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THE EUROPEAN UNION (EU) CO-DECIDING AND CO-GOVERNING AUTHORITIES – KNOWLEDGE AND EVALUATION IN THE OPINION OF THE POLES

SUMMARY

This study concerns the co-decision and co-governing system basing on the European Commission (EC) and the European Parliament (EP) as an example. However, it is not a direct description of functions of these institutions but a presentation of results of empirical studies, including respondents' knowledge about the EC and EP functioning. In the study the following thesis were verified: awareness and knowledge of the EU institutions is greater in the border regions because of participation in the process of euroregionalisation; level of knowledge about the integration is related to education, the higher and more comprehensive it is, the greater the understanding of the institutionalization of integration; residents of urban areas have greater knowledge about integration than people who live in rural areas.

Keywords: European Union, co-decision system, co-governing system

JEL Classification: E69, R50

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INTRODUCTION

In post-war Europe the actuation of integration processes is still observed. This is possible due to arranging of the integration process through the appropriate institutionalization of it. Integration, to give adequate results and be dynamic, must be professionally managed. Different types of integration are known in the world. Taking into account the criterion of institutionalization level and freedom three main types can be distinguished. One of them is the natural and the rank-and-file integration, but executed vigorously without proper institutionalization. However, this type shows the immaturity of the integration process (African countries). The second type is forced integration (such as the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance CMEA) characterized by a lack of rank-and-file willingness of member countries to integrate but having a very high level of institutionalization. However, history showed, that this type has no future. The last type of integration combines both rank-and-file approaches, based on the natural, market need for integration and an orderly institutional structure, the example of which is the European Union (EU)¹.

The EU is a good example of combining integration aspirations of societies and countries, and the institutionalization of the integration processes, which is reflected by in the integration effects. And although various elements of the integration process and its progress could be criticized, or one could look for the crisis causes in the endogenous factors (but also in exogenous), it must be objectively stated that the European integration is evolving. This fact should be undoubtedly connected with the institutionalization of integration, which is often confused with bureaucracy. In some ways this is the situation, but institutionalization is not quite bureaucracy. Integration, as experience shows should be subject to directing and ordering, which are expressed exactly in institutionalization.

EU “worked out” a number of institutions that are responsible for different parts of its operation. Among the many institutions there are those, which play a special part in co-governing and co-deciding, such as the European Commission (EC), the European Parliament (EP) and The Council

¹ E. Tomczak-Woźniak, *Pomoc Unii Europejskiej w procesie przekształceń strukturalnych gospodarstw rolniczych*, doctoral thesis 2011 (unpublished text), Lodz University of Technology, p. 7-16.

of the European Union. Thus, not unjustifiably the term co-governing of the “three” in the European integration was adopted².

The purpose of this paper is to present the level of knowledge in the society about two European organs: the European Commission and the European Parliament, as co-governing and co-deciding in EU based on an empirical evaluation of these institutions. This choice is not random because the European Commission is the supreme organ in the institutional system, is the guardian of the treaties and other community law and represents the common values of member countries and societies. The EP is the “voice of the people”, without which it is impossible to govern or perform the EC functions nor approving legislation or new member countries.

1. METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

The research process has been designed taking into account four ranges: objective, subjective, temporal and spatial. The objective scope included the issues of awareness and knowledge about the co-governing institutions of the European Union. The subjective scope included 120 Polish citizens from six voivodeships. Sample selection was carried out in a deliberately-random type, where its desirability related to testing the proper number of respondents depending on two variables: age and place of residence. The variables in the study were: age, education and place of residence. The spatial scope of the study included six Polish voivodeships, which selection was determined by the desire to test different types of regions (central, border, high and poorly developed). These were: Lodz, Masovian, Lublin, West Pomeranian, subcarpathian and Lower Silesian voivodeships. Such accepted spatial extent gave the opportunity to capture some regularities resulting from the participation degree of regions in the integration process. The time scope of the study covered the period from May to June 2013.

Accepted research hypotheses: awareness and knowledge of the EU institutions is greater in the border regions because of participation in the euroregionalisation process; knowledge level about the integration is related to education, the higher and more comprehensive it is the greater is the understanding of the institutionalization of integration; residents of urban areas have greater knowledge about integration, than people who live in the rural areas.

² M. Greta, *Euroregiony w procesie integracji europejskiej oraz w przewyżczeniu peryferyjności i dysproporcji regionalnych*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź, 2013, p. 73-87.

For the study, 120 questionnaires on paper were prepared and it was carried out by direct interview. In the expertise the methods of analysis and statistical inference, as well as methods of deduction, induction and synthesis were used. Calculations and analysis of test material were performed using Microsoft Excel. The research resulted in very extensive information, however, due to the volume limitations of this study only selected parts are published. Moreover it authors would like to turn attention that described research had character of preliminary and reconnaissance studies, constituting a point of departure for planned, deepened all-Polish empirical studies in taken research issues.

2. RESULTS

120 respondents took part in the study, of which 56% were women. 83 people declared village areas as a place of residence, which accounted for 69% of all tested people. Other people (31% of respondents) declared that they live in the city. Table 1. presents data concerning respondents age and education. The largest group were people with secondary education.

Table 1. Respondents age and education

EDUCATION	UP TO 20 YEARS OLD	21-30 YEARS OLD	31-50 YEARS OLD	OVER 51 YEARS OLD	TOTAL
Higher	0	14	11	5	30
Secondary	16	17	21	13	67
Primary	9	4	3	7	23
Total	25	35	35	25	120

Source: own elaboration.

Figure 1. presents the study results about the level of knowledge about the fields of activity of the European Parliament in particular voivodships. In each voivodship 20 interviews were conducted and respondents were asked to indicate what activities the EP carries out. The relatively high level is found in the border voivodships which is documented by the correct answers about these activities. The exception is Mazowieckie voivodship where responses were largely correct. The researchers believe this is due to the fact of a large-scale information campaign in the surroundings of the capital city.

The next figure (2.) shows the distribution of responses in voivodships to question about the European Commission functions. As you can see, this time the most knowledgeable respondents were from the west "wall" voivodships (Lower Silesian and Western Pomeranian voivodship) because they gave

the most correct answers. The worst was Lodz voivodship, in which most respondents gave incorrect answers about the knowledge on settlement of disputes. It is worth noting that the worst was the question concerning the way of governing the ECB. Nearly 70% of respondents wrongly found that the EC has such function. Such poor knowledge level in this area may suggest that due to not belonging of Poland to the euro zone structures, the Poles did not show much interest in this aspect.

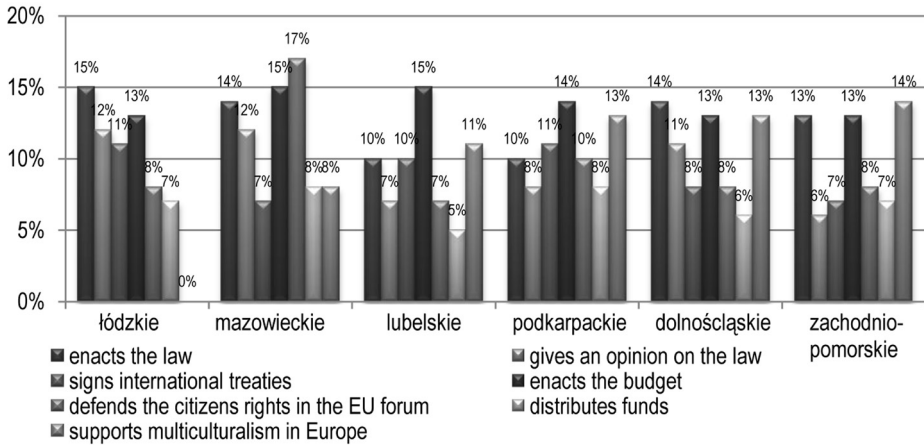


Figure 1. Knowledge about the European Parliament in particular voivodships

Source: own elaboration.

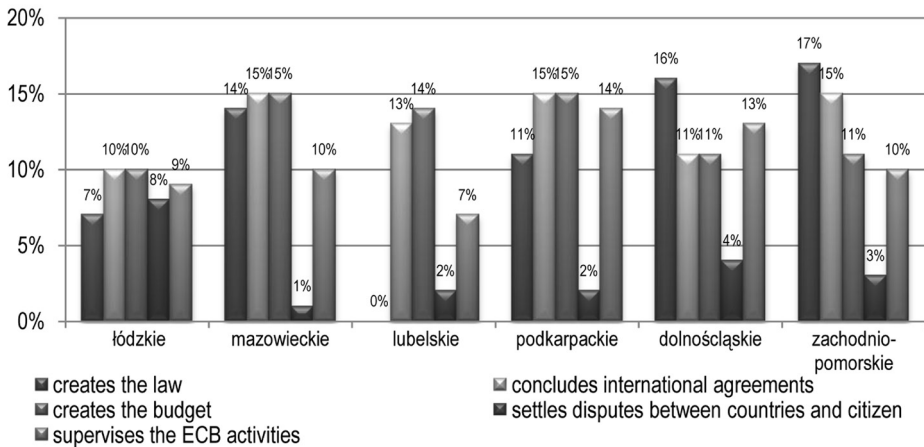


Figure 2. Knowledge about the European Commission functions in particular voivodships

Source: own elaboration.

The accepted hypotheses determined the need to present the research results in the field of knowledge about the selected EU institutions in relation to the degree of respondents education. Figures 3 and 4 confirm the idea that with the increase of education knowledge about the integration process and its institutionalization increases. Respondents with both primary and secondary education, in large part erroneously indicated the EP as an institution, which: distributes EU aid funds (primary – 91%, secondary – 55%), gives an opinion on the law (primary – 57%, secondary – 55%) and signs international agreements (primary – 61%, secondary – 61%). In case of respondents with higher education answers to all questions were correct in the vast majority, which is shown in figure 2.

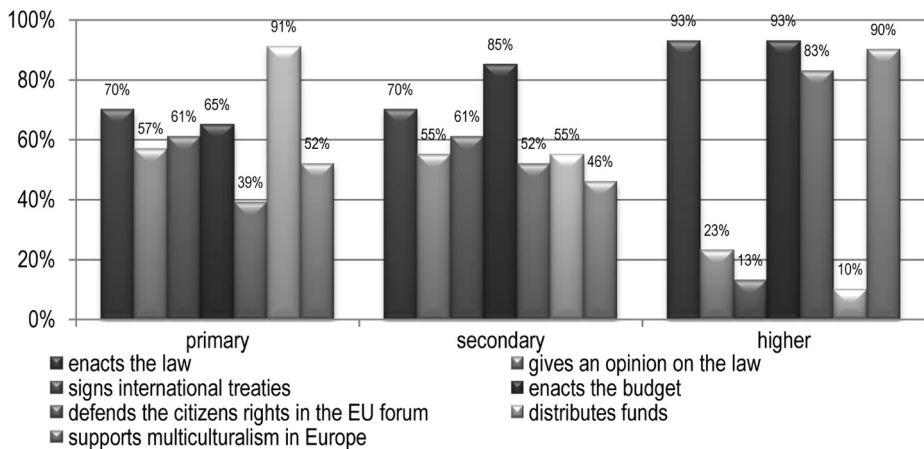


Figure 3. Education and knowledge about the European Parliament
Source: own elaboration.

Also in case of knowledge about the European Commission, this relationship has been observed (Figure 4.). Respondents who declared primary and secondary education in the majority erroneously indicated the EC as an institution, which is: supervising the work of the European Central Bank (ECB) (primary – 96%, secondary – 85%); or as a dispute settlement institution (primary – 43%, secondary – 37%), relatively poorly respondents knew the one of the most important EC functions namely the budget function (primary – 57%, secondary – 49%). In case of respondents with higher education answers to all questions were in the majority correct. No one indicated dispute settlement as the EC function (leaving it to The Court of Justice of the European Union) while only three people thought that EC has supervision over the ECB activities. This shows that higher education has

a positive effect on interest level about various aspects of the EU institutions functioning.

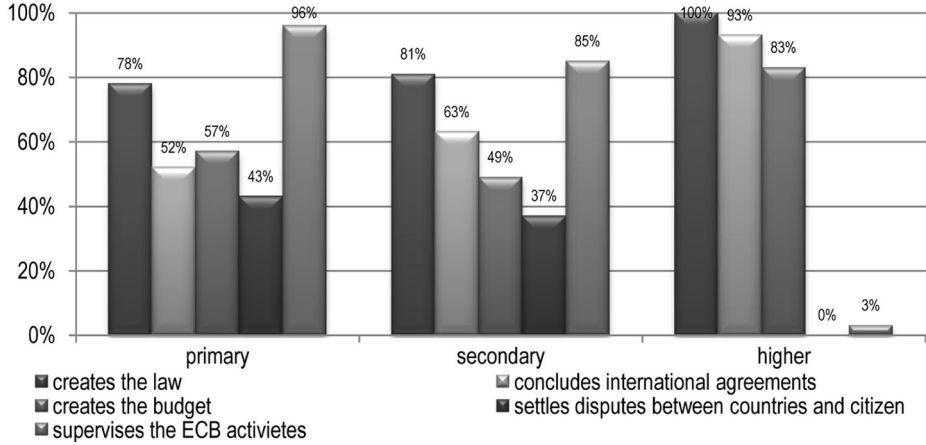


Figure 4. Education and knowledge about the European Commission functions

Source: own elaboration.

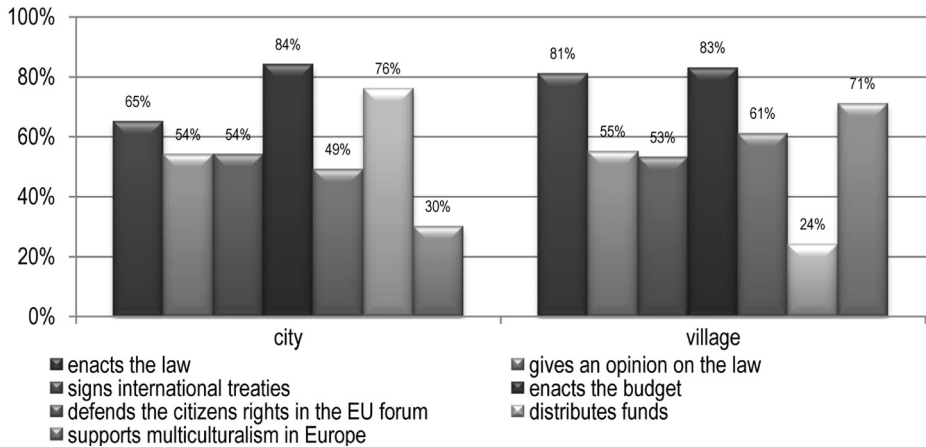


Figure 5. Place of residence and knowledge about the European Parliament

Source: own elaboration.

Another conclusion, the researchers would like to share is the relationship between knowledge about the EU institutions functioning and the place of residence. The variable value consisted of two options - village and urban areas. As shown in Figures 5. and 6., for questions of law creation by the Europe-

an Parliament and the European Commission, rural citizens were slightly better informed than people in cities. At about in the same proportions was the respondents knowledge regarding the budget enacting by EP. The same frequently urban and village residents wrongly attributed signing of international agreements as the EP function (wrong answers: city – 54%; village – 53%).

A much better (proportionally) knowledge of the villagers about: the way of aid funds distribution (correct answers: cities – 23%, villiges – 76%), EP function in supporting multiculturalism (correct answers: cities – 30%, villiges – 71%) and defending civil rights (correct answers: cities – 49%, villiges – 61%) surprised the researchers.

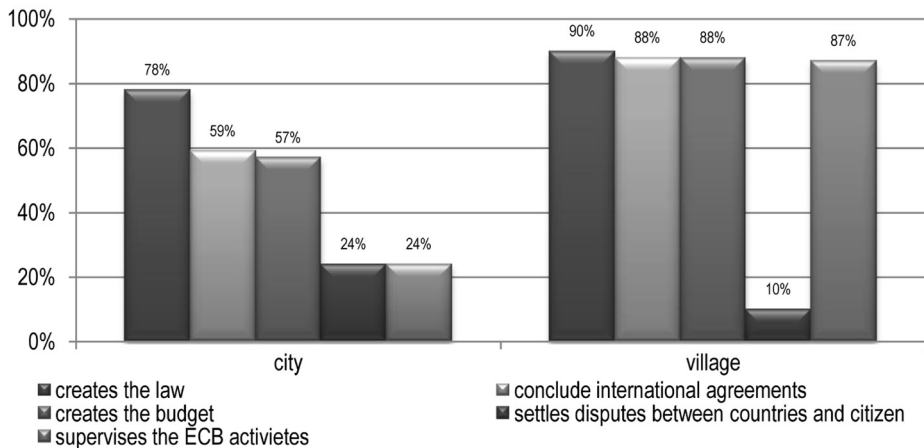


Figure 6. Place of residence and knowledge about the European Commission

Source: own elaboration.

The study also showed that the knowledge about the EC is relatively larger in village areas than in cities. The only exception was the issue of monitoring of the ECB by the EC. 87% of tested village residents wrongly answered that the EC has the authority to do it.

In the next part of the study authors apply research conclusions to formulated in the introduction research hypotheses.

3. VERIFICATION OF HYPOTHESES

The analysis of empirical data allowed the observation of some rules:

- respondents do not distinguish law-creating process from its assessment, usually indicate both responses at the same time;

- eastern border voivodships have extensive knowledge about the EP function in terms of the budget, further interviews with the respondents gave the researchers a basis to conclude that this is due to the fact the representative of this area Professor Janusz Lewandowski took the office of budget commissioner;
- border regions also emphasize the special role of the EP in the conservation of European multiculturalism and identity;
- all voivodships respondents have a wide knowledge about the EP budget function;
- professional approach to the knowledge of the EP functions is found especially in the Masovian voivodship, which can be attributed to the presence of the capital city. This is an exception to the documented thesis about the higher knowledge level in the border regions;
- in the case of the EC, respondents demonstrated their lack of knowledge about the ECB functioning. The performed interviews gave an opportunity to draw a conclusion, that it is due to the low interest in the monetary union of Polish citizens;
- the settlement of disputes between the country and citizens respondents correctly attributed to the Court of Justice of the European Union, “freeing” the European Commission from it;
- respondents correctly perceive the role of the European Commission as the guardian of treaties and the law creating authority and having complicity in budget creation.

Referring the results to the documented thesis it should be noted that general integration knowledge about the EU institutions (EP and EC) is greater in the border regions with the exception of Masovian voivodship. Border regions much earlier (as early as the 90s) got the “first dose” of integration knowledge related to the Euroregions creation process.

In general, despite the short “presence” of Poland in the EU (in economic terms) we can say that the knowledge about the EU is at a relatively good level. Satisfactory is that the interest with knowledge and absorbency of it is very high in all age groups and especially among the working age population. This is due to the generality of wish to build a European future for Polish citizens. Such future gives a chance to work, raise living standards, improve living conditions and create better conditions for the start in adult life for future generations.

Analyzing the relationship between education and knowledge level about the EP and EC functioning, the study allowed to formulate some generalizations:

- respondents with higher and secondary education manage to distinguish the legislative process and assessment, the respondents with primary education do not pay any attention to this distinction;
- among respondents with higher education there is a good orientation within the concluding international agreements procedures and the EU role in this respect, in the case of other groups of education it is difficult to express a clear opinion;
- the vast majority of respondents, regardless of the education level have a relatively good knowledge about the EP and EC role in enacting the budget;
- respondents with higher and secondary education have a good knowledge about the aid funds distribution, which cannot be said about respondents with primary education;
- youths attach great importance to multiculturalism, mutual understanding, respecting tolerance and European education, to which school prepared them;
- higher education influences the broad understanding of the integration processes in connection with deepening of the integration process which is reflected, among others, in the knowledge about the monetary union.

Referring to the second thesis reading as follows: the knowledge level about the integration is related to education, the higher and more versatile it is the better is the knowledge about the integration of institutionalization, it should be noted that the results of empirical studies confirm it. The fact is that the more educated is the respondent the greater is the general and detailed knowledge of the EU institutions.

Analyzing the research results we can draw conclusions:

- the authors did not appreciate the knowledge of respondents from rural areas about the integration knowledge and EU institutions giving the priority in this regard to residents of cities;
- rural respondents knowledge about the EP and the EC was and is linked to the fact of applying for aid funds;
- therefore, village residents have been in contact directly and earlier with the integration functioning practice, and fear of difficulties in funds availability mobilized villagers to enhance the professional knowledge about EU and its institutions;
- the statement about rural residents having a professional knowledge about the EP and the EC function in creating the European law, budget and international affairs is undisputed.

It follows, quite unexpectedly, that the empirical verification of the third hypothesis showed the need to question it.

CONCLUSIONS

Integration processes and their functioning are closely related to institutions system, this is particularly related to the integration within the EU, the development and enhancement of which would not be possible without extensive institutionalization. Authors were interested if Polish citizens know integration only in general or in detailed terms concerning functioning of various types of institutions. To examine the level of this knowledge was the intention of the study.

The thesis designed for analysis have been subjected to empirical verification, which had a quite interesting course, sometimes surprising. The positive fact is that all respondents have general knowledge. However, referring the detailed knowledge to variables: education level and residence place allows to draw some general conclusions. Regardless of any dependence construction between tested elements, some regularity can be observed, that all respondents have a good knowledge about aid funds and the budget. Typically, respondents correctly interpret the EP and the EC role in this respect.

Worrying is the fact that the knowledge about institution function related to the monetary union is fragmented, which in the face of the preparation of the Polish economy and society to the introduction of the common currency is a highly undesirable phenomenon. A surprising fact was that the people from rural areas had better knowledge about the EP and the EC.

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