

Regionalism in Upper Silesia

The Concept of Autonomous Regions in Poland

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Introduction

The decentralization of power, in particular, regionalization in the western and the eastern part of the old continent was brought about by both the European Union and processes of democratization, modernization and economic transformation. While in Western European states the structures built on state organization traditions and territorial units with regional identities were formed through centuries based on economic, political or ethnic considerations, in Eastern Europe the overdue feudalism resulted in the dominance of the central level instead of creating the culture of territorial governance and management. As a result, regional identity remained immature, moreover, in the characteristically multinational states it was overwritten by national and ethnic identity (Illés, 2002) with regional significance. In the initial phase of the transitional period the main objective in most Central and Eastern European states (CEECs) was the reinforcement of the nation state and the establishment of political and economic stability, decentralization and regionalization, therefore, were not topical issues. Later the reforms were related to several disapprovals by the governments and led to political debates among parties. Regional reform processes were formed by the lack of historical traditions and patterns of regional autonomy, the fear from the dissolution of the newly independent states' unity (Yoder, 2003), which often resulted in hurried decentralization with the transformation of the institutional system and the regional structures. This stems from the fact that decentralization needs were recognised on the central level, and in this way territorial reforms were “*top-down driven, motivated by modernization and very often intermingled with the hope of EU-accession*” (Pálné, 2000: 80).

The principles of the European Union and specifically that of the Structural Funds undoubtedly had a great impact on the administrative reforms of the transition countries. The principles of decentralization and subsidiarity, for instance, were indirectly conducted applied in such a way that indirectly drifted governments towards regionalization in the pre-accession states in Central and Eastern Europe as well as all in the Western European countries within the EU. The indirect influence of the EU appeared mainly in the need of designing the planning and statistical NUTS units, considered as the basis of development policy, which in many cases led to the transformation or realignment of the administrative system, thus a significant part of the countries harmonized their units with the administrative levels. If decentralization is only motivated by the possibility to get access to and utilize the financial means of development of the EU, the newly designed institutional system potentially remains empty, and the central level is strengthened against the regional and local units, thus, a recentralization process begins. In CEECs this scenario was based on reality, since democratic traditions and the development of strong local government were incomplete, the redistributive role in the relatively underdeveloped economies was closely tied to the central level, civil society was still weak and as long as society at large was not able to follow rapid changes, the samples of regional identity had not yet been formulated.

Decentralization and the evolution of regions can be influenced by the processes of regionalization and regionalism, or their combination. Concerning our study we have to make a distinction between top-down *modernizing regionalism (regionalization) initiated by the central level* and bottom-up regionalism, which is related to regional identity and—in several cases—ethnic or cultural issues.

Among the Visegrad (V4) countries Poland was the first to implement the administrative reform by breaking down the previous structures, which resulted in—as opposed to the other three V4 countries—deep and genuine decentralization. Despite deep top-down reforms there is still a need in Poland for further changes, which are connected with bottom-up regionalism. This study presents and analyzes the process of regionalism in Upper Silesia, the main objectives of the the Silesian Autonomy Movement (*Ruch Autonomy Śląska*, hereinafter referred to as RAŚ), the draft idea on creating

autonomous voivodeships and regionalized unitary state based on the results of political elections, the documents and draft laws of the movement. Finally, the paper offers an outline of possible consequences and solutions.

Regionalization and Regions in Poland

Poland is a decentralized unitary state with a post-transition structure based on the Napoleonic model (Sturm–Dieringer, 2005). Due to historical experiences the government in power unwillingly decentralized competencies to subnational units. As a result of the chaos and the dissension of the “*Noble Republic*”, afterward the loss of the independent statehood, the political leadership of the Second Republic and the Polish People’s Republic defined the limits of the autonomy of territorial units in order to keep the unity of the country. Only wary reforms were implemented, which resulted in dualistic structures with reduced competence and self-determination of mid-level units. Accordingly, the dichotomy of decentralization–recentralization was the determining element of the era, which was most significant—all over the Central and Eastern European region, in the Soviet sphere of influence—in the period of the system of “*soviets*” resting on the principle of democratic centralism. The administrative reform implemented in 1972-75 was another example for the centralization of power over subnational units, which were already under governmental control. The aim of the reform was to break down the territorial autonomy through the abolishment of the county (*powiat*) level and the fragmentation of the voivodeships. The debates and the principles of power-sharing in the negotiation period before the transition were similar to the former approaches (unity of state versus efficiency) and adumbrated the long-disputed process of administrative reform after 1990. After the transition only the system of local governments was established (in 1990). Although there were already several concepts on the formation of territorial self-governments, the reform was delayed until 1998, since the political parties could not agree upon a compromise on the number of territorial levels, the character and number of planned counties and voivodeships, together with the electoral system of subnational levels.

Map 1: The structure of voivodeships since 1999



Source: http://www.adam.krynicky.net/lo/mapy/pol_1999.jpg

The preambulum of the accepted constitution in 1997 declared the principles of subsidiarity and decentralization, and after parliamentary debates, demonstrations and political veto concerning the reform processes, a three-level administrative division—within this 16 voivodeships with dual structure—was formed which has been in force since 1st January 1999. With the established local governments the two-level-system remained, only the three laws¹ accepted on 5th June 1998 created again the three-level-system and the institutional structure. In case of the voivodeships the new regions were mainly created by uniting former smaller units, but in some areas the previous regions were divided and annexed to different voivodeships. The

¹ Laws on the establishment of the self-governments in the county and regional level and the state administration in voivodeships.

voivodeships, as the upper subnational administrative units are political regions but perform the administrative and planning-statistical features as well. Beside the political regions traditional and ethnic/linguistic-cultural territorial units can be found, which represent the base for Polish regionalism. The motivations, objectives and activities of the regional movements depend on the type of the region: demands for ethno-linguistic and cultural rights, higher degree of self-government or at times even autonomy. In this regard Silesia is a special area, because it can be mentioned as an ethnic/linguistic-cultural and as a traditional region at the same time, therefore the regional aspirations can be interpreted along these characteristics (Jałowiecki, 1999).

The origins of regionalism – the short history of Upper Silesia

The Upper Silesian regional movement, the RAŚ principally would like to restore the former autonomy of the area, but recently the organization's main goal is to create a regionalized unitary state in Poland, instead of the extant decentralized one. The proposed changes would have an effect not only on the functions of the voivodeships, but the regional structure as well, since both the movement's implicit and explicit aim is to unify the territory of the historic Upper Silesia, namely the Silesia and Opole Voivodeships, or their particular areas, which supposedly would have an impact on the regional division of Poland. Silesia is one of the six historical regions in Poland (Koter-Kulesza, 2003) situated in the area encompassed by Katowice, Zielona Góra, Görlitz and Opava. The western part within Silesia, Lower Silesia and the eastern part, together with Upper Silesia have been distinguished since the 15th century (Malloy 2005), whose historical development were significantly different. After the inception of the Polish state Silesia as a specific border region often changed hands: the area belonged to the Czech crown, therefore, later to the Habsburg Monarchy, afterwards to Prussia and the Holy Roman Empire. After the final partition of Poland in 1795 Silesia became a frontier of the three empires, then, between the world wars the western part belonged to Germany, while the newly established Czechoslovakia and Poland shared on the eastern part. The territory annexed to Poland was undoubtedly the most developed and most industrialized part of the country and the economically and culturally distinct region, the

Silesian Voivodeship did not have to fit in the unitary state structure. The Polish government granted autonomy to the voivodeship, thus the region had its own parliament with legislative power and through the Treasury it could manage independently the certain segment of the local revenues (Szczepański–Śliz, 2012). Accordingly, the Silesian Voivodeship—which at that time meant Katowice and its wider area—could decide on the administrative structure and the Silesian Sejm had competence in creating laws on regional education, health, social services, infrastructure, transport and the police force. The autonomy in practice ended with the expansion of the Third Reich in 1939, however, legally only in 1945 was abolished by the National Council. Poland's borders were redrawn after World War II, therefore, the remaining parts of Upper Silesia and a certain part of Lower Silesia were annexed to Poland. The administrative reform based on the principle of democratic centralism in 1950 enlarged the number of the voivodeships and instead of the former, fourteen regions and seventeen units were created in Poland, two of them in Upper Silesia: the Opole and Katowice Voivodeship (Malloy, 2005), and these were fragmented further according to the reform in 1975. In the course of the administrative reform in 1998 the suggestion presented by the government contained the realignment of the extant 49 regional units into twelve large voivodeships (Wysocka, 1998), which would mean the integration of the Katowice, Opole, Bielsko-Biała and Częstochowa Voivodeships into an Upper-Silesian region (Kamusella, 1999). The plan was issued contrary to the interests of the Opole Voivodeship with its large German minority, as well as the interests of the parliamentary opposition, hence finally the reform established sixteen voivodeships² in Poland and in the territory of Upper Silesia it created two regions, the Opole and Silesian Voivodeship.

The experience of the Western European movements proved the correspondence between economic development or even backwardness and regionalism, moreover ethno-regionalism. The main determining factors in the inception of an (ethno)regional movement are the border-land character and the economic condition varying negative or positive from the national

² To strike down the large cities losing their regional centre status and the demonstrations against the planned reform the government established the category of “city with county rights”, which was granted to all the 49 former region centers.

average. In the case of Upper Silesia both the extraordinary development and the economic recession had impact on the formation of movements and the directions of their activities. Due to economy of the former Prussia and Holy Roman Empire Upper Silesia became one of the most developed and earliest industrialized areas in Central Europe (Gorzela, 1999; Lux, 2008). The economic strength of the region is based on heavy industry (coal mining, metallurgy). The area was suited to become the centre of socialist industrial development and to retain the leading role through the state-socialist period in Poland (Lux, 2008). After the transition Upper Silesia turned into a crisis area, but due to a successful reconstruction resting on the traditional, declining industries and reindustrialization, namely the settling of new industries at the same time, the region has started to develop again.

Map 2: Silesia today



Source: <http://www.tr62.de/maps/Silesia-2000.html>

Upper Silesian society at large believed in the creation of an independent nation state after World War I within which the population could freely use the certified German, Polish and Silesian languages as well. In the beginning of the interwar period, strong Polonization and—in the Silesia Province in Germany—Germanization processes appeared and many of the residents moved to the neighbouring country corresponding with their identities. The minorities and their culture were completely ignored in the state-socialist period, so the political, cultural and scientific dialogue about an Upper Silesian society could only begin after the transition. In the first years of the nineties due to the appearance of the organizations, Upper Silesia was rediscovered and the region moved towards institutionalization. To create a Silesian regional identity many other actions (e.g. festivals, competitions) were organized, and the importance of the Silesian language was strengthened again. The accentuation of multiculturalism, multi-nationalism and the “*heroic industrial past*” was the way for the region to find its position in Europe and to illustrate the discrepancy from the rest of Poland. The decentralization implemented in the framework of the administrative reform in 1998 frustrated the society of the region: since the Silesians had never had their own regional elites. Local political leaders always arrived from outside the region. Despite the decentralization processes the current administrative system, especially the regional institutions were still regarded in Upper Silesia as agents of the state, which had no relationship with the region and local interests (Bialasiewicz, 2002). The population’s specific identity in the culturally and ethnically mixed region was formed by the regular boundary changes, the permanent “*feeling strange*” or occasionally the social-political stigma. After the transition the Silesians expected the certification of their minority rights (Janicki, 2009), but this has still not taken place.

According to all these in the nineties along the strong Upper Silesia cultural identity, two unequivocally isolated trends appeared: one of them had the aim to continue the fight for certification of the Silesian nationality and language, the other’s goal was the restoration of the granted autonomy from 1920 (Wódz, 2010).

The Movement for Autonomy of Silesia

The RAŚ was established in 1990 in Rybnik. The activities of the organization extend to the territory of historical Silesia, which includes the current Silesian, Opole Voivodeships and the south part of the Lower Silesia Voivodeship as well. Although the goals and aims of RAŚ are not significantly different from the organization's previous conceptions (Statut, 1990), regarding the tone and the activities, a "*caesura*" can be found around 2010 when the last regional and local elections were held. Because of the results of the national elections in 1991, the RAŚ could also obtain two mandates in the Sejm, but after the introduction of the five-percent threshold in 1993, the organization lost its parliamentary presence. To represent the interests of the Silesians, the movement tried to establish an alternative organization, the Union of the Population of the Silesian Nationality, which had the aim of reaching the recognition of Silesians, to develop national identity and to protect the language and culture in regional, local ethnic schools (Kamusella, 1999). The unsuccessful registration of the union motivated the RAŚ to find other possibilities. Between 1990 and 2010 the organization went on fighting for the restoration of the former autonomy, however, the geographical area of autonomy was not clear since the interwar region with special status existed within other boundaries and with modified ethnic content.

Although the RAŚ urged the expression of the Silesian identity during the 2002 and the 2011 census, the organization recognized that the estimated number of Silesians (600,000³) could constitute only ten percent of the Upper Silesian population. This rate would not be sufficient to create an autonomous unit based on ethnical disparity. Accordingly, in 2010 the RAŚ replaced the formerly represented ethno-regional and nostalgic argument

³ The study does not include the question of Silesian ethnicity and the activity of the organizations fighting for the certification of the Silesian nationality and language. Even so we must mention here that Poland is a quasi homogeneous nation state. By the census in 2002 the number of Silesians was about 173,000 (total population 38,230,080), but in 2011—due to the changes of the method of the census—it was more than 800,000 (total population about 38,511,800). With these results the Silesians became the most populous minority group in the country, although The Regional Language, National and Ethnic Minorities Act (2005) does not identify them either as minorities, or as a regional group or language.

with the idea of modernization and the deepening of decentralization in Poland.

Keeping a distance from the ethnic argumentation became visible under the leadership of the current president. Jerzy Gorzelik has shaken up the organization, built new elements (e.g. the annual “*March for autonomy*”) into its activities and unambiguously tries to create a movement with regional characters. The declaration on ethnic and linguistic issues now reads as follows: “*The question of Silesian nationality does not belong to the most important goals of the RAŚ. The main goal is to create an autonomous Upper Silesia in Poland, a country made up of autonomous regions. The necessary conditions for achieving this aim are the development of the country’s democratization, the decentralization of decisions and finances and the authentic self-governance of the regions. To realize these aims constitutional and administrative changes are needed as well as the elimination of the dual structure composed by the voivode and the regional self-government in the voivodeships*” (Szczepański–Śliz, 2012: 6). The momentum of the major change in the organization’s rhetoric was the local, county and regional elections held in 2010 which coincided with the 90th anniversary of adjudication of Silesian autonomy. During the campaign the RAŚ identified the goals that they wanted to achieve in the Silesian, Opole Voivodeship in the forthcoming years.

The main goal of the organization was stated as to create a real regional representation beside the national parties, therefore to enhance regional issues and protect the interests of the area. The key elements of the campaign focused on education, including regional education, culture and cultural heritage as well as infrastructure and public transport. Naturally, the question of autonomy played a leading role, however, instead of focusing on its content the organization emphasized only the substantial features concerning self-governments. In terms of the twentieth anniversary of local governments the RAŚ hastened finishing the reform of the administrative system, to reach its final stage, which will be the truly decentralized, regionalized state with autonomous regions. For the implementation of the new administration reform and the creation of the autonomous Upper Silesia the deadline was determined as the year 2020.

Table 1: Results of RAŚ in the regional elections in 2010

Electoral district	Number of votes		Average of valid votes	
	2006	2010	2006	2010
Bielski	1815	3570	0,87	1,58
Katowicki	15805	35264	7,69	15,96
Rybnicki	16778	32068	8,14	14,57
Gliwicki	11700	17719	5,93	8,7
Chorzowski	11139	29851	6,95	17,5
Częstochowski	662	1263	0,41	0,69
Sosnowiecki	1020	3046	0,48	1,37
Total	58919	122781	4,35	8,62

Source: Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza 2010

In the course of the regional elections the members of the RAŚ could run for mandates in each electoral district in the Silesian Voivodeship and the organization successfully nominated candidates for the mayoralty or for seats in the self-government in the county and local level as well. Based on the results of the regional elections in 2010 the support of the movement undoubtedly increased since the last elections, the votes for RAŚ more than doubled between 2006 and 2010. With the 8.62 percent of the valid votes the organization—contrary to the former elections—got representation in the regional self-government. The RAŚ obtained three seats in the central part of the voivodeship, namely in the Katowice, Chorzów and Rybnik electoral districts, while in the northern and southern areas, despite the increasing number of votes, the support of the movement only slightly developed. Due to this result the organization became the fourth strongest political group in the Silesian Voivodeship after the Civic Platform (PO), Law and Justice (PiS) and the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD), moreover in three electoral districts RAŚ overtook the leftist party. The political support of the organization was specifically high in those areas where the number of people declaring Silesian identity was also high, namely in the central part of the region, especially in Katowice and in the organization's former seat, Rybnik.

The winner PO has governed the region together with its national coalition partner, the Polish Peasants' Party (PSL) and with the RAŚ, furthermore, Gorzelik was elected to the five-member executive body of the region. The coalition agreement contains many fundamental elements represented by the RAŚ, such as the establishment of regional education, the strong protection and promotion of cultural heritage and the transparency of the activities of the self-government. The creation of a truly decentralized state is also included in the agreement.

Table 2: Results of RAŚ on the parliamentary (Senate) elections in 2011

Electoral district	Number of votes	Average of valid votes	Rank (Number of commissions)
Opole Voivodeship			
53. district, Opole	6 637	7,06	5 (7)
Silesian Voivodeship			
70. district, Gliwice	25 037	14,93	3 (4)
73. district, Rybnik	26 303	21,92	3 (5)
74. district, Katowice	41 003	25,30	2 (6)
75. district, Katowice	34 527	32,35	2 (3)
78. district, Bielsko-Biała	14 203	6,78	4 (5)

Source: Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza 2011

In the course of the parliamentary elections in 2011 RAŚ entered for mandates of the Senate as a so-called registered voter election committee. They nominated six candidates, one in the Opole, and five in the Silesian voivodeship. Although due to the divergent electoral districts the results of the two last elections are not comparable. It is clear that the political support of the RAŚ has increased significantly: the proportion of votes is 5-10 percent higher than a year before in the Silesian Voivodeship. The number of votes has increased with 18,292, which means that the political base of the movement is still growing. Based on the results of Katowice and Rybnik electoral districts—although none of them resulted in mandates—RAŚ can be mentioned as an important political element of the future and it is imaginable that the movement will be able to get mandate(s) in the Senate in the next parliamentary term. Although the achieved 7 percent in the Opole Voivodeship is much lower than in the other region, the organization could not nominate candidates even to the regional elections before, this result can

be evaluated as a success. Probably the supporting base of RAŚ and other Silesian organizations will grow also in this region in the following years.

Revealing the background of the organization's ideas the European Free Alliance can be referred to. The RAŚ is a full member (2003) of this umbrella organization, which unites progressive, nationalist, regionalist and autonomist parties in the European Union struggling for democratic rights and autonomy for different European regions and stateless nations, for deeper regionalization of member states (Riedel, 2006). By the demands going beyond the “*regionalization*” or “*autonomy*” framework and the recent Scottish and Catalan processes, the political-social judgement of activities and goals of the RAŚ in Poland, the fear from the secession plans seems to be understandable. The organization's main goal now is to change the current state structure resting on the French model with a Spanish-based regionalized unitary model. Although the idea has strong economic and financial bases as well (management of regional and local tasks), regarding the extent of Poland, the intensifying shape of regional identities, the adaptation of a Western European model can be successful.

The important and innovative element of the idea is generalization: the RAŚ offers solution not only for Upper Silesia, but also for the rest of the country. To clarify the concept the organization prepared a draft amendment of the existing constitution based on the most essential elements of the Spanish state system (cf. Giro-Szász, 2004; Domonkos, 2010). Because of the separatist accusations RAŚ firstly lays down in the amendment that “*the bases of the Constitution is the indissoluble unity of the Republic of Poland (...) and (viz. the Constitution) recognizes and guarantees the regions the right for autonomy*” (Project 2010b, Art.3.), which refers to the establishment of the regionalized country. The chapter on the territorial organization of the state, especially on the autonomous voivodeships contains a different regulation than the operative Constitution. The draft complements the missed possibility in 1997 and ensures constitutional status for the districts and the autonomous voivodeships as well. The two lower levels create the territorial self-governments while the voivodeships become units with territorial autonomy. For maintaining the unity of the state and for preventing the separatist accusations the RAŚ tried to build such securities into the draft, which hamper closer cooperation between

the regional units. These are, on the one hand, the forbidding of the confederation of regions concerning secession ambitions, on the other hand, the rigorous terms of collaboration. Along with the reorganization of the territorial division of power the organization would reform the Senate as well: according to the solutions of the regionalised unitary and federal states the composition of the Senate would depend on the extent and the population of the given region and the members would be delegated. The competencies of the autonomous voivodeships are more widely defined than in the current Constitution, but—and that is the unique element in the proposition—the list of functions do not mean general commitments for each regions. By accepting the Spanish model, namely in the asymmetric decentralization (Wódcz, 2010) the regions could themselves define the tasks listed in the constitution according to the capabilities, opportunities and interests of the given area.

The RAŚ has also developed the draft statute for the autonomous voivodeship, which would regulate the region's internal functioning. Both the planned regulations and the proposed regional insitutional system is based on the Catalan example (cf. Domonkos, 2010), although some elements follow the Polish tradition. The draft presents the institutional, administrative system and the symbols of the autonomous voivodeship in detail, however, the borders of the region—probably on purpose—are not determined. As the Statute points out: “*Silesian Autonomous Voivodeship is created by counties connected with the region historically, culturally and economically*” (Statut 2010, Art.3.), but this definition—because it is not concrete—can lead to misunderstanding. It is obvious that the ideas of the RAŚ overstep the existing administrative boundaries, a former draft of the statute (Gazeta Wyborcza 2010a) determined the western and eastern border of the future region, while in the current document, Opole is defined as a seat of the Administrative Court.

All from these concepts the union of the Silesian and Opole regions stands out. Although the idea of the integration of the two voivodeships raises several problems itself, it also questions the fate of the Częstochowa area, which has no historical or geographical links to Upper Silesia, and the RAŚ does not vindicate this territory at all. Despite many attempts this area—the former Częstochowa Voivodeship—could not successfully integrate into

the Silesian Voivodeship and the population is ready for joining the Holy Cross (*Świętokrzyskie*) Voivodeship (Kaczmarek, 2009).

Nevertheless in the draft statute the regulation on the content of autonomy, the tasks of each organization, public policy, public ownership and property are elaborated and correspond to the draft Constitution. Based on the draft statute it can be definitely stated that the organization's current projects are not unrealistic and the declaration of the strategy was preceded by a long planning process, in which RAŚ tried to summarize the demands and needs to be ready for adoption in 2019, at the definite hour for the constitutional amendment.

To achieve this goal a long-term schedule has been developed to inform both the country's leading political forces and the society about the essential elements of the conception. As a first step, RAŚ declared the Polish Regions program, the revitalization of a former organization, the League of Regions, which joined the movements fighting for deeper regional processes. RAŚ plans to organize a demonstration under the heading/motto "*March of Regions*" in 2015 in Warsaw, which will be hopefully followed by a referendum on constitutional amendments in 2019. The first step, the establishment of bottom-up regional movements in the voivodeships and historical regions seems to be successful since it has visible results. Beside the Unia Wielkopolan, established in 1990, there are now more organizations fighting for regional autonomy within their own voivodeships: some of them have legal status with statute and membership, but the most are still in chaotic stage and only has a Facebook-profile. Maybe at a later stage these quasi-organizations can become similar regional political forces, just like the RAŚ. The nationwide network will definitely exceed the current actions and civil mood. Supposedly the RAŚ exerts on the establishment of a national political party, which can create a real representative body of regions' interests. If this scenario is viable and the organization wants to be ready for the national elections in 2015, the creation of a national base remains the main task.

Conclusions

The attempt to adapt Western European path in Poland can be theoretically successful, but the general Central and Eastern European belated develop-

ment seems to be determining. It is doubtful that the regionalised or federal model comes true in Poland, which has no traditions of decentralised state organisation. The formation and strengthening of regional identities caused by regionalist–autonomist movements, the further processes of decision-making, the financial aspects of decentralisation, and the organisational evolution of the European Union have equal impact on the achievement of these concepts. Since these are long processes, time seems to be the most decisive factor in terms of evaluation.

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