
FEDERALISM AND REGIONALIZATION IN THE EUROPE

Adrian IVAN

Federalism, regionalism, regionalization are subjects that were and still are highly debated within European circles. The idea of federalism is present under various forms from the beginning of the European construction (The Schumann Plan, 1950). There are various concepts regarding federalism which are expressed by theorists of the European construction such as: Jean Monet who is an advocate of the functionalist theory, Denis de Rougemont, Altiero Spinelli or Joschka Fischer for whom the federalism represents a more intense democratisation of the European Union, a stronger Parliament with regard to the legislation principle as well as a stronger representation of the peoples of Europe at the supranational level.

With regard to the regionalisation, a distinction has to be made between the concept of regionalism and that of regionalization. The first one is a process which starts from bottom up and which is initiated by certain communities living in the interior of a sovereign nation state, and the second one is imposed from up to bottom, having as actor the state. According to the Conference of European ministers responsible of the local communities (Lisbon 1977), the regionalization is a device through which the EU reduces the economical and social disparities creating a better cohesion between the different parts of Europe.

If we consider Romania, here the administrative structure is half centralized. The 8 regions of Romania have only an economic character and each of them is guided by a Council of Regional Development which coordinates the Plan of Regional Development. In addition there is a Regional Development Agency which is in charge with the investment of the European Funds (PHARE).

Adrian IVAN, lect.univ.dr., Facultatea de Istorie,
Universitatea "Babeş-Bolyai", Cluj-Napoca

The concepts of federalism, regionalism, regionalization, region, decentralization are very popular subjects in different European environments. Most often, the partisans of federalism and regionalization give the impression that they would be the optimum solution for the preservation of the traditions of the minority or majority communities, for the assertion of the citizen in his relationships with his state of origin and with the European Union.

The debate concerning federalism is much older and in what regards the European construction, this principle is included in the Schumann plan of May, 9 1950. All currents of European thought accept federalism, but they differ in what regards the report they establish between the nation-state, supranational institutions and other local or regional players.

What is federalism? In the opinion of Thomas Fleiner, director of the Federalism Institute from the University of Fribourg (Switzerland), federalism is a traditional institutional instrument ensuring a status of quasi state or of limited sovereignty for the communities wanting to have their own autonomy and rights guaranteed by the state. This autonomous status is written in the Constitution of these states. Through the components of a federal state, ethnic communities are granted a collective right to autonomy – i.e. to the self-administration of their zone – and a power divided with each of the components of the federation¹. They take part in the decisions allowing the enlargement or the limitation of their autonomy and of the legislative, judicial, executive and fiscal power of the components of the federation.

¹ Thomas Fleiner, *Gérer la diversité*, in RISS 167-mars 2001, p.36.

Federalism is based on a territorial division, but a country can also be organized according to its relation with the community of language and religion (see the religious communities officially recognized in Switzerland, Germany, and the linguistic communities in Belgium).

One of the problem federalism poses is given by the compromise which has to take place between the central sovereignty and the autonomy of each autonomous component. When the components are made up of ethnic majorities, there is a risk of their tendency to secession. The case of the former Yugoslavia is the most relevant from this point of view, but we can also cite the case of Czechoslovakia, which in 1993 divided into the Czech and the Slovak Republics.

The federalist idea had a profound effect on the debates that took place at the Congress of European Federalist Movements in 1948-1949. What the European federalists wanted was a supranational state, based on a Constitution. The Parliament was to be its main institution, because in their opinion, this institution is the direct representative of the citizens and the expression of a solid democracy. In general, they talk about a bicameral Parliament which should represent both the parliaments of the national states as well as their peoples. From Denis de Rougemont to Altiero Spinelli, and more recently, to Joschka Fischer, the federalist projects want to come up more to the citizens's expectations, to the democratization of the European Union, to their representation at supranational level, to the assertion of the European Parliament as main legislator, etc.

European functionalists led by Jean Monnet refused the constitutional model, proposing a top to bottom integration, starting with functional sectors which, through an emphasized dynamics, should extend to other domains. In their vision, the European state was and is of federal type, but a federation in which supranational institutions would play the leading part. The nation-state should yield a part of its sovereignty, of its competencies to the community institutions, a lot more capable of facing the problems and challenges of globalization. The functional Europe is an economic Europe, its political component being very marginal (see the European Union of today). Federalists and functionalists as well as neo-medievalists do not have a very clear idea about how the *United States of Europe* would look, if it is going to be a federation of nation-states, a federation of nations or a structure based on the representation of all levels of competence: community, national, regional and local.

The partisans of the nation-state (Charles de Gaulle) consider that the European unity should favour the state as main player. They accept to yield competencies to the community institutions, preserving the political authority of the state. In the European construction, they were the advocates of unanimity as a fundamental principle in the decision-taking. Their triumph is obvious in the elaboration of the Treaty of Rome (1957), which set the foundation of the European Economic Community and of the European Community of Atomic Energy (the Single Market).

The Council of Ministers, the main legislative and decision-taking institution in the EU is the expression of preservation and assertion of sovereignty of the nation-state in the European construction. The governing form corresponding to this theory, also called intergovernmentalism, is the confederation. Confederation is one of the forms of power sharing which allows the member state to play the leading part.

States with a strong state tradition like France and Great Britain are the advocates of this type of organization of the future European state.

What is regionalism? According to the definition given by the Encyclopaedia Universalis, regionalism is seen within a state as "the tendency to promote the regional development of life and organization" and on an international level as a "tendency to express the solidarity and to promote the development of a group of nations with common interests"². Regionalism was born as a natural reaction to the lack of adaptability of the political and social structures of those states to the requirements and assessment of human communities. It sustains the valorisation of smaller geographical structures and shows the willingness to save and enhance the original economical, geographical, linguistic or folkloric, etc elements of the basic group³.

In the opinion of Charles Ricq, there is a distinction between *regionalism* and *regionalisation*⁴. Regionalism is the result of a top to bottom process, meaning that some communities become aware of

² Encyclopaedia Universalis, Corpus 15, ed. 1985, p.794.

³ *Ibidem*, p.795.

⁴ Charles Ricq, *La Région, espace institutionnel et espace d'identité*, in *Espace et Sociétés*, 41&42, p.122-123.

some regional lacks of balance, of economic underdevelopment, of ethno-cultural alienation, of the centralism of the state they live in, etc.

Regionalization is a bottom to top process, in which states become aware of the regional lack of balance, with all the adjacent phenomena: ethno-cultural alienation, economic underdevelopment, exaggerated centralism, and proceed to the decentralization of their political and judicial system by an institutionalization at a regional level. The two phenomena are complementary and as a consequence they are often taken for one another.

Regionalism is a less efficient instrument than federalism in offering possibilities of self-assertion to ethnic minorities. Nevertheless, it allows, in some cases, to ensure and keep the cohesion within diversified societies. Contrary to federalism, based on a constitution, regionalization comes into existence through a legislative decision⁵. The regions can be formed, created or dissolved with the simple majority of a Legislative Assembly. Once created, regions assert their existence through the consolidation of regionalism. Consequently, the autonomy of the minorities can be strengthened, but at the same time, reduced with a simple majority. Minorities do not have a constitutional power to hinder the authorities wanting to impose limits on regionalism or to promote decentralization.

The majority of the authors consider regionalism as a type of federalism without means of sharing the power between different federal units. There are, of course, several forms of regionalism. We speak about asymmetric regions as a form of federalism which gives a certain type of autonomy to certain regions. It is the case of Spain, where regionalism is almost constitutional, while in France it is statutory and recognizes the regional specificity of Alsacia, Corsica and Normandy, without granting them autonomy. In Italy we have a constitutional regionalism which recognizes the historic specificity of each region⁶.

To understand better what region means we will cite a number of representative definitions. Denis de Rougemont, a Swiss professor and scholar, partisan of the European federalism, one of the symbols of European federalist movements before and after the World War II, considers that regions are not objects to be studied but to be built⁷, “they are the objects of our actions, of our will”. He distinguishes a specificity of cross border regions which are “virtual regions, connected with geography, history, ecology, ethnicity and with the economic possibilities, but blocked by the sovereignty of the states lying across both sides of the frontier”⁸.

In the Bordeaux Declaration of 1978 the representatives of the Local and Regional Powers considered the region as “a fundamental element of a country’s richness”⁹. According to them the region expresses cultural diversity and enhances the economic development of a state. According to this Declaration the regions are based on universal vote. Regional institutions are the expression of decentralization. At the same time they ensure the solidarity and coordination of the basic competencies. The right of the European citizen to “a region” – according to the same document – is the expression of the identity of the European Person.

Being different from one country to another, the region is seen as “a somewhat larger territorial unity within a nation”. This community is characterized by historical, cultural, geographical and at the same time economical uniformity rendering the population cohesive in achieving their common goals and interests.

This cohesion is centred on a number of changing variables, but nevertheless essential for the community. The region should be judicially validated on the basis of sociological reality. The advocates of regions consider that the region does not weaken the state but it rather facilitates its tasks and allows it to concentrate more efficiently on its responsibilities. Through decentralization the Region facilitates the humanization and personalization of the administration and its placing under the control of citizens and elected authorities.

⁵ Thomas Fleiner, *op.cit.*

⁶ Cum funcționează democrația? [How does Democracy Work?], coordinated by R. D. Putnam, Polirom, 2001 pages 31-40.

⁷ Denis de Rougemont, *L’Avenir est notre affaire*, Paris ed. Stock, 1978, p 127.

⁸ *Ibidem.*

⁹ Convention du Conseil de l’Europe sur les problèmes de la régionalisation, Conférence des Pouvoirs Locaux et Régionaux de l’Europe, Déclaration de Bordeaux, France, 30-31 janvier, 1^{er} février 1978, pages 51-54.

The Conference of the European Ministers responsible with local communities (Lisbon, 1977) noticed that “the European integration is linked with regionalization and power sharing”. Regionalization is seen as a way of adjusting economic and social disparities existing between different parts of Europe.

In the Regionalization Community Chart (1988), the European Parliament considered a region to be a territory which geographically constitutes its own entity or a set of territories in which there is a certain continuity or whose population possesses certain elements communally and desires to promote cultural, social and economic progress.¹⁰

“Common elements” signify language, culture, historical tradition and interests related to the transportation economy. These entities appear under different judicial and political forms in several EU Member States (autonomous communities, nationalities, etc.). The document mentions the invitation extended to European countries to institutionalize on their territory or to maintain regions which correspond to the above-mentioned definition. Regionalization can not exist without institutions, and, just as Charles Ricq noted, they make a constitutive element of the regional identity, by which a group builds and develops its identity, its sense of belonging to a well-determined area, a well-defined territory¹¹. From a European viewpoint, and I am talking here about the EU, the institutionalization of regions must be based on the internal judicial order of the states. The basic principles of this institutionalization shall be stipulated by the Constitutions of the EU Member States. Therefore, regions shall be legal entities and their organization will be based on people’s will, on the very logic of the majority’s democracy.

Within Paul Robert’s French dictionary¹², region is defined as a relatively wide territory, having particular characteristics (geographic, sociological) which form a unity with respect to the neighbouring regions or to the set it belongs. In the same dictionary, regionalization is viewed as political, administrative, economic, etc. decentralization.

Jean Labasse, in a famous book called suggestively for our subject “L’Europe des Régions” (1990) made the distinction between a “Europe of the states” (a vertical one) and a “Europe of the regions” (a horizontal one)¹³. The Europe of the regions is a Europe “of the various elements of the territory belonging to the whole set of nations of unequal size, power, historical and national heritage references”¹⁴.

All these definitions converge towards the idea that the region is an economic, social and cultural set which favours decentralized initiatives, a raised participation to the decisions of national importance and which develops the access to responsibilities, at the local level.

The case of Romania

Should we analyze the case of Romania, we would see that the administrative organization corresponds to a semi-centralized structure, which underwent forms of decentralization subsequent to 1990, corresponding to a certain extent, by its administrative structure, to the definitions of the regions. The idea of the Romanian lawmaker was to create regions with economic character, dividing in 1998 the country in 8 regions, which nowadays group together several districts¹⁵. These structures are led by a **Regional Development Council** formed by the presidents of the District Councils and a representative of the Local Councils of cities, towns and communes, designated from each district during their term of office. This Council coordinates the **Regional Development Plan**. A **Regional Development Agency** works together with every Development Region, which by itself does not constitute a legal-administrative entity. The Regional Development Agency coordinates the process of utilization of European funds necessary for the development in the area (PHARE) and submits to the Development Council plans for the economic stimulation of different towns confronted with social and economic difficulties. The Regional Development Agencies play a particular role in the proper development of twinning (jumelage) activities, which allow grant of European financial subventions for the collaboration between regions from the EU and Romania.

¹⁰ See the Regionalization Community Chart, 1988.

¹¹ Charles Ricq, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

¹² Dictionnaire de la langue française (Le Grand Robert de la langue française), Paul Robert 2^{ème} édition, Tome VIII, 1989, paris, p. 165.

¹³ Jean Labasse, *L’Europe des Régions*, Paris, éd. Géographes-Flammarion, 1990, p.11.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵ Law 151/1998.

From our point of view, it is very expensive to create administrative regions starting from Romanian historical provinces. They do not correspond to the idea of ethnic, linguistic, geographic, economic unity. In Transylvania, for example, there are a great many local specificities. Sibiu has never created a geographic and linguistic cohesion with Sighișoara, although they are both cities inhabited by a majority of German population (Sași). Just the same, an administrative unity can not be created by the District of Mureș and the Districts of Covasna and Harghita, taking into account their ethnic composition.

Even the Hungarian kings during the Middle Age noticed the administrative and economic malfunctions of the provinces of “Saint Stephen’s” Crown, as well as their defective relationship with the centre. For example, it was very difficult for the holder of the Hungarian crown to calm down the autonomist outbursts of the German population from Transylvania (Sași) and of the Transylvanian Medieval kings. Altogether, the Transylvanian kings and, later on, the princes of Transylvania had to respect local autonomies. From the economic point of view, essential for the setting-up of a region, the German (Sași and Secui) communities established a lot more close economic connections with Romanian medieval states than with regions of the Hungarian kingdom or territorial unities neighbouring Transylvania. After World War I the national states set up economic unities which are difficult to overcome today.

Conclusions

The economic and social costs of a chaotic and simplistic redrawing of a country’s internal frontiers would be enormous, since there is no formula for success concerning regionalism or centralized states. There have been moments in Europe’s history when centralized structures answered more efficiently to social economic crises, while the federal structures failed. We believe that every state or nation is free to look for and establish its own ways of stimulating economically and socially its poor regions, combining effectively its own experience with the successful experiences of the EU.

The Committee of the Regions, a consultative body of the European Union created in 1994 on German Lands initiative, does not desire a divided Europe, but rather the preserving and the assertion of some regional traditions existing already in several countries (Germany, Spain, Italy). The only truly regional state is Italy, having the idea of region stipulated by its Constitution. European integration must be discussed – at least from our point of view – also from the perspective of costs and profits.

A far too expensive Europe shall be soon repudiated by the European citizen, very often dissatisfied with the lack of transparency of the community process.

Otherwise, the Community Europe starting with 1950 is based on massive participation of the nation-state to its own construction. The Council of Ministers represents the state and not the regions, whose Committee only has a consultative role. The project for a European Constitution of the European Convention, submitted to the European Council on July 18, 2003, admits European diversity and, through its subsidiarity and proportionality principle tries to balance different levels of community, national, regional or local competence, but clearly states the national identity conservation for every state or nation. In order to avoid disputes related to the majority-minority ratio, the Convention took as its starting point the idea that once the European citizen’s rights are stipulated by a Constitution, there is no need to draw a separate chapter concerning minority ethnic communities any more, as some states would have liked it, i.e. Hungary.

European construction is at the stage of redefining its major objective, realizing a European federation. It is a pluralist debate in which several theories are encountered: i.e. the realistic, functionalist, neo-medieval or federalist ones.

Bibliographie:

Books & Reviews:

1. Dictionnaire de la langue française (Le Grand Robert de la langue française), Paul Robert 2^{ème} édition, Tome VIII, Paris, 1989.
2. Encyclopaedia Universalis, Corpus 15, ed. 1985, pp. 8812-8813.
3. Thomas Fleiner, Gérer la diversité, in “RISS”, nr. 167-mars 2001, Unesco/ érès, p. 35-42.
4. Labasse, Jean, Quelles Régions pour l’Europe?, Paris, Flammarion, 1994.
5. Idem, L’Europe des Régions, Paris, éd. Géographes-Flammarion, 1990.
6. International Political Science Review, vol.10, No.3 “Pluralism, Regionalism, Nationalism.

7. Charles Ricq, *La Région, espace institutionnel et espace d'identité*, în *Espace et Sociétés*, 41&42, p. 65-78; 119-129.
8. Cum funcționează democrația?, sub coord. lui R. D. Putnam, Polirom, 2001.
9. Denis de Rougemont, *L'Avenir est notre affaire*, Paris, ed. Stock, 1978.
10. Scardigli, Victor, *L'Europe de la diversité: la dynamique des identités régionales*, Paris, CNRS éditions, 1993.
11. Sidjanski, Dusan, *L'avenir fédéraliste de l'Europe*, Paris, PUF, 1992.

Documents:

1. Convention du Conseil de l'Europe sur les problèmes de la régionalisation, Conférence des Pouvoirs Locaux et Régionaux de l'Europe, Déclaration de Bordeaux, Bordeaux, France, 30-31 janvier, 1er février 1978, pp. 51-54.
2. Charte communautaire de la régionalisation, 1988.
3. Legea 151/1998