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How does the ethnic conflict relate to autonomy?

The special case of South Tyrol

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Introduction

- The autonomy issue is considered to be a sensitive field to study.
- We can observe europewide that countries with significant linguistic or ethnic minorities are struggling to achieve further means to their given autonomy or self-governance.
- Several referendum has taken place lately, as in Scotland or Catalonia, in South Tyrol.
- Those countries, where linguistic or ethnic minorities live in relatively united territories, these minorities want to achieve a new and special means of self-governance due to the regional identity.
- Territorial demands: formation of regional parties and regional movements.
Topics of presentation

• 1. In the last 30 years the territorial autonomy attempts were strengthened and different territorial autonomy-models had been formed, without a generally accepted legal form.

• 2. The real drivers of autonomy efforts are the regional movements and regional parties which are one of the most important factors of the preservation of the minority rights, and new actors of the decentralisation process.

• 3. In this context I would like to present a special case study through the South Tyrol autonomy issue.
Concept of autonomy

According to Ruth Lapidoth:

„Autonomy is a means for diffusion of powers in order to preserve the unity of a state while respecting the diversity of its population. Ethnic conflicts are on the rise, and autonomy is often suggested as a solution to such conflicts. Ethnic and regional groups are increasingly demanding autonomy for themselves. However, while granting groups autonomy has succeeded in resolving some conflicts, it has failed to resolve others.”
Models of autonomy

According to Ruth Lapidoth three types of autonomy can be distinguished:

- **Territorial autonomy**: territorial autonomy is an arrangement that is granted to a group that differs from the majority of the population of the nation-state, but constitute a majority or a significant part of a specific region: the Aland Islands in Finland, in Italy (South Tyrol), in Scotland, in Spain, (Basques and Catalans), in Belgium (Flemish, Walloon), in France (Brittany), in the Balkan States (attempts in Székelyföld, in Romania, in Serbia, the Vojvodina, in Moldova the Gagauzia, in Macedonia, the Albanians) etc..

- **Cultural or personal autonomy**: Cultural or personal autonomy is granted to the members of a specific community (ethnic, religious, linguistic). This model of autonomy, allows minorities a significant degree of autonomy and cohesion even when minorities are dispersed throughout the territory: Norwegian, Finnish and Swedish Lapps.

- **Local autonomy (local self-administration)**: This specific form means to grant autonomy to local governments.
Autonomy-issue related to the process of decentralization

- In international law autonomy does not have any general accepted definition.
- Since the 1970s, due to the „Regions in Europe”, the revival of regionalist movements have led to forms of institutional regionalisation in a number of European countries. In search of reasons as to why this has happened: the European integration and the decentralisation, the globalisation, the decreasing role of the nation-state ↔ emerged the Regions, the global economic crisis, the transformation of the traditional party system, appreciation of the regions.
- No doubt, that the European Commission encouraged the regions and their institutional interests in the development of a new level of legitimate government.
Regional parties – as new actors of the decentralisation process

- Regional parties have an important role in the representation of the ethnic minorities interests. These parties became the most important actors at regional and national levels.
- These parties want to have access to the decision-making process and provide political representation focusing on the division of power between the central state and the region.

Claims:
- Reorganisation of the autonomy of ethnic minority in the nation state,
- Higher degree of autonomy (self-governance, independence),
- Creation or ”recreation” of a new identity, regional identity.
- Participation in the national, regional elections.
- Mobilisation of ethnic minorities, linguistic groups, and territorial movements.
Brief historical overview

- South Tyrol, was annexed by Italy at the end of World War I.
- In 1948 was born the First Autonomy-Statute, but the province of Trento was integrated into South Tyrol, and the autonomy rights of German and Ladin-speaking minorities were destroyed.
- Austria, as a ”protecting power” turned to United Nations in order to begin negotiations with Italy.
- In 1969, due to international pressure was born the Second Autonomy-Statute.
- The Autonomy-Statute came into force in 1972, guaranteed the the special autonomy status for the region of Trentino-Alto Adige (Bolzano,Trento).
The case of South Tyrol

- The Italian Constitution of 1948 codified the significance of regional institutions and recognized the regions as political bodies with legislative and administrative powers.
- South-Tyrol has a special status granted by the Italian Constitution of 1948. ( Provincial Governments, Provincial Assemblies, Regional Government, Regional Council)
- **The model of South Tyrol is not considered a “quasi-federal reality” within Italy’s regional system, but also as a “model” for resolving ethno-linguistic conflicts peacefully.**
- The model has guaranteed the bilingualism (the German, Italian), the proportional system.
Cleavages in the region- is it an exemplary model?

The South Tyrol autonomy model is a historical and exemplary model was in the European Union, but recently the model is criticized in negative sense.

Until 2000, in the region functioned a stable and accountable political and social balance, but the” status quo” had been overthrown, which has got many causes/ factors :

- the region was not able to respond and adapt to the changing requirements of European integration,
- political conflict between Rome and South Tyrol (centre- periphery cleavages).
- formation of new regional elite (higher self-determination, reduce the economic dependence from Rome, appearance of a new South Tyrol identity and participate in the decision-making process
- the spread of radical German regional parties, growing support of ethno-regional parties.
Regional parties in South-Tyrol

- In South Tyrol the political and economic conflicts have been deepening continuously.

- *Ethno-regional parties:*
  - **SVP Südtiroler Volkspartei / South Tyrolean People's Party (SVP):** Until 2008 the SVP Südtiroler Volkspartei (SVP) was the most popular catch-all party for the German-speaking and Ladin-speaking minorities. In 2013 SVP lost its absolute majority, because of the alliance of with Italian parties. As a result, the German-speaking regional parties obtained the SVP’s votes.
  - **die Freiheitlichen/Freedom Party (dF):** is the main German-speaking opposition party since the election of 2008. It represented the biggest opponent party for the hegemony of the SVP. The party represents a right-wing populist and xenophobic ideology with separatist claims. The party would be an „independent state“.
  - **Südtiroler Freiheit/South Tyrolean Freedom (SF):** is a separatist German-speaking political party, claiming the self-determination of the province from Italy and its reunification with Austria. In 2014 it called for a referendum and 92,17% of the voters have expressed their support for self-determination for their region.
Everyday life
Conclusion

• From this perspective, the 2013 regional elections in South Tyrol have a powerful influence on the relations between Italy and Austria, and basically the entire European Union.

• What will be the future of South Tyrol if the strength of regional parties continues to grow?
• How can the Italian government handle the political crisis between Rome and the region?
• How can the European Union handle and stop the efforts of the territorial autonomy movements, and territorial referendum?

The motto of „Europe of the Regions”, resulted in protection of minority rights due to the bottom-up process, and the establishment of the process of decentralization.

• The growing role of the European Union has reduced the power of nation-states in Europe and strengthened the relationships among regions.
• Regional party’s presence is significant in many European countries and the European Union needs to elaborate a new strategy.
Thanks for your attention!
Hvala na pažnji!