

The decentralisation reform in Ukraine: First accomplishments and future challenges

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Abstract. The article explores the decentralization reform in Ukraine under the presidency of Petro Poroshenko in 2014–2019, evaluating its main results and challenges in the context of territorial consolidation and democratization. The article seeks to explain what made the policy makers choose the priority of increasing the institutional and financial capacity of local government to provide public services in the context of improving Ukraine’s cohesion and resilience to external threats in relation to its territorial unity and sovereignty. The article argues that the logic of decentralization in 2014–2019 has brought Ukraine closer to the EU by implementing the principles of subsidiarity and promoting local democracy in the framework of multilevel governance in a unitary decentralized state. At the same time, the article highlights a number of challenges that decentralization faced in 2014–2019, including the level of institutional coordination within a multi-level governance setting, as well as the limited effectiveness of the incentives to increase local development in Ukraine.

In the first stage of the reform in 2014–2019, decentralization led to shifting the balance of power and resources between central and subnational actors and institutions, but did not institutionalize the involvement of the latter into the process of policy making at the central level. According to the logic of the Sequential Theory of Decentralization, the start of the reform from administrative and fiscal decentralization, as well as the postponing of political decentralization, can set the vector of reducing the degree of autonomy of actors and institutions at the sub-state levels on the further stages, especially in the case of limiting the financial capacity of self-government to provide public services.

If the reform is successful at its the next stages, it will generate a useful example of a decentralized democracy outside the EU, being more resilient to external and internal challenges due to its strengthened local self-government. Ukraine’s decentralization reform can become an

example for post-Soviet countries and some EU member states that seek to strengthen their territorial integrity.

Key words: decentralization, territorial consolidation, multi-level governance, Ukraine

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