

## ARTICLE

# THE CENTRE-REGION RELATIONS MODELS IN DECENTRALIZED EUROPEAN STATES: THE ROLE OF ETHNO-REGIONALIST PARTIES

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### ABSTRACT

The regionalization, decentralization and the growth of national identity created favorable conditions for strengthening the influence of ethno regional parties on the political process in many European states. The constant support of the regional electorate allows these parties, leading regional authorities, having a direct impact on the formation and development of relations between the central and regional authorities. This article describes the model of "center-region" relations, which can take shape in the conditions of the ethno regional party's rule. The authors suggest a relationship between the position of ethno regional parties on issues of the state-territorial structure and relations between the center and the region.

### INTRODUCTION

**KEY WORDS**  
Ethno regional party,  
"center-region" relations,

There is a strengthening of parties that defend their national identity, culture and economic well-being of the region at the present stage of development of European states. It is precisely ethno regional parties that are becoming active political actors seeking to exert a significant influence on governmental decision-making, both at the regional and national levels.

The rise of ethno regional parties in the 70s-80s of the 20th century [1] caused a special interest among the scientific community to study such parties. The variety of participation forms in the national and supranational politics makes regional parties a particularly relevant and important object of study of political science. The study of the influence of ethno regional parties on the process of building and developing relations between the regional and central authorities in the European states is of particular importance. Consideration of ethno regional parties as a political actor influencing the above-mentioned interactions in modern scientific discourse is almost absent. One can speak only of individual studies in which the issues of parties' development are touched upon in the context of "center-region" relations. The influence exerted by the ethno regional parties on building a balanced "center-region" model remains unexplored. All this indicates a number of shortcomings and the need to clarify some aspects of this problem.

### METHODS

The main research postulate of this paper is the thesis about the presence of a specific role of ethno regional parties in building a model of "center-region" relations. As a hypothesis, the authors suggest the influence of behavior, ideological orientations and political demands of ethno regional parties on the interaction between the central and regional authorities in the decentralized states. The methodological basis of the study implies reliance on the postulates of a neo institutional approach, which makes it possible to consider the parties' institution as an independent actor and participant in the political process, taking into account all forms of interaction the party enters during the course of its activities.

The authors also use the case study method as a key research tool. Using this method in line with the neo institutionalism, we can study in depth the various aspects of a particular case, reveal specific features inherent only in a particular political institution or phenomenon. The need to identify the similarities and differences between the established "center-region" models in various European decentralized states determines the use of a comparative research method as one of the leading methods in the context of this paper. The comparative method is used to identify the common and different in the aspects of the activities of the Western European ethno regional parties directly connected with the construction of "center-region" relations and, as a result, to study the formation of different types of relations between two above-mentioned authorities.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The parties called ethno regional are focused on the geographically concentrated national minorities struggling to change the existing political structure of the state and its position in it [2]. Tursan believes that, unlike other parties, ethno regional parties seek to transform the existing order of relations between the region and the state, to build a new type of relationships, which will allow taking into account the interests of the groups represented by the party [3]. The program of ethno regional parties includes

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requirements for the reorganization of the state-territorial structure towards an increase in the level of autonomy of the regions and the redistribution of powers between the center and the regions in favor of the latter.

Among the typologies taking into account the goals and requirements of ethno regional parties, the most interesting for this study is the typology of L. De Vinter [5] augmented by R. Dandoy [4], which takes into account the parties positions on issues of state-territorial organization. Typology includes three groups of ethno regional parties: a) defenders of the status quo; b) supporters of decentralization c) supporters of secession.

The ethno regional parties - defenders of the status quo - identify the struggle for recognition of the cultural exclusivity of the ethnic group represented among their goals. These parties do not seek to change the state-territorial system or expand the political autonomy of the region, they care only about the recognition of the linguistic and cultural identity of national minorities.

The ethno regional parties demanding changes in the internal borders, strengthening regional institutions and redistributing powers in favor of regional authorities belong to the advocates of decentralization [6]. The empowerment requirements may relate to various policy areas, for example, powers in the field of culture, education, language, economics, budgeting, regional development, etc.

The secessionist party has the most radical demands among all the ethno regional parties. Secession can be defined as the process of separation and withdrawal from the state of any of its parts, which implies the creation of a new state entity with all sovereign paraphernalia within the disassociated territory [7].

We tend to assume that the nature of the demands has a significant impact on the status of relations between central and regional governments in the conditions when the ethno regional parties become ruling in the region.

We raise the question of the relationships between the radical demands of ethno regional parties in the field of state-territorial structure, the distribution of powers between regional and national institutions and the nature of relations developed between the center and the region.

The peculiarities of the region's development and relations with the central authorities are to a certain extent determined by the interests of the ruling political parties. Therefore, we will talk about building relations between the center and the regions, defining the regional and regional parties as the main political actors, influencing the formation of regional interest in the future.

The choice of case studies is due to the fact that Catalonia, the Basque Country, Schleswig-Holstein and Scotland always differed by their ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity. The ethno regional forces have played and continue to play a serious role in the regional and national political arena of multinational European states. The number of cases includes all regions in which the ethno regional parties have won the regional elections in recent years, which have managed to join the coalition government or form an independent government. The "center - region" relations can emerge and develop within the framework of a federal and unitary state. Therefore, the cases include the regions of the states with a federal and unitary structure.

- Basque Nationalist Party - BNP (Basque Country, Spain);
- Catalan European Democratic Party- PDeCAT (Catalonia, Spain);
- Left Republican Party of Catalonia – ERC (Catalonia, Spain);
- Union of South-Schleswig Voters - SSW (Schleswig-Holstein, Germany);
- Scottish National Party - SNP (Scotland, UK);

To achieve the objectives, the parties were divided into groups based on the typology of R. Dandoy. [4]

The Union of South-Schleswig Voters Party supports the status quo; the Basque Nationalist Party is the pro-decentralization and autonomy party. In turn, secession supporters include the Scottish National Party, the Left Republican Party of Catalonia and the European Democratic Party of Catalonia, which are characterized by the provisions based on calls for the formation of an independent state.

We have identified a number of obligatory indicators that objectively reflect the party's position in relation to the interaction between central and regional authorities. These indicators primarily include: the parties' positions on the issues of national identity, language status, the goal and objectives set by the party, as well as the attitude to the interaction model that has developed between the center and the regions in each specific case. For a qualitative analysis of each indicator, we studied the program documents and party charters, as well as practical actions and slogans proclaimed by the party in relation to the above aspects.

We analyzed different periods that corresponded to the time in power of the ruling ethno regional party. We chose this term, since the parties, being part of the regional government, were able to implement their party programs during this period.

As a result, it was possible to identify three interaction models between the center and the regions, at the head of which are the ethno regional parties - a cooperation model, a conflict model and a center dominance model.

The cooperation model implies close interaction between the region and the center, the coordination of all actions undertaken by the region with the center's will, resolution of arising disputes and contradictions in the framework of amicable negotiation process. The region is able to protect the interests of the ethno regional group.

Such a model includes relations between the Spanish central authorities and the Basque Country, which is headed by the Basque Nationalist Party (BNP). The regional government, headed by the BNP, supports the consistent expansion of the powers of autonomy within the economic benefits received and promoting the prosperity of the region. In recent years, the regional authorities of the Basque Country managed to get rid of the image of the "main threat to the stability of the Spanish state" and become the main regional partner of the central authorities. Regional authorities do not allow the repetition of the Catalan scenario in the territory of the Basque Country, as this may jeopardize cooperation with the central authorities and the progress that has been made towards regional self-government, for example, preferences in the intergovernmental relations [8].

The conflict model is a confrontation between the region and the center representatives. In such a model, regional authorities reserve the right to freedom of political actions that are not coordinated with the center. In such a situation, the negotiation process is ineffective; the parties cannot come to a consensus, despite the center being able to legally and forcibly influence the actions of the regions.

This type of relationships can be attributed to the interaction of Spain with the Catalan authorities, led by the ERC and PDeCAT, and Scotland, whose government is headed by the SNP.

The refusal of the Spanish authorities to cooperate with the regional government on holding a referendum on the independence of Catalonia leads to an increase in the number of unilateral actions by the regional authorities, and the exclusion of the negotiation process as a tool to get rid of the accumulated contradictions. The response of the central authorities in the form of the application of legal norms to combat the separatist policies of the regional government (in particular, criminal and administrative prosecution of leaders of ethno regional parties [9] who have participated in the consultative survey on the separation of Catalonia) allows us characterizing the relations as a conflict interaction model between the center and the region.

Less tragic is the example of relations between Scotland and the British authorities. Despite the loss of separation supporters in the referendum in 2014, the change in the political situation associated with Brexit, may lead to a repeated referendum on independence [10]. The exclusion of Scotland from the European integration process can be a decisive argument for those residents of Scotland who have voted against independence at the referendum in 2014. This is due to the radically different position of the British and Scottish authorities on the issue of maintaining British membership in the European Union. SNP states that maintenance of EU membership would allow entering the Eurozone without serious consequences, as well as reducing the economic risks and secession costs [11].

The center domination model – the center has the strongest influence on the activities of regional authorities, ethnicity is not politicized and is not a tool in building relationships with other political forces in the region and with the central authorities. When a center dominance model is being formed, regional authorities do not have the capabilities and resources to change the socio-economic and political status of regional ethnic groups. Such relationships are developed in the FRG between the central authorities and the state of Schleswig-Holstein, where the Union of South-Schleswig Voters (SSW) Party represents the interests of the Danish and Frisian minorities in the federal state of Schleswig-Holstein. The protection of the culture and language of the Danes and the Frisians living in Germany are the main demands of the parties. In general, the small size of the electorate and weak positions in regional authorities do not allow the party playing a significant role in the region and having a significant impact on the change of the "center-region" relationship model in Germany. The party is not influential enough to independently change the existing status of the Danish and Frisian languages without the support of other political forces.

## CONCLUSION

Of course, the relations between central and regional institutions are not static, many factors affect the productivity and effectiveness of relations between central and regional authorities. Such factors include the activities of the ruling regional party, determining the development trajectory of the region and choosing the most acceptable format of relations with the center.

These relations can be developed within the framework of three models - conflict, cooperation and center domination. Based on the study results, it is possible to make an assumption about the existence of a relationship between the position of the ethno regional party in the field of state-territorial structure and the nature of relationships formed between the center and the region during the time in power of the ethno regional party. The ethno regional parties, which are the supporters of the status quo, advocating recognition of the linguistic and cultural identity of the regional community, and fighting for the right of an

ethnic group to be represented in the state institutions contribute to the center domination in relations with regional authorities.

The ethno regional parties advocating the redistribution of powers in favor of regional authorities and demanding the strengthening of regional institutions are the decentralization supporters. Under the rule of such a party, the region seeks to establish partnerships with the central government and to achieve the greatest possible expansion of authority in exchange for the center's support, which leads to the development of the cooperation model.

The secessionist parties are fighting for the independence of their regions and want, by reorganizing the existing states, to create a new sovereign territorial entity. This type of party, being in the position of the ruling party, stands for self-determination of the region, without receiving support from the central authorities, preferring the unilateral actions instead of the negotiation process. Lack of consensus and discrepancy in the views of the region's future leads to the formation of a conflict model of "center-region" relations.

The models proposed in this article do not claim to be universal in the study, but can help in disclosing the role of regional parties, as well as in forming and developing complex relations between the central and regional institutions.

In conclusion, it should be noted that the ethno regional parties are active players not only in the regional, but also in the national political arena. The inclusion of such parties in the regional governments allows them striving for the implementation of their programs and changing the status and powers of the region.

The identification of the relationship between the type of ethno regional party and the model of "center-region" relations has a predictive value. If the elections are won by this kind of parties, it is possible, having revealed the basic requirements in the field of state-territorial structure, to determine the peculiarities of relations with the central government. The reduction or strengthening of the conflict potential and the change in the center's role in relations with the region can also be attributed to the inclusion of an ethno regional party in the political institutions of the region or the transformation of the party's course.

#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest.

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#### FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE

None

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