

Governance Challenges in Endangered Municipalities: A Comparative Analysis of the Czech Republic and Romania

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Abstract

The topic of territorial consolidation reforms remains a significant interdisciplinary area of interest in Europe in the early years of the 21st century. These changes, as evidenced by the literature, were primarily designed to reduce the number of municipal or local governments by means of either merging them or promoting greater inter-municipal cooperation. This approach has frequently resulted in a notable reduction in the number of local government units and an expansion of their geographic area and population size. Nevertheless, a number of former Eastern Bloc countries have not implemented any territorial administrative reforms (e.g., the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Slovenia, Romania), despite the fact that many municipalities are not fulfilling their functions, are not developing, and are struggling to elect representatives to their local public authorities. Furthermore, the last decade has seen an increase in the number of municipalities across Europe facing growing demands and challenges. This has led to an increased focus on specific cases of municipalities that are in danger of ceasing to function or have already done so.

In light of the assumption that social reality is not only diversely constituted but that context is a significant factor and that European governments face comparable challenges which they address in disparate ways, this paper aims to undertake a preliminary comparative examination of municipal structures from the Czech Republic and Romania. Despite the existence of significant divergences in the political and institutional contexts of these two countries, there are numerous common features in the area of municipal threats such as economic challenges, particularly the burden of critical indebtedness, demographic shifts and problems of local democratic participation.

In order to achieve this objective, this work will attempt to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the specific threats faced by endangered municipalities in the Czech Republic and Romania?
2. How are the municipal structures of the Czech Republic and Romania affected in fulfilling their local governance functions?
3. How do national policies in the Czech Republic and Romania address these threats?

The study will therefore concentrate on the macro dimension municipalities from each country, with a view to comparing national approaches to dealing with these most endangered municipalities. This will be achieved by utilizing data drawn directly from the municipalities themselves, together with statistical data from official sources. In addition, interviews will be conducted with municipal leaders.

The paper will conclude by disseminating the findings to an international audience, thereby raising awareness of the issue of endangered municipalities. Furthermore, it will highlight the current failure to address the problems of two European Union member states that have inefficient municipal structures and municipalities in collapse.

Key words: *local government, threats, municipalities in collapse, reform, amalgamation, EU member states.*

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