PECULIARITIES OF THE LEGAL REGULATION OF PUBLIC-SERVICE POWERS OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT BODIES IN THE EUROPEAN UNION MEMBER STATES

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.61345/1339-7915.2025.2.22

Annotation. The article is devoted to the study of the peculiarities of the legal regulation of public-service powers of local self-government bodies in the European Union (EU) member states. Given the dynamic development of Ukrainian legislation that defines the legal status of such bodies, occurring under the influence of the harmonisation process with EU law, the study of the experience of EU member states is of significant theoretical and practical importance.

The methodological foundation of the study is based on the application of human-centered approach as the key and dominant paradigm. This approach makes it possible to examine the powers of local self-government bodies through the lens of ensuring and guaranteeing the rights and freedoms of individuals by means of public-service activity. In this context, the individual's ability to receive public services through clear procedures and in compliance with the principles of good governance plays a central role.

The article analyses the prerequisites for the transformation of the institution of powers as an integral component of the administrative-legal status of local self-government bodies, as well as the peculiarities of the legal recognition of such powers in light of the specific features of the legal systems of each country. Historical factors influencing the development of this legal category are highlighted, taking into account social, economic, and cultural contexts.

The importance of incorporating the experience of EU countries into the development of Ukrainian legislation regulating the activities of local self-government bodies is emphasised, particularly in view of the Europeanisation processes within the framework of European integration. It is demonstrated that Eastern European countries, which had similar starting conditions to Ukraine at the time of gaining independence, have gradually developed their own systems of local self-government. Despite differing historical, political, and economic circumstances that have influenced the evolution of local self-government institutions, there are general principles that have shaped clear and defined requirements for European states at the EU level.

To ensure the effective development of public-service powers of local self-government bodies, it is essential to take into account the standards and principles of local self-government developed at the level of the European Union. This includes involving individuals in addressing local issues and ensuring access to a sufficient range of administrative services in accordance with administrative procedural legislation. Especially noteworthy in this context is the principle of good governance, which has emerged as a standard for EU member states and accession countries alike.

Key words: human-centered approach; private individual; public authorities; local self-government bodies; public governance; public-service powers; administrative procedure.

1. Introduction.

The development of local self-government in European countries is a result of the changes that have taken place on the continent over the past two centuries. The end of the Second World War triggered

a reconsideration of the future of democracy, resistance to totalitarian regimes, the advancement of liberalism, and the restriction of nationalist movements in Europe. The adoption of *the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948, marked the starting point for the formation of a new world order. This, in turn, influenced national legislation and the establishment of good governance standards as an integral part of the modern state.

Post-war Europe required not only financial, economic, and military assistance, but also the establishment of a new legal order to support the gradual restoration of both public institutions and legal systems. It was only through mutual cooperation among European countries in addressing complex challenges that the European Union came into being. However, this entity could not function effectively without a solid legal foundation. The development of international and European mechanisms for the protection of human rights and freedoms, along with the adoption of a human-centered approach that recognises the individual as the highest value around which the state operates, became essential.

In this context, local self-government has acquired a special place among public authorities. This is confirmed by several European legal instruments, including *the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Cooperation* between Territorial Communities or Authorities of May 21, 1980, and its Additional Protocols, and *the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life* (2003). Especially significant is *the European Charter of Local Self-Government,* adopted on October 15, 1985, which serves as a key reference for Ukrainian lawmakers, scholars, and local government officials. The Charter serves as the foundation for the development of Ukraine's system of local self-government and the alignment of its legal status with established European standards. It encourages a transition toward a public-service model of local governance. This transformation has been further accelerated by the decentralisation reform and the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war. In addition, legislative reforms in the field of administrative services and the adoption of administrative procedure legislation are logically aimed at granting local self-government bodies a broad range of powers. These powers are intended to ensure and implement the rights and freedoms of private individuals and are therefore classified as public-service powers. Studying these powers is a necessary precondition for enabling individuals at the local level to access essential public services through clear, transparent, and understandable procedures. Accordingly, it is crucial for Ukraine to examine the experiences of EU member states, particularly those that began their path toward membership in the early 1990s and faced comparable challenges.

Despite the diverse historical, political, and economic conditions that have influenced the development of the institution of local self-government, there are general provisions that have shaped clear and well-defined requirements for European states at the level of the European Union. For Ukraine, where the individual is recognised as the highest value, the ongoing changes in the legal regulation of local self-government bodies, particularly within the framework of constitutional and legal reform, play a vital role. These changes will help finalise the establishment of a modern system of local self-government bodies at the level of the Constitution.

To ensure their effective operation, it is necessary to establish clear legal mechanisms through which the rights and freedoms of individuals can be realized at the local level. In this context, the institution of public governance must play a central role. At the same time, it is essential to take into account the relevant standards and principles developed at the level of the European Union for the implementation of local self-government, particularly the engagement of individuals in addressing matters of local significance and the provision of a sufficient range of administrative services in accordance with administrative procedure legislation.

It is also important to emphasise the exceptional significance of the concept of good governance, which has become a benchmark for European countries as well as for those aspiring to become full members of the European community.

2. Analysis of Scholarly Publications.

The legal status of local self-government bodies has been the subject of research by a number of Ukrainian legal scholars specializing in constitutional, administrative, and municipal law, including

A. Yezerov, Y. Batan, A. Pukhtetska, V. Dikhtiievskyi, T. Kolomoiets, V. Kolpakov, I. Kovbas, P. Krainii, among others. Specific elements of the legal status of these bodies, their functions and powers, have been explored in the works of I. Babin, P. Patsurkivskyi, R. Havryliuk, V. Vdovichen, T. Karabin, T. Matselyk, and others.

In recent years, researchers have increasingly focused on changes in legislation governing the activities of local self-government bodies as administrative authorities in relations arising during the provision of public services, as well as on the application of new administrative procedural legislation. These aspects have been studied by V. Tymoshchuk, I. Koliushko, I. Boiko, O. Soloviova, A. Shkolyk, A. Sharaya, and others.

Issues related to the specific features of public-service powers in EU countries are addressed in the works of J. Wittermans, N. Nurkolis, J. Vásquez, S. Peña, A. Sacchi, F. Pupo, H. Daemen, and others.

In both Ukraine and individual EU member states, local self-government bodies are examined as independent subjects of public law relations. Scholars analyse decentralisation legislation and the relationship between local self-government and executive authorities in terms of the distribution of powers and the financial capacity to fulfill them. This represents a general and shared feature in the development of the institution of local self-government both in Ukraine and in certain EU countries.

3. Purpose of the Research.

The aim of this research is to examine the peculiarities of the legal status of local self-government bodies and the distribution of public-service powers between them and other public authorities in the EU member states, with a view to incorporating best practices into Ukrainian legislation on local self-government.

Given Ukraine's progress toward European integration, the development of effective legislation to regulate the activities of local self-government bodies in addressing issues of local importance, not only in relations with other state authorities but also with every private individual residing within the relevant territory, is among the country's key priorities and challenges. The active development of legislation in the field of public services and administrative procedures requires a comprehensive and systematic study of international experience in this domain.

4. Review and Discussion.

In the Ukrainian doctrine of administrative law, the study of local self-government bodies is taking place under the influence of European integration processes, which are being implemented through the improvement of the system of such bodies by introducing both European and national practices from countries where local self-government reform is in its final stages or has already been completed. To better understand the strengths and weaknesses of improving the existing system of local self-government bodies in Ukraine, it is advisable to analyse the current theoretical and practical frameworks operating in countries that have long been members of the European Union (such as France and Italy), as well as in countries that gained independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc (such as Slovenia, Romania, and Croatia). It is worth noting that Ukrainian public law has a substantial theoretical foundation, which to some extent is used by the legislator, though not always to its full potential. Particular attention should be given to doctrinal developments concerning the concept of good governance and its underlying principles.

According to A. Yezerov and Y. Batan, the implementation of the concept of good governance in the activities of local self-government bodies during the provision of administrative services must be carried out in accordance with the principles of good governance, as this will ensure the highest standard of service delivery. As the researchers emphasise, the following principles play a crucial role in this process: legality, accessibility, the right to be heard, the right to appeal, transparency, and accountability [1, p. 111].

A. Pukhtetska and V. Dikhtievskyi note that the principles of good governance form and set standards for public servants who direct their activities both to ensure the rights and freedoms of the individual and to ensure the public interest of the state. They are reflected in the normative consolidation through the norms of administrative law of various levels – from constitutional norms to individual bylaws and judicial practice [2, p. 73].

Foreign publications on the subject under study have different reviews and different models of consolidation of public service powers in the legislation of individual EU countries. However, the relevant process has a common denominator, which is that good governance is a prerequisite for the functioning of the local government system. They draw attention to the fact that decentralisation is an integral part of vesting local governments with public service powers both at the level of constitutional and special legislation.

According to Michelle and J. Wietermans, who in their article explore the relationship between the French Constitution and the local government decentralisation reform, the rule of law is not only subject to the rule of law but also includes ethical (moral) values contained in the law or in society itself to meet the public interest. There is equality before the law: in this case, everyone, regardless of their position and class in society, is subject to the same law. Similarly, civil servants are subject to the same laws as ordinary people. Legislation is a set of normative legal acts and/or laws and regulations on the basis of which state institutions and/or state bodies are established, which have the relevant powers granted by laws and regulations, where such powers and authority cannot be used outside the state [3, p. 51].

N. Nurkolis believes that the main principle in the implementation of regional autonomy is the principle of decentralisation, which means the transfer of political and administrative power from the higher level of executive power to the local level. This transfer is aimed at preventing the concentration of power, finances and, as a sign of democratization of the government, as well as involving people responsible for the administration of governance in the regions. At the same time, the principle of decentralisation involves the transfer of powers and authority from the central government to the regions or local governments; delegation of power and authority; division and granting of power and authority; a means of dividing and forming administrative regions [4].

According to J. M. Vazquez, S. L. Peña, and A. Sacchi, the practical benefits of decentralisation are not as clear-cut as fiscal federalism theory suggests. There are significant challenges that must be considered when designing decentralisation programs. It is essential to carefully assess whether decentralisation should be implemented at all, and if so, which sectors or regions it is suitable for. Effective coordination between the central government and regional or oblast authorities is also crucial. When well designed and executed, decentralisation can greatly improve public sector efficiency. Like medicine, decentralisation can have a positive effect only if it is applied appropriately – targeting the right issue, at the right time, and in the right amount; otherwise, it can cause harm [5, p. 1097].

F. M. Poupot argues that in France there is a significant gap between government rhetoric and institutional reality, even if the constitution mentions the principle of decentralisation, its implementation still takes place through a strong centralized model, especially in an institutional structure where local authorities are actually very controlled [6]. This thesis is reflected in the legal framework for the legal regulation of local authorities and local self-government.

The territorial reform in the French Republic took place in 1982. The law of March 2, 1982, on the rights and freedoms of communes, departments and regions introduced fundamental changes despite the complex process of decentralisation. Its essence was as follows: 22 elected regional councils replaced the previously co-opted institutions and significantly expanded the powers of 96 departmental councils and large communes. A decisive innovation was the transfer of executive power in the department and regions from the prefect to the president of the department or region, who is elected by the council. This required the division of prefecture services into those that remained under the prefect's leadership and assumed state powers, and those that were transferred to the president of the department or region. Departments and regions acquired the status of territorial authorities and were freed from the traditional tutelage of the prefect, who remained responsible exclusively for

verifying the legality and budgetary a posteriori control [7]. The reforms extended local influence to such policy areas as social issues, economic development, and education. All three levels of French subnational governance (region, department and municipality) were strengthened, with increased budgets, staff and powers. The corresponding financial compensation was provided in the form of transferring state taxes to local governments and budget subsidies. In other words, ensuring the required level of financial independence of local governments is a prerequisite for them to exercise their powers, including public service powers.

Another problem that arose already during the distribution of powers is the uncertainty of the scope of competence: even if the legal status of public authorities provides for the necessary responsibilities for each of them, they are not always observed. This is manifested in competition between communes, departments, and regions, and is especially evident during elections. Another drawback is the lack of a formal hierarchy, which leads to a lack of proper interaction and creates additional problems in their practical activities.

Some changes in how local governments in France exercise their powers have been influenced by the Russian-Ukrainian war. Although the state initially allocated €400 million at the start of the crisis, the costs of accommodation and shelter exceeded this amount, bringing the total expenditure on assistance measures to €634 million for the entire year of 2022. On March 11, 2022, the Burgundy-Franche-Comté Regional Council held an extraordinary meeting and adopted a solidarity package with a financial contribution of €300,000. Among other actions, the council decided to use €150,000 from the Special Fund for International Action (FACECO) for this purpose. Additionally, the council allocated €50,000 in financial aid to a humanitarian NGO working in countries neighboring Western Ukraine to urgently address the needs of displaced people. The council also approved emergency spending of €100,000 to support various initiatives hosting Ukrainian refugees arriving in the region [7].

Taking into account European experience to improve the legal status of local self-government bodies in Ukraine requires considering the specific context of countries that, until the 1990s, were influenced by the Soviet ethnocentric doctrine. This doctrine prioritised public administration over other areas of public life, making true autonomy for local self-government bodies impossible and preventing them from being granted powers that protect individual rights and freedoms within a service-state framework. In this regard, the experience of Croatia is particularly interesting, as it gained independence and joined the EU through socio-political processes.

In the context of harmonising and improving local government legislation to enhance the delivery of public services, several Croatian scholars highlight the significant influence of the European integration process. V. Đulabić notes that the most substantial impact on public services and their conceptualisation over the past quarter century stems from Croatia's active engagement with the European Union and its aspiration to attain full membership. The implementation of the single market project, as one of the EU's strategic objectives, has had a profound effect on member states in terms of organising and delivering various types of public services. The Europeanisation of these services has been driven by a range of both soft and hard legal instruments, including policy papers and other documents issued by EU institutions (such as the European Commission and the European Parliament), EU treaties and their accompanying protocols, case law of the EU Court of Justice, as well as specific EU legislative acts [8, p. 6]. In this regard, the legislative reform trajectory concerning local self-government in Croatia closely resembles the path currently being pursued by Ukraine, the key distinction lying in the timing of these reforms.

A similar situation has developed in Romanian legal doctrine and practice, though with its own unique features. As noted by I. Popescu, the European Commission's assessment of administrative decentralisation in Romania highlighted that, in recent years, powers have been transferred from central to local authorities in areas such as social welfare, healthcare, education, transportation, communal services, and emergency response. However, the absence of a clear legal framework and a coherent strategy to coordinate decentralisation, ensuring transparency and stability, has impeded the effective strengthening of local autonomy. Consequently, tensions and conflicts have emerged during the transfer of powers from the central government to the local level.

An important component of the process of transferring powers to local self-government bodies was the adoption of administrative legislation that defined the substantive and procedural aspects of public-law relations between public authorities (local self-government bodies) and other participants. In doing so, the experience of Germany in this field was utilized. In the early 1990s, there arose an urgent need to codify administrative legislation. Between 2000 and 2003, specialists in public administration at the Regional Training Centre for Continuous Public Management, in cooperation with the German Academy of Public Administration, developed draft versions of two codes: *the Administrative Code*, which regulates substantive law issues, and *the Code of Administrative Procedure*, which covers aspects of contentious and non-contentious procedures. *The Administrative Code*, adopted in 2019, regulates the general framework for the organisation and functioning of state management bodies and institutions, the status of personnel therein, administrative liability, and public services, as well as certain special rules regarding state property and administrative-territorial units [8, p. 18]. Romanian legal doctrine has formulated provisions emphasising the need to harmonise legislation and practice to ensure the necessary level of public-service delivery by local self-government bodies. To this end, it was necessary to formulate the concepts of services of general economic interest and non-economic services of general interest.

Slovenia's experience in reforming its local self-government system has included delegating appropriate powers to protect rights and freedoms by providing public services to citizens. As a unitary state, Slovenia has a single-tier system of local self-government units known as municipalities. Before 1994, although municipalities were recognised as distinct public-law entities, they mainly performed state administrative functions and played a significant role in the national economy. At that time, local self-government in the European sense existed only within smaller subdivisions of municipalities, called local communities [10].

The implementation of a new constitutional design of local self-government in Slovenia began with the adoption of *the Local Self-Government Act* in 1993 and continued in 1994 with the establishment of the first network of new municipalities. *The European Charter of Local Self-Government* was ratified in 1996, and in 2006, amendments were made to certain articles of the Constitution. Alongside improvements in constitutional-level legal regulation, a number of strategic political documents related to local self-government were adopted, the most recent of which was *the Strategy for the Development of Local Self-Government* in 2015 [11]. According to Slovenian theory and legislation, there are two categories of state (local) services: economic and social. Local economic public services are further divided into two subcategories: mandatory and optional *(Article 3 of the Act on Services of General Economic Interest)* [12].

These services are defined not only by legislation but also directly by local self-government bodies, which determine their specific scope. For example, public services in the energy sector are regulated by sectoral laws covering areas such as energy, transport and communications, municipal services, water management, natural resources, environmental protection, and other aspects of economic infrastructure. Social public services are governed by specific legislation in fields like education, science, culture, sports, healthcare, social assistance, childcare, support for people with disabilities, and social welfare [12]. Under current Slovenian law, local self-government bodies are responsible for funding local social services. Additionally, other revenue sources may be used to support the effective administration of these services.

Despite this, local self-government bodies face numerous challenges. As fiscal pressure in Slovenia has intensified in recent years, strict austerity measures have required the reorganisation of all segments of the public sector, including the provision of public services at the local level. In analysing Slovenian legislation governing the exercise of public-service powers by local self-government bodies, scholars point out significant problems related to the forms and mechanisms of service delivery. *The Local Self-Government Act of 1993* provides that municipalities may deliver local public services jointly, particularly where such cooperation enhances the efficiency and effectiveness of service provision. These services may be provided through the joint establishment of a public enterprise or public institution, and their functioning is supervised by joint municipal bodies [13, p. 709].

The experience of the Italian Republic in conferring public-service powers on local self-government bodies is closely tied to the implementation of administrative and constitutional reforms. These

reforms have functioned as key instruments for introducing the changes required to ensure the stable and effective operation of the local self-government system. This has been accomplished by enhancing the legal status of these bodies through the allocation of appropriate powers.

The imperative to modernize public governance is arguably more urgent in Italy than in many other countries. As highlighted in F. Bassanini's study, the success of these reforms will fundamentally shape the culture of public administration by simplifying rules and procedures and alleviating the bureaucratic burden on both citizens and businesses. This transformation entails a strategic shift in public administration's focus – from rigid processes to tangible results. Bassanini emphasizes that further legislative changes are essential to foster innovations aimed at establishing a more decentralised government and a public administration free from excessive bureaucracy – one that is increasingly open and responsive to the needs of the market and civil society [14, p. 232].

An analysis of the legislation of the Italian Republic allows for an interim conclusion that the distribution of powers is carried out at the constitutional level, followed by its further consolidation through legislation that regulates the specific functions and activities of individual public authorities, including local self-government bodies.

The Constitution establishes a dual principle of differentiation: differentiation by subject matter, which forms the basis for the distribution of legislative powers between the state and the regions, imposing the same limitations on both, and differentiation by type of attribution, which tends to transfer administrative powers to municipalities. With regard to legislation, the Constitution enumerates the areas in which the state holds exclusive jurisdiction, as well as the areas of shared jurisdiction between the state (within the framework of fundamental principles) and the regions. All areas not included in these two categories fall within the competence of the regions.

There are two main criteria for determining the areas of exclusive state competence. The first criterion establishes exclusive state competence in fields involving the core functions of the state, such as foreign affairs, defense, public order and security, citizenship, and currency. The second criterion assigns exclusive competence to the state in areas that would otherwise fall under regional jurisdiction, such as the definition of the essential levels of protection for civil rights and social services, which must be guaranteed by the regions across the entire national territory; antitrust legislation, protection of cultural heritage, and general education standards, among others [15].

In 1990, *the Law on the Organisation of Local Self-Government №142/1990* of 8 June 1990 introduced a new system of local self-government and granted it the corresponding public-service powers. According to Article 1 of the Law, it defines the principles for organising the activities of municipalities and provinces. Although its provisions do not apply to regions with special status, the law nevertheless establishes the principles of organisation for municipalities and provinces and sets out a list of their functions. The law prohibits the introduction of any exceptions to these provisions other than by a direct amendment to *the Constitution of Italy* [16]. From this, it follows that Italian legislation, like the legislation of the previously analysed countries (Slovenia, Croatia, Romania), forms a legal foundation for the exercise of local self-government by legitimizing it at the level of both the Constitution and the law on local self-government.

Local self-government bodies form a system composed of local communities, municipalities, and provinces. Among these, local communities serve as the foundational unit, from which municipalities are formed, and in turn, municipalities constitute part of the provinces. All three entities are granted autonomy, which can be classified into two types: institutional autonomy and financial autonomy. This autonomy is ensured through legal regulation established by separate legislative acts. The powers of municipalities and provinces include both own (original) powers and delegated powers. Such delegation may be carried out either by the state or by the region in which the relevant local self-government bodies are established.

Article 22 of the Law delineates a comprehensive list of public services to be delivered by municipalities. These encompass services within both the social and economic domains, as well as those falling under the municipalities' autonomous competencies. The exercise of public-service powers occurs through various mechanisms. For instance, municipalities may delegate these powers

to specialized companies engaged in entrepreneurial activities. Furthermore, the law provides for the management of public-service functions through joint-stock companies with local public capital participation, particularly when the services possess economic and entrepreneurial significance. In addition, institutions established to deliver social services of a non-entrepreneurial nature also operate within this framework [16].

Beyond the legal framework governing the exercise of public-service powers by local self-government bodies, the Constitutional Court of Italy plays a crucial role in resolving challenges related to their implementation. The Court has been pivotal in advancing decentralisation, a process propelled by the far-reaching constitutional reform of 2001. As noted by R. Bina, the Court's primary responsibility was to redistribute powers among territorial levels, addressing a significant increase in judicial conflicts between regional and central authorities. In several rulings, the Court tended to justify an expanded role for the central government, often adopting a centralist interpretation of the revised allocation of powers [17, p. 895].

5. Conclusions.

Thus, the changes occurring in the legal status of local self-government bodies both in the EU countries and in Ukraine are a consequence of the influence of European integration processes, the implementation of provisions of the Council of Europe, the European Commission, and other institutions, as well as the spread of requirements to improve local self-government activities through the expansion of their public-service powers. These processes at the national level have taken place within the framework of decentralisation, active legislative activity, and the work of judicial institutions. All analysed countries without exception have relevant sections or articles in their Constitutions regulating the legal status of local self-government bodies, the list of their powers, and the specifics of exercising public-service powers. Similar trends are observed both in EU member states that have long been part of the Union (France, Italy) and those that joined more recently (Slovenia, Romania, Croatia). The formation of national legislation regulating the provision of public services within the powers of such bodies has developed under the influence of the expanding body of European legislation in the field of local self-government.

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