



WEAKNESSES AND SUCCESSES OF THE UKRAINIAN ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM

ŚLABOŚCI I SUKCESY UKRAIŃSKIEJ REFORMY ADMINISTRACYJNEJ

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Abstract

Ukraine is one of the last post-communist countries where implementation of administrative reforms has started in practice. The aim of the study is to analyze the local-level results of the main stage of the administrative reform in Ukraine which was carried out in 2014–2020. The analysis concerns Ukrainian local government units equivalent to LAU 1 and LAU 2. When collecting data, the so-called triangulation of sources was applied. The SWOT method was used in the analysis, and Neshkova and Konstadinova's publication (2012) constitutes the reference point. The decentralization of power and finance has led to the creation of amalgamated territorial communities (ATCs), better able to deliver public services. Thus, in this respect, the effects of the administrative reform in Ukraine so far have been similar to those diagnosed by Neshkova and Konstadinova (2012) in other post-communist countries. Admittedly, corruption in Ukraine has decreased, but only slightly. Therefore, Neshkova and Konstadinova's (2012) assumption about the positive impact of administrative reforms on reducing corruption in post-communist countries was not confirmed in Ukraine. Referring to the detailed results of the SWOT analysis, the greatest strengths of this reform included the partial success of financial decentral-

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ization and the establishment of the State Regional Development Fund (SRDF) to support the development of local governments. The quality of public services has also improved. However, there were also weaknesses in the form of still too small funds received by the new ATCs and irregularities in the functioning of the SRDF. International support for this reform and the intensification of the activities of non-governmental organizations were considered to be the greatest opportunities. The still existing strongest threat of an endogenous nature is (despite its decline) the level of corruption, and the exogenous one is a threat from Russia. In addition, the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic can be seen at the end of the implementation of the reform.

Keywords: administrative reform, Ukraine, hromada, SWOT.

Streszczenie

Ukraina jest jednym z ostatnich krajów postkomunistycznych, w którym reformy administracyjne zaczęto w praktyce realizować. Celem opracowania jest analiza rezultatów na szczeblu lokalnym głównego etapu reformy administracyjnej na Ukrainie, który zrealizowano w latach 2014–2020. Przedmiotem analizy są ukraińskie jednostki samorządu terytorialnego stanowiące odpowiednik LAU 1 i LAU 2. Przy gromadzeniu danych posłużono się tzw. triangulacją źródeł. W analizie wykorzystano metodę SWOT, a punkt odniesienia stanowi publikacja Neshkovej i Konstadinovej (2012). Decentralizacja władzy i finansów doprowadziła do powstania połączonych społeczności terytorialnych (ATC), w większym stopniu zdolnych do świadczenia usług publicznych. Pod tym względem efekty reformy administracyjnej na Ukrainie są więc podobne do tych, które zdiagnozowały Neshkova i Konstadinova (2012) w innych krajach postkomunistycznych. Wprawdzie korupcja na Ukrainie zmniejszyła się, ale tylko nieznacznie. Dlatego też nie potwierdziło się przypuszczenie Neshkovej i Konstadinovej (2012) o pozytywnym wpływie reform administracyjnych na ograniczenie korupcji w krajach postkomunistycznych. Odnosząc się do szczegółowych wyników analizy SWOT, za największe mocne strony tej reformy uznano częściowy sukces finansowej decentralizacji oraz powołanie Państwowego Funduszu Rozwoju Regionalnego (SRDF) mającego wspierać rozwój samorządów. Poprawiono także jakość usług publicznych. Do słabych stron należy zaliczyć nadal zbyt małe środki finansowe otrzymywane przez nowe ATCs oraz nieprawidłowości w funkcjonowaniu SRDF. Za największe szanse uznano wsparcie międzynarodowe dla tej reformy oraz intensyfikację działalności organizacji pozarządowych. Najsilniejszym zagrożeniem o charakterze wewnętrznym jest nadal wysoki (mimo jego spadku) poziom korupcji, a zewnętrznym – zagrożenie ze strony Rosji. Ponadto widać negatywny wpływ pandemii COVID-19 w końcówce wdrażania reformy.

Słowa kluczowe: reforma administracyjna, Ukraina, hromada, SWOT.

INTRODUCTION

After 1989, a whole series of processes resulting from political transformation took place in post-communist countries. Administrative reform belongs to such

processes. According to Neshkova and Konstadinova (2012), reforms of the public sector after the collapse of communism were conducted with a view to consolidating the democratic process and enhancing economic development. Comparing the moment of initiation and the depth of transformation processes in post-communist countries (Kostecki et al. (eds.), 2000; Rose, 2009; Norkus, 2012; Petrov, van Elsuwege (eds.), 2018) with the moment of the start and depth of administrative reforms in these countries (Nunberg et al., 1999; Meyer-Sahling, 2004; Bouckaert, 2009; Bouckaert et al., 2011; Liebert et al., 2013; Nemeč, 2014), one can see a clear link between reforms of the administration and the systemic reforms. This means that those countries which started their systemic reforms first and with the greatest determination were the first to implement reforms of their administration and with the best results.

Post-communist countries can be divided into two large groups depending on the beginning and the intensity of administrative reforms. The first one includes those post-communist countries that are now members of the European Union. Administrative reforms were initiated there already in the 1990s and were carried out with the great support of external specialists, in particular from the European Union. The vast majority of these reforms ended positively (Vanags, Vilka, 2003; Camyar, 2010; Nemeč, Špaček (eds.), 2017). In the other group, there are countries of the former USSR (without the Baltic Assembly countries), countries of the former Yugoslavia (without Croatia and Slovenia) and Albania, where reforms have not been implemented, have been partially implemented or real reforms have been implemented with long delay. As a result, their positive impact on the citizens' quality of life is relatively small (Bogus, Pavelco, 2006; Perlman, Gleason, 2007; Baimyrzaeva, 2011; Džinić, 2011; Rinnert, 2015; Busygina et al., 2018). In this context, it was considered important to analyze the Ukrainian public administration reform, actually initiated only in 2014 and completed in 2020. However, one should be aware that at present, in connection with the Russian aggression initiated on 24 February 2022, the positive effects of this reform are limited.

The current administrative reform in Ukraine mainly aims at changing the administrative structure of the country at the local level and at increasing the competences and financial independence of newly formed local governments (Okunovska et al., 2020). The implementation of the principles of the functioning of administration consistent with the New Public Management or good governance is of secondary importance in this reform. Hence, this study is part of the research on the impact of territorial-administrative reorganizations on the capacity to deliver services at the local level or on local democracy (see: Swianiewicz (ed.), 2010; Soukopova et al., 2014; Steiner et al., 2016; Ebinger et al., 2019; Swianiewicz, 2021).

The main purpose of the article is to identify the successes and failures of the Ukrainian reform of public administration. Yet, special attention is drawn to veri-

fying the two positive effects of reforms identified by Neshkova and Konstadinova (2012). They analyzed the effects of administrative reforms in 1996–2007 in Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Macedonia, Romania and Slovakia. Conclusions from that study were considered as a valid reference point for the 2014–2020 period in Ukraine, as the Ukrainian state has long delays in introducing actual reforms (Aslund, 2012; Dabrowski, 2014; Hartwell, 2016). Based on the conducted research, Neshkova and Konstadinova (2012) stated that (1) in post-communist countries, the existence of reforms of the civil service systematically correlates with lower levels of corruption in the public sector, and (2) more competent and predictable bureaucracies should be created to facilitate doing business in these countries (the results indicate a sharp and steady growth of the FDI after the reforms).

It seems that now is a good time for first assessments of the administrative reform initiated in 2014, as the local elections at the end of 2020 can be treated as a symbolic date of completing the reform.

HISTORY OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM IN UKRAINE

According to Aslund (2016), after Ukraine gained independence, there were three periods when reforms were attempted, but their level was insufficient, and only 2015 was a breakthrough year (see: Peacock, Corder, 2016). This opinion can also be fully applied to the administrative reform attempts, but the current reform had already been initiated in 2014. Earlier attempts at this reform had been unsuccessful, and external aid had been poorly used (cf. Kovryga, Nickel, 2006; Leitch, 2017). This is also confirmed by Garnec' et al. (2013), according to whom, 2010–2012 can be characterized as a departure from the previously developed reform projects and their actual rejection. It was also visible in the societal reluctance to these reforms (Krušel'nicka et al., 2013).

The continuing excessive centralization of powers and the low financial independence of local governments resulted in another attempt at a reform in 2014 (Skripnuk, 2015). In spring 2014, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine approved the concept of the reform of local self-government and the organization of power (Concept, 2014), which assumed the delegation of a large number of powers to local self-government. Initially, it was assumed that the implementation of the reform would require changes to the Constitution, and even an appropriate draft was prepared¹. Unfortunately, political conditions prevented the adoption of the proposed amendments to the Constitution. Therefore, the reform was implemented within the framework of the current Constitution.

Since then, the administrative reform has been under way, and its most visible effect is the decentralization of power and finances. This is done mainly through

¹ It was even approved by the Venice Commission experts (see: Venice Commission, 2015).

changes in the administrative structure at the local level and increasing the competences and financial independence of newly established local governments.

In 2020, the creation of amalgamated territorial communities² (ATCs) and new districts³ was completed. 1,470 ATCs were created instead of 11,518 old communities (in 2013) and 136 new raions instead of 490 (in 2013). Local elections were held on October 25, 2020 (in accordance with the new electoral code adopted in 2019). This moment can be considered a symbolic end to the main stage of the administrative reform in Ukraine. However, the health care system is still being reformed⁴ (its reform is linked to the administrative reform).

Laying the foundations for an effective fight against corruption was recognized as a separate area of the administrative reform in Ukraine. In 2014, the act “On the Prevention of Corruption” (LAW-1700, 2014) was adopted. A number of new anti-corruption bodies have been created since 2015: the National Agency on Corruption Prevention, the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine, the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor’s Office, Ukraine’s State Bureau of Investigation, Asset Recovery and Management Agency, the High Anti-Corruption Court of Ukraine. In early 2021, the Bureau of Economic Security of Ukraine was created, which works with the Security Service of Ukraine and the tax police. It investigates corruption offences and organized crime in the field of economic crimes. Again, international institutions provide great aid to build an effective system of combating all forms of corruption in public life in Ukraine (cf. EBRD, 2020). It should be clearly emphasized that the fight against corruption in Ukraine is of key importance for gaining the society’s trust in public institutions and for sustained economic growth.

The implemented administrative reform did not change the division into first level of subdivision⁵. There are still 24 oblasts (regions), one autonomous republic (Crimea) and two cities with a special status (Kyiv, Sevastopol). Yet, one should keep in mind that the Ukrainian authorities have no control over the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, Sevastopol and part of the Donetsk Oblast and the Luhansk Oblast (occupied by Russians in 2014) plus territories occupied by Russians in the aftermath of their launching a war with Ukraine in 2022.

² These are local government units that can be included in level LAU 2. The term *hromada* is also used, which is a direct translation from Ukrainian.

³ These are local government units that can be included in level LAU 1. The term *raion* is also used, which is a direct translation from Ukrainian.

⁴ These reforms consist of a healthcare funding reform, implementing new financial tools at the specialized and tertiary care levels (Government portal, 2020).

⁵ These are local government units that can be included in level NUTS-2, while the Autonomous Republic of Crimea together with Sevastopol possibly to level NUTS-2 and at the same time NUTS-1.

DATA AND METHODS

This study used the desk research method (Czarniawska, 2014). When collecting data, the method of triangulation was applied, as it is commonly used in qualitative studies (Carter et al., 2014). From among the types of triangulation distinguished by Patton (1999), triangulation of sources was applied.

Firstly, the results of a survey on citizens' expectations and their assessment of the administrative reform were used. These were studies conducted in 2014–2020 by three Ukrainian institutions: the Swiss-Ukrainian Decentralization Support Project DESPRO, Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation, and the Civil Network "OPORA". Secondly, the statistical data on changes in the economic development of local governments (and the whole of Ukraine) were obtained from two Ukrainian sources: the Ministry for Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine (Minregion) and the information portal of the decentralization reform in Ukraine "Decentralization". Thirdly, the international data provided by the European Business Association (EBA), UNCTAD United Nations, the World Bank and Transparency International were used.

The SWOT method was applied in the analysis. It is a widely used method in social sciences (Helms, Nixon, 2010), also for analyses of public administration in post-communist countries (Guță, 2015). It was also used in relation to other reforms carried out in Ukraine (Kryzyna, Kovalenko, 2020).

SWOT ANALYSIS

The analysis of the administrative reform in Ukraine was conducted with a breakdown into individual SWOT components, i.e.: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. To facilitate the perception of the results, each subsection contains results and discussion concerning that component.

Strengths

Increasing financial resources (as a result of financial decentralization) enables new local governments to implement projects supporting business and to develop public–private partnerships. As a result of financial decentralization, revenues to local budgets have increased. To assess their growth more objectively, inflation processes are taken into account. In particular, the analysis of inflows to local budgets has taken inflation into account, and they were converted into the purchasing power of the hryvnia in 2014 (Fig. 1).

Even taking inflation into account, it can be seen that real own incomes of new ATCs in the period of 2014–2019 increased by as much as 61.5%. Although in 2020 they did decrease slightly, this was an unusual year due to the COVID-19

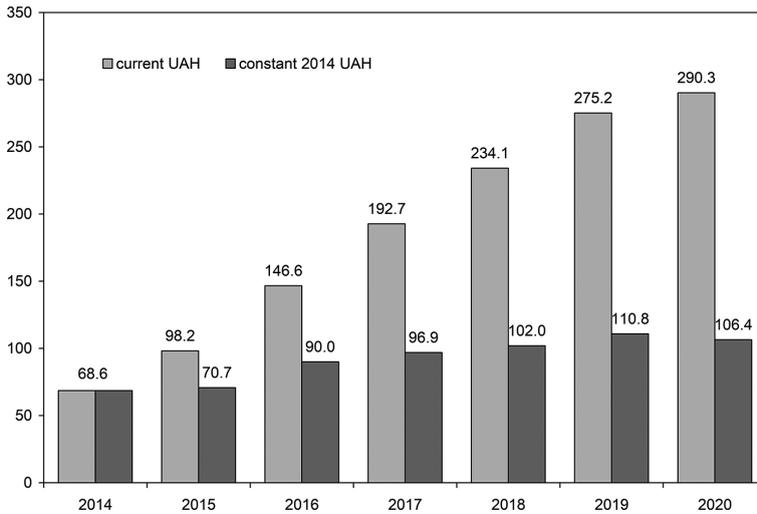


Fig. 1. Own income of communities, in billion hryvnia (UAH)

Source: own study based on: Decentralizaciâ (2021b), Ukrstat (2021).

pandemic. Moreover, there was a decrease in the share of subsidies received by local budgets from the state budget (Fig. 2). Therefore, one can see that ATCs have become more independent, less reliant on central authorities. However, Wright and Slukhai (2021) point out that these incomes are still too small for the units to be able to conduct all activities, especially the infrastructural ones.

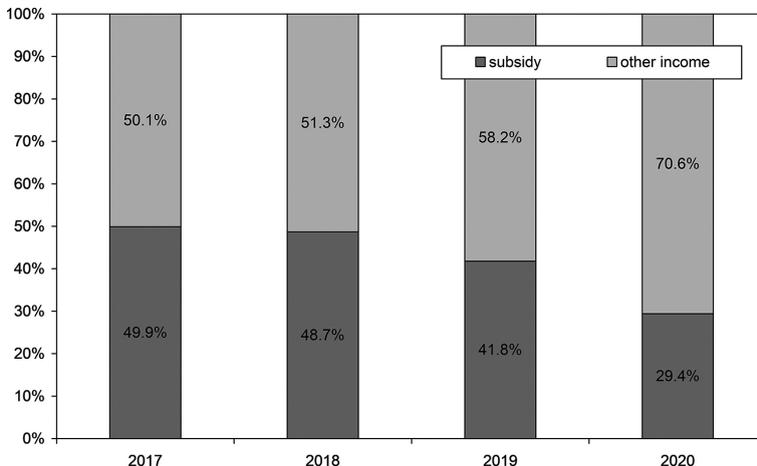


Fig. 2. The share of subsidies received by local budgets from the state in 2017–2020, % in the total income

Source: Decentralizaciâ (2021a).

At the end of 2014, the State Regional Development Fund (SRDF) was established, whose funds (not less than 1% of the predicted revenues of the central budget) should be used for the implementation of investment programs and regional and local development projects. They were also used to encourage cooperation and voluntary association of ‘old’ hromadas into new ACTs (Miniregion, 2014). Thanks to this fund, it has finally become possible to implement programs meeting the priorities set out in the State Strategy of Regional Development (Strategy, 2014, 2020). The nominal amount of SRDF funds was steadily growing until 2019. However, taking the GDP deflator into account, an increase was only in 2018 and 2019 (Fig. 3). The 2020 decrease, relative to 2019, is the result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In April 2020, a decision was made to transfer 2.6 billion hryvnia out of 7.5 billion hryvnia in SRDF (i.e. as much as 34.7% of the entire budget) to counteract the effects of this pandemic (Ministry for..., 2020).

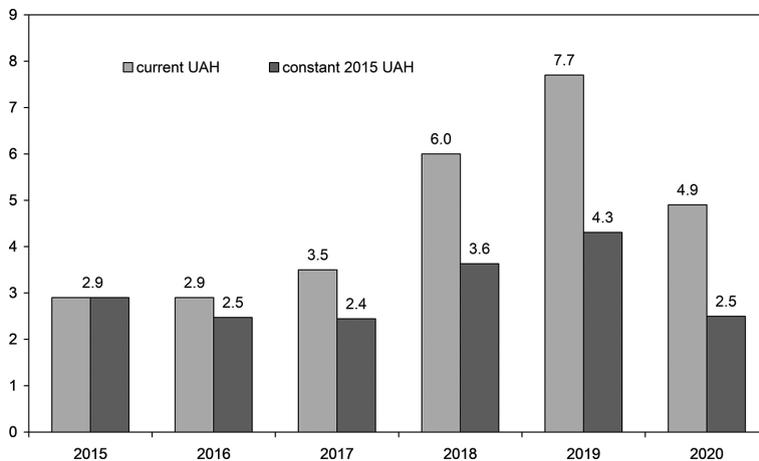


Fig. 3. The volume of the State Regional Development Fund, in billion hryvnia (UAH)

Source: own study based on: Ševčenko, Bahur (2020), Ukrstat (2021).

From the citizens’ perspective, the quality of public services offered by the local government is an important criterion for assessing its functioning. With this in view, the existing ‘old’ Administrative Service Centers (ASCs) have been reformed in Ukraine. Firstly, the existing ‘old’ ASCs have been transformed into ‘new’ ASCs, whose direct result was the consolidation of districts from 490 to 136. Secondly, the competences of the ‘new’ ASCs have been extended and, at the same time, some administrative procedures, including those related to running a business, have been simplified. Citizens and entrepreneurs can obtain documents in one place, whereas previously they had to do it in several places. Indirectly, this also reduces corruption-generating situations (International Alert, 2017).

ATCs have also been granted the right to dispose of land owned by local governments. In 2020, a new type of urban planning documentation regarding spatial development was introduced—Comprehensive spatial development plan for the territory of a territorial community. It is developed and implemented in order to ensure sustainable development of a territorial community and to take into account the concept of integrated development of a territorial community (LAW-711, 2020). This indirectly contributes to increasing the attractiveness of local governments to potential investors, which translates into an improvement in the investment attractiveness of Ukraine. In the Doing Business ranking, Ukraine advanced from the 112th place in 2014 (World Bank, 2014) to the 64th place in 2020 (World Bank, 2020).

Weaknesses

During the implementation of the reform, there was a risk of large diversification of local governments into poorer and richer ones. Increased financing for new ATCs was accompanied by low funding for the ‘old’ communities that merged and transformed into new ATCs with delay (International Alert, 2017). Also, the introduced decentralization of municipal financing did not eliminate the problem of an uneven pace of their development (Storonâns’ka, 2020).

According to the assumptions of the reform, decisions on the allocation of the State Regional Development Fund (SRDF) funds and subsidies for socio-economic development should be taken in consistence with a formula ensuring objectivity, and not as a result of local governments’ lobbying in the central government. In theory, this should eliminate a use of funds allocated to local governments for political purposes by the central government, e.g. during elections. It should also minimize the potential for corruption related to the allocation of financial resources (International Alert, 2017). However, a study conducted by the OPORA organization points to the lack of transparency in the process of allocating financial resources. Among others, this results in allocating funds for activities not necessarily most needed by local communities. It also prevents the full use of government subsidies to achieve a sustainable pro-development effect (OPORA, 2018). In 2019, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine obtained the right (as an exception to the Budget Code) to spend 50% of the SRDF funds on its own priorities. This means that the government, bypassing the procedures set out in the administrative reform of 2014, may direct these funds towards goals defined by itself (OPORA, 2019). Experts of the National Institute for Strategic Studies (Ševčenko, Bahur, 2020) list the following problematic issues related to the distribution and use of the SRDF funds:

- lack of cohesion during the procedures for planning and allocating resources;

- unpredictability of the amount of funds received from the SRDF (due to the lifting of the actual dependence of the SRDF volume on the central budget);
- partly applying some political criteria to select the winning projects;
- partial consultations with the inhabitants of local government units.

There is also a constant high risk of corruption in local governments. This is especially important in the context of the unfinished land reform and the transfer of some purchases to the level of new local governments (Sipko, Kiričenko, 2019). A survey conducted by Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation in 2016 (Sidorčuk, 2016) shows that some leaders of the newly formed ATCs feel like ‘local princes’. This is confirmed by research from 2020, which shows that 15.7% of the ATCs inhabitants fear the local authorities’ actions over which there will be no social control (Nagrbec’ka, 2020). Naturally, such threats should be counteracted. On the one hand, an effective system of control by the central government should be introduced. The projected institution of prefects is to serve this purpose. On the other hand, control should be exercised by civil society, e.g. through NGOs.

Unfortunately, the weakness of the civic impact of social capital (Sereda, 2014) and large emigration from the country (Piontkiv’ska et al., 2018) constitute important endogenous barriers to the development of ATCs. This problem has dramatically intensified due to Russia’s attack on Ukraine⁶. Another problem is the limited employment opportunities in ATC-affiliated institutions to enable them to properly fulfil their tasks (Storonâns’ka et al., 2019).

Opportunities

International cooperation is a great support for the administrative reform in Ukraine. In 2014–2020, 25 international projects of technical assistance in the field of decentralization were implemented in Ukraine (Decentralization: International Cooperation, 2021). The aid was mainly related to:

- creating technical conditions for the development of online public services;
- ensuring the transparency of online public services;
- raising the ethos of ASCs employees;
- simplifying the applied procedures.

After 2014, thanks to the enactment of the Law of Ukraine on Cooperation of Territorial Communities (LAW-1508, 2014), the possibilities of implementing collaborative projects between ASCs increased. An opportunity was created for several ASCs to participate in one project. This allows achieving a synergistic effect. According to the website of the Ministry for Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine, by the end of February 2021, about 650 such agreements

⁶ According to the UNHCR data (2022) as of 6th July 2022, 5.7 mln individual refugees from Ukraine have been recorded across Europe, including 3.6 mln refugees from Ukraine registered for Temporary Protection or similar national protection schemes in Europe.

were concluded (Miniregion, 2021). Most of the agreements between ASCs concern the following areas:

- implementation of joint projects;
- administrative service of the population;
- garbage collection and solid waste management;
- common fire protection.

Additional opportunities for long-term economic growth appear thanks to the development of the economic activity of local governments, a reduction in tax avoidance by residents and entrepreneurs, and rationalization of local government spending (Harus, Nivievskiy, 2020). This is also facilitated by possibilities of developing the community identity, including the local communities' own symbols that reflect their historical and cultural features and traditions (Tkačuk, Natalenko, 2020).

An end to the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine would provide additional opportunities and resources that could be used for reforms. At the same time, this conflict has united pro-Ukrainian society (Halling, Stewart, 2015). Ukraine's revolution of dignity (Shveda, Park, 2016), the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine (Kuzio, 2020), the aforementioned international technical assistance from other countries and the implementation of administrative reform have led to the intensification of activities of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The main trends in their development include (Ėvdokimova, Vitkovic'ka 2018):

- an increase in the total number of NGOs;
- a large increase in the number of organizations dealing with solving the problems of soldiers, internally displaced persons or, in general, citizens affected by the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine;
- an increase in funding for NGOs, mainly due to support from international donors.

The development and an increase in NGO activity has a positive effect on the administrative reform, because an active society is a partner in pro-development activities and, simultaneously, a controller of the local government authorities' actions. The latter is especially important in the context of the still high level of corruption in Ukraine (Vilpišauskas et al., 2021). Unfortunately, Russia's attack on Ukraine in 2022 forced the NGO activity to be redirected to neutralize the negative consequences of the war and to the Armed Forces of Ukraine and the Territorial Defence Forces.

Threats

Corruption has long been perceived in Ukraine as a problem and a threat to its development (Karklins, 2005). Figure 4 shows changes in the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI). Evidently, in 2014–2020 there was a trend to improve the situation,

although it was weak. In addition, in 2019 there was a deterioration, which resulted from: (1) discrepancies between the declarations and the real actions of institutions set up to fight corruption, (2) improperly conducted investigations into the harassment and murder of public activists (Saakov, 2020).

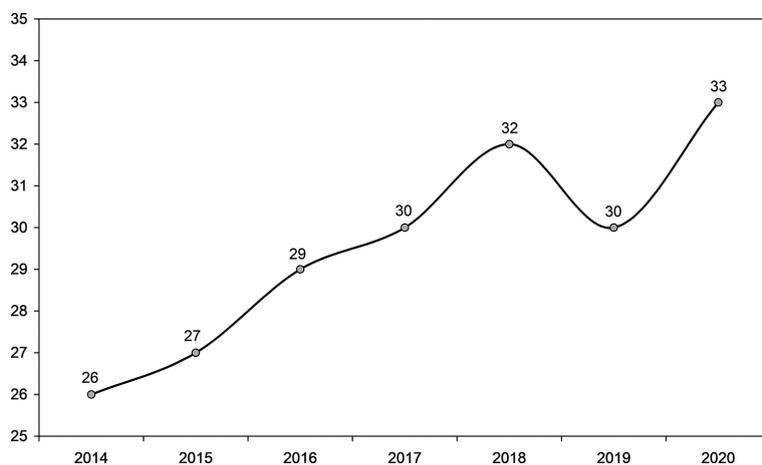


Fig. 4. Dynamics of the Corruption Perceptions Index in Ukraine

Source: Transparency International (2020).

One should remember that the CPI only shows the perception of corruption in the public sector, not corruption in general. This index does not include the so-called “domestic corruption” that occurs in hospitals, schools, colleges etc. The research conducted in 2020 (Nagrbec’ka, 2020) shows that among the expectations related to the administrative reform, the most respondents (57.6%) indicated limiting the corruption.

The results of surveys conducted among experts indicate a deterioration in the investment climate in Ukraine in 2019–2020. 94% of the respondents (i.e. over 100 managers of the largest international and Ukrainian companies) believe that the weak judicial system is one of the reasons for Ukraine’s low investment attractiveness (EBA, 2020). Of course, strong separatism in the east of the country (Katchanovski, 2016) and the related Joint Forces Operation⁷ is also of great importance (UACRISIS, 2018). After the Revolution of Dignity (Euromaidan revolution) from 2014, the volume of foreign direct investment in Ukraine (FDI) has not yet reached the level of 2010–2012 (Fig. 5). However, in 2020, a decline in the FDI occurred worldwide by 42% (UNCTAD 2021) as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

⁷ Until 2018, it was called the Anti-Terrorist Operation in the eastern region of Ukraine.

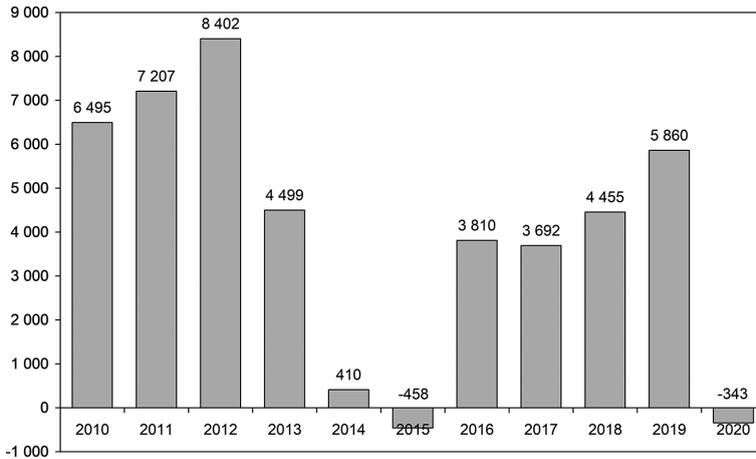


Fig. 5. Foreign direct investment in Ukraine, million dollars

Source: Mìnfìn (2020).

The lack of a system of adequate supervision and control over the legality of local governments' actions may adversely affect the results of the decentralization reform. Therefore, on the one hand, there are demands to establish the institution of a prefect, who should supervise local government in Ukraine in the future (Radcuk, 2021). On the other hand, there are opinions about the “threat to independence and the autonomy of local self-government, interference in matters of local importance, and thus the actual subordination of local self-government to the will of the state apparatus” (Boldirèv, Čubar', 2020, p. 18). This issue requires delicate and thoughtful actions in order not to lead to anarchy on the one hand, and not to distort the idea of creating and implementing an effective, decentralized system of self-government administration on the other.

Certain threats to the reform are also associated with local elections. Firstly, there is a danger of using national and ethnic differences to mobilize the electorate (International Alert, 2017). Secondly, the administrative reform, including local elections, cannot be carried out in areas beyond the control of the Ukrainian authorities. But also on the Ukrainian side, near the areas covered by the Joint Forces Operation, specific forms of military–civil administrations arise (Voronov, 2018). Therefore, the continuing armed conflict in eastern Ukraine increases the threat to the administrative reform. In addition, this conflict causes significant economic losses. A comparative analysis of the effects of interstate and civil armed conflicts in the years 1990–2014 showed that, during a conflict, the GDP per capita in a conflict-participating country could drop by over 60% (Točonov, Naumova, 2018). In Ukraine, a decline in the GDP (in USD per capita) in the first two years of the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine amounted to 47.5% (Baronin, 2017). According to Kasperovič's calculations (2018), the annual decline in the

Table 1. Change in the Gross Domestic Product deflator in Ukraine in 2013–2020

Year	Change in GDP deflator, %
2012	7.8
2013	4.3
2014	15.9
2015	38.9
2016	17.3
2017	22.1
2018	15.4
2019	8.2
2020	9.8

Source: Ukrstat (2021).

GDP in dollars was 26.7% in 2014 and 31.8% in 2015. Table 1 shows that in the first years (2014–2018) of the armed conflict there was an increase in inflation.

Annual defense spending from the Ukrainian state budget continues to grow. For example, in 2017, it was UAH 64.5 billion, and for 2020 the draft of the state budget already provided for UAH 116.2 billion (Batamanûk-Zelins'ka et al., 2020). This is essential, as shown by the escalation of tensions on the part of Russia in April 2021 (Williams, Emmott, 2021) and in December 2021.

As a result, funds that could be allocated, among others, to improve the functioning of ATCs and to develop civil society must be spent on defense.

The COVID-19 pandemic is also a major threat. From the outbreak of the disease to the end of May 2021, almost 2.2 million people were officially confirmed as infected, while in slightly more than 0.5 million cases, COVID-19 was recognized as a direct or indirect cause of death (MOZ, 2021). The threat is exacerbated by the high reluctance to vaccinate. According to a survey conducted by the Razumkov Center in March 2021 (Razumkov Centr, 2021), as many as 51.5% of the respondents stated that they did not intend to vaccinate against the coronavirus.

The transfer of 2.6 billion hryvnia in 2020 from the SRDF to fight this pandemic has already been mentioned. As in other countries, the restrictions resulting from the fight against the pandemic complicated the holding of local elections (Rejting, 2020). Furthermore, the pandemic caused additional difficulties in reforming the health care system (Bakhnivskyi, Ignashchuk, 2020; Government portal, 2020). Additionally, there has been a decline in the level of public trust in the government (International Center for Policy Studies, 2020), which also indirectly affects the level of trust in its activities related to the administrative reform.

CONCLUSIONS

Referring to the conclusions of Neshkova and Konstadinova (2012) it was found that the decentralization of power and finances has led to the creation of ATCs. They can help provide better public services (including business support) and develop infrastructure. In this respect, the effects of the administrative reform in Ukraine to date are similar to those diagnosed by Neshkova and Konstadinova (2012) in other post-communist countries. Yet, on the other hand, corruption re-

mains at a high level, although the Corruption Perceptions Index indicates a slow improvement in this respect (Transparency International, 2020). According to most respondents in Ukraine-wide polls, fighting against corruption still remains a top priority in the administrative reform (Nagrbec'ka, 2020). Hence Neshkova and Konstadinova's conclusion (2012) about the positive impact of administrative reforms on reducing corruption is yet to be confirmed in the case of Ukraine.

Referring directly to the SWOT analysis results, it was found that financial decentralization was partially successful, because in the period of 2014–2020, own income of the analyzed local governments increased more than 1.5 times. This is accompanied by the share of subsidies received by local budgets from the state budget (up to 29.4% in 2020). Therefore, the new ATCs became more independent. However, their income was still too small to be able to conduct infrastructural investments. The quality of public services has also improved, while the potential fostering of corruption during procedures decreased, and they became more attractive for investment. On the other hand, the residents' fears of the broad competences granted to local authorities and the lack of social control over their activities are quite visible (in 2020, this was feared by 15.7% of the survey residents of ATCs). The establishment of the SRDF, which is to support the development of local governments, should also be considered a success. However, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, its budget decreased in 2020. The weakness of the SRDF is also that since 2019 the government has been able to allocate 50% of its resources to the implementation of its own priorities—thus reducing the transparency in the process of allocating financial resources.

International cooperation is a great support for the administrative reform in Ukraine. In 2014–2020, 25 international projects of technical assistance in the field of decentralization were implemented in Ukraine. Opportunities for the development of new ACTs have also increased thanks to legal changes which allow implementation of one project by several ACTs. The administrative reform and international support also resulted in the development and an increase in NGO activity. Obviously, there are also threats. Corruption remains a major problem in Ukraine. While the CPI increased from 26 to 33 in the period of 2014–2020, it is still too low. Likewise, the deterioration of the investment climate and the weak inflow of FDI, which did not reach the level before the revolution of 2014 (e.g. it was 5.9 billion dollars in 2019, while in 2012 it was 8.4 billion dollars) also poses a threat to the administrative reform. The armed conflict in the east of the country, which has been ongoing since 2014, was also an important factor negatively affecting the analyzed administrative reform. It caused not only a decline in Ukraine's GDP (it amounted to 47.5% in the first two years of this conflict), but also an increase in inflation (the highest amounting to 38.9% in 2015) and the allocation of significant financial resources to defense (e.g. in 2017 it was 64.5 billion UAH). In the final phase of the reform, the COVID-19 pandemic also became

a threat to its success. In addition to the difficulties in the functioning of local administration, it also caused significant financial losses (e.g. in 2020, 2.6 billion UAH were transferred from the SRDF to fight the pandemic).

However, the attack of Russia on Ukraine launched in 2022 is the greatest threat to the reform discussed here. At the moment, we do not know how it will end. Yet, its destructive effect on the functioning of ATC is substantial: from the lack of financial resources, through the physical destruction of their infrastructure and disorganization of work (through killing people or forcing them to flee) and ending with *de facto* dissolving them (in areas occupied by the Russian Federation).

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