

From region to nation and back again: Moravian parties' rhetoric and politics in the course of time

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Abstract

The paper deals with the history and political impact of “Moravist” or Moravian political representation. The movement that started already during the 1968/1969 period to rise claims of Moravian political autonomy or “home rule” and that was transformed after 1989 into a full-fledged political party to compete for chairs in the Czech diet and Czechoslovak federal parliament presents an interesting example of a failed attempt in regional and later on even ethnic mobilization in the history of recent Czech politics. The paper will focus on the development of the Movement for Autonomous Democracy – Society for Moravia and Silesia and the parties and movements that followed after the disintegration of the movement in mid-1990s. The second aim of the paper is to analyse and evaluate strategies employed by Moravian regionalist parties in order to valorise the issue of regional minority claims. The original appeal of the Movement for Autonomous Democracy was based on claims for territorial autonomy lost during the communist period. Later on, together with the marginalization of political relevance of Moravian parties and politicians (loss of parliamentary relevance after 1996), a distinct tendency towards radicalization could be observed. The new generation of Moravian activists reframed actually the minority claims from territorial / regionalist context and started to adopt the language of an oppressed national minority distinctive from and suppressed by the Czech majority. This “invention” of separate Moravian “nationality” was by far the most original, though unsuccessful, attempt to mobilize cleavages of ethnic politics in the Czech Lands after 1989.

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Key words

Moravian regionalism, framing of minority claims, invention of ethno-politics

The Czech Republic does not belong to those European countries that demonstrate a high level of political salience of centre-periphery cleavage. Regional specificities within the Czech Republic are mostly limited to folklore and dialects, they do not manifest themselves by distinctive patterns of political behaviour, nor by the existence of specific regionalist parties that would try to mobilize the voters from the peripheries to protest against the dominance of Prague centre. This does not mean however that such parties do not exist at all and that their politically marginal position has been the same since the very beginning of the democratic regime established after the Velvet Revolution. On the contrary: political parties and movements representing peripheral protest in Moravia enjoyed wide political support in early 1990s and a separate Moravian identity (or at least the way it was perceived) was an important source of collective as well as individual political behaviour of a considerable share of people living in the territory of Moravia and Silesia.

This paper adopts a combination of historical and political perspective at those developments with the aim to describe and analyse the “ups and downs” of Moravian political movements, to look for the sources of their electoral success, to examine their rhetoric and arguments developed in order to mobilize voters on the grounds of regional Moravian identity, and to explain these phenomena in political terms.

In order to meet these goals, the paper will be divided into the following parts. First, a brief overview of Moravian history will explain the historical sources of Moravian specific identity. The post-1989 Moravian politics was to some extent a continuation of the previous attempts to use the Moravian issue as political program, therefore a basic review of older Moravian political peripheral claims will be provided. The last part focuses on the development of Moravian political parties and movements² since the 1989 and it analyses developments of the Moravian political narratives and political discourse. Concluding remarks will try to put the Moravian peripheral politics into a broader political context.

Before we start with the analysis itself, it is necessary to add one important terminological and conceptual remark. Within the Moravian movement, there has been an internal dispute concerning the relation between Moravia and Silesia, which belonged historically together with Bohemia and Upper and Lower Lusatia (*Lužice*) to the lands of the Czech Crown as two autonomous bodies. A vast majority of Silesia was however lost to Prussia after the Wars of Austrian Succession in the first half of the 18th century and only a small part remained part of the Czech Lands., This part of Silesia preserved its autonomous status until 1918, but was merged with Moravia

² The term “party” is perceived by the Czech public as somewhat discredited; for this reason a number of entities prefer the form of a political movement. The difference is purely semantic; under the law (Act No. 424/1991 Coll., as amended) movements and parties are subject to identical requirements.

into the Moravian-Silesian Province during the interwar period. For historical, linguistic, national and other reasons, Silesia is a distinctive area different from Moravia and a separate Silesian identity has been in some cases stressed within the Moravian movement as well. For practical reasons, the claim to achieve Moravian autonomy was typically including the territory of Silesia. In the following paper, we will focus on the mainstream Moravian peripheral political protest and we will consider Silesia only in those cases which include Silesia to strengthen argumentation for Moravian autonomous claims.

Moravia – a distinctive part of the Czech Lands

To explain the historical sources of Moravian peripheral identity which became politicized in the early 1990s, we must take into account the path dependency that takes into account specific position of Moravia (and Silesia) within the system of the Czech Lands at least since the Early Modern period. We are not trying to support idea of the primordial nationalists that nations are somehow granted, on the other hand, we have to modify the views of pure constructivists, such as Ernst Gellner (2006), who stress the moment of political construction in the process of building modern European nations. In fact, the best theoretical background for considering the role of path dependency in the case of Moravia seems to be the approach of a prominent expert in history of European national movements, Czech historian Miroslav Hroch. According to Hroch, “*nations are not a product of coincidence*” (Hroch 2009). Such statements do not deny the constructivist aspect of modern nations’ creation but it pays respect to the fact that the political elite can successfully construct only those national projects that have a sound historical background and can be differentiated from other imagined communities (Anderson 1991), ideally both in terms of territory and identity. Moravia is such country, as its territorial coherence has not been seriously disputed since the medieval period and it was an integral but autonomous part of the territories of the Czech Crown in the Middle Ages and in the (Early) Modern periods.

During the Middle Ages, the Czech Lands as such were a periphery within the emerging European system of states. Moravia, having a peripheral position within the Czech Lands, was thus a “*periphery of periphery*” (Šedo 2002, 3). The consolidation of political institutions that took place during the rule of the Luxembourg Dynasty (1310-1437) and that lasted basically until the defeat of the Czech protestant estates in 1620 maintained the general subordinate position of Moravia within the Czech Lands but modified the institutional settings of the Czech political system. Moravian elites had less influence on political institutions in terms of the whole kingdom, but the new institutional arrangement practically encapsulated the Moravian political elite, and only those noble families who lived and had properties at the territory of Moravia had access to Moravian autonomous offices. This relative increase of Moravian political autonomy was allowed by the changing international context during the period when the Czech Crown was held by the Jagiellonian and the Habsburg Dynasties in the 15th and the 16th centuries. After the Battle of White Mountain (1620), the Czech Lands were firmly incorporated into the

body of Habsburg domains. Moravia was less devastated by forceful re-Catholicization than Bohemia and to some extent successfully resisted attempts at general centralization of administration (Šedo 2002, 4-5).³

When Moravia entered the period of modern mass politics in the second half of the 19th century, Vienna and Prague were two competing centres to which Moravia was attached and against which Moravian peripheral protest could be directed. The role of Vienna was stressed not only by the fact that it was the capital of the entire Habsburg Monarchy, but also because of the considerable German minority living at the territory of Moravia.⁴ In the age of looming mass nationalism, they found Vienna more attractive – for obvious reasons – than the predominantly Czech Prague. For the emerging Moravian political elite in the mid-19th century, a theoretically different way of conceptualizing their own identity was left open. There was the possibility to maintain ethnic Czech identity and to focus on Prague centre. The second option was identification with the political system of the Habsburg monarchy which favored German as the main language but which stayed in a way “above” national clashes, similarly to the famous family of Trotta von Sipolje from Joseph Roth’s well-known novels. The third option was German nationalism and the fourth one was Moravian provincial patriotism which could be in practical issues blended with moderate Czech or German nationalism (see Malíř 1990). At the turn of the 19th and the 20th century, both identities based on pure nationalism clearly took leading position but especially among the Czech politicians from Moravia, strong feeling of peripheral specificities (although typically not of strictly distinctive identity) persisted. One reason for this tendency was the internal administrative division of the so-called Cisleithania into several provinces in which autonomous sets of party systems were developed. It means that both Czech and German politicians in Moravia created political parties that were administratively independent but similar to (and cooperating with) parties of other provinces of Austrian part of the Monarchy (Malíř 1996).

It was quite typical for Moravian and Czech parties to merge in the period just after the end of the WWI (some of them had already merged earlier during the war), but Moravian autonomy remained granted by the Czechoslovak republic after 1918. In 1927, the new law on administrative division of Czechoslovakia merged Moravia and Silesia into one province. A more substantial change had occurred in 1918-1920, because political autonomy had been transformed into mere administrative decentralization. Moravian and Silesian diets were abolished. Regional governmental bodies were replaced by bureaucratic authorities subordinated to the Moravian

³ For medieval history of Moravia consult Válka (1991), for Early Modern period Válka (1995).

⁴ According to the 1910 public census, German-speaking inhabitants constituted roughly 28 per cent of the inhabitants of Moravia. This does not automatically mean that all these people belonged to the German nationality because the census asked about “colloquial language” (Umgangssprache), and thus some Jewish inhabitants of Moravia declared to use German as a means of everyday communication as well. German-speaking population dominated some regions, including several important industrial cities and economic centres such as Brno.

provincial president who was controlled by the Czechoslovak minister of interior. Autonomy was, strictly speaking, turned into decentralized public administration. This situation lasted until the German occupation (1939-1945). After 1945, Moravian-Silesian Province was renewed with a considerably lower level of real administrative power. With the exception of Czechoslovak People's Party, other Czech parties of the National Front (Socialists, Social Democrats, and Communists) supported the idea of reorganizing Czechoslovakia into smaller and purely administrative regions, with some respect to the specific position of Slovakia (Pernes 1996, 170-171). The process of abolishing Moravia-Silesia as a unit of decentralized administration started after the parliamentary election in 1946, and since 1 January 1949, Provinces were finally replaced with regions and the last remnants of Moravian autonomy were lost. The regions were reorganized several times during the Communist rule and some of the territorial rectifications did not even respect the historical border line between Bohemia and Moravia which had been observed for centuries.

It is possible to employ the concept of peripheries drawn by Stein Rokkan (1999, 97-107) to summarize the historical position of Moravia within the Czech Lands. Moravia was a periphery with distinct territorial as well as social boundaries, controlled by the Czech centre in terms of military, administrative, economic as well as cultural dimensions. The inclusion of the Czech Lands into the Habsburg Monarchy however opened a way for a potential competition between Prague and Vienna as "natural" centres for the Moravian periphery. It was precisely this competition, together with the multi-national (Czech-German-Jewish) character of Moravia, that created fertile soil where the seeds of Moravian identity and peripheral protest could grow. During the 20th century, this position of certain "distance, difference, and dependence" in relation the centre (Rokkan 1999, 114-115) gave rise to several waves of political protest aimed at valorisation of peripheral identities and at addressing related political claims, as will be shown in the next part of this paper.

A historical survey of the territory needs to be complemented by a basic population survey. Available data from public censuses for the period of the Habsburg Monarchy, for the interwar years as well as for the socialist period in Czechoslovakia, do not include an option to declare Moravian nationality. The situation changed after 1991, so there are data concerning the number of citizens who declared to belong to Moravian (or Silesian) nation from the most recent period. The data are presented in the following table.

Table 1: Moravian and Silesian nationality in the public censuses 1991-2011

no. of inhabitants / per cent	1991	2001	2011
Czech	8 363 768 / 81.2	9 249 777 / 90.4	6 711 624 / 64.3
Moravian	1 362 313 / 13.2	380 474 / 3.7	521 801 / 5.0
Silesian	44 446 / 0.4	10 878 / 0.1	12 214 / 0.1
Czech and Moravian	-	-	99 028 / 0.9
Czech and Silesian	-	-	4 361 / 0.0
Moravian and Silesian	-	-	4 567 / 0.0
Moravian and other	-	-	2 217 / 0.0
Silesian and other	-	-	414 / 0.0
undeclared	-	-	2 642 666 / 25.3

Source: ČSU 1991, 2001, 2011

Note: In 2011, nationality was an optional field in the census and citizens could opt for one or two nationalities.

Interpreting the results, we can conclude that there was a certain period when the declaration of Moravian nationality was a kind of political statement and at the same time also “fashion”. It is not a coincidence that the considerable number of Moravians detected by the general census “appeared” in the period of the heyday of Moravian political movement. Still, the subsequent censuses show that there is an important, although not very stable, minority (actually the biggest of all nation communities with the exception of major Czech population) of citizens of the Czech Republic who identify with their Moravian origin: not only in terms of regional affiliation but as well in terms of distinctive nationality. Another important feature is the geographical distribution of Moravians. According to the last census, almost one half of Moravians lived at the territory of Southern Moravian Region (capital Brno), and an important share of Moravians lived in Zlín and Olomouc Regions. Their share in other regions which partially occupy the territory of Moravia (Moravian-Silesian Region with the capital of Ostrava and Vysočina Region with the capital of Jihlava) was considerably lower and the share of Moravians in the regions of Bohemia was negligible (ČSU 2011).

The potential for political mobilisation of the Moravian issue thus, at least theoretically, takes place in the Czech Republic and especially in Southern Moravia where the bulk of Moravian population lives.

A brief “prehistory” of Moravian political movements before 1989

The issue of Moravian autonomy was one of the hot topics of Czechoslovak political debates in the 1920s because it was a part of the general debate concerning the optimal model of administrative division of the state. This issue was however solved by the formal re-introduction of provinces on 1 January 1928 and later on, Moravian issues lost prominence as

the political parties had to face the social and political consequences of the Great Depression and later on the pro-Nazi radicalization of German inhabitants of Czechoslovakia, the two crucial political problems of the 1930s.

In some political parties (especially among the Christian-democratic Czechoslovak People's Party), contemporaries differentiated among the "Bohemian" and the "Moravian" wings, but these differed more in terms of different stances in economic and political position, not in terms of emphasis they put on Moravian territorial issues.

In the period after the Munich Accord (September 1938), which transformed the interwar Czechoslovak democracy into the authoritarian "Second Republic" and later, in March 1938, into the Protectorate Bohemia and Moravia occupied by the Nazi Germany, there were marginal but interesting contacts between Moravian activists and the Czech and Slovak far-right.

Moravian activism has become stronger after the secession of the Slovak State from Czechoslovakia. A group of people around the Moravian-Slovak Society (*Moravskoslovenská společnost*), later renamed as Ethnographic Moravia (*Národopisná Morava*), which was established originally as a society which supports and carries research into the Moravian folklore, proposed that some parts of Moravia should be separated from the Protectorate and included into the territories of Moravian Slovakia (*Moravské Slovácko*) and Moravian Wallachia (*Valašsko*) and then into the body of the fascist Slovak State. These ambitions were propelled especially by the anti-Czech sentiments of the painter and Moravian cultural and political activist Joža Úprka who died already in January 1940. Many of the following leading personalities of Ethnographic Moravia collaborated with the occupation administration during the War. Despite some sympathy expressed by the leading politicians of the Slovak State (including its main ideologist Vojtech Tuka), the German administration strictly rejected any border changes (Mezihorák 1997).

Early in 1940, the Moravian National Socialist Party (*Moravská národní sociální strana* – MNSS) was created as a sequel to the previous small factions of Moravian fascists. MNSS was a tiny group of quislings who established contacts with the Brno branch of NSDAP, who worked only in two local communities of Brno and Tišnov. The program of MNSS included anti-Semitic features and declarations of Moravia as an autonomous part of Hitler's Great German Empire inhabited by people of Moravian nationality distinctive from the Czech nationality. Generally, the manifesto of the party, issued in March 1940, simply copied the main theses of NSDAP. Even in its heady, the party had hardly more than about 200 members and its activities practically stopped in 1942. The level of collaboration of Moravian regional activism with the Nazi regime was thus negligible, especially when compared to, say, Croatian, Breton, or Welsh regional movements in the period of the WWII (Mareš – Suchánek 2003).

The only attempt to raise Moravian issues back to political prominence occurred during the short period of the so-called Prague Spring in 1968.

General liberalization of political discourse (and to a small extent even of political regime under the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia) opened the way for voicing different minority opinions, including requests for restitution of Moravian autonomy. The first claim of this kind was raised by the staff of the Moravian Museum in Brno who, in a declaration adopted on the 2nd April 1968, required the renewal of the Moravian Province. Such a claim was not a product of mere historical resentments. On the contrary: one important part of the reform agenda of the Prague Spring (and actually the only reform which was actually accomplished) was the notion of federalization of Czechoslovakia. The experts from the Moravian Museum wanted to see Moravia included as the third subject of the planned federation together with Bohemia and Slovakia. Two days later, similar claim was made by prominent Moravian writers and two weeks later by Moravian and Silesian journalists. Rather surprisingly, Moravian communist politicians followed the suit: the Regional National Committee of Southern Moravian Region demanded the renewal of the Moravian Province in mid-April 1968. The same institution of Northern Moravia however rejected the plan in favour of one Czech Socialist Republic as a part of the Czechoslovak federation. Already in the 1968-1969 period, territorial support of Moravian autonomy was concentrated predominantly in Southern Moravia, which can be also noticed after 1989. Society for Moravia and Silesia (*Společnost pro Moravu a Slezsko* – SMS) was founded in mid-May 1968. SMS reached its apex in summer 1968 when the number of its members exceeded 250.000. SMS issued the “Moravian-Silesian Declaration” that required not only the restitution of Moravian autonomy but generally supported the process of liberalization and democratization of Czechoslovakia, special emphasis was put on respecting human rights. Citizens of Moravia and Silesia were labelled as a “*sociologically and psychologically distinctive branch of the Czech nation.*” Although the efforts of SMS to establish close relations with official Communist politicians in Southern Moravian region met with some sympathies, the reaction of Prague communists was underwhelming and Moravian claims were simply ridiculed. The Soviet occupation in August 1968 and the “normalization” period which started to emerge in spring 1969 stopped all Moravian efforts for another two decades. (Pernes 1996, 196-212)

Moravia was not a prominent topic for the Czech dissent movement, apart from some publications produced in the late 1980s by the circle of authors around the samizdat journal *Central Europe – Brno Version* (later known as *Proglas*) which however focused on cultural and historical issues only. The revival of Moravian political claims started only with the Velvet Revolution.

The rise and fall of Moravian politics after 1989

Especially during the 1990s, the scene of Moravian politics was enormously varied (see Springerová 2010 or Strmiska 2000 for details). A number of political as well as cultural organisations, striving for Moravian autonomy and fostering the Moravian claims with different arguments and strategies, emerged immediately after the end of the communist regime early in 1990. In the following analysis, we will focus only on those bodies that

gained at least some political prominence, or which are typical / important for the development of Moravian political discourse and communication tactics. The minor Moravian movements and groups of activists therefore remain beyond the scope of the following analysis.

After 1989, the former generation of Moravian activists as well as “new blood” prepared for the renewal of the Moravian movement. The SMS had not been forgotten and from its foundations, the new Movement for Autonomous Democracy – Society for Moravia and Silesia (*Hnutí samosprávné demokracie – Společnost pro Moravu a Slezsko*, HSD-SMS) was built. HSD-SMS was officially established on 1 April 1990 and the psychologist Boleslav Bárta, who chaired already the 1968-1969 SMS, became its leader. Under the clever slogan “*At least one vote for Moravia*”⁵, the HSD-SMS achieved parliamentary representation both on the level of the Czech Republic and on the federal level. HSD-SMS even entered the Czech government, but the reputation of the Movement was soon damaged by the accusation that Boleslav Bárta collaborated with the State Secret Police (*Státní bezpečnost*, StB) of the communist regime. The charismatic Bárta was backed by the majority of HSD-SMS, but the first rift within the movement had already occurred and it was deepened by the decision of the HSD-SMS from January 1991 to leave the Czech government in protest against the lack of interest in the renewal of Moravian autonomy.

Minister Bohumil Tichý, the only representative of HSD-SMS in the Czech government, refused to resign and during the spring of 1991, the parliamentary factions of HSD-SMS in the Czech and in the federal parliament split into “HSD-SMS I” and “HSD-SMS II” clubs. The public response to these developments was quick and predictable: a dramatic decline of popular support. The public opinion surveys that assigned around 11 per cent of the vote to HSD-SMS in winter 1990/1991 showed a swift defection of the voters to other parties. The symbolical termination of the early (and at the same time the most successful) period of the Moravian political movement was the decease of Boleslav Bárta who died on 31 May 1991.

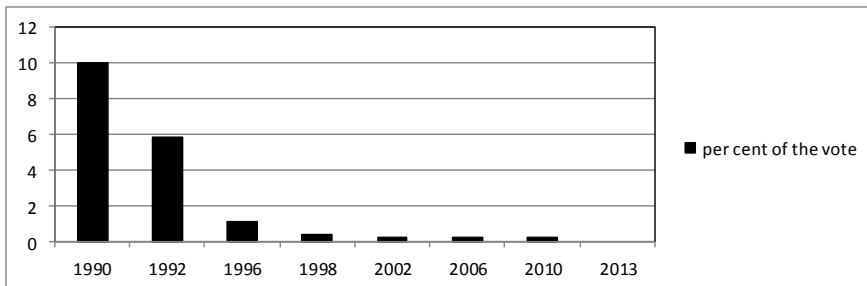
Bárta’s successor Jan Kryčér attempted to place HSD-SMS on the Czech political map in a new way by developing a new identity for movement which would be less focused on Moravian issues and would put more emphasis on its liberal and centrist image. Unsuccessfully, Kryčér was trying to cooperate with other small centrist parties in the Czech Republic, such as the Greens and some smaller Moravian parties, especially the Moravian National Party (*Moravská národní strana – MNS*) (Pšejša 2005, 38-39). This strategy was perhaps not completely wrong, bearing in mind that in 1992, a pre-election coalition of HSD-SMS and its minor allies managed to get into the Czech National Council, which became a lower house of the Czech Parliament after

⁵ In the first democratic election of 1990, voters casted votes for the Czech (or Slovak) National Council, and House of People, as well as House of Nations, of the Federal Assembly. The same applies to the 1992 parliamentary election. Another catchy, though unofficial, slogan of the 1990 campaign was “*Moravia and Silesia is not Bohemia at all*” (“*Morava a Slezsko není žádný Česko*”).

the split of Czechoslovakia in 1993.⁶ On the other hand, the tendency towards a centrist profile “mainstreaming” the Moravian issue contributed to another outbreak of rifts and heated debates among the Moravian political elites and the movement soon drifted into political marginality, being backed by no more than 2 per cent of the electorate after January 1993.

Kryčér went on with the transformation of the movement, renaming it first to the Movement for Autonomous Democracy of Moravia and Silesia and, in January 1994, to the Czech-Moravian Centre Party (*Českomoravská strana středu – ČMSS*). This step was followed by a defection of Kryčér’s opponents who in 1994 established the Movement of Autonomous Moravia and Silesia – Moravian National Unification (*Hnutí samosprávné Moravy a Slezska – Moravské národní sjednocení, HSMS-MNSj*). This consolidation of ČMSS and other small centrist parties⁷ led to the creation of the Czech-Moravian Centre Union (*Českomoravská unie středu, ČMUS*). As a result of internal splits and feuds, three different Moravian lists run for the chairs in the 1996 Czech parliamentary election with no success whatsoever (see Graph 1 for details). Moravian politics moved to the fringe of Czech party politics and it has remained there ever since. Moravian parties did not fare much better in local, regional, and Senate election, their modest success was limited to Southern Moravia only (see Mareš – Strmiska 2005, 1622-1627).

Graph 1: Results of Moravian parties in the parliamentary election in the Czech Republic



Source: www.volby.cz

Notes:

Czech National Council in 1990 and 1992, House of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic since 1996.

The data are for HSD-SMS in 1990 and 1992; in 1996 the data aggregate the results of ČMUS (0,45), HSD-SMS (0,42) and Moravian National Party – Movement for Silesian-Moravian Unity (*Moravská národní strana – Hnutí slezskomoravského sjednocení – MNS-HSMSj*); in 1998 and 2002 MDS; in 2006 and 2010 *Moravané*; no Moravian party ran in 2013 elections.

⁶ For details on the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, see Stein (1997), Měchýř (1991), and especially Rychlík (2012).

⁷ Liberal Social Union, Agrarian Union, later on Czech Union of Merchants and Traders joined ČMUS in 1995 followed by Christian Socials Union later on. It is needless to say that all these parties were small aggregates with only marginal public support.

In parallel to HSD-SMS, there was another body – Moravian National Party. The party was founded in the course of the summer of 1990 as an extra-parliamentary party and the party structure was established at the initial congress held in December 1990. The main difference between HSD-SMS and MNS was their conceptualisation of Moravian identity.⁸ HSD-SMS built on the regional approach, while MNS stressed the notion that Moravians are an ethnically distinctive nation different from the Czechs. Some of MNS activists even discussed political independence of Moravia as the ultimate goal of the Moravian movement and secessionist agenda was part of the MNS mainstream. The gap between MNS and HSD-SMS was however not unbridgeable, as two members of MNS were elected to the Czech National Council in 1992 at the list led by HSD-SMS. Internal conflicts, so typical for HSD-SMS, were present within MNS as well. In 1996, when Ivan Dřimal was confirmed as chairman of the MNS (after a series of heavy disputes), the dissatisfied faction created the Moravian National Unification platform which later on merged with HSMS and created the HSMS-MNSj. The residual party changed its name several times and tried to complement the Moravian nationalism with elements of general traditionalism and conservatism in order to differentiate itself from liberal and centrist ex-HSD-SMS formations (Strmiska 2000, 3-4).

After the electoral disaster in 1996, two leading Moravian parties (ČMUS and MNS) merged in April 1997 into the Moravian Democratic Party (*Moravská demokratická strana*, MDS) chaired by the former chairman of MNS Ivan Dřimal. At the same time, HSMS-MNSj still existed independently and formed a pre-electoral coalition with MDS in 1998. The coalition however failed again to achieve any political significance. Moravian parties literally consumed their strength and potential in internal personal and program feuds and inconsequence, they simply fell into oblivion. The last step towards integration of Moravian movement occurred in December 2005 when HSMS absorbed the entire MDS. As a symbol of newly achieved political unity of Moravian movement, a new name was selected for the party. Since December 2005, Moravian party politics is represented solely by the party called Moravians (*Moravané*, M). The party has its own youth movement (Young Moravians – *Mladí Moravané*) and it cooperates at the European level with other regionalist parties as a member of European Free Alliance (EFA). As far as ideological stances of Moravians are concerned, liberal and conservative profiles were abandoned in favour of a strong emphasis on direct democracy as a “natural” source of pressure towards Moravian self-government.

⁸ At the fringes of the Moravian movement, some radical proponents of Moravian nationalism and anti-Czech separatism followed their own interests. There is, however, only very limited evidence of any extremist or terrorist plans and activities planned or carried out by Moravian activists. Extremist tendencies were limited to a short period of time and to a handful of individuals, they never affected the mainstream of Moravian politics in any substantial manner (Mareš 2001).

From region to ethnic group: (re)framing Moravian claims for autonomy

The original framework of Moravian claims was based on the general issue of Czechoslovak federation and its reform that started to be discussed early in 1990. HSD-SMS proposed to transform the federation from two to three entities which would recreate the Moravian-Silesian Province as a self-governing body. The general argumentation line was focusing on the revision of territorial organisation of Czechoslovakia in order to restore status quo ante 1949, but the electoral program for the 1990 parliamentary election contained some references to Moravian ethnic identity, claiming “[a]utonomous and equal position of Moravia within the state [and] recognition of Moravians by legislation as an ethnic group with its own juridical subjectivity” (Jak a koho volit 1990, 70). A similar view was presented in the Moravian declaration from April 1990, which was an ideological platform for (re)shaping HSD-SMS (cited in Pavlovský 2010):

For the sake of realisation ...of reconstruction of our state into a Czechoslovak federative republic, we demand that the Federal Assembly, even before the election [to be held in June 1990 – VH] issues a law on the rehabilitation of Moravian-Silesian Province which would provide a remedy of injustices perpetrated at more than 4 million of its inhabitants since its abolishment by the communist regime on 1 January 1949. This wilful act of dictatorship has no parallel in the entire 1,200 years of Moravian history, Moravian statehood, and provincial autonomy with constitutional elements.

HSD-SMS politicians as well as the leaders of its sequel parties always tended to stress regional identity and to address Moravian claims as a product of regionalism, not of ethno-separatism. Argumentation for transforming the dual federation into a three-part one was, of course, *passé* after dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1992/1993. Moravian regionalists however soon discovered an interesting external argument of their claims by invoking the idea of “Europe of regions” (Mareš 2002).

Even the Moravian National Party did not exclude regionalist arguments from its repertoire. On the contrary, since it declared to follow the historical tradition of the National Party active in Moravian politics in the 1861-1911 period (Springerová 2010, 67). On the other hand, MNS stressed from the outset that Moravia is not only a specific region to be regarded as an autonomous province but that Moravians area separate nation.

The most radical invocation of national differences between the Czechs and the Moravians can be found in *Charta Moravorum*, a document issued probably in 1994, which claimed that the results of the 1991 public census 1991 had been falsified by the Czech Republic authorities with the aim to reduce the number of people of Moravian nationality, and appealed to the readers to embark on various acts of civil disobedience, such as tearing the official coats of arms of the Czech Republic from public buildings in Moravia. For our purposes, it is important to note that the Moravian Information Centre, the editor of the *Charta Moravorum* and a marginal group of a handful of Moravian radicals, issued several declarations in which

it conceptualized the Moravian nation as historically preceding the Czech nation (cited in Springerová 2010, 140):

“We, Moravians, and our sovereign Svatopluk I The Great, were recognized as a nation already in the year 880 by the bulla Industriae Tuae ... We are the fourth nation (the chosen one as well?) in the history of our civilization with its own language of liturgy! ...Moravia and we, Moravians, have always had our own diet, our own laws, our own army, and earlier also our own currency”.

The claim is based on the existence of the so-called Great Moravian Empire in the 9th century AD. To derive the unbroken existence of a separate Moravian nation from the simple fact that an aggregate of territories and tribes under a single political rule existed once in the same territory cannot be however fully supported by historical evidence and can be actually understood as an example of political construction of a separate national identity based on the arguments of historical existence and longevity. This strategy was typical, by the way, for the Czech national revival period, when activists attempted to support Czech political claims vis-à-vis Vienna with historical existence of Czech nationhood and statehood, which should in their eyes imply the recognition of political rights in the actual political constellation.

Such radical statements however attracted only very limited attention. This fact, as well as the organisational mergers of Moravian parties after a series of defeats (Moravian Democratic Party in 1997 as well as Moravians in 2005), forced the Moravian politicians to face the challenge to reconcile both arguments: Moravia as a land with distinctive territorial identity and a tradition of self-rule to be reinstalled, and Moravia as a land inhabited by an indigenous nation different from the Czech nation. The final compromise was based on a simple mixture of both of these elements and was not necessarily aimed at their synthesis. In a way, the radical national framing of Moravian issues was side-lined in favour of the strong emphasis on regionalism and self-rule. It was a realistic option that took into consideration the marginality of those Moravian formations that used radical nationalist rhetoric as well as the generally bigger impact of regionalist arguments on the Moravian public.

The “transition” from radicalism back to a moderate stance was, however, not always easy, at least as far as passionate emotional language of party proclamations is concerned, as the following extract from the founding manifesto of MDS shows (cited in Springerová 2010, 153)

Moravian Democratic Party tries today to raise the Moravian flag; it strives for the return of autonomy to Moravia, for respect to the rights of the Moravian nation, for such a state of affairs in which Moravians are deciding on money they pay for the taxes. It is clear that Prague will exploit us as long as it will rule over Moravia. Nothing gets better till Moravians stop to reckon to the promises from the centre and take the affairs into their own hands.

The current political representation of Moravian regionalism, the political party called Moravians, uses the concept of “nationality” instead of the

concept of “nation” and mixes historical as well as political arguments to support the claim for Moravian self-rule (Moravané 2015, 5):

The political party Moravians ... is a party of democratic and tolerant provincial patriotism; it has the ambition to defend above all the interest of those citizens of the Czech Republic and of the EU who claim allegiance to the program of Moravian provincial autonomy, positive Moravian provincial patriotism, and Moravian nationality. At the same time, we are convinced that our goals and means to achieve them are advantageous for all citizens of the Czech Republic and Europe.

The manifesto of Moravians refers to the tradition of autonomy since 1182 till the destruction of Moravian-Silesian Province in 1949. Moravians claim that the citizens of Moravia are in fact discriminated and that their Moravian identity is suppressed, which makes them second-rate citizens. As a practical solution, Moravians wish to organize the Czech Republic as a federation of three provinces (Bohemia, Moravia-Silesia, and Prague) and they are claiming to follow the example of federal countries such as Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, and to be encouraged by the decentralisation successes in some Western European countries. The transformation of the EU into the “Europe of regions” is mentioned together with emphasis on the subsidiarity principle in the administration of public affairs.

In a way, Moravians are closing the circle of Moravian attempts in terms of ideological and conceptual framing of the claims for autonomy. The recent conceptualisation of the Moravian movement as regionalist and pro-European follows a decade of shifts from regionalism to nationalism and back again, and it brings the Moravian movement to a similar moderate political footing as in the very early period of the democratic transition.

Concluding remarks

Moravian political movement striving for autonomy enjoyed its heyday some two decades ago and quickly fell into political marginality in the second half of the 1990s. The most important reason of its fall seems to be the inability of the various and often contentious Moravian leaders and activists to find common ground and common language. Too many different but always minor projects and strategies were developed in order to build a sound organisational background for the mobilisation of voters mobilisation and to present the party as an attractive coalition partner for other political bodies. None of these attempts proved to be successful.

Another reason of the declining support for Moravian political claims was connected with the change in argumentation why is Moravia a distinctive part of the Czech Lands that deserves self-rule and general recognition of her specific features. Former regionalist discourse, aimed especially at a combination of two communication tactics (Moravia deserves autonomy because it used to be autonomous for centuries; the establishment of Moravian-Silesian Province or Republic will resolve the stalemate which

occurred during the “Hyphen War”⁹ between the Czech and the Slovak political representation), was in fact strongest in the brief period of 1990-1992. The results of the public census in 1991, showing that there were actually more than 1,300,000 Moravians in Czechoslovakia, provided fuel for this argument. However, the partition of Czechoslovakia in 1992 had a negative impact on this strategy, as another dual arrangement (Czech-Moravian) was absolutely unthinkable after the experience with Czech-Slovak disputes. This combination of internal feuds within HSD-SMS and the dramatic change of political and legal context was a lethal mixture for moderate Moravian politicians who preferred to frame Moravian issues in a strictly regionalist discourse.

The way was thus left open for a radical version of Moravian discourse, based on claims that Moravia is not only a distinctive region but that Moravians are a distinctive nation different from the Czechs. Such a change is not completely new in the context of European regionalist movements. Similar radicalisation was, for example, noticeable among the politicians of *Lega Nord* in Northern Italy that in the mid-1990s replaced regionalist discourse with a new one, built on the idea of a separate ethno-national identity of the inhabitants of Northern Italy who were actually claimed to be superior to their Italian neighbours in moral terms (Cavatorta 2001, Giordano 2000). A concept of an independent “Padania” was an outcome in the case of Moravian movement. Even the extreme Moravian nationalists did not want to abolish the common state with the Czechs in favour of an independent Moravian country. Such radicalisation however did not agree with the popular feeling. Even for those inhabitants of Moravia who profess Moravian nationality, a complete separation of Czech and Moravian identities in national terms was hardly acceptable, and this radical nationalist discourse drove away the few followers the Moravian parties actually had.

One might pose a question why has the political party Moravians not been able to gain more popularity among Moravian voters and to recover from the position of a marginal and in fact irrelevant party, as it has returned to the moderate regionalist discursive strategy (a turn which occurred around the beginning of the new millennium). One reason could be the impact of the left-right cleavage based on socio-economic issues which now functions as a backbone that shapes Czech party competition (Hloušek – Kopeček 2008), another reason may be the lack of new, strong, and convincing political personalities among the leaders of the Moravians. Among other structural factors, we might list the general lack of radical politics within the Czech political culture. Somewhat paradoxically, the relatively successful stabilisation of administrative regions in the last fifteen years does not leave

⁹ The term “Hyphen War” refers to the symbolical dimension of Czech-Slovak disputes of the early 1990s. The object of the dispute was the official name of Czechoslovakia. Václav Havel’s suggestion to change the name caused a controversy: the Czech political representation preferred “Czechoslovak Republic” version while the Slovaks preferred “Czecho-Slovak Republic” which, for the Czech part, was not acceptable because this was the name of the country in the period between the infamous Munich Agreement (1938) and the creation of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia (1939). Finally, a compromise was reached: Czech and Slovak Federative Republic.

much space for re-creation of Moravian Lands as a realist political alternative. Brno, Olomouc, Zlín and Ostrava have become respected centres of the four regions (*kraje*) that cover vast majority of the original territory of Moravia and the citizens' need for self-rule seems to be addressed successfully by the existing regions.

One must, however, have a look at the territorial composition of the population as well: a vast majority of people with Moravian nationality is situated within one region (Southern Moravia with the capital of Brno). The rises and falls in the numbers of Moravians according to the public censuses (especially the downswing in 2001) show moreover that for many people, Moravian identity is not firmly fixed and is perhaps based more on fashion within the political discourse than on other reasons why one feels attached to a certain collective identity. In other words, Moravian politicians are extremely fragile vis-à-vis the changing tenor of political discourse and they would need to invent something more attractive in order to regain medial and electoral prominence they once achieved in early 1990s. The contemporary program of Moravians, stressing the renewal of Moravian-Silesian province in the situation where recently established regions have achieved a reasonable level of recognition among the citizens as well as political elites, does not seem to bring such an impulse for the refreshment of Moravian politics in the near future.

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