

Perspectives on decentralization

The premises of decentralization and regionalization in Romania

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Abstract

Decentralization is creating a system of government in which local authorities and local public services practice self-control under a more or less limited control of the state which recognizes their legal personality, their own authority and ensures the resources they need.

The existence itself and the effects of the harsh forms of the administrative guardianship which is characterized by the right to dismiss or dissolve the autonomous entity, the right to approve and to substitute and even the right to cancel an administrative act of the guardianship body in the decentralized administrative system contributes to more than a simple alteration of the local autonomy, realizing with many others examples a paradoxical framework which proves the problematic nature of decentralization in practice and in theory.

Key Words: *decentralization, government, authority, public service, control.*

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A first perspective would be that the decentralization is a process of reorganization or reconfiguration of the authority, which aims to achieve a system of mutual accountability based on the principle of subsidiary between levels of government: the central, the regional and the local level. Decentralization becomes a way to significantly increase the degree of transparency of the local government, its effectiveness and to promote systems of local decision, systems whose democratic legitimacy strengthens the rule of law (Alexandru, 2002: 300).

According to a second perspective, the decentralization is actually a performance factor of the state. This is because decentralization is achieved through constructive pressure on the local government in the sense of assuming new responsibilities and the acquisition of new skills which gives them greater freedom of expression in the process of providing management of local public services. The local administrative freedom often generates increased efficiency of the techniques and practices in planning, budgeting and management (Alexandru&Gilia&Ivanoff , 2008:85-86).

In a third perspective, the decentralization is defined as a phenomenon with a high degree of complexity involving many geographic entities, local, regional, national and even international, societal participants, represented by the two sectors, the public and private and civil society, and social divisions such as the political, the socio-cultural or the environmental. (Alexandru, 2002: 301).

A fourth perspective would be that the decentralization represents the means of achieving goals as democratization, local government, increasing government efficiency, privatization and encouraging multiple possibilities of providing local services (Alexandru, Gilia and Ivanoff , 2008: 87-88).

Regionalization and Regionalism

Regionalism and regionalization are involved in specific processes and phenomena such as regional imbalances, ethno-cultural alienation, the centralism and the socialization of European Community policy. Regionalism and regionalization are both the consequences of regional imbalances and their solutions. Ethno-cultural alienation is the result of the awareness of some regional authorities regarding the unjustified character of the linguistic and cultural dependencies between them and other regions. Closely related to ethno-cultural alienation is the centralism which represents the exercise of the state monopoly over the decision-making system. Socializing the European policy means increasing the role of the state in all departments of social life and even in private life (Gorun and Gorun, 2009: 56).

Regionalism is a bottom-up manifestation towards the three stages of the regional process. These stages are: the emergence of the regional consciousness, the regional events or the actions with a regionalist character and the expansion of the regional institutions or the regional power.

Regionalization is different from regionalism because it has a downward trajectory towards the three phases of the regional process, different goals and different means for achieving these goals. As a reaction to the regional movement the State may recognize, considering its regions as homogeneous territories, the regional identity and it may allow them to participate in a certain degree in the management of their local business, of their needs and interests (Alexandru, 2002:634).

In essence, regionalization aims a balance in terms of wealth distribution, by raising the economical level of regions with a lower degree of development, at the same time being complemented and mutually conditioned by regionalism which aims the acquisition of regional decision-making power in all its compartments.

The premises of decentralization and regionalization in Romania

In 1996, under The Phare Program for Regional Development Policy, the Government and the European Commission elaborated The Green Paper “The Regional Development Policy in Romania“. This project included a detailed analysis of the differences manifested between the regions especially in the field of demography, labor, economy and unemployment and it affirmed the need to formulate and implement an effective regional development policy in order to reduce regional disparities and to increase the development of the regions. The solution was found in creating the development regions (Popescu, 1999: 147-148).

The institutions destined to implement the regional development policy are The National Council for Regional Development, The Agencies for Regional Development and The Regional Development Fund. A development region consists of 4-7 counties; an exception represents the development region of Bucharest (+ Ilfov County). In Romania, all counties are part of a development region (Popescu, 1999:148).

The law no. 151/1998 on regional development in Romania

It established the institutional framework, the objectives and the instruments of the Romanian regional development policy. The main objectives of this policy are: the stimulation of a balanced regional development, the prevention of new imbalances, meeting the criteria for the European integration and for the access to the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund of the European Union, the stimulation of the interregional, national, international cooperation, including the Euro-regions.

According to this law, the development regions do not represent administrative-territorial units and do not have legal personality. Therefore, they are not considered as distinct territorial collectivities or administrative districts of the state’s administration.

The establishment of the development regions is optional depending on the willingness to associate of the counties. The development regions have a contractual nature because their formation is based on an agreement which is in fact a contract of the administrative law and they also have a permanent institutionalized form and their own institutional structures (Popescu, 1999:148-149).

The 8 Development Regions

1. The North-East Region includes the following counties: Bacău, Botoșani, Iași, Neamț, Suceava and Vaslui.
2. The North-West Region: Bihor, Bistrița-Năsăud, Cluj, Maramureș, Satu Mare and Sălaj.
3. The South-East/ Dobrogea Region: Brăila, Buzău, Constanța, Galați, Vrancea and Tulcea.
4. The South /Muntenia Region: Argeș, Călărași, Dâmbovița, Giurgiu, Ialomița, Prahova and Teleorman.
5. The South-West/Oltenia Region: Dolj, Gorj, Mehedinți, Olt and Vâlcea.
6. The West Region: Arad, Caraș-Severin, Hunedoara and Timiș.
7. The Centre Region: Alba, Brașov, Covasna, Harghita, Mureș and Sibiu.
8. The București-Ilfov Region: București City and Ilfov County.

Although the Romanian Constitution provides certain guarantees in relation to the local autonomy through the article 120, paragraph 1: *“Public administration in territorial-administrative units is based on the principles of decentralization, local autonomy, and deconcentration of public services”*, the Romanian administrative system remains a centralized one. The need for a constitutional reform is evident. For the decentralization and regionalization to become effective, the state must recognize the legal personality of the regions and decentralize its administration first through its fundamental law.

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