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# PHILOSOPHICAL SCIENCES

## CONCEPTUAL DIMENSIONS AND DIRECTIONS OF DECENTRALIZATION AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE FOR UKRAINIAN EDUCATION

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### Abstract

The concept of "decentralization" is explored in the context of transfer of powers to lower levels of government. The interdependence of power and administrative competences of the state, regional, local and public levels is analyzed. Different directions of decentralization are considered, such as administrative, financial and controlling. Decentralization of education in all its multidimensionality is defined as a special direction.

**Keywords:** decentralization, deconcentration, delegation, devolution, divestment, decentralization of education.

**Problem statement.** One of the most substantive shortcomings of the former USSR's philosophy of education was its excessive centralization. Despite a number of constructive measures to overcome it, the remnants of excessive centralization of education, unfortunately, occasionally appear till the present day. The latest state development commitment for decentralization also applies to education. Meanwhile, its implementation is a problem that requires detailed study. At the same time, the search for educational responses to the challenges of decentralization is in the centre of the study.

**Analysis of the development of the problem.** In the last decade in Ukraine, theoretical developments in state, administrative and managerial decentralization have become particularly relevant. First of all, it reflects practical necessity. Scientific-theoretical, methodological, statistical and practical investigations of such scientists as L. Benovska, L. Bielova, Yu. Vasylyv, D. Dzvinchuk, L. Zasiakina, L. Kalinina, T. Krystopchuk, N. Levchenko, I. Lopushynskyi, V. Meleshko, O. Panych, D. Savchuk, Ye. Sytnychenko, M. Stepanenko etc., were useful regarding the issues of direct organizational reform of Ukrainian education within the framework of decentralization. At the same time, the new realities require a thorough study of the fundamental problems associated with decentralization processes in public administration.

**Research aim.** The aim of this article is to study the basic conceptual dimensions and direction of decentralization, as well as their diverse effects on the field of education.

**The main part.** When highlighting the essence and main directions of the decentralization process, it is necessary to note that the concept of "decentralization" as well as the opposite concept of "centralization" characterize the processes of concentration of power and its dispersion, i.e. vertical distribution of power between center and territories. If centralization is more or less unambiguously understood as a process of strengthening the role of central government institutions, which is inherent in the governing political system with vertical structure, subordination and concentration of power in a single center, then decentralization (in Latin de-

means contrast and -centralis means central), has a variety of manifestations being "interpreted as the destruction, weakening or abolition of centralization on semantic level" [1, p. 6].

The processes of vertical distribution of power are explained in the models that characterize the relations within the state, the interaction of central and local authorities: the model of partnership and mediation (agency model). The first model provides for equal relations between central and local authorities, aimed at achieving a common goal, the second one assigns to the local government the role of subordinate mediator, which serves as a tool for implementing the political course of the center and means of performing administrative functions on the ground. It is necessary to add the model of "interdependence", when local communities depend on support of the center (legislative or financial), and the central government depends on the effective operation of local authorities on the ground. Power relations in this case are based on the principles of compromise and information exchange, they are more equal than in the mediation model, and more developed and dynamic than in the partnership model [2, p. 46].

The tendency to organize power relations in modern conditions is a movement towards decentralization, and the models of partnership and interdependence are considered as more desirable. Governments in most countries feel the need of transferring power from the center to the regional and local levels, due to the current socio-political and technological development of post-industrial society, increasing trends in the localization of regional ethnic and sub-ethnic groups.

Decentralization is often equated with individual freedom, pluralistic democracy and local self-government. The concept of "decentralization" is often used in a broad sense, absorbing almost all centrifugal phenomena and processes in the state, leading to a weakening of centralization. However, there is a narrow interpretation offered by the French researcher of administrative law G. Vedel. According to his interpretation, decentralization is "not the transfer of power to civil servants and authorities representing the central government, but to other authorities that are not hierarchically subordinated to the latter, mainly those elected

by the population" [3, p. 392]. However, many definitions of decentralization do not focus on the election or non-hierarchy of the authorities, to which power is delegated. What is highlighted most of all is that the process of decentralization results in the expansion and strengthening of the rights and powers of administrative-territorial units or lower authorities and organizations while at the same time narrowing the rights and powers of the center [4, p. 232]. In addition, the definitions of decentralization also often emphasize that it is a process or situation of distribution (transfer) of power (authority) and responsibility for the provision of public (social) functions from the central (national) to lower (subnational, regional or local) levels of government or quasi-independent government agencies and / or the private sector institutions [5, p. 128].

Decentralization in the narrow sense is also associated with territorial decentralization on the basis of the redistribution of powers between different geographical levels of government, such as the central / federal government, states, regions, provinces, counties and communities. The purpose of such redistribution is to give greater powers to those bodies that are closer to the people where such powers can be exercised in the most successful way. There are various forms of territorial decentralization: deconcentration, delegation, devolution and divestment. The first and the second one are often associated with administrative decentralization, the third and the fourth with political one. If administrative decentralization involves the transfer of powers from central government officials in the capital to those working in regions, provinces or districts, which also can be accompanied by the establishment of strong sectoral management or the allocation of appropriate resources and powers to local authorities under the supervision of ministries [1, p. 14], then political decentralization involves the joint development and implementation of politics by involving interested parties [6]. Let's consider the above-mentioned forms of decentralization in more detail.

Deconcentration involves the transfer of a certain amount of responsibility, power and resources by the central government to its local representatives [7]. In this way, the central government establishes and provides resource offices/units on the ground, but retains central control. This institutional principle determines the specifics of the organization of public administration, when local government bodies are empowered to exercise executive power. Deconcentration is often contrasted with decentralization on the grounds that decentralization is understood as the transfer of decision-making rights to bodies that are not hierarchically subordinate to central government authorities and are usually elected by the concerned citizens, while deconcentration as a way of organizing governance within the state. [8, p. 330], which is manifested in the transfer of powers to officials appointed from the center to the field. Thus, deconcentration does not involve the transfer of rights to local government, as the main decision-making powers remain within the competence of the center, and local authorities perform administrative functions on its behalf [9, p. 57]. As a result, the gov-

ernment is getting closer to the citizens, although vertical subordination remains. Some scientists believe that deconcentration acts to some extent as a way of centralization through intermediaries or the institution of governorship. Others call it the weakest form of decentralization, because in this case the local government is empowered to perform only certain (mainly administrative) tasks in the short-term outlook [10, p. 206].

Deconcentration in education management is the relocation of leading educational authorities from the capital to other places, such as regional capitals or other administrative units of the state. It is widely used in those countries where political changes lead to administrative-territorial changes (Spain) and transfer of primary responsibility for the organization of current activities of educational institutions from offices in the capital to the offices of regional centers (smaller capitals) [11, p. 107].

Delegation involves the transfer of authority and administrative responsibilities. However, there are quite different interpretations of this process. Some researchers emphasize that the case of delegation is the transfer of an important part of state powers to the exclusive competence of local governments, calling this form the most complete model of decentralization [12]. In this context, delegation (rather than decentralization in general) as a transfer of power to self-governing (elected) bodies should be opposed to deconcentration as a transfer of power to centrally appointed local executive bodies. Local governments receive certain rights in some areas through delegation in accordance with current legislation, they act independently and have their own sources of funding. The process of making decisions and their implementation entirely belongs to the competence of local governments, and in case of conflict between them and the central government, the responsible courts can intervene only in case of any violations of laws or the Constitution [6].

Others characterize delegation as a specific way of conferring authority, according to which one body imposes an obligation on another one and gives for a definite or indefinite period of time the right to decide on matters within the competence of the first body. In this case, the body that delegated the authority may return it back at any time. This allows to quickly respond to problems, contradictions that arise in society, because the powers are given to the body that can best use them to achieve the most positive result [13, p. 94]. In this case, delegated powers are transferred on the basis of a certain legal act, like delegated powers of local authorities of most EU member states are transferred on the basis of special laws with the possible conclusion of additional agreements [14, p. 30]. In Ukraine, the legislation also provides for the possibility of delegating powers by executive authorities to local government bodies and vice versa. In particular, these provisions are contained in the Law "On Local State Administrations" № 586-XIV of 09.04.1999 [15] and the Law "On Local Self-Government in Ukraine" № 280/97-BP of 21.05.1997 [16], although the legislation does not contain specific mechanisms for the interaction of these bodies and the procedure for delegating powers.

In addition, they talk about delegation also in the case when administrative decentralization is manifested in the translation of part of the higher control functions down to the lower levels of the bureaucratic hierarchy or to specially created structures: bureaus, agencies, centers, etc. This option of "delegation" of educational powers was used by some Western European countries like Austria, Italy, Finland and the Netherlands [11, p. 107]. In our opinion, such an interpretation of this process shows little difference between delegation and deconcentration.

In general, delegation can be considered a moderate or compromise form of decentralization, as local authorities have the right to make decisions, but their activities to exercise their powers are accountable and controlled [10, p. 205].

Devolution, as the most extreme type or the strongest form of decentralization, involves the transfer of power and real responsibility from the central to the local level, because decisions on financial, administrative and regulatory powers are made at the local level. At the same time, we refer to the transfer of the most important key powers. Usually, devolution takes place in states whose individual components have broad autonomy, in particular, the right to form their own parliament and government [10, p. 204]. Therefore, devolution is often identified with political decentralization or certain cases of autonomy: the process of acquiring territorial autonomy, i.e. giving independence to the territory in solving internal problems beyond the rights and powers of the state, which includes this self-governing unit. This term is used in English-language sources to describe the processes of autonomy in unitary states. In case of devolution, the implementation of basic functions and the adoption of appropriate decisions may be entrusted to the bodies specially created for a certain period of time and for a specific purpose, whose heads are appointed or elected by the central government. Devolution or transfer of power from the highest level to the lowest is carried out by the legislative and executive branches. At the same time, the center always retains the power of secondary law-making, i.e. it retains the final constitutional power. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in Great Britain gained their autonomous status by means of devolution [17, p. 213-214]. An example of devolution in the management of education is the experience of Belgium, when the language communities of this country were given full responsibility for educational activities. The latter had to regulate financial flows, personnel issues, and selection of training content [11, p. 107].

Finally, divestment is a form of decentralization in which direct planning and executive functions are transferred from government institutions to non-governmental organizations. This form is neither the main nor the most important form of decentralization, as it is not directly related to the activities of the local self-government system. Divestment is often carried out with partial transfer of administrative functions, combined with deregulation or partial privatization [6].

Most countries are experimenting or planning to try some form of decentralization. This process means the transfer of decision-making powers from central

ministries to intermediate governments, local authorities and communities. However, the degree of delegation of authorities varies from administrative deconcentration to a much broader transfer of financial control to the regional or local level. Reforming power relations, Ukraine takes as a basis various forms of decentralization, meanwhile the clearly dominant type among them is the form of delegation of powers and responsibilities for management of social processes and their financing to democratically elected local governments while maintaining the authority to determine the country's development strategy and general reforms by central authorities.

The study of the experience of many countries that underwent decentralization reforms in the second half of the last century allows us to identify the main motives for expanding and strengthening the rights and powers of administrative-territorial units. Among them the first priority have: 1) political motives (in most countries of the world they are the basis of enthusiasm for increasing public participation in government decision-making); 2) financial motives (national governments are not able to provide full funding for social budget institutions); 3) motives for efficiency (decision-making at the local level helps to reduce the cost of achieving each individual result) [18, p. 133]. The process of decentralization in most developed countries is carried out in three complementary ways: active involvement of public influence in solving social problems; strengthening the role of local government in the social sector in making appropriate decisions on the beginning of organizational and economic changes; increasing the autonomy of social sector institutions in the management of their financial, material and human resources [19].

Decentralization reform, which entered the political agenda in Ukraine immediately after the Revolution of Dignity in 2014 due to increased public demand and interest of new political elites in improving the existing system of local self-government [20, p. 3], in one way or another is guided by all of the above stated motives and occurs in these ways. Decentralization in Ukraine is considered both as a basis for reforming the governance of regions and territorial units, and as a basis for building local democracy and spreading the principles of local self-government in accordance with European standards [21, p. 11]. According to the Sustainable Development Strategy "Ukraine - 2020", approved by the Presidential Decree of January 12, 2015, the goal of decentralization policy was "to move away from the centralized model of governance in the country, ensure local government capacity and build an effective system of territorial organization in Ukraine, full implementation of the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, the principles of subsidiarity, universality and financial self-sufficiency of local self-government" [22]. According to the government's Concept of local self-government reform and territorial organization of power in Ukraine, a simple and logical system of local self-government should be built, which is able to ensure normal and comfortable life of Ukrainian citizens in the cities and villages [23].

In the realities of Ukrainian society, primary direction of decentralization was the construction of a territorial basis for effective local self-government or modernization of territorial organization of power through the process of consolidation of administrative territories (defined in Ukrainian legislation as "voluntary association of communities") [24, p. 2]. This need is due to the fact that most local communities did not have enough human resources to be financially self-sufficient. Prior to the decentralization reform, 10.2 thousand communities of 11.5 thousand that existed in Ukraine were rural communities. 92% of them had less than 3 thousand inhabitants, 47% had less than 1 thousand inhabitants [20, p. 4].

According to the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Concept of Reforming Local Self-Government and Territorial Organization of Power in Ukraine of June 18, 2014, it was necessary to form approximately 1500 able-bodied territorial communities capable of stimulating local development and providing quality and accessible public services on the ground (instead of tens of thousands of city, town and village councils, unable to perform their own and delegated powers). Later, the number 1289 appeared in the approved long-term plans. As part of this task, it was planned to solve the problem of "duplication" of powers between public authorities and local governments at different levels [21, p. 12].

As of the beginning of 2019, 876 united territorial communities (OTGs) have been established in the country, covering a third of the territory of Ukraine [25], and the process continues, although it lags behind the government's schedule. The newly formed communities received more financial resources, direct relations with the State Budget and at the same time broader powers and responsibilities.

Another important area of decentralization in Ukraine is financial decentralization, which reflects the financial powers of regional bodies and is one of the fundamental conditions for the independence and viability of local authorities. If the decentralization of decision-making processes increases the opportunities for local government to participate in the development of the territory under its control, then fiscal decentralization contributes to the effective provision of public services by more careful coordination of government expenditures with the most necessary local needs [6]. Fiscal decentralization transfers to local authorities, private enterprises financial resources, the power to collect local taxes, as well as the right to determine the expenditures of local budgets in order to perform their decentralized functions [1, p. 13]. By and large, it provides obtaining fiscal independence for local governments, i.e. the ability to decide on the formation of the tax base, determine the rates of relevant local taxes and fees, the introduction of tax incentives for industries at the regional level and to search for additional financial resources [21, p. 21-22]. Decentralization in the field of budget relations is to strengthen the income capacity of local communities, provides incentives for local communities to fill their budgets more efficiently, move to self-sufficiency and carefully plan their expenditures.

Due to financial decentralization, local budgets have already received tens of billions of hryvnias in revenues.

The third, so far promising direction of decentralization in Ukraine, is a comprehensive reform of the administrative-territorial system. Completion of the process of unification of territorial communities should correspond to the formation of a new system of administrative-territorial organization, reforming the territorial organization of power at the subregional (district) level, synchronizing this process with the implementation of educational, medical and other sectoral reforms [21, p. 24]. It is expected that the decentralization reform will provide appropriate conditions for the provision of quality, competitive education on the ground, which requires high quality staff and a full training cycle. The number of kindergartens should also be increased and high-quality medical services should be provided. Community administrative service centers should be people-oriented, and citizens should receive quality administrative services quickly and efficiently. A self-sufficient community should be able to provide these services without any assistance from the state [26, p. 124].

In addition, while at the local level the key area of reform has been the creation of strong and institutionally capable communities, at the regional level the improvement has been associated with the redistribution of powers from state administrations to district and oblast councils. Therefore, the proposed constitutional project on decentralization creates a new model of interaction between the state and local self-government at the regional level. In particular, it liquidates rayon and oblast state administrations, and instead gives to rayon and oblast councils the right to form their own executive bodies, as well as introduces a new control institution - prefects, who will have the right to suspend local government decisions [20, p. 5-6].

**Conclusions.** Summing up the analysis of the main opportunities and challenges of decentralization, it is necessary to note that decentralization as a process of transfer of power (authority) and responsibility for the provision of public functions from central to lower (subnational, regional, local) levels of government or quasi-independent government agencies and / or private sector institutions has various manifestations. Reforming power relations, Ukraine takes as a basis various forms of decentralization, meanwhile the clearly dominant type among them is the form of delegation of powers and responsibilities for management of social processes and their financing to democratically elected local governments while maintaining the authority to determine the country's development strategy and general reforms by central authorities. The main directions of "decentralization in Ukrainian style" are the modernization of the territorial organization of power through the unification of territorial communities, financial decentralization and comprehensive reform of the administrative-territorial system with the implementation of educational, medical and other sectoral reforms and redistribution of powers from state administrations to district and regional councils. While acknowledging the first success of decentralization reform in Ukraine, it should be recognized that not all potential entities of management of social processes are ready for decentralization. Some of them directly or latently resist the

reform, some do not have necessary experience and competence. It is possible to increase the number of entities ready for change by conducting information campaigns, training village chiefs and local government officials, involving experts and general public. Close cooperation between the Ministry of Education, local authorities, local communities, schools, teachers and parents is also particularly important in the field of education.

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