Problem setting. It is impossible to build a new system of public administration without an improved territorial organization of the state. In almost every European state the decentralization of powers was followed by a territorial reform that was to enlarge territorial units.

Recent research and publications analysis showed that such scientists as Averianov V.B., Aleksieiev V.M., Bakumenko V.D., Koliushko I.B., Kondyk P.M., Kravchenko S.O., Kuibida V.S., Lakhyzha M.I., Nyzhnyk N.R., Pashko L.A., Prokopenko L.L., Seriogin S.M., Surmin Yu.P., Tymoshchuk V.P., Sharov Yu.P., Yatsiuk V.A. and others paid much attention to various aspects of the administrative-territorial reform. The author grounds this paper on works by these researchers as well as on practice of the administrative-territorial reform in Europe.

Paper objective is to study foreign experience of the administrative-territorial reform in terms of decentralization of powers. It might be useful for Ukraine and help avoiding mistakes when implementing the administrative-territorial reform.

Paper main body. The article covers foreign experience of the administrative-territorial reforms in terms of decentralization of powers with a purpose to implement reforms effectively. In almost every European state the
decentralization of powers was followed by a territorial reform that was to enlarge territorial units. Thus it is necessary to apply scientific methods and involve active and professional political and civil environment as well as leading scientists to develop its implementation model.

The article provides examples of how administrative-territorial reforms were implemented in European countries. The author has analyzed ways and methods to implement them.

There are two approaches to the enlargement: to stimuli voluntary union of municipalities and an administrative enlargement. Each method has its advantages and disadvantages.

Some countries like France, Denmark when implementing their administrative-territorial reforms paid maximum attention to national and state traditions, family ties, public opinion, historical, cultural, economic affairs and other indexes. It resulted in a huge number of the lowest administrative-territorial units.

When enforcing a territorial reform it is necessary to take measures to soften its implementation. They soften the process of reforms. However they often slow it down and as a result there appears a necessity to apply strict administrative measures.

**Conclusions of the research.** Analyzing foreign experience of local governance reformation it is possible to make the following conclusions:

1. The enlargement criteria of administrative-territorial units’ enlargement are based upon:
   - the territory and population;
   - functions (tasks and competence) of local authorities of different territorial levels;
   - political and financial autonomy of territorial authorities;
   - mechanisms of public services provision (through state or municipal services or through private sector).

2. The administrative-territorial reforms should have a purpose to enhance the effectiveness of services’ provision and approximate powers to people.

3. Reforms should be applied in a complex way on the basis of scientific programs with due regard to foreign experience, own failures and previous mistakes, features and potential of regions.
4. Administrative-territorial reforms initiated by public are more effective than those initiated from above. Even if there is a state initiative the reforms should be advanced by a wide discussion and public opinion should be taken into consideration.

5. A voluntary union of territories is more efficient. The state should stimuli it with certain preferences.