

Review of Regionalization Process of France's Administrative System: An Institutionalisation Issue¹

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Abstract

The regionalization, that appears as a modern phenomenon, affects the 21st century public administration. Especially in terms of European nation-states. when the regionalization is implemented because of the local demands by the central administration, in the countries that have a centralized administration like France, this regionalization process would have been executed by the own will of the center. This paper aims to examine the sociological dynamics of the regionalization movement in France. In accordance with this, the regionalization in France is addressed under (the) three different topics from the functioning of the State with the regional governments, the relations between center and periphery, and the articulation between the State and society regarding the political participation, democracy and decentralization. In addition, this paper pursues the historical data related to the regional

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formation, sociological and administrative balance among the elected and the elites, and then the statistics created by the data obtained from French interior ministry. Therewith, to be more contented at expressing the French regionalization movement that states a multidimensional process, the comparison with other European States and several examples are presented.

Keywords: Regionalization, France, Relations between center and periphery, Central and local administration

Fransa İdari Sisteminin Bölgeleşme Sürecine Bir Bakış: Kurumlaşma Sorunu

Öz

Modern bir olgu olarak karşımıza çıkan bölgeselleşme, 21. yy kamu idaresini farklı dinamiklerle etkilemektedir. Özellikle Avrupalı Ulus-Devletler açısından, bölgeselleşme yerelden gelen isteklerle merkezî idare tarafından uygulamaya konulurken, Fransa gibi merkezî idari yapıya sahip olan ülkelerde ise bizzat merkezin kendi isteğiyle bu süreç yürütülmüştür. Bu çalışma, Fransa'daki bölgeselleşme hareketinin sosyolojik dinamiklerini incelemeyi hedeflemektedir. Bu doğrultuda, bölge yönetimleri ile birlikte devletin işlevselliği, merkez-yerel ilişkileri ve katılım, demokrasi ve yerelleşme bakımından devlet-toplum arasındaki ilişkiler olmak üzere, Fransa'daki bölgeselleşme, üç ayrı başlık altında ele alınmıştır. Çalışmada, bölge yönetimlerinin oluşmasına ilişkin tarihi verilere, seçilmişler ile atanmışlar arasındaki idari ve sosyolojik dengelere, yerel katılım noktasında ise Fransız İçişleri Bakanlığı'ndan elde edilen verilerle oluşturulmuş istatistiklere yer verilmiştir. Bununla birlikte, çok boyutlu bir süreci ifade eden Fransa'daki bölgeselleşme hareketinin daha rahat anlaşılabilmesi için diğer Avrupa devletleriyle karşılaştırılma yapılmış ve çeşitli örnekler sunulmuştur.

Anahtar kelimeler: Bölgeselleşme, Fransa, Merkez-Yerel İlişkisi, Merkezî ve Yerel İdare

Introduction

Regionalization in France still reflects an incomplete character in a process that has been going on since 1960. The decentralization reforms that began in the 2000s allow regionalization to be established on a constitutional basis. A committee for the reform of local authorities chaired by Former Prime Minister Eduard Balladur highlights the need to further strengthen the regions in France. To do this, a demographic criterion is added: the average population of the regions should be between 3 and 4 million, and the number of regions should therefore be increased from 22 to 15. The Former President, François Hollande, presents, in an op-ed published in the regional press on 3 June 2014, his territorial reform project, which notably foresees a strengthening of the regions, whose number should decrease from 22 to 14 in metropolitan France and whose responsibilities should increase. However, the law (Article 1) replaced the 22 existing metropolitan regions with 13 regions constituted by the addition of regions without changing the departments that make them up on 1st January, 2016. One of the main purposes of this merging project is to reduce administrative expenditure whereas the report published (September 2019) by the Court of Auditors clearly states that the evaluation of the impact of the State's decisions on local finances must be strengthened and the establishment of the "new regions" on 1st January 2016 has gone smoothly but has not, so far, brought any efficiency gains (Cours des comptes, 2019, p.13). This administrative panorama shows the lack of institutionalization at the regional level in France.

In this case, this paper argues that the main reason for the regionalization in France, which represents one of the most considerable changes in French public administration, is an institutional step to generalize the industrialization and urbanization to the whole country rather than democratic or local participation regulator. It is on this basis that the economic aims are hugely implemented at the beginning of French regionalization as well as at its development. At first, the regionalization has been planned to render the economic objectives effective as a public policy. The regional reform that supposedly remains to be carried out

should not exceed the French capital's roles. By preserving common interests, it aims to restructure France by creating regional capitals. These would become real development hubs, taking with them the regional grouping which would be attached to them (Dischamps, 1970, p.179). However, this phenomenon affects the multidimensional reflexes like center-periphery relations, political participation, etc. In this context, the constitutional review of the French local system reflects the new organizational relations between central bureaucracy and departmental government. This is because the regionalization in France has changed the administrative hierarchy in favor of its political development. In the new context, the departments as the historical institutions, became part of the regional organizations which were the new managers of public policy in a particular area determined by the central government and the law.

There are, nevertheless, some institutional problems in the implementation of the regionalization policy for three reasons: the central government would like to be the unique actor of this process by not deeply being affected by the regionalization. This can be interpreted as a result of the traditional French centralism. The second reason stems from the center-periphery relations based on two different elements: On the one hand, some local actors, especially the nominees like prefects, departments' governors, considered the regionalization process as an asymmetrical risk for their status in administrative hierarchy. On the other hand, the weak integration of certain regions such as Corsica could pose a political threat to the unitary state. The recent treaty on Franco-German Cooperation and Integration, signed on January 22nd, 2019, also became a political polemic in France because of the fact that the treaty may consolidate decentralized cooperation among local governments. The last reason is about the political participation of French citizens at regional level. This factor could be an indicator to measure the efficacy of administrative reforms in terms of public opinion.

These factors could help to test the institutional degree of the regionalization process in France. So, what is the relationship between the institutionalization and regionalization processes in France between

1960-2016? In addition, the following three supportive questions can be presented as operationalization of the main research question: How does the regional administration affect the functional structure of the French State? How have the center-periphery relations been formed by this administrative phenomenon? And which elements do the state-society development influence at the point of political participation? This paper seeks to explain the emergence of the regions in the French territorial system with a historical perspective. Then, it examines the administrative and political interaction between the center and local administrations, the decision-making process, the harmony, and issues about the regionalization's path. Lastly, the democratic participation, voter behaviors, the contribution of the regions to French democracy, and public administration will be analyzed from the perspective of the State-society relationship. Finally, 'the regionalization process in France is mostly characterized by under-institutionalization process' is the argument that is put forward as a result of this research.

1. The Regionalization's influences on the Functional Structure of the State

To set out to identify what the regionalization brings on the State functioning in France, the origin of these administrative units will be analyzed towards the decentralization process. French State, mostly considered as the ideal type of the centralism phenomena, is now constitutionally decentralized since the constitutional amendment of 28th March 2003. However, the regional merging in 2016 complicates both regionalization and decentralization processes.

1.1. Regional Administrative Unite

Regionalization refers to a form of decentralization of a State that transfers powers to its regions. In France, the regionalization process officially started in 1954 with the establishment of regional development committees. After that, a governmental decree in 1955 extended the 21 regional economic programs which were to become the administrative unit of the decentralization and regionalization process. These

new institutions have had a crucial role in executing the regional development systematically, legally and in a harmonious manner with the central government. Thus, the many conferences in which the prefect participated actively were organized to discuss the regional development plans (Chevallier, Rangeon, & Sellier, 1982).

In 1964, the central government nominated the regional governor to head these 21 units and established Regional Economic Development Commissions (CODER) to provide sustainability for regional development (Bodiguel, 1966). This administrative organization could have contributed to creating new employment at the campaign, with the help of Interministerial Delegation of Land Planning and Regional Attractiveness (DATAR). In this way, the decrease in the industrial discrepancy between île de France and other regions has become the new politics determined by central administration (Chevallier et al., 1982).

However, the regionalization movement had not acquired any legal position. Therefore, those new regional institutions were the strategic articulation within the context of the relations between center and periphery (Grémion, 1976). To dissolve this legal dualism, Charles de Gaulle insisted on the draft legislation that had been rejected in the referendum of 1969. This draft legislation aimed to assign legal status to the region, by redefining the territorial administration like municipalities, departments, regions, and Overseas Departments and Territories (DOM-TOM). It was also possible to create the other local units by the law. Likewise, the role of the President has become more important vis-à-vis the parliament with the V Republic Constitution of which General de Gaulle influenced the formation (Vernon, 1961).

Despite the fact that the regional units did not have the legal status, the French state needed the new institutions to stabilize industrial development at the local and regional levels. In the light of this, the state has transformed those administrative units founded since the decentralization and regionalization process as part of the public establishment. Thus, the regional units had some administrative particularity related to the local functioning like juridical personality and budget autonomy. But it cannot be said that the public establishments did not have

legal status at the regional level at that time. In order to involve local authorities in the effort to restore public finances, the State is gradually reducing the financial transfers to local authorities. Lisa Passavant-Guion states that “...*this reduction will fall to €11 billion over three years in 2015*” (Passavant-Guion, 2018, p.42). On this point, it can be highlighted that the fiscal decentralization does not always provide the effective governance at the regional level while the administrative one can be a key element that reinforces the powers of regional elites. With an optimistic perspective, it can also serve to have a more democratic and participatory type of local governance on the hand, and to reduce the regional inequalities on the other hand (Hankla, 2009, pp.635-636). France's administration is experiencing both two sides of the decentralization transition.

1.2. From Centralization to the Decentralization

In the period up to 1972, the basis of the regional administrations was laid, but these institutions did not become an effective part of the local authorities and of the administrative system. Between 1945-1973, the population density increased in the big cities as a result of the industrial potential of the French economy. These two elements contributed largely to the political transformation of the State administration. However, between 1974-1982, there was low economic growth and unemployment under the stagnating condition (Villa, Charpin, Raoul, Tréca, & Chaillié, 1978). The rapid industrialization and modernization of the social and economic structure lead to remarkable changes (Oktay, 2003). In French society, the structural transformation extended into many fields like politics, culture, and economy while the administration and bureaucracy as two domains that change slower than the society, entered into a different type of evolution. Durkheim notes that « *plus les sociétés se développent, plus l'État se développe* » (Durkheim, 1899, p.436). Thanks to the historical centralization, state functions become more numerous, penetrate more deeply into all the other social functions that it concentrates and unifies by that very fact (Durkheim, 1899). In this case, from the 1980s, western economic systems accelerated the

liberal transformation to strengthen their position against the politics and government. Liberal economies aimed to decrease state intervention in trade and market. At the same time, they sought to ensure the development of well-structured institutional and economic dynamics under the state guarantees. These processes were executed with difficulty in the centralized state structure when they were successfully adopted in the decentralized directions. From this point of view, the regional units in France have been aiming to improve regional development but the traditional centralism in the administration and its internalization by the society might help to understand why the constitutional review that claimed the regionalization transformation of the territorial government was refused at the end of the referendum of 1969. Political centrality of French state had a large effect on the public choice.

The political system which is organized around the centralized center, is naturally insufficient for democratic participation, local demands, bottom-up policy-making. However, this ironic situation could have been counterbalanced by introducing social and political acts of the government as a result of the top-down policy. This is because centralized systems can produce the necessary tools to operationalize the public policies more effectively (Duran, 1990, 2010). At this point, in 1981, the French government started the decentralization process that will have become a constitutional principle in 2004, by changing the centralized administrative system (Thoenig & Duran, 1996). Thus, the regionalization process was coalesced into the decentralization's acts, especially with the 1982 law on the liberty of the local authorities (municipalities, departments, regions). Hereunder, the regional councils' members will have been elected after 1986, after a transition period. Besides that, it is envisaged that the departments and regions' executive role will transfer to the prefects, high officials, and president of the regional councils.

The transfer of some administrative power that central government possessed on the local authorities is, in theory, a necessary element of the decentralization. However, during this process, the State could implement some administrative mechanisms that prevent the centrifugal

forces and protect the integral functioning of the territorial management. These mechanisms are generally the administrative and financial tutelage ordered by the central bureaucracy. In this case, the decentralization law of 1982 removed the administrative and financial tutelage of the French State on the local entities and provided a new control system about the legality, which is more moderate than the previous mechanisms. This transformation also affected the functioning of the political system in France that had begun to differentiate. This is because the decentralization gives the new decisional competences to the local authorities (Duran, 1993). In order to make the decentralization effective through the financial dimension, in 1988 another law increased the financial power of the local governments and the position of the regional audit chambers become more visible at the regional finance control (Şengül, 2005).

This new system is more effective in order to share power between the center and local governments and to balance the financial resources of these entities. In addition, the regionalization and the decentralization process attribute the more political rights to the Corsican regional council and the cultural and linguistic rights to this island with autonomist aspirations. In 2003, with the regulation based on the regional participation, the regions were composed after an election structured around a two-round system. All of these steps, which have a considerable impact on the French administration system, heralded a new period for decentralization in 2004. In this regard, the first article of the 1958 constitution has been changed as the organization of the state became decentralized and the regions gained legal constitutional status. This structural change reordered the French territorial system so that there would be municipalities, departments, regions, privileged local authorities and overseas department. Thus, in 2006 the local administrative system had become compatible with the European principles determined by the European Charter of Local Self-Government.

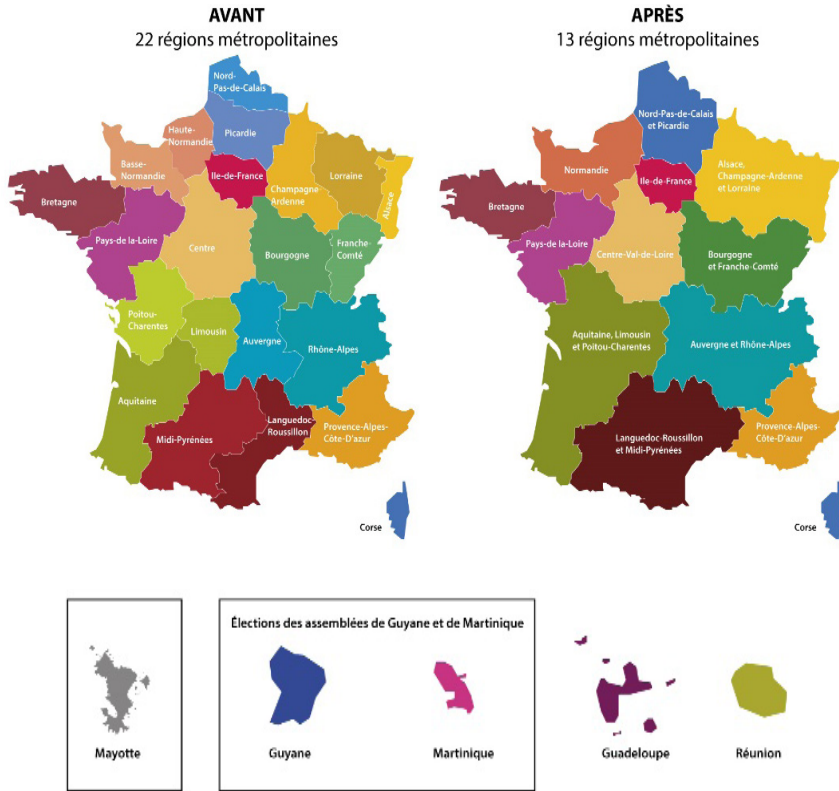
As has already been discussed, the local governments must have the autonomous financial mechanisms in order to move independently vis-à-vis the center. These financial resources could be composed

of taxes, local institutions' economic activities and government aid. In 2009, French administration has promoted a new regulation about the fiscal system. This reform decreased the economic independent of the regions. The central government has also taken action in 2016 to reduce the local expenditures by merging the regions. This new administrative division also means the reconfiguration of the territorial system in France.

1.3. Fusion of the regional governments

The regionalization process, which started in 1964, is still continuing to develop. The central government applies many reform programs about the administrative system to make it institutional and rational. For example, in 2015, a new law aims to reconstruct the territorial system (loi Notre of 7 August 2015) (Long, 2015). This new regulation aims to rationalize the competences and therefore the expenditure of local authorities. On one hand, this new regulation intends to render the decentralization process more institutionalized and rationalized through relations between the center and local actors. On the other, it angles more competence to the regional units. However, Saoudi remarks a paradox that the region's current loss of competence seems to go hand in hand with the loss of its autonomous fiscal capacity, which is both a symbol of political power and of the legitimacy of the regions (Saoudi, 2017).

In this case, there is a breaking point over the regionalization in France. The 22 regions, which were established at the beginning of that process, were restructured into 13 regions (as the map below shows, source: <https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Media/MI/Images/Actualites/carte-election-13-regions-apres-2>). The main purpose of such an administrative action is determined as decreasing the economic gap among the regions. In addition, it can be said that the French government envisages to strengthen financial control and to improve public expenditure management and control. By 2020, this merging project will have been set up for the departmental system too. The administrative merging has not been applied at the regional level, but before that, the merging program was executed in order to decrease the number



of communes (Tellier, 2017). In France there are more than 35, 000 communes. But this project has not succeeded in the new structure envisaged for the small municipalities for many reasons. The main reason for the failure is that the local politicians did not want to give up their political rights and it can be seen that the people who live there reacted democratically against this project (Ashford, 1982). Even if the same criticisms still exist about the regional merging process, the government executes it more effectively.

As can be seen, French regionalization signifies a complicated process. This is because the administrative influences of this act show that there is a multivariable process. When the regionalization allows for the

reconstruction of the local system and the state functioning and its efficacy, it affects the relations between center-periphery and state-society too. Now, it would be better to analyze these relations that influence on the sociological dynamics in French society.

2. The center-periphery relations through regionalization

French regionalization has been affecting the administrative reports at local level while the European Union integration has also ongoing impacts on this process. It poses a direct challenge to the relations among local system's actors, more precisely between the officers of departments and regional governor. It reflects the multiplication of the administrative elites that indicates emerging of the new relationships between the elected actors and them (Bottomer, 1982). So, new relational issues at local level should be considered.

2.1. The “centrifugation” at the governmental level

It can be argued that the social and political movements, which are against the center's action, are interpreted as the centrifuge act in an administration system that functions centrally. In this context, French centralization is historically and culturally based on I. François and Louis XIV periods when the departmental system is derived from the French revolution (Elias, 1990). Furthermore, the political balance appeared among the local institutions and the center leans on the 19th century. From this century, the role and the function of French administration would be “centralizator” (Grémion, 1976). It should also be noted that in a centralized country such as France, even if some political and administrative issues exist between the center and local administrations like technical and equipment supports of the central government, management problems of the French-administered territories outside Europe, these reactions would not be considered as centrifuge movements. With the exception of the regionalist movement of Corsica, the French periphery seems now well-integrated to the center after the decolonization process of 1960s. Double jobbing (*cumul des mandats* in French) and the French pluralistic constitutional regime (Aron, 1965) have ma-

for implications with representativity possibilities of the local actors at center (Şengül, 2012).

2.2. European Union

In theory, the French local entities dispose the political and financial autonomy provided by The European Charter of Local Self-Government whereas, in practice, traditional centralization based on cultural, social, political and economic dynamics does not allow that they could take initiative independently from the center. For example, in the Alsace region, which was belatedly integrated into the French territorial system, the voter behavior tendencies considerably concentrate on the right parties. This political attitude of the Alsatians does not reflect the cultural elements but it can be explained by the political and especially, economic dimensions. This is because the Alsace is one of the richest regions in France with its industrial potential. At the same time, even if European Union, which is described as the Union of Nation-State, constructs a new political and administration horizon over the members, in Belgium, Spain, Portugal and Italy, the periphery began to introduce into a centrifugal process, by influencing factors of regionalization. In this case, the center has to attribute more competence to the local entities to handle the situation or to ensure consensus based on the administrative interests. For example, in 1997, the Constitutional review in Portugal provided more financial initiatives to the regional administrations to stabilize relations. Besides, in Belgium, Spain and Italy in which the center of these countries had lately accomplished their centralization, the peripheral powers could find to create the resistance mechanisms against the center (CDLR, 1998; Marcou, 1999).

In France, most of the studies made about the regionalization insist on the fact that this process began in 1964. The administrative reforms executed by the *Ancien régime*, the departmental system of French revolution, Napoleonic centralization and the regionalization of Gaullist administration demonstrate in what way, and to what extent, the State metamorphosis took place. So, from the 1960s, the central administration formed by de Gaulle has handled the regionalization process as a

government policy and a state political action. As already noted, the main reason for this transformation could be divided into two categories: the internal dynamics and the external ones (Thomas, 1995). As the internal elements, during the Second World War, the V Republic government aimed to revive the declined institutions of IV Republic (Merle, 1987). In this context, it must be necessary to reestablish the territorial system, to reduce the economic imbalance among the regions and to balance the presidential power by the local administrations. The external causes are that French government tried to integrate their institutions to European Economic Community and to adapt the structural transformation at the economic, political and administrative level. Thus, it can be said that these internal and external phenomena are closely related to this regionalization process. However, like the European development, that transformation is executed despite the reaction even if it is almost decisive. The regionalization in France is functioned by the stable and strong will of administrative policy, despite the peripheral reaction (Birnbaum, 2011). If this regionalization process could be analyzed by considering the public policies elaborated with the regional elites, it can be understood how well-centralized French State become decentralized today (Pasquier, 2003).

2.3. Administrative elites and elected ones

From the second half of the 20th century, the regional movement that is effective through the policies of V. Republic began to change the administrative system as well as the relations between the elites who are responsible at local level. In this case, Pierre Grémion, the French sociologist examined the dynamics of French administration system, in his book named "*Peripheral Power*", carried out many sociological investigations with the administrators in the main departments and the administrators in the peripheral departments in order to understand the conflictual relations between them. At that moment, the duties of the regional units, which could not obtain the legal status were assumed by departments' *chef-lieu*. In practice, the prefects of these departments managed the regionalization mission and they were organizing the ap-

pointments with the administrators' participation to discuss this project, as already said. As Grémion noted, the prefects of main departments began to reinforce their executive power at regional level. In contrast, the peripheral forces resisted these demands. The peripheral reaction focuses on the acquisition of the regional prefectural status by the departmental prefects. For this, the periphery uses two arguments based on equality and equity. Those arguments insist on the illegitimacy of the regions that are derived from the departments (Grémion, 1976). Thus, such a situation could cause administrative dichotomy and the formation of ill-structured regions. This is because the prefect assumes the executive role of the government as well as protecting the general interest of the area where he is in charge. However, Grémion underlines that the determination of the main department among the others in a region will normally provide some privilege to the administrator of this zone. Regionalization continues to develop via these units (Grémion, 1976).

During the same years, it can be seen that there was a complicated relationship between the mayors and prefects or the sub-prefects. In this system, the prefects of the centralized administration demanded the harmonic functioning of the municipalities. On this matter, in the book of Michel Crozier and Erhard Friedberg, they examined the relationship between actors and system, "*a good prefect knows to listen to the mayors and a good mayor convinces the prefect*" (Crozier & Friedberg 1977, p.254). Here, the person who takes the initiative is the mayor and when he carries out this initiative, the prefect must be convinced about the project that will provide the necessities of the public service. Furthermore, these relations are also so fragile. On this issue, the feedback and the outcomes obtained from the policies concern the mayors and the prefects too. Thus, the relations between these two authorities are fragile, thin and dependent on each other. The dependent structure also prevents the independent movement of the actors. The coordination and the integration among the institutions play a key role in the decision-making-process and its application. The financial problems of the municipalities and the centralized structure of the administrative system limit explicitly the actions of the elected organs at local

level. Therefore, the prefects had a more advantageous position than the elected ones in terms of the deconcentration power. Nevertheless, decentralization process reduces the administrative dependency of the mayors to the prefects while regionalization one scales down the regional inequalities.

The deconcentration power brings closer the institutional links between local authorities and the State. The municipal units need competences in terms of qualification, help, equipment and technical provided by the central government. On this point, the cross-regulation model put forward by Crozier and Thoenig offers here a useful perspective in deciphering the complexified relationships among local elected representatives and civil servants in the administration. The central government's technicians have more technical expertise in construction, maintenance and repairs than the elected officials. As a result, "... *the mayor is largely dependent on local government officials...*" (Crozier & Thoenig, 1975, p.9). The decentralization issue obviously arises from the moment that the big urban cities are now able to contribute to the development of the less urbanized zones in terms of technical equipment which means they no longer need central government support.

2.4. The relations between the department and the region

Today, these relations between those two institutions tend to change in favor of regions. Here, the regionalization policies of the center made the regional units more important than the departments. The institutional structure of the regions continues to develop with the support of central bureaucracy while the departments begin to become sub-actors in this process. It can be argued that the importance of the departments, which has been in existence since 1789 and are the principal actor of the territorial system, has visibly reduced and then similar phenomena also affect Italian administration. On this point, there is one question: "When the European Union as an inclusive organization tend to regionalize the European States, could they be affected themselves by that regionalization process?" The response to the question must focus on the economic causes rather than local demands. As already mentioned,

in France, regionalization is started as a growth model in economy in order to ensure an industrial balance across the country. In Italy, regionalization is also shaped by the economic elements as well as the local demands, which exist historically. In 2008, the European debt crises that created a fiscal pressure upon Italian administration influenced the regionalization in Italy. Because of the crises, Italy decided to transfer some departmental competences to regions and to municipalities for the purpose of reducing the public expenses/financing (Acteurs Publics, 2015a) (Acteurs Publics, 2015b). The experiences gained from regionalization created the important transformation for French administration when they caused radical news at the institutional level in Spain and in Italy (Mény, 1985). The increase in local participation and of financial autonomy and the aiming of the economic growth from the local level shows us that the EU supports the regionalization process, especially for economic reasons.

Now what must go back to France as an example is the reducing of departmental competencies which is still a big issue of discussion among politicians. For example, in 2016, in the 86th French Departmental Congress, the President of the Senate Gérard Larcher, criticized the actual situation about the departmental power and proposed that State reinforces their competences, by referring to 72nd article of the Constitution. So, the initiatives taken by the center about regionalization aim to centralize regionalization by considering the development of those organization and the administrative reforms (Pasquier, 2003). Here, the aim of the center is particularly important, because it can be still argued that the regions do not effectively work yet. When the State predicts the functioning of the departments dependently above the regions, the position of the departments is still protected traditionally by the elected and nominated organs at that level. The failed referendum, which was organized at the beginning of the regionalization process also proves this. In France where the centralization is interiorized culturally, politically and administratively, even if the regionalization idea is supported by the governors, the reforms that are still executed show us that the centralization process is not achieved.

Additionally, the particular schools from which the nominated elites graduate, is another issue to be discussed in view of the elected-nominated relations. Jack Hayward, the French political scientist, notes that the nominated ones tend still to protect the centralized architecture of the State and to produce public policies in line with this (Hayward, 1981). The discussion is centered on the existence of the symbolic schools like National School of Administration (ENA, also a Grand School) and the Grande Ecole. In this context, some intellectuals defend their existence for their administrative quality while others want to abolish these schools in order to democratize access to the administration (Vernet & Sapin, 2016). So, regionalization certainly creates new challenges for administrators, but there is no similar evidence when the participation rates of individuals are considered.

3. Political Participation and the Relationship between the State and Society through Regionalization

The low participation rates in regional elections even poses the legitimacy problem for those who are elected. Even if the first regional elections of 1986 have recorded a relative high percentage of participation, the results of the last four ones explicitly underlined the arising legitimacy risk as can be observed in the graphics below. Dupoirier rightly poses this question after the fourth regional elections held in 2004; “*can one speak in France of a regionalization of regional elections?*” (Dupoirier, 2004, p.571). These elections have a particular result in favor of the Socialist party that obtained the right to govern 21 of the 22 metropolitan regions. So, ruling at the regional level develops into a fundamental challenge for this party owing to the fact that the new administrative division, which is the regional fusion, would be interpreted as a political strategy of the Socialist government under Hollande presidency after losing political space at the end of the regional elections of 2010. Political ambition of actors exceeds the participation rates at regional position.

3.1 Regional Participation

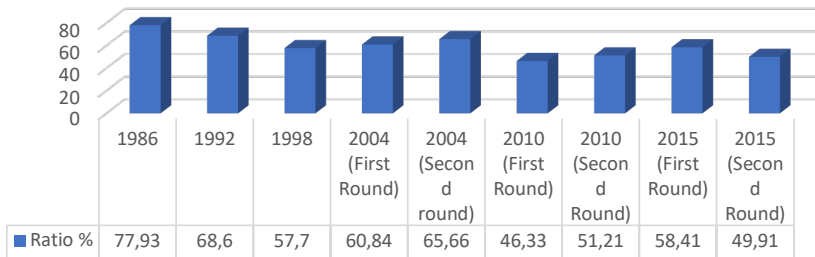
It can be already pointed out that regionalization, which is revealed by the demand of the center, had started regional development, new areas for job opportunities in order to diminish the unemployment and economics reasons, like effective use of resources. This process started for economic and administrative reasons, created different political dynamics between the bureaucrats themselves as well as between the bureaucrats and the elected representatives on the level of administration of department. On that point, new dynamics of political participation have also come up as a second stage just after the 1982 reform. Since the end of the 1960s and 1970s, the inefficiency of the political participation system and traditional democratic forms in France have been criticized by De Gaulle as well. Besides, it was important to convince the people for the regional executions of the center government in order to ensure its legitimacy (Mény, 1985).

On behalf of the execution of the participation mechanism, it has been decided that the member of the council and regional parliament would be elected for six years through the general voting right in 1986 and the two-round system of proportional counting of preference votes in 2004. The general and local elections in 1986 took place in the same period and some changes on the political stability in terms of relation between left and right wing have happened (Martin, 1986). It could be shown that the rise of the far-right and, also the fall of the rate of none-participants in comparison with the general elections in 1981 and 1986 as examples. In 2015, after the unification of the regions, the number of the representatives has been redefined through the regional and departmental elections law (legifrance.gouv.fr, 2016).

Low political participation in regional elections comes up as a noteworthy factor. Such that, the participation rate in 1986 could not be reached nowadays. The data as shown in graphic 1 clearly shows the low political participation between 1986-2015 (data.gouv.fr, 2016). That low sense of political participation is not just a case for regional elections. Also, during departmental elections, especially for the last three periods, it can be seen that the participation rates stuck at approx-

imately 50%. For example, in the latest departmental election, in 2015, the valid electoral ratio on the second round was calculated at 55% (interieur.gouv.fr, 2016).

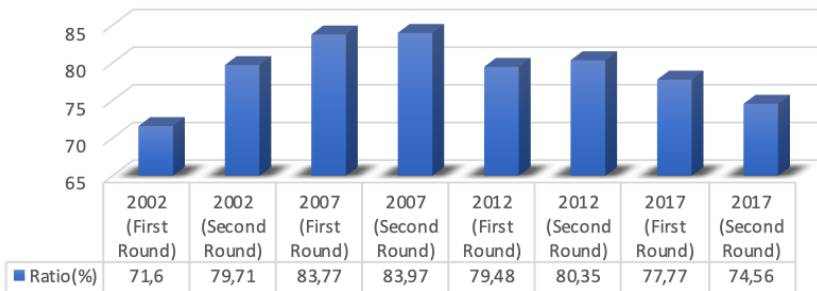
Figure 1: 1986-2015 Participation ratio about the regional elections in France (%)



Data source: French Interior ministry

On the other hand, as shown in graphic 2, although the participation rates for the presidential election which is considered more national and more inclusive are higher than the local elections, the participation rate for the latest presidential election in 2017 at the first round is 77,5% and the latter at the second round is 74.5% (interieur.gouv.fr, 2016). Even though the rate of participation for the presidential election is higher than the other elections, there is nearly 25% absence of participation. When the other statistical data is evaluated, it can be seen that in the presidential election in 2012, there was 46 million electorates, but 9.4 million electorates chose not to vote and 700.000 votes were invalid at the first round. On the second round, 9 million voters chose not to vote and 2 million votes were invalid (interieur.gouv.fr, 2020).

Figure 2: 2002-2017 Participation ratio about the Presidential Election (%)



Data source: French Interior ministry

3.2 Participation Issue

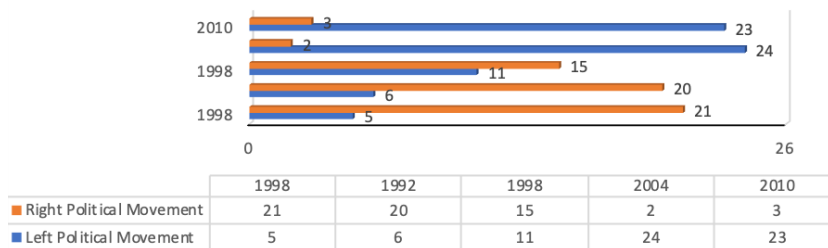
Low political participation is not just an issue for France. This kind of tendency is known in other European countries as well. According to research conducted, for the last two decades, the absence of participation is around 14% in European Union countries. The absence of political participation of Eastern European countries was explained by some classical theories, which see the continued effects of the hegemonic power of Soviet Union and because of that democracy, election, and vote have not yet become a tradition or ritual; but yet it should be however pointed out why that phenomenon is also common in other European countries. In that purpose, at least for understanding the case of France, Anne Muxel's work is emphasized, which questions the factors of participation like education level, socio-economic status and other social factors. In this point, it can be said that the low sense of political participation is a new model of participation. Likewise, even though voting is still a common part of politics, it is the oldest model of representative democracy. Hence, because of the relatively institutional structure decadence of the politics and individualization of voter's expectations, the right *not-to-vote* has gained its legitimacy. Besides this, the forms of direct political participation like demonstration and meeting right, manifestations, marches and petition have become more

frequent. Thus, the tendency of low political participation carries personal as well as collective reasons (Muxel, 2007). Here, the reason that I emphasize, the right *not-to-vote* is precisely because voting in France is not an obligation, but just a civil duty.

3.3 Effects of Election System on Participation and State-Society Relation

In parallel to all those reasons, the two-round election system in France could influence especially regional low participation. From 2004, these two round systems have been applied to the regional election, thus the balance between left and right wing has changed. According to this, it can be seen that until 2004, in three elections, right wing parties achieved electoral success, but then, after the two-round system was introduced for regional election from 2004, left wing parties have achieved much more success at regional council (See below graphic 3). But it should be said that the regional election which took place in 2015 was an exception. On the first tour, far-right wing has achieved success, because of it on the second-round votes, those in general vote for left wing had to vote for right wing in order to pressurize far-right wing. Therefore, the unification of the regions after 2015, the balance between left and right has changed and the ideological tendency, which defends the autonomy of Corsica, has come up as a stronger new factor. In consequence, while the left wing won five regions of 13, right wing has won seven regions and the autonomist party has won Corsica (interieur.gouv.fr, 2020). It can be said that the consequences of regional administration reforms bring new dynamics to French politics.

Figure 3: The Righth-Left Political Balance between the regional presidents



Data source: French Interior Ministry

The Socialist party has lost some seats because of those new dynamics, which emerged with the regional reforms. In order to stop losing votes, the Socialist party has carried out new reforms. According to this, the double jobbing, which provides that elected officials could hold several mandates, has been limited by law. For instance, in the past, the president of a district municipality could have been assigned for a job in provincial administration; a senator or council member could have held office at European Parliament. But now, from 2017, the *cumul des mandats* in regional and legislative administration will be restricted for the elected. It means that the regional actors will not have chance to represent their political interests at the European level anymore. On the other hand, the public opinion considers that if the elected holds more than one administration duty, this could hinder one of his duties. Thus, for French public opinion, it is important to discuss if holding several mandates is ethical or not, especially for mayors.

4. Conclusion

Regionalization, which is historically a complex process, needs to be evolving in a more institutionally structure. Despite several legislative reforms, France seems unable to modernize its constitutional principle of “free administration of local governments” which would allow for a different organization and management of the state. The new administrative division of 2016 for the regions demonstrates the

uncertainty surrounding the regional construction even if the regionalization politics, which started for economic reasons at first place, is now a new factor between local and center administration through democratic values, such as political participation. The limitations of the *cumul des mandats* would have negative representative consequences for the regionalization of France.

According to the center-periphery relationship, there are some different dynamics between elected and appointed. Therefore, it was a rough process for center and center-periphery relation to add the regions as a part of administration system. Particularly provincial administrations, which have historical profundity, became like an institutional resistance weld. This tendency of resistance to regionalization was also shown in French society with its rejection of Charles De Gaulle's referendum for regionalization. But as previously noted, the Gaullist French center has continued the regionalization process. Regionalization as a part of the localization movement, is developing, carrying more institutional identity and gaining more power, but yet there is something lacking in case of its budget and finance. Decentralization reforms, including the 2004 laws on regionalization, have not been able to correct the imbalances in budget, expertise and resources that hamper the French regions. Because, the central government still has a dominant role on the distribution of the fiscal incomes. This stems from the asymmetrical position of the state in administrative matters. It could have political impacts on voter behavior that French electorate takes into account the presidential elections more important than the other ones.

In the perspective of the relation between the administration and society, low political participation has had some negative effects on democratic culture; however, it is also new behavior from voters. On that point, for those who live in Western European countries in which individualization was an important step and also for those who live in a twenty-first century neo-liberal economic system, some opinions consider that the right *not-to-vote* is a political attitude. As demonstrated in the graphics, the number of absent voters for the presidential election is up to 18-25% but for the regional elections, it is up to 50%. From this

point, it could be argued that regionalization and regional administration are not yet very important for voters. That issue could cause some inefficiency for the legitimacy of regionalization and the acceptance of public policies by society. The French regionalization can be considered politically, institutionally and financially fragile.

Consequently, regionalization in France, which was started by the Gaullist administration with V. Republic, can be treated as a fundamental transformation, still incomplete, for the traditional state centralism. From 1982, the localization movement was continued with regionalization, and with those movements, economics, educational and cultural acquisitions have been won. Between 1982-2016, the period, which was called first, second and third localization movement (*Acte I-II-III de la décentralisation*), regional administrations have obtained their constitutional status through the principle of localization. According to all of those elements, it can be predictable that the French center administration could become more decentralist and territory administrations could continue their localizations. For the participation point, low political participation for regional election can be prevented by giving more power to regional administration. At the end of this article, it can be argued that the regionalization in France reflects a limited and incomplete view. In order to overcome this problem, the French administration needs to attribute a more institutional character which could promote the effectiveness of public action to the regionalization process.

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