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Europeanization and the Regions. The Case of the UK and Poland

Summary

The aim of this text is to answer the question to what extent European integration influenced the creation and functioning of the regions in two countries: United Kingdom and Poland. The hypothesis is, based on model of different sources of regional power by A. Bourne, that in both countries the EU impact strengthened regional powers. European integration is shown as one of the factors triggering decentralization reforms in both countries. A pro-regional shift in national politics is explained as a sign of Europeanization of administrative structures and political priorities. There is evidence that European integration empowered regions in the UK and Poland. Sub-national authorities received new competencies, especially regarding regional policy implementation, and can use new channels of participation in the formulation of EU policy. Even if central governments remain to be gate-keepers between regional authorities and the EU, the regional profile has been boosted.

KEYWORDS

region, regional power, europeanization, devolution, Poland, United Kingdom

EUROPEIZACJA REGIONÓW NA PRZYKŁADZIE
WIELKIEJ BRYTANII I POLSKI

Streszczenie

Celem niniejszego tekstu jest próba odpowiedzi na pytanie, do jakiego stopnia proces integracji europejskiej wpłynął na pozycję regionów w systemach politycznych w dwóch wybranych krajach: Polsce i Wielkiej Brytanii. W tekście przywołano model ilustrujący różne źródła siły regionów, opracowany przez A. Bourne. W świetle tego modelu integracja europejska ukazana jest jako jeden z czynników sprzyjających decentralizacji i wzmocnienia siły regionów. Analiza poszczególnych aspektów potencjału regionów pozwala na stwierdzenie, że europeizacja spowodowała przekazanie nowych kompetencji władzom regionów i umożliwiła im wykorzystanie nowych kanałów oddziaływania na formułowanie polityki regionalnej, tym samym wzmacniając znaczenie regionalnych struktur władzy zarówno w Polsce, jak i Wielkiej Brytanii.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE

region, potencjał regionalny, europeizacja, dewolucja, Polska, Wielka Brytania

INTRODUCTION

It is agreed that there is no single model of regional governance in the European Union (EU) – since it is a sovereignty issue of the Member States, the EU does not impose any institutional model, putting emphasis in regional policy on process and outcome¹. Therefore, forms of regionalization differ from administrative reform, which leads to decentralization of public administration (Polish case) to

¹ G. Sasse, *How Deep is the Wider Europe: The Europeanization of Sub-National Governance in Central and Eastern Europe*, Workshop: Implications of enlargement for the rule of law and constitutionalism in post-communist legal orders, EUI, Florence, 28-29 November 2003, p. 2.

federalism, whereas devolution is a solution somewhere in the middle, with a dominant nation state and federal – style autonomy rights (British case)².

The EU leaves the Member States freedom to choose the institutional form of regionalization and the central government seems to be the most important actor in this process. The aim of this text is to answer the question to what extent European integration influenced the creation and functioning of the regions³ in two countries: the United Kingdom and Poland. On the basis of a model of different sources of regional power by Angela K. Bourne, the hypothesis is that in both countries the EU impact strengthened regional powers. European integration is shown as one of the factors triggering decentralization reforms in both countries. A pro-regional shift in national politics is explained as a sign of Europeanization of administrative structures and political priorities⁴. A comparison of the two countries is presented to show similarities and differences in the impact of European integration on different sources of regional power.

EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AND THE CREATION OF REGIONAL STRUCTURES

For the sake of clarity, there is a need to shed light on existing regional structures in both countries. In Poland, the first attempt towards decentralization – independent of the influence of European

2 R. Sturm, J. Dieringer, *The Europeanization of Regions in Eastern and Western Europe: Theoretical Perspectives*, „Regional & Federal Studies”, 15:3, 2005, p. 282-283.

3 The region is understood a *system of institutions, social and economic relations and actions, related with a particular territorial, political, functional space*; definition after: M. Keating, *Les régions constituent-elles un niveau de gouvernement en Europe?*, [in:] P. Le Galès, Ch. Lequesne, *Les paradoxes des régions en Europe*, Paris, La Découverte, 1997, p. 19-20.

4 Europeanization can be understood as *incremental process re-orienting the direction and shape of politics to the degree that EC political and economic dynamics become part of the organizational logic of national politics*; after: R. Ladrech, *Europeanization of domestic politics and institutions: the case of France*, „Journal of Common Market Studies”, 32 (1), 1994, p. 69.

Communities – was undertaken in 1990, when local units of territorial self-governments (communes) were created. This was only the first stage of the reform since the EU membership implied a need for stronger self-governance structures. After a long debate, the reform of state administration entered into force on 1 January 1999, establishing 16 new provinces, 373 counties and 2489 communes⁵.

In the UK, in response to growing nationalist tendencies, devolution was brought to the political agenda by the minority Labour government in the 1970s, but it failed in referendums. After 20 years, the Labour's Party government launched a constitutional reform, this time approved in referendums in Wales and Scotland. Devolved institutions included legislatures in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales and executives in the first two cases. The British model is described as asymmetrical regionalism due to the lack of devolution in England.

In Poland, like in other post-communist countries, regionalization was pushed mainly by national policy makers with a mere contribution from ethnic groups or civil society organizations⁶. It can be regarded as endogenous development towards democracy, debated since the 1980s, also in other post-communist countries regionalization, and it became a salient issue within the context of EU accession⁷. On the other hand, Poland also experienced adaptational pressures regarding the EU conditionality criteria⁸. Chapter 21 of the accession negotiations, titled '*Regional Policy and Co-ordination of Structural Instruments*', required „Member States to create an 'appropriate legal

5 M. Czernielewska, Ch. Paraskevopoulos, J. Szlachta, *The regionalization process in Poland: an example of 'Shallow' Europeanization?*, „Regional & Federal Studies”, 14:3, 2004, p. 467-468.

6 J.A. Yoder, *Leading the Way to Regionalization in Post-Communist Europe: An Examination of the Process and Outcomes of Regional Reform in Poland*, „East European Politics and Societies”, 2007, 21, p. 425.

7 G. Sasse, *How Deep is the Wider Europe: The Europeanization of Sub-National Governance in Central and Eastern Europe*, Workshop: Implications of enlargement for the rule of law and constitutionalism in post-communist legal orders, EUI, Florence, 28-29 November 2003, p. 28.

8 M. Czernielewska, Ch. Paraskevopoulos, J. Szlachta, *The regionalization process in Poland: an example of 'Shallow' Europeanization?*, „Regional & Federal Studies”, 14:3, 2004, p. 465-466.

framework' allowing for the implementation of specific provisions, an approved 'territorial organization' based on NUTS classifications, with a programming and administrative capacity and sound financial and budgetary management"⁹. Nevertheless, the perspective of „EU membership influenced the form and timing of the reform, but it was a reinforcement of an existing trend rather than a trigger for change"¹⁰.

In the UK, regionalization was mainly a product of movements from below, not related with the process of European integration. It was supposed to be a solution for domestic problems – nationalist and separatist sentiment in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland¹¹. The impact of the EU, mainly through the cohesion policy, is modest. Even after the 1988 structural funds reform, introducing the partnership principle, central government still plays a role of a gate-keeper in the relations between the Commission and local authorities¹². As Ian Bache and Rachel Jones states: „There was no evidence that the EC structural policy had caused anything but the most superficial change in domestic territorial relations"¹³.

On the other hand, the administrative geography of the United Kingdom is based on the system of the Nomenclature of Units for Territorial Statistics (NUTS) introduced across the European Union for statistical purposes¹⁴. The UK is then divided into 37 NUTS 2 regions which act as basic units for the application of EU regional

9 G. Sasse, *How Deep is the Wider Europe: The Europeanization of Sub- National Governance in Central and Eastern Europe*, Workshop: Implications of enlargement for the rule of law and constitutionalism in post-communist legal orders, EUI, Florence, 28-29 November 2003, p. 5.

10 Ibidem, p. 16.

11 A. Jassem, *Wielka Brytania a Wspólnoty Europejskie: aspekty ustrojowo-polityczne*, „Studia Europejskie”, 1/2003, p. 73.

12 I. Bache, R. Jones, *Has EU regional policy empowered the regions? A study of Spain and the United Kingdom*, „Regional and Federal Studies”, 10/2000, p. 10.

13 Ibidem, p. 16.

14 Conf. REGULATION (EC) No 1059/2003 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 26 May 2003 on the establishment of a common classification of territorial units for statistics (NUTS), „Official Journal of the European Union” L 154/1, 21.6.2003.

policies¹⁵. In England, where decentralization was more constrained, Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) were set up under the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998 (instead of devolved assemblies in other regions). RDAs were designed as strategic drivers of regional economic development in their region, being responsible e.g. for promoting business efficiency, investment, competitiveness, employment and sustainable development. They performed a key role in the administration of European Funds, managing European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and socio-economic elements of the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE), as well as co-financing elements of European Social Fund (ESF) programmes (with Government Offices still in charge of ESF management)¹⁶. The Conservative – Liberal Coalition in power since May 2010 announced a reform of sub-national development scheme which would lead to closing of RDAs by the end of May 2012. Nine RDAs will be replaced by around 35 Local Enterprise Partnerships and this triggers skepticism and reasonable doubts considering difficulties in managing of spatial particularities by the Whitehall¹⁷.

EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AND REGIONAL POWER

The following section is focused on the impact of the European integration on different sources of regional power¹⁸, applying the model created by A. Bourne.

Firstly, legal and constitutional resources should be taken into account. The EU institutional bias, privileging central governments

15 For more details on UK administrative geography please consult: Office for National Statistics: <<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/prodcom/annual--pra34-to-pra92--/pra36631-product-sales-and-trade--miscellaneous-stationer-s-goods/nomenclature-of-units-for-territorial-statistics.html>>.

16 For more information please consult: <http://www.englandsrdas.com/>.

17 L. Pugalis, *The regional lacuna: a preliminary map of the transition from Regional Development Agencies to Local Economic Partnerships*, „Regions: The Newsletter of the Regional Studies Association”, Spring 2011, Issue 281, p. 6-7.,

18 Regional power signifies *region's ability to influence decisions in its favour or its ability to control or escape the control of political actors at other territorial levels*; definition after: A. Bourne, *The Impact of European Integration on Regional Power*, „Journal of Common Market Studies”, 41:4, 2003, p. 598.

and inducing the transfer of competencies to the EU level, is said to work against regions¹⁹. For the Polish regions, as for other new Member States, the EU accession had an ambiguous impact. EU membership facilitated the creation of regional administrative structures but at the same time the role of new regional authorities was often undermined by the centralized nature of the accession process itself and – within the regional policy – a preference for the centre given by the Commission in the interest of greater efficiency²⁰. As Laszlo Bruszt states, „paradoxically, the administration of Structural Funds, which were designed to upgrade regional capacities, became factors of re-centralization”²¹. That is why some authors claim that regionalization in Poland is the example of „shallow” regionalization which is strongly linked to the institutional weakness of the sub-national administrations, explained below. As for the UK, numerous competences, devolved in 1999 to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, had been already transferred to the EU level. There was therefore no substantial transfer of policy responsibilities to the EU level so the devolved executives did not perceive the EU policy making as a threat to their own competencies²².

As for legal – administrative resources following A. Bourne, the transfer of EU-related administrative responsibilities and resources to the regions is analysed. In Poland, the pro-partnership approach to administering of EU structural funds has empowered the regions, granting them new responsibilities, and boosted the political authority and legitimacy of new units²³. They play a role in

19 Ibidem, p. 600.

20 M. Baun, D. Marek, *Regional Policy and Decentralization in the Czech Republic*, „Regional and Federal Studies”, 16/2006, p. 409-410.

21 L. Bruszt, *Multi-Level Governance – The Eastern Versions. Emerging Patterns of Regional Developmental. Governance in the New Member States*, „EUI Working Papers”, Florence, SPS 2007/13, p. 8.

22 R. Palmer, *European Integration and Intra-State Relations in Germany and the United Kingdom*, [in:] *The EU and territorial politics within member states: conflict or co-operation?*, A. K. Bourne (ed.), Leiden, Brill, 2004, p. 67-68.

23 G. Sasse, *How Deep is the Wider Europe: The Europeanization of Sub-National Governance in Central and Eastern Europe*, Workshop: Implications of enlargement for the rule of law and constitutionalism in post-communist legal orders, EUI, Florence, 28-29 November 2003, p. 25.

regional economic development by the submission of regional development plans to a medium-term National Development Plan²⁴. Nevertheless, for the period 2004-2006, EU funding was negotiated between the European Commission and the Polish central government and was associated in a majority with the spending of national ministries²⁵. Central level remains dominant for the 2007-2013 planning period with its control over 60-70% of financial aid²⁶. This reflects the Commission's re-centralization tendency, mentioned above, and is fairly understandable if we take into account the volume of structural funding and the lack of experience of new levels of sub-national government. The reform of regional policy after 2013 includes introducing a governance system engaging regional and local levels of administration to a greater extent²⁷.

In the UK, as it was mentioned, the introduction of partnership principle has not changed a lot in the way of implementing structural funds. Sub-national partners are indeed involved in the preparation of Single Programming Documents and in the evaluation of the programmes but the partnership remains superficial, since the programmes are run centrally as before the introduction of partnership principle²⁸. Nevertheless, devolved administrations have the opportunity to engage in the formulation of EU-related policies. In that sense, we can talk about the bottom-up Europeanization, with the territorial input into EU policy-making. Before devolution, it was provided by the Scottish, Welsh, and Northern Ireland Offices of

24 M. Ferry, I. McMaster, *Implementing Structural Funds in Polish and Czech Regions: Convergence, Variation, Empowerment?*, „Regional and Federal Studies”, 15/2005, p. 23.

25 M. Ferry, *The EU and recent regional reform in Poland*, „Europe-Asia Studies”, 55:7, 2003, p. 1110-1111.

26 L. Bruszt, *Multi-Level Governance – The Eastern Versions. Emerging Patterns of Regional Developmental. Governance in the New Member States*, „EUI Working Papers”, Florence, SPS 2007/13, p. 13-14.

27 For more information see European Commission, *Fifth Report on Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion*, Brussels, November 2010.

28 P. John, *Europeanization in a Centralizing State: Multi-level Governance in the UK*, [in:] *The regional dimension of the European Union : towards a third level in Europe?*, C. Jeffery, S. Weyand, G. Marks (eds.), London, Frank Cass, 1997, p. 137-138.

the UK government and their respective ministers – the Secretaries of State – holding place in the Cabinet²⁹. After the reforms, officials from devolved administrations are invited to the UK Cabinet Office European Secretariat which meets every Friday and gets access to all relevant EU documentation.

In terms of relational resources, European integration can also provide sub-national actors with new opportunities for regional–supranational alliances, allowing for their mobilization beyond the state³⁰. Regions can bypass the nation state and exert direct influence on the supranational arena independently from central authorities. Polish and British regions make use of this opportunity through their offices in Brussels (14 Polish and 29 British), delegations to the Committee of the Regions and participation in trans-regional networks and associations.

Let us now turn to another aspect of regional power, i.e. the legitimacy of regional government. In both countries, the programming framework for structural funds, based on the partnership principle, has boosted the regional profile. In that sense, the EU has enhanced the legitimacy of regional actors as decision–makers and implementers – partners in the formulation, management and implementation of EU funds³¹.

In the UK, new opportunities to define regional identities in the EU cause fears that Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland could move away from the UK political and constitutional framework³². Norman Davies states that the EU could be a catalyst of the collapse of the UK if the links between Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland continue to

29 S. Bulmer, M. Burch, P. Hogwood, A. Scott, *UK Devolution and the European Union: A Tale of Cooperative Asymmetry?*, „The Journal of Federalism”, 36(1), 2006, p. 79.

30 A. Bourne, *The Impact of European Integration on Regional Power*, „Journal of Common Market Studies”, 41:4, 2003, p. 601.

31 M. Ferry, I. McMaster, *Implementing Structural Funds in Polish and Czech Regions: Convergence, Variation, Empowerment?*, „Regional and Federal Studies”, 15/2005, p. 33.

32 J. Carl, *European Integration and Multiple Identities: Changing Allegiances in the Post-Devolution UK?*, [in:] *The EU and territorial politics within member states: conflict or co-operation?*, A. K. Bourne (ed.), Leiden, Brill, 2004, p. 206.

weaken in favour of stronger links with the EU³³. Scotland is the most eager to search for the ally in the European institutions for its separatist idea of „Scotland's independence in Europe”, raised in the 1980s and employed recently by the Scottish National Party³⁴.

As for the EU impact on financial resources in Poland, there is an asymmetry between the expanding portfolio of EU-related competencies granted by the centre to the regions and the funds available to carry them out³⁵. Paradoxically then, EU accession can work against the processes of power devolution in Poland³⁶. Without doubts, the funds flowing to the regions have increased³⁷ but they are in majority controlled by the centre, thus regions depend on central subsidies to finance their initiatives³⁸.

In the case of the UK, structural funding for the 2000-2006 planning period amounted to 27 billion euros and for the 2007-2013 period, the UK has been allocated 10.6 billion euros in total³⁹.

European integration can also affect organizational efficiency or institutional performance⁴⁰. For the Polish inexperienced regional

33 Quoted after A. Jassem, *Wielka Brytania a Wspólnota Europejskie: aspekty ustrojowo-polityczne*, „Studia Europejskie”, 1/2003, p. 74.

34 M. Keating, B. Jones, *Nations, regions and Europe: the UK experience*, [in:] *The European Union and the Regions*, B. Jones, M. Keating (eds.), Clarendon Press, Oxford 1995, s.96-97.

35 M. Ferry, I. McMaster, *Implementing Structural Funds in Polish and Czech Regions: Convergence, Variation, Empowerment?*, „Regional and Federal Studies”, 15/2005, p. 26.

36 M. Czernielewska, Ch. Paraskevopoulos, J. Szlachta, *The regionalization process in Poland: an example of 'Shallow' Europeanization?*, „Regional & Federal Studies”, 14:3, 2004, p. 487.

37 For the 2004-2006 planning period, Poland was allocated 8.3 billion euros in structural funding. The allocation for the 2007-2013 planning period amounts to 86 billion euros, which makes Poland the largest single recipient of structural funding.

38 M. Ferry, I. McMaster, *Implementing Structural Funds in Polish and Czech Regions: Convergence, Variation, Empowerment?*, „Regional and Federal Studies”, 15/2005, p. 26.

39 For more information please consult: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/atlas2007/fiche/uk_en.pdf.

40 Those factors can be measured e.g. by the quality of administrative services, ability to introduce and implement strategic decisions in the management

institutions, new responsibilities granted to self-governments were a serious administrative challenge, difficult to deal with if we consider the lack of cooperative culture, extremely weak civil society and the legacy of distrust syndrome⁴¹. On the other hand, EU membership played an important role in the socialization – or rather Europeanization – of regional elites. They are brought into ‘European’ elite discourse through different EU fora and activities, scientific and educational exchanges, social interactions with partners from another Member States⁴². They develop their cultural and social capital through trainings, exchanges and intra- and cross-regional networking⁴³. Similarly, in the UK, EU-related obligations on the devolved level required an increased amount of institutional resources⁴⁴. The asset of devolution was that there has been a transfer of staff from territorial offices of central government to devolved administrations, together with a transfer of knowledge and experience necessary to tackle with the EU issues⁴⁵. Regional elites are also „Euro-socialized” through participation in Europe-wide associations and cross-border initiatives.

of various issues, quality of local legislative process, political stability or ability to stimulate regional economic growth; after: H. Baldersheim, P. Swaniewicz, P., *The institutional performance of Polish regions in an enlarged EU: How much potential? How path dependent?*, [in:] *The Regional Challenge in Central and Eastern Europe. Territorial Restructuring and European Integration*, M. Keating, J. Hughes J. (eds.), Brussels, PIE-Peter Lang, 2003, p. 132.

- 41 M. Czernielewska, Ch. Paraskevopoulos, J. Szlachta, *The regionalization process in Poland: an example of ‘Shallow’ Europeanization?*, „Regional & Federal Studies”, 14:3, 2004, p. 487-493.
- 42 G. Sasse, *How Deep is the Wider Europe: The Europeanization of Sub- National Governance in Central and Eastern Europe*, Workshop: Implications of enlargement for the rule of law and constitutionalism in post-communist legal orders, EUI, Florence, 28-29 November 2003, p. 16.
- 43 L. Bruszt, *Multi-Level Governance – The Eastern Versions. Emerging Patterns of Regional Developmental. Governance in the New Member States*, „EUI Working Papers”, Florence, SPS 2007/13, p. 8.
- 44 S. Bulmer, *British devolution and European policy-making: transforming Britain into multi-level governance*, Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, p. 44.
- 45 Ch. Jeffrey, *Devolution and the European Union: Trajectories and Futures*, [in:] *The dynamics of devolution: the state of the nations 2005*, A. Trench (ed.), Exeter, Imprint Academic, 2005, p. 187.

The EU can also affect internal regional characteristics such as political cohesion or stability. The EU supports the peace process in Northern Ireland through the PEACE Programme⁴⁶. Since 1989, the EU contributes also to the International Fund for Ireland which is an organization established by the UK and Ireland governments to encourage dialogue between Nationalists and Unionists in Ireland⁴⁷.

CONCLUSION

The essay has looked at the nature of regionalization in Poland and the UK showing the influence of the EU in two areas: firstly, the emergence of regional structures, secondly, different sources of regional power.

It is very difficult to assess if the European integration empowers, weakens or has no effect on sub-national entities in the Member States. A lot depends on the historical background and pre-existing conditions. As Peter John states,

in unitary states [such as Poland and the UK] the potential transfer of power and resources as a result of European policy is dependant on the willingness of national government to transfer functions to sub-central government⁴⁸.

That is why one would argue that the EU only partially influenced the emergence and powers of regions in both analyzed countries.

This influence seems to be more visible in Poland, where

46 It is a unique instrument within the Structural Funds, aimed at contributing to reconciliation and targeted to groups and sectors „most affected by the conflict“. The programme is implemented through inclusive (Protestant and Catholic), joint (North/South of Ireland) and „bottom-up“ delivery structures (locally-based partnerships, NGOs); cf. http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/newsroom/document/pdf/manchesteruk.pdf.

47 For more information please consult: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/newsroom/document/pdf/manchesteruk.pdf.

48 P. John, *Europeanization in a Centralizing State: Multi-level Governance in the UK*, [in:] *The regional dimension of the European Union : towards a third level in Europe?*, C. Jeffery, S. Weyand, G. Marks (eds.), London, Frank Cass, 1997, p.132.

regionalization can be seen as a compromise between acceptance of the requirements of EU accession, the logic of democratization including the principle of self-governance, and the striving for government control in order to secure Polish statehood⁴⁹.

There is evidence that European integration empowered regions in the UK and Poland. Sub-national authorities received new competencies, especially regarding regional policy implementation, and can use new channels of participation in formulation of EU policy. Even if central governments remain to be gate-keepers between regional authorities and the EU, the regional profile has been boosted.

As a conclusion one can quote Udo Bullmann, who claims that

in spite of still dominant position of the nation-states, the reforms of EC regional policy seem to have enabled sub-state governments to serve as new interlocutors of the Commission. They thus also challenge the traditional monopoly of national governments to mediate between domestic and international affairs⁵⁰.

49 R. Sturm, J. Dieringer, *The Europeanization of Regions in Eastern and Western Europe: Theoretical Perspectives*, „Regional & Federal Studies”, 15:3, 2005, p. 291.

50 U. Bullmann, *The politics of the Third level*, [in:] *The regional dimension of the European Union: towards a third level in Europe ?* Ch. Jeffery, S. Weyand, G. Marks (eds.), London, Frank Cass, 2001, p. 5.