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## Transformation of the Ideology of Decentralization in Ukraine in the Conditions of a Full-scale Russian Invasion

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## **Transformation of the ideology of decentralization in Ukraine in the conditions of a full-scale russian invasion**

### *The concept of the ideology of decentralization*

The ideology of decentralization is a set of ideas that regulate the relationship between central and local authorities due to the transfer of most powers to the local level. The ideology of decentralization occupies a unique position in the structure of ideology because it simultaneously manifests all the main components and varieties of the main ideologies of a larger scale (political, economic, cultural, etc.).

In other words, the ideology of decentralization has its political, economic, legal, social and cultural components, which until recently were not taken into account by many of its analysts. Moreover, in the ideology of decentralization, political and economic aspects took a dominant position, less often - legal, sometimes - social and almost never - cultural components. More specifically, the ideology of decentralization primarily includes ideologically based ideas from political ideology regarding the ratio of central and local authorities, determining the primacy of national or local political priorities, etc. Economic ideology justifies the selection of priorities for the economic development of local (territorial) communities, the main directions of their economic policy in accordance with the political model. Legal ideology supplies normative acts and legislative initiatives to the ideology of decentralization, defines the rights and obligations of local/territorial communities, etc. Social ideology offers such communities ways to take into account the social needs of local residents, including measures to provide for persons with disabilities, etc. Culturally oriented ideology offers a number of measures regarding the selection of a certain educational model at the preschool and primary level, as well as compulsory secondary education, the

expediency of opening special secondary and higher education institutions, the most necessary for the training of specialists specifically for the needs of the community.

Thus, the ideology of decentralization occupies an important and ever-increasing importance both in the world as a whole and in our country. But the present requires not only and not so much various ideological ideas about certain components of social reality, not only instructions and attitudes, but also an understanding of how ideologies influence and determine the real behavior of broad masses of people, social groups and individual individuals.

### *Implementation of decentralization in Ukraine*

Decentralization is one of the forms of democratic governance, which allows to expand the powers of local self-government, to promote the involvement of the population in public administration, to activate market and financial mechanisms as an effective strategy for management, which will ensure the effective development of territorial communities either in peacetime or in wartime.

The decentralization reform, which began to be implemented in Ukraine in 2014 with the adoption of the Concept of Local Self-Government Reform at the legislative level, is one of the forms of democratic governance. After local elections in 2020, as of today, there are 1,469 communities in Ukraine, formed by merging villages, towns, and cities.

The legally established goal of decentralization is the optimization of regional development through quick response to citizens' requests, solving local problems. This is due to the fact that all necessary services (medical, educational, social, administrative, etc.) are at the basic level - in the community. Since the beginning of the decentralization reform, the administrative and territorial system has changed, that is, the number of districts has decreased (from 490 to 136), the names of some settlements, streets, etc. have changed.

The main aspects of the Concept of Local Self-Government Reform relate to:

1. Establishing a justified territorial basis for the activities of local self-government bodies and executive authorities
2. Creation of appropriate material, financial and organizational conditions to ensure that local self-government bodies exercise their own and delegated powers.
3. Demarcation of powers in the system of local self-government bodies and executive bodies at different levels of the administrative-territorial system according to the principle of subsidiarity.
4. Separation of powers between executive authorities and local self-government bodies on the basis of decentralization of power
5. Introduction of a mechanism of state control over the conformity of decisions of local self-government bodies with the Constitution and laws of Ukraine and the quality of public services provided to the population.
6. Involvement of the population in making administrative decisions, promoting the development of forms of direct people's power.
7. Improvement of the mechanism of coordination of activities of local executive bodies.

So, the beginning of the practical implementation of the ideology of decentralization in Ukraine was laid in accordance with European standards. The subjects of policy-making in the country demonstrated the political will to implement the ideology of decentralization. At the first stage of the reform (2014-2019), mainly legislative initiatives related to the tax and financial aspect of communities, association of communities were implemented. At the second stage of the decentralization reform (2020-2021), the main focus was on the ability of communities to provide quality services in various sectors in accordance with strategic planning and the needs of residents. The implementation of the ideas of decentralization at the second stage of the reform was aimed at the formation of the territorial community as the main subject of ensuring the development of the corresponding territory and the formation of

representation in the newly formed communities with a new administrative and territorial structure.

*Decentralization in the conditions of a full-scale russian invasion*

With the beginning of the full-scale russian invasion to Ukraine, Ukrainian communities faced new challenges. Challenges related to the war necessitated a rethinking of regional policy. The transformation of this ideology took place in the context of convergence of decentralization and centralization and they cannot be considered as opposite concepts of the management organization at the local level. The ideology of decentralization and communities plays an important role in the fight against the aggressor.

The research, which was conducted by the semi-structured in-depth interview method among heads of Ukrainian communities, experts made it possible to outline the following aspects of decentralization in the period of war:

- 1) Strengthening the power of heads of communities. In May 2022, a draft law on amendments to the Law of Ukraine "On the Legal Regime of Martial Law" regarding the functioning of local self-government during the period of martial law was adopted. Local officials received more responsibility and resources; some decisions can be made by the heads of communities individually, and communities can implement new functions for them to provide supplies for the Armed Forces of Ukraine and accommodate internally displaced persons, as well as continue providing basic services to the population, even in those communities that have been heavily affected by the war.
- 2) The management structure of the regions has changed. Military administrations were established in the regions as temporary bodies during the martial law period, which coordinate martial law measures on the ground, budget distribution processes, provision of humanitarian aid, restoration of necessary infrastructure, and provision of basic services in territories affected by hostilities. Military

administrations are also formed where local self-government bodies are unable to perform the functions assigned to them – to manage property, approve and control the budget and programmes, as well as to solve other urgent issues of local importance. The proposal to create a military administration for a specific settlement (community) is submitted by the head of the regional military administration, who is aware of all the nuances in the region or the military command. Importantly the law “On the legal regime of martial law” does not prohibit the appointment of a village, settlement, or city head as the head of the military administration of a settlement. However, the functions of the head of the community in normal times and the head of the military administration in wartime are significantly different. The authority of the head is much broader than that of the head of the community. The head of the military administration is, in fact, the head of the community, council and executive committee.

- 3) The horizontal management line has strengthened. Intermunicipal cooperation between communities became more active, and community associations became more institutionally capable. Communities jointly solve problems of local importance: infrastructure restoration, provision of services to internally displaced persons, provision of materials for the restoration of affected areas, etc.
- 4) International cooperation has strengthened. This concerns the direct cooperation of Ukrainian cities and towns with sister cities. Communication takes place directly between cities without the involvement of central authorities.
- 5) Creation and staffing of resistance forces in communities. This concerns the formation of territorial defense, volunteer battalions. These communities were formed to protect cities, towns, and villages, and in the first days of the invasion of the Russian Federation, together with the forces of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, they prevented the enemy from advancing further through the territory of Ukraine.

- 6) Prompt creation of volunteer headquarters. Volunteers provide all necessary assistance to both civilians and military personnel. They were active in providing territorial defense with everything necessary: food, medical supplies, body armor, etc. In addition, volunteers are involved in the delivery of humanitarian aid with their vehicles to war zones.
- 7) Provision of necessary services to internally displaced people. According to official data of the Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine, about 7 million people are internally displaced persons. Only in October 2022, about 18,000 Ukrainians were evacuated from dangerous regions, temporarily occupied and de-occupied territories. Evacuation rates are especially high on the eve of winter. Mandatory evacuation continues in some regions, in particular the Donetsk region. In total, about 1.1 million civilians were evacuated from this territory. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, more than 4 million Ukrainians are in European countries for temporary protection . In this regard, processes of displacement of people affect both host communities and communities from which people leave. For the host communities, the challenge is primarily related to the fact that it is necessary to provide services not only to the residents of the communities, but also to internally displaced persons, which requires additional resources (financial, human, infrastructural) and coordination.

Challenges related to the war necessitated a rethinking of regional policy. Measures to change regional policy are carried out both at the national and local levels. The issue of functional typology of territories has been settled at the legislative level. With the amendments to the Law of Ukraine "On the Basics of State Regional Policy", 4 types of territories have been allocated, according to which the restoration of de-occupied territories will take place: areas of recovery, areas with special conditions for development, areas of sustainable development, poles of economic growth. The law separately stipulates the importance of the logical integrity of the entire "strategic triad"

- local strategies must be developed taking into account the priorities and goals of the state and relevant regional strategies. And today, the issues of return of temporarily occupied territories, restoration of Ukrainian statehood in de-occupied territories, return of Ukrainians who were forcibly left abroad, and ensuring the viability of communities remain relevant for Ukrainian society. The economic component, the influx of investors and external resources, the employment of the population, the availability of the necessary infrastructure, and the functioning of business also depend on this. And it is the capable communities in cooperation with the state authorities that will be able to continue the implementation of the ideology of decentralization and the restoration of the territories affected by russian aggression.