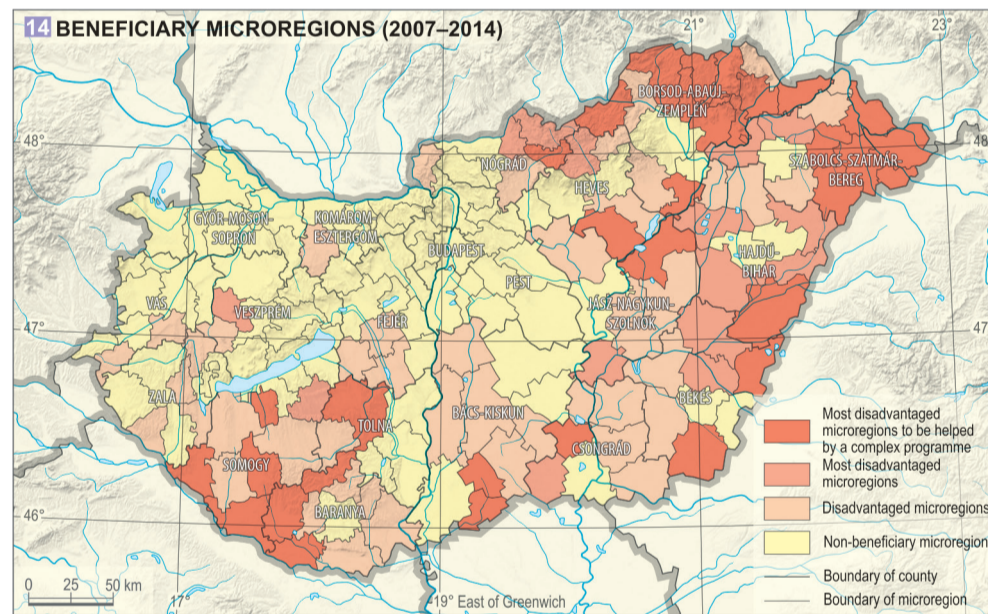
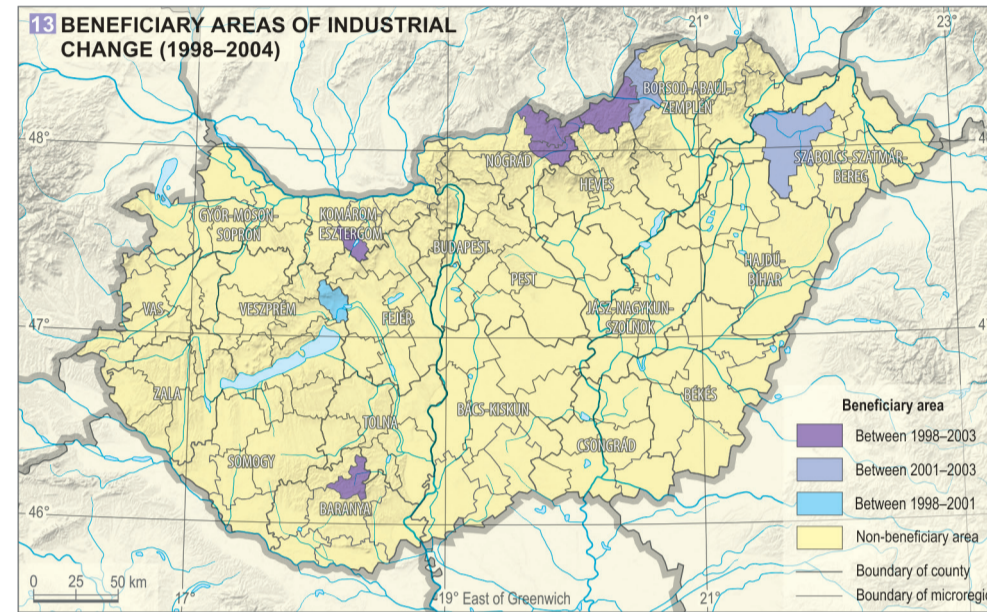
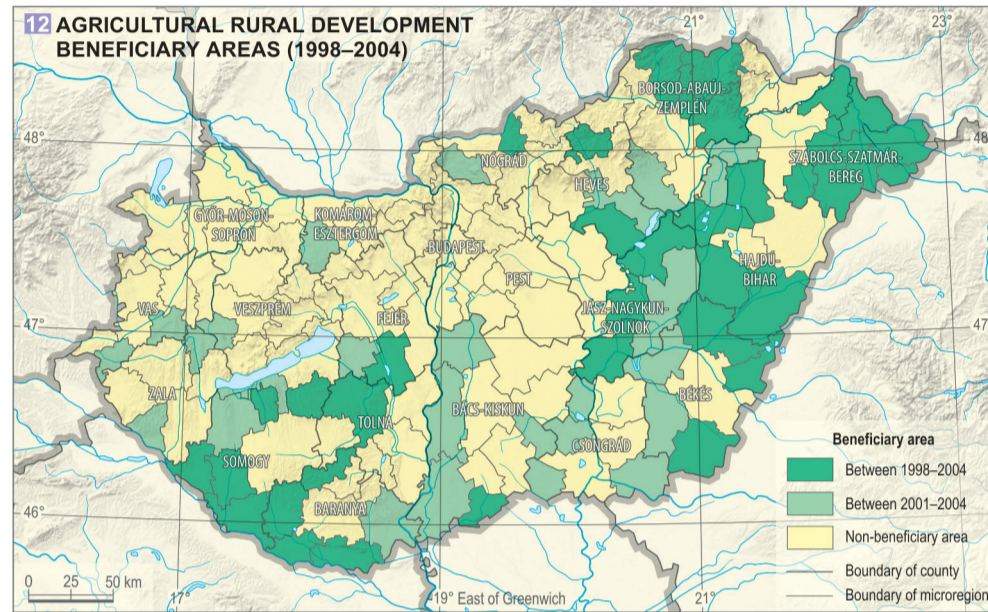
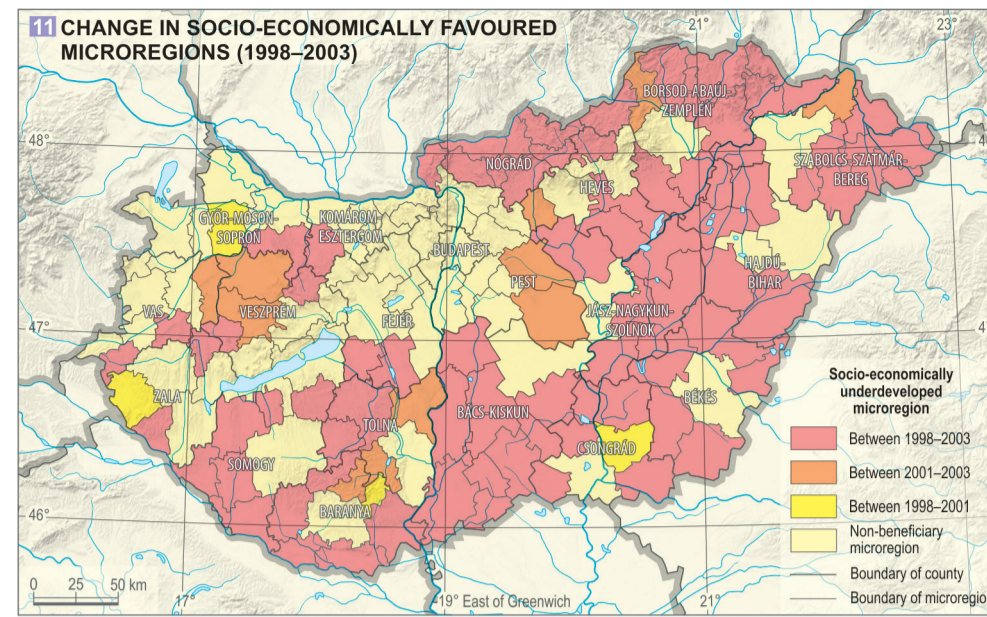
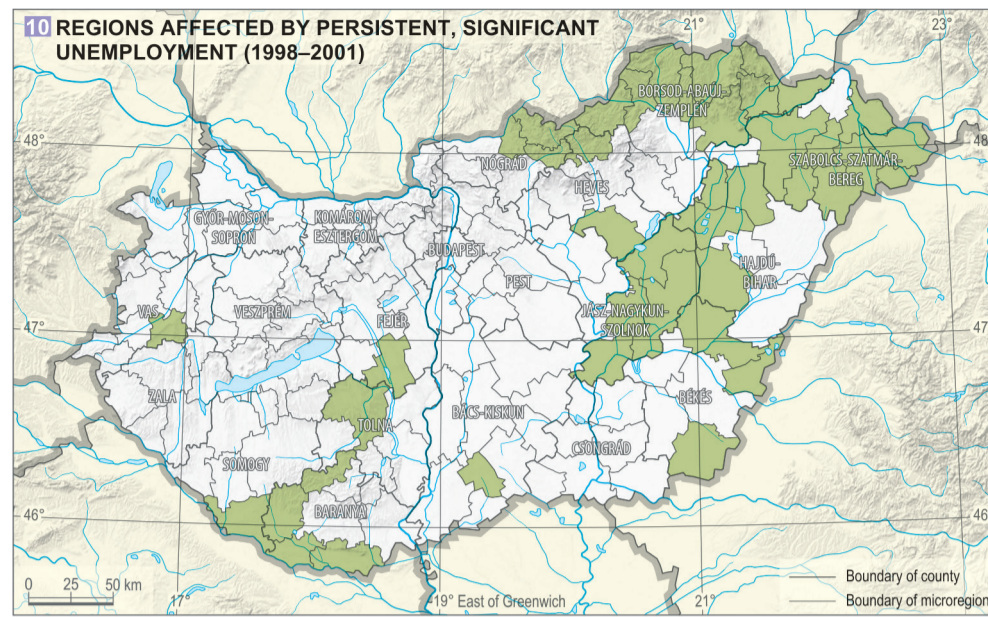
The impact of European Union membership on the institutional development of public administration and regional development

After Hungary's accession to the EU, the institutional system of regional development was shaped by both EU and domestic regulations. At the central level, management and payment authorities, monitoring committees (whose members were representatives of central government, entrepreneurs, and representatives of voluntary organizations and public bodies), and the so-called contributing organizations were established in line with EU regulations. This institutional system oversaw the implementation of the seven-year development programmes (the so-called operational programmes). There was only one regional programme where preparations for decision-making were initially undertaken at the regional level and then – between 2014 and 2020 – at the county level. This programme was known as the Regional Operational Programme from 2004 until 2006, as the operational programmes of named regions between 2007 and 2013, as the Territorial and Settlement Development Operational Programme (TOP) between 2014 and 2020, and as TOP+ from 2021. Among the various institutional actors, those exercising control over development resources could become dominant in practice. At the regional level, this initially meant the regional development councils and the regional development agencies. Subsequently, the county governments became more influential. From 2010, the government's regional development policy has favoured the county level, with the emphasis being placed on the county self-governments. Accordingly, in 2012 the county and regional development councils were abolished. At the regional level, regional consultation fora were established throughout the country, with each forum being operated by the chairpersons of the county assemblies in the given region. Similar consultation fora also operate at the county level, facilitating cooperation between towns with county rights and the county governments. Such fora are important because towns with county rights are not part of the county regional development programmes. In view of the transfer of the tasks of regional development to the county level, the regional development agencies were abolished in June 2016.

In terms of regional planning, the statistical regions were important in the initial period, but after 2010 the counties became more significant. At the same time, however, during the implementation of individual development programmes, the demarcation of microregions according to their level of development assumed growing importance. This was because such development programmes could be initiated in underdeveloped areas, with grant applications receiving higher scores and greater support. A review of the classification of regions was adapted to the EU's multiannual financial frameworks. Thus, the year 2007 saw the establishment of a microregional classification, but this was followed in 2014 by a district classification 14 15.

In Hungary, rural development based on EU funds differs from the system of regional development both in organizational terms and geographically. Formerly, the principal decision-maker, the so-called managing authority, operated within the ministry responsible for agricultural affairs, while at the regional level, the payment agency had regional and then county branch offices. The exception was the LEADER (Liaison between Actions for the Development of the Rural Economy) programme, which was introduced in the EU in 1991.

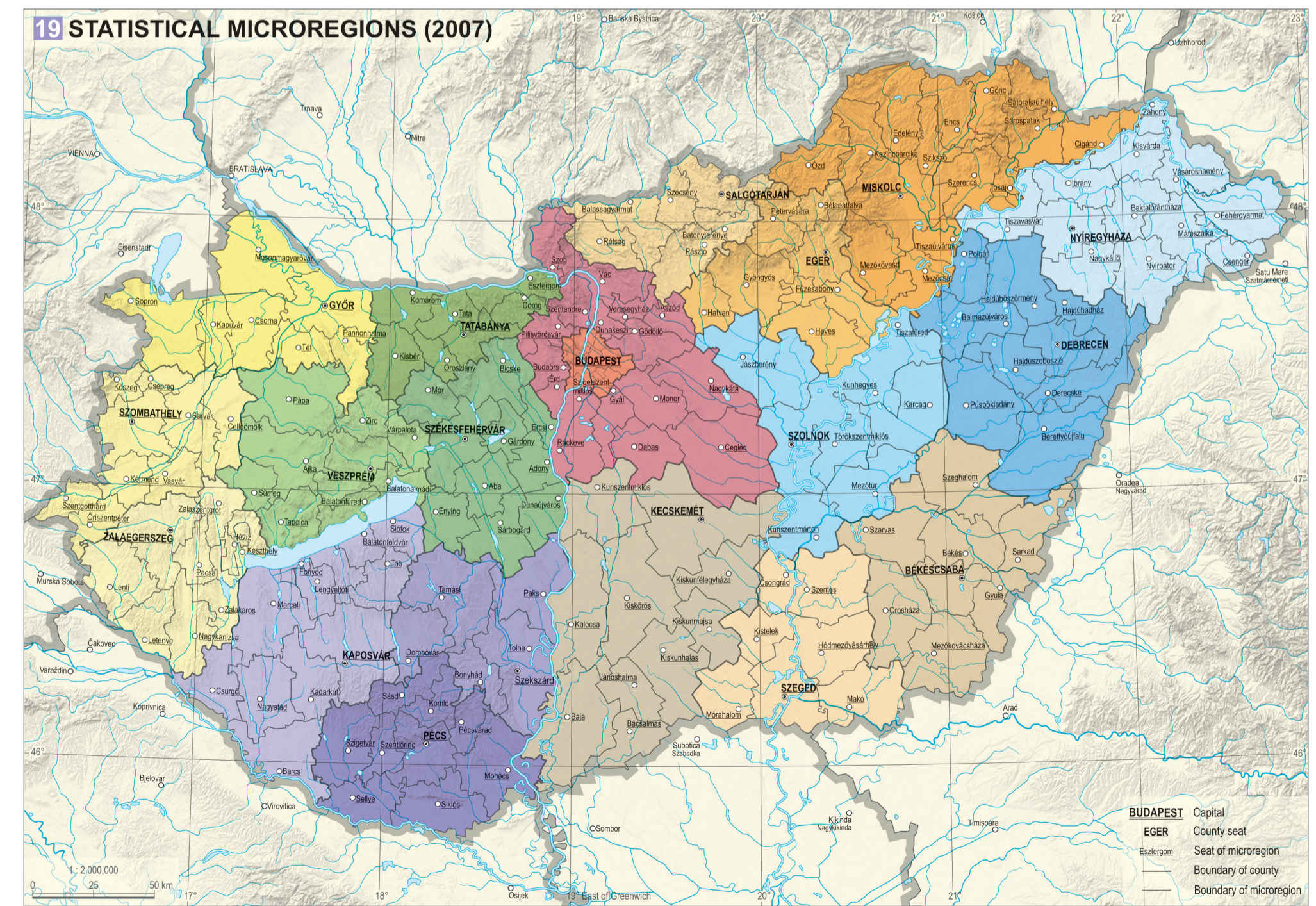




to the current LAU 2 level. The number of these territorial administrative units gradually increased from 138 to 175. In 1996, the microregions became part of the institutional system of regional development under the auspices of the development councils, whose members were the local governments.

In 2004, after the adoption of the Act on multi-purpose microregional associations, a reform of municipal public services could take place. These organizational reforms encouraged the establishment of complex voluntary self-government associations matching the boundaries of the statistical microregions. By 2007, multi-purpose associations covered the entire country

with no overlapping ¹⁹. It thus became possible and expedient for these associations to exercise the powers of the microregional development councils. Accordingly, settlement development was coordinated at a lower to intermediate level and public service provision was optimized. The associations defined their competences themselves, typically undertaking to provide basic human public services. Under the provisions of Act CLXXXIX of 2011 on local governments in Hungary, the associations were required to become legal entities. Even so, everyday experience suggests that the microregions of the previous period still strongly shape the public service districts in a functional sense.



This programme is noteworthy because it is the closest to the local level. It constitutes a functional area spanning administrative boundaries ¹⁶ and exercising local decision-making powers. Since the proportion of public sector representatives in the decision-making process must not exceed 49%, the majority is formed from entrepreneurs and other members of the public.

Between 2005 and 2007, 70 such organizations (so-called Local Action Groups) were operating in Hungary ¹⁷. Since 2007, the programme has covered the entire country, excluding settlements where the population density is greater than 120 persons/sq. km. The only change has been in the number of Local Action Groups; in 2022, there were 103 such groups ¹⁸.

Functional and spatial processes of the microregional local government associations

In 1994, the Hungarian Central Statistical Office demarcated the *statistical microregions*, which correspond

The constitutional and public administrative system after 2011

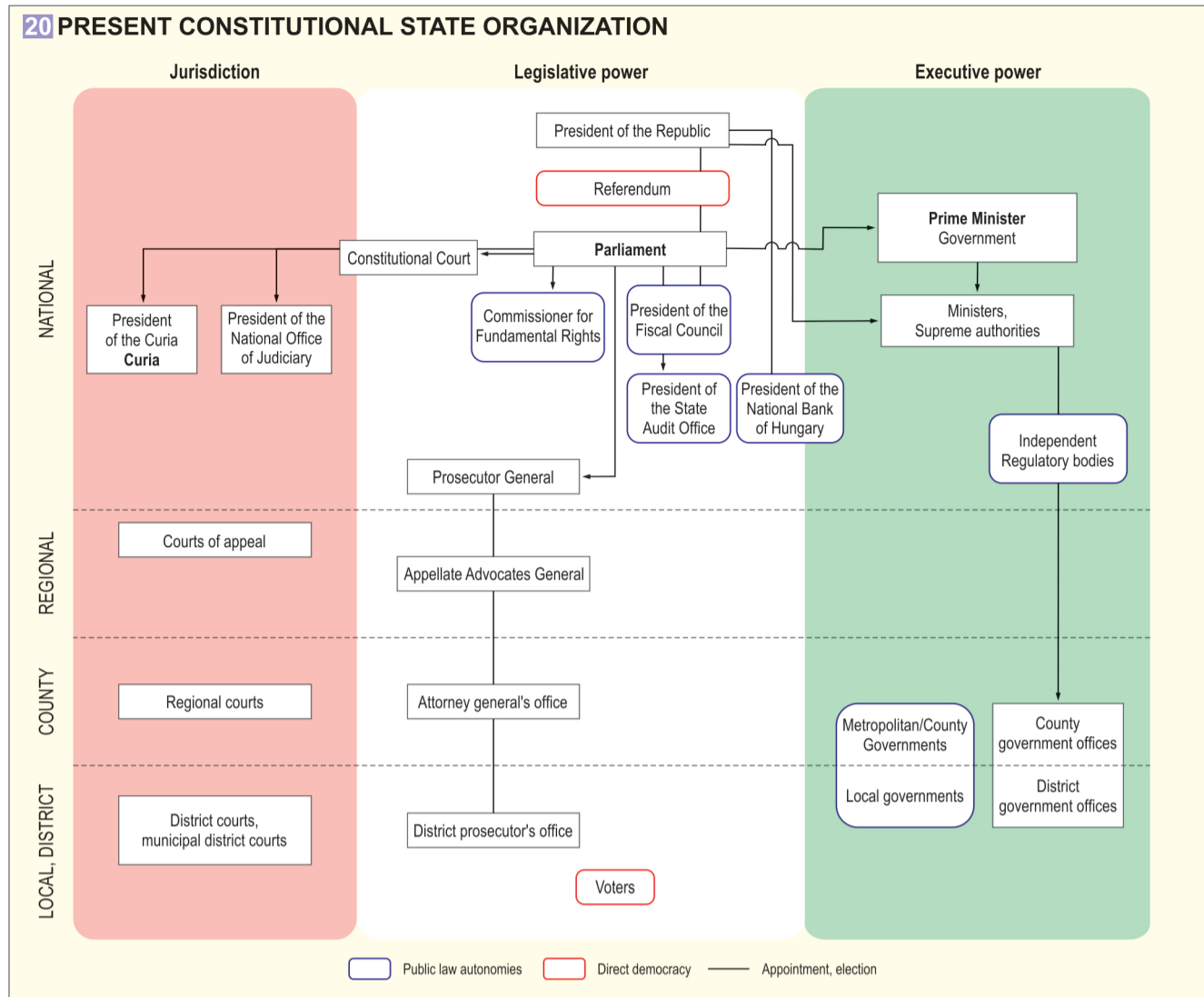
Hungary's present constitution entered into force on 1 January 2012, replacing the repeatedly amended Act XX of 1949, which had been fundamentally reformed in 1989 as a temporary solution. The parliament, which exercises constitution-making powers, adopted the new Fundamental Law with a two-thirds majority, thereby symbolically underlining the purpose of the constitution as the foundation of the entire legal system.

The *Fundamental Law's* provisions on fundamental rights and the organization of the state must be applied in harmony with the National Avowal, which forms the preamble to the Fundamental Law, and the principles of the historical constitution.

The form of state and government did not alter with the adoption of the new constitution. Indeed, in terms of the various actors, the present state organization is remarkably like the former one. Nevertheless, the relative power status of the various state organizational units was altered in comparison with the old constitutional model dating to 1989/90 ²⁰.

The most important principles governing the democratic state framework are contained in the first chapter of the Fundamental Law entitled 'Foundation'. Hungary is a *parliamentary republic* based on the principles of *popular sovereignty* and the *rule of law* and in which the principle of the division of powers prevails. The dictatorial exercise of power is prohibited.

The structure of the Hungarian state reflects the system of *checks and balances on power*. Alongside the legislature, executive and judiciary, several other autonomous institutions have constitutional status: the Presi-



ritorial division of other elements of the state organization (the courts, the prosecutor's office, and law enforcement).

The constitution contains merely framework rules for local governments. Unlike the previous model, it does not declare the right to self-governance of local communities; according to the new concept of the state, local governments are not primarily fora for citizen participation and representation. Rather, their main function is to implement public tasks as part of the executive branch of the unified state. The constitutional regulations apply principally to local governments, with the counties being mentioned only indirectly. The rules governing the election of presidents of the county representative bodies are, however, given special mention.

The new law on local governments

In 2011, a new law on local governments was enacted (*Act on Local Governments of Hungary*). The Act altered the basic functions of local governments and the framework of spatial cooperation in many areas. The local government system established in Hungary in the early 1990s was generally acknowledged as embodying an extremely broad range of tasks and responsibilities even on a European scale. Even at the time of the adoption of the earlier law, many local governments were struggling to perform the various tasks. It was not until 2011 that an overhaul of the system could be undertaken. The delay was mainly due to a lack of political consensus, with any amendment to the system requiring a two-thirds parliamentary majority. According to the provisions of the new law, the right to local self-governance is due to the communities of voters in the settlements (local governance) and in the counties (regional governance). Previously, this right had been included in the Constitution. As the Fundamental Law no longer includes this provision, the right has effectively been 'moved down' one level. A fundamental objective of the changes – in line with the idea of a 'benevolent state' – was to broaden the range of public services, improve their accessibility and quality, and meet the needs of the public. Further, these objectives were to be accomplished more cheaply or at least more efficiently. In the government's view, centralization represented the best means to achieve this. In practice, therefore, many tasks were transferred from the local governments to the state. Rather than happen immediately, the changes occurred in stages over several



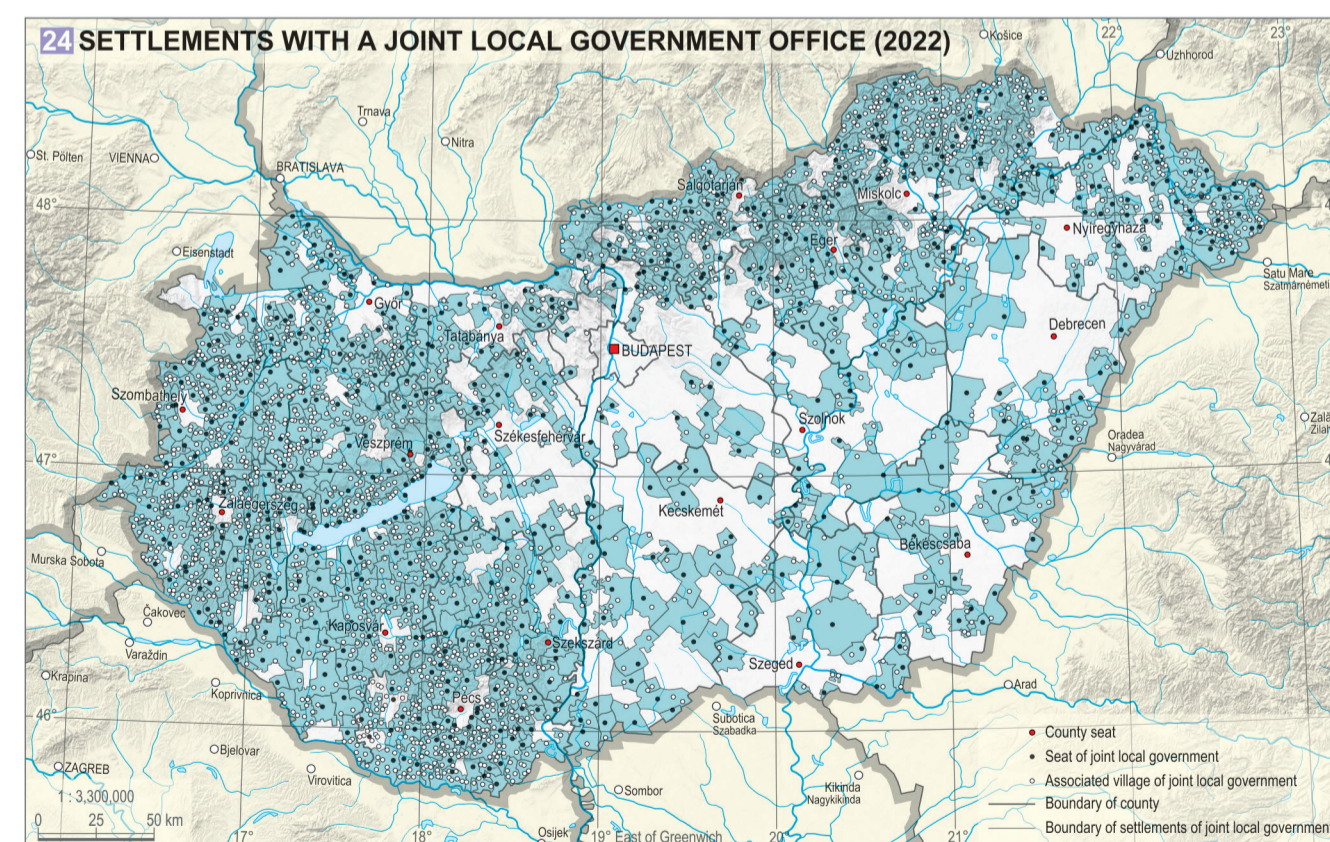
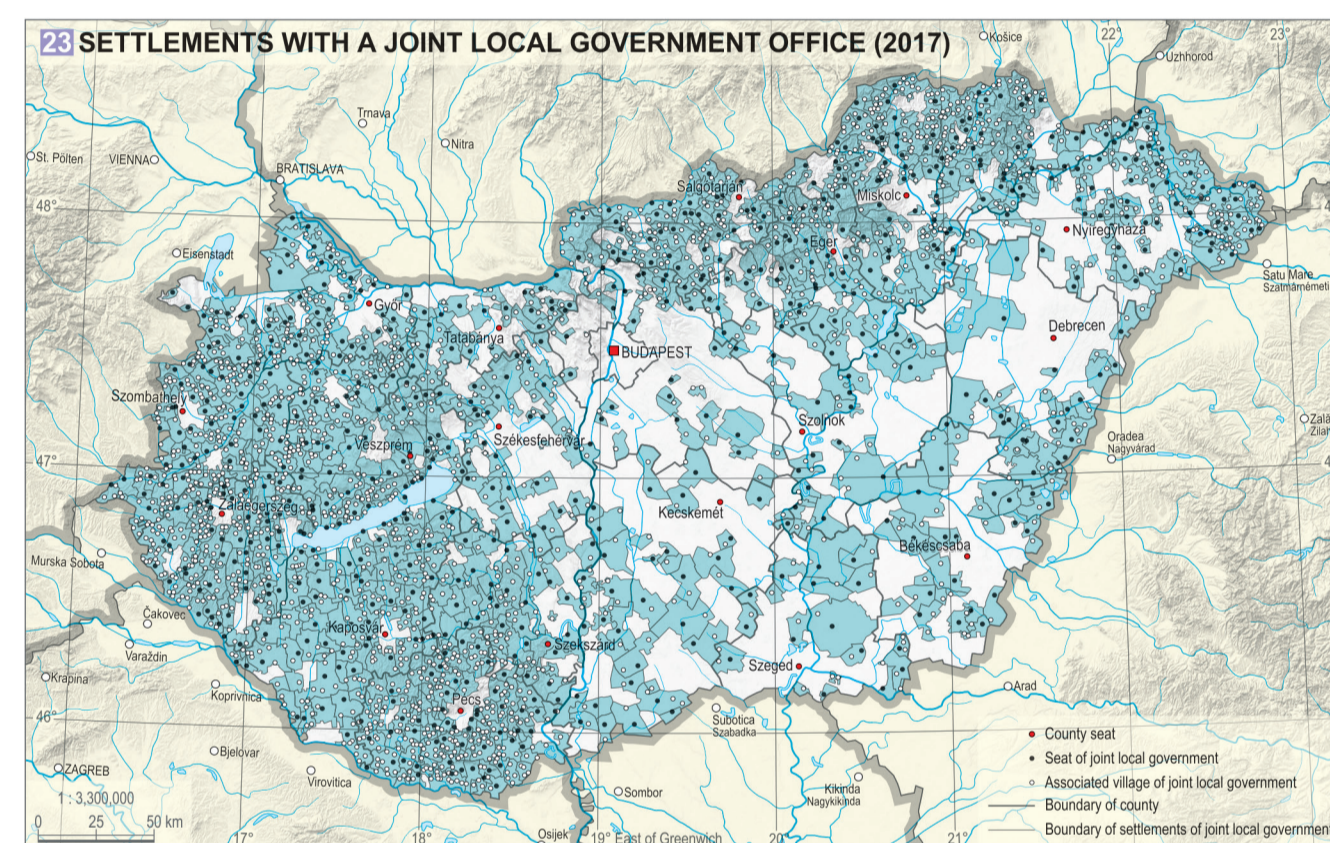
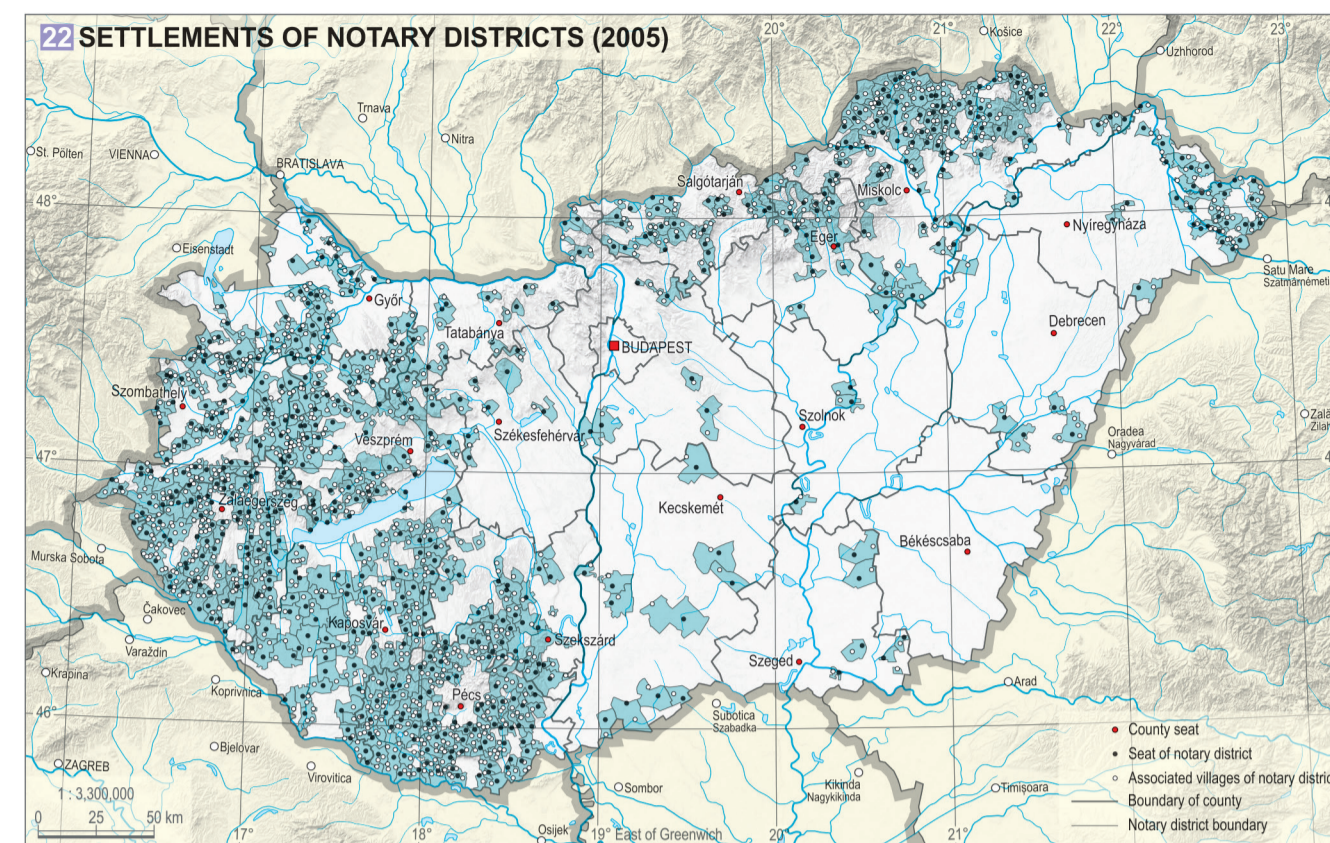
3 Joint local government office of Kisgyőr and Bükkaranyos

years. The impact on the territorial structure of public administration was negligible. That is to say, no new administrative divisions were created in lieu of (or alongside) the existing authorities and organizations. However, an exception to this was the nationalization of primary educational institutions (i.e. elementary schools), which led to the establishment of a school district system under the direction of a national central body (currently the Klebelsberg Centre). Professional and maintenance tasks were transferred from the local level to the new school districts, which covered, on average, an area of 3–4 administrative districts. 21

The new Act on Local Governments of Hungary introduced provisions affecting the administrative territorial structure, with changes to the *operational areas of local government offices*. This reform did not take effect immediately. Its full effects were felt only after the 2014 local government elections. According to the provisions in force, a *joint local government office* is to be established by local governments (villages) within a single district whose administrative territories are separated from each other by no more than the administrative territory of a single other settlement and whose joint population size does not exceed 2,000 inhabitants 3. A settlement with a population exceeding 2,000 people may also accede to a joint local government office (Section 85(1)). Either the total population of the settlements belonging to a joint local government office is at least 2,000 inhabitants or the number of settlements belonging to the joint local government office is at least seven (Section 85(2)).

The decrease in the number of joint offices was understandably accompanied by an increase in concentration. Thus, whereas in 2005, only two joint offices (known as notary districts at the time) had included eight or more settlements, in 2017 there were 43 such joint offices, with their number increasing to 50 in 2021 22 23 24. The 738 joint local government offices cover an area with 3.05 million inhabitants in total. In other words, each joint local government office covers, on average, an area with ca. 4,100 inhabitants. By way of comparison, the corresponding statistical data for independent offices (excluding Budapest and towns with county rights) reveal that the 510 independent local government offices cover an area with 3.17 million inhabitants in total. Thus, each independent local government office covers, on average, an area with 6,200 inhabitants.

Between 2017 and 2021, 195 of the 738 joint local government offices saw changes in their constituent settlements. Further, in more than a third of cases, the settlements constituting a joint local government office do not form a contiguous administrative area. The frequency of changes in the constituent settlements and the existence of so many non-contiguous associations indicate that local governments are utilizing all their options when establishing and operating joint local government offices. In other words, the system is still

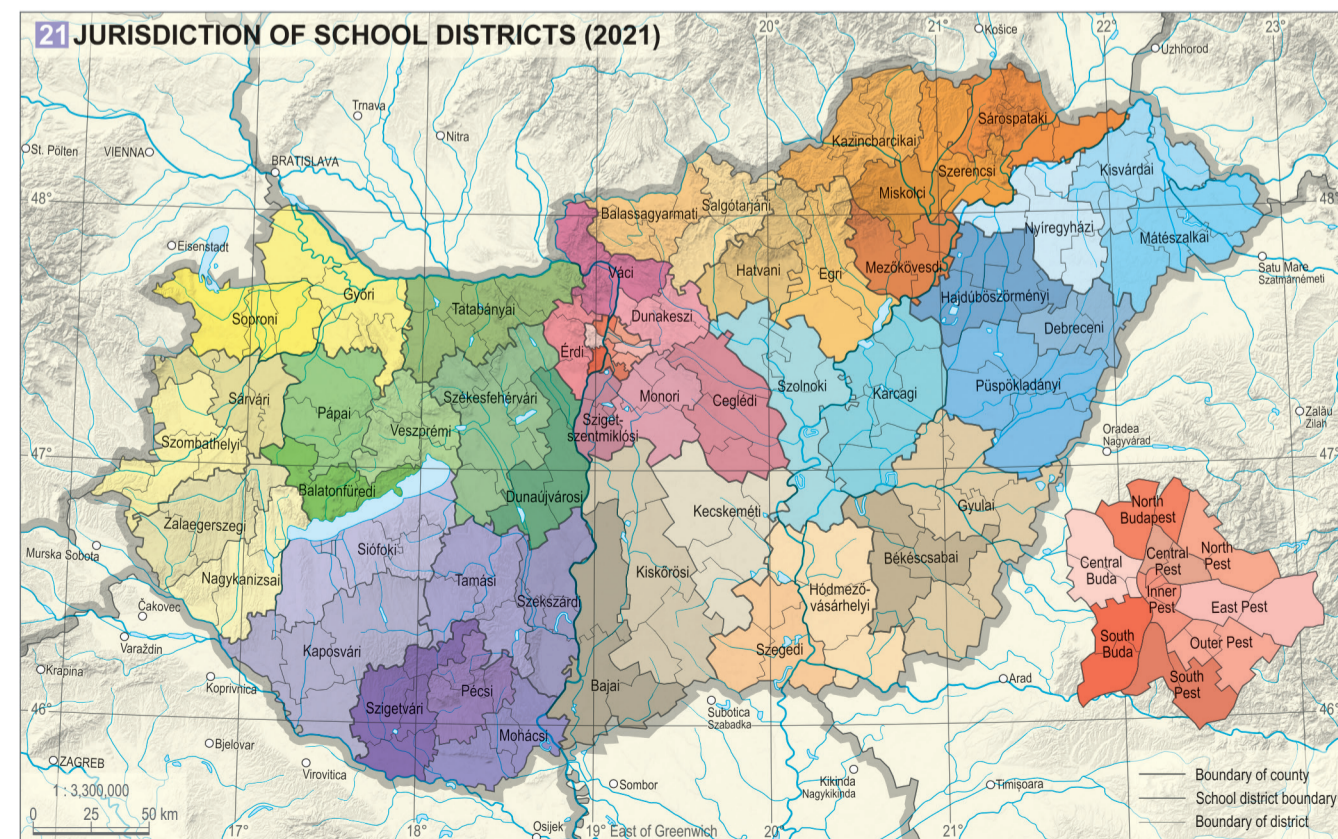


nicipal districts in the capital city and other towns is merely a public legal option.

Regarding regional state administration, the capital and county government offices are identified in the Fundamental Law as territorial state administrative organs with general competence. After 2010, most of the sectoral decentralized authorities were integrated into these bodies. At the same time, the consolidated role of the state and the tightening of local government supervision necessitated a new level of public administration, the *districts*, which were established as intermediaries between the counties and the settlements.

The law on government administration adopted in 2018 authorized the government to regulate the state administrative organs. Pursuant to this, the government adopted a decree on the jurisdiction, legal status, and powers of the county and district government offices. According to the provisions of the decree, the government retains the option of deviating from the general rules of county and district jurisdiction.

The Fundamental Law makes no reference to the ter-



dent of the Republic, the Constitutional Court, the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights, the Audit Office, the Fiscal Council, the Central Bank, the Defence Forces, the Prosecutor's Office, and the self-governments.

The supreme body of executive power is the *Government*, which is endowed in the Fundamental Law with general powers and performs all tasks that are not referred to the competence of another body by law. The Prime Minister, as head of the Cabinet, nominates the ministers and determines general government policy. The institution of the 'constructive motion of no confidence' underwrites the stability of the government and the position of the prime minister.

Constitutions generally refrain from defining the executive power, thereby leaving governments room for manoeuvre in organizing public administration. The constitution does not contain provisions governing the system of public administration subordinate to the government; it merely states the ministries are to be listed in an Act.

The Fundamental Law also authorizes the government to establish state administrative bodies within the legal framework. Exceptionally detailed rules apply to financial constitutionality, with the public finances being placed within a stricter constitutional frame. The constitution authorizes the National Assembly to adopt so-called cardinal laws on the establishment of separate regulatory bodies that lie within the executive power framework but operate (relatively) independently of the Government and the ministries.

The country's administrative divisions are outlined in the *Fundamental Law*, partly in the comprehensive rules of the 'Foundation' and partly in the specific provisions concerning the state administration. The Fundamental Law stipulates that the territory of Hungary consists of the *capital, counties, towns and villages*. Municipal districts can be formed in the capital city and in other towns.

The constitutional status granted to the counties has effectively halted earlier attempts at regionalization and other territorial reform; the counties are constitutionally protected. At the same time, the Fundamental Law does not mention districts. Further, the creation of mu-

unicipal districts in the capital city and other towns is merely a public legal option.

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voluntary, even within the narrowed framework of local government autonomy.

The Act on Local Governments of Hungary also brought significant changes to the *county governments* 4. Although their jurisdictional areas remained un-

altered, their responsibilities were significantly rede-

financed. Thus, two decades after the change of system in Hungary, the various functions of the county governments, which had already been limited to the maintenance of county institutions, were narrowed even further. Indeed, the Act restricted the tasks of the county governments to regional development and spatial



4 The Baranya County government office in Pécs



5 The building of the district office (old county hall) in Sopron

planning, rural development, and unspecified coordination functions. The tasks removed by the Act from the county governments were transferred to the government offices (i.e. to state administrative organs like-wise operating at county level). From the perspective of both the local governments and the county governments, the policy trend was clear: a *strengthening of the state organizational system coupled with a weakening of self-governance* at local and county levels.

Rebirth of the districts, new responsibilities, a new territorial division

In modern Hungary's system of territorial administration, the districts have seen the most frequent changes in terms of their functions and divisions. The explanation for this is that the various reforms implemented at local and county level have invariably affected in some way the districts. During certain periods under communism, the districts were powerful actors in administrative terms, yet at other times they were discontinued, dropping out of the system of territorial administration.

The constitutional and administrative changes introduced in 2010 reignited the question of whether there should be districts. Research was conducted with a view to exploring the administrative functions of districts in the past as well as their potential future roles. In the end, it was decided at the political level that the districts should be reintegrated into the Hungarian system of public administration.

Act XCIII of 2012 on the formation of districts and the amendment of specific related laws determined the conditions for the resurrection of the districts. Meanwhile, the rules governing the operation of the district offices were formulated in Government Decree no. 216/2012.

During preparations for the changes, it was proposed that there should be no more than seven district offices in Budapest and 168 districts in the counties. The Ministry of Culture and Innovation released

the draft legislation for public debate on the government's website. There followed considerable debate on the issue even within the governing parties, with parliamentarians from these parties also submitting proposals for amendments. Changes and amendments were also demanded by the associations of local governments, local governments, and members of the public. The county government offices evaluated the proposals in writing, giving support to some of them while rejecting others.

After an evaluation of the various amendment proposals, several changes were made to the plans. Government Decree no. 218/2012 defined the areas of jurisdiction and seats of the districts. District offices were established in all 23 *municipal districts of the capital city, Budapest*. In total, 175 *district offices were established in the 19 counties* [5].

As part of the redistribution of the tasks and powers of the state administration, the districts took over most of the state administrative tasks of the notaries. During the transition, the district offices were given responsibilities in such fields as child protection, guardianship, environmental and nature protection, and social services. Under the new framework, the guardianship offices, the animal health and food safety offices, the land registry offices, and the employment branch offices became district administrative bodies.

The district offices operate as extraneous bodies of the county administrative offices. Established on 1 January 2013, the district offices have received the greatest number of tasks in the field of *official administration*.

Historical traditions were considered when deciding upon the territorial division of the districts and the formation of a network of centres. Another major consideration, however, was the accessibility of the new district seats. Reflecting the disparate geographical, settlement-network and demographic features of the regions and counties, the number of districts varied, at the county level, between six and eighteen.

The district seats are, without exception, settlements with urban status, but they differ considerably in terms of size and development, both nationally and within

25 INTEGRATED SPECIALIZED ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANS (FROM 1 JANUARY 2011)

Specialized administrative organ of health insurance fund
Food chain safety and animal health directorate
Architect office
Forestry directorate
Consumer protection inspectorate
Land registry office
Directorate for agriculture
Judicial service
Transport inspectorate
Cultural heritage office
Metrology and technical safety authority
Employment centre
Specialized administrative body for occupational safety and employment
Specialized administrative body for public health
Plant and soil protection directorate
Pension insurance directorate
Social and guardianship office

the individual counties. Some districts comprise exclusively urban settlements (e.g. Debrecen and Hajdúböszörmény), an unprecedented development in the history of districts in Hungary. In contrast, in as many as 70 districts, the district seat is the only settlement with urban status in the district. In general, districts formed around the county seats are the largest in terms of territory and population in each county. (The district of Zalaegerszeg contains the greatest number of settlements – 84 settlements.)

The development of decentralized bodies of public administration since 2010

The rationalization of regional bodies operating under the auspices of various ministries and central administrative organs began in 2010. The first step was the adoption of Act CXXVI of 2010, which led to the establishment of the Budapest and county government offices. This measure integrated about half of the decentralized state administrative organs into the government office structure. [25] From the public's perspective, an important goal of integration was better coordinated cooperation between authorities operating within a joint organization but pursuing diversified activities. This would facilitate the administrative tasks, thereby assisting several authorities concurrently.

As a second step, additional decentralized organs were integrated in 2015 (e.g. the mining departments, and environmental and nature protection inspectorates), resulting in the creation of an integrated government office system. In consequence, the government office departments that had previously consisted of

the specialized administrative organs of the capital and county government offices and independently operating specialized administrative organs, became departments of the administrative bodies operating at the district level.

As a third step, in the second half of 2016 (or from 1 January 2017), the current territorial structure was established. The essence of this structure is that, as a rule, the decentralized regional state administration operates at the county level. Likewise as a rule, the government offices make up the organizational framework for this. Non-integrated territorial state administrative organs are the following: the territorial bodies of the National Tax and Customs Administration, the various county police headquarters, the county directorates of the Hungarian State Treasury, the school districts, the various branch offices of the Directorate-General for Social Affairs and Child Protection.

The regional directorates of the National Directorate-General for Aliens Policing [26] and the national park directorates (MNA 2. 12.19.), as well as the 12 regional directorates of the National Institute of Hydrology and Water Management [27], have not been integrated and – in line with their functions – do not operate within the confines of county borders.

In 2017, the former mining departments were integrated into the county government offices of Baranya, Veszprém, Pest, Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok, and Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén counties. Then, in 2022, their duties were transferred to a single national authority, the Supervisory Authority of Regulatory Affairs.

The courts and the prosecution service

In Hungary, justice is administered by the *courts*. The judicial organization has several levels, but there is no hierarchical relationship between the various levels. Thus, courts higher in the hierarchy do not have the power to instruct those lower in the hierarchy. (The Constitutional Court is in a special situation, as it does not form part of the ordinary court system.)

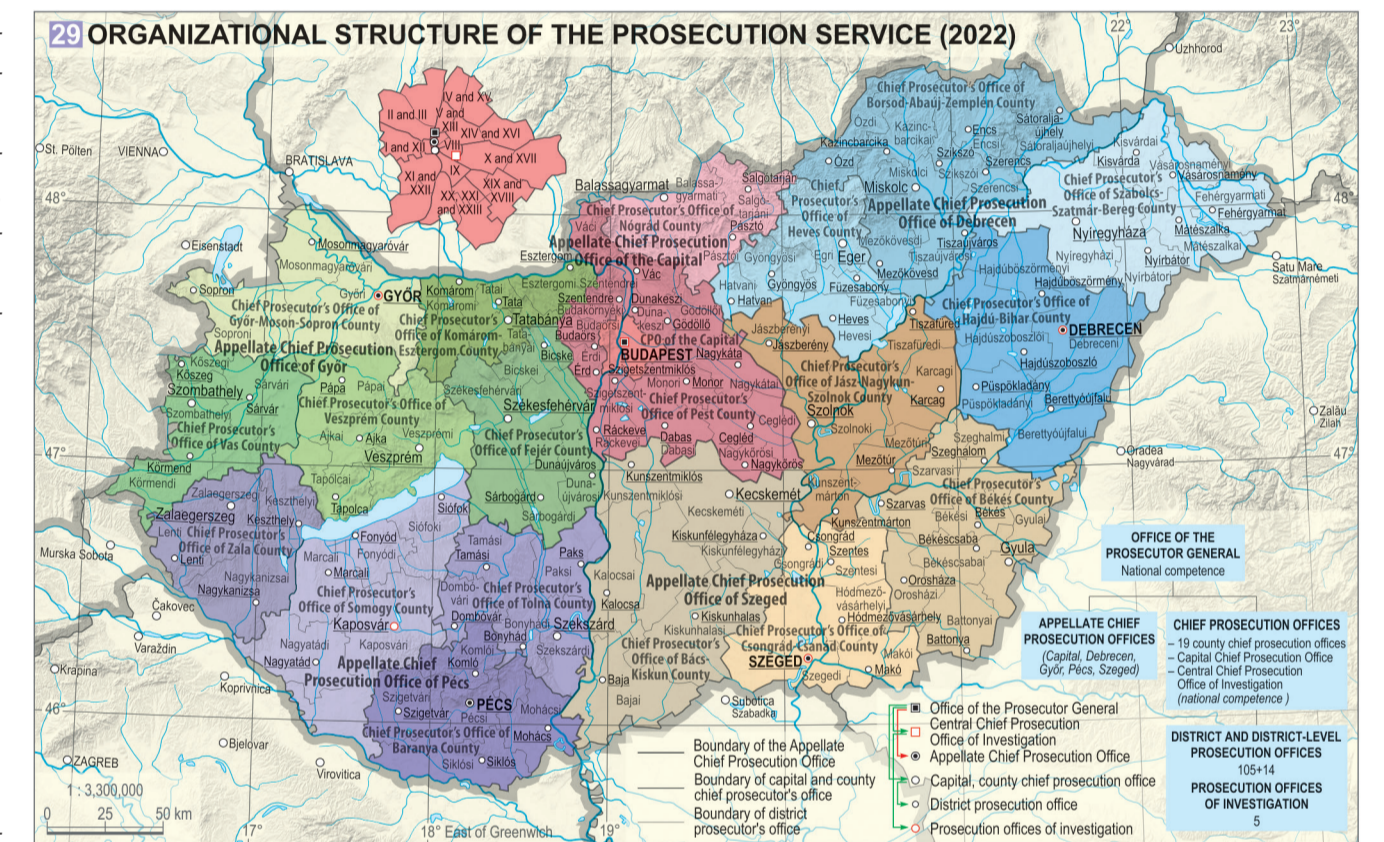
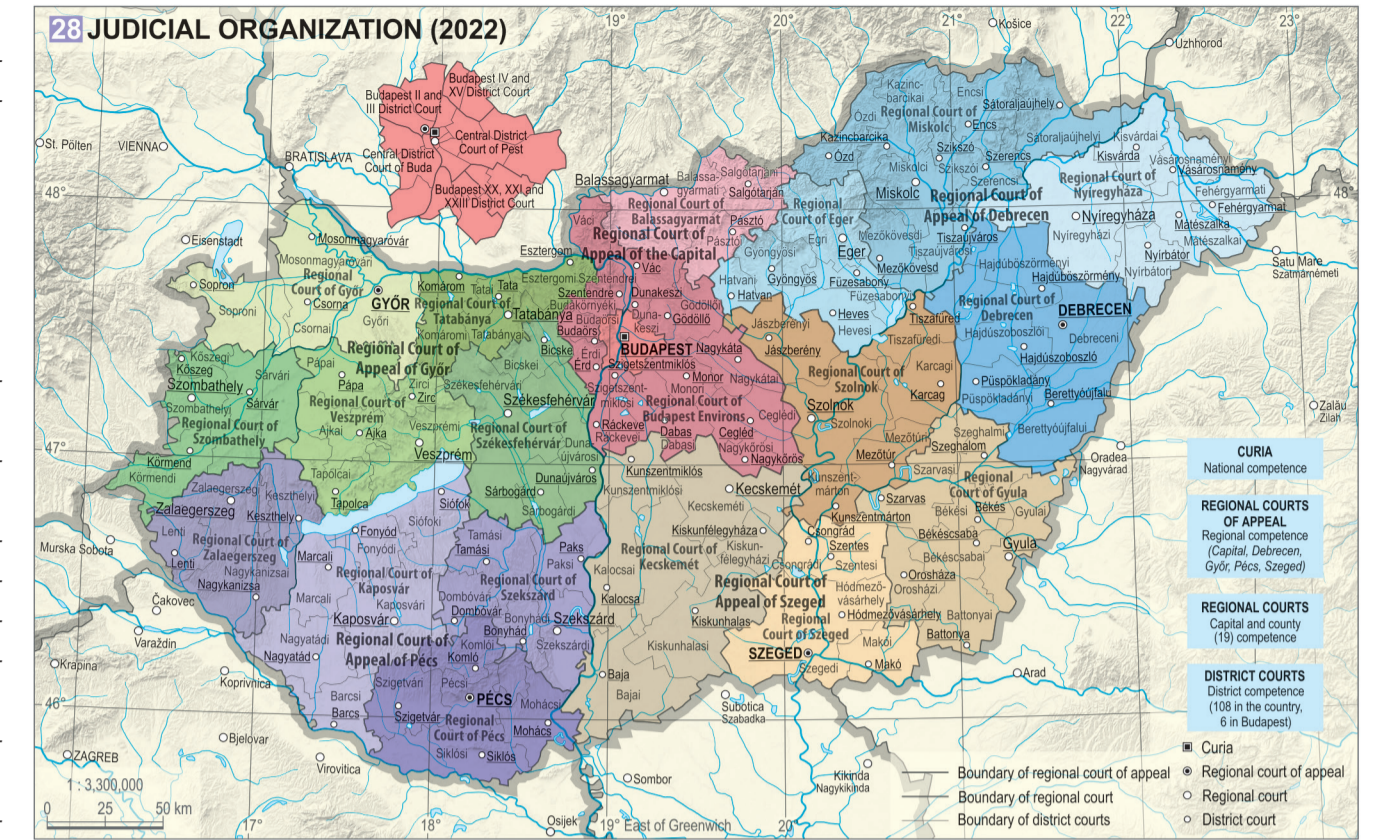
In 1990, under the provisions of Act IV of 1972, justice was provided by the Supreme Court, the county courts (including the Budapest Metropolitan Court), the local courts (municipal courts in towns and municipal district courts in Budapest), the employment courts, and the military courts.

In 1997, the Hungarian Parliament adopted a new law on the judicial organization. Based on this, justice was exercised by the following courts: the Supreme Court, the courts of appeal, the county courts (in Budapest, the Budapest Metropolitan Court), the local courts (i.e. the municipal courts and, in Budapest, the municipal district courts), the labour courts. In certain cases determined by law, military councils acted in the first instance at designated county courts.

Regional courts of appeal were established in Budapest, Pécs and Szeged in 2003 and in Debrecen [6] and Győr in 2005.



6 The Debrecen Court of Appeal



The next major change in Hungary's judicial organization came after the introduction of *Hungary's Fundamental Law* and by the implementation of *Act CLXI of 2011*.

Pursuant to the provisions of the *Fundamental Law*, the task of the courts is to administer justice. They do so in criminal cases, private lawsuits, in cases where the legality of public administrative decisions or local government decrees is contested and, furthermore, in instances where local governments have failed to fulfil their statutory legislative obligations.

Under the provisions of Act CLXI of 2011, justice in Hungary was exercised by the Curia (Supreme Court), the regional courts of appeal, the regional courts, the district courts and the municipal district courts, as well as the public administrative and labour courts.

The public administrative and labour courts began their operation on 1 January 2013, and they were discontinued on 31 March 2020. Since then, eight courts with public administrative boards/panels (the Metropolitan Court of Budapest and the regional courts of Budapest Environs, Debrecen, Győr, Miskolc, Pécs, Szeged, and Veszprém) proceed in administrative disputes at the first instance.

Since 1 March 2022, a special public administrative board – a forum for legal redress in public administrative matters – has been in operation at the Budapest Regional Court of Appeal.

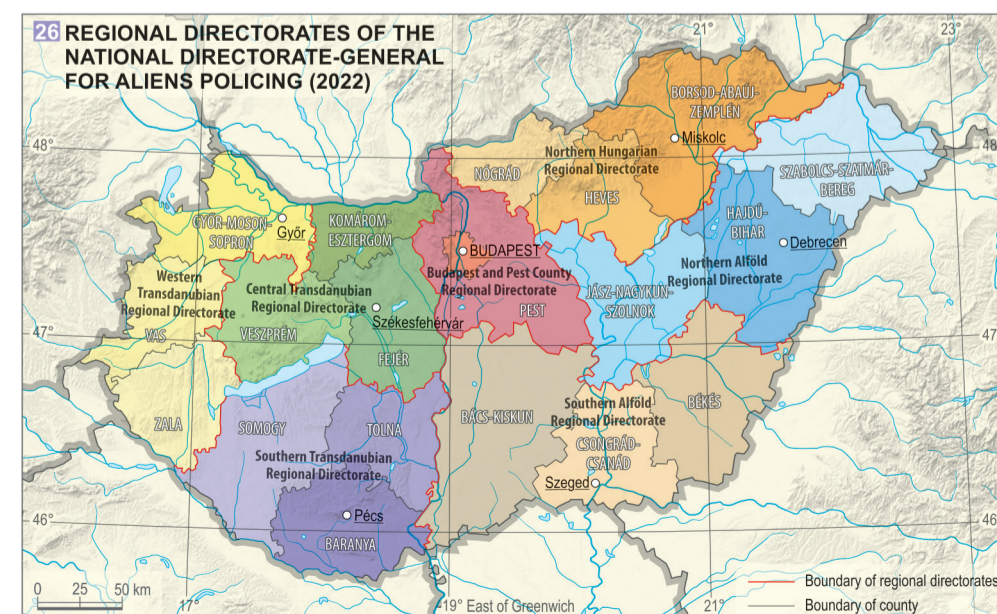
The Hungarian judicial system comprises the following levels: [28]

The district courts: As of 1 January 2013, the legal successors of the municipal courts and municipal district courts acting in the first instance are the district courts (in Budapest, there are six merged district courts). The jurisdiction of these courts extends to all cases in which the first-instance proceedings are not referred to another court of law.

The regional courts: In the counties and in Budapest, the regional courts function as the legal successors to the county (and metropolitan) courts. The regional courts proceed at first instance in matters within their jurisdiction as determined by law. When acting as second instance, they hear and adjudicate appeals filed against the decisions of district courts and municipal district courts. In cases defined by law, military councils proceed at first instance, doing so at the following five courts: the regional courts of Budapest, Győr, Szeged, Kaposvár, and Debrecen.

The regional courts of appeal (in Budapest, Debrecen, Győr, Pécs, Szeged): In cases defined by law, these courts assess the legal remedies submitted against the decisions of the district courts and regional courts.

Curia (Supreme Court): The Curia is at the top of the judicial hierarchy; its main task is to ensure the uniformity of judgments [7]. To this end, it makes 'uniformity decisions'. The Curia assesses the legal reme-





7 The Curia building in Budapest

dies submitted against the decisions of regional courts and regional courts of appeal as well as petitions for review. It also reviews whether local government decrees are in conformity with legal rules or should be annulled and decides whether local governments have failed to fulfil their statutory legislative obligations.

The *Prosecution service* is a strictly hierarchical state organ that is headed and directed by the Prosecutor General. As contributors to the justice system, the Prosecutor General and the Prosecution service enforce the State's demand that crimes be investigated and duly punished. Thus, their most important task is to prosecute crimes and bring the perpetrators before the courts. The Prosecution service seeks to protect the rights of individuals and organizations, while prosecuting actions that violate the constitutional order and endanger the security of the country. It exercises supervisory powers in connection with investigations, represents the prosecution in court proceedings, and supervises the legality of penal enforcement.

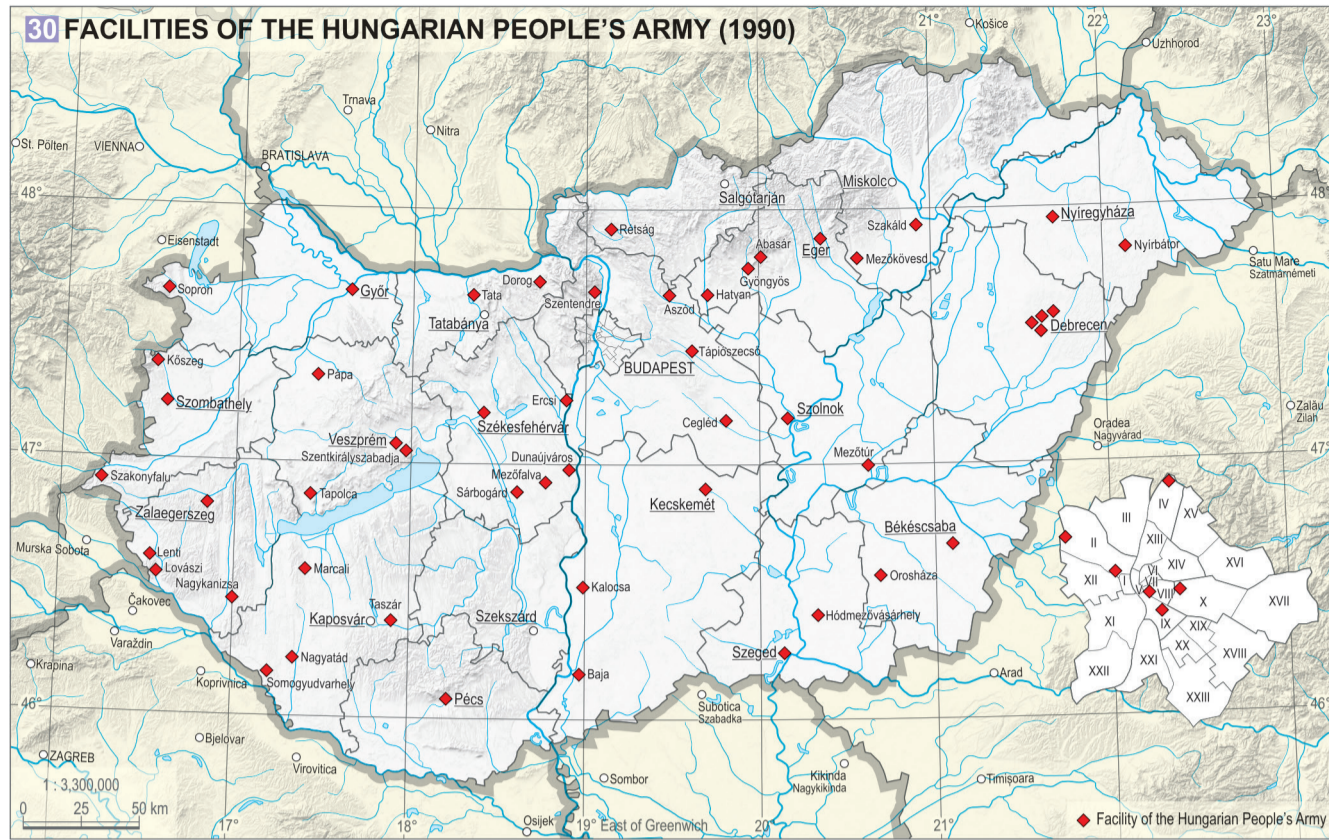
The organizational structure of the Prosecution service is basically aligned with the judicial organization, but there are also differences [29].

In 1989, the most important constitutional change relating to the Prosecution service was the extension of the Prosecutor General's tenure from four to six years. At that time, the organizational structure of the Prosecution service was regulated by Act V of 1972, pursuant to which the Prosecution service operated at the following levels: the Public Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Hungary, the county and Budapest chief prosecutor's offices, the local prosecutor's offices, the Military Prosecutor's Office, the regional military prosecution offices, and the prosecution offices of various senior military units.

In 2003, concurrently with the creation of the regional courts of appeal, *appellate chief prosecution offices* were created in Budapest (the capital), Debrecen, Győr, Pécs and Szeged.

The organization of the Prosecution service reflects the regional divisions of the judicial organization. Alongside the territorial factor, the application of the *functional principle* has resulted in the establishment of prosecution bodies with special tasks. For instance, the year 2006 saw the establishment of the *Central Chief Prosecution Office of Investigation*, which was followed by the creation of regional offices of investigation in Budapest, Debrecen, Győr, Szeged and Kaposvár.

Under the Fundamental Law of Hungary, which entered into force on 1 January 2012, the Prosecutor General's right to direct the Prosecution service includes the right to determine its organization. Pursuant to Act CLXIII of 2011 on the Prosecution service, the various prosecution bodies in Hungary are as follows: the Office of the Prosecutor General, the appellate chief prosecution offices (in Budapest, Debrecen, Győr, Pécs, and Szeged), the county chief prosecution offices (19 counties, Budapest and central investigative offices), the district prosecution offices.



The jurisdictional areas of the district and district-level prosecution offices are – save for a few exceptions – the same as those of the district courts. The exceptions include Csorna, Barcs and Zirc, where there are district courts but no district prosecution offices.

The organizational coherence of the Prosecution service was achieved with the abolition of the military prosecution offices: the military prosecutors were integrated into the organization of the Prosecution service and continue to function as an integral part of it.

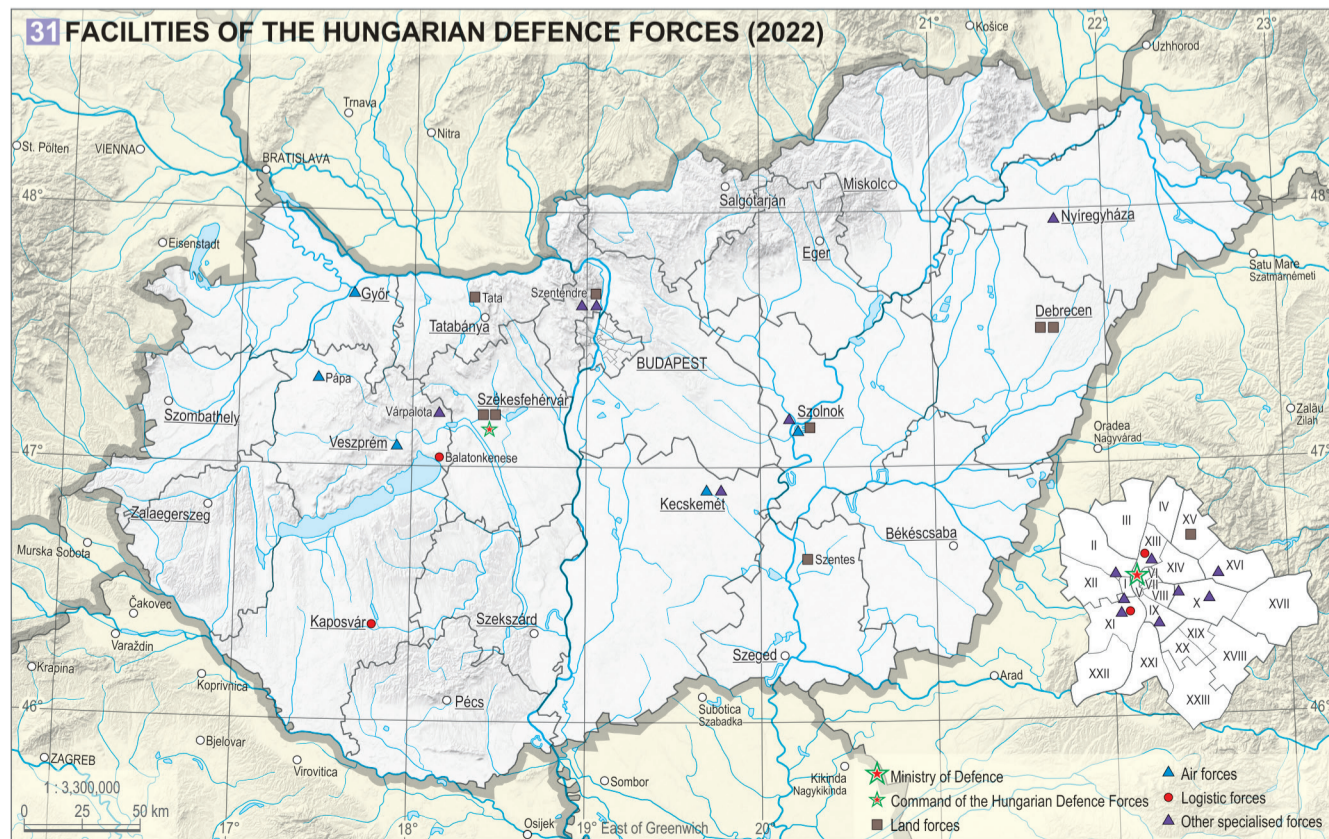
Hungarian Defence Forces

Until the fall of communism, the country's defence forces were called the *Hungarian People's Army (HPA)* [30], which was in the late 1980s, a mass army sustaining a large peacetime force. It was characterized by the use of old and new Soviet military equipment with considerable cost and material requirements and by the application of Soviet operational and combat methods and principles. The period 1985–1989 saw the first major organizational restructuring and downsizing of the defence forces. As part of the transition process and military reforms that began in the 1980s, the land forces switched from the former regiment-division-army organizational model to the battalion-brigade-army corps organizational framework. Not all

parts of the military were affected by Hungary's change of system. There were certain elements of continuity in terms of organization but also in the field of weaponry and military culture. Over time, the nature of the armed forces changed, with conscription being abolished (in 2004) and many garrisons facing closure. In the run-up to *NATO membership*, a general reform of the armed forces was undertaken, followed by a strategic and defence review.

On 15 March 1990, the HPA was reconstituted as the *Hungarian Defence Forces (HDF)*. An important aspect of the transformation was Hungary's withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact. The withdrawal process was completed on 1 July 1991 when the Warsaw Pact was terminated. In the 1990s, Hungary's armed forces underwent a process of transition marked by the following stages: abandonment of the old model, construction of an independent national defence force, management of the Yugoslav crisis, and integration into the Western alliance.

On 12 March 1999, Hungary became a full member of NATO, an outstanding event in Hungary's 20th-century history. NATO expects member states to commit a minimum of 2% of their GDP to defence spending, but military spending in Hungary fell to 0.87% in 2014. Since then, due to the National Defence and Force Development Programme, defence spending has steadily increased, reaching 2.43% of GDP in 2023.



8 Maria Theresa Barracks, the headquarters of the Metropolitan garrison

Under the constitution, the core duties of the HDF are the military defence of the independence, territorial integrity and borders of Hungary and the performance of collective defence and peacekeeping tasks arising from NATO membership and international treaties, as well as carrying out humanitarian activities in accordance with the provisions of international law. The Fundamental Law also establishes the nature of the HDF, requiring them to take part in the prevention of disasters and the relief and elimination of their consequences.

Act CXIII of 2011 on national defence and the HDF regulates in detail the organization, duties, management, leadership and operation of the HDF.

In times of peace, national defence is managed by the National Assembly, the President of the Republic, the Government, and the Minister of Defence. During a state of emergency, the highest governing body of Hungary's national defence and the HDF is the National Defence Council, a body chaired by the President of the Republic, the Speaker of the National Assembly, the leaders of the parliamentary groups, the Prime Minister, government ministers, and – with the right to be consulted – the Chief of General Staff of the HDF.

The *Command of the HDF* was established on 1 January 2019 as a strategic planning body overseeing preparations for the country's military defence. It is also in charge of tasks at a military operational level. The HDF are headed by a Commander. The Ministry of Defence performs the management, supervisory and state administrative tasks.

In the 2000s, after Hungary's accession to NATO, the HDF still owned around 2000 properties around the country, including 134,000 hectares of land, 10,750 military buildings, and 1661 residential buildings. This was a legacy of the Cold War infrastructure when the army comprised a force of almost 300,000 men. Although many military properties have since been transferred to civilian use, there remains a significant inventory of real estate. [31] [8]

The *rearmament of the HDF* was undertaken in several stages, initially using Russian but subsequently mainly Western weaponry. [32] Russian and Belarusian weapons and military equipment were received by Hungary even after 1991 in lieu of the repayment of Soviet state debt. Such military cooperation with Russia and Belarus was also necessary in order to maintain the existing military technology. A hundred T-72 tanks were purchased from Belarus (1996), while MiG-29 fighter jets were acquired from Russia (1993). Several Mi-24 and Mi-8 helicopters were renovated by the HDF in cooperation with Russia. At the same time, in the run-up to NATO membership, Western technologies also gradually appeared. The first major purchase was the Mistral Atlas air defence missile system, acquired from France in 1997. In 2001, alongside the MiG-29 aircraft, JAS-39 Gripen fighter jets were acquired on lease as replacements for the MiG-21 aircraft.

The Hungarian government seeks to remedy the technological backwardness of the HDF by means of a ten-year *National Defence and Force Development Programme ('Zrínyi 2026')*. Under the programme, which was announced in 2016, Hungary has made several major purchases of Western military technology, while also developing weapons manufacturing capabilities in the country. The objective is for the HDF to become one of the most modern armies in Central Europe by 2026. In addition to the modernization of existing military equipment, a substantial amount of ammunition has also been procured. Hungarian soldiers have been issued with new military uniforms and equipment.

The procurement of 250 Carl Gustaf M4 multi-role weapons from Sweden commenced in 2019. The company Rheinmetall Hungary built a factory producing Lynx infantry fighting vehicles in Zalaegerszeg, a large-calibre cannon ammunition and explosives production factory in Várpalota as well as a radar manufacturing and maintenance plant in Nyírtelek. In Kaposvár, later in Győr the production of Gidran combat vehicles began under a Turkish licence. Airbus Helicopters Hungary began production of helicopter parts in Gyula, while HM Arzenál Elektromechanikai Zrt. manufactures modern firearms in Kiskunfélegyháza.

Among the most significant developments is the replacement of the T-72 tanks of the Cold War era with 12 German Leopard 2A4 tanks and 44 German Leopard 2A7 tanks. Under the terms of an agreement signed in 2018, 12 used Leopard 2A4s already arrived at the Tata base; the rest of the fleet are scheduled for delivery between 2023 and 2025. The same agreement foresees the purchase of 24 Panzerhaubitze (PzH 2000) self-propelled howitzers for future delivery.

The HDF have undergone significant personnel changes since the early 1990s [9]. Under communism, the HPA was a mass army based on conscription. Reflecting the policy objectives of successive governments, it has been transformed into a professional volunteer force. The number of personnel underwent a steep decline from 155,700 in 1989 to 23,950 in 2007. By the late 2020s, it is envisaged that there will be 20,000 reservists and 30,000 active soldiers. In 2021, the number of personnel was 34,200 (including reservists and active soldiers).

Adopted in 2021, the *National Military Strategy of Hungary* addresses the operational environment of the 21st century and the role of the HDF. It analyses defence capabilities, future defence requirements, and the issue of deterrence and defence, while also examining national and international cooperation as well as defence administration and national resilience.

As part of the *NATO forces structure*, in recent decades Hungary has consistently excelled in *international peace operations* in the Balkans (IFOR, SFOR, KFOR, AFOR, MFOR), in Iraq, and in Afghanistan (ISAF, NTM-A, RSM). As well as fulfilling Hungary's obligations as a member of the Alliance, such roles have enhanced the professional development, knowledge and experience of Hungarian soldiers. The peace-



9 Hungarian soldiers

32 PERSONNEL AND EQUIPMENT OF THE HUNGARIAN DEFENCE FORCES (1990, 2022)

	1 January 1990	1 January 2022
Number of personnel	143,200	34,200
of which soldier	110,700	17,850
of which civilian employees	32,500	16,350
Reserve personnel	—	11,456
Tanks	1,435	46
Armoured troop transport vehicles	2,310	664
Fighter aircraft	113	18
Fighter helicopters	96	20
Artillery equipment	1,750	409

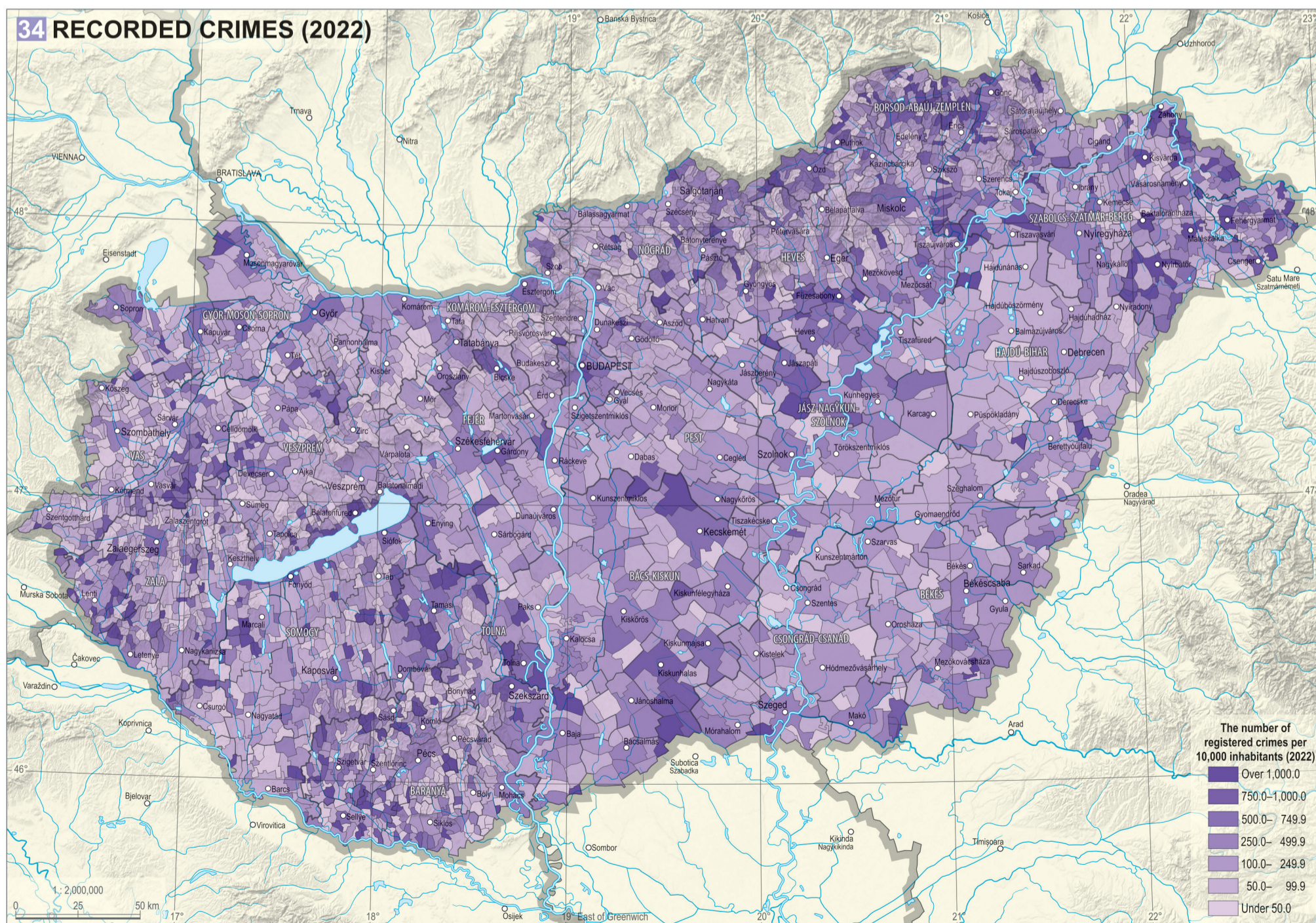
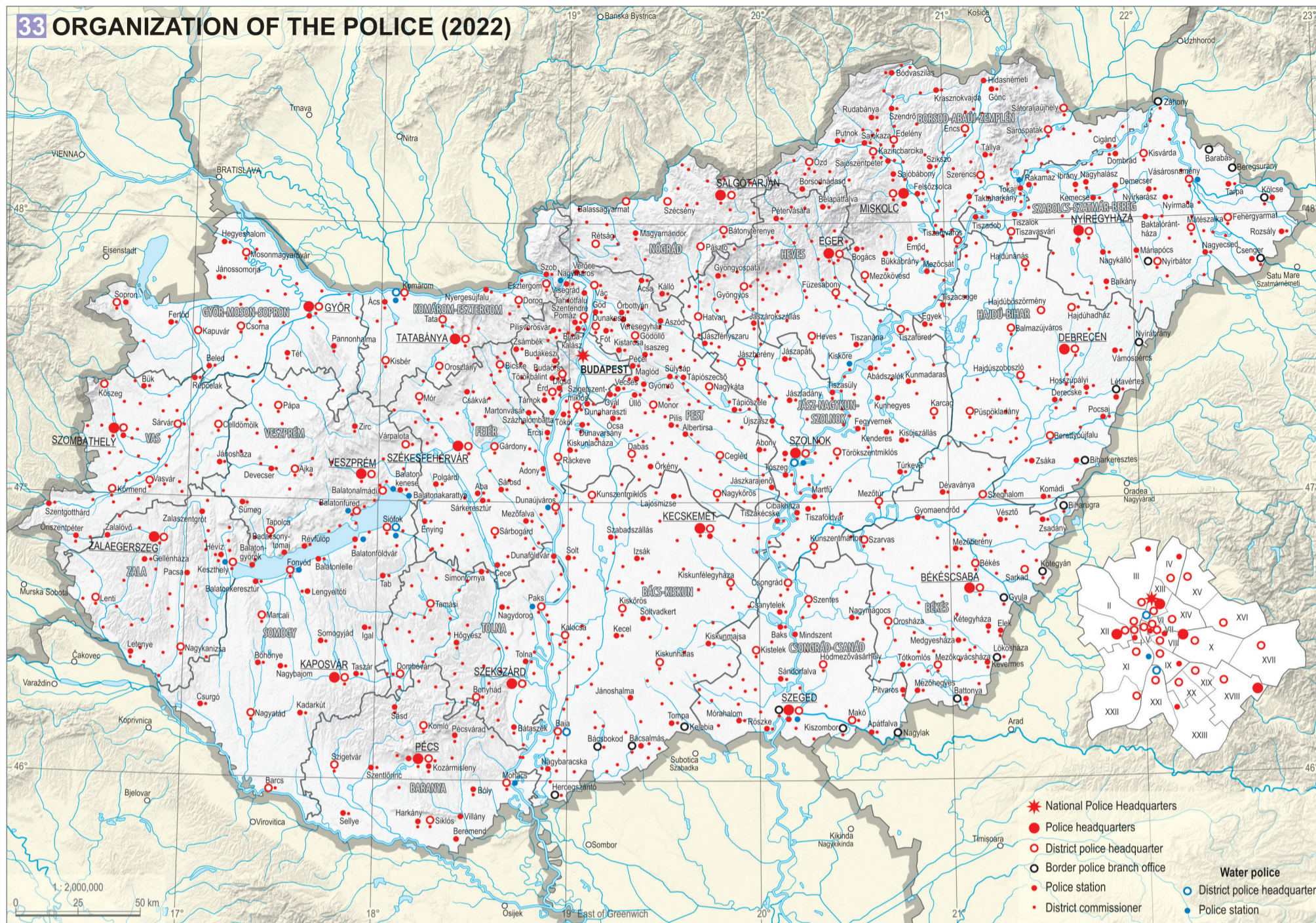
keeping operations have proven the soldiers' ability to cooperate, while also testing their strengths in a live setting. Since 1990, Hungary has participated in peace support missions under the auspices of the United Nations (MINURSO, MINUSCA, UNMIK, UNIFIL, UNOMIG, UNAVEM, UNIKOM), the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Nagorno-Karabakh, Ukraine), and the EU (EUFOR Althea, EUNAVFOR MED Sophia, EUFOR Concordia, EU MMG Georgia, EUNAVFOR Atalanta), as well as at international request (First Gulf War).

Police service

The Police in Hungary is the principal law enforcement body. Its operations are governed by Act XXXIV of 1994, which defines its mission as protecting public security, domestic order, and the national borders. The predecessors of Hungary's current police force were the *gendarmerie and urban police forces* (est. 1881), which were nationalized and placed under a uniform system of supervision in the 1920s. These developments led to the creation of the Royal Hungarian Police, although the gendarmerie continued to exist until 1945. The aftermath of World War II saw the creation of a centralized communist state police force, which also undertook political tasks. This force underwent a radical transformation in the late 1980s at the time of Hungary's change of system, becoming the Police service as we know it today. In terms of its tasks and operation, the last major change was the *merger of the Border Guard with the Police*, a process that began in 2007/2008 when the Police took charge of guarding the country's borders. (In 2022, border patrol units were established, followed by recruitment and training.)

Like other law enforcement bodies, the Police has a hierarchical structure (National Police Headquarters, county police headquarters, municipal police headquarters, police stations, police district commissioners), with a territorial structure that reflects the administrative divisions of the settlement system. [33] The law also requires cooperation with the relevant county and municipal governments from the level of the county police headquarters downwards in such fields as the establishment and termination of police bodies, the appointment of police chiefs, and the oversight of operations.

At the top of the organizational hierarchy is the *National Police Headquarters (ORFK)*, which is based in Budapest together with some associated institutions [10]. The ORFK directs several territorial authorities and bodies with well-defined tasks, such as the Airport Police Directorate, the International Law Enforcement Cooperation Centre, the Police Education and Training Centre, the International Education Centre, and the National Standby Police. Since 2010, the *Counter-Terrorism Centre (TEK)* has been operating independently



10 Main office of the National, Budapest and Pest County Police Headquarters



11 Police officers guarding the Serbian–Hungarian border

(i.e. in tandem with) the Police. It also performs various law enforcement tasks and is likewise based in Budapest. Combatting terrorism is its primary function.

The various *county police headquarters* (19 bodies) are located one hierarchical level down. Each of them is in a county centre, with the area of jurisdiction being the respective county. The area of jurisdiction of the *Budapest Police Headquarters* (BRFK) is Budapest. By means of its decentralized sub-units, the National Standby Police has a presence in many parts of the country. It has centres at a *regional level* rather than at the county level. To meet the tasks of border protection, *border patrol units* were established in Miskolc, Nyírbátor, Debrecen, Orosháza, Szeged, Kiskunhalas, Pécs, Kaposvár, Nagykanizsa, Szombathely, and Győr. The *TEK* likewise operates decentralized branch offices, some of which are regionally based (like those of the National Standby Police), albeit at distinct locations (Pécs, Miskolc, Győr, Debrecen, Békéscsaba, and Szombathely). Its presence in Paks is justified by the heightened security requirements of the nuclear power plant. The two uppermost hierarchical levels of the Police have been operating in a nearly unaltered territorial structure since 1990.

The various *municipal police headquarters* constitute the next level down, but here the territorial principle is no longer self-evident. Municipal police headquarters operate in 129 settlements, to which are added the 22 *municipal district police headquarters* in Budapest as well as the three *water police forces*. The number of municipal police headquarters (129) does not correspond with the number of towns (348) or the number of district seats (174). In general, it can be stated that municipal police headquarters are only to be found in settlements with urban status which are, with two exceptions (Dorog, Budaörs), district seats. In nearly fifty district seats (around 30% of the total), there is only a lower-ranking police presence. A comparable situation can be observed in the case of urban status, with the presence of a municipal police headquarters or a higher body in 37% of the 348 Hungarian towns.

The *local police stations* are at the next level down, being present in more than 240 settlements. Evidently, in larger settlements, several local police stations operate. Their organization is determined by the municipal police headquarters. In each of the district seats, there is at least one local police station, but local police stations can also be found in 168 non-district seats, 54 of which do not even have urban status. At the same time, in more than fifty settlements with urban status, the police presence is lower in rank than a local police station. Towns lacking a major police station (Biatorbágy, Hajdúsámson, Kerepes, Piliscsaba) are situated in proximity to higher-ranking police stations elsewhere, typically in agglomerations.

At the lowest hierarchical level of the police is the *district commissioner system*, which was established in

1954 and ensures a police presence in close proximity to the public. There are district commissioner offices in nearly a thousand settlements, and in some settlements there several district commissioner offices. This organizational unit has the greatest variability, with the number of district commissioner offices undergoing constant change. The district commissioner system does not correspond with the settlement system; many towns have several district commissioner offices. At the same time, fewer than ten towns lack official district commissioner offices.

Two special organizational structures can be found within the Police service, with both structures being related to geographical phenomena. One is the *water police*, which operates along the rivers Danube and Tisza and at Lake Balaton in a hierarchical and territorial system resembling the customary police force. The headquarters of the *Danube River Police* is based in Budapest, to which six patrols are subject (Komárom, Nagymaros, Budapest, Dunaújváros, Paks, Mohács). Two district commissioner offices have also been established – at Gönyű and at Baja. The headquarter of the *Tisza Water Police* is based in Szolnok, with police stations at Kisköre, Szeged, Szolnok, Tokaj and Vásárosnamény; there are also eight district commissioner offices. The headquarters of the *Balaton Water Police* lies in Siófok, with police stations at Balatonföldvár, Balatonfüred, Balatonkenese, Siófok, Keszthely, and Fonyód.

After the abolition of the *Hungarian Border Guard* (1946–2007), border control became the responsibility of the Police. Border police branch offices were organized within the Police service along the country's external Schengen borders (i.e. along the borders with Serbia, Romania, and Ukraine) [11]. There are 21 such offices in border settlements located in the counties of Bács-Kiskun, Csongrád-Csanád, Békés, Hajdú-Bihar and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg.

Considerable regional disparities in *police accessibility* are an inevitable consequence of the peculiar features of the Hungarian settlement network. While the vast majority of settlements in much of the Alföld region (except the Nyírség area) have some form of police presence, police accessibility is significantly worse in the tiny villages of Northern Hungary and the upland areas of Transdanubia. Accessibility is particularly poor in the Cserhát, Cseréhat and Nyírség areas and in parts of Southern Transdanubia, as well as the border regions of the counties Komárom-Esztergom, Győr-Moson-Sopron and Veszprém.

In 2021, a total of 154,012 *recorded crimes* occurred in Hungary, representing a rate of 1,540 per 100,000 inhabitants (this is about a third of the rate observed two decades ago, although the decrease is partly the result of legislative changes). The crime rate is higher than average in some regional centres (e.g. Győr and Pécs), county seats (e.g. Kecskemét and Nyíregyháza), and small towns. Yet it is lower than average in other similar settlements (e.g. Debrecen and Veszprém) [14]. A higher crime rate has been observed in the underdeveloped inner and outer peripheries (e.g. in South Transdanubia, in the northeastern periphery of Hungary, and the Central Tisza region), as well as in some more developed areas (e.g. along the shores of Lake

Balaton). Thus, social disadvantage and certain socio-economic and geographical features can favour higher rates of crimes. At the same time, based on statistical studies, there is no clear correlation between a constant police presence and the number of crimes at the settlement level. Rather, the crime rate tends to reflect the social, financial, and economic status of settlements.

After Hungary's change of system, there was a steady albeit uneven increase in the *number of police officers*. [35] Between 1990 and 1995 there was a substantial increase (from almost 32,000 to more than 39,000). Subsequently, after a decade of stagnation and decline, the abolition of the Border Guard in 2007 and the integration of its personnel into the Police service resulted in another significant increase in the number of police personnel (from 36,000 to more than 43,000). The expansion in personnel numbers lasted until the late 2010s. There followed a renewed period of stagnation, followed by a slight decrease. The change in the total number of personnel primarily reflects changes in the number of police officers, with the number of civilian employees being more balanced. Over the past thirty years, the civilian share of personnel has increased slightly (from 23.5% to 27%). The number of police officers increased from a total number of nearly 32,000 in 1990 to over 50,000 by 2022. This is a significant increase, even when the number of former Border Guard staff is taken account.

Concerning the number of border guards, it should be noted that in 1989 it was decided that, as of 1995, the border guard should comprise exclusively professional border guards (rather than soldiers serving in the military, including conscripts). Although the Yugoslav wars delayed for a time the removal of conscripts, by 1998 the national borders were being controlled entirely by *professional border guards*. This explains the significant increase in their number between 1990 and 2000. In an emergency, Hungarian Defence Forces personnel also participate in guarding the border.

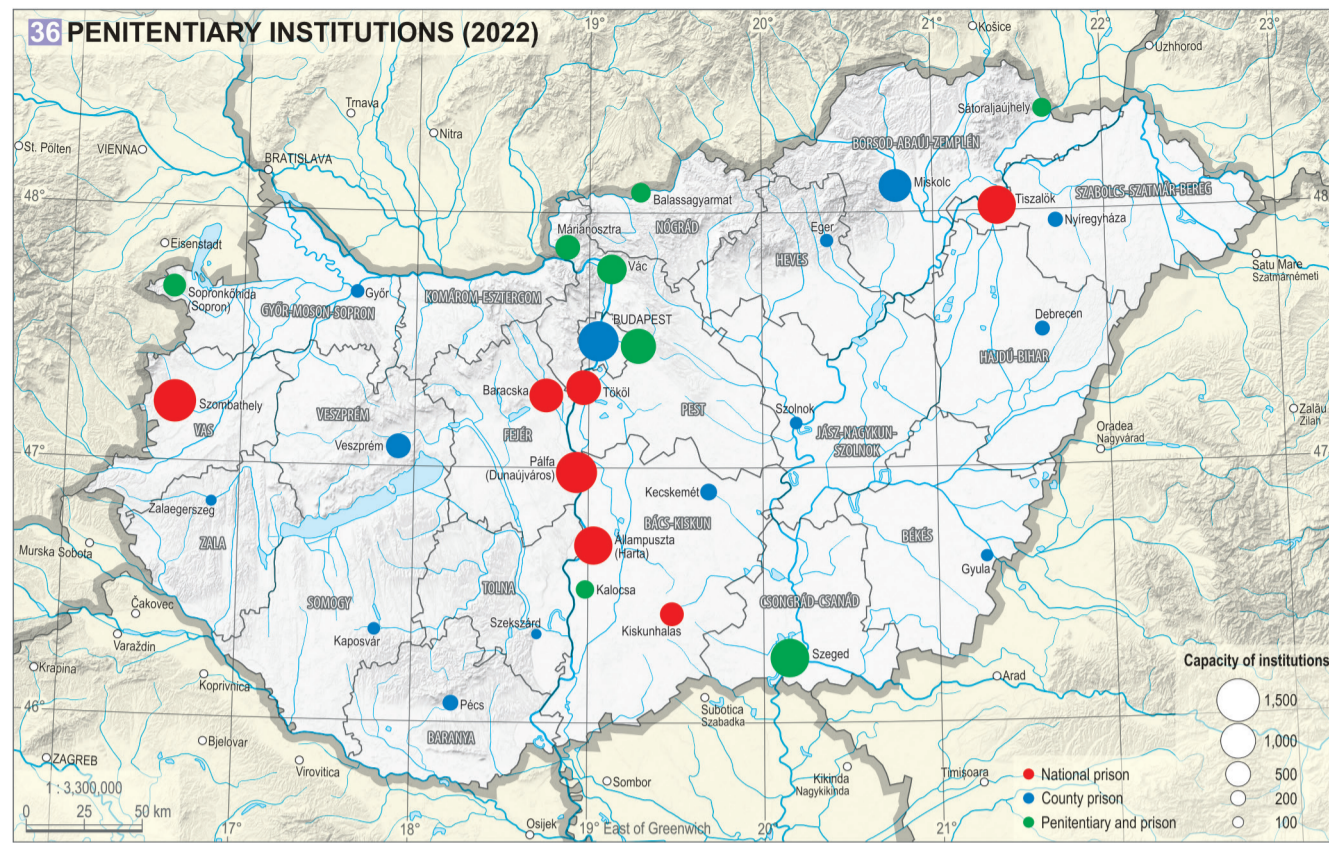
Prison service

The operational framework of the Prison service is defined by two pieces of legislation: its institutional structure is laid down in *Act CVII of 1995* on the Prison service, while its practical operations are governed by *Act CCXL of 2013* on the execution of punishments, criminal measures, certain coercive measures and confinement for infractions. The latter replaced Law Decree no.

35 CHANGES IN THE NUMBER OF POLICE AND BORDER GUARDS (1990–2022)

	1990	1995	2000	2007	2010	2015	2020	2022
The entire police staff	31,970	39,135	38,607	36,011	43,278	48,761	50,629	50,513
Border guard staff*	4,854	4,931	10,388	11,011	—	—	—	—

*Excluding conscripts involved in border surveillance.



tially corresponds with the country's administrative divisions. The smaller prisons (each accommodating 100-250 inmates) have regional (or county) jurisdiction, typically serving as pre-trial or temporary detention facilities. With one exception, they use the buildings of old county jails and penitentiaries, which were mostly established in the 1880s and 1890s and are still to be found in the county seats. ³⁶ The oldest historical prisons are the jails and penitentiaries, some of which (those in Balassagyarmat, Márianosztra, Vác) have been operating as penitentiaries since the mid-19th century.

The figure clearly illustrates that, except for Budapest and Szeged, the national maximum-security prisons are those which, as their name suggests, are primarily used as prisons for convicted adult criminals. The largest, most recently established, national prisons can each accommodate 1,000–1,500 inmates and they have the broadest range of tasks: they basically function as minimum- and medium-security prisons, but most of them also receive convicts serving maximum-security prison sentences. They also function on a regional basis as pre-trial and remand prisons.

As part of a prison expansion and modernization programme, in the early 2000s, partly as a result of green field investments, several prisons underwent renewal. Two new prisons were opened: Tiszalök Prison in 2008 ¹² and Kiskunhalas National Prison in 2019.

Fire service and disaster prevention

Hungary's change of system resulted in major reforms in the field of fire protection and prevention. *Act LXV of 1990* on the local governments made *local fire protection* the responsibility of the local governments.



12 The Tiszalök National Penitentiary

Act XX of 1991 defined firefighting and technical rescue as mandatory public tasks of municipalities with professional firefighting services. The former state fire brigade was divided into two parts, with the *national and county fire services* operating as *state bodies* and the *urban fire brigades* as *municipal institutions*. In 1993, fire protection and civil defence were united under the direction of the National Fire and Civil Defence Command. In 1995, the government divided up this organization (Government Decree no. 140/1995). Consequently, two institutions with national scope and powers were created: the National Command of the Fire Service and the National Command of Civil Defence. Pursuant to *Act LXXIV of 1999* on the management and organization of disaster protection and the prevention of major accidents involving dangerous substances, the state fire service and civil defence administration were merged to form a single disaster management organization. From 1 January 2000, the two national headquarters were integrated into a *National Directorate General for Disaster Management (OKF)*. County disaster management directorates were formed out of the old county fire brigades, serving also as professional supervisory bodies for the professional municipal fire brigades and for the volunteer and facility fire brigades. The civil defence branch offices were also subordinated to these county directorates.

Act CXXVIII of 2011 on disaster management and the amendment of related laws made firefighting and technical rescue a state task. As of 1 January 2012, the professional municipal fire brigades were abolished and merged into a disaster management body. This latter body – the new integrated and professional disaster prevention agency – became a law enforcement agency performing, among other things, state administrative tasks. Its staff members are law enforcement officers, officer aspirants, and employees. As far as the organizational structure is concerned, the central body with national competence is the *OKF* (Ministry of the Interior). This body oversees the *county disaster management directorates* (19), the *Budapest Disaster Management Directorate*, the *Disaster Management Education Centre*, and the *Economic Supply Centre*. ³⁷ In turn, the county bodies oversee the *disaster prevention branch offices*, of which there are 65 nationwide (five of which are in Budapest). The branch offices, as the local bodies of the professional disaster prevention agencies, direct the *fire brigades* (of which there are 106 nationwide). Within this framework, 47 *disaster prevention stations* were also established in 2012. The county disaster management directorates also oversee the municipal and facility fire brigades. There is considerable cooperation between the two types of institutions. The former were established in 60 different places as public bodies employing both professional and volunteer firefighters. The country's 67 facility fire brigades, which do not have territorial operational areas, are primarily responsible for firefighting and other technical rescue tasks relating to given commercial organizations. In

addition to the aforementioned, there are also 669 *voluntary firefighting associations* in Hungary, which are committed to cooperation in the field of professional fire-fighting and technical rescue.

In line with their basic mission, the disaster prevention bodies are required to protect the lives and property of Hungarian citizens and to ensure the safe operation of the national economy and the country's critical infrastructure. In the field of public safety, they seek to prevent disasters, conduct rescues in civilian emergency situations, organize the tasks of management, perform defensive functions, eliminate harmful effects, and carry out restoration and reconstruction. In order to fulfil the tasks, disaster prevention:

- exercises authority with regard to fire and civil defence, industrial security, water management and water protection;
- operates national, county, regional and local professional, voluntary and otherwise committed civil defence bodies;
- regulates, manages and supervises the fire protection system, providing professional supervision in the field of firefighting and technical rescue and for the municipal and facility fire brigades and the volunteer firefighting associations;
- exercises powers in such fields as the identification and supervision of critical infrastructure in Hungary, civil emergency planning, defence administration, mobilization of the national economy, and the management of state reserves;
- maintains information technology and telecommunications capabilities and undertakes deployment management, measuring and sensing, and the maintenance of public alarm systems in the country;
- under its auspices are the Disaster Prevention Education Centre and the Disaster Prevention Institute of the Faculty of Law Enforcement, National University of Public Service.

The professional disaster prevention agency carries out its duties in close cooperation with other law enforcement agencies, the Hungarian Defence Forces, various civil society organizations, and local governments. In addition to the bodies and organizations responsible for performing the various tasks at a high standard, it is essential that the public be actively involved, as self-protection and active participation are essential elements.

Administrative divisions in the Carpathian Basin today

The Carpathian Basin is currently shared by 8 countries ³⁸. From the 10–11th centuries until 1918, the Hungarian state covered the entire basin (except for the interlude of Ottoman rule). It was only during the wars and political changes of the 20th century that the fragmentation of the region occurred. Consequently, the present *national borders* within the Carpathian Basin are extremely 'young'. In contrast, some of the boundaries at the periphery of the region have existed for 1,000–1,100 years (e.g. the current Slovenian–Croatian, Slovak–Austrian, Slovak–Czech, and Slovak–Polish borders along the Danube). Concerning the contemporary economic and military alliances, the external border of the EU and NATO runs along Hungary's borders with Ukraine and Serbia. The Schengen zone extends as far as the eastern borders of Slovakia, Hungary and Croatia. Based on the above, the countries currently sharing the Carpathian Basin vary considerably in age. Hungary (750 years, 895–1541, 1918–1944, 1945–) and Serbia

(545 years) have been *independent countries* for the longest periods (the figures are calculated for the period until 2023). In contrast, Croatia (229 years) and Romania (164 years) have experienced shorter periods of national independence. Meanwhile, Slovakia, Ukraine and Slovenia count as some of Europe's youngest countries, having been independent for just 31–36 years. The majority of the Carpathian Basin's inhabitants live in one of the following countries: Hungary (34.3% of the region's inhabitants), Romania (24.1%), Slovakia (19.3%) and Croatia (9.7%).

According to the EU's *Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistical Purposes* (NUTS) the NUTS 1 (*major socio-economic regions*) level is represented by three units both in Hungary and in Transylvania (Romania) and by one unit both in Croatia and in Slovakia. NUTS 2 (*basic regions for the application of regional policies*) is represented by territorial units in Austria (Burgenland), Serbia (Vojvodina), and Ukraine (Zakarpattia). NUTS 3 (*small regions, i.e. counties*) has been represented by territorial units in several countries for many decades (since 1950 in Hungary and since 1968 in Romania). In other places, such territorial units were introduced in the aftermath of the change of system (in 1992 in Croatia and Serbia, and in 1996 in Slovakia). An important addition to the NUTS system is the LAU (*local administrative units*) system. LAU 1 territorial units (roughly *districts*) have mostly arisen in recent decades (e.g. in 1996 in Slovakia, in 2013 in Hungary, and in 2020 in Ukraine), but there are other instances where territorial units in this category have remained almost unchanged for more than half a century (since 1966 in Serbia and since 1945 in Austria). The lowest level of administrative division is LAU 2 (roughly *villages*), of which there are 8,296 units in the Carpathian Basin. ³⁹ In terms of the *size* of the above *administrative units*, the variance is particularly stark at the level of NUTS 3 (counties etc.). Indeed, on average, Slovakia's regions (*kraj*) and Romania's counties are 1.5 times larger than the regional average and almost 3 times larger than counties in Croatia. At the level of LAU 1 (districts), we observe that Ukrainian districts are 4 times larger than districts in Slovakia and almost 1.5 times larger than those in the other countries of the region.

As the previous sections of this chapter have focused on Hungary, in the following the recent history and contemporary status of administrative spatial divisions in other countries and regions of the Carpathian Basin will be explored.

With an area of 49,035 sq. km, *Slovakia* gained its independence on 1 January 1993, at the time of the dissolution of Czechoslovakia. The capital city, *Bratislava*, has 475,000 inhabitants and is the seat of the office of the president of the republic, the parliament and the government ¹³. The country's current territorial-administrative divisions are based on Law No. 221 of 1996, which divided Slovakia into 8 regions (*kraj*), 79 districts (*okres*), and 2867 municipalities (*obec*). The Hungarian ethnic area in the south extends over 5 *krajs*,



13 The Slovak Parliament in Bratislava

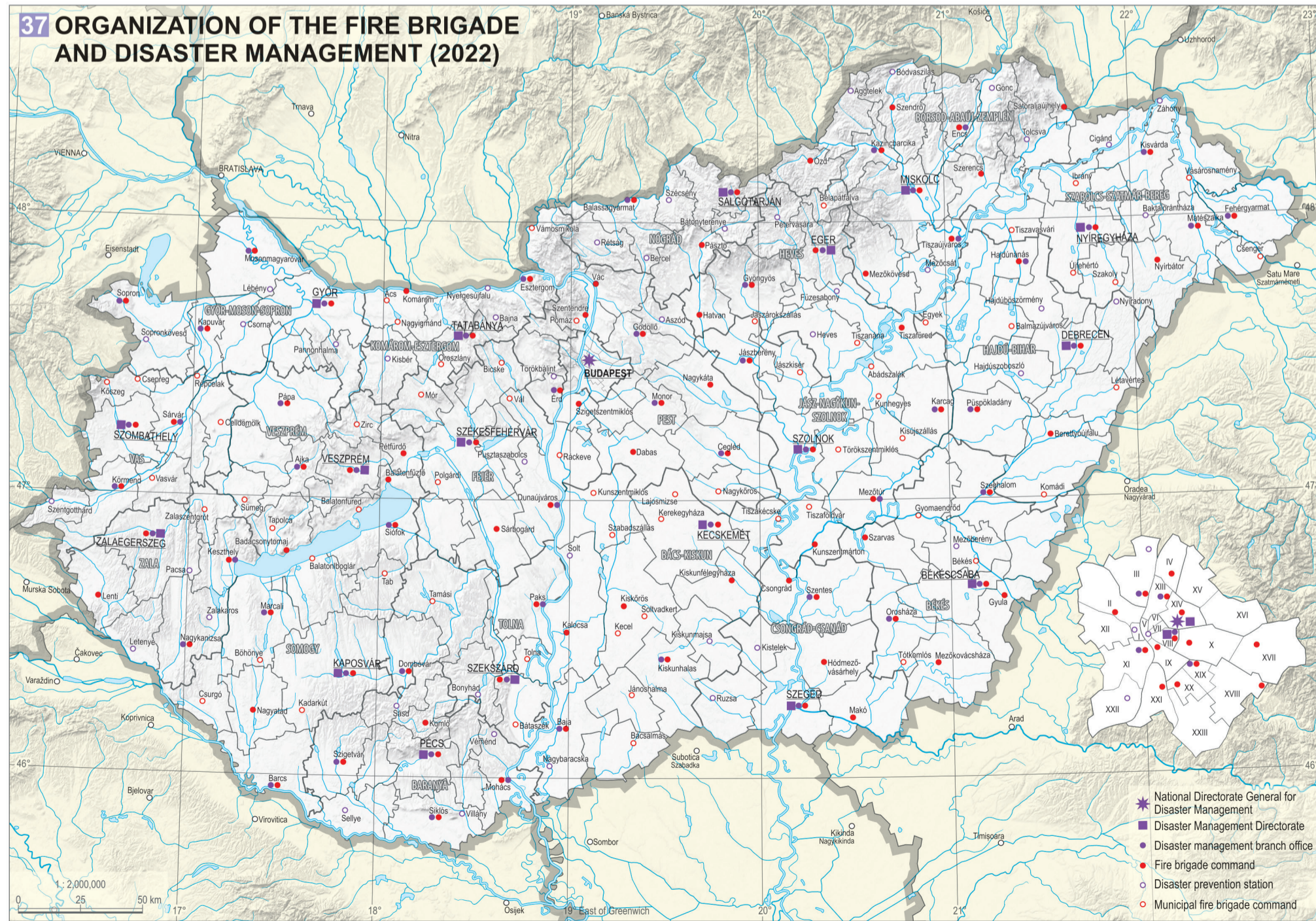
11/1979 on the execution of penalties and measures, which was outdated in many respects and had been amended by Act XXXII of 1993.

The administrative supervision of the Prison service, as a state armed law enforcement agency, is undertaken by the State Secretary for Internal Security of the Ministry of the Interior. Meanwhile, its professional activities are managed by the *National Command for Prisons (BVOP)*, which operates as an independent budgetary institution and legal entity. The central institutional system of the BVOP consists of organizational units (departments and sections) operating under the authority of a National Commander (and his two deputy

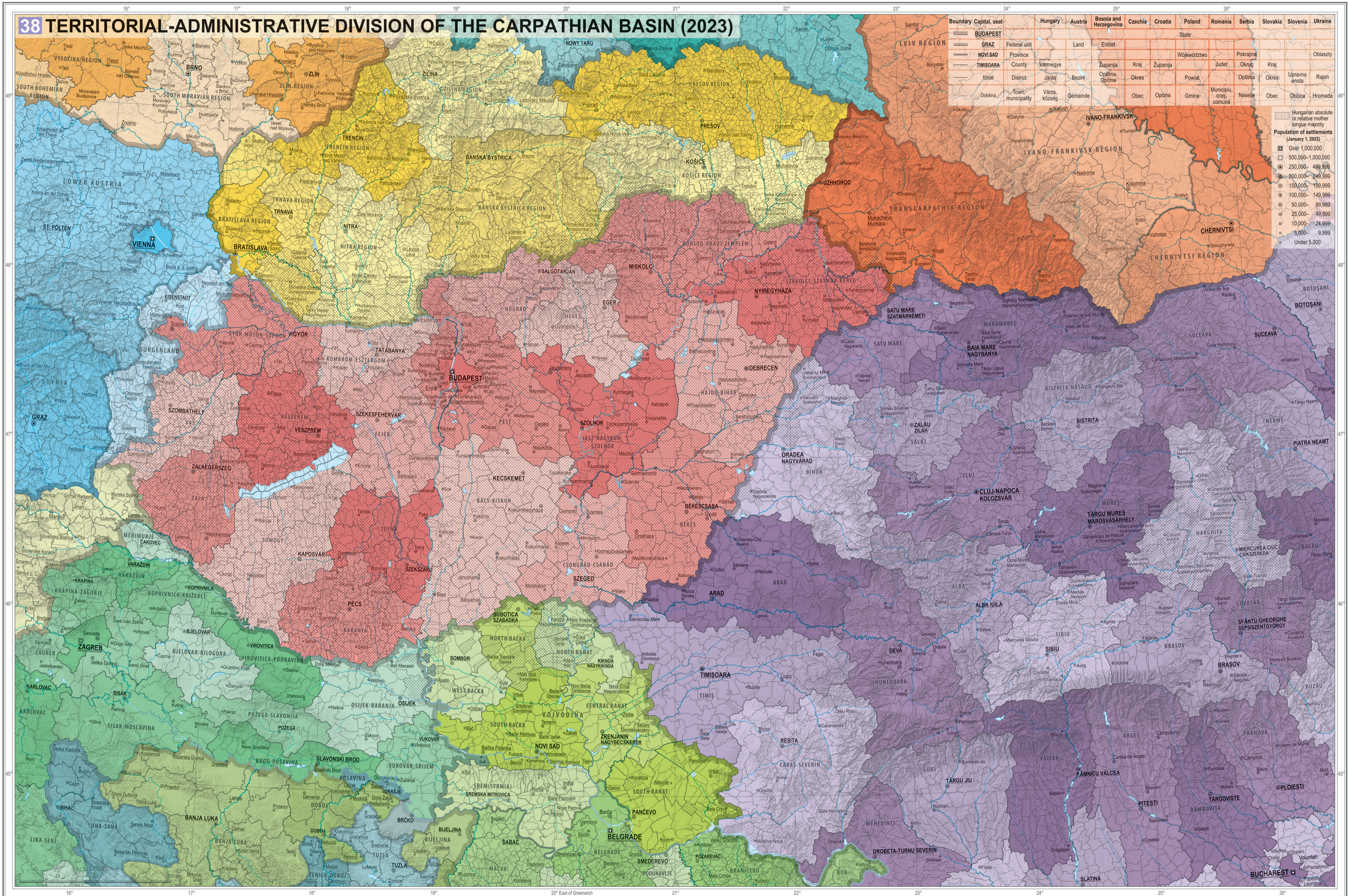
ties), who are appointed by the Minister of the Interior.

The BVOP oversees and directs the execution of the service duties of the prisons, background institutions, and associated economic companies (including the detention, education, employment, health care, transportation and registration of prisoners and the education and further training of the professional staff). It provides the resources and conditions necessary for the performance of the various tasks and coordinates relations with other actors involved in the execution of punishments (state and civil society organizations, churches, and foundations).

The territorial system of the Prison service only par-



38 TERRITORIAL-ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION OF THE CARPATHIAN BASIN (2023)



Boundary	Capital, seat	Hungary	Austria	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Czechia	Croatia	Poland	Romania	Serbia	Slovakia	Slovenia	Ukraine
—	BUDAPEST	Federal unit	Land	Entitet	Województwo	Pokrajina	State	Judet	Opština	Okraj	Občina	Oblaszty
—	GRAZ	Province	Varmegye	Zupanija	Kraj	Zupanija	Województwo	Okraj	Opština	Okraj	Občina	Oblaszty
—	NOVISAD	County	Varmegye	Zupanija	Kraj	Zupanija	Województwo	Okraj	Opština	Okraj	Občina	Oblaszty
—	TIMISOARA	Khrai	Distrikt	Járs	Bezirk	Opština, Općina	Okres	Powiat	Gmina	Municipiu, oras, comună	Nasele	Obec
—		Dobšina	Town municipality	Város, község	Gemeinde	Obec	Općina	Gmina	Municipiu, oras, comună	Nasele	Obec	Občina

Population of settlements (January 1, 2023)

- Over 1,000,000
- 500,000–1,000,000
- 250,000–499,999
- 200,000–249,999
- 150,000–199,999
- 100,000–149,999
- 50,000–99,999
- 25,000–49,999
- 10,000–24,999
- 5,000–9,999
- Under 5,000

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39 TERRITORIAL-ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION OF THE CARPATHIAN BASIN (2023)

Country, region	Territory	NUTS2	NUTS3	LAU1	LAU2	Settlement	NUTS2	NUTS3	LAU1	LAU2	Settlement	NUTS2	NUTS3	LAU1	LAU2	Settlement
	(km ²)															
HUNGARY	93,023	Régió (region)	Vármegye (county)	Járás (district)	Város, község (municipality)	Település (settlement)	8	20	197	3,177	3,178	11,628.0	4,651.0	472.0	29.3	29.3
SLOVAKIA	49,035	Oblasť (region)	Kraj (small region)	Okres (district)	Obec (municipality)	Sídlo (settlement)	4	8	79	2,878	2,878	12,259.0	6,129.0	621.0	17.0	17.0
Zakarpattia (UKRAINE)	12,777	Oblasť (region)	—	Raion (district)	Hromada (municipality)	Poselennia (settlement)	1	—	6	64	609	12,777.0	—	2,129.0	199.6	21.0
Transylvania, Crişana-Maramureş, Banat (ROMANIA)	100,293	Regiunea (region)	Judeţul (county)	—	Municipiu, oraş, comună (municipality)	Municipiu, oraş, sat (settlement)	3	16	—	1,182	5,293	33,431.0	6,268.0	—	84.8	18.9
Vojvodina (SERBIA)	21,614	Region (region)	Okrug (district)	Opština, grad (municipality)	Naselje (settlement)	Naselje (settlement)	1	7	45	467	467	21,614.0	3,087.7	480.3	46.3	46.3
Pannonian Croatia (CROATIA)	31,871	Statistička regija (region)	Županija (county)	—	Općina (municipality)	Naselje (settlement)	3	14	—	336	4,294	10,623.7	2,276.5	—	94.9	7.4
Prekmurje (SLOVENIA)	948.7	—	—	Upravna enota (administrative unit)	Občina (municipality)	Naselje (settlement)	—	—	2	19	176	—	—	474.3	49.9	5.4
Burgenland (AUSTRIA)	3,965.2	Land (province, region)	Bezirksgruppe (group of districts)	Bezirk (district)	Gemeinde (municipality)	Ortschaft (settlement)	1	3	9	171	318	3,965.2	1,321.7	440.6	23.2	12.5
CARPATHIAN BASIN	313,526.9	—	—	—	—	—	21	68	338	8,294	17,213	—	—	—	—	—

each of which has a predominantly Slovak population. In the Slovak ethnic area in the north, each of the former large *districts*, which had, on average, an area of 1,300 sq. km, was divided into three new smaller districts (400–500 sq. km) in accordance with the principle of public administrative decentralization. The opposite of all this occurred in the southern, Hungarian-populated areas. The large districts of Dunajská Streda/Dunaszerdahely, Komárno/Komárom, Nové Zámky/Érsekújvár, and Levice/Léva, with areas of 1,100–1,600 sq. km, were left untouched. At the same time, the territorial-administrative changes divided up the Hungarian ethnic area near the border in the eastern parts of Slovakia, establishing districts inhabited primarily by Slovaks and subordinated to district centres with predominantly Slovak inhabitants. As a result of these changes, out of Slovakia's 79 districts, Hungarians constitute the absolute majority of inhabitants in just two districts. The country's two major cities, Bratislava and Košice, were divided into 5 and 4 districts and 17 and 22 municipalities, respectively.

Self-governance is realized at two levels: 1. *the self-governing region* (from 2002), which is called a higher territorial unit (VÚC); 2. *the self-governing municipality*. At present, there are 2,890 of the latter, of which 140 are towns and 3 are military areas. Slovakia's *district offices*, which used to form part of the state administra-

tion [14], were discontinued between 2004 and 2013 and consolidated into 50 sub-regional offices (*obvody*).

Ukraine, which declared its independence on 24 August 1991 at the time of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, has a presence in the Carpathian Basin in the form of *Zakarpattia region*. With an area of 12,777 sq. km, Zakarpattia was transferred from Hungary to Czechoslovakia in 1920 (and again in late 1944) and then to the Soviet Union in 1945. The region's external borders have remained unchanged since 1945. The regional seat is *Uzhhorod*, with 115,000 inhabitants [15]. Between 1991 and 2020, the administrative divisions inherited from the Soviet era (*raions*, town and village councils) remained largely unaltered.

As the final stage in the restructuring of Ukraine's system of public administration, which began in 2015, the Supreme Council of Ukraine adopted a law on the country's public administration on 15 July 2020. The aim of the legislation was to decentralize the system of public administration and expand the powers of local governments. In Zakarpattia, the outcome was the abolition of the 13 *raions*, followed by the reconstitution of 6 of them as larger *raions*. In this way, the average territory of the districts was doubled. As a result of the changes, Ukraine's only district (Berehovo/Beregszász) with an ethnic Hungarian majority disappeared, given the inclusion of ethnic Ukrainian areas (former

Vynohradiv district). Indeed, the share of Hungarian native speakers in the Berehovo district fell from 72.3% to 44%. It was then that Ukraine established the lowest-level self-governing territorial units, the voluntary (urban, urban-type and rural) *municipal territorial associations*. Out of the previous 337 councils in Zakarpattia, 64 municipalities (*hromada*) were created. The number of *towns with regional (oblast) rights* has remained unchanged (5): Uzhhorod, Mukachevo, Khust, Berehovo/Beregszász, and Chop/Csap.

Romania, which has traditionally seen itself as a centralized nation-state, is divided under the present constitution into *communes* (*comune*), *cities/towns* (*oraşe*) and *counties* (*judete*), whose operations are supervised by *prefects* appointed by the Romanian government. In 1998, with a view to promoting regional development, *macroregions* (NUTS 1) and *regions* (NUTS 2) were created, neither of which were formally recognized as administrative units or legal entities. In the part of Romania that was annexed from Hungary in 1920, 3 regions were created, covering 16 counties [16]. The boundaries of the large *counties* established in 1968 have remained unchanged. Only two counties, namely Harghita/Hargita and Covasna/Kovászna in Székely Land, have an ethnic Hungarian majority. It is here that the Hungarian community in Transylvania (principally the Székely National Council)



17 The Mureş County Council in Târgu Mureş/Marosvásárhely



18 Assembly of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina in Novi Sad



19 The Town Hall of Subotica/Szabadka

envisages *territorial autonomy*, an idea that has been rejected by successive Romanian governments. Among all the areas inhabited by minorities in the Carpathian Basin, Székely Land in Transylvania is the most obvious candidate for ethnic-based territorial self-determination, in view of the region's demographic, economic and historical background. The Hungarian population of this region was self-governing from the 14th century until 1876 (and again between 1952 and 1960/68). The predominantly Hungarian ethnic character of Székely Land has remained intact from the 13th century to the present day. An association of the Hungarian-majority towns and communes of Harghita, Covasna and Mureş counties could lead to the creation of a self-governing region with 750,000 inhabitants (76.5% Hungarian-speaking).

The number of LAU 2 units in the Romanian part of the Carpathian Basin increased from 1,111 to 1,191 between 1992 and 2011, owing mainly to the establishment of new communes. Around the turn of the millennium, the number of towns classified as municipalities (*municipii*) increased from 26 to 48, the number of other towns from 91 to 95. Meanwhile, the number of communes increased from 994 to 1,048. The most populous and urbanized cities with the most developed infrastructure are usually given the rank of municipality [17]. The largest such urban settlement in Transylvania is Cluj-Napoca/Kolozsvár, which has 286,000 inhabitants and is the region's economic and cultural centre. In contrast, the smallest is Beiuş in Bihor County, with 10,000 inhabitants. Today, only 7 of the 48 municipalities still retain a Hungarian majority. Ethnic Hungarians form a majority in 12 of 95 other towns in the region. Most of these towns are situated in Székely Land, with the exceptions being a few small towns in the Partium area. The communes, Romania's smallest territorial units of local administration and self-government, are relatively large, with an average area of 85 sq. km and comprising, on average, 5 villages. The latter is an average with a large variance, since the communes often comprise 1–2 villages in lowland areas and river valleys but as many as 20–40 villages in upland areas.

In the Serbian part of the Carpathian Basin lies the *Autonomous Province of Vojvodina*, which was estab-

lished in 1945 and covers a territory of 21,614 sq. km. The province corresponds to NUTS 2 and has its own parliament [18] and government, exercising autonomy in various fields (e.g. education, culture, science, and infrastructure). The administrative divisions in Serbia are determined by the 2006 government decree on administrative districts and the 2007 law on territorial organization. Under their provisions, Serbia has the following administrative divisions: autonomous provinces (Vojvodina, Kosovo), municipalities (*opština*), cities (*grad*), and the capital city of Belgrade. In the spirit of decentralization, *administrative districts* (*okrug*) without self-governing powers and corresponding to the level of NUTS 3 were created in 1992. As the territorial representatives of state power, these administrative districts are made up of urban and rural settlements and host various state institutions. There are 7 of them in Vojvodina, in two of which – North Bačka and North Banat – ethnic Hungarians constitute a relative majority of inhabitants. *Rural and urban municipalities* corresponding to LAU 1 are the basic territorial units of self-government in Serbia. They have their own municipal assemblies, presidents or urban mayors, public services, and budgets. The rural municipalities usually have more than 10,000 inhabitants, while the urban municipalities usually have populations of more than 100,000. There are 45 such territorial units in Vojvodina, of which 6 – Novi Sad, Subotica/Szabadka [19], Zrenjanin/Nagybecskerek, Sombor, Pančevo, and Sremska Mitrovica – have urban status. In Vojvodina, these rural and urban municipalities are divided into 467 settlements.

The Central European (Pannonian) part of Croatia, with an area of 31,871 sq. km, lies in the Carpathian Basin. The country undertook a reform of its system of administrative division as early as 1992, in the aftermath of the declaration of independence and during the Yugoslav war. The administrative divisions inherited from the Yugoslav period were transformed. With roots reaching back to the 10–11th centuries, the *counties* (*županija*), which had been abolished in 1921, were restored as the basic territorial units of the regional governments. The counties in their present form were demarcated and named in 1997 [20]. Under the Croatian constitution, the counties perform re-

gional functions, having particular regard for education, health, regional and urban planning, and infrastructure. Fourteen of Croatia's counties, which correspond to NUTS 3, are in the Pannonian part of the country, including the capital city of Zagreb, which has county rights and a population of 767,000 [21]. Under the provisions of the constitution, the basic units of local government are the *towns* (*grad*) and *municipalities* (*općina*). The 4294 settlements (*naselje*) lying in the Pannonian part of the country are grouped into 336 (68 urban and 268 rural) municipalities at the level of LAU 1. During the Yugoslav era, Croatia's municipalities were similar in size and population to today's Serbian municipalities or Hungarian districts. However, as the outcome of legislation adopted in 1992, 1997 and 2006, their size was significantly reduced. Excluding Zagreb, Croatian towns in the Carpathian Basin have, on average, 16,000 inhabitants. The largest among them is Osijek with 96,000 inhabitants.

Slovenia, the smallest country in the region, has 949 sq. km of territory in the Carpathian Basin, which constitutes *Prekmurje*. The year 1995 saw the establishment of *administrative units* (*upravna enota*), at which time the state administration was completely separated off from the local governments. Resembling in size the former Yugoslav municipalities, two of these LAU 1 territorial units, Lendava/Alsólendva and Murska Sobota, are in Prekmurje. Today, the *municipalities* (*občina*) are the only territorial units of self-government in Slovenia. Currently, the 176 settlements (*naselje*) of Prekmurje are grouped into 19 municipalities. Among them, only Murska Sobota, with 18,000 inhabitants is classified as an urban municipality (*mestna občina*).

Burgenland, a federal unit (Land) of Austria with an area of 3,965 sq. km, comprises territory that belonged to Hungary until 1921. *Eisenstadt* has been its capital since 1945 (and between 1925 and 1938) [22]. The Land is divided into 7 *districts* (*Bezirke*) and 2 *statutory cities* (*Statutarstädte*), namely Eisenstadt and Rust. Burgenland's 318 settlements are grouped into 171 *municipalities* (*Gemeinde*), which are the basic units of self-government. Among these municipalities, 2 of them are the aforementioned statutory cities, and there are also 11 *urban municipalities* (*Stadtgemeinde*) and 67 *market towns* (*Marktgemeinde*).



14 District office building in Rimavská Sobota/Rimaszombat



15 The building of the Zakarpattia government office in Uzhhorod



16 The Town Hall of Oradea/Nagyvárad



20 The seat of Osijek-Baranja County in Osijek



21 The Croatian Sabor (Parliament) in Zagreb



22 The seat of the province of Burgenland in Eisenstadt

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