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## About the necessity of scientific research concerning regional and ethnoregional parties in Central and Eastern Europe

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**ABOUT THE NECESSITY OF SCIENTIFIC  
RESEARCH CONCERNING REGIONAL  
AND ETHNOREGIONAL PARTIES IN CENTRAL  
AND EASTERN EUROPE**

***Abstract:***

The history of states situated in Central and Eastern Europe in nineteenth and twentieth centuries differs significantly from the history of contemporary than western democracies. In nineteenth century, when the majority of states in Western Europe have shaped their own models of horizontal and vertical division of powers, states in Central and Eastern part of the continent have fought for their political position in the context of larger, complex states or didn't exist at the map of the world at all. The short period of peace between the First and the Second World War has allowed for some experiments with democratic institutions and procedures, but there was no time for their consolidation. After the Second World War that part of Europe has fallen under the influence of the Soviet Union, losing the chance to implement political solutions known by the Western Europeans for more than 150 years. The democratic transition, started symbolically in 1989, has allowed to undertake new efforts to establish democratic orders in states of Central and Eastern Europe. However, the horizontal division of powers was far more important than the reflection on necessity of vertical organization of the public authority. Mentioned problems have decisively caused difficulties in defining relations between political centres and peripheries in states of the Central and Eastern Europe. But it does not mean that politically significant processes in these states are taking place only in political centres and their only actors are state-wide-parties. For that reason the main aim of this paper will be to justify the necessity of scientific research concerning regional and ethnoregional parties as well as proto-parties in Central and Eastern Europe.

***Key words:***

political parties, regional parties, ethnicity, regionalism, Central and Eastern Europe

## *Introduction*

The history of states situated in Central and Eastern Europe in nineteenth and twentieth centuries differs significantly from the history of contemporary western democracies. In nineteenth century, when the majority of states in Western Europe have shaped their own models of horizontal and vertical division of powers, states in Central and Eastern part of the continent have fought for their political position in the context of the larger, complex states or didn't exist at the map of the world at all. The short period of peace between the First and the Second World War has allowed for some experiments with democratic institutions and procedures, but there was no time for their consolidation. European states had not enough time to learn how to organize political life in ethnically heterogeneous reality and what means to respect rights of minorities in democratic reality.

After the Second World War that part of Europe has fallen under the influence of the Soviet Union, losing the chance to implement political solutions known by the Western Europeans for more than 150 years. Thus it can be assumed, that the experience of non-democratic and highly centralized system had a strong influence for the political and electoral behaviour of political elites and voters after the fall of communism.

The democratic transition, started symbolically in 1989, has allowed to undertake new efforts to establish democratic orders in states of Central and Eastern Europe. However, the beginning of that process was associated with establishment of principles of organization and interaction between institutions operating in political centres of mentioned states. The horizontal division of powers was far more important than the reflection on necessity of vertical organization of the public authority. It can be assumed that the political imagination of elites actively involved in processes of democratization included the need of change of political relations in political centres. But they did not understand the importance of decentralization processes, well known in states of Western Europe from the nineteenth century. Decentralization in states of mentioned region have been introduced gradually and rather not because of the reflection on the need to carry out such kind of changes. It was rather due to the beginning of negotiations to access to structures of the European Union.

Problems mentioned above have decisively caused difficulties in defining relations between political centres and peripheries in states of the Central and Eastern Europe, in the period of the political transition in the last decade of the twentieth century. However, it does not mean that politically significant processes in these countries are taking place only in political centres and their only actors are *state-wide-parties*. For that reason the main aim

of this paper will be to justify the necessity of scientific research concerning regional and ethnoregional parties as well as proto-parties in Central and Eastern Europe.

### ***The importance of the research field***

It is easy to notice that authors of a very extensive literature on political parties in Europe focus mainly on analysis of phenomenon occurring in political centres of modern states. It can be explained by the significance of central governments and parliaments in decision-making processes and their high dynamics. But it does not change the fact that political parties, carrying out their activities at the territory of the whole state, are often not the only actors in the political scene with the real political influence.

Relatively few publications dedicated to political parties present problems related with their operation at sub-national level of the region. Also relatively few studies describe regional and ethnoregional parties, and much less regional proto-parties. Several reasons can be found to explain it. Without a doubt, the first one is the adoption of the false assumption that the phenomenon of ethnicity in united Europe is a phenomenon in decline. The unification of certain legal procedures or creation of united market determines many regional or ethnic groups to preserve their own identity. It is an important factor for the character of political demands presented by those groups. Highlighting of cultural differences and own group identity is increasingly characteristic not only for *state-wide-parties*, but also for entities operating at regional level. In particular that phenomenon can be observed in West European states, e.g. in Spain (Catalonia, Basque Country, etc.) or in Great Britain (Scotland, Wales or the Northern Ireland). The centre-periphery conflict has reached a significant level of institutionalization there and regional and ethnoregional parties have significant position in political and party systems. The situation is very different in Central and Eastern Europe. Problems with decentralization and realization of minorities rights - mentioned above - are situating regional communities in a very different political position. Problems of Silesians and Kashubians in Poland, Moravians in Czechia or Hungarian Community in Slovakia are not as well described in scientific literature as the case of Catalonia in Spain or Scotland in Great Britain. Anyhow they pay attention of scientists (e.g.: Minahan 2002; Obracht-Prondzyński 2002; Obracht-Prondzyński 2007; Mordawski 2005; Modrzejewski 2013; Sekuła 2009; Sekuła 2012; Trościak 2016; Kocsis & Kocsis-Hodosi 1998).

Secondly, marginalization of research of this type can also result from the fact that in Western Europe deputies originating from regional and ethnoregional parties usually gain relatively a small number of seats in state parliaments and in the European Parliament in comparison with representatives of other large “families” of political parties. However, as noted by Lieven de Winter, is not a result of their marginal political weight, but rather the relatively small size of territory where the fight for votes (de Winter 2001: 3). It is worth to note that in western democracies electoral procedures usually permit for an effective participation of regional and ethnoregional parties in the process of formation the composition of representative bodies (Myśliwiec 2014). Usually this way territorial minorities are involved in decision-making processes related to the functioning of the political system. In Central and Eastern Europe it does not always work this way. E.g. high electoral threshold (5% for parties and 8% for their coalitions), established in electoral procedure to the first chamber of the Polish parliament, effectively prevents the possibility of obtainment of the political representation by regional and ethnoregional parties. In change this same law exempt national minorities - but only these which are legally recognized by the Polish state - from obligation to cross any electoral threshold (Dz.U. 2011).

Thirdly, the study of regional and ethnoregional parties in western democracies requires conclusions get from analysis of certain phenomenon which existence dates back to the late nineteenth century, were clearly visible in the 1920s and 1930s and which were intensified at the end of the last century. In that part of Europe regional and ethnoregional parties constitute the unique combination of old and new elements which make up the reality of contemporary political systems. Some of these parties were created in the late nineteenth century. The perfect example could be the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) is founded in 1895 by Sabino Arana Goiri. Other parties assigned to the same “family” appeared in the second and third decade of the twentieth century. They include the Welsh National Party (Plaid Cymru - founded in 1925), the Catalan Republican Left (ERC - founded in 1931) and the Scottish National Party (SNP - founded in 1934). Finally, the intensification of the process of creating of regional and ethnoregional parties in Western Europe falls on the end of the twentieth century. Integration processes in Europe, as well as the decentralization of particular states, has resulted with such parties as the Democratic Convergence of Catalonia, whose existence dates back to 1974, the Northern League (founded in 1989), and League of Savoy, established in 1994. In such a situation assessment of the evolution of phenomenon of emergence and political impact of regional and ethnoregional parties on party systems of the West European states is an extremely difficult task. In change, investigation concerning regional and ethnoregional parties in Central and Eastern Europe is not

such a demanding challenge. The lack of statehood in nineteenth century, tragic fate of the political elite during the Second World War and the experience of socialist reality with its strict centralization have caused that the period of time for the research work on political parties starts in practice in 1990s.

Fourthly, it should be also pointed out that despite of the existence of a number of classifications of political parties, authors investigating that issue propose usually the adoption of division for “families” of political parties, referring to the main “poles of competition” (Antoszewski 2009: 75). In practice it means narrowing the classification to several major doctrinal stereotypes that distinguish modern parties. For Andrzej Antoszewski (2009: 75) this approach is particularly useful for comparative research. It enables to identify the most stable socio-political divisions that divide people in different European countries. At the same time the amount of party “families” distinguished under such classification depends on the perspective taken by the author. For example, in 2002 Ryszard Herbut singled out seven “families” of political parties: communist, left libertarian, social democratic, Christian democratic, liberal, conservative and extreme right (Herbut 2002). In 2009 Andrzej Antoszewski has identified five major “poles of competition”: socialist (moderate left), the conservative Christian-democratic, liberal, radical and ecological (represented by the orthodox left communist and / or extreme right-wing) (Antoszewski 2009: 75-76). While in 1993 Adam Jamróz pointed out for the existence of only three living doctrinal stereotypes in modern democratic states: conservative, liberal and social democratic (Jamróz 1993: 187). The adoption of such a classification seems to be right, because it indicates for existence of a stable socio-political cleavages in European states. However, it is worth to stress on that in modern Europe divisions associated only with ideological issues are not the only important ones. The fact of disappointment of the significant part of electorate with the political offer presented by traditional *state-wide-parties* has created a chance to gain votes of dissatisfied voters by parties that refer to other value systems. Like it was noted by Wojciech Sokół: “(...) without questioning the creative role of ideas, one should remember about the category of interest as the basis for the political action.” (Sokół & Żmigrodzki 2008: 37).

It is worth to underline that currently at the united Europe one of the most important socio-political division is the cleavage centre - periphery. The importance of its existence - in the context of considerations presented in theory and practice of political parties - is the fact that many authors indicate in their classifications for existence of the “family” of regional and ethnoregional parties. And so “the family of regional and ethnic parties” can be found in classification proposed by Klaus von Beyme, although the author himself stress on that it cannot be presented together within classic ideological schemes

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(von Beyme 1982). “The family of regional parties” can be found in the classification proposed by Jürg Steiner (1993: 25-98), “the family of ethnic parties” by British researcher Paul Lewis (2000: 56), and in classification of Czech political scientists can be find a “the family of regional and ethnic parties” (Fiala, Holzer, Strmiska 2002: 17-21).

The problem of the regional and ethnic parties “family” existence is also present in Polish literature. Such relevant authors as Ryszard Herbut and Andrzej Antoszewski mention about it in their works, but do not include that “family” into proposed classifications, referring to the main doctrinal stereotypes. Richard Herbut notes that regional parties do not fit into the classical layout left-right and therefore it is always risky to make such a classification. Anyhow, the author also points to the fact that in states where the centre-periphery conflict has achieved a significant level of relevance in politics, the researcher can locate a regional party on the left-right axis (Herbut 2002: 182).

Andrzej Antoszewski is also against the classification of this type of parties as a separate “family”. He underline, like Wojciech Sokół, that distinction of ethnic party should be done on a different basis, it means by reference to the social groups that the party represent (Antoszewski 2009: 73).

It should be emphasized that despite the justified and negative attitude of presented authors to the recognizing of regional and ethnic parties in classifications indicating the existence of ideological “families”, they move in their studies and comment on the problem of their existence. Therefore, it can be assumed that this problem has its significance for the scientific research (Myśliwiec 2014).

### ***Justification for the purpose to intensify the research***

Intensification of research on the position of regional and ethnoregional parties in political systems of the European countries, and in particular their presence in representative bodies on four levels - European, national, regional and local - is definitely needed. The first argument in favour of this kind of research is the fact that in modern Europe these groups play a central role in construction of regional “imagined communities” (Anderson 1983). It consequently forcing scientists to define the emerging and redefine the existing relationships between political centres and peripheries (de Winter, Gómez-Reino, Lynch 2006: 15). That scientific aim seems to be particularly important in the case of states situated in Central and Eastern Europe. A quarter-century of a new chance to exist in democratic reality forced political elites of particular states not only to define horizontal relations between political parties and institutions but also vertical ones. However, political changes observed nowadays in Poland

or Hungary lead to ask a question about models of democracy proposed in Central and Eastern Europe. The fact that in transition process central institutions were much more important than the vertical division of powers, has its influence for present political events. New organization of central institutions and the attempt to strengthen the state centralization are still in the centre of interest of political elites in mentioned states. But it does not mean that there are no reactions for it from the part of peripheral regions and their political elites.

The second argument is the fact that in West European states the level of relevance of regional and ethnoregional parties is quite high. Those parties are present almost in all western party systems and succeed in almost all types of elections. Two successive waves of political mobilization (in 1970s and 1990s) have showed that the phenomenon of peripheral nationalisms in Western Europe have increased (de Winter, Gómez-Reino, Lynch 2006: 14). Such successes like electoral results obtained by the Scottish National Party in elections to the House of Commons in 2015 or to the Scottish Parliament in 2016 cannot be unnoticed by researchers of political systems. But also it is worth to investigate electoral efforts of regional, ethnoregional and proto parties in Central and Eastern Europe. Although they do not obtain as many votes and seats as their counterparts in Western Europe, they participate in elections and usually present a different political offer than the most of *state-wide-parties*. Proposals presented by the Silesian Autonomy Movement (Ruch Autonomii Śląska – RAŚ) in Poland, Moravians (Moravané) in Chechia or Party of the Hungarian Community (Strana maďarskej komunity - Magyar Közösség Pártja - SMK-MKP) in Slovakia is a part of political reality of those states.

Thirdly, the process of regionalization of states in western part of Europe has undoubtedly the significant influence on their modernization. It could be observed already in the seventies of the twentieth century that modernization was associated with increase of peripheral mobilization in highly developed societies. Arend Lijphart pointed for that phenomenon in his publication in 1977 (Lijphart 1977). In his opinion the most important factors determining the emergence of ethnic conflicts in the West were:

- the horizontalisation of vertical ethnic groups, based on an unequal impact on development of particular groups,
- a growing number of issues which are the field of the state activity,
- decreasing displacement of ethnic conflict and weakening of other socio-political divisions,
- a new wave of democratization, daring ethnic demands,
- the growing importance of post-bourgeois values such as democratization, decentralization, autonomy and the right to self-determination,
- and the demonstration effect of ethnic demands (Lijphart 1977: 46-64).



Therefore it can be assumed that the reference of regional and ethnoregional parties to new values system and use of disappointment of a large part of electorate have helped them to gather a significant political capital in last decades (de Winter, Gómez-Reino, Lynch 2006: 14).

But in times when Arent Lijphart was presenting his publication concerning regional and ethnoregional political problems in the West, the situation of regional and ethnic groups in Central and Eastern part of Europe was very different. Like it was mentioned above, problems of decentralization and implementation of minorities rights was a democratic experiment between two world wars, without time for its consolidation. Also it was not a political priority for elites ruling between 1945 and 1989, nor even after the beginning of the democratic transition. For this reason the famous concept of Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan that party systems of 1960s reflect - despite a few significant exceptions – the structure of the divisions of the twenties, does not fit to the political reality of Central and Eastern Europe (Lipset & Rokkan 1967). It is much more adequate to base the scientific investigation on relations between political centre and peripheries in that region and their influence for particular party systems on Herbert Kitschelt concept (Kitschelt 1995) or on the theory of socio-political breaks of Radosław Markowski (Markowski 2009). Only knowledge about the nature of that kind of socio-political breaks, in specific territorial and historical reality, can help to understand political demands of the regional and ethnoregional parties at studied area. Besides, it seems that in present situation of search for a new models of democracy in Central and Eastern Europe (in particular in Poland and Hungary), related with an attempt to strength states centralization, it will be necessary to redefine relations between political centres and peripheric regions with their own identities.

## *Conclusions*

The main aim of this paper was to justify the necessity of scientific research concerning regional and ethnoregional parties as well as proto-parties in Central and Eastern Europe. The analysis presented above leads to next conclusions:

1. Problems of regional and ethnic minorities and their political representation in Central and Eastern Europe (eg. Silesians and Kashubians in Poland, Moravians in Czechia or Hungarian Community in Slovakia) are not as well described in scientific literature as cases of relevant examples in Western Europe (eg. Catalonia in Spain or Scotland in Great Britain). It should be a challenge for political scientists.

2. In western democracies electoral procedures usually permit for an effective participation of regional and ethnoregional parties in the process of formation the composition of representative bodies. Usually this way territorial minorities are involved in decision-making processes related to the functioning of the political system. In Central and Eastern Europe it does not always work this way. For this reason the research work concerning sources of that phenomenon is highly desirable.
3. Investigation concerning regional and ethnoregional parties in Central and Eastern Europe is a different challenge than in the case of West European reality. The lack of statehood in nineteenth century, tragic fate of the political elite during the Second World War and the experience of socialist reality with its strict centralization have caused that the period of time for the research work on political parties starts in 1990s. In that case the researcher should join the investigation on historical sources of centre-peripheric cleavage and political reality after the beginning of the democratic transition.
4. Despite of the justified and negative attitude to recognizing regional and ethnic parties in classifications indicating the existence of ideological “families”, relevant authors present in their studies and comment on the problem of their existence. Therefore, it can be assumed that this problem has its significance for the scientific research.
5. Regional and ethnoregional parties play a central role in construction of regional “imagined communities”. It consequently forcing scientists to define the emerging and redefine the existing relationships between political centres and peripheries. Nowadays that scientific aim seems to be particularly important in the case of states situated in Central and Eastern Europe. The most important question is which will be the political reaction of regional, ethnoregional and proto parties for political elites efforts to establish the new organization of central institutions and the attempt to strength the state centralization.
6. It is worth to investigate electoral efforts of regional, ethnoregional and proto parties in Central and Eastern Europe. Although they do not obtain as many votes and seats as their counterparts in Western Europe, they participate in elections and usually present a different political offer than the most of *state-wide-parties*.
7. It is much more adequate to base the scientific investigation on relations between political centre and peripheries in Central and Eastern Europe and their influence for particular party systems rather on Herbert Kitschelt concept or on the theory of socio-political breaks of Radosław Markowski than on the concept of Seymour Martin Lipset and

Stein Rokkan. Only knowledge about the nature of that kind of socio-political breaks, in specific territorial and historical reality, can help to understand political demands of the regional and ethnoregional parties at studied area. Besides, it seems that in present situation of search for a new models of democracy in Central and Eastern Europe (in particular in Poland and Hungary), related with an attempt to strength states centralization, it will be necessary to redefine relations between political centres and peripheric regions with their own identities.

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