

COMPARATIVE ASPECTS OF THE LOCAL POLITICAL-ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEMS FROM ITALY AND FRANCE IN THE INTERWAR PERIOD

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ABSTRACT:

THE DIFFICULT POSTWAR ECONOMIC CONTEXT MADE THE IDEA OF DECENTRALIZATION AND REGIONALIZATION SEEM A PANACEA FOR ALL PROBLEMS: IT COULD REVITALIZE THE PEOPLE, IT WILL DISCHARGE THE INSTITUTIONS OF THE CUMBERSOME AND EXPENSIVE BUREAUCRACY, IT WILL ELIMINATE IN GREAT PART THE STERILE POLITICAL GAMES AND WILL PROTECT THE POPULATION AGAINST DANGEROUS GOVERNMENT IMPROVISATION. WE CAN CONCLUDE FROM THESE POINTS, THAT THERE IS A SIMILARITY BETWEEN THE INTERWAR DEBATE ON REGIONALIZATION IN TWO EUROPEAN COUNTRIES AND THE CURRENT ROMANIA; WE ALSO DISCUSS THE SAME PROBLEMATIC SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT.

KEY WORDS: PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION, DECENTRALIZATION, REGIONALIZATION REFORM, FASCISM, CENTRALIZATION.

I. FRANCE

Discussions of political parties on administrative reform started before World War, continued after its ending, becoming a general public target for the French people high expectations. The return of Alsace and Lorraine within the French state will generate intense debate on regionalization as it was understood from the start that the politico-administrative action should be almost invisible on this German-speaking population not to inflame a favorable population that does not reject the French authority. Then, the provincial originality had a chance to be put forward in the state, not just in the two provinces.

In terms of the popularity of decentralization and regionalization ideas, these words became fashionable both in the public and scientific environments, the political debates and specialized magazines offering large areas to this issue. The freedom-loving nation considered the expanding of local, within the traditional territorial districts of the commune and the department, an important contribution to the preservation of human freedoms. In the electoral programs of candidates in the elections of November 1918, both the right and left of the political spectrum, the words decentralization and regionalism were often used.

The older debate on decentralization turns into a debate on regionalization, on the need

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for a new level of administration - regional - within the French territorial system. The reforms of 1871 and 1884 have satisfied an important part of the traditional objectives of the decentralization theory. The obstacles that limit the action of local elected officials are now of another kind. Especially, the existence of technical controls and the issue of financial resources restrict the scope of local authorities. From now on, improving local courts power primarily involves the development of highly complex and technical reforms, especially on local finances. Thus, losing their original political dimension and becoming primarily a technical problem, the decentralization of the communes and departments administration will occupy a secondary place on the agenda of public and political debate. The involution of the traditional decentralization is highlighted especially the development of regionalism and administrative reorganization projects on a regional basis. They indicate a transformation of the objectives. The main problem is creating new territorial structures essential because of the territorial adaptation failure. Regionalism does not bring up the legal status of communities (devolution), but emphasizes the geographical aspect, the necessity to elaborate a new administrative map; so the urgency does not represent a new division of authority, but a new organization of its exercise. The desire to respect the provincial originalities, the rationalization of administration, a more efficient organization of the economic life have led regionalism adherents to seek not so much a redistribution of power between the state agents and citizens, or their representatives, as a decongestant and a redistribution of the state administration of public services within appropriate territorial constituencies².

The theoretical debate is carried around the French regionalist Federation (Fédération française régionaliste) founded in 1900 by Jean Charles-Brun that brought together personalities belonging to the entire political spectrum, from the republican or monarchical left to its right, men of letters and artists, geographers, lawyers, etc. The federation lacked a common groundswell, relying primarily on its members and exceptional personalities. The federation presented as an apolitical movement, its president, Charles- Brown, saying "the regionalism was not an issue of political régime"(my translation). The Federation of French regionalist program was based on the following principles: the sharing of France in homogeneous regions; the creation of regional centers; business management of the commune by the commune, of the region by the region; of the nation by the state; creating a responsible jurisdiction to adjudicate conflicts between the individual, the commune, the region and the state, freedom of village and regional initiatives; the balancing of the economic interests of each region, adapting education to the local and regional needs; development of private initiative in the field of letters, science and arts.

1. POLITICAL ACTIONS - PARLIAMENTARY AND GOVERNMENTAL PROJECTS OF REGIONAL ORGANIZATION

The political groups will accept the idea of regionalization as public valid, but there are interpretations of the views. Socialists support the extension of the commune powers and regional reform, but just as radicals remain cautious regarding the role of the region. Socialists supported and promoted only the economic region. Communists declare themselves in favor of the decentralization. In the 1920s, the Communists promote the empowerment of local government program which aims to eliminate "political and administrative servitude" of communes and departments, to provide them political and administrative autonomy, control over their own budgets, revenue collection and establishment of expenses, police control and freedom to intervene in the local economy

² Jean-Michel Guieu, *Régionalisme et idée européenne dans la première moitié du XXe siècle: le cas de Jean Charles-Brun*, (1870-1946), in Marie-Thérèse Bitsch (dir.), *Le fait régional et la construction européenne*, (Bruxelles, Bruylant, 2003), 31-44;

through the development of industrial and commercial capacity of the municipality³. Unlike radicals, communists supported regional autonomy in Alsace⁴.

In turn, Republicans assert their commitment to decentralization, but are skeptical of the establishment of the region. The Republican Party supports only a very specialized area, because the main objective is the stability and consolidation of the Republic. To the right of the political spectrum, the various parties strongly support decentralization and regionalization, but their projects are very different from each other, sometimes even antagonistic.

The right and left parliamentarians submitted to the parliamentary chambers offices, new reform projects or have resumed the projects proposed before the war, which promoted both the expansion of the powers of local authorities and the establishment of administrative and economic regions⁵. According to the analysis conducted by Maurice Bourjol there can be identified three categories of parliamentary proposals for the regionalization. The first type, *the federal oriented administrative regionalism*, groups a number of projects that promote a highly decentralized system. Projects in this category are building a unitary territorial collectivity very decentralized. This type of regionalism presents an administrative nature, but the directives of the projects lead to a deep decentralization, both regarding the election of the organs, the role of central government representative, as for the powers of the new authorities.

The second category, *Mixed administrative regionalism*, is characterized by a strong central government control over regional institutions and by combining decentralization and devolution. This form of administrative regionalism tends to align the departmental and regional institutions sometimes limiting to perform simple administrative devolution.

A third category, *the economic regionalism*, is characterized more by the manner of appointing regional bodies, than by their powers. Successive governments have proposed to turn various administrative decentralization projects and established several committees to study decentralization. Note that the decentralization of government projects and especially regionalization were weak, lacking clear consequences.

2. FAILURE OF DEBATE ON THE REGIONAL REFORM

Although there have been many regional reform projects, they were not political materialized. From the electoral point of view, the regionalization idea was commonly used, but the parties reaching power will deny the election promises, the strongest opposition being the policy of regionalism. Also, the lawyers were very hostile towards regionalism. According to H. Berthelemy, the question was put as follows: the economic decentralization should not become an administrative one as it will lead to a federal system that was totally discredited in France by the Girondins⁶. Moreover, "ce problème du régionalisme administratif est un de ceux qui donne le plus l'impression d'une agitation à vide et d'un bluff électoral."⁷

Another key reason for the opposition to regionalism is the danger that, as we saw

³ Yves Mény, *Centralisation et décentralisation dans le débat politique français*, Librairie générale de droit et de jurisprudence, 1974, 248.

⁴ Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Histoire de France des Régions. La périphérie française des origines à nos jours*, Seuil, Paris, 2001, p. 36; Bernard Reimeringer, "Un communisme régionaliste? Le communisme alsacien", in Christian Gras, Georges Livet, *Régions et régionalisme en France du XVIIIe siècle à nos jours*, (Paris, PUF, 1977), 454-455.

⁵ The number of regional reform projects brought to the Parliament is impressive. From 1890 to 1926, forty-one regional reform projects were proposed and other six from 1926 to 1934.

⁶ H. Berthélémy, *Traite élémentaire de droit administratif*, (Paris, 1930), 364.

⁷ Berthélémy, *Traite élémentaire de droit administratif*, 213.

above, a certain part of the right, reactionary and monarchic, was the political regime for the parliamentary republic. In the context of this political and cultural climate the reluctance of the liberals can be better understood and the resistance of the left against the regionalization. In the majority of cases, they have considered the administrative regionalization as an innovation rather dangerous than useful, representing a serious threat to the Republic. In view of the moderate Republicans, only the economic regionalization was desirable. Also, both radicals and socialists opposed to the plans of regional decentralization.⁸

Also, the opposition against regionalism and its failure was favored by the tension and internal contradictions of the French regionalism. These contradictions have occurred between supporters and those of decentralization and the decentralized authoritarian regime; between corporate and administrative regionalism; between moderate regionalism, supporter of maintaining the department level and the regionalism that promote dissolution of the department⁹.

Despite the intense debate on decentralization, on the legislative plan the results were modest. Legislative measures aimed at decentralization rather than regionalization:

- Decree -Law from October 1, November 5 and December 28, 1926, adopted during the Prime Minister Poincaré have deconcentrated the control of the capital on departmental and communal business, in the field of creating the utility companies and the establishment of common departmental services for economic and social purposes. In particular, the Decree-Law from 5 November, entitled "decree of decentralization and administrative deconcentration" greatly expanded powers to the General Council and departmental committees of communes. The powers of the general councils have also been expanded: they had the right to decide finally on all matters of departmental interest.
- Regional reform from April 5, 1919 there were created the so-called "regions Clémentel" (named after M. Clémentel, Minister of Commerce)¹⁰, regional economic groups led by the chambers of commerce. There were not decentralized institutions, but rather a form of economic regionalism, grouping the chambers of commerce of a certain region, which then coordinated their activities on a regional basis.

During the third decade and in the years preceding the Second World War there is no longer a question of enlargement and development of commune and department autonomies. On the contrary, the crisis will lead to the strengthening of the leadership on local finances, limiting the creative freedom and their organization. Compared to the increase of the powers of the state, which has sometimes developed at the expense of local governments, it seemed less. The state invaded the remit of local government in various ways, a process that determined a certain degree of recentralization in center-periphery relations. Along with these measures, the large number of laws and decrees adopted by the early twentieth century, which led to increased territorial services of the State in the periphery have led supporters to promote decentralization and demand new decentralizing reforms. The decrease of the powers of local elected officials was due rather to the increase of the powers of central and local authorities, rather than to the deliberate legislative attempts to reduce their power. Only in the 30s there were some deliberate attempts to restrict local government and local financial crisis caused guardianship strengthening on the local communities¹¹. The reputation which

⁸ Burdeau, François, *Histoire de l'ad siècle*, Montchrestien, Paris, 1989 p. 251-252

⁹ Bourjol, *op. cit.*, pp. 180-181

¹⁰ A. Gorun, I. Ghizdeanu, H.T. Gorun, G. Radu (coord.), *Romania si politici regionale*, Tg-Jiu: Academica Brancusi, 2013, p.43

¹¹ Vivien A. Schmidt, *Democratizing France. The Political and Administrative History of Decentralization*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990 p. 68

gained by the French administrative system, as one of the most centralized in the world, although at first glance, considering the formal legal framework, it is deserved, was still exaggerated by different researchers over time. Studies of French local administrative system over the last decades, which adopt a politological methodology at the expense of the legal one, demonstrated that, in reality, politicians and local administrators have found different ways to bypass the centralized system and thus obtained a formal local autonomy and a higher power than allowed by the legal frame. The highly centralized system from a formal point of view, will find balance on the plan of informal relations established between representatives of the central bureaucracy and authorities local / departmental, especially after the mayor's authority was strengthened by overlapping mandates (number of mayors who also held the function of parliamentary increasing in the civil society). We can recall the relationship of complicity between local officials and prefects recognized only in the recent decades as a way of promoting informal regional and local interests. In this way, the secret of departmental vitality despite its territorial inadequacy and limited financial resources is reflected in the size of local informal power relations, the interdependence of national and local scope. Without its removal, the particularity of the functioning of center-periphery relations in the political-administrative system has alleviated the centralism weight. Surely this informal sphere was favored by the overlapping of elective mandates, constant phenomenon of the French political life during the July Monarchy (1830-1848) until the Vth Republic (1958)¹².

II. ITALY

1. THE DEBATE ON THE ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM AFTER FIRST WORLD WAR UNTIL THE FASCIST TAKEOVER

Regarding the decentralization and the local autonomy organization in the immediate post-war period, debate on regionalization and autonomy experienced a strong manifestation. Demands for regional autonomy have multiplied, which was seen as a necessary condition for a profound renewal of the liberal state structures. Also, the discussion on autonomy was favored by the annexation by the Italian state of new territories with different administrative traditions, some of them enjoying local autonomy more developed than that of the Italian state.

After World War I, Luigi Sturzo, a representative of the Catholic world and one of the founders of the Italian People's Party in January 1919, will continue the reflection on the issues of autonomy and regionalism. At the beginning of the century, Sturzo had promoted mainly the consolidation of the commune autonomy. Now, in the new political, economic and social context in the aftermath of the war, said Sturzo, problems of administrative decentralization, local autonomy and the creation of the region were of fundamental importance and they could only find resolution in a general reform of the Italian administrative system¹³. The region promoted by Sturzo does not have federal valences; on the contrary, he said that the Italian state was unitary, not federal. Also, the author considered, the creation of the region in Italy, despite what the opponents of regionalism considered, did not represent a threat to the national unity¹⁴. Sturzo categorically rejects the claims that the regions are artificial constructions without historical background; in his opinion, in Italy the region represents a specific unit of language, history, customs and

¹² Stefano Mannoni, *Une et indivisible. Storia dell'accentramento amministrativo in Francia. La formazione del sistema (1661-1815)*, vol. I, Giuffr  Editore, (Milano, 1994). 365-366.

¹³ Luigi Sturzo, *La regione*, apud Claudia Petraccone (a cura di), *Federalismo e autonomia in Italia dall'unità a oggi*, Editori Laterza, 1995, 188

¹⁴ Sturzo, *La regione*, 187.

traditions; the region corresponds to a bureaucratic reality that the British Unitarianism, in sixty years existence, did not remove. The region was to have primarily an economic function and be a representative-elective body. Regional authorities were chosen by the communes and provinces and were not appointed by the central government; they were to be elected directly on the basis of universal suffrage, right given to women also. The regional authority included the following areas: public works, schools, especially secondary and professional, industry, trade, agriculture, health and state services which, because of their mixed character or for their simplification could be delegated to the regional level¹⁵.

In contrast to L. Sturzo, Oliviero Zuccarini, member of the Italian Republican Party manifested his opinion, in the magazine *Political Criticism*, that autonomy and federalism were the optimal solution through which Italy could overcome the crisis after the war, and who could provide the premises for the development and the general welfare. The main objective of Zuccarini was the shift from the centralized state, which performed multiple complex functions to a state keeping and carrying only the essential functions at the central level of interventionism widely exercised in a system of autonomy, freedom and economic independence. For Zuccarini, the term decentralization is integrated into the broader concept of the federal union that will give rise to a higher quality unit. The federal organization, the author argued, was not opposed to the national unity but, instead, gave the surest guarantee¹⁶. Despite the effervescence of the debate and the ideas on a new organization of the local and regional administrative system, various projects and reform proposals that have circulated in this period did not enjoy a wide audience. They will remain below the effective evolution of the institutional structure and the reform projects that will reappear in the Parliament.

2. THE LOCAL POLITICAL-ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM DURING THE FASCIST REGIME

One of the first objectives of the fascist regime was the expanding in territory of the power won at the center. The administrative instruments used for this purpose were the prefects' interventions, the controls of the Provincial Administrative Commission and the dissolution of the communal councils. The most important innovation of the fascist centralism in the field of local administration was the deletion of the principle of local authorities' election, in 1926.

Il sindaco (the mayor) became podestà, which took all the functions previously exercised by the municipal council, the mayor and the municipal delegation. He was appointed by the central authority, at the proposal of the prefect. They were first appointed in the communes with less than 5,000 inhabitants, and afterwards in all the others. Besides the *podestà*¹⁷, the Law of 1926 established the so-called municipal consulting, advisory bodies, optional for communes with less than 20,000 inhabitants and compulsory for the two newly created common categories: communes with up to 100,000 inhabitants or the provincial capitals and those which exceeded this number of inhabitants. The advisory body, *consulta municipale* consisted of a number of members that varied depending on the size of the commune (could not be more than six), appointed by the prefect: 1/3 of them were appointed at the choice of the prefect and 2/3 were appointed by the prefect at the suggestion of the competent economic, trade unions and local associations. With the diversification of the legal regime of the cities, the fascist government has removed one of the fundamental elements of the previous system, namely the uniformity of communal organization.

¹⁵ Sturzo, *La regione*, 189-190.

¹⁶ Oliviero Zuccarini, *Il federalismo come rimedio alla dissoluzione*, in Petraccone, *op. cit.*, 176-183.

¹⁷ During the fascist regime, the head of the communes administration was called *podestà*.

In 1925 Rome was transformed into *governatorato* (governorship) administered by a governor and two deputy governors appointed by royal decree. The governor was assisted by ten *rhetors*, appointed by the government and eighty consultants, some of whom are elected from citizens with special skills and some are appointed by the economic, technical and professional city organisms.

Regarding the provincial administration, in 1928 it was adopted a reform analogous to the one of the municipal level. Provincial administrative organs shall be appointed by the government now on: according to the law of 27 December 1928, the province was ruled by a president appointed by the center for a period of four years and can be reappointed; along with the chairperson it was instituted a collegial body of administration composed of members appointed by the Minister of Internal Affairs, also for a period of 4 years. Also this year, the compression of local autonomy was completed along with the nationalization of the senior officials of communes and provinces, secretaries, who from now on will not depend on communes and provinces, but will become the political clerks¹⁸.

The main feature that characterized the fascist regime intervention on the territorial organisms was denying of the democratic principle. Fascists argued that the deletion of the elective principle regarding the constitution of the local authorities, was not prejudicial to the local autonomy, but went beyond identification - considered a theoretical preconception - between the autonomy and the election. The reform aimed to create a non-elective autonomy, which would better respond a conception of representation understood as designating powers, not as a mandate.

The functions of communes and provinces were limited, continuously, through state legislation. During this time, it developed the phenomenon of parallel administrations and controls, which had complicated during the liberal period, the Italian centralism linearity. A report by the Constituent Assembly on the issue of local autonomy, elaborated after the war, showed about 130 types of controls that were applied to the communes in 1945.

In conclusion, during the fascist period it disappeared any trace of local democracy, local authorities becoming more addicted to the center than in the previous period. In 1934, it was drafted a new organization law for communes and provinces, which consolidated, reorganized and amended previous laws, while codifying the minor role of communes and provinces in the new system.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The regionalization problem turned out to be a long-term one which, despite the theoretical debates, did not materialize from a political point of view in the interwar period. This proves that mature political-administrative systems, such as those in France and Italy, did not rush immediately to an administrative innovation until there was no mature reflection on the issue. Today in Romania, the regionalization problem appeared 'overnight' and people are trying to fix it all 'overnight'. The experience of the two states, shown above, proves that it takes decades of debate to make a project feasible and realistic. It is true that the administrative errors can be solved through the administrative way, a wrong regionalization possibly being followed by a re-regionalization, but the economic and social costs are very high.
2. Both European countries have opted for more centralized political-administrative systems, because of the economic crisis and internal problems of historical specificity. Thus, Italy because of the fascist political regime, has been one of the most centralized

¹⁸ Guido Melis, *Storia dell'amministrazione italiana. 1861-1993*, (Mulino, 1996), 345-348;

administrative systems, even if a state was traditionally composed of provinces, united only a few decades ago, which had their own administrative customs. France is recentralizing after a period of autonomy administration, because of the finance crisis. Both countries needed a big political event representing a new beginning and giving new opportunities to the idea of regionalization, and this was the Second World War.

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