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European Experience of Decentralization in a Civil Society in the Postmodern Era

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Abstract: In the postmodern era, European political philosophy has introduced several concepts. These concepts have ideologically prepared Western countries for decentralization reform. Being still “in process”, reflection on the proper structure of postmodern society is marked by ambiguous and often contradictory ideas. The very view on the state as a de-hierarchical, rhizomorphic and horizontal phenomenon presupposes numerous ways of reforming it. Throughout their histories, European countries have shifted from confrontations, hostilities and rivalries towards new mechanisms of fruitful relationships between civil society and state institutions. Nowadays, many aspects are influencing the elaboration and implementation of strategies on civil society development in different countries. These aspects include the following: different starting conditions; the presence or absence of basic principles of public space development; the possibility of fulfilling civic practices’ potential; the level of political participation. West European countries have managed to create a viable structure to support the development of civil society, as well as maintain a stable dialogue between it and the state. However, the process is still on: effective practices of interaction between them are being developed; conditions for more effective cooperation are being improved; new financial instruments are being created and implemented. All Central and East European countries have a common understanding of civil society as one of the most important actors in developing cooperation with the government. At the same time, they should be able to solve existing essential problems, such as low awareness about global development problems and the population’s unreadiness to meet the immediate objectives of civil society development.

Keywords: *Postmodern philosophy, rhizome, decentralization, regionalism, territorial reforms.*

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Introduction

Every country differs in causes, forms and results of decentralization, origins and changes in the relations between central and local government, basic social values. The useful experience of foreign countries shows that one cannot optimize the territorial organization of power, strengthen local self-government and create self-sufficient territorial communities without decentralization of power. The latter acts as the basis for ensuring a high standard of living and providing quality services at the local level.

One can observe a tendency towards the wide implementation of decentralization reforms in many countries in administrative, political, budgetary and financial spheres. The introduction of decentralization reforms also contributes to establishing market relations. Every country had its reasons for implementing decentralization reforms. However, the main and general reasons include economic and political ones, as well as the need to improve the quality of public services, consolidate society and solve ethnic issues.

The implementation of administrative and territorial reforms in Central and Eastern Europe, the Baltics and other countries highlights the uniqueness of every country's experience, which cannot be simply copied and should be adapted to the social realities of Ukraine.

In Ukraine, decentralization occurs at the level of administrative-territorial reform. Similar to many other political changes in the country, this process does not consider the ideas that originated in Western civilization and became a prerequisite for decentralization trends. The relevance of this article lies in justifying current reforms with political and philosophical concepts on the interaction within the "citizen – community – state" triangle.

The decentralization concept, which is becoming "the core" of political discourse in the postmodern (informational, digital) era, can be analyzed in diachronic and synchronic aspects. Concerning diachrony, this concept is the result of 2.5 thousand years of reflecting on the dialectic of both personal and common good in political philosophy. Besides, there are some efforts to "rehabilitate" the individual himself or the partial good, namely, relieve them from the axiological dictate of the state (government) or the common good.

There are four stages in the history of this process:

- Plato's (2006) concept of an ideal state (*Πολιτεία*, *Res publica*) as an absolute good. Enclosed in itself, such a state is a place for the good

objectively common to all its citizens. Differences between certain segments of this state (or classes, citizens) lie in the natural ability to comprehend the truth, rather than in their needs. Accordingly, the decentralization concept is not possible in Plato's philosophy. With its immanent multiplicity, it destroys the very *eidōs* (εἶδος) of truth, which must be only one and to which all members of society must serve. For the last two millennia, this concept of "unitarity" and closedness of the state has been inviolable.

- The Social Contract theory. The utopias of the past advocated models of social welfare, based on order, control and universal recognition. In contrast, theorists of social contract prioritized freedom and human rights, perceiving the state and the contract concerning it as an inevitable evil, a tragic necessity, a certain generally accepted protective mechanism. At this stage, decentralization can be viewed as vertical since it involves the emancipation of members of society in a hierarchical, rather than regional, context.

- The Closed Commercial State. The most important component of this theory is the advocacy for equality (namely, that of distribution). According to Fichte (2012), equality must be both legal and economic. The state must provide its citizens with what belongs to them by right; moreover, everyone must be equal in terms of private property. For the first time, emphasis is placed on the economic aspect; yet, it is not supported with the concept of regional decentralization (probably, due to the fragmentation of German philosophy). Generally, Fichte's conception of property (2012) became the basis for Marxist and other theories of the state. At the same time, it was refuted by many anti-socialist utopias.

- Postmodern concepts of decentralization first originated as a result of the deconstruction of discourse on political power and later attempted to "positively" solve objective problems related to decentralization and regionalization of policy in Western countries.

Both description and comparative analysis of these postmodern concepts constitute a synchronous way of studying decentralization concepts.

The article *aims* to establish links between postmodern political-philosophical concepts and specific decentralization practices adopted in France and Poland.

The scientific value of the article lies in the first philosophical justification of decentralization processes in Ukrainian discourse.

Importantly, this research relies on the methods of *complex analysis*, including *descriptive-analytical methods* (to describe postmodern political-

philosophical texts) and *descriptive-statistical methods* (to study specific decentralization practices).

Theoretical Preconditions

The ideological revolution of the 1950-60s (“spring revolution”, “sexual revolution”, feminism and postmodernism, environmental and abolitionist movements, anti-colonialism) was a reaction to the dictate of totalitarian and authoritarian ideologies prevailing in Europe during the interwar period. These ideologies viewed the state as an absolute value, and its unitarity was considered axiomatic. To some extent, they followed Plato’s concept of the state (2006). Existentialist philosophy, as well as an “anthropological” turn in the humanities, became the antithesis of totalitarianism in terms of both emancipation and revival of anthropocentrism in the philosophical aspect. From the political-philosophical point of view, one of the manifestations of anti-totalitarian and post-totalitarian aspirations was the concept of decentralization and regionalization. Foucault (1995) was the first to deconstruct the idea of the state as an absolute good in a postmodern context.

Foucault (1995) described the characteristics of a three-level system of government adopted in different historical periods, namely, sovereign power, disciplinary power and biopolitics. Together, they constitute “the concept of governmentality”. A synthesis of sovereign and disciplinary power, characteristic of modernist society, ensures more effective control and management. This prompted Foucault (1995) to symbolize the state as a prison (Jessop, 2007). For the first time in French postmodern philosophy, Foucault’s biopolitics (1995) brings one closer to the decentralization concept, albeit with negative connotations inherent in deconstructivism. In this case, the technological effectiveness of decentralization can be explained by the changes in the focus and mechanics of power. Biopolitics intervenes in a larger set of both universal and random phenomena and regulates them so that management is the least costly and most effective (Vainio & Paloniemi, 2012; Winkel, 2012).

Both the effectiveness of individual communities governance in postmodern times and the links of this effectiveness with the creation of information technologies, rather than Foucault’s negative perception of the state (1995), have influenced the further development of the decentralization concept.

Zuboff's concept of surveillance capitalism (2015) appears to be the closest to Foucault's concept of biopolitics (1995). Both the state and large corporations whose interests it represents practise aggressive exploitation of consumers' personal data that are seen as materials for developing virtual prediction models by artificial intelligence. These models are expected to be able to predict a possible vector of purchasing activity in the market. In the future, these models will be used by highly qualified specialists to unilaterally correct the behaviour of potential buyers, suggestively pushing them to make the "right" consumer decision in the real world (Zuboff, 2015; 2019; Zuboff et al., 2019). In this system, the totality of digital and information power may imply decentralization as a negation of this very totality.

Foucault's (1995) and Zuboff's (2015) postmodern conceptions of power, which are quite distant from each other temporally, mainly rely on political, economic and informational aspects. However, a "spatial" aspect is indeed important for the theory and practice of decentralization. This aspect has been much promoted by postmodern philosophy, namely poststructuralism, after the introduction of the "rhizome" concept (Giroux et al., 2009). The rhizome is a horizontal structure with network connections. Occasionally, the Internet is compared to such a structure since it too lacks a centre, is characterized by horizontal connections and is self-creative. Besides, the rhizome is a system without memory. Rhizome-based space is acentric and non-hierarchical, and its self-organization lies in the absence of organization (Bryant, 2009).

Some researchers explain the basic principles of decentralization as a consequence of regionalism through the rhizome model. In global dimensions, decentralization is considered to be a rhizomatic process that seeks to create a "world of regions", a multicentric and anti-hierarchical system. Thus, decentralization transforms interstate relations into interregional ones (Bryant, 2008).

Because of such an approach, regions differ significantly from the state not only in spatial terms. A region is more a way of subsistence for the world-rhizome and less an object of politics. Its strength depends on the degree of its involvement in the global space and its horizontal ties with other regions (Boundas, 2009).

In local dimensions, decentralization retains multicentrism and anti-hierarchy that extend to values, traditions, and the socio-cultural sphere. It allows one to freely build new connections between cultural phenomena in the region, invent new myths and create new regions. Comparing

consequences of decentralization with the rhizome principle inevitably leads to the conclusion that decentralization uses flexible policies that do not build rigid philosophical, social or ideological systems, do not describe reality but interpret it situationally, depending on specific circumstances. Finally, it is essential to consider global and local socio-cultural models relevant to decentralization (Beistegui, 2012).

The mythology of a decentralized state, as well as the whole space in postmodernism, is not unique in its multiplicity and diversity. It is infinite in its relativity and inevitably separated from real life, given that the very concept of “reality” in postmodernism is questionable. Space created by decentralization can be compared to virtuality, which completely copies reality and, at the same time, exists in a plane completely separate from it (Beaulieu, 2009).

The number of regional mythologies, even within one community, is unlimited. They can develop freely, taking various forms and interacting in the most complex and obscure ways. In this case, every space is self-contained, living its own discourse and, at the same time, being unable to claim supremacy or monopoly. The decentralization ideology creates the preconditions for recreating many regional (both local and global) mythologies, which, on the one hand, enjoy complete freedom in creating the actual territorial-mythological space. On the other hand, they continue to exist in the global postmodern paradigm, which rigidly isolates this mythology from the real world and regulation (Agamben, 2004).

Research Theory

There are some promising data on the benefit from synthesizing political-philosophical systems of postmodernism and specific practices of decentralization. This can be explained by both practical results of decentralization policy and the “positive” focus of a post-Foucauldian political philosophy.

Arguments for the Theory

In Scandinavian countries, local government is organized on an agency-related basis. In Sweden, the first wave of reforms (the 1970s) was a transit from local government with the features of direct democracy to a functionally organized representative system (Babarykina, 2016, p. 122). In Finland, the 1990 governance reforms relied on large-scale transformations at local levels, including agency relations between levels of government with

broad autonomy and the introduction of market principles in the provision of public services. However, both commercialization and transition of public services to the local level harmed the social sphere. The latter was traditionally characterized by the high-level quality of service delivery. Later, the Finnish governance reforms began to focus on the German experience of gradual transformation using pilot projects.

In Denmark, the search for optimal decentralization began in 1958 and continued until 2007. It was when a new division of powers entered into force, and areas for further improvement of decentralized governance, along with the promotion of integration processes for municipal consolidation, were identified. Nowadays, Denmark is one of the most decentralized countries in Europe. However, a fragmented administrative system is too “expensive”. The expenditures of local governments after municipal consolidation reforms, when the average population of municipalities increased from 20 to 55 thousand inhabitants, became stable, although they used to grow constantly. Denmark is one of the countries with the largest municipalities with the largest powers. Most European countries first encouraged the consolidation of small communities and then forced them to unite.

In Italy, decentralization reforms resulted in a three-level system of power organization (region – province – commune). Expenditures on education, health care, transport, civil aviation, as well as administrative services for industry and business, are associated with regional budgets. Regions are also responsible for territorial planning and development. Therefore, they must be provided with sufficient resources, which include both their resources and funds within the equal distribution provided by the state to support economic development and reduce social and economic unrest.

Provinces are to support and develop public transport, authorize and control private transport, as well as roads within the provinces and related infrastructure. Besides, they deal with secondary education infrastructure, employment and social service centres, ensure economic development and promote tourism and sports. Finally, provinces support and nurture cooperation and partnership among communes.

Communes introduce and collect local taxes, regulate local police, health care, primary and secondary education, public transport. They ensure the high-quality provision of social services at the local level, monitor trade permits, garbage collection and disposal, as well as concern themselves with

such issues as local transport infrastructure, street lighting and social housing (Babarykina, 2016, p. 9).

Arguments against the Theory

Paradoxically, most of the problems with decentralization arise in France, the birthplace of European postmodern philosophy and the country that was one of the first to declare decentralization as its main mission.

Decentralization in France began a long time ago. Indeed, it dates back to the 1789 revolution, when 44,000 communes appeared, and 90 departments were established. At that time, mayors were appointed by the state, and departments were governed by prefects. Over time, however, the harsh influence of the state somehow “softened”, and mayors began to be elected by the population.

The largest reform of administrative-territorial structure in France is associated with the presidency of Charles de Gaulle in the 1980s. He proposed a fundamentally new approach to developing the state and the relations between the central administration and territorial units (Babka, 2014).

The decentralization of government began under the Law on the Rights and Freedoms of Communes, Departments and Regions in 1982. Regions became administrative units with all necessary powers and were headed by a governing board elected based on universal suffrage (Buslenko, 2013).

They started to implement the decentralization law, which envisaged more autonomy for communities and shifted leadership to the elected rather than the appointed. Although prefects remained in departments, heads of departments were now elected by the so-called “peers”. Also, they introduced regions that consisted of departments with assemblies as elected bodies (Dolzhenkov, 2000). At the same time, communes were many in number and did not have the funds to implement projects for residents. Thus, the question arose of how to make them effective. Consequently, it was agreed to combine the efforts of communities.

The 1982 reform has made it possible to establish agglomeration communities, as well as the community of communes for smaller cities. There is also an association of communes to solve a specific problem. There are now 18,000 different communes in France, which is also a problem, so the government aims to reduce the number of communes to at least 5,000 (Hariacha, 2009).

In total, between 1982 and 1986, they passed additional 25 laws and approximately 200 decrees. Besides, new local taxes (in addition to the four main ones) and a global subsidy for decentralization from the state budget were introduced to compensate for the costs of local governments in exercising their expanded powers. However, it soon became clear that such compensation was not enough. Eventually, this led to a growing mismatch between the expanded powers of communes and the insufficient financial, material, human and other resources available to them. Some effective measures were needed to address this particular problem. As a result, the priority in further reforms became the consolidation of lower-level administrative units through the development of inter-municipal cooperation (Arabchuk, 2016).

Between 1990 and 2000, the government created legislation that introduced an intermediate link between the community and the department, an agglomeration or an inter-municipal association.

The state encouraged the unification of communes through additional subsidies. In 1999, it was decided to provide an additional € 40 per person per year to the merging communes to encourage unification. That is, the merger of 100,000 received an additional 4 million euros. A law was passed in 2010 to strengthen the merger with new infusions. Yet, the economic crisis prevented the law from being implemented (there were no free funds in the state budget) (Diamond, 2000).

Both cooperation and concentration of resources allowed communes to implement large investment projects, which rather contributed to developing the economy of the territories. In this regard, two decisions were of fundamental importance: to give the communes the right to form associations; to establish two new forms of cooperation, namely, the community of communes for rural areas and the community of the city for urban areas (Hariacha, 2009). Both forms expanded the powers in the field of landscaping and economic development. Inter-communal associations received the status of state institutions of inter-communal cooperation. Importantly, they are a legal entity and enjoy financial independence. As a result, the number of communities of communes in the country has been growing rapidly since 1992. Approximately a thousand communities of communes had been established by 1999 (Borshchevskiy & Voloshyn, 2016, p. 57). However, the form of “community of cities” turned out to be ineffective (there were only five such communities), and therefore in 1999, it was abolished.

The following decisions taken within the decentralization policy framework indeed complemented and developed the inter-municipal cooperation concept. Thus, it was agreed to specify the basic functioning principles of inter-communal associations and their obligatory and optional duties (including the right of taxation). Furthermore, inefficient forms of inter-communal associations were abolished, and new ones were introduced. This applies to agglomeration communities (more than 50,000 people), urban communities (over 500 thousand people) and community of communes (an association of two or more communes without a standard for the number of inhabitants) with expanded powers (Diamond, 2000).

Between 1992 and 1999, the practice of inter-municipal cooperation received legislative approval, which contributed to its unprecedented development. During the period from January 1, 1993, to January 1, 2005, the number of state institutions under inter-communal cooperation with their power of taxation increased fivefold (Borshchevskiy & Voloshyn, 2016, p. 57). Thus, inter-municipal cooperation has been strengthening. At the same time, the main emphasis is now on the role of urban agglomerations in terms of landscaping, sustainable development and urbanization, as well as greater involvement of the population in solving local problems and democratization of urban governance.

At the first stage, French decentralization policy is characterized by consistent efforts to delegate powers in the field of governance and socio-economic development to local governments and expand their autonomy. Much attention was paid to the distribution of powers between territorial communities of different levels. In the early 1990s, an important vector of decentralization policy was the development of inter-municipal cooperation to strengthen the resource potential of lower levels of local government. It became possible to form an additional communal level of governance, covering a large part of the country's territory, rather quickly. As of January 1, 2005, 84% of the population of France lived in inter-communal associations enjoying their power of taxation (compared to 27% in 1993), and 88% of communes were members of such associations (compared to 13.8% in 1993) (Borshchevskiy & Voloshyn, 2016, pp. 58–59).

Although not as broad as in the early 1980s, the decentralization policy intensified after the introduction of several important amendments to the Constitution, reflecting the accompanying changes (Hrytsiak & Barovska, 2007). Although France remains “a single and indivisible republic”, Article 1 of the Basic Law now states that “the system (of the

French Republic) is decentralized”. Besides, major changes were made to Chapter XII of the Constitution, devoted to territorial communities. In particular, the status of the region as an administrative-territorial unit was consolidated (Hrytsiak & Barovska, 2007).

Several important amendments which were approved by subsequent organic laws have addressed the issue of territorial governance. Thus, it was agreed to recognize the right of territorial communities to make decisions exceeding their authority. It allowed one to expand the autonomy of local governments and their ability to consider the conditions and development needs of specific areas. Local governments were actively using the obtained right, as evidenced by the growth of relevant initiatives in the coming years.

Another important amendment clarified the concepts of financial autonomy and resources of territorial communities (Diamond, 2000). Accordingly, financial autonomy has the following characteristics: 1) territorial communities are entitled to freely use their financial resources and receive tax revenues; 2) the main part of their financial resources shall be tax and other revenues; 3) any new transfer of powers shall be accompanied by the provision of the required funds.

At the same time, it was decided to simplify the rules for the operation of inter-communal associations and the possibility of changing their organizational form. The reforms of the following years were characterized by a gradual departure from the previous strategy. The decentralization policy reached “the maturity stage”, and it was essential to consolidate it (Zavadskyi, 2008).

The 2010 reform witnessed difficult discussions, agreements and resulted in a series of important laws (Zahorodnii, 2004). A year after the adoption of the Basic Law in 2010, its real positive results became noticeable.

Thus, two-thirds of the departments adopted inter-municipal cooperation schemes, and all communes in these departments joined state institutions of inter-communal cooperation with the power of their taxation. At the same time, the number of such associations in the country has decreased by almost 20% (from 1,828 to 1,477) and inter-communal syndicates by 18%, which is equivalent to their reduction between 1999 and 2011 (Dolzhenkov, 2000).

It must be noted that these reforms are driven by the strong personality of the Minister, the Prime Minister or the President. French law now stipulates that all communes should be in associations (metropolises,

agglomerations or community of communes). The process is not over yet, although the bulk of the communes have already joined the associations.

The course of the 2015 territorial reform, that is the division of competences between departments and regions, has become the subject of a new reform. However, the reform is not aimed at transferring the competences of the state to local governments and regulating the distribution of competences between them (which is the core of decentralization). Instead, it strives to increase the efficiency of state power at both national and local levels and enhance the quality of public services due to the support of territorial communities or the specification of their competences (Decentralization, 2016).

Such shifts in emphasis are related to the effects of the global financial crisis, the public finance crisis, the economic recession and high unemployment rates. The austerity policy has led to limited state financial support for local budgets and made it difficult to solve the most acute socio-economic problems at the local level. The country needs to streamline the multi-tiered system of territorial organization, simplifying it, making it more understandable for citizens, clearly dividing the powers of different levels of government, which in many cases remain extremely blurred and duplicate each other.

There are three strategic areas in the French territorial reform: 1) consolidating the upper level of administrative division (regions) to form territorial units of “European size” and increase their role in territorial governance and efficiency (regionalization); 2) consolidating territorial communities of the lower level (communes) by creating a network of metropolises (metropolization) to increase the efficiency of the corresponding local governments and make each region prosperous and competitive; 3) streamlining the distribution of powers between local authorities at different levels, which should provide substantial savings in general government spending (Zashkilniak & Krykun, 2002).

The overarching framework of competences of regions, departments and communes, as well as general conditions for implementing certain competences, were defined in the framework of the MAPTAM Law as of January 27, 2014 (*Detsentralizatsiya dnye ekonomichne zrostannya*, 2016). It has especially approved the new status and competences of the metropolis for large urban agglomerations with more than 400 thousand inhabitants and the rules of integration between territorial communities located within the metropolis.

Metropolises have become the most powerful state institutions of inter-communal cooperation with the power of taxation. Currently, no other community of communes has such a wide range of competences covering almost all aspects of society. Metropolises may assume competences of departments and regions in which they are located in addition to competences of the community of communes. The state may delegate additional competences to them (by agreement), for example, in the field of housing or social assistance (Zashkilniak & Krykun, 2002).

The reform's incompleteness lies in the lack of an approved clear scheme of relations between regions and metropolises, which have received legal recognition as the leading regional economic entities. Regions with strong metropolises allow certain competition between metropolitan and regional authorities for a leading role in innovation and economic development. The reform has not fulfilled the expectations of the abolition of departments, although this issue was repeatedly raised in the 20th century and discussed while preparing the reform. Today, departments are too small administrative-territorial units by both European and French standards (Zashkilniak & Krykun, 2002).

Despite the undoubted positive results of the French territorial reform (in the field of local government development and inter-municipal cooperation), many important issues remain unresolved. Indeed, the administrative-territorial structure of the country has not become more optimal and clearer. The number of levels and types of territorial units has increased. Regions and numerous inter-communal associations have been incorporated into the three historical levels (communes, departments and the state). Also noteworthy is the increasing role of cities in local development by creating inter-municipal associations of cities and surrounding areas. Such a complex path of reform is associated with the lack of public consultation, and the use of an administrative principle only demonstrates the low efficiency and slows down the decentralization reform.

Analyzing Arguments against the Theory

Decentralization Reforms in Poland

Regarding Ukraine's entry into the European future, one should consider the Polish experience of decentralization reforms due to several reasons. First, it is a neighbouring state that shares certain similarities with Ukraine. They are as follows: the former post-communist state; a similar chronological framework for state-building and problems with finding a

model of public administration. Second, Poland is a unitary state with a republican form of governance, a democratic political system but a parliamentary form of government. Most importantly, the Polish experience of decentralization reforms has turned out to be quite successful.

It must be noted that the country's decentralization reform has contributed to the independent development of local self-government and improved the quality of life of its citizens. After the country acceded to the European Union, the reform has enabled the newly created administrative units to act as equal partners in international cooperation.

The Constitution of Poland declares the unitary structure of the state. Besides, it states that the principle of a unitary state is not an obstacle to decentralization and is guaranteed by the territorial structure of Poland in the context of the decentralization reform and the introduction of autonomous units in the country's administrative division. The concept of decentralization is closely related to that of subsidiarity, which implies the existence of local governments addressing issues at local and regional levels. The governance mechanism lies in the fact that local issues are decided by the local community rather than by public authorities. The principle of power decentralization has become the basis of territorial reform in Poland (Arabadzhyiev et al., 2014).

The Polish reform of power decentralization and local government development began with the adoption of the Law "On Gmina Self-Government" in 1990 (Babarykina, 2016), which resulted in the establishment of the gmina (commune) as the basis of local government. Its main task was to meet the most important human needs (Nerubasska & Maksymchuk, 2020; Nerubasska et al., 2020). To this end, the appropriate infrastructure was created, and budget reform was initiated. The Polish system of administrative division primarily required the creation of the basic territorial level of government at the gmina level. Both the financial component and the distribution of communal property at the basic level were of key importance for the successful implementation of the territorial reform. At the legislative level, Poland has introduced a clear mechanism for distributing the revenue side of the budget between the state budget and local budgets. In turn, it has allowed territorial authorities to independently form a budget and forecast further development of the administrative-territorial unit.

The legislative implementation of the country's territorial reform began with the adoption of the Law "On the Establishment of a Basic

Three-Level Administrative Division of the State” in 1998 (Borshchevskiy & Voloshyn, 2016, p. 57). The new three-level administrative division has introduced voivodships (provinces), powiats (counties or districts) and gminas (communes or municipalities). The state is headed by the president, the voivodships by the voivode, the powiats by the starosta (the county sheriff) and the gminas by a directly elected mayor (known as prezydent in large towns, burmistrz in most urban and urban-rural gminas and wójt in rural gminas).

The relevant legislation regulates the administrative authority of each territorial level. Thus, gminas are governed by the gmina council, powiats by the powiat council and voivodships by the sejmik (an elected assembly). The term of office of these bodies is four years (Borshchevskiy & Voloshyn, 2016).

In Poland, the largest administrative-territorial unit is the voivodship characterized by certain power-related dualism: between the state administration and local governments. The voivode as the representative of the Council of Ministers in the voivodship, who is endowed with basic state functions, is to implement state policy. The voivode’s right to delegate the government’s powers under an agreement of local government is quite positive. Such decision-making autonomy in terms of power distribution at the regional level proves the effectiveness of the power decentralization principle enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Poland (Hroisman, 2015). Public administration functions can also be performed by local government bodies of a single administration, local government bodies and associations as long as it is envisaged by law or an agreement on delegated powers. However, the powiat level has its peculiarities. In particular, powiats are to supplement the powers of gminas in resolving issues that cannot be resolved independently. Powiats are governed by the council elected by the population of this administrative unit. The functions of the powiat council involve budgeting, determining the tax burden, using communal property and exercising control at the gmina level.

The Sejm may dissolve the powiat council or board on the proposal of the Prime Minister in case of their repeated violation of the Constitution or legislation of Poland. A clear distribution of revenues between the state budget and local budgets at the legislative level, as well as the financial independence of powiats, allows territorial authorities to independently form a budget and forecast the further development of the administrative-territorial unit. Cities on the rights of powiats have become a peculiarity of

Polish territorial administration. Such a status was acquired by settlements with a population of more than 100,000 as of December 31, 1998, as well as by those which lost the status of the city in which the voivodship administration was located that very day. The Polish model of public administration is characterized by dualism in terms of state administration and local governments only at the regional level. Besides, the creation of regulatory, staffing, budget and control mechanisms, as well as the establishment of vertical and horizontal interaction between different territorial levels of administrative division, has ensured the development of an effective model of local and regional governance and maintained a balance of power between local governments and public administration.

At the voivodship level, the Polish model of public governance is characterized by certain power dualism of both governmental structures and local governments. However, the independence level of local governments is quite high, especially in the budget sphere and in addressing the welfare of the population at the local level. Regarding the gmina level, there is no dualism of power.

The power decentralization reform has brought the greatest changes at the lowest level, namely, at that of gminas. Local governments have thus gained a real right to manage and use their resources, as well as received additional powers and greater responsibilities.

The government model has changed in favour of gminas, as well as the realization of their rights to self-government. Local governments, being rather financially self-sufficient, have taken over most of the functions to ensure the prosperity of gminas at the basic level. Effective self-government has become the impetus for the socio-economic development of rural areas. Gminas are entitled to create smaller territorial divisions with their authorities (Hrytsiak & Barovska, 2007).

Poland has managed to change many aspects along with power decentralization, including the education system, the health care system, the system of funds redistribution through the budget. It has become possible due to a systemic approach used to modify the country's administrative division. All the subsequent reforms supplemented the previous ones.

Gminas have become independent legal entities, with the right to defend their interests in court (including before the government). The range of their competences is not exhaustive, while voivodships do not have such rights. It is important to note that most tasks are fulfilled at the level of gminas. Active gminas, in addition to their funds, also attract grants.

However, local authorities themselves decide how to spend money on the needs of their locality when implementing various projects. City residents can also be involved in the projects since there is a so-called public budget of cities. It can be spent on the projects offered and developed by the residents themselves (Hroisman, 2015).

Open voting allows residents to vote for the projects until the approved budget is used. Approximately 25 to 30 investment or cultural projects are implemented each year (Hrytsiak & Barovska, 2007).

The administrative-territorial reform in Poland involved two stages and lasted approximately 10 years. The first stage of the reform began with changes in the structure of administrative division and the expansion of powers of local government bodies at the basic level. The second stage of the reform completed the transition to the three-level structure of the administrative-territorial system. Consequently, the number of voivodships was reduced from 49 to 17. Besides, the powiat as a traditional territorial unit was restored, and almost 2,500 gminas were formed.

In essence, the profound structural reform of public administration consisted of two simultaneous interrelated reforms. They include the reform of territorial organization and the reform of local government, that is power decentralization.

Thus, the Polish experience allows one to conclude that the success of the power decentralization reform lies in its rapidness and comprehensiveness. Any expectations of an ideal model are only a reason to postpone the necessary changes. In Poland, one can still hear criticism of the reforms already implemented, as well as accusations of its incompatibility with local government principles.

Conclusions

The analysis of relevant legal frameworks, funding schemes for civil society organizations, statistical data, levels of citizens' involvement and the impact of ICT on civil society development in European countries indicates the trend towards strengthening institutional climate in almost all Member States from Central and South-Eastern Europe, high levels of public funding in stable democracies, sustainable development of volunteering as a resource potential of civil society development and the effective use of information technologies for civic participation and social capital.

The foreign experience highlights the importance of decentralization for the countries dealing with profound changes in the system of social

relations regulation. Indeed, decentralization is an effective way to modify the essential characteristics of society and has significant potential and prospects for local development.

Thus, Western European countries have managed to create a viable structure to support the development of civil society and reinforce its dialogue with the state. One can observe how effective interaction between them is nurtured and new financial instruments are being developed and implemented. All Central and Eastern European countries have a common understanding and recognition of civil society as one of the most important actors in the development of cooperation with the government. At the same time, non-governmental organizations in these countries should be able to address the following problems: the population's low awareness of global development problems; their unpreparedness and low potential to meet the urgent objectives of civil society development.

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