



DECENTRALIZATION REFORM IN UKRAINE
AND ITS CONSEQUENCES ON CIVIL RESPONSE IN THE FACE OF WAR

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The war in Ukraine has brought new challenges to the security system of the world, but also surprised the world about how Ukrainians resist the war. One of the reasons why Ukrainians could self-organize themselves so efficiently is because of decentralization reform. The decentralization reform that has been carried out in Ukraine is considered a successful one but at the same time had some problems and limitations: some researchers (Barbieri, 2020; Bader, 2020) point to the risks that it brings. The main ones are the local elite capture and possible separatist movements. But in the current research I limit to achievements of the decentralization reform that impact the civil resistance.

To begin, it is important to know the reason why decentralization of power is introduced. Firstly, there was an opinion that if the local elite is in power, then the population is much closer to the government (Mattingly, 2016, p. 384). That's why decentralization is the devolution of decision making from the center to the local government (Bardhan, 2002, p. 186). Secondly, through decentralization reforms there is hope to improve public policy and resource allocation, so they consider the needs and capacities of citizens better (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 2002). The goal of local government reform and decentralization is to ensure an effective and appropriate response to the needs of local communities for public services by transferring power to local government structures (Kasim & Agloba, 2017, p. 94).

Decentralization process in Ukraine started on April 1, 2014, when the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine approved the Concept of Reforming Local Self-Government and Organization of Territorial Authority in Ukraine. The main goals of the decentralization reform were declared as to achieve the optimal distribution of powers between local governments and executive authorities, as well as the formation of such a base of the administrative-territorial system as the territorial community (hromada) (Gorbatiuk, 2020, p. 57).

The reform includes two components: amendments to the Constitution and a package of new draft laws on the amalgamated territorial communities (ATCs), and re-organization of their functions. As a result, there was a consolidation into large territories and a reorientation of administrative and financial resources to such large communities (Palermo 2020, 372). The goal of merging municipalities into ATCs and switching of power and resources to them is to solve two problems in self-government. The first is the inability to generate income before 2014. The second is the lack of professionals at the municipal executive level. After some amendments were made in the tax laws, a lot of taxes are transferred and remain in the local budget (Bader, 2020, p. 262). The reform achieved significant results, but it has been the administrative and fiscal decentralization but not a political one (Romanova & Umland, 2021). That's why some of the success of decentralization reform is because budgets and financial autonomy have become larger (Palermo, 2020, p. 263). Another changes that positively affected the political system in a whole and were because of decentralization reform, have become the role of local branches of political parties and the direction of their activities: political parties built on the "bottom-up" principle became to play an important role in local politics; increased intra-party competition and reduced the influence of party functionaries from the central level on local affairs; received by non-parliamentary parties the

levers of influence on the formation of regional policy; the emergence of parties' need to develop at a local level; political parties involved local civic activists and intellectuals in order to renew the members of parties and increase their own rating (Gorbatiuk, 2020, p. 82). Even before the local elections local activists were able to be elected to the newly formed community's councils, as political parties did not pay much attention to local councils until local elections in 2020. The involvement of citizens in the life of their communities was facilitated by the creation of such tools of local (and not only) democracy as electronic petitions and the participation budget (Kruglashov & Sabadash, 2022). Moreover, it should be noted that one advantage of decentralization was the increasing the state's resilience to internal and external challenges through territorial consolidation at the local level (Romanova & Umland, 2021).

In terms of how decentralization reform affects the civilian resistance during the current war, some conclusions could be already made. Decentralization reform has developed the local governance, where local councils and their heads became independent from the regional councils. One of the major mistakes the Russian government made was to suppose that if Russians took the regional council and regional administration then other councils and administrations on this regional territory would surrender before them. But in the end we can observe the independence of local communities from the regional center. Each community continues to resist as they protect their own hromada (community). Or, for example, even when the territory is occupied the people are still gathering in peaceful meetings to show their support for Ukraine.

Another sign that decentralization reform works is that hromadas on occupied territories could accumulate resources like manage logistics to provide food for local residents. So, without the humanitarian aid local self-government were able to mobilize local business to continue producing food (it concerns the territories where no active fighting are). Furthermore, the small communities with the support of local governments and who are not on the frontline created centers for IDPs and humanitarian hubs.

To conclude, it is worth to note that some of the main goals of the decentralization were achieved specifically that Ukrainians became much closer to the government and resource allocation was improved that allowed it to bring the needs and capacities of citizens better than it was before 2014.

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