

ANNA ŚLIZ  
MAREK S. SZCZEPAŃSKI  
Opole

## BETWEEN ETHNICITY AND NATIONALITY A SOCIOLOGICAL CASE STUDY OF THE UPPER SILESIA'S GROUP<sup>1</sup>

### CULTURAL HOMOGENISATION VS. CULTURAL HETEROGENISATION

The world in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century is both the world of national and ethnic cultures and global homogenisation of the cultural system. The process of cultural uniformisation is accompanied by the return to ethnic and national roots, i.e. *ethnos*. That phenomenon has been metaphorically described by Benjamin Barber writing about McWorld and Jihad which are not against each other but feed one other.<sup>2</sup> People who accept global elements of the system want to preserve the diversity which determines their individual and group identities. While taking advantage of the world civilisation achievements, they are faithful to their own language, tradition, and religion. They manifest their culture in order to gain a significant place within the societal structure in which they live. Such a situation is typical mainly of ethnic and national minorities which, while living in a dominant culture, want to keep their own one which is substantially different. At the same time, they strive to have a prominent place in the social structure not only in the cultural sense but also economically and politically. In this article we will raise the issue of Silesians, who inhabit the region of Upper Silesia, i.e. the Śląskie [Silesian] and Opolskie voivodships. Formally, the existence of that group was confirmed with the 2002 National Census data. Until today, however, Silesians have not been recognised as an ethnic or national minority in the meaning of the Act on National and Ethnic Minorities and Regional Language<sup>3</sup>. Silesians do seek to be recognised as a national group but so far have been unsuccessful. Who are Silesians? What is their place in the Polish society?

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<sup>1</sup> The article focuses on the region of Upper Silesia within its historical borders (part of the present Śląskie and Opolskie voivodships) but for stylistic reasons we will use also the terms Silesia and Silesians.

<sup>2</sup> B.R. Barber (1995), *Jihad vs. McWorld*, New York [Polish translation: *Dżihad kontra McŚwiat*, Warszawa, 1997].

<sup>3</sup> Act on National and Ethnic Minorities and Regional Language of 6 January 2005.

## ETHNICITY VS. NATIONALITY

Referring to Silesians, sociologists use the word a *group*, however, Silesians want to be recognised as a nationality. Manifestations of Silesians' desire are the Union of People of Silesian Nationality (Związek Ludności Narodowości Śląskiej) in Katowice which has not been registered so far, and the Association of People of Silesian Nationality (Stowarzyszenie Osób Narodowości Śląskiej) registered in Opole. Leaving terminological disputes aside, it is important to provide an insight into the ethnicity and nationality concepts in sociology. The term *ethnicity* corresponds directly to the sociological definition of an *ethnic group*, a more comprehensive understanding of which was already provided by Max Weber.

We shall call 'ethnic groups' those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type and customs or both, or because of memories of colonisation and migration; this belief must be important for the propagation of the group formation; conversely, it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists [...].<sup>4</sup>

Weber's understanding of an ethnic group is broad and embraces nations, national minorities, autochthonic groups, and groups of immigrant descent. Silesians are native people of Upper Silesia and so they are an ethnic group in Weber's sense. In the 1970s, an ethnic group was equated with ethnicity and that situation lasted practically until 1974. Then, in 1975, *Ethnicity*, a collection of essays by American sociologists, was published.<sup>5</sup> In this book inter-ethnic relations in the pluralistic American society were described and the research on the ethnic specificity of groups. Their cultural distinctness was highlighted.<sup>6</sup> In the theory of ethnicity formulated by American sociologists, cultural factors were recognised to be primary manifestations of ethnicity. Their significance results from cultural heritage, group cultivation of culture and shared history of the group formed in the course of migration and adaptation to a new environment.<sup>7</sup> That understanding of ethnicity seems more relevant in the context of Silesians' fight for their nationality. Silesians' presence in Upper Silesia, however, is not a result of migration as they are its indigenous population. It is also a fact that Silesians are defined by a number of features which are associated with ethnicity. Referring back to the classical dispute between primordialism<sup>8</sup> and situationalism<sup>9</sup>, Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan considered ethnicity to be

<sup>4</sup> J. Mucha (1996), *Codzienność i odświętność*, Warszawa, p. 20.

<sup>5</sup> N. Glazer, D. Moynihan (eds) (1975), *Ethnicity. Theory and Experience*, New York.

<sup>6</sup> A. Posern-Zieliński (1982), *Tradycja a etniczność. Przemiany kultury Polonii amerykańskiej*, Wrocław, pp. 12-13.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*. pp. 12-13.

<sup>8</sup> Primordialism is a kind of ties constituting a group through their shared culture, religion and origin. This sort of ties persists in a group, which guarantees its continuity: E. Shils (1957), *Primordial, Personal Sacred, and Civil Ties*, "British Journal of Sociology" Vol. 8, pp. 130-145.

<sup>9</sup> Situationalism refers to ethnic minorities which update their distinctive features in specific situations. Cf. G. Babiński (1998), *Pogranicze polsko-ukraińskie: etniczność, zróżnicowanie religijne, tożsamość*, Kraków, p. 28-30.

a conscious group identification in terms of culture and tradition. That specific category of the sense of ethnicity manifests itself primarily in sentiments, preferences and sensitivity and thus in ethnic awareness and identity. Nathan Glazer considered ethnicity to be a kind of awareness composed of “nostalgia” and ethnic “ideology”. At the core of a brief definition of ethnicity are beliefs, sentiments and traditional values of the group. That is the condition of Upper Silesians who are faithful to a tradition different from the Polish one. Their distinctness is for them the ground for their struggle not for their ethnicity (i.e. they are ethnically distinct) but for being granted the status of nationality, i.e. for being recognised as members of the Silesian nation. Thus it is important to underline that in sociological literature, ethnic groups are considered to be seeds of nations and that blurs boundaries between the two.

The emergence of national communities on ethnic foundations is a historical process which can take various forms. Many authors strongly agree with ethnic sources of nations [...]. An ethnic group is treated as a proto-nation stage.<sup>10</sup>

In the above context it is important to note that the recognition of a group as a nation has serious political implications. Only a national group can claim their rights to independence (though it is not a necessary precondition).<sup>11</sup> As Max Weber wrote, the sense of community *ergo* nation has many sources including shared political memories, religion, common language, and finally, “racial” *habitus*.<sup>12</sup> Bronisław Malinowski believed that a national group is characterised by a mature culture which, despite its internal diversity, is coherent<sup>13</sup> and members of the group are aware of their belonging to that community and feel the ties that bind them all. Members of an ethnic group, on the other hand, are not always aware that they belong to a specific group and of ethnic ties that connect all its members. If we view Silesians in that way, it is clear why they want to be recognised as a nation and not an ethnicity. Who, then, are the Silesians of today?

#### HISTORY OF SILESIA AND ITS POPULATION: CONTEXTS

In ancient times, regions of the present Silesia were inhabited by Celtic and Germanic tribes. Starting from the 7<sup>th</sup> century, however, that area was unquestionably under the influence of the Slavic culture. The recorded history of Upper Silesia as the most culturally diverse region of modern Poland dates to the times of Silesian Piasts. During their rule, colonisation processes increased the number of Germans

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<sup>10</sup> A. Kłosowska (1996), *Kultury narodowe u korzeni*, Warszawa, p. 46.

<sup>11</sup> J. Kurczewska (1999), *Naród*, in: *Encyklopedia socjologii*, vol. 2, Warszawa, p. 290.

<sup>12</sup> M. Weber (1978), *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, University of California Press, p. 389 [Polish translation: *Gospodarka i społeczeństwo. Zarys socjologii rozumiejącej*, Warszawa, 2002, p. 317].

<sup>13</sup> B. Malinowski (1958), *Szkice z teorii kultury*, Warszawa, p. 47.

in towns and villages and in monasteries and convents. The German language was used increasingly often, and German knights and clergy were increasingly present at Polish courts. That led to dissatisfaction among Poles who, until the 17<sup>th</sup> century, were the majority in Silesia, and whose settlements gradually became but an oasis in the midst of “German lands on the left bank of the Oder”<sup>14</sup>. As a result of subordinating Upper Silesian duchies to the Bohemian Crown, those lands became part of the Bohemian-German culture. Until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Czech language was official there and starting from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it was accompanied by German. After the Silesian wars in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, most of Upper Silesia lands became part of Prussia which did not change the character those lands inhabited by Poles, Germans, Moravians (Czechs), and Jews. Along with industrialisation of Upper Silesia, the region experienced a growing inflow of Germans who were employed as technical staff, teachers, and merchants.<sup>15</sup> The life of Poles, Germans, Czechs and Jews in Upper Silesia, just like the entire Upper Silesian world, kept changing in the following centuries. Between WW1 and WW2, as Wojciech Korfanty wrote, national awareness of 1/3 of the population inhabiting the then Polish part of Upper Silesia was not crystallised as Polish or German and locals described themselves as Silesians. That was the first clear self-identification of the autochthonous people. In the three Silesian uprisings, they fought either on the German side or on the Polish one, depending on their views.<sup>16</sup> That situation was an example of how vague the identity of the native Silesian population was. The most tragic period in the relations between Polish, German, Czech, and Jewish people and the native population was the time of the World War II and the years which followed. After WW2, German people inhabiting the lands of Upper Silesia were resettled to Germany while people from central and eastern Poland increasingly settled in Silesia. Upper Silesia remained, therefore, a melting pot of cultures,

in which mixing cultural and historical experiences of the local people, who were thoroughly investigated by the People’s Government because of their inclusion in various national lists from the war period (the so-called *Volkliste*), mixed with experiences of immigrant population from central and eastern Poland, people displaced from the territories of the Second Polish Republic annexed, in 1945, to the Soviet Republic, and repatriates from France and Belgium [...] in addition to the Polish population, to Upper Silesia came Ukrainians who identified themselves as Poles due to the fact that they were citizens of the Second Polish Republic and Jews from the East of Poland.<sup>17</sup>

Later, the mosaic of national and ethnic minorities and the native population of Silesia was enriched by a growing number of Poles who migrated there looking for jobs. When the process of industrialisation accelerated, they migrated from culturally different regions of Poland in search for work and better living conditions. In the

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<sup>14</sup> L. Szaraniec (2007), *Wielokulturowość Górnego Śląska*, Katowice, p. 7.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>16</sup> M. Czapliński, E. Kaszuba, G. Wąs, R. Zerelik (2002), *Historia Śląska*, Wrocław, p. 395.

<sup>17</sup> L. Szaraniec (2007), *op. cit.*, p. 10.

1970s, a large part of the autochthonic population left Upper Silesia to join their families in Germany and settled in the industrial centres of Westphalia and Northern Rhineland. In addition, the Jewish minority departed, moving to western European countries, the United States and Israel.

In the real socialism period, numerous efforts were made to integrate the culturally and nationally diversified Upper Silesia. Activities of authorities included, *inter alia*, an introduction of a special system of education, a cultural programme and a special agenda for mass media. Traditions of national, ethnic minorities and Silesians were cultivated in the private sphere only and were sometimes supported by the Church. When Poland embarked on its path of freedom, the atmosphere of cultural pluralism was restored. Its empirical exemplifications are the results of recent National Censuses (2002 and 2011) which demonstrated the degree of cultural diversity of Poland and its regions including Upper Silesia.

#### SILESIAN NATIONAL IDENTIFICATION

The most visible minorities living in Upper Silesia include the German minority and Silesians. Members of Czech, Roma and Jewish minorities live there too but they do not constitute substantial communities. We focus on the group of Silesians who live in Upper Silesia only. In the National Census conducted in Poland in 2002, the Silesian nationality was declared by 173,153 people, including 145,500 living in the Śląskie voivodship and 24,200 living in the Pomorskie voivodship. In 2002, in the Polish part of Cieszyn Silesia (Bielsko-Biała town and poviats of Cieszyn and Bielsko-Biała), Silesian nationality was declared by 1,045 people.<sup>18</sup> Results of the 2011 National Census were very different. The Silesian nationality was declared by 817 thousand people, 362 thousand of whom declared that it was their only nationality and 418 thousand declared that it was their “first” nationality.<sup>19</sup> It is difficult to compare the data collected in both censuses. In 2002, respondents were asked to identify one nationality (national affiliation) only whereas in 2011 it was possible to declare both a (first) nationality and other (second) national and ethnic identifications.<sup>20</sup> The number of identifications with Silesian nationality aroused a desire among members of that group to fight for being recognised as a nation(ality). Results of the census have become an important argument for supporters of such a solution, who are mostly members of the Union of People of Silesian Nationality in Katowice and the Association of People of Silesian Nationality in Opole. The latter one was

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<sup>18</sup> Results of the 2002 National Census of Population and Housing. Central Statistical Office (online) [accessed: December 2010].

<sup>19</sup> National census of population and housing 2011. Report: [www.stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/lud\\_reportj\\_wynikowJNSP2011.pdf](http://www.stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/lud_reportj_wynikowJNSP2011.pdf) [accessed: 09.06.2013].

<sup>20</sup> [www.ceo.org.pl/pl/online/6/mniejszosci-narodowe-w-liczbach](http://www.ceo.org.pl/pl/online/6/mniejszosci-narodowe-w-liczbach) [accessed: 05.06.2013].

registered by the appropriate court in Opole in December 2011<sup>21</sup> and in September 2012, the court dismissed the appeal of the Prosecutor's Office against that decision.<sup>22</sup> The Union of People of Silesian Nationality despite its efforts had not been registered yet. Supporters of the thesis on the existence of the Silesian nation(ality) see it as separate from Polish, German, Czech, or Slovak in terms of having its own culture, history and language. The Silesian nationality, however, has not been recognised by any country. In addition, in 1998 and 2007, the Polish Supreme Court decided that Silesians are not recognised as a separate national group by the general public (social awareness) and sustained the decision of the District Court in Katowice of March 2006.<sup>23</sup> At that time, the latter court had refused to enter the Union of People of Silesian Nationality into the appropriate register.

The District Court decided that the concept of 'nationality' derives 'nation', and 'nation' as a conceptual category requires the existence of an organised community. Such an existence of an organised community which can be treated a separate nation requires, *inter alia*, that it is perceived in that way by the legislator or other people. Neither an internal belief of a group of people about the existence of a separate Silesian nation and Silesian nationality, nor declaring such a nationality in censuses will suffice to recognise the existence of a separate Silesian nation and Silesian nationality. A Silesian nation (Silesian nationality) exists neither in the public awareness nor in legal acts. The perceived distinctness of Silesians (in terms of language, culture...) is associated more with historical regions (Upper Silesia, Lower Silesia, Cieszyn Silesia) of the country than with the existence of the Silesian nation.<sup>24</sup>

Earlier, in 2004, the European Court of Human Rights dismissed the appeal against the decision not to register the Union of People of Silesian Nationality taken by the District Court in Katowice in 1998. At the same time, the European Court did not take any position on the existence or non-existence of the Silesian nation(ality).<sup>25</sup> From the above facts it follows that the registration of the Union of People of Silesian Nationality would be equal to recognising Silesians as a nation(ality). Such a dependence does not seem to exist in case of the Association of People of Silesian Nationality. It was formally institutionalised but that fact was not seen as related to the recognising Silesians as a nation(ality). Silesians still think about their nation(ality) but today they focus more on cultural and political activities than on the registration of their own nation(ality).

<sup>21</sup> [www.slonzoki.org](http://www.slonzoki.org) [accessed: 08.06.2013].

<sup>22</sup> *Jest decyzja sądu w sprawie Stowarzyszenia Osób Narodowości Śląskiej*, "Nowa Trybuna Opolska" 7.09.2012.

<sup>23</sup> Decision of 14.02.2007, III SK 20/06; [www.prawo.money.pl/orzecznictwo/sad\\_najwyzszy/postanowienie](http://www.prawo.money.pl/orzecznictwo/sad_najwyzszy/postanowienie) [accessed: 09.06.2013].

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>25</sup> Decision of the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights of 17 February 2004 in case of *Gorzelik and others v. Poland* (Application 44158/98), *Gorzelik et autres c. Pologne/and Others v. Poland* [GC], no/no. 44158/98, CEDH/ECHR 2004.

## CULTURE OF SILESIA: INSTITUTIONS AND IMPONDERABLES

A constitutive element of a national group is both an objective and subjective sense of cultural distinctness. That distinctness is determined by such factors as shared historical memory, attachment to a given territory, tradition (customs and habits), religion, and language. Max Weber, in his analysis of the understanding of nationality, wrote:

Until a short time ago most Poles in Upper Silesia had no strongly developed sense of Polish nationality that was antagonistic to the Prussian state which is based essentially on the German language. They were loyal if passive 'Prussians', but they were not 'Germans' interested in the existence of the *Reich*; the majority did not feel a conscious or a strong need to segregate themselves from German-speaking fellow citizens. Hence, in this case there was no sense of nationality based on common language, and there was no *Kulturgemeinschaft* in view of the lack of cultural development.<sup>26</sup>

The above speaks for a diversified identification of the indigenous people of Silesia who, until today, do not have a clear definition of their own nationality or even ethnicity.

Upper Silesia is a cultural border region, a peripheral borderland far from political and administrative centres. At the same time, its population is clearly aware of its social distinctness. Despite its borderland location, the region was the second most important industrial area after the Ruhr, at first of Prussia, and later of Germany. It was there where one of the first steam engines in Europe was installed, the formula of Nivea cream, marketed since 1911, was developed, the shower was invented, and trams were early introduced. Illiteracy was common but twelve inhabitants of historical Silesia were awarded Noble prizes in physics, chemistry, and economy. In the real socialism period, Silesia was characterised by further intensive industrialisation and today it is one of the fastest developing regions of the Republic of Poland.

The regional Upper Silesian cultural system is a outcome of many years of intertwining of different cultures and traditions of various provenance.<sup>27</sup> A characteristic feature of Upper Silesia is the fact that, over the centuries, it was influenced by various cultural, political, administrative, and economic systems. In result, its population is characterised by ambiguous and diversified national identity combinations and national indifference is a not a marginal phenomenon. Like many borderlands, Silesia had been part of different countries and that had to very important and significant consequences. In brief, Upper Silesia in last ten centuries was under the political influence of Moravians, Czechs, Poles, again Czechs, Austrians, Prussians, and later,

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<sup>26</sup> M. Weber, *op. cit.*, p. 396 [Polish translation: p. 316].

<sup>27</sup> Z. Staszczak (1978), *Pogranicze polsko-niemieckie jako pogranicze etnograficzne*, Poznań; K. Kwaśniewski (1982), *Zderzenie kultur. Tożsamość a aspekty konfliktów i tolerancji*, Warszawa; Z. Rykiel (1990), *Region przygraniczny jako przedmiot badań geograficznych*, "Przegląd Geograficzny" V. 62.

after the Silesian referendum, of Poles, Germans, and Czechs. It is also important to note that Silesia has been always part of Europe, not only in the geographical but also cultural and civilisational sense. It shared Europe's history and kept consolidating its own specificity. An element of that specificity is "Silesianness", a regional system of culture which manifests itself mainly through popular culture, i.e. in all kinds of festivals, festivities and Silesian cuisine, customs and local celebrations as well as in popular Silesian songs and stage events. It is also manifested in strong family bonds and neighbourly contacts which are core ties in the Silesian community.<sup>28</sup> Examples of Silesian traditions include church fairs and celebrations of one's fiftieth birthday (Abraham). Another element of Silesian traditions is the regional cuisine. Silesian dumplings with roulade and red cabbage are an almost obligatory Sunday dinner in each Silesian house. Hence, family ties are an important element of the Silesian world. But Silesian culture has also its public dimension. For example, the Radio Katowice broadcaster organises dialect contests titled "Po naszymu, czyli po Śląsku" (In our tongue that is in Silesian). The Radio Piekary's advertising slogan is "Na Śląsku, o Śląsku, po Śląsku" (In Silesia, about Silesia, in Silesian).<sup>29</sup>

The issue of the Silesian dialect or tongue is highly relevant. For a couple of years already, the Polish Sejm [Parliament] has been debating whether to recognise the Silesian tongue as a regional language. In the Polish Act on National and Ethnic Minorities and Regional Language, neither Silesians are recognised as an ethnic minority, nor the Silesian tongue is recognised as a regional language as Kashubian is.<sup>30</sup> The Sejm is working on amending the provision on the regional language with the aim to include the Silesian tongue. The Silesian tongue, in fact, meets the criteria mentioned in the definition of a regional language set forth in the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages drawn up in Strasbourg on 5 November 1992. According to the Charter, a regional language is traditionally spoken by citizens of a given country who constitute a minority and is neither a dialect of the official language, i.e. Polish in that case, nor a language of immigrants. Core activities of people who identify themselves as Silesians include taking care of the culture and traditions of the Upper Silesian region. An official recognition of Silesian as a regional language is their primary objective.<sup>31</sup> Disputes on recognising Silesians as a national minority and their tongue as a regional language have been carried at the Sejm for a couple of years. They have involved not only politicians but also linguists, anthropologists, sociologists and political scientists. To the end of August 2012, those issues were again disputed at meetings of the Sejm Committee for national and regional minorities. And once again the Silesian *dialect* was not given the status of a *language* but, undoubtedly, such efforts will be continued. The concern about

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<sup>28</sup> J. Kijonka-Niezabitowska (2009), *Z problemów narodowości i tożsamości śląskiej – dylematy i wybory*, "Studia Socjologiczne" No. 4, p. 101.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 101.

<sup>30</sup> Act on National and Ethnic Minorities and Regional Language of 6 January 2005.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*.

the Silesian *godka* [Silesian word for a tongue/speech] is common not only among individuals, such as Kazimierz Kutz, but also organisations, such as the Movement for Silesian Autonomy, the main objective of which is the fight for the autonomy of Upper Silesia which that region once had in the Second Republic of Poland, i.e. between WW1 and WW2.

#### AUTONOMY OF UPPER SILESIA? ACTORS AND IDEAS<sup>32</sup>

The fact that Silesia used to be part of different States played a special role in the disintegration and social deconstruction of the community living in that region. As one may presume, the Silesian referendum (20 March 1921) and three Silesian uprisings (August 1919, August 1920, May-July 1921) accelerated the disintegration process dramatically. As a result of political decisions, the territorially and socially cohesive area was divided. The Upper Silesian community was permanently and irrevocably compromised.

In the political history of Upper Silesia, a most important fact was the establishment of the Silesian (Śląskie) voivodship after World War I. The voivodship was created by the Legislative Sejm of the Republic of Poland by means of the Constitutional Act of 15 July 1920. The new administrative and political unit was perceived to be the fulfilment of autonomy and separatist aspirations which, in the past, manifested themselves in activities of Hans Georg von Praschma, Karl Ulitzka, Hans Lukaschka and Ewald Latacz as well as of Wojciech Korfanty (elected to the *Reichstag* in 1907), Adam Napieralski and Jan Kapica. All of them, though for very different reasons, strived for separating Upper Silesia from the Silesian province and granting it an autonomous status, first within the borders of Prussia and later of Poland.

The Silesian voivodship started to function as an autonomous administrative unit only after Polish army entered the territory granted to Poland as a result of the 1921 referendum, i.e. between 17 June and 4 July 1922. The Legislative Sejm granted the newly established voivodship its autonomy and symbolic institutions including the regional Silesian Sejm and the Silesian Treasury, i.e. a regional Ministry of Treasury. The Silesian Sejm had broad competence in matters related to internal policy and everyday life of the voivodship but none in foreign affairs and military issues. It needs to be underlined that the Silesian Sejm, the statutory competence of which were wide, at least formally, was, after the May Coup d'État, limited in its activities by an influential voivod, Michał Grażyński, supported by the central government and Marshal Józef Piłsudski.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> In this part of the article, we use some fragments of: M. S. Szczepański, A. Śliz, *Die Bewegung für die Autonomie Schlesiens (RAS)*, "Polen-Analysen" Deutsches Polen Institut Darmstadt und Forschungsstelle Osteuropa, Bremen, 112/03.07.2012.

<sup>33</sup> A. Klich (2007), *Bez mitów. Portrety ze Śląska*, Gdynia.

The Silesian Treasury was a separate institution, to which a *tangent* principle applied, i.e. about 50% of Silesian income stayed in the voivodship and the remaining part was passed to the Treasury of the Republic of Poland. The Constitutional Act of the State National Council of 6 May 1945 put an end to the regional autonomy of Silesia. However, many Silesian scholars question the validity of that political decision taken by post-war communist authorities. The Polish transformation of the 1990s once again revived the dream about the autonomous Silesian region.

That dream was institutionalised by the creation of the Movement for Silesia Autonomy (Ruch Autonomii Śląska, RAŚ). This association was founded in January 1990. Today, according to its activists, it has about 7 thousand members, the majority of whom live in the Silesian voivodship. The basic statutory objective of the Movement is to establish an autonomous region within the historical borders of Upper Silesia. In the Movement's Statutes, the objectives are described in more detail:

1. obtaining autonomy by Silesia within the framework of the mature decentralisation of the Republic of Poland,
2. deepening the regional identity among the population of Silesia and of other regions of the Republic of Poland,
3. shaping and developing an active civil attitude among Silesian people,
4. participation in the integration of all people living in Silesia, irrespective of their ethnicity,
5. taking active measures aimed at the protection of natural environment and the material and mental heritage,
6. promotion of human rights and civil freedoms,
7. promotion of European integration and development of contacts and cooperation between societies,
8. keeping cultural and economic contacts with the Silesian diasporas as well as sustaining their emotional ties with their homeland,
9. promoting and shaping a positive image of Silesia,
10. promoting linguistic diversity and the Silesian tongue.<sup>34</sup>

The Movement seeks to achieve its clearly defined objectives through, *inter alia*, a considerable activity of its members in public life: acting for the local community, supporting cultural and educational activities, working with the youth and promoting the idea of autonomy and regionalism. In this context it is important to mention the Upper Silesian Heritage Days organised by the Movement, initiatives aimed at saving post-industrial monuments as well as numerous educational activities in the real and virtual world.

The idea of the Movement for Silesia Autonomy invokes the autonomy enjoyed by the Silesian voivodship during the Second Republic of Poland. At the same time, it clearly refers to the present situation in Spain, especially in Catalonia. It must be highlighted that the Movement deprecates separatist tendencies but is of the opinion that broad autonomy within the Republic of Poland is the best solution for Silesia. Therefore, from the beginning, the Movement has emphasised the need for a constitutional reform which would take into consideration Poland's regional diversity and respect the sense of identity of regional, ethnic, and national groups and their aspirations to manifest political autonomy. That is why the nature of the Movement

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<sup>34</sup> Statutes of the Movement for Silesia Autonomy, Chapter II – Objectives, measures, and methods of action, Article 12: [www.autonomia.pl](http://www.autonomia.pl) (accessed: 13.06.2012).

is regional only. Its fundamental objective is administrative modernisation of Poland oriented towards the Republic of autonomous regions which has found its expression in the Movement proposal of draft amendments to the Polish Constitution, i.e.

The Constitution is based on the indissoluble unity of the Republic of Poland, the common and indivisible homeland of all its citizens, and it recognises and guarantees the right to territorial autonomy of its regions and solidarity among all. The Act establishes local government units which exercise public authority.<sup>35</sup>

It is assumed that the level of autonomy of the regions would differ, similarly to the Spanish model, as an expression of the strength of cultural identity (language, religion, tradition) and the level of economic development.

Members of the Movement for Silesia Autonomy are people associated with cultural and civilisational values of the region which, however, are not necessarily native. According to its *Biuletyn Informacyjny* (Information Bulletin), the Movement's goal is that

Silesia obtains its full rights which it deserves, first of all, due to its strong economic potential, natural resources of this Land, its minerals and coal. The foundation of the path we have taken is the right of people inhabiting this Land to decide about their own fate.

The Movement, starting from its formation, has a clear and definite view of the shape of autonomous Silesia and principles of its functioning. The basis for the future regionalisation decisions in this part of Poland should, according to the Movement, be the restitution of the Silesian Autonomy on the basis of the Constitutional Act of 15 July 1920.

#### UPPER SILESIA CLAIMS

The group of Upper Silesians provokes strong emotions not only among inhabitants of Upper Silesia but also among Poles in other regions of the Republic of Poland. Those emotions are connected with Silesians' efforts to be recognised as a nation(al)ity and political activities aimed at obtaining autonomy for Upper Silesia within Polish borders. We are aware that the two dimensions are not equivocal but it is difficult not to notice a connection between them. On the one hand, the efforts to promote the Silesian nation(al)ity consist in raising arguments related to results of National Censuses (2002 and 2011) which revealed a high level of self-identification of inhabitants of Silesia with the Silesian nation(al)ity. On the other hand, they include measures taken to maintain the Silesian system of culture, the aim of which is to demonstrate the mature culture of the region which is different from the Pol-

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<sup>35</sup> Draft amendments of 13 June 2012 to the Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 2 April 1997. Chapter I: The Republic, Article 3, items 1 and 2, [www.autonomia.pl/n/konstytucja](http://www.autonomia.pl/n/konstytucja).

ish culture. The struggle for the autonomy of Upper Silesia is, however, primarily a political activity though it also oriented towards the manifestation of the Silesian culture. What brings the two worlds together is the struggle for the recognition of Silesian as a regional language which, to a varying degree, may become a distinctive competence of both the Silesian people and autonomous Upper Silesia.

#### ABSTRACT

*The difficult and complicated history of Upper Silesia, especially changes in state affiliation, created in the native population the need of a stable identity that would resist political transformations. This led to the formation of the Silesian community, which according to the latest national census (2011) is 817 thousand people strong. That number is a substantial argument in the strife of Silesians for the recognition of their Silesian nationality, all the more so, since according to the law on national and ethnic minorities and regional language, Upper Silesians are neither an ethnic nor national minority. Hitherto endeavours to register the Silesian nation(ality) proved unsuccessful. But Silesians persist in their efforts. They preserve their cultural system and strive for the recognition of the Silesian tongue as a regional language. Culture and language are important elements defining national identification and Upper Silesians are aware of that fact. In their activity, they are supported among others by the Movement for Silesia Autonomy (Ruch Autonomii Śląska), which in its aspiration to the autonomy of Upper Silesia does not forget about the Silesian tradition and above all about the tongue.*