

Ethnoregional communities and their political representation in Central and Eastern Europe

In the 20th century, as a consequence of the disintegration of large empires and peace treaties, several ethnic groups became minorities in the territories of the newly established small states. After the forty-year period of state socialism, by the last years of the era there were significant political and social movements that started a new epoch of self-organisation in the Central and Eastern European region. There were political movements based on national identity endeavouring to become independent and to redraw the borders within the region, and some of them were successful in creating new nation states (bringing more and more communities into minority status), while others attempted to achieve personal and /or territorial autonomy within the given country. Some of the minority groups lives territorially concentrated in a specific region or along the border. Although these so-called ethnoregional communities may differ significantly based on their population and regional proportions, they form a specific group of ethnic minorities. Organizations representing these communities are ethnoregional parties.

The most widely accepted definition by determining ethnoregional parties is originated from MÜLLER-ROMMEL, who defines this group of political organisations as parties *„referring to the efforts of geographically concentrated peripheral minorities which challenge the working order and sometimes even the democratic order of a nation-state by demanding recognition of their cultural identity”* (MÜLLER-ROMMEL 1998:19). Ethnoregional parties are special mixtures of ethnic parties, which are organised in order to represent the interests of a given minority, and of regional parties, which are organised in order to represent interests of a given territory. The specific feature of ethnoregional parties is the representation of these two interrelated dimensions in the course of their operation and activity (DANDROY 2010). This definition can be supplemented by the determinative characteristic of ethnoregional parties, namely their demands *“(...) for the reorganization of the power structure of the national political system, for a certain degree of self-government for the region”* (DE WINTER 2001:4). According to DE WINTER, the degree of targeted self-government can vary from cultural protectionism to separatism.

The “ethnic renaissance”, the development of democratisation processes, the decentralisation supported by the ethnic groups, the conflicts effected by economic inequalities, the different development paths, and the opportunities of central and periphery (as a determining cleavage in party formation according to LIPSET – ROKKAN 1967) can be mentioned among the reasons of the establishment and strengthening of political movements and parties (GYÖRI-SZABÓ 2006). Their party evolutions were accelerated by the rise of Europe of Regions, the appearance of multi-level governance theory, and by the institutional reforms within the EU (direct elections to the EP, establishment of Committee of the Regions) as well as the changes in common regional policy (LYNCH 2007, ELIAS 2008). As a complex result of minority mobilisation and favourable changes concerning regions, European Free Alliance (it unites progressive, nationalist, regionalist and autonomist parties (RIEDEL 2006) struggling for democratic rights and autonomy or for deeper regionalization) was established in 1981 with the aim to integrate extremely heterogeneous ethnoregional parties and movements and to represent them in the European Parliament (LYNCH – DE WINTER 2008). Nevertheless, the Alliance is far from uniting all the ethnoregional movements; although its membership is ever expanding, representation in EP did not become more stable over the years (this led to coalition with the Greens in 1999). The party could not profit a lot due to eastward enlargement in 2004 and since the accession of Romania, Bulgaria, and Croatia either, as

many of small and fragile ethnoregional parties from mostly centralised states decided to join traditional European political parties instead of EFA (LYNCH 2007).

Western European ethnoregional parties have a large scientific literature with several books and studies on comparative analysis. The typological attempts on systematisation, the extremely heterogeneous party family is trying to sort organisations according to different aspects (see DE WINTER 1998, DANDROY 2010, MASSETTI – SHAKEL 2015). The classification based on definitive features, namely the concept on the way and method to reorganise the national state, is just one of the possible solutions. An attempt on typology of Central and Eastern European ethnic politics (cultural revivalism, political autonomism, territorial self-determinism, separatism and irredentism) fits into this series (BUGAJSKI 1993). However, after the transition several organisations, which were elements of this classification, disappeared (in rare cases due to achieving objectives) or replaced by another, new identities awakened or entered another phase of ethnic politics.

Ethnoregional parties in Central and Eastern Europe were paid little attention so far, but recently scientific interest is increasingly turning towards the region. However, either the Central and Eastern European (e.g. BOCHSLER 2006.), or the Pan-European (e.g. SZÖCSIK – ZUBER 2015) examinations are taken into consideration, the number of synthetic analyses is still low, and the literature is dominated mainly by case studies. Significant need can be seen for summarising analysis regarding lesser-known ethnoregional parties in the region, and for creation of typology similar (not necessarily identical) to the one in Western Europe, which will pave the way for Europe-wide comparisons. Upper Silesian ethno-regionalism was analysed in detail in my doctoral dissertation (BARANYAI 2013), while within the framework of a scholarship program (National Excellence Program) four Central and East European autonomy aspirations (Carpatho-Rusyn, Moravian, Szekler, and Upper Silesian) were examined, followed by a research project on (ethno)regional endeavours with a broader geographical scope (Istria, Upland, Vojvodina) in Central and Eastern Europe. As a synthesizing conclusion we can state, that minority policy and the protection of territorial integrity (manifested in insufficient decentralisation as well) in nationalizing states (BRUBAKER 1995) do not create opportunities to begin substantive dialogue about territorial autonomy and to deepen the level of self-governance in regions. A significant part of ethnoregional organisations can become political factor at the most in local and regional level, while others – although their socio-political base is sufficient – are not able to represent uniformly the territorial autonomy issue at national level, due to internal conflicts. My research results on this topic are published in several studies as well as in a monograph (BARANYAI 2017a) and a book chapter (BARANYAI 2017b).

This presentation summarizes the results of a research, which had the aim to explore the main features and historical development of Central and Eastern European ethnoregional parties, to build a database (detailed data on organizations, political-legislative framework and regional characteristics), to develop a typology and to summarize the macro regional characteristics regarding these types. Within the framework of the presentation the developed typology of ethnoregional parties in Central and Eastern Europe will be presented. As a starting point, ideal types of DANDROY (2010) was used, who distinguishes three basic types and further subtypes of ethnoregional movements in Western Europe: protectionist (conservative, participationist), decentralist (autonomist, federalist, confederalist) and secessionist (independentist, irredentist, rattachist). According to the main hypothesis of the research proposal, the Western European typology based on definitive features is just partly adaptable for Central and Eastern European political organizations: as a result of different historical development and as an effect of regional characteristics emerged after the state-socialist era, ethnoregional parties do not fit into ideal types, their endeavours appear often in parallel, in equal, or alternative forms.

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