

## **SEPARATING THE CAPITAL REGION IN POLAND – THE RATIONALITY OF THE POLITICAL CONCEPTION**

Paweł J. Borkowski

*Lazarski University,  
Faculty of Economics and Management,  
Świeradowska 43, 02-662 Warsaw, Poland,  
pawel.borkowski@lazarski.pl*

Agnieszka Bógdał-Brzezińska

*University of Warsaw,  
Faculty of Political Science and International Studies,  
Krakowskie Przedmieście 26/28, 00-927 Warsaw, Poland,  
bogdal@uw.edu.pl*

Jan A. Wendt

*University of Gdańsk,  
Faculty of Social Sciences,  
Institute of Socio-Economic Geography and Spatial Management,  
Bażyńskiego 4, 80-309 Gdańsk, Poland,  
jan.wendt@ug.edu.pl*

### **Abstract:**

Thematically, the thesis is in the field of research on politics and administration and electoral geography. The subject of the research is the division of the Mazowieckie Voivodeship, which is the largest in terms of territory and population, into two smaller administrative units, planned and announced by the Polish government. The purpose of the analysis is to assess the rationality of the planned decisions regarding the creation of a new voivodeship (region) in Poland. Multidimensional analysis was used in the study of political and local government conditions and in the characteristics of the financial and local government policy of the European Union. The results of the conducted research indicate that the division of Mazovia is a classic example of gerrymandering.

**Key words:** *election, gerrymandering, Mazovia, region, voivodeship, Warsaw*

## INTRODUCTION

Establishing special capital regions and introducing in these cases nonstandard legal entities has a long tradition. There are some well-known examples like the Federal District of Columbia in United States, Berlin as a land in the Bundesrepublik and Great London, which according to British law is an administrative region, but not a city. Because of its history of politically motivated decisions it is a good point of reference to the situation in Poland in 2020.

Warsaw, capital of Poland since 1586, traditionally was a late capital of Mazovia province and a place of gatherings of the Polish parliament from around 1500. After the Second World War, in 1946, a new administrative map of Poland was introduced, with Warsaw being at the same time a separated city and a capital of a voivodeship (region). The was the same for four of the other biggest Polish cities – Łódź, Cracow, Wrocław and Poznań. There was no tradition of separating Warsaw and neighbouring communities from the Mazovia Voivodeship. It is important to state that traditionally this province was economically underdeveloped and Warsaw relatively small comparing to other historically prominent cities – Cracow, Gdansk and Toruń.

The phenomenon of the special capital regions as well as the political, economic and social conditions of such decisions about their formation are present in both historical and contemporary scientific research. Brussels is an important case of a special capital region – situated somewhere in between Flanders and Wallonia, politically separated as a legal entity, linguistically an island. Belgium is a country where regional separatism is threatening the very existence of a state. Administrative divisions are introduced to serve one general purpose – to provide an effective structure for the management of social and economic issues on a state and regional level.

Another example is Great London. It covers 1579 km<sup>2</sup> with about 8,2 million inhabitants. It consists of the City of London and 32 other London boroughs, divided into two groupings: Inner London – City of London and 12 communities, and Outer London – 20 communities. There are formally two cities in the region – the City of London mentioned before and the City of Westminster. The Conservative British government in 1986 dismantled its regional authority delegating its competences to small communities. It was a politically motivated decision – voters in London traditionally elect Labour MPs [Kochan 2008; O’Leary 2009]. Londoners voted in a referendum in 1998 to create a new governance structure for Greater London. The position of directly elected Mayor of London was created by the Greater London Authority Act 1999 in 2000 as part of the reforms. The role became important and visible in the country as a whole. It is occupied by politicians, who sometimes use it as a trampoline or a phase in their career [Mansley, Demsar 2015]. The most famous example is, of course, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson. The case of Greater London can serve as a proof that governing a capital (or administrative unit with a capital) carries important symbolic meaning and can become politically highly beneficial. The rationality of a management system, regional borders and the effectiveness of local government were

not the main goals of leaders of the country.

## **1. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The issue of exercising power in the capital or the largest city in the country has always aroused emotions in politicians. No wonder that the electoral rules in such centres and related administrative regions are subject to frequent changes. Voting rules [Wendt, Bógdał-Brzezińska 2020], constituency boundaries, terms of office of elected authorities or the rules for assigning seats to elected local government bodies are changed. However, the most frequent changes introduced in order to obtain current, real political benefits is the manipulation of the boundaries of constituencies and more broadly of administrative units.

The borders of the administrative units follow historical divisions and/or are a product of efforts to adapt their size to a changing reality (number of inhabitants, economic potential, economic links) of proficient space management. The introduction of a democratic political system and common voting rights resulted in the politically motivated manipulation of constituencies' borders. This practice was named after the most infamous user of this tool, Elbridge Gerry (1744-1814) as gerrymandering. As a governor of Massachusetts he introduced new borders to help candidates of his party to win. "The gerrymander is an American name for a political abuse, which, though by no means exclusively American, has been most widely practiced and generally tolerated in this country. (...) Nor is it suited to European conditions, because it is difficult there to shift electoral boundaries. European electoral units in large part have a clearly defined historical basis, which in turn rests upon geographic coherence" – C. O. Sauer wrote more than 100 years ago in his still useful work "Geography and the Gerrymander" [Sauer 1918]. The prevention of such a malpractice was considered important for democracy [Vickrey 1961]. The term refers to the "deliberate manipulation of legislative district boundaries in order to achieve some political or personal objective that serves the interests of those in power, who have been charged with drawing the lines" [Keena et al. 2019]. It occurs in electoral systems that assign seats in a legislative body to localised constituencies in order to advance the goal of territorial representation. Nowadays this practice is analysed by researchers from the US, Europe and Asia [Malesky 2009; Bowen 2014; Tan 2016; Kennedy 2017]. Research has been both in theoretical [Alexeev, Mixon 2018; Gatesman, Unwin 2020], as well as political [Chen, Rodden 2013; Ong et al. 2017; Ross 2018; Warrington 2018] regional aspects and even educational (Allen 2020). Gerrymandering and its consequences have been studied in recent years in Slovakia [Halás, Klapka 2017], Romania [Giugăl et al. 2017], Italy [Ratto Trabucco 2019] and in Turkey, in local elections [Aygul 2016] and in the capital [Tuysuz, Gülmez 2019].

It can be treated as a condemned malpractice but also as a quite routine type of action that ruling parties are susceptible to use, especially in a situation of low political culture and weak civil society or as a tool to transform political regimes into

authoritarian or hybrid ones. The last case can be treated as a sign of crisis of poorly rooted or unstable democratic regimes. The question of gerrymandering is also a point of growing interest to the mathematicians – it provides some good examples of an interdisciplinary approach [Hodge et al. 2010]. The subject of research was also the rationality of the gerrymandering phenomenon [Bertrall 2018].

Also in Poland, as early as the 1990s, political scientists began to focus on the issue of manipulating administrative borders in the context of changes in electoral procedure. Because of the political transformation new democratic laws concerning free elections were relatively unstable and some researchers asked a question whether parties benefit from the manipulations [Kamiński 2020]. However other issues became prominent; how to model an electoral system to prevent gerrymandering (Hamman, 2003) and how big is the risk of such manipulations to the so-called young democracies [Żukowski 2003; Pierzgałski, Stępień 2017; Balicki 2018]?

In the next decade more attention was focused on the requirements of legal solutions aimed at protecting existing administrative structures against gerrymandering and malapportionment [Pierzgałski 2015]. Attention was also paid to the increasingly subtle and frequent occurrence of experiments with constituencies changing in the context of the particularly important reforms after 1997 and local elections [Flis, Stoicki 2016].

## **2. AIM AND METHODS OF RESEARCH**

The aim of this study is to evaluate how the situation of political polarisation stimulates the redrawing of administrative borders in the context of gerrymandering in local elections. The authors have analysed the case of the planned division of the Mazovian Voivodeship into two units using basic space and statistical analysis together with a critical review of literature provided by political science. The work uses statistical analysis to evaluate the potential of the existing and planned voivodeships. The same methods were used to evaluate the planned results of local elections in the new provinces. Multidimension analyses was used in the study of political and local government conditions and in the characteristics of the financial and local government policy of the European Union [Kulas, Wendt 2018].

In general, redrawing administrative borders should be treated as a common practice to keep divisions functional with a growing population or new responsibilities of the local government. Especially being a member of European Union creates a new situation with cohesion funds that are distributed on a regional basis. Well thought out changes can result in financial gains and better management structures enabling both central and local governments to work more efficiently. In the analysed case the situation is different – a reason for the division of the Mazovian Voivodeship into two parts is to enable Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość – PiS), ruling in Poland since 2015, to seize control of the local government of one of the proposed parts. Because the party is not popular in the liberal and cosmopolite city electorate, the size of Warsaw and mobilisation of its voters prevented them from taking control of the

management of voivodeships in 2018. It is not a new idea anyway. The division of Mazovia into two regions was already discussed in 2016 and met with substantial criticism [Swianiewicz 2016; Opolski, Modzelewski 2017].

To test this hypothesis this study puts together basic economic variables and electoral preferences data trying to assess the probability of getting the desired outcome (control of the local government, limiting the influence of the Warsawian electorate on the province) by planned division. In further parts of the study we refer to the existing province as Mazovian and to the planned units as the Mazovia- Warsaw and the Mazovia-Region Voivodeships.

### 3. THE IDEA OF THE MAZOVIA DIVISION AND ECONOMIC DATA

The Mazovian Voivodeship was created together with 15 others in 1997 in the biggest local government reform since World War II. The main purpose of the changes was to strengthen the principle of autonomy of the local communities and widen their responsibilities . It was considered a necessary step in the political transformation ending the centralisation practices of the authoritative communist regime (Levitas 2018; Regulski 2003). As Poland was already entering the period of membership negotiations with EU it was also important to create units big enough to enable them to effectively absorb future European funds. The transformation from 49 small to 16 big Voivodeships combined with introducing powerful regional marshals resulted later in local governments' gaining substantial competence concerning the spending of cohesion funds.

The Mazovian Voivodeship was the biggest of all, uniting not only the historical province of Mazovia but also territories to the south with the city of Radom [Łysoń 2017]. Warsaw is continuously a dominating central economic point counting for 71% of GDP. The capital with its agglomeration provides 84% of fiscal revenues in the budget for voivodeships.

The idea of separation of the capital from the rest of province was introduced for the first time in 2006. The local elections that year - only 11 months after the general elections that brought to power the right-wing government of PiS – were won by the opposition. The Mazovian local assembly was controlled by Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska - PO) and the Polish People's Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe – PSL). The same parties controlled it after the next four elections (Table 1).

**Table 1. Mandates in Mazovian Voivodeship (regional) Assembly; coalition in power versus opposition**

<b>Election Year</b>	<b>Ruling coalition (PO, PSL + left parties)</b>	<b>Opposition (PiS and its coalitions)</b>
2006	36	24
2010	36	14
2014	31	19
2018	26	25

*Source: own elaboration based on official data of Mazovian Local Assembly.*

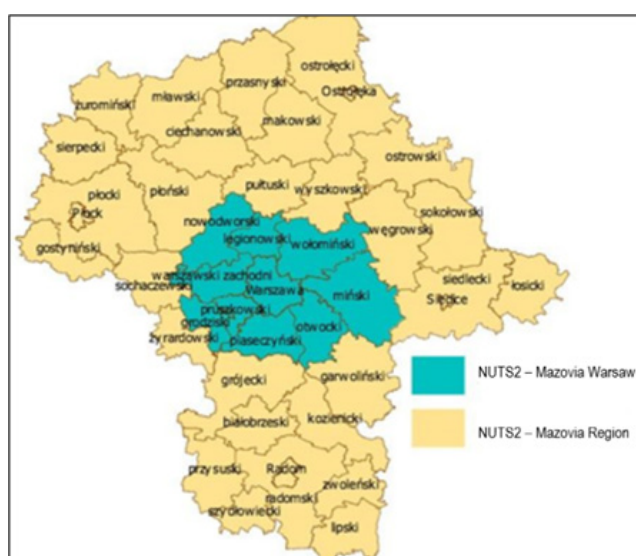


Polish politicians were aware of the differences in gross income in Warsaw and other parts of the voivodeship. From the EU's perspective the fast economic development of Warsaw was putting at risk the city's eligibility to use cohesion funds in the next seven-years' budget. The solution proposed in 2015 was based on the principle that every member state determines by itself the borders of the most important NUTS 2 EU regions. The Polish government of PO/PSL divided the voivodeship into two NUTS 2 units leaving the administrative framework intact. The official proposition was sent to the European Commission in 2016 and the necessary regulation came into force on 1 January 2018.

The income gap between parts of the province was expected to grow in the future. It was estimated that by 2020, GDP per capita of Warsaw and its closest communities would reach 147% of the EU average. Other portions of the voivodeship will be among the least developed regions in the whole of the EU with GDP per capita only approximately 60% of the EU average [TVN Warszawa 2018]. As early as 2007, the government of Prime Minister Jarosław Kaczyński initiated studies to divide the Mazovian Voivodeship before the 2010 local elections. His losing power after the early 2007 elections put a halt to such plans. The issue returned in 2009 when Lech Kaczyński, twin brother of the former prime minister and a Mayor of Warsaw, met in Radom with the Mayors of five cities that had lost their status after the 1997 reforms. He opted for an exclusion of the Warsaw agglomeration from the Masovian Voivodeship stressing that it will end the huge paradox – the richest province after taking Warsaw and Plock out is at the same time the poorest one. Plock is an ancient capital of Mazovia, much older than Warsaw, nowadays the centre of the oil industry, housing the biggest refinery in Poland. It lost its place as the second biggest city to Radom, which - as we stated before - historically was not in the region. The rivalry as to which of the cities should be the capital after the planned separation is continuously present and was not solved till redaction of this work. As long as Civic Platform was in power at a national level the plan would be mothballed and an alternative solution – NUTS separation, was chosen (Fig.1).

**Fig. 1.**  
**Planned division**  
**of Mazovian Voivodeship**  
**into two units**

Source: [Kaczor 2020]



In 2015 quite unexpectedly the idea returned during the election campaign for the Polish parliament. The PiS local leaders from Plock promised the division of Mazovia and setting the capital of the non-Warsaw part of the region in Plock. Same party leaders from Radom strongly opposed this. Their voice was given meaning by the fact that Radom was at that time the biggest city with a Mayor from PiS [Portal Plock 2020; Biznes Wprost 2020]. The rivalry inside the ruling party was intensive and, with much more pressing issues at stake, the ruling party let the problem seemingly die during its first term in office (2015-2019).

In 2020 it became clear that the issue had just been postponed and PiS waited for a politically feasible moment. A defined plan for separating Warsaw and 33 neighbouring communities from the Mazovian Voivodeship was presented, although the door for slight changes was left open. At the same time, a prominent MP from the town of Wolomin, Jacek Sasin [Gazeta Prawna 2019] entered the cabinet and it became clear that he would be the person to give the initiative its final shape. According to the separation plan (Figure 1,) the new Mazovia Region would clearly be land which formed a group of the less developed regions of Poland. The same characteristics of the small but densely populated Mazovia Warsaw Region would make it stand out even more when comparing it to the Polish average figures (Table 2).

**Table 2. Basic economic data comparing Polish Voivodeships in 2018**

Voivodeships	Population Poland =100%	GDP NUTS2, Poland =100%	Monthly income Poland =100%	Beds in hospitals / 10 000 person	Housing / 1000 person	Cars / 1000 person
Lower Silesia	7,6	8,3	102,3	51	409	629
Kuyavian-Pomeran.	5,4	4,4	86,5	46	362	598
Lublin	5,5	3,7	88,7	52	369	593
Lubuskie	2,6	2,2	88,0	42	372	648
Lodzkie	6,4	6,0	92,1	51	415	616
Lesser Poland	8,9	8,1	96,5	44	353	576
<b>Mazowieckie (now)</b>	<b>14,1</b>	<b>22,6</b>	<b>122,3</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>426</b>	<b>678</b>
<b>Mazovia Warsaw</b>	<b>8,0</b>	<b>17,4</b>	<b>135,4</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>480</b>	<b>701</b>
<b>Mazovia Region</b>	<b>6,1</b>	<b>5,2</b>	<b>95,5</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>356</b>	<b>648</b>
Opole	2,6	2,0	90,8	45	362	649
Podkarpackie	5,5	3,9	85,9	47	315	555
Podlasie	3,1	2,2	88,8	50	385	525
Pomeranian	6,1	5,9	98,4	39	377	598
Silesian	11,8	12,3	100,2	55	391	585
Świętokrzyskie	3,2	2,3	86,3	46	360	569
Warmia and Mazury	3,7	2,6	84,2	45	363	546
Greater Poland	9,1	9,8	91,7	43	352	671
West Pomeranian	4,4	3,7	90,7	46	388	579
Poland*	38411,1 thous.	496,4 bln euro	1068,0 euro	47	381	610

\*Average gross monthly income Poland =100%

\*\*Poland - Summary data with out Mazowieckie Region and Mazowieckie Warszawaw

Source: own elaboration based on data from Polish Statistical Office (GUS).

The new Mazovia Warsaw will rank first in almost all sets of indicators. The new Mazovia Region will be one of the underdeveloped, peripheral regions, with limited revenues and problems in healthcare availability. Potentially it will be economically unsustainable. It will also gather historically separated subregions, now linked by the central position of Warsaw in the radial structure.

#### 4. POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION

The plan looks feasible only from the political point of view – in a region separated from the Warsaw agglomeration, the ruling party can expect a landslide victory in elections for the local assembly. It will overshadow the defeat in 2018, when electoral predictions and calculations were favourable, but eventually because of the one mandate, PiS had to form the opposition on a voivodeship level. Power slipping from the hands of the ruling party created turmoil and internal debate resulting in the push for province division.

Closer look at data from the 2018 local elections in the Mazovian Voivodeship supports the hopes of the right-wing government. Victory in the counties forming a new region is highly probable. The Warsaw agglomeration amounts to the majority of votes casted for the opposition. Traditionally it comes together with the position of the Mayor of Warsaw and a comfortable majority in the City Council for centrist-liberal political forces. In Warsaw itself the opposition in 2018 elections won twice as many votes as PiS (Table 3).

**Table 3. Main winners and losers of 2018 elections for the regional assembly in Mazovian Voivodeship by counties (winners in bold)**

Counties and cities with county status	Turnout (% of voters)	Main parties and coalitions (%)	
		PiS and its coalition (governmental parties)	PO and its coalition (opposition parties)
<b>Planned Voivodeship Mazovia Warsaw</b>			
Warsaw	66,49	25,77	<b>54,92</b>
Piaseczyński	59,91	28,25	<b>50,96</b>
Nowodworski	59,20	30,74	<b>47,80</b>
Grodziski	59,99	29,39	<b>46,15</b>
Warsaw West	62,30	30,64	<b>44,11</b>
Pruszkowski	61,19	30,22	<b>43,56</b>
Legionowski	62,29	29,18	<b>43,25</b>
Otwocki	59,93	<b>39,11</b>	37,75
Miński	56,55	<b>42,43</b>	35,58
Wołomiński	58,02	<b>39,24</b>	34,38
<b>Planned Voivodeship Mazovia Region</b>			
Przysuski	65,23	<b>57,68</b>	22,51
Garwoliński	57,34	<b>56,56</b>	26,46
Szydłowiecki	61,85	<b>50,97</b>	28,05
Ostrowski	58,13	<b>50,44</b>	33,14
Siedlecki	57,79	<b>48,95</b>	32,90



Radomski	59,60	<b>48,25</b>	28,57
Białobrzegi	58,17	<b>47,50</b>	36,73
Sokołowski	61,87	<b>46,86</b>	34,55
Węgrowski	57,79	<b>46,72</b>	38,53
Siedlce	53,75	<b>46,44</b>	30,86
Pułtuski	62,47	<b>44,92</b>	40,11
Ostrołęcki	57,61	<b>43,47</b>	34,54
Łosicki	55,27	<b>42,58</b>	40,10
Wyszkowski	59,20	<b>42,27</b>	36,97
Radom	52,72	<b>41,66</b>	40,86
Zwoleński	59,77	39,97	<b>44,48</b>
Lipski	57,84	39,45	<b>39,54</b>
Ostrołęka	55,54	<b>38,96</b>	36,69
Koziński	60,28	38,70	<b>43,79</b>
Makowski	59,03	37,63	<b>49,21</b>
Przasnyski	57,36	37,28	<b>46,68</b>
Gostyniński	58,48	37,03	<b>49,78</b>
Żyrardowski	54,85	36,94	<b>42,61</b>
Grójecki	57,50	36,85	<b>41,87</b>
Płoński	55,83	36,67	<b>49,61</b>
Mławski	56,35	36,44	<b>47,77</b>
Ciechanowski	57,74	34,43	<b>49,83</b>
Płocki	57,60	33,98	<b>51,42</b>
Żuromiński	59,22	33,95	<b>54,90</b>
Sochaczewski	54,86	33,09	<b>52,22</b>
Płock	54,75	32,23	<b>56,31</b>
Sierpecki	61,26	28,46	<b>58,10</b>

Source: own elaboration based on official data of self-governmental election 2018.

Taking into account the actual political preferences shown by the votes casted in 2018, the predicted outcome will support the political reasoning for the separation. In the newly created Mazovia Warsaw Voivodeship parties opposing the national right-wing government can count on 15 seats out of the total number of 26. Comparatively speaking, the ruling party can expect to take 14 out of the 25 seats in the assembly of the new Mazovia Region Voivodeship (Table 4).

The leaders of Warsaw and the members of the Mazovia Assembly together with civil activists are strongly against this planned division. In January 2020 they accepted a document on the issue, that was widely distributed in the hope of influencing public opinion against the new regional structures. They stressed especially three main points, that all the documents, strategic plans and indicative programmes concerning European funds will expire the moment the planned division will be introduced. It poses a risk of losing previously appropriated funds. New programmes would have to be negotiated with the European Commission and it will negatively affect both Warsaw (e.g. subway funding) and the new region. Additionally the division of the

**Table 4. Results of 2018 elections for the regional assembly in Mazovian Voivodeship by counties in the new proposed division for two new Voivodeships**

No.*	Man-dates	The geographical scope of constituencies	KO & others	PiS & others
-	51	Existing Mazovian Voivodeship (existing)	26	25
1	5	Warsaw boroughs: Ursynów, Wilanów, Śródmieście, Ochota, Mokotów	4	1
2	5	Warsaw boroughs: Bemowo, Bielany, Ursus, Włochy, Wola, Żoliborz	3	2
3	5	Warsaw boroughs: Białołęka, Rembertów, Targówek, Wawer, Wesoła, Praga Północ, Praga Południe	3	2
7	11	Counties: grodziski, legionowski, nowodworski, otwocki, piaseczyński, pruszkowski, warszawski zachodni, wołomiński	5	6
-	26	Proposed Mazovia Warsaw Voivodeship (new)	15	11
4	9	City of Płock; counties: ciechanowski, gostyniński, mławski, płocki, płoński, przasnyski, pułtuski, sierpecki, sochaczewski, żuromiński, żyrardowski	5	4
5	7	City of Radom; counties: białobrzegi, grójecki, kozienicki, lipski, przysuski, radomski, szydlowiecki, zwoleniński	3	4
6	9	Cities of Ostrołęka and Siedlce; counties: garwoliński, łosicki, makowski, miński**, ostrołęcki, ostrowski, siedlecki, sokołowski, węgrowski, wyszkowski	3	6
-	25	Proposed Mazovia Region Voivodeship (new)	11	14

\*Number of the constituency for the local council

\*\*County of Miński is set to be the part of capital region

Source: own elaboration of data of Polish State Election Commission.

Mazovian Voivodeship will bring major obstacles for the inhabitants of the Mazovia Region to gain specialised healthcare. Of 26 hospitals and other crucial elements of the infrastructure 14 are located in Warsaw. Provincial hospitals serve the general purposes of the local populations – hospitals in Warsaw are typically highly specialised clinics of regional importance, supported by the Voivodeship budget serving all the inhabitants. The division will be detrimental in this crucial area for an ageing population. Voivodeship regional strategies and planning documents will also expire, what can result in new obstacles for citizens and business alike. The preparation of crucial documents for spatial urban planning take typically 2-3 years, and the consequences for the issuing of, for example, building permits will be potentially disastrous [Sabak-Gąska 2020].

As far as revenues and spending are concerned, there are major transfers from the Polish capital to other parts of the existing Voivodeship. Warsaw counts for 84% of revenues from CIT tax (2 billion from 2,34 billion PLN). Because of the higher income in the capital it absorbs also higher sums from the local segment of PIT. In 2019 the budget of the Voivodeship was 2,65 billion PLN – the planned Mazovia Warsaw Voivodeship consumed 1 billion comparing to 1,65 billion for the Mazovia Region – it counts for 61% of spending. The separation of the Warsaw metropolitan region is unreasonable from the fiscal point of view.

The division of the Mazovia Voivodeship follows the general political strategy of PiS

which is to win the support of local communities by promises to create new units of territorial administration. At least two other Voivodeships were present in public discussion, especially during the election campaigns: Czestochowa and Middle-Pomerania. One needs to remember that the Polish local administration reform of 1997 originally opted for 12 big Voivodeships, but because of local interest and politically motivated pressure, this number was changed to 15 and later to 16 [Wendt 2001; Wendt 2006; Śleszyński 2018]. Losing the function of local administrative centres for more than 30 cities created some problems, including depopulation and peripheralisation. But the Mazovia division is a single idea, and not part of general efforts to minimise the negative effects of the 1997 reform on smaller urban centres.

## **CONCLUSION**

The policy of a coalition of right-wing parties in Poland regarding the division of Mazovia is in line with the nature of gerrymandering. From the perspective of efforts to improve the current results in parliamentary and local elections, it meets the criteria of rational political decisions indicated in the literature. A push for the Mazovia division and the separation of the Warsaw agglomeration will benefit PiS in five major aspects: seizing power in the regional assembly in a new, definitely rural Voivodeship; sending a strong message to other peripheral regions in Poland that the interest of their inhabitants are high on the party priority list, building trust and support in these regions; the possibility to choose, directly or indirectly, high ranking officials in the new territorial unit and fill positions in local government controlled legal entities, especially communal agencies (Wendt, 2018); defining clearly on the political map major societal division between liberal and pro-European cities and conservative, patriotic provincial areas; and the ability to deprive the new, small and rich Warsaw Voivodeship of a big chunk of revenues using the redistribution mechanism and hinder the realisation of investments or other electoral promises made by the Warsaw Mayor and assembly, controlled historically by the opposition. The use of the redistribution mechanism was introduced in Poland in 1997 and makes richer voivodeships provide some part of their yearly revenues to poorer ones.

In the concept of the planned Mazowieckie Voivodeship, however, one can see deficits in the rationality of the decisions of the Polish government in relation to the effective functioning of this new administrative unit. The potential threats are: a very small budget for the planned Mazovia Region Voivodeship (which is possibly too small to fulfil basic functions); the risk of strengthening the already visible tendency for a “brain drain” – educated young people migrate to big cities looking for jobs and a less oppressive society. Warsaw will offer not only a higher standard of living but also the possibility to express oneself and follow a chosen style of life; the rivalry between cities for the position of the capital of the new region, with conflict inside the ruling party in her traditional base; a greater level of accountability in the new region with the same party controlling both national and regional government and the inability

to shift responsibility to “big city politicians”. Although the leaders of the ruling party stress the issue of European funds it should be treated as a smoke screen as changing the NUTS 2 division in 2018 had already settled the problem.

The plan to separate Warsaw from the rest of the region follows a ruling scheme favourable to the ruling PiS party – underlining and redefining the divisions in society, pointing out that liberal elites, living in big cities and seizing disproportionately a larger part of the benefits of fast economic development are willing to cement the status quo. Only the conservative party will put an emphasis on traditions, the Christian legacy and national pride which will serve the interest of the peripheries.

The pandemic of Covid-19, omnipresent in 2020, makes predictions much harder. After intensive discussions in the first five months of 2020, the new law project was expected to be presented by early autumn. We are still waiting for the political decision – the lockdown and the economic and societal costs of the pandemic made all the steps very risky especially to the ruling party. The outcome of the planned early local elections in two new Voivodeships could be quite different from expectations and predictions based on previous data. Rebuilding support for the old former agrarian party PSL is one possible scenario. In that case, in place of a swift victory in the new regional unit, PiS can face a double defeat – traditionally in Warsaw and surprisingly in the Mazovia Region. The economic consequences of Covid-19 are the main reason behind Next Generation Europe – a huge financial programme of post-pandemic reconstruction with a strong ecological component [European Commission 2020]. All the regions of Poland are eligible for the funds and their distribution should be a priority.

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