

# Moravian political parties: The story of almost forgotten regionalist attempt in the Czech Republic<sup>1</sup>

*Vít Hloušek*

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## **Abstract:**

The paper deals with 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 the full-fledged political party to compete for chairs in Czech diet and Czechoslovak federal parliament presents an interesting example of failed attempt in regional and later on even ethnic mobilization in the history of recent Czech politics. The paper will focus on 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. Second aim of the paper is to analyse and evaluate strategies employed by Moravian regionalist parties in regard to valorisation the issue of regional minority claims. Original appeal of the Movement for Autonomous Democracy was based on claims for territorial autonomy lost during the communist period. Later on, together with marginalization of political relevance of Moravian parties and politicians (loss of parliamentary relevance after 1996), clear trend towards radicalization could be observed. The new generation of Moravian activists reframed actually the minority claims from territorial / regionalist context to the language of 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 how to mobilize along the cleavages of ethnic politics in the Czech Lands after 1989.

## **Keywords:**

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

The Czech Republic does not belong to those European countries that demonstrate high level of political salience of centre-periphery cleavage. Regional specificities within the Czech Republic are almost only at the level of folklore, dialects, not in a way of very distinctive patterns of political behaviour, nor in the way of existence of specific regionalist parties that try to mobilize the voters on peripheral protest against dominance of Prague centre. This does not mean that such parties do not exist at all and that their political marginal position was the same since the very beginning of recent democratic regime created after the Velvet

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Revolution. Just on the contrary, political parties and movements representing peripheral protest of Moravia were widely politically supported in the beginning of the 1990s and separate Moravian identity (or at least perception of it) was important source of collective as well as individual political behaviour of considerable share of people living at the territory of Moravia and Silesia.

Presented paper looks in combination of historical and political scientific perspective at those developments with the aim to describe and analyse ups and downs of Moravian political movements, to look for the sources of its electoral success, to analyse its rhetoric and arguments developed to mobilize voters and to invoke regional Moravian identity to explain it in political terms.

In order to meet these goals, the paper will be organized in following parts. First a brief course in Moravian history will explain what the historical sources of Moravian specific identity are. The post-1989 Moravian politics was to some extent following previous attempts to use Moravian issue as political program, therefore the brief review of older Moravian political peripheral claims will be provided. The last part is focusing on analysis of development of Moravian political parties and movements<sup>2</sup> since the 1989 and to analyse developments of Moravian political narrative and political discourse. Concluding remarks will try to put the Moravian peripheral politics into broader political context.

Before the analysis starts, we have to add one important terminological and conceptual remark. Within the Moravian movement, there was a sort of internal dispute concerning the relation between Moravia and Silesia which belonged historically together with Bohemia and Upper and Lower Lusatia (*Lužice*) to the complex of lands of the Czech Crown as two autonomous bodies. Vast majority of Silesia was however lost for Prussia after the Wars of Austrian Succession in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and only small part remained part of the Czech Lands preserving its autonomous status till 1918 and being merged with Moravia into the Moravian-Silesian Province during the interwar period. For historical, linguistic, national and other reasons, Silesia demonstrates distinctive area from Moravia and separate Silesian identity was stressed within the Moravian movement as well. For practical reason, the claim to create Moravian autonomy was typically including the territory of Silesia. In the following paper, we will focus on mainstream Moravian peripheral political protest and we will consider Silesia only in those cases which include Silesia to foster argumentation for Moravian autonomous claims.

### **Moravia – a distinctive part of the Czech Lands**

To explain historical sources of Moravian peripheral identity to be politicized in the early 1990s, one must have a look at some type of path dependency that takes into account specific

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<sup>2</sup> 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.

position of Moravia (and Silesia) within the system of the Czech Lands at least since the early modern period. We are not claiming to support idea of primordial nationalist that the nations are for granted, on the other hand, we have to modify views of pure constructivists such as Ernst Gelner (2006) who stress the moment of political construction in the process of building of modern European nations. In fact, the best theoretical background for consideration of the role of path dependency in the case of Moravia offers approach of 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 statement does not deny constructivist aspect of modern nations' creation but it pays respect to the fact that political elite can successfully construct only those national projects that have sound historical background and can be differentiated from other imagined communities (Anderson 1991), ideally both in territorial and identity dimensions. An example of such country brings Moravia which territorial coherence was not seriously disputed since medieval period and which was integral but autonomous part of the territories of the Czech Crown in medieval and (early) modern periods.

In the medieval period, 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 a *"periphery of periphery"* (Šedo 2002: 3). The consolidation of political institutions that took part during the rule of the Luxembourg Dynasty (1310-1437) and that lasted basically till the defeat of the Czech protestant estates in 1620 maintained the general subordinated position of Moravia within the Czech Lands but modified institutional settings of Czech political system. Moravian elites had lesser impact on Kingdom-wide institutions but the new institutional arrangement practically encapsulated Moravian political elite limiting access to Moravian autonomous offices to those noble families who lived and had properties at the territory of Moravia. Relative increase of Moravian political autonomy rose because of changing international context in the period when the Czech Crown was held by the Jagiellonian and the Habsburg Dynasties during the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. After the Battle of White Mountain (1620), the Czech Lands were firmly incorporated to the body of Habsburg domains. Moravia was lesser devastated by forceful re-catholicization than Bohemia and to some extent successfully resisted attempts in general centralization of administration (Šedo 2002: 4-5).

When Moravia entered the period of modern mass competitive politics in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Vienna and Prague were two competing centres to which Moravia was attached and against to which Moravian peripheral protest could be driven. The role of Vienna was stressed not only by the fact that it was the capital of entire Habsburg Monarchy but because of considerable German minority living at the territory of Moravia<sup>3</sup> for whom Vienna was in the age of looming mass nationalism for obvious reasons more attractive than predominantly Czech city of Prague. For emerging Moravian political elite in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, theoretically different way of how to conceptualize own identity leave opened. There

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<sup>3</sup> According to 1910 public census, German speaking inhabitants constituted roughly 28 per cent of inhabitants of Moravia. This does not automatically mean that all these people belonged to German nationality because the census asked about *"colloquial language"* (*Umgangssprache*), so some Jewish inhabitants of Moravia declared to use German as a tool of everyday communication as well. German speaking population dominated some regions including some important industrial cities and economic centres such as Brno.

was a possibility of having ethnic Czech identity and to focus on Prague centre. The second option was tendency to identification with the political system of the Habsburg monarchy which favored German language but which stayed in a way “above” national clashes, somewhat in a way of famous family of Trotta von Sipolje from Joseph Roth’s well-known novels. The third option was German nationalism, the fourth Moravian provincial patriotism which could be in practical circumstances blended with moderate Czech or German nationalism (see Malíř 1990). At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, both national options 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. Last but not least because of internal administrative division of so-called Cisleithania into provinces in which autonomous sets of party systems were developed. It means that both Czech and German politicians in Moravia created political parties of the similar kind but administratively independent from other provinces of Austrian part of the Monarchy (Malíř 1996).

Moravian and Czech parties merged typically in the period just after the end of the WWI (some of them already earlier during the War years) but the Moravian autonomy remained for granted by the Czechoslovak republic after 1918. In 1927, the new law on administrative division of Czechoslovakia only merged Moravia and Silesia into one province. More substantial change however occurred in 1918-1920 period already because political autonomy was transformed into mere administrative decentralization. Moravian and Silesian diets were abolished. Regional governmental body was replaced with bureaucratic authorities subordinated to Moravian provincial president who was controlled by the Czechoslovak minister of interior. Autonomy was strictly speaking turned into the decentralized public administration. Such situation lasted till German occupation (1939-1945). After 1945, Moravian-Silesian Province was renewed with considerably lower level of real administrative power and with the exception of Czechoslovak People’s Party, other Czech parties of National Front (Socialists, Social Democrats, and Communists) expressed the favour to reorganize Czechoslovakia into smaller and purely administrative regions with some respect to specific position of Slovakia (Pernes 1996: 170-171). After parliamentary elections 1946, the process abolishing Moravia-Silesia as a unit of decentralized administration started and since the 1<sup>st</sup> January 1949, Provinces were finally replaced with regions and last remnants of Moravian autonomy were lost. The regions were reorganized couple of times during the Communist rule and some of territorial rectifications did not even respect historical border line between Bohemia and Moravia functioning for centuries.

We can use concept of peripheries drawn by Stein Rokkan (1999: 97-107) to summarize historical position of Moravia within the Czech Lands. Moravia was a periphery with clear territorial as well as social boundaries controlled by the Czech centre in terms of military-administrative, economic as well as cultural dimensions. Inclusion of the Czech Lands into the Habsburg Monarchy however opened a way for potential competition among Prague and Vienna as “natural” centres for Moravian periphery and exactly this competition together with multi-national (Czech-German-Jewish) character of Moravia created convenient soil for seeds of Moravian identity and peripheral protest to grow. Position of certain “distance, difference, and dependence” on the centre (Rokkan 1999: 114-115) promoted during the 20<sup>th</sup>

century several waves of political protest aimed at valorisation of peripheral identities and at addressing related political claims, as shown in the next part.

Historical survey of territory must be completed with the basic population survey. The data of public censuses we have for the period of the Habsburg Monarchy, interwar as well as socialist Czechoslovakia do not include any option to declare Moravian nationality. The situation changed after 1991, so we have survey of development of citizens declared to belong to Moravian (or Silesian) nation for the recent period. The data are presented in the following table.

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

<b>N. OF INHABITANTS / PER CENT</b>	<b>1991</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2011</b>
<b>CZECH</b>	8 363 768 / 81,2	9 249 777 / 90,4	6 711 624 / 64,3
<b>MORAVIAN</b>	1 362 313 / 13,2	380 474 / 3,7	521 801 / 5,0
<b>SILESIAN</b>	44 446 / 0,4	10 878 / 0,1	12 214 / 0,1
<b>CZECH AND MORAVIAN</b>	-	-	99 028 / 0,9
<b>CZECH AND SILESIAN</b>	-	-	4 361 / 0,0
<b>MORAVIAN AND SILESIAN</b>	-	-	4 567 / 0,0
<b>MORAVIAN AND OTHER</b>	-	-	2 217 / 0,0
<b>SILESIAN AND OTHER</b>	-	-	414 / 0,0
<b>UNDECLARED</b>	-	-	2 642 666 / 25,3

Source: ČSU 1991, 2001, 2011

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

Interpreting the results, we can conclude that there was certain period where to declare as Moravian was a kind of political statement and in the same time “fashion”. It is not a coincidence that the considerable number of Moravians detected by the general census “appeared” in the period of the heydays of Moravian political movement. Still the subsequent censuses show that there is important although not very stable minority (actually the biggest of all nationality 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. Other important feature is geographical distribution of Moravians. Almost one half of Moravians according to the last census lived at the territory of Southern Moravian Region (capital Brno), important share of Moravians lived in Zlín and Olomouc Regions but their share in other regions partially occupying territory of Moravia (Moravian-Silesian Region with capital Ostrava and Vysočina Region with capital Jihlava) was considerably lower and the share of Moravians in regions of Bohemia was negligible (ČSU 2011).

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

### **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 general debate concerning the optimal model of administrative division of the state. This issue was however solved by formal re-introduction of provinces since the 1<sup>st</sup> January 1928<sup>4</sup> and later on, Moravian issues lost any prominence because the political parties faced social and political consequences of the Great Depression and later on pro-Nazi radicalization of German inhabitants of Czechoslovakia as 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 they differed more in terms of distinguished economic and political position, not in terms of more or less stress put on Moravian territorial issues.

Marginal but interesting were contacts of Moravian activists with Czech and Slovak far right in the period after the Munich Accord (September 1938) transformed interwar Czechoslovak democracy into authoritarian “Second Republic” and in March 1938 into the Protectorate Bohemia and Moravia occupied by the Nazi Germany.

Certain attraction among some Moravian activist arouse after secession of Slovak State from Czechoslovakia. A group of people around societies Moravian-Slovak Society (*Moravskoslovenská společnost*) later remained to Ethnographic Moravia (*Národopisná Morava*) established originally as a society to support development of (and inquiry into) the Moravian folklore established a vision to cede parts of Moravia from the Protectorate and to include the territories of Moravian Slovakia (*Moravské Slovácko*) and Moravian Wallachia (*Valašsko*) into the body of fascist Slovak State. These ambitions were propelled especially by anti-Czech resentments of painter and Moravian cultural and political activist Joža Úprka who died already in January 1940. Many of following leading characters of Ethnographic Moravia collaborated with occupation administration during the War. Despite some sympathy expressed by leading politicians of Slovak State (including its main ideologist Vojtech Tuka), German administration strictly rejected any border changes (Mezihorák 1997).

In early 1940, Moravian National Socialist Party (*Moravská národní sociální strana – MNSS*) was created as a sequel of previous small factions of Moravian fascists. MNSS was a tiny group of quislings who established contacts with Brno branch of NSDAP, who worked only in two local communities of Brno and Tišnov and whose program included anti-Semite features

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<sup>4</sup> Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia in fact never ceased to function as real administrative units in the period 1918-1928; they were “only” deprived from political autonomy.

with verbal declarations of Moravia as an autonomous part of Hitler's Great German Empire inhabited by people with Moravian nationality distinctive from the Czech nationality. Generally, the manifesto issued in March 1940 simply copied main theses of NSDAP. The activity of the party included even at the heydays hardly more than roughly 200 members and it was practically stopped in 1942. Level of quisling collaboration with Nazi regime of Moravian regional activism was thus negligible compared to, say, Croatian, Brittany, or Welsh regional movement in the period of the WWII (Mareš – Suchánek 2003).

The only attempt to get Moravian issues back to political prominence took part during the short period of so-called Prague Spring 1968. General liberalization of political discourse (but not of political regime ruled by the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia) opened the way for voicing different minority opinions including request for restitution of Moravian autonomy. The first voice was raised by community of staff of Moravian Museum in Brno who in declaration adopted on the 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1968 claimed renewal of Moravian Province. Such claim was not a product of mere historical consideration. Just on the contrary since one important part of reform agenda of the Prague Spring (and actually the only really accomplished reform) was the notion of federalization of Czechoslovakia. The claim of experts from Moravian Museum was intended to include Moravia as the third subject of 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: Regional National Committee of Southern Moravian Region demanded renewal of Moravian Province in mid-April 1968. The same institution of Northern Moravia however rejected firmly the plan in favour of one Czech Socialist Republic as a part of Czechoslovak federation. Already in 1968-1969 period, the territorial support of Moravian autonomy was concentrated predominantly in Southern Moravia, which was a feature to continue after 1989. Society for Moravia and Silesia (*Společnost pro Moravu a Slezsko* – SMS) founded in mid-May 1968. The apex was reached by SMS in summer 1968 when the number of members exceeded 250.000. SMS issued "Moravian-Silesian Declaration" that claimed not only restitution of Moravian autonomy but generally supported process of liberalization and democratization of Czechoslovakia, special emphasis was put on the respect to human rights. Citizens of Moravia and Silesia were labelled as "*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 some sympathies among them, the reaction of Prague communists remained cool and Moravian claims were simply ridiculed. Soviet occupation in August 1968 and emerging "normalization" in spring 1969 stopped any Moravian efforts for another two decades. (Pernes 1996: 196-212)

Moravia was not the prominent topic of Czech dissent movement either not to take into consideration some publications produced in the late 1980s by the circle of authors around samizdat journal Central Europe – Brno's Version (later known as Proglas) focusing on cultural and historical issues. Revival of Moravian political claims was to appear together with the Velvet Revolution.

## Rise and fall of Moravian politics after 1989<sup>5</sup>

The scene of Moravian politics especially during the 1990s was enormously various. Many political as well as cultural organisation striving for Moravian autonomy and fostering the Moravian claims with different arguments and strategies emerged immediately after the end of communist regime in early 1990. In the following analysis, we will focus only on those subjects that gained at least some political prominence or which are typical / important for development of Moravian political discourse and communication tactics. Therefore the minor Moravian movements and groups of activists remain behind the scope of the following analysis.

After 1989, former generation of Moravian activists as well as “new blood” prepared renewal of Moravian movement. The SMS was not forgotten and at its roots, 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<sup>st</sup> April 1990 and the leader became psychologist Boleslav Bárta who chaired already the 1968-1969 SMS. Under the clever slogan “*At least one vote for Moravia*”<sup>6</sup>, the HSD-SMS obtained parliamentary representation both at the level of the Czech Republic and the federal level. HSD-SMS even entered the Czech government but the reputation of the Movement was soon damaged by accusation of Boleslav Bárta to collaborate with State Secret Police (*Státní tajná bezpečnost*, STB) of the communist regime. Charismatic Bárta was backed by the majority of HSD-SMS but the first rift within the movement occurred and it was deepened by the decision of the HSD-SMS from January 1991 to leave the Czech government in protest against lack of interest in renewal of Moravian autonomy.

Minister Bohumil Tichý, the only representative of HSD-SMS in the Czech government, refused to resign and during the spring 1991, the parliamentary factions of HSD-SMS in Czech and federal parliament split into “HSD-SMS I” and “HSD-SMS II” clubs. Public reflection was quick and expectable: the 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 swift defection of the voters to other parties. Symbolical termination of the early (and in the same time the most successful) period of Moravian political movement was decease of Boleslav Bárta who died because of his third heart attack on 31<sup>st</sup> May 1991.

Bárta’s successor Jan Kryčér attempted to place HSD-SMS on the Czech political map in a new way by developing identity of the movement which was less focused on Moravian issues and more stressing its liberal and centrist image. Kryčér was trying without success to cooperate with other small centrist parties in the Czech Republic such as Greens and smaller

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<sup>5</sup> The most comprehensive account on development of Moravian politics is presented by Pavlína Springerová (2010), short but well-informed paper on origins and developments of Moravian parties written by Maxmilián Strmiska (2000).

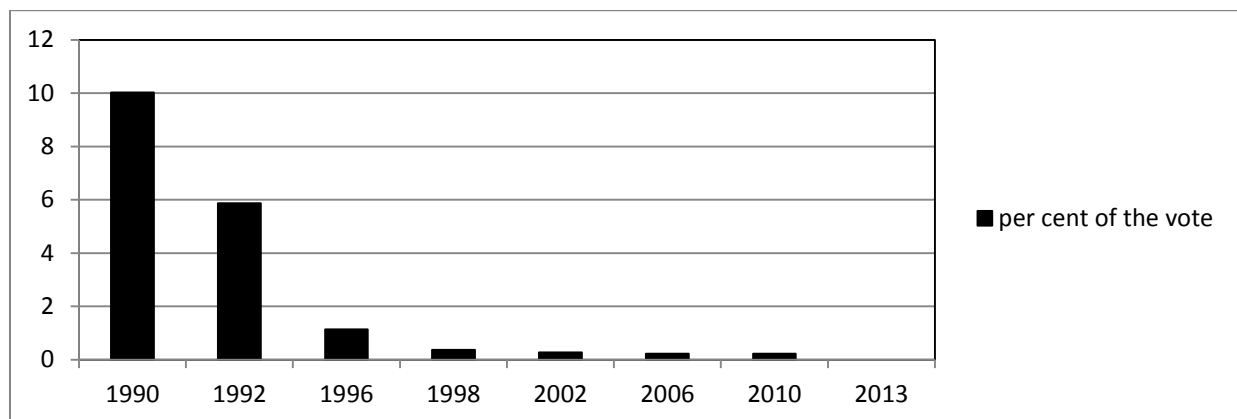
<sup>6</sup> In 1990 first democratic elections, voters casted votes for the Czech (or Slovak) National Council, House of People, as well as House of Nations of the Federal Assembly. The same applies to the 1992 parliamentary elections. Another catchy though unofficial slogan of 1990 campaign was “*Moravia and Silesia is not any Bohemia*” (“*Morava a Slezsko není žádný Česko*”).



Moravian parties<sup>7</sup> (Pšeja 2005: 38-39). This strategy was perhaps not completely wrong taking into account the fact that in 1992, HSD-SMS and his minor allies in pre-election coalition managed to get into the Czech National Council.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, tendency towards centrist profile with “mainstreaming” of Moravian issue contributed to other round of rifts and heated debates among Moravian political elites and the movement soon moved to the political marginality being backed by no more than 2 per cent of the voters after January 1993.

Kryčer went on with transformation of the movement with renaming it first to Movement for Autonomous Democracy of Moravia and Silesia and in January 1994 to Czech-Moravian Centre Party (*Českomoravská strana středu – ČMSS*). This step was followed by defection of Kryčer’s opponents who established in 1994 Movement of Autonomous Moravia and Silesia – Moravian National Unification (*Hnutí samosprávné Moravy a Slezska – Moravské národní sjednocení, HSMS-MNSj*). Merger between ČMSS and other small centrist parties<sup>9</sup> led to creation of Czech-Moravian Centre Union (*Českomoravská unie středu, ČMUS*). As a follow up of internal splits and feuds, three different Moravian lists run for the chairs in 1996 Czech parliamentary election with no success (see Graph 1 for details). Moravian politics moved to the fringe of Czech party politics and it has remained there ever since.<sup>10</sup>

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



Source: [www.volby.cz](http://www.volby.cz)

Notes:

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

<sup>7</sup> Moravian National Party (*Moravská národní strana – MNS*).

<sup>8</sup> Which became the lower house of the Czech Parliament on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1993. HSD-SMS run for the Federal Assembly in 1992 too but it failed to get neither in the House of People nor in the House of Nations skipping not above the 5 per cent threshold.

<sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> Moravian parties did not fared much better in local, regional, and Senate elections with some small successes in Southern Moravia only (see Mareš – Strmiska 2005: 1622-1627).

The data are for HSD-SMS in 1990 and 1992; in 1996 the data aggregate 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 run in 2013 elections.

In parallel to HSD-SMS, Moravian National Party (*Moravská národní strana*, MNS) existed. The party was founded in the course of summer 1990 as an extra-parliamentary party and the party structure was fixed by the initial congress held in December 1990. The main difference between HSD-SMS and MNS was the conceptualisation of Moravian identity.<sup>11</sup> HSD-SMS built on the regional approach, MNS stressed that Moravians are ethnically specific nation different from the Czech one. Some of MNS activists even discussed 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, so two members of MNS were elected at the HSD-SMS led list to the Czech National Council in 1992. Internal conflict so typical for HSD-SMS was present within MNS as well. In 1996 when Ivan Dřimal was confirmed as a chairman of the MNS (after series of heavy disputes), the dissatisfied faction created Moravian National Unification platform to merge later on with HSMS into the HSMS-MNSj.<sup>12</sup> Residual party changed the name several times and tried to complete the Moravian nationalism with elements of general traditionalism and conservatism to be differentiated from liberal and centrist ex-HSD-SMS formations (Strmiska 2000: 3-4).

In consequence of electoral disaster 1996, two leading Moravian parties (ČMUS and MNS) merged in April 1997 into Moravian Democratic Party (*Moravská demokratická strana*, MDS) chaired by former chairman of MNS Ivan Dřimal. Parallely, HSMS-MNSj existed. MDS and HSMS-MNSj formed pre-electoral coalition in 1998 but it failed again to gain any political significance. Moravian parties literally consumed their forces with internal personal and program feuds and in parallel, they simply fell into oblivion. The last step towards integration of Moravian movement happened in December 2005 when HSMS integrated the entire MDS. As a symbol of newly achieved political unity of Moravian movement, the new name of the party was selected. 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 strong emphasis on direct democracy as a “natural” ally of pressure towards Moravian self-government.

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<sup>11</sup> At the fringes of Moravian movement, some radical proponents of Moravian nationalism and anti-Czech separatism functioned. There is, however, only very limited evidence on any extremist or terrorist plans and activities provided by Moravian activists. Extremist tendencies were limited in time and they included only individuals and they never blended mainstream of Moravian politics in any substantive way (Mareš 2001).

<sup>12</sup> Among HSMS-MNSj leaders, there were an interesting number of Brno intellectuals who have belonged to the prominent political figures of Moravian movement ever since the early 1990s, such as legal expert Jiří Bílý or historian Jiří Pernes.

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

Original framework of Moravian claims was based on the general issue of Czechoslovak federation and its reform that was discussed since the early 1990. HSD-SMS proposed to rebuild the federation from two to three entities which would recreate the Moravian-Silesian Province as a self-governing body. General argumentation line was focusing on revision of territorial organisation of Czechoslovakia in order to restore status quo ante 1949 but the electoral program for 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). Similar view was presented in Moravian declaration from April 1990, an ideological platform of (re)shaping HSD-SMS (cited in Pavlovský 2010):

*For provision of realisation ... of reconstruction of our state to Czechoslovak federative republic we demand that the Federal Assembly yet before elections [to be held in June 1990 – VH] issues the law on rehabilitation of Moravian-Silesian Province which would provide remedy of injustices perpetrated at more than 4 million of its inhabitants by cancelation of it by the communist power on the 1<sup>st</sup> January 1949. This wilful act of dictatorship has not any parallel in the entire 1.200 years of Moravian history, Moravian statehood, and provincial autonomy with constitutional elements.*

Among the HSD-SMS politicians as well as among the leaders of its sequel parties, the stress was always put on regional identity and addressing of Moravian claims as product of regionalism, not ethno-separatism. Argumentation for re-building the dual federation into the trial one was, of course, *passé* after dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1992/1993. The Moravian regionalists however found soon an interesting external “spoiler” 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. Just on the contrary since it declared to follow historical tradition of National Party active in Moravian politics in 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 autonomous province but Moravians are the nation that is different from, not a part of Czech nation.

The most radical invocation of national differences between the Czechs and the Moravians offered *Charta Moravorum*, a document issued probably in 1994, which claimed certain falsification of result of public census 1991 by the Czech Republic authorities aimed at reduction of number of people declaring to have Moravian nationality and appealed to the readers for activities of civil disobedience such as smearing of the official coats of arms of the Czech Republic from public buildings in Moravia. For our purposes is important to note that the Moravian Information Centre, editor of the *Charta Moravorum* and marginal aggregate of couple of Moravian radicals, issued declarations in which conceptualized Moravian nation as historically preceding 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 own language of liturgy! ... Moravia and we, Moravians, have had always our own diet, own laws, own army and earlier also own currency”.*<sup>13</sup>

Organisational mergers of Moravian parties after series of defeats (Moravian Democratic Party in 1997 as well as Moravians in 2005) put the Moravian politicians to face the challenge to reconcile both of the arguments, Moravia as land with distinctive territorial identity and tradition of self-rule to be reinstated, and Moravia as a land inhabited by the indigenous nation different from the Czech nation. Final compromise was based on simple mixture of both of these elements without necessarily aimed at their synthesis. In a way, radical national framing of Moravian issue was however side-lined in favour of strong emphasis on regionalism and self-rule. It was a realistic option that took into consideration marginality of those Moravian formations that used radical nationalist rhetoric as well as generally bigger impact of regionalist arguments on the Moravian public.

The “transition” from radicalism back to moderate stance was, however, not always easy at least as far as passionate emotional language of party proclamations is concerned, as the following statement taken 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 return of autonomy to Moravia, for respect to rights of Moravian nation, for such 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 on the promises from the centre and they will not take the affairs into their own hands.*

Current political representation of Moravia regionalism, political party Moravians, uses instead of the concept of “nation” the concept of “nationality” and mixes historical as well as political arguments to support claim for Moravian self-rule (Moravané 2015: 5):

*Political party Moravians ... is a party of democratic and tolerant provincial patriotism; it has ambition to defend above all the interest of those citizens of the Czech Republic and the EU who claim allegiance to the program of Moravian provincial autonomy, positive Moravian provincial patriotism, and Moravian nationality. In 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.*

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<sup>13</sup> The claim is based on existence of so-called Great Moravian Empire in the 9<sup>th</sup> century AD. To derive unbroken existence of separate Moravian nation from the simple fact that an aggregate of territories and tribes under single political rule existed is however not fully supportable with historical evidence and can be actually understood as an example of political construction of a separate national identity by use of arguments on historical existence and longevity. This strategy was typical, by the way, for Czech national awakening period and support of Czech political claims vis-à-vis Vienna with historical existence of Czech nationhood and statehood which shall imply recognition of political right in actual political constellation.

The manifesto of Moravians refers to the tradition of autonomy since 1182 till destruction of Moravian-Silesian Province in 1949. Moravians claim that the citizens of Moravia are in fact discriminated and their Moravian identity is suppressed which makes them citizens of second-order importance. 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 example of federal countries such as Germany, Austria, and Switzerland and to be encouraged by decentralisation successes in some Western European countries. Transformation of the EU into the "Europe of regions" is mentioned together with emphasis put on following of the subsidiarity principle in administration of public affairs.

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

### **Concluding remarks**

Moravian political movement striving for autonomy faced its heydays some two decades ago and fell quickly into political marginality in the second half of the 1990s. The most important reason of the fall seems to be inability to find common ground and common language among the various and often contentious personalities among Moravian leaders and activists. Too many different but mainly minor projects, aggregates and strategies were developed to build a sound organisational background for voters' mobilisation and to become attractive coalition partner for other political parties.

Another reason of declining support for Moravian political claims was however clearly connected with changing tenor of argumentation why is Moravia a distinctive part of the Czech Lands that deserves self-rule and generally recognition of her specific features. Former regionalist discourse aimed especially at combination of two communication tactics (Moravia deserves autonomy because it already took place for centuries; establishment of Moravian-Silesian Province or Republic will solve the stalemate established during the "Hyphen War"<sup>14</sup> between the Czech and the Slovak political representations) was in fact the strongest in the brief period of 1990-1992. Important feed for this argument was outcome of public census 1991 showing that there actually live more than 1,300,000 of Moravians in Czechoslovakia. Key

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<sup>14</sup> The term "Hyphen War" refers to the symbolical dimension of Czech-Slovak disputes of the early 1990s. The object of dispute was the official name of Czechoslovakia. The suggestion of Václav Havel to change the name "Czechoslovak Socialist Republic" with the new one clearly showed that the Czech political representation preferred return to "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 between the infamous Munich Accord (1938) and creation of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia (1939). Finally a compromise was reached: Czech and Slovak Federative Republic.

impact on this strategy however had partition of Czechoslovakia in 1992 because reprise of any dualism (Czech-Moravian) was absolutely unthinkable after annoying experience with Czech-Slovak disputes. Combination of internal feuds within HSD-SMS and dramatic change of political and legal context for any administrative reform to consider some Moravian self-rule, this was a lethal mixture for moderate Moravian politicians who preferred to frame Moravian issues in strictly regionalist discourse.

The way was opened for radical version of Moravian discourse based on claims that Moravia is not only distinctive region but especially distinctive nation different from the Czech one. Such a change is not completely new among European regionalist movements. Similar radicalisation was, for example, present among politicians of *Lega Nord* in Northern Italy that replaced in the mid-1990s regionalist discourse with a new one built on the idea of separate ethno-national base of inhabitants of Northern Italy who were actually claimed to be supreme to their Italian neighbours in moral terms (Cavatorta 2001, Giordano 2000). A concept of independent "Padania" was an outcome which did actually not happen in the case of Moravian movement. Even the Moravian nationalists did not want to abandon the common state with the Czechs in favour of independent Moravian country. The radicalisation however did not meet with public moods. Even for those inhabitants of Moravia who feel to have Moravian nationality, complete separation of Czech and Moravian identities in national terms was hardly acceptable and the more radical nationalist discourse turned, the less followers the Moravian parties actually had.

One might pose a question why after the return to moderate regionalist discursive strategy (a turn provided around the beginning of the New Millennium), political party Moravians was not able to improve its minor popularity among Moravian voters to get from position of a marginal and in fact irrelevant party. Part of the explanation is based on major impact of left-right cleavage based on socio-economic issues as a backbone that shapes Czech party competition (Hloušek – Kopeček 2008), another part in lack of new, strong, and convincing political personalities among the leaders of the Moravians. One, however, must have a look at territorial composition of the population: vast majority of people with Moravian nationality are situated within one region (Southern Moravia with the capital of Brno). The ups and downs of numbers of Moravians according to the public censuses (especially the downswing in 2001) shows moreover that for many people, Moravian identity is not firmly fixed and is based perhaps more on fashions within political discourse than on other reasons why one feels certain collective identity. In other words, Moravian politicians are extremely fragile vis-à-vis changing tenor of political discourse and they would need to invent something attractive to regain medial and electoral prominence once achieved in early 1990s. The contemporary program of Moravians stressing renewal of Moravian-Silesian province in the situation where recent regions achieved reasonable level of recognition among the citizens as well as political elites does not seem to bring such an impulse for refreshment of Moravian politics in the near future.

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