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**REGIONALIZATION, REGIONAL PARTIES AND PARTY
SYSTEMS IN SPAIN AND IN ITALY
(Some Remarks)**

In recent decades, the phenomena of regionalism and sub-nationalism have aroused considerable interest in the field of political science and related disciplines, both within Europe and outside it. Of course, this interest has not been spread equally within individual aspects of this problem. Relatively little attention has been paid to the formation and development of party regional systems and subsystems. The main cause of this is clearly not rooted in an underestimation of the importance of regional parties and movements, but rather in the continuing preference for classic paradigms when looking at regionalist formations. These paradigms come out of the classic theories and typologies of "nation"-state (and in this sense supra-regional) systems of political parties. It is completely understandable that regional formations usually receive more attention only after their breakthrough into the arena of nation-wide politics, only after they have begun to be considered as a *party relevant* to national or federal politics, and considered such by the use of the criteria "large". Specific regional aspects active in these parties generally remain of marginal interest. In the most wide spread theories of party systems, the concept of regional party systems has been left with either a marginal place or no place at all.¹ The incorporation of this concept into traditional schema appears to be a contentious affair which has damaged their coherence and further complicated the classification and typologies of systems of political parties. At the same time, doubts arise about whether the expected contributions to be gained from an appropriate revision to the classic formulations will in the end correspond to the effort expended. Today, at the beginning of the second half of the 1990s, it is nevertheless possible to assert that the development of party arrangements in, for example, Spain, Italy, Belgium, Canada, India and in other countries has shown the indispensability, at

¹ Cf. Sartori, G.: *Parties and Party Systems. A framework for analysis. I.*, Cambridge 1976; von Beyme, K.: *I partiti nelle democrazie occidentali*, Bologna 1987, chap. 4, part D.

both the empirical and theoretical-methodological levels, of the concept of a regional system of political parties. This of course does not mean that it would be possible to announce the creation of this concept as being somehow closed or fixed. In fact, the opposite is true: it is a theme which remains open to various approaches and solutions.

The formulation of problems bound up with the conception of a regional system of political parties do not as a rule initially arise out of theoretical thinking, but are rather contingent on practical concerns. These primarily include estimating in principle how much it is possible use the same concepts, methods and schema as are used in the analysis of "national" arrangements of political parties when describing and analysing regional party systems. Some researchers hesitate at the question of whether to adopt an approach towards regional party systems which would treat them as if they were dealing with independent, authentic systems or rather to conceive of them as *sub-systems* within the framework of nation-wide systems of political parties.² At the general level, it would be only with great difficulty that a definite answer to this question could be given. For example, it would not be appropriate to assert that regional party (sub-)systems are reduced copies of "national" systems of political parties and that it is possible to look at them in the same manner. In such a case, the concept of a regional party system would not be necessary except perhaps as a residual category. Of course, it is possible to find sub-systems of political parties whose formats and mechanisms are derived from "nation-wide" or federal models. At the same time, it is possible, under certain conditions, to incorporate such sub-systems into the category of a regional system of political parties. And yet it is not possible to exclude from consideration the existence of regional party systems which cannot be considered as being derivative of "national" party arrangements. It is exactly in these cases that the concept of a regional system of political parties finds a broad level of application.

From the point of view of judging the development or "maturity" of individual regional party arrangements, it is especially significant whether or not the *relevant* political parties operating in a given system become differentiated from "national", nation-wide political parties. Of particular interest for research are those regional systems of political parties where a contest develops between differing party-political actors, i.e. between regional, in the broad sense of the word (regionalist, sub-national), formations and "national" or federal parties, or their regional scions. The perspective offered by research into regional party formations should make it possible to evaluate the contest between the participating parties at various levels, including elements of asymmetry caused by the interaction of differing types of actors and the operating of various combinations of exogenic and endogenic agents. At the same time, it is necessary to appropriately modify criteria relevant to regional parties and the object of their

² Cf. Llera Ramo, F. J.: *Continuidad y cambio en el sistema de partidos vasco 1977-1987*, Revista de Estudios Políticos, n. 59, Enero-Marzo 1988, pp. 277-278.

systemic role, with regard to the intensity of competition and the processes of polarisation and segmentation taking place in a given system of political parties.

Very interesting, but complicated, is the question of how much the formation of regional systems or sub-systems and a tendency to regionalization are mutually connected and manifest themselves on the "national" (or federal) level of party arrangements. For example, a marked, long-term regionalization of the voting population of what were originally nation-wide parties *can* create favourable conditions for a wider level of assertion by regional parties and the creation of *new* regional party systems. However, this does not have to be so. Given the number of various factors and their combination influencing these processes, it is very difficult to formulate any kind of general conclusions. Only rarely is it possible to satisfactorily explain the creation of new regional party systems exclusively "from above" on the basis of changes which had *previously* taken place in the "national" or federal spheres. Efforts to clarify the creation of these systems according to one axis of conflict (usually centre-periphery), however significant, have been shown to be very misleading as well. Previous experience has led to a preference for multi-dimensional perspectives. An attempt to show the necessity and significance of multi-dimensional perspectives is made in the following brief analysis which examines the functioning of regionalizing tendencies and the creation of regional party systems in Spain and Italy, states which are especially interesting subjects for research in this complex problem, given the themes which have been selected, as well as a "European perspective".

I. Spain

Contemporary Spain presents one of the most interesting cases of regionalization, which has strongly affected the sphere of party politics, even if it has not manifested itself at all political levels. This is true even within a wider, non-European, scope. To the extent that the *Spanish* "national" setting is involved, after the stabilisation of the Spanish political spectrum at the beginning of the 1980s, the regionalizing tendency has not expressed itself in a pronounced fragmentation which could decisively change the format and mechanics of the party system and the balance of power between the main parties. Although the total proportion of votes and seats for regional formations is subject to certain fluctuations, it can be said that in the best cases, these formations receive about 10% of the votes cast and the same percent of parliamentary (Lower House) seats.³ The fact that some regional parties and their blocks or coalitions – Convergence and Union, (*Convergència i Unió*, CiU), the Basque Nationalist Party, (*Partido Nacionalista Vasco*, PNV) or the Canarian Coalition, (*Coalición Canaria*, CC) – have become important parties in recent years does not only on

³ Cf. elections results in "*Si, Spain*" (on line), 1996.

come from the possession of some parliamentary seats in and of themselves, but also from the possibility of exerting their coalition potential, be that direct or indirect, on the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (*Partido Socialista Obrero Español*, PSOE) and later on the Popular Party (*Partido Popular*, PP). This vital role, even if of minority coalition partner or parliamentary ally or eventually even the decisive role of "tipping the scales", is understandably made possible by PP's and PSOE's relatively equal levels of strength. Strictly speaking, the individual regional parties, even if taken together, represent neither a "third force", in the sense of an additional distinctive alternative for governing, on the Spanish "national" scene, nor a realistic counterbalance to the two already mentioned major parties.

Without regard to the possibility that *some* regional parties exert influence in specific situations on potential coalitions at the *nation-wide* level, it is possible to say that the *primary source* of significance and importance of these regional parties in Spain is derived from the *regional* level. The institutional basis for the activities of regional parties and movements, and for regional party systems and sub-systems, has been created step by step, primarily in the first half of the 1980s in connection with the fulfilling of an ambivalent concept of the decentralisation of Spanish state by means of the creation of autonomous regions (*Comunidades Autónomas*).⁴ However, only some of the regional political scenes thus far have profiles like those of actual regional party systems, primarily in Catalonia and the Basque region and to a lesser degree in Galicia. At the same time, the development of party arrangements in Andalusia, Navarre, Aragon, on the Canary and Balearic Islands and in Valencia, etc., from the very beginning has not progressed so straightforwardly and unequivocally. The process of regionalization in the party spectrum has had varying degrees of intensity, dynamism and results in the individual regions.

The path to a "mature", developed regional party system, marked by the presence of strong regional formations, was clearest in the "historical" regions of the Basque (Euskadi) and in Catalonia and Galicia. In these regions it was possible to use not only the significant (sub)nationalist cultural and political setting, but also to a certain level, to link up with inter-war era party arrangements, not to mention the tradition of both domestic and exiled anti-Franco, and consequently anti-centralising, resistance as well.⁵

Catalanism and Catalanian formations (*Lliga Regionalista*, the ERC, *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya*, and the more recent CiU) have served, and continue to a certain degree to do so, as models for other ethnic-regional move-

⁴ Cf. Clavero Arévalo, M.: *España, desde el centralismo a las autonomías*, Barcelona 1983; Cabellos, C.: *El nacimiento de las autonomías*, Madrid 1984

⁵ Cf. Chao, R.: *Después de Franco*, Madrid 1976; Ramirez, M.: *Sistema de partidos en España (1931-1990)*, Madrid 1991; de Esteban, J., Guerra, L. L.: *Los partidos políticos en la España actual*, Barcelona 1982; Platón, M.: *La amenaza separatista. Mito y realidad de los nacionalismos en España*, Madrid 1994; Silver, Ph. W.: *Nacionalismos y transición: Euskadi, Catalunya, España*, San Sebastian 1978.

ments, both within Spain and abroad. The strong ethnic-regional and political-historical setting made easier both the creation of regional and sub-nationalistic formations and the subsequent distinctive party-political arrangements. However, this process was not exclusively influenced by endogenic factors. An important role was also played by factors of an external nature. Catalonia was never the “black sheep” of modern Spain that the Basque region was. The strategic importance of the Basque region was much less and this territory could be considered in this sense as a peripheral area, whereas this was never true for Catalonia. The formation of a regional system of political parties in Catalonia took place in a specific political-power context, where the relationship between Catalonia and the Spanish-Castilian centre at the moment played an important role. This relationship could not develop out of the interaction between the “national” centre and a true regional periphery. These moments in the early formative phase of contemporary Catalan party arrangements rather symptomatically placed the Catalan parties at an initial disadvantage. Of course, after they achieved their pronounced breakthrough on the domestic Catalan scenethese then came to work in their favour. The rise of *Convergència i Unió* (CiU), the centrist block of the Democratic Convergence of Catalonia (*Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya*, CDC) and the Democratic Union of Catalonia (*Unió Democràtica de Catalunya*, UDC) was made possible, amongst other things, by the diversification of Spanish and regional-Catalonian political trends in the late 1970s and early 1980s. As soon as CiU became the most important formation within the framework of the Catalonia region (in 1980), its importance on the Spanish political scene multiplied without regard to the continuing differences in the size of their voting base in regional and nation-wide parliamentary elections.⁶ The CiU were allowed by success on the Spanish political scene to retroactively consolidate their regional presence. The dominant position of the CiU was also influenced by the process of *regionalization* of all the important Catalanian parties. Even those parties whose original political orientation and cultural-political setting did not identify them as a *Catalonian* formation (the Catalanian Socialists’ Party, the Catalanian Initiative-Greens and especially the Popular Party) were progressively forced to highlight regional aspects of their political identity.⁷ The important line of conflict dividing regional parties from offshoot-branch (*succursalistas*) “national” (pro-Spanish) formations typical for regional systems of political parties nevertheless remained in place, even in Catalanian party arrangements.

6 Cf. *Què és Convergència* (<http://www.portal.com/cdc/>), *Eleccions al Congrés de Diputats i al Senat* (ibid.), 1995; *Elections. Parliament of Catalonia*, in: “Si, Spain” (<http://www.portal.com/cdc/>); *Eleccions al Parlament de Catalunya 1995* (<http://www.portal.com/cdc/>), 1995. Platón, M., *op. cit.*

7 The attempt to achieve at least *some* “catalanization” of the Popular Party in Catalonia has been the most interesting case. Cf. Dolores Garcia, M.: *El PP catalán celebra su refundación*, *El Periódico de Catalunya* (on line), 28–2–1996; “*Aporto credibilidad catalanista*”: *Entrevista a Josep Maria Trias de Bes*, *La Vanguardia* (on line), 18–8–1995; Miquel, J.: *Alex Vidal-Quadras, llanero solitario del españolismo*, *Sur*, 16–11–1995.

In the Basque region, as opposed to Catalonia, the initial position of all the Spanish parties, with the exception of PSE-PSOE (*Partido Socialista de Euskadi*), was very weak. The characteristic feature of Basque party arrangements was the central position of the Basque National Party (PNV) and the important role of additional Basque ("patriotic", *abertzales*) formations, especially the radical coalition *Herri Batasuna* (HB, the Popular Union), a splinter fraction of PNV, *Eusko Alkartasuna* (EA, the Basque Solidarity), and the transitory *Euskadiko Ezkerra* (EE, the Basque Left). Interaction within the framework of the Basque nationalistic camp also had a distinctly greater importance than did similar interaction in Catalonia between the CiU and ERC.⁸ The *peripheral nature* of the Basque region, along with additional factors, especially the specific process of polarisation, whose main source comes from the most "patriotic" end of the local political spectrum (*Herri Batasuna*), meaningfully aided in the contrasting profile of this regional party system with the Spanish political arena. On the other hand, the peripheral nature of the Basque region represented a limiting factor from the viewpoint of the pertinent "visibility" and *non-mediated* expansion of the Basque parties' political influence outside the given limits of the regional framework (with the important exception of Navarre). A number of other regional parties have been situated in structurally similar situations, operating in regions comparable to the Basque region in terms of the peripheral nature of their standing and the importance of local voters for "national" elections. Of course it is not possible to judge the current or potentially accessible limits of influence of these various regional parties only from this perspective. Nevertheless it would be a mistake to overlook the important differences in the extent of operating space held by the Aragonese Party (PAR), the Valencian Union (UV), the Galician National Block (BNG) or the Andalusian Party (PA) in comparison with, for example the Riojan Party or Asturian Party or eventually not to take into consideration the unique insular conditions found in Balearian or Canarian regionalistic formations.

An analysis of the role and dimension of activities of regional parties should start with a careful examination of their position in the pertinent (regional) party arrangements and only in this context can the consideration of the size of individual regional spheres of activity have any meaning. For example, Andalusia, with respect to its size, is certainly a macro-region, but it is not part of the Spanish heartland (*España profunda*). It is a macro-region with peripheral char-

⁸ Cf. Pérez Calvo, A.: *Los partidos políticos en el País Vasco (Aproximación a su estudio)*, Madrid 1977; Llera Ramo, F. J.: *El sistema de partidos en la Comunidad autónoma del País Vasco*, Revista de Estudios Políticos, n. 46/47, Julio-October 1985, pp. 527–552; Llera Ramo, F. J.: *Continuidad y cambio en el sistema de partidos vasco 1977–1987*, Revista de Estudios Políticos, n. 59, Enero-Marzo 1988, pp. 277–375; Mata López, J. M.: *El nacionalismo vasco radical. Discurso, organización y expresiones*, Bilbao 1993; Strmiska, M.: *Radikální nacionalismus a systém politických stran v Baskicku*, Politologický časopis, a. III, n. 1, 1996, pp. 77–86; de la Granja Sainz, J. L.: *El nacionalismo vasco: un siglo de historia*, Madrid 1995. Cf. *Eusko Alderdi Jeltzalea – Partido Nacionalista Vasco* (<http://www.eaj-pnv.es/>), *Eusko Alkartasuna* (<http://www.tsai4.es/ea/>).

acteristics, one where party interactions take place which are not typical for either regional peripheries or central areas. In this environment, a “soft” variant of regionalism could to a certain degree assert itself. This occurred in connection with the restructuring of Andalusian party arrangements in the first half of the 1980s and is embodied in the Andalusian Party (*Partido Andalucista*, PA).⁹ The Andalusian regional party arrangement is marked by the longer term predominance of the Socialists and this region has remained a bastion of the PSOE even during the years of the erosion of its popular support (1993–1996).¹⁰ The relevance of the Andalusian formations (the PA and their splinter group, the Andalusian Party of Progress, PAP) has been contingent on both their moderate centrist orientation and more significantly by the development of the relative strengths of PSOE and PP at the regional level. This has allowed the Andalusian Party, from time to time, to “tip the scales” one way or the other. From this perspective, the standing of the Andalusians has been more advantageous than the position of the local “third” formations, the United Left and its allies (*Izquierda Unida – Los Verdes – Convocatoria por Andalucía*, IU-LV-CA). The macro-regional character, within which the activities of the PA have until now taken place, has had a secondary role and has not automatically added importance to the Andalusian formations in comparison with regional parties from smaller areas. If the question of internal cohesion and potential of Andalusism as a political platform is dismissed and if the problem is approached from an internal perspective, it is possible to formulate the hypothesis that interest should duly be paid to this macro-regional setting only when and if the Andalusians manage to markedly make headway to the detriment of one or both of the main parties (Socialist and Popular) and to go from being a mere “tipper of the scales” to one of the poles of Andalusian politics and so change the mechanics of this party system, *with the valorisation of its regional dimension*.

II. Italy

In spite of Italy’s clear regional heterogeneity, it is not one of the countries which has afforded fertile soil for the assertion of regional parties and the creation of regional party systems. This was true at least during most of the era of the “First Republic” and continued to be so up to the impressive expansion of the northern Italian leagues in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

⁹ Cf. *Diputados en oferta. Partido Andalucista*, in: *Elecciones*, El Mundo (on line), 4–3–1996; *Pedro Pacheco*, in: *Perfiles/Elecciones*, El Mundo (<http://elecciones.el-mundo.es/>), March 1996; *Ortega reivindica la unidad andalucista*, Sur, 13–12–1995, s. 6; *Partido Andalucista: La solución de Andalucía*, 1996, Bejarano, J.: *El andalucismo intenta salir del hoyo electoral*, La Vanguardia (on line), 2–1–1996.

¹⁰ Cf. *Elections Parliament of Andalucía*, in: *Si, Spain* (<http://www.DocuWeb.ca/SiSpain/politics/election/>), *Elecciones Cortes, Andalucía-Congreso 1996*; (<http://www.elecciones96.mji.es/generale/congreso/>), *Elecciones al Parlamento de Andalucía* (<http://www.elecciones96.mji.es/andaluza/>).

The most favourable setting for the locating of regional parties and movements was at first in the autonomous regions of the Italian Republic (regions with special status), in Trentino-Alto Adige, Valle d'Aosta, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Sicily and Sardinia. The most notable regional political formations have been active in precisely these areas and include, for example, the Valdostan Union (*Union Valdôtaine*, UV), the Tyrolean-Trentino Autonomous Party (*Partito Autonomista Trentino Tirolese*, PATT), the South Tyrolean People's Party (*Südtiroler Volkspartei*, SVP), or the Sardinian Action Party (*Partito Sardo d'Azione*, PSd'A).¹¹ In addition to these parties, other, smaller parties operated in both these and other Italian regions, their significance being, however, negligible, with the one exception in the immediate post-war period of the Movement for Sicilian Independence (MIS).

Not one of the above mentioned parties had played an important *independent* role in "national" Italian politics. Their representation in the Italian parliament had been minimal (all together they have received about 1% of the seats in the Lower House).¹² The peripheral nature of their regional settings has played its role. This applied not only to the miniature Alpine region of the Valle d'Aosta, but to a greater or lesser degree to all the regions with special status. Worthy of note is the fact that not all of the regional parties mentioned above have managed in the long run to become the most important formation in at least their home region. Only the SVP and UV had managed this. The PSd'A, for example, even during the period of its greatest expansion, was not able to make much headway to the detriment of the two largest Italian parties. In this connection, it is not surprising to learn that a true regional system of parties had been noticeably created on in the South Tyrol (Alto Adige), if the micro-region of Valle d'Aosta is ignored.¹³ Otherwise, there are primarily cases of party sub-systems (Sardinia), in which the regional (sub-national) dimension is not of first importance. It is necessary to remember that conditions favourable for the activity of a larger number of *important* regional parties were not established and consequently the pluralization of the regionalistic sector of the local political spectrum was in most cases limited.

This situation began to change as a result of the expansion of a new type of regional formation, which it is possible to generally refer to as "northern Italian leagues". The first of these groupings was the Venetian League (*Liga Veneta*), founded in 1978. The modern Northern League can be considered a direct descendent of this grouping. In 1982, the Lombard Autonomous League was established, better known after 1984 under the shorter heading of the Lombard

¹¹ See Galli, G., Comero, D. (eds.): *Partiti storici e nuove formazioni*, Milano 1992; Colarizi, S.: *Storia dei partiti dell'Italia repubblicana*, Bari 1994; Grimaldi, A. A., Lanchester, F.: *Principi senza scettro. Storia dei partiti politici italiani*, Milano 1978; Strmiska, M.: *Italské politické strany (1945–1994)*, Brno 1995, pp. 56–58.

¹² Cf. Strmiska, M., *op. cit.*, pp. 64–69.

¹³ Cf. Andreatta, G., Pace, S.: *La provincia autonoma di Trento. Itinerario dell'autonomia*, Trento 1981; *Politiche e regionali '94 a confronto*, Circ. 6 – Trentino Alto Adige (<http://www.mclink.it/comunit/elezioni/>).

League (*Lega Lombarda*, LL).¹⁴ The Lombard League, active in the most important economic region of Italy, soon overtook the Venetian League, which had been weakened by internal conflicts. The Lombard League then became the leading force in the northern Italian regional movement and with dynamic force, co-ordinated their political activities. The result of this was the creation of the Northern Alliance in 1989, followed by the Northern League (*Lega Nord*, LN) in 1991. Other important regional groups either joined the league or worked in co-operation, e.g. the Ligurian Union, the Northern-Ligurian League, Autonomous Piedmont, the Toscan Alliance, the Emilia-Romagna League, etc. Of course, the Northern League has never encompassed all the northern Italian leagues. A number of smaller regional groupings has given preference to an independent approach (the Lombard Alpine League, Free Piedmont, etc.).

From modest beginnings, a telling increase in the political influence of the Northern League began to show at the beginning of the 1990s. The parliamentary elections of 1992 showed this markedly. More important than gaining about 9% of the votes was the very strong position of the LN in Lombardy, Piedmont, Liguria, Venice and Friuli-Venezia Giulia. The position of the Northern League was consolidated two years later with an alliance to the movement of Silvio Berlusconi, *Forza Italia* (Italy Ahead!). This resulted in the Northern League moving into the forefront of Italian politics with a 117 parliamentary seats from the 1994 elections. However, the LN did not achieve its main goal, the changing of Italy into a modern federal state. The temporary alliance with Berlusconi's *Forza Italia* and the post-fascist National Alliance damaged the prospects of the League in the long run.¹⁵ Nevertheless, after overcoming the crisis which resulted from the split with Berlusconi, the Northern League galvanised its "separatist" rhetoric and achieved a noteworthy result in the 1996 parliamentary elections, confirming its standing as a important actor on the Italian political scene. The role of the league was made much easier by the fact that none of its opponents has yet offered a believable alternative conception of a federalised Italy and an effective solution of the problems in relations between the Italian North and South.¹⁶

If the question is about the level of national politics, it is possible to state that the role of the Northern League in comparison with formations of regional provenance in other countries has been very important and in its own way, exceptional, to which it is necessary to add that it was carried out in the very specific context of the transformation of the Italian party system. If the results of the activities of the LN on a national level have been widely commented upon

¹⁴ Cf. Mannheimer, R. (ed.): *La Lega Lombarda*, Milano 1991; Diamanti, I.: *La Lega. Geografia, storia e sociologia di un soggetto politico*, Roma 1995; Vimercati, D.: *I lombardi alla nuova crociata. Il "fenomeno Lega" dall'esordio all' trionfo*, Milano 1990; Mazzette, A., Rovati, G. (red.): *La protesta dei "forti". Leghe del Nord e Partito Sardo d'Azione*, Milano 1993; Costantini, L.: *Dentro la Lega. Come nasce, come cresce, come comunica*, Roma 1994, Lega Nord (Official WWW site) (<http://www.leganordsen.it/>)

¹⁵ Cf. Diamanti, *op. cit.*, pp. 150–154.

¹⁶ Cf. Diamanti, *op. cit.*, pp. 172–173; Pasquino, G.: *Lo Stato Federale*, Milano 1996.

and analysed, regional aspects of the political changes directly tied to the activities of the League have been pushed into the background. Shifts in individual regional contexts have not been carefully analysed and their interpretation has been shown to be controversial. It cannot be said that through passing expansion and entrenchment of the northern Italian leagues has markedly stimulated the creation of a regional party system in Northern Italy. A well-known earlier moment may be offered for consideration as an explanation. The structure of political opportunities in the last seven years has favoured the abandonment of narrow regional platforms as politically less favourable in the logic of party competition, and that on a *national* scale. The macro-regionalist and/or federalist transformation, originally the project of the LL, together with representative accompanying processes, has already been described and analysed.¹⁷ Of course, the Northern League has not irretrievably lost its (macro)regional formation, even if somewhat paradoxically, *the centre of its activity without a doubt has been unequivocally in the national sphere, not in regional politics*. The lower number of votes for the Northern League in individual regional elections in 1995, in comparison with their results in the parliamentary elections of 1994 and 1996, can be explained with a reference on the changing standing and role of the League and the level of party strength on the Italian scene. But even if these moments are closely watched, together with the unlikeness of the configurations of strengths taking part in elections at various levels (national, regional, communal) in individual regions, the disparity is too large to be satisfactorily explained by the more or less haphazard inter-play carried out by various forces.¹⁸ It is necessary to wait not only for a solution to the problem of reforms in the regional-federal ordering of Italy, but for additional regional and communal elections as well and with the help of comparative analysis of voting trends to try and answer the question whether it truly deals with temporary and haphazard phenomena or not. For the time being, it is necessary to count on the hypothesis that the weaker results of the League in regional elections were not accidental and they resulted directly from the character of the League as a formation disposed rather to the expression of protest (whether of regional or macro-regional provenance) at the national, not *strictu sensu* regional, level.

* * *

An analysis of party-political arrangements in Spain and Italy give arguments which support the thesis that important regional (regionalist, sub-nationalistic, autonomistic) parties are irreplaceable constituent elements of regional party systems. Without parties of this type party systems can not profile as true regional formations. In addition, it is not possible to mistake regional formations

¹⁷ Cf. Mazzette, Rovati, *op. cit.*; Allievi, S.: *Le parole della Lega*, Milano 1992; Mannheimer, *op. cit.*; Diamanti, *op. cit.*

¹⁸ Cf. *Retrospettivi Camera: Riepilogo (1994)*, *La Repubblica-Elezioni 1996* (<http://www.repubblica.interbussines.it/camera.htm>).

for regional offshoots of "national" (or federal) parties. In cases where the important elements of local party arrangements create exclusively or nearly exclusively subsidiaries of "national" parties, it is more advantageous to speak rather of regional party *sub*-systems.

The profiling of regional party arrangements is significantly influenced by the character of the main regional parties and also whether what is occurring results in a contest *between* important regional formations, which points out the regional characteristics of the system and contributes to a differentiating of its special mechanics from mechanics representative of national party systems. In a large number of regional party arrangements, however, the conditions favourable for the activities of a greater number of *relevant* regional parties do not exist. At the same time, collective regional parties and movements are often formed not only with a view towards regional conditions and levels of power, but a very strong motivation can be an effort to place a beneficial, strong regional representation on the nation-wide level without the mediation of some "centralist" party. In the past, a popular, straightforward generalisation of the aspects of the conflict between the centre and periphery, relating to the phenomenon of regional parties, often came out of a simplified perspective of "national" politics and an abundant disregard for the activity of other factors (the cultural-political setting, regionalism, inter-regional interaction, etc.). A comparison of the genesis of regional party systems in Spain and Italy has shown the multi-faceted conflict between the centre and the periphery and the manner of its politicisation.

A difficult problem is the evaluation of results of the interaction of generically differentiated parties in view of the profiling of regional party systems. In a *regional* framework, a simple principle is valid. The more significant the regional parties are (especially if they become dominant), the more it is normal for there to be a greater degree of regionalization in the relevant system, including its individual parts (compare the cases of Catalonia and the Basque region in Spain). This of course does not apply without exception in *all* cases, which is witnessed by the cases of Spanish Andalusia and northern Italy and which the ambivalent effects of macro-regionalist tendencies can be demonstrated. This is similarly the case at the nation-wide or inter-regional level, where the interaction of generically differentiated actors, taking place at the same time in different institutional spheres can lead to the strengthening of the regional profile of individual party (sub)systems or to the fragmentation and regionalization of the *entire* party spectrum. It may lead to a conservative status quo and "freezing" of the processes of regionalization or it may, for example, stimulate a tendency towards a homogenising federalisation. It is also possible to recall that regionalist formations, especially if they have the character of a protest movement, are not always optimally adaptable to differentiated *parallel roles* at various levels of institutional politics and that adaptation to these roles may easily bring about a weakening of their regionalist characteristics or even their breakdown. That can have binding, regressive results on a regional system or subsystem of which this formation was a part. While the interactions of regional and nation-wide

parties do not emerge exclusively on regional political scenes, they can be found just as well at the nation-wide level, it is precisely in a regional context that they have their largest, and often key, significance, from the point of view of the profiling and functioning of party systems. If the question is interaction on the "national" (federal, etc.) scene, it is important to keep in mind that not all forms of *regionalism*, and especially *macro-regionalism* create favourable, fertile soil for the appearance of distinctive, new regional party arrangements, and what is more, individual forms of regionalism may change precisely as a result of these interactions. And that is one of the moments which, in a complex manner, do form and develop regional party systems and the functioning of regionalizing tendencies and that is still an interesting subject for research.

(Translated by Jeff Vanderziel)