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La France à la loupe

Decentralisation in France

Decentralisation is a **system of organisation of state administrative bodies**, by which decision-making and management powers are delegated to directly elected local government bodies in order to ensure a **better balance of powers** across the nation. By bringing policy-making closer to citizens, decentralisation fosters **the emergence of local democracy**.

Although France initially had a centralised administration, local government powers have been extended by legislation since the 19th century. The Act of 10 August 1871 introducing direct election by popular vote of departmental councils and the Act of 5 April 1884 on municipal organisation were milestones in this regard. But it was not until **1982** that a genuine **decentralisation policy** emerged, in **three phases**:

- Defferre laws devolving significant powers to local and regional bodies in 1982-83;
- Legislation expanding the first laws on decentralisation and incorporating decentralisation into the territorial organisation of the state;
- **Constitutional reform passed in 2003** on the decentralised organisation of the state.

The latter reform makes the role of local and regional bodies permanent by enshrining the principle that "**the organisation of the state is decentralised**" in **Article 1 of the Constitution** and by including the regions alongside the municipalities and overseas departments and territories in the administrative subdivisions of France referred to in the Constitution.

The reform was expanded by four laws:

- **Act 2003-705 of 1 August on local referendums**: details the scope of local referendums and establishes the conditions for holding mandatory and optional referendums;

- **Act 2003-704 of 1 August 2003 on experimentation by administrative subdivisions**: sets the conditions for experimentation;
- **Act 2004-758 of 1 August 2004 on revenue-sharing for the administrative subdivisions** : defines the revenues levied by the administrative subdivisions and sets a minimum share to be retained by them;
- **Act of 13 August 2004 on local government powers and obligations**: defines the new powers devolved by the central government to local bodies.

To find out more

WEBSITES

- ➲ **Vie publique:** La décentralisation

http://www.vie-publique.fr/dossier_polpublic/decentralisation/index.shtml

Reviews the legislation on decentralisation and describes the practical operation of decentralisation in the social and economic spheres.

- ➲ **Vie publique:** Qu'est-ce que la décentralisation? (What is decentralisation?)

http://www.vie-publique.fr/découverte_instit/instit/instit_3_2_0_q0.htm

Defines decentralisation, recapitulates the legislation and reforms on decentralisation.

- ➲ **National Assembly**

- La décentralisation (1789-2002)

<http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/histoire/decentralisation.asp>

Retraces the history of decentralisation from 1789 to 2002.

- Organisation décentralisée de la République (Decentralised organisation of the state)

<http://www.assemblee-nat.fr/12/dossiers/decentralisation.asp>

Explains Constitutional Act 2003-276 of 28 March 2003 on the decentralised organisation of the state.

FURTHER READING

- ➲ **Décentralisation, acte II: dernières réformes (Decentralisation, Act II: the most recent reforms).** – La Documentation française, *Regards sur l'actualité* No. 308, February 2005.
- ➲ **Décentralisation, Etat et territoires (Decentralisation, state and administrative subdivisions).** – La Documentation française, *Cahiers français* No. 318, January/February 2004.
- ➲ **Décentralisation et expérimentations locales (Decentralisation and local experiments).** – La Documentation française, *Problèmes politiques et sociaux* No. 895, December 2003.
- ➲ **Décentralisation.** – La Documentation française, *Regards sur l'actualité* No. 286, December 2002.