

**Секция «Политические науки»**

**Decentralization in multi-ethnic states**

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The importance of the problem of decentralization cannot be underestimated. The possibility, both pluses and minuses of the decentralization (sometimes defined as regionalism) are examined currently by the authoritative specialists (Michiel S. De Vries, Christopher R. Duncan, D. Bracanti and others). It has always been one of the most difficult issues in the policy of any state, but its actuality and urgency nowadays has become of great significance. It can be proved by the next fact. A number of researchers (both Russian (S.V. Cheshko, R.G. Pikhoya, V.A. Tishkov and others) and Western (T. Martin, Z. Brzezinski, H. Carrère d'Encausse and others) consider the activity of the ethnic elites and the unwillingness of the centre to solve this problem one of the most possible factors of the collapse of the Soviet Union.

So, what are the main reasons for the decentralization? In fact, every nation has its own specific traits but we can mark out the most widespread ones. First of all, these are the unceasing claims of the regional representatives. As a matter of fact, they can sometimes become the inspirers of the decentralization itself. When they become influential figures in the political life of the whole country (not only their region), they are able to promote their ideas, implement them legislatively. There can be a number of scenarios in such situation: from simply holding referenda of regional importance to generation of unique plans (such as "Ibarretxe Plan" in Spain, according to which the Basque Country could have formed a "free association" with Spain itself). One more frequently-met reason for decentralization in world practice is the desire of the centre to distribute the legitimate power among the local governments. In this case the state authorities find it more acceptable and convenient to delegate political proxies to the regions so that this can even lead to the creation of confederations. The most significant example of such a phenomenon is Switzerland.

Therefore, after analyzing the numerous examples, we can distinguish between the two most commonly met types of decentralization. The first type is characterized by the high level of initiative of regional and local representatives, the diffusion of the national self-awareness of the ethnic groups living in such regions. In the second one, on the contrary, the centre itself demonstrates their attention to the problems of the periphery. But we can also mark out the third type. It is the situation when both the local and central elites realize the necessity and urgency of the decentralization. For instance, there is a modern trend in British internal policy – devolution. The Parliament of the United Kingdom makes the decisions about the delegation of powers to the regional political structures of Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland. It is, in fact, a kind of compromise between the two sides.

Decentralization itself is inseparably linked with the phenomenon of asymmetrical federalism. Diverse degrees of the autonomy are provided owing to the level of the regional independence. It is showed up in different ways in various countries (from India to Canada). Though, the classical illustrations of this political model of relations between the centre and the regions

are European countries (such as the United Kingdom, Spain, Belgium). But here there are a lot of conversations and arguments concerning the efficiency of decentralization and its acceptability in the states of the European Union.

One more curious factor providing the acceptance of decentralization by the state governments is the modern process of isolation of the communities, or ghettoization [1] (it is especially actual for Western Europe and the United States). Such isolated communities can lobby their interests (such as the preservation of their language, culture, religion, freedom of assembly etc.) in the political structures. Thereby the states are naturally looking for compromise with those and volens nolens distribute their power to the official community organizations (a live example: the Eastern diasporas in the U.S. (particularly Chinese)).

It is rather difficult to elicit a concrete trend in the attitude of the society towards the decentralization. Sometimes the population of the autonomous formation on the territory of the concrete country is quite uncertain about the future of the state itself (in Belgium 60% Flemish and 47% Walloons believe that the Kingdom is about to decay into two states). [2] Sometimes the government finds it illegal or unnecessary to even conduct such referenda or polls (in Spain, as an example). Therefore this phenomenon cannot be always studied properly due to the lack of information.

There are various forms of the practical realization of the process of regionalization. Their more or less dynamic carrying into life depends on the one hand on the activity of the ethnic leaders, the degree of self-organization and hierarchy of the ethnic minority or diaspora, existence of the mighty political lobby (which is able to sustain and defend the group interests); on the other hand, of the understanding of their needs and requirements by the central government, the willingness to listen to and fulfill them. So, based in these premises, we can single out several models, according to which the decentralization takes place:

- The attempt to find the middle ground between the state authority and local elites, which is characterized by the not so high possibility of conflict. There are only political ways of regulating the relations between the two sides. Therefore, the process of decentralization can be formalized legislatively, which guarantees the further partnership of the centre and regions (it is devolution in Wales, situation in Belgium, where there are not any outbursts of violence, the problem is solved by peaceful means, the political and law format of regionalization).

- The reluctance of the national administration to intensify the attempts to come to a concrete decision, the conservation of the present situation. In such cases there is latent potential of conflict, sometimes it even can be armed. The regional elites appeal to historical truth, they can often exploit the sympathy of the international community. Thus, the decentralization can turn into separatism (that is more common for Asia and Africa: for example, the Tibetan and Uighur separatism in China, instability in Indonesia (which led in 2002 to the secession of the East Timor)). But as for Europe, the state of affairs in Basque Country resembles this pattern of interaction between the center and the region.

The consequences of decentralization are determined by its nature. It stands to reason that the refusal of the national government to carry on negotiations with the regions can provoke an armed conflict and even a civil war. The example of the Soviet Union shows that decentralization, if led in an unprepared country without due regard for the national specificity, can cause the collapse of the state. But the cooperation and joint elaboration of the law system in this field are quite more productive.

So, what are the most appropriate solutions to this problem, which are very urgent to survival of the countries? First of all, of course, it is the unceasing dialogue between the two sides, which can probably prevent the power variant of the decision. The decentralization proved to be more effective when conducted gradually: from the recognition of cultural and confessional identity of the ethnic minorities to concession of the political rights to them if this is the only way to continue the coexistence. It is necessary to fix the alterations of the policy towards decentralization in the official law documents and control their practical implementation. To sum it up, it can be regarded as a means of maintenance of the stability in multi-ethnic society, a mechanism of accommodation of conflicting interests in the globalizing modern world.

### **Литература**

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