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**The reform of the State in France:  
disappointed ambitions of the regional and local authorities**

**Summary**

The unsustainable level of public debt calls for structural reforms. Among them, the territorial reform appears as an essential part of the reform of the state. But the question is: how to start this vast project, while decentralization is, as it were, in midstream? The division of competences between the state and the three levels of regional and local authorities required inextricable political compromises, formalized in many amendments, which removed any consistency from the drafts of bills that have been submitted to Parliament; the exercise of decentralized territorial competences is becoming more and more difficult due to the increasingly worrying budgetary constraints: equality between the territories requires now a range of equalization measures and territorial solidarity. But the latter only makes sense when there is something to be redistributed.

Do the budget constraints justify a real territorial “big bang” or do they rather dictate it? The merger of regions is seen as the centerpiece of the territorial reform to come, as if larger regions were enough to make them more powerful and more prosperous. The economies of scale will only be effective after many years. The European Commission expects France to make the necessary structural reforms and prove its credibility in controlling public finances. When it comes to the citizens, they expect more services and more protection from the state and the regional and local authorities but without increased tax pressure. Only a return to economic growth could foster the convergence of expectations that are *a priori* diametrically opposed.

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