**American Federalism in 1990s.**

While it would be an overstatement to suggest that the average American has a clear concept of meaning of federalism in 1994, there is some evidence than issues, involving locus of governmental power are important to many. For example, polling organizations frequently ask citizens - which level of government most enjoys their trust and confidence. The results consistently indicate, that people trust their local governments most and their national government least. The states drift along in the middle. So, most Americans view local government the most favorably.

However, as is the case in most areas of our political life, attitudes change significantly when citizens are faced with specific issues. Even though Americans appear to be committed to federalism in the abstract, they always seem to have lengthy list of problems which they want the federal government because state and local governments have failed to resolve them, or a list of services which are perceived as poorly provided or not provided at all. It is common for individuals and groups to respond to such perceptions by demanding that the national government create new standards or mandates or provide direct or indirect expenditures of money. Sometimes, they seek both.

While it is traditional to expect demands for increased national government activity from more liberal, so-called «big government», elements in American society, conservatives, who see themselves as a defenders of state’s rights and local self-government also may jump on the bandwagon and demand national action. Thus it is quite unsurprising that recently liberal elements in American society have sought national legislation controlling access to firearms, as reflected in recently-adopted Brady Bill, which requires dealers to run checks on purchasers. On the other hand, it seems unusual, from a federalism perspective, that conservative elements have sought national government action to eliminate or restrict access to abortions or to permit the introduction of prayers in the public schools.

Perhaps the best recent example of such a demand for national action may be found in public safety area. There is a general perception, that high levels of criminal activity made the persons and property of the average citizen in this country unsafe. In general, however, the definition and control of criminal behavior has historically been a state and local responsibility. Our national officials sense that there is a demand for them to do something in response to state and local failures. The result is anti-crime legislation at the national level which has been proposed by the President and which is largely supported by members of Congress. While many of us doubt the effectiveness of the specific legislation, few people have seriously objected to this activity as destructive of basic fabric of our federal system.

The result is an inconsistent and often confusing approach to solving governmental problems in a federalist concept. In terms of practical politics, the system provides multiple forms of access. Various groups, no matter what ideological view of the federal system, take a pragmatic approach. That is, when their preferred level of government fails to produce policy results, that are satisfactory, they seek action at another level. None of the models of the federal systems seems to describe this state of affairs very well.

There is also confusion about federalism at another level in the US. We often observe this best when trying to teach about the system in our American Government classes. For some, federalism is equated with democracy. This is to say that they believe that unitary systems are by definition undemocratic. These patriotic souls are skeptical of evidence which demonstrates that some unitary systems are quite democratic, and that some federal systems are quite autocratic in nature.

Still, others confuse federalism with the concepts of separation of powers and checks and balances which are so important in understanding American government. While federalism does indeed divide governmental powers and involve some checking and balancing, separation of powers is a term, normally reserved to discussions of the relations between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of our governments. This distinction is troublesome for many of our students.

Due to my limited time I would like to state some most nuisance problems, that became a heavy burden for every American, involved in active politics in any way. First, we should mention the so-called «unfunded mandate», that became the biggest bone of contention in American intergovernmental rules. An unfunded mandate can be said to exist when the national government requires new or improved services or level of regulation, but leaves funding largely to state and local governments. This permits national level officials and institutions to establish their own policy without any considering costs. While that seems a poor way to operate, it fits in well with some traditional American political attitudes in which costs of government services are either ignored or assumed to be borne by someone else.

Some examples may illustrate the reasons for state complaints. In 1993, the Congress passed a law requiring the states to provide a system of voter’s registration which was