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**Article**

## The Eastern Partnership and its Impact on Self-Governance Reform in Ukraine

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## THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP AND ITS IMPACT ON SELF-GOVERNANCE REFORM IN UKRAINE

Vadym ZHELTOVSKYY\*

**Abstract:** *Article poses a question on the effectiveness of the European policy for Eastern Partnership in Ukraine under current circumstances of political and military crisis. Particularly, the role of Poland as a key country for the success of given policy in Ukraine is taken into consideration with the emphasis on Polish-Ukrainian cooperation on the issue of self-governance reform in Ukraine. The aim of the article is threefold. First, to analyse the main trends of EU-Ukraine cooperation in terms of the EaP policy. Second, to present author's research on the role of different political and social actors from Poland and Ukraine (local authorities, non-governmental organizations, Academia) in implementation of European experience on self-governance reform and decentralization processes on Ukrainian ground. Finally, the article makes an attempt to evaluate the EU strategy in regard to Ukraine and present possible ways for further cooperation as regards the reform of self-governance in Ukraine.*

**Keywords:** European policy for Eastern Partnership; self-governance; decentralization

### Introduction

Democracy, good governance and stability are declared to be the key elements for the success of the Eastern Partnership policies on such issues as public administration, civil service, civil protection, judiciary, etc. Moreover, reforms in given areas involve the application of appropriate experience from other members of the Partnership (European Council, 2015). That leads to an assumption that the success of strengthening democratic principles and good governance may be reflected in the success of the self-governance reform and successful decentralization processes of particular country.

As a matter of fact, the article makes an attempt to analyse the first steps of the self-governance reform in Ukraine taken by post-Maidan authorities and follow the outcomes of the cooperation on given matter between the European Union and Ukrainian officials. Particular emphasis is put on the approach toward the self-governance reform in three Ukrainian regions (Rivne, Dnipro, Zaporizzia) and engagement of European expertise on the matter. To achieve the aim stated above, the focus is put on the following aspects:

- the EU-Ukraine cooperation in terms of the EaP policy;
- role of Poland in the context of the European policy on Eastern partnership;

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- differences and similarities in regional approach in western and eastern parts of Ukraine to the engagement of European luminaries in the reforming processes;
- role of different actors and their cooperation on implementation of changes at local and regional levels, etc.

The analysis of named issues aims at answering the question whether the Eastern Partnership efforts on strengthening democracy in Ukraine lead to expected results and whether the Ukrainian reform of self-governance has chances to become a success story.

### **1. Polish-Ukrainian Cooperation in Terms of European Policy for Eastern Partnership**

As already stated before, the Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative of the European Union intends to provide a platform for discussions of a wide range of important issues between the EU and its eastern neighbours. An important aspect is that the project was initiated by Poland and a subsequent proposal was prepared in co-operation with Sweden. It was presented by the foreign ministers of Poland and Sweden at the EU's General Affairs and External Relations Council in Brussels on 26 May 2008. Furthermore, the Eastern Partnership was inaugurated by the European Union in Prague on 7 May 2009 (Runner, 2008).

Overall, the role of Poland in the Eastern Partnership policies on self-governance reform in Ukraine may be regarded as one of the most significant for a number of reasons. First, it is the geographical position of the two states and the good partner relations between official authorities in Kyiv and Warsaw. The close distance between many Ukrainian and Polish regional counterparts make it easier to exchange their experience, organize joint events and engage different participants of the reforming processes in the meetings and discussions.

Second, it is the success of Polish self-governance reform and unanimous declaration of top Ukrainian officials on readiness to implement the self-governance transformation following the example of Polish model of the reform. That could have been easily noticed in political discourse of post-Maidan leaders at the very beginning of their being in office. During his first official visit to Poland, President Petro Poroshenko asserted that Polish experience in decentralization reform was the most relevant for Ukraine and it would be taken as a basis during works of Constitutional Committee in Ukraine (Channel 5, 2014). In his turn, former Speaker of Ukrainian Parliament and current Prime Minister of Ukraine Volodymyr Groysman requested Polish government to provide Ukraine with practical advice on self-governance reform (NBN News, *n.a.*). Similar rhetoric could have been observed in the addresses of former Prime Minister Yatseniuk (Day, 2015).

Finally, it is the position of local self-governments' officials both in Poland and Ukraine and their declared readiness to cooperate on the matter of decentralization. As a matter of fact, the meaning of cooperation between Polish local self-governments and representatives of local and regional authorities in Ukraine was clearly emphasized by the Committee of Regions in its official documentation. The example might be the Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the role of local and regional authorities within the Eastern Partnership published on 22 April 2009. The paper considered the development of local democracy as a central element in cooperation between the European Union and countries from the Eastern Partnership project.

The significance of regions and social meaning of regional authorities' engagement in the Eastern partnership initiative is widely underlined in scientific research on the matter. Observers point that active position of local authorities may lead to growing interest among citizens who would join the process and become active participant of the reforming steps (Taczyńska, 2015). Analysts point to the value of strong and well organized potential of local and regional authorities which could improve efficiency of governance and play key role for successful democratization. In this regard, empirical experience of self-governments (local, regional, state, European and international) cooperating in a decentralized way with partners in Eastern Partnership are considered to be of primary importance.

Simultaneously, there appeared a need to establish a discussion forum in order to receive optimal results and fruitful solutions using diverse experience of a wide range of local actors. Such platform known as Conference of Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership ("CORLEAP") was created in 2011 as the political forum of local and regional authorities from the European Union and the Eastern Partnership countries. CORLEAP is positioned by its initiators as the only EU platform that offers an opportunity to discuss the contribution by cities and regions in the development of the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP, *n.a.*).

It should be particularly emphasized that CORLEAP is considered to be a basis of the Eastern Partnership as far as its regional dimension is concerned. Being created as a result of common efforts of the European Commission and the Committee of the Regions, CORLEAP opened doors for political cooperation between local and regional authorities in the EU and partners from the EaP. Such cooperation would result in the increase of local authorities' impact on regional political strategy development and would strengthen the citizen-official cooperation in partner states that all together would lead to stronger local government (Taczyńska, 2015).

Interestingly, it was presentation of the Vinnytsia Region of Ukraine on 15 September 2011 in the Committee of the Regions that was the first presentation of a region from the partner country in

the Committee within the framework of the “open door policy” suggested in CORLEAP action plan (CORLEAP, *n.d*). In fact, Vinnycia is a city in central part of Ukraine that is famous for its successful development under the leadership of current Ukrainian Prime Minister Volodymyr Groysman as a mayor of the city in years 2006-2014. Moreover, because of his successful stay in mayor office, Groysman became associated with prospective transformation of local self-governments across Ukraine. Being the author of new Concept of Self-Governance Reform and Territorial Authority Organization in Ukraine that was approved by the cabinet of ministers of Ukraine on 1 April 2014 (Yatseniuk, 2014), he, however, did not stay long on a position of Vice Prime Minister of Ukraine for Regional Policy and the Minister of Regional Development, Construction and Housing and Communal Services of Ukraine. Instead, after being elected to Ukrainian parliament, Groysman became as a speaker and then a prime minister.

Currently, the particular attention of Vinnycia authorities is paid to regional cooperation with Poland at the level of voivodship. As an example might serve presentation on the economic forum in Łódź or on seminar organized by the commission for territorial cohesion policy (COTER) entitled “Cooperation of European Regions: Territorial Perspectives”. According to official reports, similar events are considered as an opportunity to learn the experience of Poland concerning such issues as decentralization, strengthening of local self-governance and European integration as well as creation of positive image abroad.

Among other priorities, the 2015 Vynyccia state administration report defines the following:

- development of international cooperation between regions and territorial communities of the region with foreign partners in terms of cross-regional and cross-border cooperation in the sphere of export trade, humanitarian issues and social politics;
- implementation of measures oriented at the improvement of executive authorities activity and the activity of local self-governance as regards practical realization of programme of the European integration of Ukraine;
- promotion of regional image and search for foreign investments into regional economy;
- support for the development of business relations of regional companies with their counterparts abroad (Vinnica State Administration, *n.a.*).

It should be stressed that joint projects undertaken by the authorities of Vinnica region and Polish partners have been mainly concentrated on economic cooperation and deepening relations between the entrepreneurs from partner regions. At the same time, the issue of self-governance was discussed in the context of the project entitled “The Process of the Territorial Local Self-governance

– Importance of Changes for Poland” that is realized by the Fund of Local Democracy Support and Euroregion “Dnister”.

As far as Ukrainian scholars are concerned, they assert that learning from Polish and European experience may be productive for Ukrainian side for a number of reasons. As a matter of fact, interregional cooperation is considered to be beneficial for the regional adaptation to the European standards. New opportunities for the participation in a range of joint programs provide Ukrainian regions with possibility of developing effective institutional component and reaching fruitful results in terms of interregional and cross-border cooperation. Finally, similar cooperation encourages citizens to actively participate in life of their region and implement the European standards of governance on local scale (Buglay, 2013).

In order to present the steps undertaken by the European Commission aimed at speeding the process of transformation prior to the Eastern Partnership Initiative a number of EU efforts should be taken into consideration. The first attempt was made in 1991 when the European Union started its Tacis Programme. The main element of Tacis support was aimed at transferring know-how and expertise to organizations in the partner countries. Additionally, the participation of both governmental and non-governmental organization was welcomed. Furthermore, Tacis was replaced by the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) which introduced such innovative features as:

- cross-border cooperation, which provided ground for joint programs, bringing together regions of Member States and partner countries sharing a common border;
- a Governance Facility which supported creative partners showing the eagerness to reform their regions using good governance strategy;
- the Twinning and the TAIEX instruments that served as a cooperation tool between a public administration in a partner country and the equivalent institution in an EU Member and were aimed at enhancing co-operative activities (European Council, 2015).

From the significant perspective of cross-border cooperation between Poland and Ukraine one should analyse the Programme of Cross-Border Cooperation Poland-Belarus-Ukraine 2007-2013 (PL-BY-UA) realized in terms of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI). The major task of the project was to support cross-border development processes and major beneficiaries were non-government organizations, local and regional authorities, non-profit organizations, public institutions, euroregions, and other institutions which implement non-profit projects consistent with the following Programme priorities:

**Priority 1. Increasing competitiveness of the border area:**

- Measure 1.1. Better conditions for entrepreneurship.
- Measure 1.2. Tourism development.
- Measure 1.3. Improving access to the region.

**Priority 2. Improving the quality of life:**

- Measure 2.1. Natural environment protection in the borderland.
- Measure 2.2. Efficient and secure borders.

**Priority 3. Networking and people-to-people cooperation:**

- Measure 3.1. Regional and local cross-border cooperation capacity building.
- Measure 3.2. Local communities' initiatives.

It was of considerable importance that approved projects might have received up to 90% of eligible cost from the programme sources which budget consisted of 202,9 million EUR , including 186,2 million EUR - EU co-financing (The Center of European Projects, *n.a.*).

Another example of Polish-Ukrainian cooperation on local and regional level might be **Central Europe Cooperating for Success Programme** in 2007-2013. The programme itself covered wider range of issues relating not only to cooperation between Poland and Ukraine. In fact, the initiative encourages cooperation among regions of nine central European countries: Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine. The declared aim was to improve innovation, accessibility and the environment and to enhance the competitiveness and attractiveness of their cities and regions.

The programme defined four priorities for cooperation projects:

- **PRIORITY 1:** Facilitating innovation across Central Europe.
- **PRIORITY 2:** Improving accessibility to, and within, Central Europe.
- **PRIORITY 3:** Using our environment responsibly.
- **PRIORITY 4:** Enhancing competitiveness and attractiveness of cities and regions.
- As for Priority 4, it included the following areas of intervention:
  - developing polycentric settlement structures and territorial cooperation;
  - addressing the territorial effects of demographic and social change;
  - capitalising on cultural resources, to make cities and regions more attractive (The Central Europe Cooperating for Success Programme, *n.a.*).

However, it should be emphasised that Ukrainian side was not included in members' list for the 2014-2020 stage of the programme. Instead, the 2020 perspective covered regions from Croatia.

Speaking about Ukrainian-Polish cooperation on the issue of local and regional competitiveness and cooperation, it comes as obvious that given matter has been among top priorities of every single programme. Some researchers make an attempt to analyse the engagement of Polish self-government units in realization of the Eastern Partnership programme. Skorupska asserts that about 70% of local governments in Poland have had foreign partners in recent years, which was influenced by a number of factors such as size of these units or their geographical location. In favour of the importance of geographical position may serve the fact that at the gmina level international cooperation usually is not among top priorities with the exception for local governments situated in the border regions, where contact with the neighbouring country has become commonplace (Skorupska, 2015, p.12).

In her turn, Taczyńska presents the results of the 2013 Ministry of Administration and Digitalization of Poland poll taking among representatives of local and regional self-government in Poland participating in the Eastern Partnership initiative. As far as issue of the international cooperation is concerned, the scale of cooperation with the Eastern partnership states was on the second position following the cooperation with the EU member states. Interestingly, at the level of voivodship 100% of respondents declared their cooperation with partners from the EaP while cooperation with the EU member states took the second place with 93% of positive answer. As for level of powiats, the balance was practically even, however, in favor of the EaP: **56** respondents stated their cooperation with the EU member states and **58** – with states from EaP. At the same time, at the level of gminas, the cooperation in terms of the European Union was vividly more intensive: **215** respondents versus **174** respondents cooperating with partners from outside European Union (Taczyńska, 2015, pp. 47-49).

Analyzing Polish-Ukrainian interregional cooperation in terms of European Union initiatives toward eastern partners, a group of scholars address the issue of Euroregions that are regarded as an assisting tool of relationship regulations between Poland and its non-EU partners. The matter of Euroregions is topical for Ukraine for a simple reason: 19 out of 25 Ukrainian regions that constitute 77% of Ukrainian state are border regions. Majority of the regions participate or participated in a number of Euroregions with partners from such countries as Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Moldova, Russia, and Belarus. In other words, the partners in terms of cross-border cooperation might be divided into two main categories: EU and non-EU partners.

Scholars see both positive and negative features of euroregions' functioning at present. Among positive features of euroregions' institutions the following are considered to be the most important: 1) a variety of operation areas and directions: from economy to culture; 2) possibility of cooperating with the non-governmental sector in a spontaneous way (Taczyńska, 2015, p. 45); 3) establishment



of direct links between regional and local government bodies assisting in elimination of communist era legacies when there were no relations between two states. (Wolczuk and Wolczuk, 2003, p. 82). Such characteristics made euroregion a very effective tool of activity in border areas of Central-Eastern Europe

As far as negative side of the euroregions' performance are concerned, scholars mainly stress the financial aspect. Lack of proper finance resources becomes an impediment to the concept of euroregions and to the development of Polish-Ukrainian contacts in particular (Wolczuk and Wolczuk, 2003, p. 82). Meanwhile, despite existing financial troubles, there is a considerable interest among representatives of Ukrainian and Polish border regions to participate in common projects. However, another obstacle for the Euroregions is their being outside mainstream national administrative structures that often results in their marginalized position in the project selection process by central governments (Hooper and Klamsch, 2004, p.122). If to summarise a number of problems that impede the process of the euroregions development the following are seen as the crucial ones: lack of financing, insufficient level of the development of cross-border infrastructure, imperfectness of legal framework for cross-border cooperation, uncertainty regarding legal responsibilities of local authorities, significant differences in economic development of partner regions, etc. (Dolotina, 2013, p. 196).

In order to overcome existed problematic areas, a set of recommendation has been presented by analysts of the issue who define such main tasks for further development of Euroregions as: adoption of necessary tools to gradually minimize and eliminate the administrative and legal impediments which restrain the cross-border cooperation; adjustment of Ukrainian legal basis to the international norms and development of legal acts (a strategy for each Euroregion, Custom and Tax Codex improvement, to name a few) regulating the activity of local authorities that are engaged in Euroregions cooperation; or development of complex state programmes of regional cooperation and their funding based on development of financial infrastructure (banks, funds) of Euroregions. Apart from that, the focus of authorities responsible for the creation of favourable basis for effective euroregions should be put on building transport system in accordance with the European standards, creation of cross-border information server, or establishment of monitoring and coordinating sub-councils in European regions (Hordiyenko *et al.*, 2011; Velychko, 2012, p. 134).

## **2. Regional Approach to Decentralization in Context of International Cooperation.**

### **2.1. Brief Overview of Selected Regions**

The May 2015 Riga Eastern Partnership Summit devoted much attention to Ukrainian case and state of Ukrainian reforms as well as provided the direction for further actions. As far as the matter of self-government reform in Ukraine in the 2015 Summit declaration is concerned, the document addresses several points. Participants underline that the Eastern Partnership will continue its commitment to long-term, comprehensive modernization reforms. Particular emphasis was put on multilateral cooperation between various regional partners and role of the Eastern Partnership in the developing closer ties among partners. Finally, the declaration stresses the significance of such cooperation and its promotion at the regional and municipal levels of government as well as citizens' involvement in the reforming processes (European Council, 2015).

In this regard, the article poses a question on political and civil interest in the reforming of particular region and makes an attempt to follow similar and different features of official-citizen cooperation on the matter of European experience implementation in selected regions. Additionally, the aspect of scientific involvement in the debate on decentralization is analysed in reference to participation of regional respected scientific centres. By doing so, one might follow the level of academic engagement in the process of project development in particular region as well as the level of trust and mutual interest in the relationship between theorists and practitioners or the level of motivation and encouragement from the state as far as the scientific-administrative cooperation is considered.

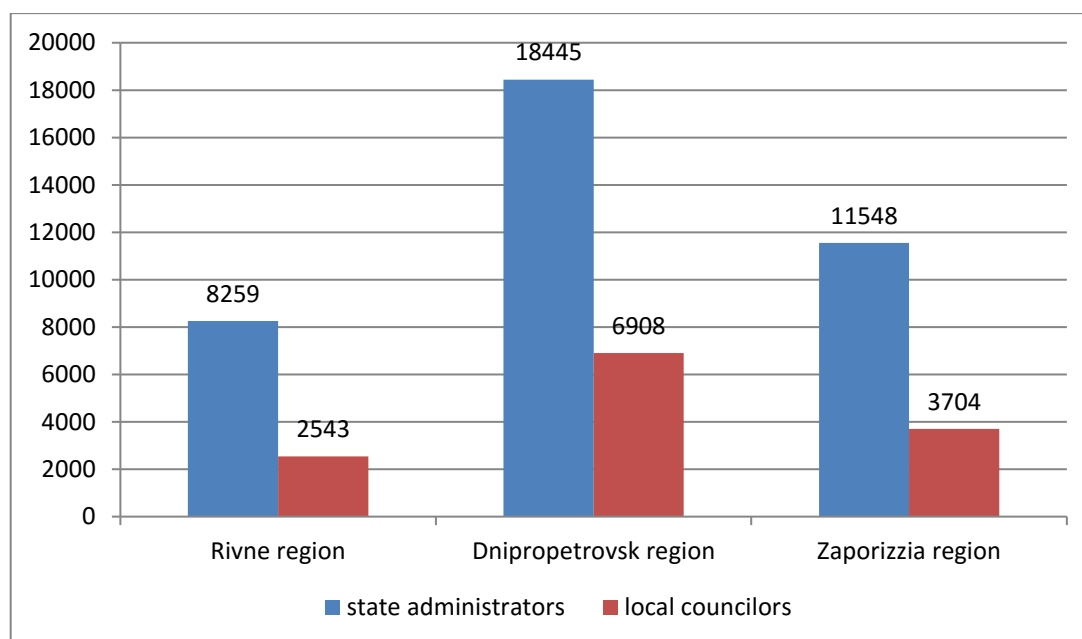
The regions taken into consideration are the following:

- Rivne region (North-west Ukraine).
- Dnipro region (South-east Ukraine).
- Zaporizzia region (South-east Ukraine).

Given selection of regions brings an opportunity to follow the main trends in international cooperation and regional interest in European assistance. As Thurston puts it in his article *Ukraine and the Lethal Hand of History*, main aspects which led to internal division of the country are language, religion, history or cultural orientation. Thurston illustrates the division of Ukrainian society over the values stating that under current situation the key question becomes “*What did your granddad do in the War?*” According to the author, a traveller across Ukraine might notice that from west to east the great heroes become villains (Thurston, 2016). The question remains whether similar division might be observed on self-government reform and decentralization process.

If to compare the amount of local councilors and state administrators in three regions taken under consideration as well as the proportion of local officials in reference to population of particular region, it comes to light that the biggest amount of both administrators and councilors act in Dnipro region while Rivne region has the smallest amount of officials. True, the amount of population in analysed regions is different as well: from 1161.2 thousand in Rivne region to 3276.6 thousand in Dnipro region that takes the first place among all Ukrainian regions. If to speak about the amount of citizens on one official, numbers vary as well. The diagram and table below present respective data in all three regions.

**Figure 1 - The amount of local councilors and state administrators in Ukrainian regions**



Source: Author's representation, based on data from Derzhavna sluzhba v cyfrach, [State Service in Numbers], Kyiv 2015, p. 8, available at: [http://www.center.gov.ua/attachments/article/26/CSF\\_2015\\_UKR.pdf](http://www.center.gov.ua/attachments/article/26/CSF_2015_UKR.pdf).

**Table 1 - Proportion of population and local officials in Ukrainian regions**

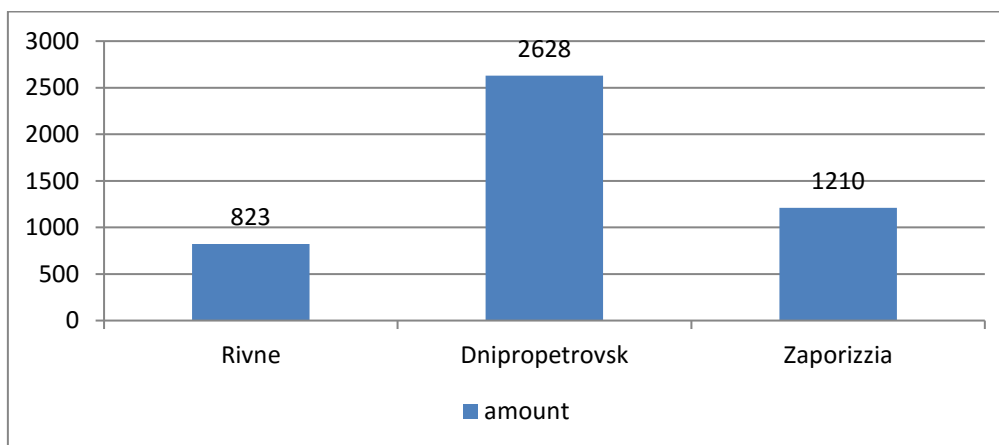
Region	Population (in thousands)	Amount of citizens per one councilor	Amount of citizens per one administrator
<b>Ukraine</b>	<b>42928.9</b>	<b>508</b>	<b>145</b>
Rivne	1161.2	457	141
Dnipro	3276.6	474	178
Zaporizzia	1765.9	477	153

Source: Author's representation, based on data from Derzhavna sluzhba v cyfrach, [State Service in Numbers], Kyiv 2015, p. 8, available at: [http://www.center.gov.ua/attachments/article/26/CSF\\_2015\\_UKR.pdf](http://www.center.gov.ua/attachments/article/26/CSF_2015_UKR.pdf)

Another important feature for comparison of the regions is the amount of civil organizations registered in every area. Traditionally, the biggest amount is in Dnipro while “the smallest” amount

of organizations is registered in Rivne region. However, the numbers in diagram below lead to a question on real activity of the organizations. Among other aspects in this reference, it is of vital importance to follow the trends of cooperation between different organizations in one region as well as between organizations and representatives of local authorities; readiness of organization members to actively participate in joint projects with political and social actors of the region, etc.

**Figure 2 - Amount of Civil Organizations in Selected Regions**



Source: Author's representation, based on data from *Dijalnist gromadskich objednan v Ukraini v 2014 roci. Statystychnyj biuleten*, [Activity of civil associations in Ukraine in 2014. Statistical bulletin], Kyiv 2015, p.40.

## 2.2. International Cooperation and Self-governance Reform

The survey below puts emphasis on international aspect of regional authorities' performance in different parts of Ukraine and simultaneously makes an attempt to follow the peculiar features of international cooperation.

The aim of the analysis is to follow main directions and results of such cooperation and, what is most important, to see what place is given to the issue of decentralization in joint actions and projects. In addition to that, it is made an attempt to conduct comparative analysis of similarities and differences in cooperation patterns and to define major counterparts as regards the common effort to transform Ukrainian system of local governance. Another goal is to analyse the engagement of civil society activists and representatives of local universities in the international projects supervised by local authorities.

## RIVNE REGION

As far as international cooperation of Rivne regional authorities is concerned, on the grounds of agreements and memorandums, the international and interregional relationships are developed with such countries as Poland, Belarus, Croatia or Azerbaijan. However, one of the most active partners is Poland. At present, Rivne regional authorities work on development of two-side interregional cooperation between Rivne regional state administration and Pomorskie voivodship as well as analyse the ways of possible projects with Mazowieckie voivodship in Poland.

Thanks to its geographical position, Rivne region has good potential for the realization of active cross-border cooperation with Polish counterparts. In fact, the administration acts as a beneficiary in the following projects:

- *Cooperation between Self-government of Rivne and Lublin as Element of Trans-border Region Development* – the project is oriented at ground preparation for the sufficient cooperation between the institutions in different spheres of Rivne and Lublin communities with total budget of 320.8 thousand euros.
- *Development of Small and Medium Businesses in Rivne and Lublin* – the aim of the project is enhancement of the competitiveness level of companies – participants. Total budget - 373.7 thousand euros.
- *Investment in Culture. Systemic Steps for the Promotion of Cultural Education* – the project promotes the potential building and the role of civil centres in the development of cultural cooperation. Total budget – 888.5 thousand euros.

As far as other projects on territorial self-government are concerned, an example of good practices might be joint project “*Territorial Self-governance – Export Hit of Poland*” of Rivne regional state administration and Marshal government of Warmia-Mazury voivodship financed by Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland. Particular attention should be paid to study visit “Self-government in Warmia and Mazury” that gave opportunity to local and regional authorities of Rivne region to see the peculiarities of the self-governance processes in Polish region. Another visit “Warmia and Mazury - Social Aspect” was devoted to such issues as the potential of local civic organizations, civil society building and the development of local democracy. Overall, both visits were organized in terms of the project “Support of Self-government and Civic Dimension of Polish Foreign Policy 2015”.

Particular focus is put on the realization of projects in terms of the Programme of Cross-Border Cooperation Poland-Belarus-Ukraine 2007-2013 (PL-BY-UA) realized in terms of the European

Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI). The projects are related to establishment of alternative forms of preschool education in rural communities. Another example is the project Shtetl Routes on objects of Jewish cultural heritage in the cross-border tourism. A number of other initiatives are concentrated on eco-tourism development in different parts of the region.

Such brief analysis of international cooperation of Rivne state administration in recent years makes it possible to conclude that there has been a strong tendency of deepening cooperation ties with international partners (Poland in particular) on a wide range of issues like education, business development or increase of civil awareness on the matter of European Union. At the same time, until recently the issue of decentralization was not among the top priorities in the agenda of the administrative officials that can be explained by the general policy course of previous central authorities in Kyiv.

The situation has changed significantly with the adoption of new course on reforming of the self-governance sector. More importantly, the European partners were eager to support Ukrainian attempts in implementation of EU experience on the matter. However, the existed projects mainly concentrate on increasing competences and skills of regional officials and do not take into account the engagement of scientific circles and public activists in the reforming process.

## **DNIPRO REGION**

The analysis of international cooperation of Dnipro region brings to some extent similar results as in Rivne region. It is possible to notice a wide range of agreements and memorandums between the regional authorities in Dnipro and their partners in other countries such as Poland, Germany, Belarus, Georgia or others.

As regards the issue of decentralization, a number of projects took place in 2006-2008 when representatives of local and regional authorities had opportunity to visit Poland and analyse the results of administrative reform, peculiarities of territorial communities' performance, principles of cooperation between executive authorities and local self-governments of Polish gminas and voivodships. The upshot of the visits was the deliberation of a range of proposals on changes to Ukrainian laws. The proposals were sent to Verkhovna Rada, President of Ukraine and Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine.

As for further steps on bilateral cooperation on decentralization issue, they were observed in 2014-2015 when the first actions towards the implementation of self-governance reform were adopted by the Ukrainian Parliament. Visits of heads of village councils of Dnipro region to Lublin region of

Poland were organized in order to show Ukrainian local authorities the practical aspects of Polish decentralization model that was said to be a sample model for Ukraine (Novyy Format, 2015).

A peculiar feature of Dnipro region in comparison to other selected regions of Ukraine is its participation in the Swiss-Ukrainian Decentralization Support Programme DESPRO. As for DESPRO Project mission, it concentrates on optimization of the management system and effective local development in Ukraine, which, in turn, creates favourable conditions for democratic processes and services at the community level (DESPRO (Swiss-Ukrainian project “Decentralization Support in Ukraine”, *n.a.*).

The outcome of Dnipro regional council participation in the DESPRO project has become the initiative to launch in cooperation with National Academy of State Management the project entitled “School of Local Self-government” for organizing study courses for authorities of different levels, local councilors and civil activists. The aim of the project is to prepare local authorities and social actors for the implementation of the decentralization reform. The 2015 pilot project predicted three months online course for 1200 students. Among subjects were the following: new regional policy, formation of effective communities and their participation in territorial management, budget decentralization, mechanisms of maintenance of sustainable local development under conditions of decentralization (*Unian*, 2015). An important aspect is that the students were supposed to discuss the newly adopted laws and decisions on the self-governance reform in Ukraine.

## **ZAPORIZZIA REGION**

Zaporizzia that is a neighbouring region of Dnipro is taken into consideration in order to follow the similarities and differences between two regions which are being closed not only geographically but mentally as well.

The development of European integration is declared to be topical for new authorities of regional administration. However, the geographical position determines the priority directions of cooperation with the European and international partners. As a result of military tensions on the borders of Zaporizzia region, the accents were put on actions aimed at supporting people who moved to Zaporizzia because of war. The region has taken part in GIZ project on establishment of supportive programme for communities hosting internally displaced citizens (GIZ Project “Reform of municipal services in Eastern Ukraine”, *n.a.*). The project covers such regions as Zaporizzia, Dnipro and Charkiv.

However, Zaporizzia became a pilot region for the project entitled “Special Initiative Ukraine” planned for 2015-2018. The aim of the project is to improve the quality of services provided by the state institutions and civic society groups to internally displaced citizens. The choice might be explained by the fact that at the beginning of 2016, the region hosted 113 thousand of displaced citizens and there appeared need to adjust the services of particular area to new circumstances (Zaporizzia State Administration, *n.a.*).

Additionally, the cooperation with German partners resulted in study visits of joint groups consisted of representatives of regional council and administration to Saxony-Anhalt land in Germany. The aim of the visit was to learn the German experience of decentralization and to establish cooperation in the economic, social and cultural spheres. Meanwhile, Poland remains to be a traditional partner for Ukrainian regions in realization of the reforming processes. The cooperation takes place in the form of study visits similar to the one described above. The example might be the study trip to Silesia voivodship under the title *The Experience of Self-government: Foundations, History, Authority and Actions. Polish experience for Ukraine.*

Significant aspect in Ukrainian-Polish cooperation is the engagement of local actors to the discussion forum and study tours in order to introduce them to the outcomes of the reform. In this regard, participants from Zaporizzia region had a chance to interact with Polish counterparts in terms of the project *Decentralization Today* (Terra Humana, *n.a.*). Regional authorities started their cooperation with Polish JUT BE&ED Corporation working on creating applications for EU financial support and developing projects that could be attractive for foreign investors and could lead to positive changes of regional image on the international arena (Jutbeed, *n.a.*).

Another significant initiative on self-government in the region is cooperation on the decentralization issue between local self-governments of Zaporizzia region and Federation of Canadian municipalities. It is important to notice that Zaporizzia became one of four Ukrainian regions selected for the participation in the PLEDDG Project that is supported by the Canadian Government and aimed at strengthening of municipal sector in Ukraine, implementation of effective democratic management and increase of Ukrainian cities’ abilities to efficiently develop democratic techniques of governing; support the decentralization processes and the process of integrating development planning at local, regional and state level (Partnership for Local Economic Development and Democratic Governance Project [PLEDDG], *n.a.*).



### 2.3. Summary of Regional International Cooperation on Self-governance

The brief overview of the regional accents of international cooperation vividly shows that the direction toward European integration and implementation of democratic principles is the official course in all the three regions. At the same time, the major partner in regional cooperation on self-governance is Poland. Apart from close and effective relationship with Poland, a number of Ukrainian regions happened to be engaged into international projects on decentralization and self-governance reform organized and conducted by European and world democracies with strong traditions of civic society and its participation in political life of their own country. The important aspect is that the mentioned programmes and initiatives are long-term oriented and provide educational opportunities for the Ukrainian policy makers.

### 3. Officials, NGOs and Scholars – Outcomes and Perspectives for Cooperation

Furthermore, the outcomes of the international project initiated by Pultusk Academy of Humanities is presented in the context of universities' role in the educational programmes for local policy makers and effectiveness of similar steps in different parts of Ukraine. The rationale of the project lies in the opportunity to analyse the outcomes of Ukrainian research in the decentralization reform and to engage Pultusk Academy and partner universities in Ukraine into the professional discussion process on self-governance reform.

On the one hand, local political actors may share their vision on the reform and peculiarities of particular territory or region while on the other, theorists from Academia may advice on successful practices and mistakes made in Poland and other EU countries. Additionally, regional NGOs and activists should be encouraged and welcomed to participate in the discussion. Given triangle cooperation prioritize the possibility of equal access to the discussion process and the right to advice for every single participant. Therefore, the learning process includes participation of lecturers from different countries to enrich the discussion by sharing diverse views on particular topic, opportunity to work in multinational groups and hear the position of European practitioners in the field of self-governance.

Meantime, the article focuses on the outcomes of round table discussion on self-governance reform in Ukraine and Polish experience on the matter under the title: **Civil Partners of Local Authorities**. The round table took place in all the three regions: Rivne, Zaporizzia and Dnipro. The coordinator invited representatives from respected Polish non-governmental organizations to

participate and share their experience on fruitful cooperation with the local authorities. The focuses of the round tables were the following:

**Focus on NGOs role in the reforming processes**

- state of awareness of the proposed governmental proposal on planned action toward self-governance and decentralization reform in Ukraine;
- state of cooperation between NGOs and local administrations;
- role of media in the functioning of NGOs and cooperation with the administration;
- level of public trust to local NGOs.

**Focus on International Assistance to Ukrainian NGOs**

- exchange of good working practices of NGOs in Poland and the European Union;
- NGOs as actor in building civil society in the European Union states;
- legal basis for the functioning of NGOs in the European Union states.

**Focus on Polish-Ukrainian cooperation on reform matter**

- possibilities of cooperation between Polish and Ukrainian NGOs;
- the search for possibilities of joint application by Polish and Ukrainian NGOs for programmes co-financed by the European Union.

**Focus on Civil Support for the Reform**

- civic expectations toward reform;
- major arguments for and against the reform;
- availability of resources for the reform implementation on local scale;
- education initiatives on raising civic awareness of the self-governance and essence of the proposed concept.

**Round Table Results**

Interestingly enough, the discussions brought somewhat unexpected outcomes. Rivne, Dnipro and Zaporizzia demonstrated strong interest and motivation from the side of regional authorities in further cooperation with the Polish colleagues. However, the reaction from non-governmental organization was not that unanimous. Dnipro and Zaporizzia expressed enthusiasm and readiness to cooperate in the following areas:

- knowledge and availability of legal basis for the formation and functioning of NGOs in the European Union and chances for its adaptation in Ukraine;
- exchange of experiences, good practices, the functioning of NGOs in the European Union;

- possibilities of cooperation with Polish / EU NGOs;
- knowledge of the mechanisms related to the financing of NGOs in Poland and the EU;
- joint projects in the field of civil society development in Ukraine;
- implementation of Polish experience in the policy of engaging senior citizens into the life of particular community, i.e. establishment of the University of the Third Age etc.

At the same time, the observations of discussions between the Ukrainian NGOs and the local authorities or between different generations of NGOs in Ukraine who blame each other for the lack of independence illustrate that those non-governmental organizations who were active for longer time accuse their younger counterparts of having lack of experience and professional standards while NGOs that were established during or after the Revolution of Dignity criticize older colleagues for collaboration with former political regime of Yanukoych and willingness to cooperate with representatives of former team.

As for round table in Rivne, it brought contrasting results in reference to the position of regional NGOs. In fact, all regional NGOs received invitation from regional state administration and brochure with the description of all Polish non-governmental organizations participating in the event. However, only **one** non-governmental organization appeared at the meeting – Rivne Department of Committee of Voters of Ukraine, the organization whose representatives are members of the reformatory team on the self-governance reform in Ukraine. However, the representative of the organization did not show much interest in the discussion on Polish experience of the self-governance reform. The similar situation came as a surprise for the coordinator and partners in Rivne regions and posed a question of possible reasons for such lack of interest among non-governmental organizations in Rivne. As a result of analysis conducted with the participation of Rivne regional state administration, among possible reasons the following were underlined:

- low level of trust to local authorities;
- small amount of NGOs acting in the field of self-governance development;
- lack of information on active citizens and NGOs in the Rivne regional state administration;
- lack of interest in the activity of NGOs from the side of local administrations.

Particularly, it should be stressed that the organizer of the event in Rivne was the regional state administration while in Dnipro and Zaporizzia, the event was hosted by partner universities. That might be another proof for tensions in relationships between local state administrators and representatives of NGOs and serve as an argument in favour of the engagement of universities in the process of reformatory changes.

## Conclusions

The analysis of the EU-Ukrainian cooperation trends on the matter of self-governance and implementation of European good practices in Ukrainian reforming attempts clearly illustrate the significance of the Eastern Partnership Initiatives for reforming processes in Ukraine and their impact on positive dynamics of Ukrainian transformation. At the same time, the analysis of the issue often brings controversial outcomes that only prove the topicality of the research on the Eastern Partnership policy and the initiative itself. Additionally, the survey of cooperation tradition between representatives of local authorities and representatives of local Academia in Ukrainian regions leads to various outcomes that define the areas of prospective joint projects.

On the one hand, the proposal in terms of the Eastern Partnership is wide and gives opportunity to provide local and regional decision-makers with necessary skills and tools to successfully perform in the transformation process of their regions. However, when it comes to cooperation between local actors, they illustrate rather weak eagerness to productively cooperate on a range of issues from both sides. In fact, there might be drawn a parallel with Joseph S. Nye statement on the gap between theorists and practitioners in the field of international relations. To remind, Nye asserts that Academia and policymaking circles are inherently different, but in recent years the gap between the two was growing wider. Therefore, the scholar recommends that Academia and the government take a series of measures to enhance cooperation and understanding, to promote two-way interaction between the two. What is more, scholars should also increase pragmatic and close contact with the government (Nye, 2008, p. 651).

The very same recommendations might be applicable for those officials who are implementing the self-governance reform in Ukraine and those academic luminaries who specialize in the field of decentralization and reforms overall. In their turn, the European partners and donors should conduct careful monitoring over the performance of Ukrainian counterparts for the success of Eastern Partnership initiatives to be achieved.

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