The main directions of local self-government reform in Ukraine in the conditions of European integration

The democratic state presupposes the existence of a proper model of organization of power, which is based on the principle of democracy, and which provides real opportunities for the people to exercise the proper authority at all levels, the means of influencing the policy of the state, exercised by public authorities, on the conformity of the activities of the authorities with the sovereign will of the people and their variability. Undoubtedly, the existence of a democratic political regime can only be mentioned when the whole system of public authority meets these requirements. We are talking about the highest (national) level of organization of government, as well as regional and, of course, local.

The reform of the local self-government system initiated in Ukraine is a long-awaited response to the public demand for the destruction of the Soviet political system in Ukraine. The implementation of reforms related to the development of the principles of self-government in Ukrainian society results in significant changes in the system of public administration in general and the involvement of communities in local development policy in particular. In this context, local government reforms need to be consistent and step-by-step realized in implementing institutional innovations. In general, decentralization requires: political, administrative, judicial reform; reform of the financial and banking systems; society's willingness to accept the model of decentralized power; reorganization of a number of executive bodies, reduction of the governing apparatus; adherence to discipline and vision of the implementation process, counteracting pressure from politicians, especially in developing countries. The condition for decentralization is the simultaneous implementation of reforms, success of which is impossible without any of them. For countries experiencing the influence of the Soviet system of government, the process of decentralization depends directly on the strength of that influence. The population of the USSR remembers what centralization is. The only advantage in this case is the desire for change, which is exacerbated by the totally unsatisfactory level of public service provision, the level of local infrastructure development, and so on. However, merely denying the past does not give a clear vision of the future. In addition, the complexity of Ukrainian realities lies in the small experience of self-government in general and the almost complete lack of historical experience of effective governance in particular.

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At the present stage, Ukraine is steadily focusing its efforts on pursuing the European integration course, fulfilling its international legal obligations, inter alia, on the development of local and regional democracy. Further democratization of society, decentralization of power on the basis of subsidiarity has been and remains nowadays Ukraine's priorities.

An important role in these processes is played by the reform of local self-government and the territorial organization of government in accordance with the main provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government of 15 October 1985, which has become an integral part of national legislation in this field. In particular, the mentioned Charter states that in accordance with:

- Article 3, paragraph 1 «Local self-government denotes the right and the ability of local authorities, within the limits of the law, to regulate and manage a substantial share of public affairs under their own responsibility and in the interests of the local population»;
- Article 9, paragraph 1 «Local authorities shall be entitled, within national economic policy, to adequate financial resources of their own, of which they may dispose freely within the framework of their powers»;
- Article 9, paragraph 5 «The protection of financially weaker local authorities calls for the institution of financial equalisation procedures or equivalent measures which are designed to correct the effects of the unequal distribution of potential sources of finance and of the financial burden they must support. Such procedures or measures shall not diminish the discretion local authorities may exercise within their own sphere of responsibility» [1] etc.

Confirmation of this was the determination of priorities in the programming documents of the President, the Government and the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, including decentralization of power, transfer of financial resources and strengthening of the material and financial basis of local self-government bodies, satisfaction of interests of citizens in all spheres of vital activity in the respective territories, provision of high and accessible public services to the population, harmonization of interests of the state and territorial communities.

Implementation of the reform started on the basis of the Concept of reforming local self-government and territorial organization of government, the Government's Program of Activities, the «Strategy 2020» of the President of Ukraine and the corresponding plan for their implementation. The provisions of these acts should be implemented, because the imperfection of the functioning of the state authorities and local self-government gives rise to citizens' distrust of state and self-governing institutions; the absence of a clear structure of civil society and public control over the activities of public authorities and local self-government, respectively, reduces the level of reality of legal norms [2].

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In addition to regulatory support for reform, it is important that public authorities wish to transfer part of their authority to territorial communities and local governments, as well as the willingness of civil society itself to take responsibility for addressing local issues. Mostly, this «moral barrier» applies to countries that have felt the influence of the Soviet system of government.

After all, local self-government in Ukraine faces challenges that need change in the context of its reform:

- financial failure of communities;
- insufficient development budget resources for infrastructure investments;
- crisis of municipal infrastructure;
- deterioration of networks;
- lack of distribution of powers between local authorities;
- alienation of local self-government bodies from the population;
- corruption;
- opacity of activity;
- inefficient use of municipal property;
- crisis of personnel policy, system of training of local self-government personnel;
- underdevelopment of the independent public sector, forms of direct democracy;
- inability of residents to protect their rights;
- difficult demographic situation, deterioration of quantitative and qualitative parameters of human resources.

In the context of the abovementioned, interaction of public authorities and civil society institutions, one of which is local self-government, is extremely important, and such interaction is not only one of the important elements of state policy, but also a part of legal reality, in historical context – historically - legal reality [3, p. 339]. Therefore, the historical experience of such interaction should be taken into account. The legal basis of such interaction should be aimed at ensuring the rights and freedoms of the individual and citizen in Ukraine; the creation of an effective human rights protection mechanism is the key to minimizing threats to Ukraine's national security, which is especially relevant in the context of the challenges of our country today [4, p. 47; 5, p. 346]. The «mobility» of such interaction in time allows to reveal its objectively caused by the specific historical period mutation, variability, and thus - to find out the typical for this period features, characteristics [6, p. 171].

At the same time, it is necessary to take into account the international experience, which shows that it is impossible to redistribute powers and resources between executive authorities and local self-government without reforming the administrative and territorial structure of Ukraine.

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In accordance with article 133 of the Constitution of Ukraine the system of the administrative and territorial structure of Ukraine is composed of

- the Autonomous Republic of Crimea,
- oblasts,
- districts,
- cities,
- city districts,
- settlements
- villages [7].

The modern administrative and territorial structure of Ukraine has the following problems:

- unregulated structure;
- unregulated of the status of a number of administrative-territorial units;
- lack of a single classification and order of classification;
- difference of administrative-territorial units of one level by square, number of inhabitants, etc .;
- the inconsistency of delimitation of administrative and territorial units with the requirements of the European Union.

The administratively territorial structure of Ukraine that is irrational to date makes it possible to solve a number of the following problems, namely:

- optimization of powers of public authorities;
- improvement of land relations;
- overcoming the unbalanced securement of budgetary institutions;
- attraction of foreign investments;
- a significant improvement of budget infrastructure.

Regarding the legislative solution to the issue of administrative and territorial structure, Ukraine has a problem, which is the absence of a single specialized act that will determine the order of its organization.

The experience of foreign countries and the latest scientific researches, in addition to the proper territorial organization, make it possible to distinguish the following prerequisites for successful implementation of decentralization phenomena and effective management in the system of decentralized power:

- affirmation of the principle of the rule of law;
- recognition and guarantees of local self-government;
- equal legal protection of all forms of ownership;
- democratic and effective electoral legislation;
- independence, efficiency, accessibility and transparency of the judicial system, functioning of the institutions of administrative justice;
- perfect budgeting process and high financial discipline;
- availability of social standards;
- developed public sector [8].

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According to the information posted on the official website «Decentralization of Power», decentralization means the transfer of significant powers and budgets from state bodies to local self-governments. To have as many powers as possible the bodies closest to the people where such powers can be exercised most successfully.

The same source substantiates the difference between decentralization and federalization, which is that federalization means the transfer of significant powers to the level of regions (oblasts), and the reform of local self-government places a stake on communities (people). It is risky to transfer resources and powers to the regional level only. This is the only way to reproduce a centralized and corrupt system of government, only at the regional level [9].

E. Rushkovsky and S. Kosikovsky, analyzing territorial decentralization, distinguish three of its system-building components:

1. Decentralization is political (appropriate arrangement). The public-legal status of local self-government bodies comes from the specific way of forming these bodies and their representative character. Appropriate constitutional guarantees for the formation of a system of local self-government bodies certify the independence of such bodies from the state.

2. Decentralization is administrative - the task of local self-government bodies is assigned, and hence the functions and powers to satisfy the public interest within the respective territory.

3. Decentralization is financial - availability of own financial and material means, exercising of powers of ownership, use and disposal of financial resources owned by communities [10, p. 163].

The Concept of reforming local self-government and territorial organization of power in Ukraine from April 1, 2014, identifying the problems that currently need effective and rapid resolution, states that the purposes of the Concept are:

- defining directions, mechanisms and terms of formation of effective local self-government and territorial organization of power for creation and maintenance of a complete living environment for citizens;
- providing high quality and accessible public services;
- establishment of direct democracy institutions;
- meeting the interests of citizens in all spheres of life in the respective territory;
- harmonization of interests of the state and territorial communities.

The objectives of the reform are:

- ensuring the accessibility and quality of public services;
- achieving optimal distribution of powers between local self-government bodies and executive authorities;
- defining a sound territorial basis for the activities of local self-government bodies and executive authorities in order to ensure the accessibility and proper quality of public services provided by such bodies;

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- the creation of adequate material, financial and organizational conditions to ensure the implementation of local and local authorities' own and delegated powers [11].

However, it should be noted that this Concept was adopted before the signing of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union; therefore, its provisions should take into account the basic principles of the mentioned Agreement, in particular:

- Article 2 «Respect for democratic principles, human rights and fundamental freedoms, as defined in particular in the Helsinki Final Act 1975 of the Security and Cooperation Council in Europe and the Paris Charter for New Europe 1990, as well as in other relevant instruments of protection of human rights, including the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and the Council of Europe Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of 1950, as well as respect for the rule of law, should form the basis of domestic and foreign policy, which are the main elements of this Agreement. Ensuring respect for the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity, inviolability of borders and independence, as well as counteracting the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, related materials and their means of delivery, are also essential elements of this Agreement»;

- Article 14 «Within the framework of cooperation in the field of justice, freedom and security, the Parties attach particular importance to the establishment of the rule of law and to the strengthening of institutions of all levels in the field of governance in general and of law enforcement and judicial authorities in particular. Cooperation will be aimed, in particular, at strengthening the judiciary, enhancing its effectiveness, guaranteeing its independence and impartiality and combating corruption. Justice, freedom and security cooperation will be based on the principle of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms» [12] and others.

It should be noted that international political-legal documents listed in Article 2 of the Association Agreement provide for a strong link between the protection of human and citizen's rights and freedoms and the realization of the rights of the population in the field of local self-government. Therefore, it is obvious that the Concept of reforming local self-government and territorial organization of government in Ukraine should be substantially revised as a consequence of the signing of the Association Agreement with the EU by Ukraine.

It should be noted that recently adopted acts, which should promote the implementation of the reform, have partly started to be implemented in the part of concrete actions with the aim of becoming a real local self-government and transferring power to the level of territorial communities local self-government towards decentralization of power).

In the context of the abovementioned, it should be emphasized that the change of political elites in Ukraine in 2019 had absolutely no impact on the

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strategic course of the Ukrainian state in support of the European vector for the development of local self-government bases. This was evidenced by the submission on December 13, 2019 by the President of Ukraine V. Zelensky to the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine of the Bill No. 2598 «On Amendments to the Constitution of Ukraine (on the Decentralization of Power)» (as an urgent one, that has priority).

As stated in the explanatory note, «the proposed changes aim at strengthening the constitutional and legal foundations of local self-government, enhancing the effectiveness of the local self-government system, capable of providing optimal conditions for the enjoyment of human rights and freedoms at the community, county and oblast levels, and promoting the further development of forms of direct democracy and decentralization of power, defining a rational spatial framework for organizing power to ensure decentralization, accessibility and quality of administrative servants, enhancing the capacity and responsibility of communities for their development, creating the preconditions for sustainable territorial development. The proposed changes are in accordance with the unitary form of state system established in Article 2 of the Constitution of Ukraine. The Bill on Amendments to the Constitution of Ukraine proposes amendments on decentralization of state power in Ukraine, improvement of territorial organization of power and strengthening of the constitutional and legal status of local self-government.»

It should be emphasized, that the project is based on the ideas of modern constitutionalism, *the Association Agreement between Ukraine, on the one hand, and the European Union, the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, on the other hand, the European Charter of Local Self-Government and other* [13] international legal acts.

However, regardless of this position of the Head of State, the Government, the legislative body of Ukraine, the lack of professional training and gradual implementation of the stages of reform entails the risk of leveling it out, failing to take into account the basic essence - forming self-sufficient capable territorial communities and improving the conditions for providing quality services to the community.

However, decentralization processes have both advantages and disadvantages.

Among the *main benefits* of decentralization are the following:

- creating the conditions for the effective development of civil society;
- creation of favorable conditions for medium-sized businesses with further development of local infrastructure;
- efficient allocation of budgetary resources to address the needs of the territorial community and economic development;
- ensuring transparency and openness in the activities of local self-government bodies, improving the quality of public service delivery;

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- raising awareness and responsibility for own actions and decisions of both local government officials and territorial communities themselves;

- minimization of bureaucracy and efficiency of service in local self-government bodies.

However, along with the positive aspects, there are some *drawbacks* to decentralization, which include:

- complication of the ability to influence the macroeconomic situation at the state level;

- reducing the coordination of the implementation of the delegated powers, slowing down the implementation of state programs against the background of giving greater importance to local political priorities;

- efforts of the central authorities to avoid responsibility for the provision of public services to the population, self-removal of the central bodies from solving urgent issues;

- reduction of coordination of actions between central and local bodies and administrative-territorial units;

- the efforts of the central authorities to retain power;

- unevenness in socio-economic development of administrative and territorial units;

- slowing down the implementation of state programs; avoidance by central authorities of responsibility for providing public services to the population;

- lack of own finances, which will lead to the inability of local authorities to perform functions.

Each country's experience is unique and reflects the specificities of its development. Therefore, it is necessary to take into account the specific historical, economic and political development of a particular country.

There are *three main local government models in European countries* today:

Anglo-Saxon (United Kingdom).

High level of autonomy of local self-government, election and control by the population. Absence on the ground of special state commissioners, which has the function of control over local self-government bodies. Absence of local administrations (local bodies of state power);

Continental (France, Italy, Spain, Belgium, Poland, Bulgaria).

The combination of direct government and local self-government. There is a hierarchy of a system of governance in which local self-government is a link in comparison to state power. Limited autonomy of local self-government, availability of special state commissioners, who control local self-government bodies;

Mixed (Germany, Austria).

In some local self-government units, the elected body may be both a municipal government unit and a representative of the state administration.

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Thus, the reform of the local self-government system initiated in Ukraine is a long-awaited response to the public demand for the destruction of the Soviet political system that existed in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.

The implementation of reforms related to the development of the principles of self-government in Ukrainian society results in significant changes in the system of public administration in general and the involvement of communities in local development policy in particular. In this context, local government reforms require clear consistency and sequencing in the implementation of institutional innovations [14].

Conclusion.

The **main directions** of implementation of reforms on decentralization of power in Ukraine and reorganization of local self-government are:

- carrying out administrative-territorial reform to ensure the integrity of the state and its unitary structure;
- Adoption of the Law of Ukraine «On the Administrative and Territorial Structure of Ukraine», which would take into account the realities of Ukraine signing the Association Agreement with the European Union;
- a clear definition of the powers, rights and obligations of public authorities and local self-government with a view to balancing interests in the public relations system, ensuring the implementation of the principle of subsidiarity;
- implementation of effective policies of social, economic and cultural development of the regions;
- the formation of capable territorial communities, ensuring the extension of their rights to resolve issues of local importance;
- budget reform taking into account priority areas of financing;
- further legislative work, including legislative support for extended community powers, separation of powers, etc.

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Vol. III

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ISBN-*978-1-77192-537-2*

Accent Graphics Communications & Publishing
807-2625 Regina st., Ottawa, Ontario, K2B 5W8
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