

SILESIAN AUTONOMIST MOVEMENT IN POLAND AND ONE OF ITS ACTIVISTS

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Ethnic and National Diversity in Poland

Contemporary Poland is one of most ethnically and nationally homogenous countries of the European Union. The number of people whose ethnic origins are different from Polish ranges from 2 to 3 per cent of the total population, which means that 1-1.2 million of Polish citizens belong to an ethnic or a national minority.¹ However, it is worth recalling that Poland became a relatively homogenous country only after the Second World War. This happened as a result of ethnic cleansing, migrations and forced migrations and change of the shape of the borders. Before 1945 Poland was not only a multiethnic but also multinational country. In the interwar Poland Poles made up only 68.9 per cent of the country's population. The biggest minorities were the Ukrainians (13.9 per cent of the total populations), the Jews (8.7 per cent), Belarusians (3.1 per cent), and Germans, (2.3 per cent - Census 1931). The total population of Poland as a consequence of the atrocities of the Second World War has dramatically decreased from over 35 million before the war to less than 24 million after the war. The vast majority of Polish Jews were exterminated, approximately 3 million of Poles were forced to leave their homes in the eastern Kresy region and settle in the former German territories and approximately 5 million Germans were expelled from the so-called 'regained territories' (in Polish 'ziemie odzyskane') into the Allied occupation zones (Wasilewski 2006).

In Communist Poland monoethnicity was one of the major doctrinal elements of the new political reality. If members of the minority communities were present in the political processes they were there not in order to represent the interests of their groups but as representatives of the whole society. In the period when ethnic associations and organizations were controlled and

¹ The Polish Law or more precisely the Bill on Ethnic and National Minorities and Regional Languages from 6th January 2005 (in Polish - *Ustawa o mniejszościach narodowych i etnicznych oraz o języku regionalnym*) stipulates that in order to be recognized as an ethnic or national minority a given group must reside in Poland for at least 100 years. This is means that newly arrived groups (e.g. Vietnamese) have no chances of being recognized in Poland as minority.

financed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and when a policy of ‘one minority – one organization’ was in place, ethnic organizations were largely instruments of control over minorities by the central state administration. This situation has radically changed after 1989. Since then one may observe in Poland a revival of ethnicity marked by significant activism of ethnic and national minorities. Some of the most commonly mentioned reasons behind this revival are the freezing of the issues of minorities after the Second World War, a delay in the emergence of modern nations in this part of the world, increasing significance of the human rights protection, and the creation of the new minorities as a result of processes of migration and globalization contributing to glocalization (Babiński & Miodunka 1995).

According to the official website of the Polish Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration there are 9 national minorities² and 4 ethnic minorities³ in Poland. In spite of the fact that during the last census in 2001, 173,200 people declared that they belonged to “Silesian nationality”⁴, Silesians are qualified to neither of the two categories. The Polish authorities do not recognize Silesians as a national minority nor as an ethnic minority. There have been fierce political and academic debates whether Silesians are a nation or not, however this issue will not be discussed here since it is not relevant for this analysis of the Silesian autonomist movement and biography of one of its active members⁵. If the declarations of over 173 thousand people are to be taken into account, Silesians outnumber national minorities such as Germans (152,900 according to 2001 Census), Belarussians (48,700) and Ukrainians (31,000) in Poland. However, if the number of people who speak Silesian at home is to be taken into consideration then the Silesian minority is three times smaller and consists of less than 57 thousand people.⁶ Whichever figures are considered, the Silesian movement with its diverse groups is an important element of wider panorama of social movements contesting political status quo. Some of the groups within the Silesian movement have been formulating claims in line with the Polish national narrative (e.g. UpperSilesian Union – in Polish: *Związek Górnośląski* – hereafter ZG) while others (e.g. analysed in this article Silesian Autonomy Movement - in Polish: *Ruch Autonomii Śląska* –

² Armenians, Byelorussians, Czechs, Germans, Jews, Lithuanians, Russians, Slovaks and Ukrainians.

³ Karaims, Lemkos, Roma and Tatars.

⁴ This was partially a result of the dynamic campaign carried out by the Silesian Autonomy Movement (in Polish – *Ruch Autonomii Śląska* – RAŚ) under the slogan – “You have the right to declare Silesian nationality”.

⁵ To learn about these debates see, for example, Simonides 1995, Kwaśniewicz 1997, Szczepański 2003, Nijakowski 2004, 2007.

⁶ For more information about the Silesian ‘language’ see for example Kamusella 2004 or Wyderka 2004.

hereafter RAŚ) have been challenging the national narrative and formulating claims for greater autonomy.

History of Silesian Movement

Although the Silesian Autonomy Movement (RAŚ) was founded in 1990, the history of the Silesian movement calling either for greater autonomy from Poland and Germany or for Silesian independence is much longer. The roots of ethnic mobilisation of Silesians might be traced back to the beginning of 19th century, that is to the time of emergence of many other modern European nation-states. One of the pioneers of this mobilisation was Jan Gajda (1827-1911) - an author of the Call to the People of Upper Silesia published in Uppersilesian Daily (in Polish – Dziennik Górnos Śląski) in 1849. He suggested the creation of the Silesian League, patterned on the similar Polish organization, which would support “matters purely Silesian and Silesian nationality” (quoted in Gorzelik 2004: 18). This call, however, was not followed by any constructive measures and the creation of the Silesian League remained only in the sphere of postulates. At the same time Silesians were fairly resilient to the Germanisation policies of the United Germany (Poland was not present on the maps of 19th century Europe) and the ideas of the Polish national movement. The Polish historian Andrzej Chwalba describes the situation of the Silesian population at the turn of 19th and 20th century in the following way: “The vast majority of Silesians maintained their Polish-Silesian way of speaking, culture and customs. Neither did they consider themselves Germans nor Poles. Their self-esteem and awareness of cultural difference had been developed to such an extent, that they were able to defend their local identity, Silesian homeland from the German culture, on the one hand, and Polish culture on the other.” (2000: 545)

The first organizations mobilizing around Silesian identity started to emerge at the end of 19th century and the beginning of 20th century. One of the first significant organizational initiatives was the creation of the Silesian People’s Party in 1909 by Joseph Koźdoń. Up to the breakout of the First World War the Party was publishing a weekly newspaper the “Silesian” (in Polish – “Ślęzak”) which had a circulation of 4,000 copies . There were numerous other organizations and associations set up around the Party such as the Silesian People’s Union (Śląski Związek Ludowy).

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The emergence of the new nation-states after WWI contributed to the polarization of attitudes and increased pace of the nationalization processes. The Silesian movement placed amongst the competing German, Czech and Polish nationalisms started to formulate increasingly ambitious calls including a call for an independent Upper-Silesian state. Members of the Union of Uppersilesians (Związek Górnoślązaków), set up in 1919, were lobbying for the creation of a Silesian republic in the Prussian part (and later also in the Austrian part) of Silesia with Polish and German as official languages and a federal form of government similar to the one in Switzerland. Although these ideas did not see fulfilment in social reality, Silesians maintained their strong identity in defiance of German, Polish and Czech nationalization pressures. At the end of the interwar period Wojciech Korfanty estimated that around 30 per cent of the inhabitants of the Autonomous Silesian Voivodeship, were indifferent to the Polish and German identities, favouring the Silesian one (Korfanty quoted in Gorzelik 2004: 22).

During, and after, the Second World War Silesians were subjected to intensified nationalization efforts. According to Jerzy Gorzelik, one of the major contemporary protagonists of the Silesian movement, Polish nationalism was unattractive to Silesians for numerous reasons. One of them was that contrary to German nationalism, Polish nationalism did not include in its ideology elements of regionalism. Another reason for low attractiveness of Polish nationalism to Silesians was the alien character of Polish patriotism based on the heritage of gentry's democracy (versus in Silesia strong urban class) and romantic tradition praising the uncompromising attitudes of "Great Poles" (in Silesia emphasis was on pragmatism). Yet, another could be the centralizing and homogenizing approach to managing cultural diversity advocated by the Communist regime that did not leave much room for manoeuvre for those with hybrid or plural ethnic identities (Ibid: 23-24). After 1989 this situation changed radically, as not only Silesian minority but also other ethnic and national minorities started to experience significant revival and began to dynamically re-organize themselves.

Current Programme and Mobilizing Structures⁷

Silesian Autonomy Movement (RAŚ) was one of the many minority organizations set up in the atmosphere of the post-Communist ethnic revival. In contrast to the UpperSilesian Union (ZG) it

⁷ By mobilizing structures I mean after McAdam's et al. "*collective vehicles, informal as well as formal, through which people mobilize and engage in collective actions*" (1996: 3).

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does not frame its claims in line with mainstream Polish nationalism, but by referring to the autonomist experiences of the interwar Silesian Voivodeship, and more recently to regionalisation processes within the European Union⁸, it calls for greater autonomy for Silesia. Apart from this, the Movement promotes active social citizenship amongst inhabitants of the region and strives to make them proud of the rich Silesian cultural heritage. A crucial feature of the programme of the movement are demands of consistent application of the principle of subsidiarity and empowerment of the regions within the European Union. For many years the call for the recognition of Silesian nation was also an important element of RAŚ programme.

In fact, RAŚ became a household name not only in the region but also in other parts of the country as a result of its long and mediatised campaign to register the Union of People of Silesian Nationality (in Polish: Związek Ludności Narodowości Śląskiej – hereafter ZLNŚ). In December 1996 Jerzy Gorzelik, Rudolf Kołodziejczyk i Erwin Sowa submitted to the Voivodeship Court in Katowice and application for the registration of the ZLNŚ. Although the representative of the central authorities, government-appointed Voivode opposed the registration of the Union, in June 1997 the court registered ZLNŚ as the political representative organization for the Silesian minority. However, a few months later this decision was revoked by the Court of Appeal starting a legal battle between the ZLNŚ and Polish authorities that eventually ended in the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. In February 2004, the Court upheld the decision of Polish authorities revoking the registration of the association that claims to represent the Silesian nation. After this legal defeat the leader of RAŚ Jerzy Gorzelik left the ZLNŚ and since then the two organisations, RAŚ and ZLNŚ (led by Andrzej Roczniok), started to increasingly differ⁹. Hence today ZLNŚ should be rather viewed as adversary of RAŚ, or its ‘derailed radical flank’, rather than as an institution struggling for the same cause.

When the Silesian Autonomy Movement was born in the beginning of the 1990s, it was mostly dominated by 40-years-olds and older members with very few young people. Over the years, however, it has recruited many young members including my interviewee and the actual

⁸ The strategy of linking up with other autonomist region of the EU has been clearly visible not only in the organisation’s discourse, but also in its contacts. RAŚ was the first organization from Post-Communist Europe admitted to the European Free Alliance (hereafter EFA - from 2004 a European party) representing stateless nations and regions striving for larger autonomy. At the moment EFA (after June 2009 European elections) has seven Members in the European Parliament who make up a coalition with European Greens.

⁹ The leadership of RAŚ has been for example heavily criticising such actions taken by the ZLNŚ as: recognition of the Republic of South Osetia after the recent war in Caucasus.

leader of RAŚ, Jerzy Gorzelik. Today RAŚ is a dynamic organization, with a yearly income of circa 28.000 PLN¹⁰, branches in 9 towns and cities¹¹ and around 7.000 due paying registered members. The majority of its members are below 40 years of age. It is these young members who are most active and who are recruiting new members to RAŚ through various events and activities. During local elections the movement can count on the support of around 50.000-60.000 people. In the last local elections in 2006, this support was insufficient to guarantee RAŚ a seat in the sejmik of the Silesian Voivodeship.¹² However, the movement has managed to pass a threshold of 5% of votes and win mandates in a few municipalities and county councils including: Bieruń-Lędziny county (10.4% of votes), Ruda Śląska (9.39%), Mysłowice (8.3%), Rybnik county (8.1%), Tarnowskie Góry county (7.73%), Katowice (7.7%), Gliwice county (7.54%), Bytom (6.8%), Zabrze (5.71%), Tychy (5.1%) and Piekary Śląskie (5.06%). Thus, its political representation in the region is made up of a few members of local councils and two-three borough leaders. According to my interviewee this political representation could be even more numerous if the voter turnout had been higher.¹³

One of RAŚ closest allies is undoubtedly the Association of Upper-Silesian Youth (in Polish – Stowarzyszenie Młodzież Górnośląska - hereafter SMG). The organization which is a form of youth branch of RAŚ describes itself as “a body that unites young people who feel affinity with Upper Silesia (...) and who feel committed to the idea of civic and democratic Silesia in the Europe of regions”. There are between 200 and 300 members in the SMG who are actively involved in various RAŚ projects as well as developing their own projects - most notably the Uppersilesian Days of Heritage described below. Most of them strongly support the call for greater autonomy for Silesia and the postulate of recognition of Silesian nationality.¹⁴

Another association closely linked with RAŚ is “Pro Loquela Silesiana” (hereafter PLS) - Society for Cultivating and Promoting Silesian Speech. It was set up in October 2007 in order to promote Silesian speech in the public sphere and in all walks of life and support the efforts aimed at standardizing Silesian orthography, grammar and lexis. In March 2008 the PLS together

¹⁰ This is a figure from 2008 financial report of the organisation which can be found on its website www.raslaska.aremmedia.net

¹¹ Apart from the main office in Katowice, the organisation also has branches in Rybnik, Opole, Chorzów, Ruda Śląska, Mysłowice, Mikołów, Wodzisław-Żory, Lubiniec and Olesno.

¹² RAŚ obtained 4.35% of votes in the whole Voivodeship.

¹³ He has estimated the optimal support for the movement of around 100.000 – 130.000 people.

¹⁴ More information about the SMG can be found on <http://www.mgsilesia.org/>

with RAŚ and ZG issued a petition to the Members of Polish Parliament from the region in which they called for the recognition of Silesian as a regional language. A few months later the PLS organized a conference entitled “Silesian – form of speech or already a language?”. At present the Society is concentrating its efforts on developing first Silesian primer and “standardizing Silesian speech”. The latter goals Pro Loquela Silesiana tries to achieve *inter alia* in partnership with the Silesian University in Katowice.¹⁵

RAŚ is also closely cooperating with numerous other organizations and associations that work towards similar goals. Probably one of the most important ones is ZG (UpperSilesian Union) which does not call for Silesian autonomy, but strives for the promotion of Silesian. In spite of clear ideological differences the activists of RAŚ have managed to cooperate with some members of ZG on specific projects, most notably the aforementioned petition for the recognition of Silesian as a regional language.¹⁶ Amongst other smaller organizations that cooperate with RAŚ on different projects are: Śląski Związek Akademicki, Stowarzyszenie Gliwickie Metamorfozy, Towarzystwo Wspierania i Rozwoju Wsi Cisek and Towarzystwo Miłośników Ziemi Wodzisławskiej. This cooperation often results from the personal contacts of RAŚ individual members.

The last, but not least, crucial vehicle through which RAŚ mobilizes and engages people in collective actions is its monthly newspaper with a circulation of 4.000 copies. “The Silesian Swallow”, distributed mainly among the members of the movement, is the only regional newspaper that is entirely devoted to all kind of regional issues ranging from history, economics, politics to culture, art and sport. It is also the only newspaper in the country that publishes articles in Silesian language.¹⁷

Major Actions and Campaigns

RAŚ and its befriended organisations have been mobilizing people through a variety of actions and campaigns. There is no room here to describe the plethora of initiatives that have been undertaken towards this goal but it is worth pointing out some of the major ones.

¹⁵ More information about the PLS can be found in the July 2008 issue of Silesian Swallow – Jaskółka Śląska.

¹⁶ More information about the ZG can be found on <http://www.zg.org.pl/>

¹⁷ The electronic version of the newspaper with some of texts can be found on <http://www.jaskolkaslaska.eu/>

Undoubtedly one of the most important initiatives of RAŚ with far-reaching consequences was the campaign before the first post-WWII census in 2001 that included a question on national belonging. This very dynamic campaign, involving inter alia organization of numerous press conferences and distribution of thousands of posters and leaflets, was carried out under the title - “You have the right to declare Silesian nationality”. It was in accordance with the instruction of the Central Statistics Office (Główny Urząd Statystyczny) to census takers who were supposed to write down in the census forms all declared nationalities. The goal of the campaign was on the one hand to promote the idea of Silesian nationality and on the other hand to counter the campaigns of disinformation carried out by some other organisations (e.g. German minority) and individuals (e.g. Henryk Kroll) discrediting the claims of RAŚ about the existence of Silesian nation.¹⁸ All these efforts paid off when the results of the census were announced in June 2003. It turned out that contrary to what most sociologists thought the largest national minority in Poland were not the Germans, but Silesians. The results of the census have also greatly embodied a famous saying by Ernest Renan that “a nation's existence is, if you will pardon the metaphor, a daily plebiscite” (1996: 52-54).

Another initiative of RAŚ that attracts substantial media attention is its annual ‘March for Autonomy’. These are organised on 15th July to recall the introduction (in 1920) of the bill of the pre-war Lower Chamber of Polish Parliament guaranteeing the autonomy of Silesian Voivodeship. The first ‘March for Autonomy’ was organised in 2007. This year’s march (third) has attracted around 1000 people from the whole region as well as Silesians from Germany and Great Britain and supporters of the Silesian Autonomy Movement from other parts of the country and abroad. The participants of the March signed a petition to the Prime Minister – Donald Tusk, composed of the excerpts of his own speech from 1994 in which he strongly backed the ideas of decentralisation and regionalisation.¹⁹

RAŚ has been also carrying out numerous projects that do not attract as much media attention as the aforementioned ones. One of them is “Tyta dlo piyrzoka” or ‘Sweets for First Formers’ that according to one of the members of RAŚ is supposed “sweeten the knowledge which the first formers are going to receive at schools”. The project involves collecting

¹⁸ For more information about this campaign see Melon 2008.

¹⁹ For more information about the ‘Third March for Autonomy’ see the August issue of “Silesian Swallow” – Jaskółka Śląska.

donations from local business and turning them into large packs of sweets destined for children from poor families who are beginning their school education. Another is Górnośląskie Tacyty or UpperSilesian Tacitus which is an award given yearly to individuals who have significantly contributed to popularisation of Silesian history. Amongst the laureates of the prize are Małgorzata Szajnert for her bestseller book "Czarny ogród" (Black Garden) and Prof. Wojciech Kunicki for his book "Śląsk. Rzeczywistości wyobrażone" (Silesia. Imagined realities).²⁰

One of the most important initiatives carried out by the organisation closely linked with RAŚ are UpperSilesian Days of Heritage organised by Association of Upper-Silesian Youth. The major goal of this project organised within the European Days of Heritage is to raise awareness of the inhabitants of the region and people from elsewhere about the rich cultural heritage of UpperSilesia. Numerous sightseeing tours and lectures about different elements of the UpperSilesian heritage make up the core of the programme of the Days.²¹

Instead of Conclusion

As shown above, the mobilisation carried out by the Silesian Autonomist Movement and its befriended organisation is multifaceted and of diverse intensity. On the whole, however, one may notice that while in the 1990s the main efforts of the movement were directed towards forging 'a nation' from above – especially by creation of Union of People of Silesian Nationality and campaign around the nationality in the Census, at present the major attention is being paid mainly to bottom-up initiatives aiming at developing Silesian ethnic distinctiveness. Some of the most important projects that go towards this end are standardisation of Silesian language carried out by Pro Loquela Silesian and promotion of knowledge about the cultural heritage of UpperSilesia undertaken most dynamically by the youth branch of RAŚ or Association of Upper-Silesian Youth. In other words, the processes of forging of Silesian nation and Silesian ethnic group run parallel and should be assessed within wider regionalisation, glocalisation and globalisation processes.

²⁰ Full list of activities of RAŚ in 2008 can be found on http://www.raslaska.aredia.net/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=411&Itemid=15

²¹ More information about the UpperSilesian Days of Heritage can be found on www.gornoslaskie-dziedzictwo.com

Bartek: Born and Bread European Silesian

The central office of the Silesian Autonomy Movement (RAŚ) is located in the old part of the city of Katowice or the heart of Upper Silesia region. That is where I met with Bartek and several other members of the Movement who after an introductory chat set off to a nearby pavement café and left me and my interviewee alone in office. In the course of more than 2 hours interview we were interrupted twice for a minute or two by people coming to the office to buy latest issue of the their monthly newspaper - Silesian Swallow - and by members of RAŚ bringing a large packs of sweets destined for the children from poor families who will begin school from 1st September 2009 (part of the project 'Sweets for First Formers' described above). My informant Bartek – a 33- year old spokesperson of RAŚ - has been in the forefront of the organizational activities for more than a decade. As a young professional, apart from being an active member of RAŚ, he is working for one of the local businesses. During the interview Bartek wore black shoes and trousers and a matching white long-sleeved shirt. His answers to all of the questions were elaborate and full off intriguing details. He was relaxed and good-humoured, however, at the same time made sure that the interviewer received all the requested information. The factual data presented below was cross-checked with the informant and a permission to use his actual name was obtained.

Primary Socialisation

Bartek was born in Gliwice – a town nearby Katowice (less than half an hour drive), however before the Second World War belonging to a different country (Germany) - in a mixed Polish-Silesian family in 1976. The family of his mother has lived in Silesia since time immemorial, whereas the ancestors of his father migrated to this region from the interwar Polish Eastern territories (Kresy) after WWII. As a child he was growing up in a multicultural environment in which the elements of the Eastern Polish culture were mixing with those of Silesia. He was able to make out these differences in the language used by members of his family, their customs and codes of behaviour. His grandfather from the mother's side of the family fought during the Second World War in the German Army, whereas his second grandfather in the Polish Army. The two grandfathers had never said anything critical about each other. According to Bartek they

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got on with each other very well and the war experience was one of the elements of their biographies that facilitated their communication.

Bartek's parents, like his grandparents, were not active in any organisations or associations. In his opinion this reluctance to get involved in the activities of civil society or civic passivism is a typical feature of the Silesian mentality, especially widespread among older generations of Silesians. Bartek's mother worked in the administration of the Silesian Technical University, whereas his father in the Polish National Rail company (In Polish - Polskie Koleje Państwowe). They situated themselves in the middle of the social stratification ladder. Bartek claims to have very good relationships with both of his parents. He states: "Of course during my adolescence I went through the rebellious period but on the whole my relationships with parents were very good". This has been partially, in his view, an outcome of the very strong emphasis put on family values and ties in both Polish Eastern and Silesian traditions.

Bartek have started to discover his 'otherness' when he went to school and began to notice that the knowledge about his region which he had acquired at home varies from the one thought at school. He explains that "at school it was emphasised that Silesia has been a typically Polish industrial region where Polishness was especially cherished and awaited. At home, on the other hand, it was the Silesianness that was particularly stressed... There was a certain distance to the official Polish national ideology". He has started to ask himself a question about his own identity – "who am I"? He knew that officially he was Polish but started to feel increasingly detached from this identity.

A particularly important moment came when Bartek was at secondary school in which half of the male students in the classroom were Silesians. One day they were discussing a current news article regarding an initiative in the North Poland to build a memorial to the German soldiers killed during the Second World War. There was a general outrage that someone could come up with an idea of building a monument to the "Nazis". Bartek, however, was not outraged at all. "I had a grandfather who was in the German Army and I have never perceived him as a Nazi. I knew that this was a natural consequence of the fact that he lived in Germany, where there was a general conscription at the time." He disapproved of the generalisations of the media and strongly opposed them.. It was a turning point in his identity formation, or a moment when he realized that he was different than some of his significant others.

Bartek accounts for his identity transition in the following way: “At a certain moment Silesianness won, it had its own exoticism ... marginalized in the public discourse, it started to be much more attractive than mainstream Polishness. It was more attractive because it was from here, it was natural (informant’s own emphasis). It was not an identity learnt from the school books and teachers, but it was rooted in the experiences of my grandfathers, grandmothers, aunts and uncles.”

Secondary Socialisation

Bartek joined Silesian Autonomy Movement (RAŚ) just before the ‘mock secondary school-leaving examination’ (in Polish: próbna matura). However the process of joining the organization started a few months earlier. During the summer holidays he went with his uncle to Germany for a Silesian Compatriots’ Association encounter (in Polish: Ziomkostwo Ślązaków). For Bartek it was his first trip to Germany and he was going there not because he was particularly interested in Silesian or German matters but, because the trip was almost free. Thus, he went there more as a tourist rather than as a meeting participant. During the reunion someone distributed the newspaper published by RAŚ “Silesian Swallow”. This was the first encounter of future RAŚ spokesperson with the organization. He thoroughly analysed its content and realized that it largely resembled the narrative he heard at home. After returning from Germany Bartek wrote to RAŚ and requested more materials. “After reading this material I decided to join RAŚ. It was 1995” – he confessed.

Soon after joining RAŚ Bartek successfully passed entry exams to the Department of Law and became a student of the Silesian University. As he pointed out during the interview, the choice of legal studies had not been an outcome of his interest in this field but rather of the “Silesian canon” – a typical way of thinking in the region that a young man has to learn a trade. Miners and priests were particularly valued in the hierarchy of esteemed professions. If someone was aiming higher, though, then such professions as lawyer and physician were socially appreciated. Psychology or sociology – disciplines that appealed to Bartek were not regarded as worthy of studying. Thus, my informant followed suite and chose to study law. He stated that “I was struggling a bit during the studies but did not have too big a problem. Law was definitely not something I was dreaming about ... The interesting things were happening not in the Law Faculty but outside of it.” These “interesting things” that were happening side by side with tedious

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studies were the activities of RAŚ. They were, in the words of my interviewee, “the bright side of life during his university years” and remained so till today.

From the very beginning of Bartek activism in RAŚ he became responsible for international relations of the organization and started to initiate new contacts. At this time Internet use was not as widespread as it is today, so most of his correspondence with the prospective partners from Bretagne, Northern Italy, Wales, Scotland, Slovenia and other European regions with strong autonomist movements was in the traditional paper form. Thanks to these contacts my informant has managed to visit different parts of Europe and get to know them better. Later these partnerships would enable Bartek to secure an internship in the European Parliament in the European Free Alliance.

As a result of his activism in RAŚ he has managed to develop a substantial amount of social capital within the region and beyond it. The organization of various seminars and conference and participation in them was one of the major ways of developing it. As Bartek pointed out “we were going to different congresses and conferences and then guests from abroad were visiting us... in 1997, for example, we organized a large conferences at the Silesian University devoted to the national and regional minorities Europe. “ He was assisted during the organization of such events as the one mentioned above by other members of RAŚ who provided accommodation and food in their hotels and restaurants. Thus, when a few years later he wanted to go for a short holiday he knew which members of the movement were providing accommodation in interesting localities. Even when refurbishing his apartment he could rely on some RAŚ members who offered their services for much lower than market prices.

The social capital acquired by Bartek in the context of RAŚ activism was not limited only to Silesia and Poland but went beyond regional and national borders. He recalled that when he got married he could go with his wife on very interesting honeymoon to *Siebenbürgen* (in Polish – Siedmiogród), where in each of the cities they could stay with their local friends; Romanians, Hungarians and Germans. When a few years later he went with his wife to Moravia some local friends helped them to choose the most interesting places to visit and stay overnight. Bartek’s dynamic engagement as a representative of RAŚ on the international level contributed to the accession of his organisation in 2000/2001 to the European Free Alliance (hereafter EFA) - an association of cooperation of political parties lobbying for maximum decentralization. In 2004

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RAŚ was one of the founding members of the European Free Alliance Party²². At present, as one may read in the Alliance brochures, the party is politically active in '29 stateless nations and regions' and represents among others Silesians, Moravians, Hungarian minority in Slovakia and Polish minority in Lithuania.

Bartek, as a person who for two years was working for the EFA in Brussels greatly facilitated the 'Europeanization' of RAŚ not only at the institutional level but also at the ideological level. He has also attracted to RAŚ its current leader and contemporary icon of Silesian Autonomist Movement, Jerzy Gorzelik. He recalled that after joining RAŚ he had impression that there were almost no young people in it. The vast majority of members at that time were over 50 years old. My interviewee pointed out that he had missed contact with his peers and decided to search for some. In these efforts he was assisted by the contemporary leader of RAŚ who informed him that in Kraków, at the Jagiellonian University, a new Silesian organisation had been recently set up - Silesian Academic Union (In Polish: Śląski Związek Akademicki). He contacted its founder, who turned out to be Jerzy Gorzelik and invited him to join RAŚ. The outcome of their interaction was that Jerzy joined RAŚ and Bartek joined the Silesian Academic Union. At the same time a few other younger people joined the ranks of RAŚ and the activities of the movement have started to gain momentum.

Although at first the older members were viewing the new members with suspicion and felt endangered by them, after a relatively short period of time the young activists had gained respect of the older members and started to play increasingly important role in the movement. At present with Jerzy Gorzelik as a leader, the young generation of members play a key role in shaping the activities of the movement. They are in the forefront of such projects that arose from the ranks of RAŚ and its youth branch Association of Upper-Silesian Youth, as for instance, the Upper-Silesian Days of Heritage and the March for Autonomy (both projects are described in detail above). According to Bartek this young generation of members possesses not only the necessary knowledge where to get the funding for this kind of projects, including European funding, and how to run them, but also have substantial social capital stretching beyond regional and national borders which they are able to quite effectively mobilise towards their goals. One of such members is definitely my interviewee.

²² For more information about European Free Alliance see its website <http://www.e-f-a.org>

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In his opinion there are numerous reasons why the young people from Silesia are attracted to RAŚ. The fact that now the movement is made up by a significant number of young people is clearly one of them. The new members are recruited by their peers who are already active in RAŚ. However, in Bartek's view much more important is that the movement has something positive to offer them. In the past, in his opinion there was a lot of moaning, complaining and talking about how bad the contemporary times were. At present, there is a 'positive programme' which outlines the major goals and means of achieving them.

Ideas Behind the Movement

What is this 'positive programme' according to Bartek? The key notion behind the whole programme is autonomy. The movement strives for regional autonomy for Upper Silesia within its historical borders. It often recalls the pre-WWII autonomy of Silesian Voivodeship that was guaranteed by the bill of the Lower Chamber of Polish Parliament (Polish – Sejm) after the First World War in 1920. This bill created Silesian Sejm (with 48 members – reduced after 1935 to 28 members), Silesian Voivodeship Council, Silesian Treasury and Silesian Voivodeship Police. Today's autonomy should resemble in Bartek's view the inter-war autonomy and yet, at the same time, go beyond this model towards a modern European regionalist framework. It should involve devolution of as many powers from the central government to Silesia as possible. For instance, he suggested that Silesia should have the power to develop its own law in accordance with the Polish Constitution.

The next important element of the movement's programme, according to Bartek, is the recognition of Silesian nationality by the Polish State. At the same time he hurried to emphasize that RAŚ was not an organisation representing the interest of the whole national minority. As a lawyer and one of the informal leaders of the movement, Bartek has been clearly strongly involved in the legal battle over the right to register an organisation that would evoke the existence of Silesian nation. Although the battle over the registration of the Union of People of Silesian Nationality (ZLNŚ) described above has been lost by RAŚ in all courts, including European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, the movement has not fully diverted its attention from the efforts to form a nation from above to the creation of a nation from below. The demand of recognition of Silesian nationality by the state has visibly been a part of the top-down strategy. However, in recent years, with increased efforts to codify the Silesian language

undertaken *inter alia* by the Association Pro Loquela Silesiana, the bottom-up strategy has been also gaining ground.

If autonomy is a notion that unites many Silesians at the ideological level or higher level of abstraction, activism for the common good of all inhabitants of the region is an element that according to my interviewee brings many people together in everyday life. Thus, efforts to increase activism of the inhabitants of the Upper Silesia have been at the core of the programme of the Silesian Autonomist Movement. RAŚ strives to promote active social and political citizenship not only through various social events such as, for example, the March for Autonomy, but also through numerous cultural events, including a punk-rock concert (Silesia Attack) and sightseeing tours around cultural heritage sights in Silesia. As Bartek pointed out “The events aim to show that this region is not just a region of coal and steel but that it is a multicultural place with a lot of potential”. The ‘positive programme’ as Bartek called it, pays particular emphasis to the human agency. This is evident for instance in the following statement of my informant: “We keep saying to people that if they want to achieve something in their lives and if they want this region to blossom, then they have to start to act on their streets, in their districts, towns and cities”. People who come to RAŚ know that the movement has some resources that can empower them and enable them to carry out their individual projects. Thus, RAŚ seems to unite a substantial number of people whom the growth of individual freedoms and the increase in opportunities for greater self-interpretation did not make socially indifferent.²³ On the contrary, these individuals, including my informant, while constructing their personal biographies with significant component of Silesian authenticity, actively engaged with the social reality around them. They rarely do so in their professional capacity, while working full time for the Movement, but rather in their personal capacity outside of their full-time employment. However, this does not mean that while doing it *pro bono* they do it less professionally. Quite the opposite, like Bartek they often “put more heart into it”.

Professional Career and Private Life

The professional career of my interviewee started straight after his studies in the Financial Department of the Gliwice City Hall. Bartek was responsible for assessing the level of individual

²³ This phenomenon has been often referred to as a ‘paradox of individualised citizens’ – see for instance Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002.

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local taxes. In his own words he worked as “a socially quite ill-favoured person”. Not surprisingly, with his legal diploma at hand he was searching for some better posts. The new opportunities emerged when he learnt about the contest for the pre-accession auxiliary posts in the European Parliament. He applied for the post and after meeting with the representative of the Free European Alliance he was soon offered a 2-year contract in their group in Brussels.

Yet, before leaving for Brussels Bartek had a short political episode. In 2002 he was running in the local elections. Although he received around 2 thousand votes he did not manage to secure a place in the regional council. In the Silesian areas RAŚ obtained 8 to 9 per cent of votes, however in the whole voievodship the movement was short of 0,6 per cent of votes to pass the 5 per cent threshold. Bartek attributed this electoral failure of RAŚ to the “artificial administrative boundaries which assemble places that have very little in common with Upper Silesia.”

During Bartek’s stay in Brussels his social capital was significantly enriched. Not only as a result of numerous trips to different European regions, but also as a consequence of meeting likeminded people inside the Belgian office of the Free European Alliance and in the European Parliament. In the FEA he was responsible for the contacts with regional and national minority organisations in the countries that joined the European Union in 2004 and during the last enlargements plus with Turkey. His duty was to monitor the situation of the national and regional minorities in the accessing countries, maintaining contacts with them and animating cooperation between them. He enjoyed this work and at the end of the term he was faced with the dilemma whether he should stay in Brussels for another parliamentary term or return back to Poland. His decision to return to Silesia was influenced by the fact that, while working in Brussels, he met, his future wife and decided to get married and live in Poland.

When he got married he moved from Gliwice to Katowice and although he has been living there since 2005, he is still able to easily spot the cultural difference between the two neighbouring towns separated before the WWII by the national border. Some of these differences are visible in the architecture of the two towns, attitude to Germanness and the key features of Silesianness (e.g. the one in Katowice is strongly aligned with Polishness whereas the one from Gliwice with Germanness).

After coming back from Brussels he returned to the job in the City Hall but not in the tax department. Instead he started to work in the department dealing with European Union projects.

His experience in the European Parliament was an important asset. Last year, however, he decided to quit this job and move to a private company. He is now working in the Scientific Technological Park (In Polish - Park Naukowo-Technologiczny) - a leading actor in developing energy-efficient technologies. In the new firm he has been responsible for the contacts with different firms in this sector - both in Poland and abroad – trying to initiate cooperation between them. He claims that since taking this post he has been making an extensive use of the contacts he has made during the time of his intensive engagement in RAŚ.

In recent months he has been slightly less active in RAŚ as a consequence of a turning point in his private life. The birth of his first child has not only revolutionised his agenda but also slightly changed his perspective on different aspects of social and economic reality. In spite of new parental obligations, though, Bartek still has time for the movement whose activities seem to be closely interwoven with his private life.

Political Values and Cultural Consumption

As far as political ideas are concerned Bartek very firmly describes himself as a free market liberal. He has pointed out that he would enjoy living in the country with low taxes, and “where people decide about themselves and do not wait for the benevolent king to come and repair their bridge”. He strongly believes in the individual’s capacity to improve his or her economic well-being. This also applies to the communal level, and thus it embodies one of the key ideas of the movement that Silesian region would be better off in the country with a less centralized administrative structure.

Bartek has claimed that currently there is no political party with which he can identify. He was pinning his hopes on Platforma Obywatelska – PO (Civic Platform²⁴) – as a predominantly urban and liberal force - when it was emerging, but later he became disappointed when he noticed that the party was not fulfilling its electoral promises and ideologically approaching Prawo i Sprawiedliwość – PIS (Law and Justice²⁵). In spite of that, PO is still a natural partner of RAŚ in Katowice. However, Bartek quickly added that this was the choice of reason rather than of love.

²⁴ At present the ruling party (in coalition with smaller Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe)

²⁵ Former ruling party and at present the major force in political opposition.

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He is satisfied with his current economic situation, however he also expressed some ambitions to improve it. On the social stratification ladder he sees himself, like other members of RAŚ, as a person occupying a middle position. He talked about himself as a member of a socially mobile group that was not interested in waiting for manna from heaven, but wanted to change the social and political reality according to his will. His morality has been very strongly shaped by the religious reality of Silesia. He claims to regularly attend church services and describes himself as a practising Catholic.

As far as the most important significant others are concerned who have particularly strongly influenced my interviewee, he claimed that such people were above all members of his closest family. He has pointed out that he was always fascinated by his parents and grandparents 'who knew where they belonged'. For Bartek they were the most important role models – individuals on which he could always rely on and who were there when he needed help. His family home experiences were very positive and this is also a reason why he spoke so highly about members of his family.

The current leader of RAŚ, Jerzy Gorzelik who joined the movement under the influence of my interviewee has been also an significant other for him, and most probably vice versa. The fact that Bartek is a godfather of Jerzy's daughter is a proof of the friendship that clearly goes beyond organisational matters.

While talking about important significant others Bartek mentioned not only his relatives and friends from RAŚ, but also persons from outside of his family and movement. One of them is a famous composer, Wojciech Kilar, who migrated to Silesia from the former Eastern territories after the Second World War and put down his roots in the region. What especially appealed to Bartek was the composer's humbleness and his love for the land which became his own. My interviewee at the same time made clear that he did not share the political views of Kilar, who during the last parliament campaign (2007) made a number of official statements in support of Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice Party led by the twin brother of Polish President). What he shared with him was love for music.

Bartek is particularly fond of film music. This is probably one of the reasons why he has mentioned the composer of the music to such films as, for example, *The Ninth Gate*, *Le Pianiste*, *Life As a Fatal Sexually Transmitted Disease*, as an important role model. Wojciech Kilar has also composed music to a film *Land of Promise* (In Polish: "Ziemia obiecana") – which Bartek

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considered “the best Polish film produced after Second World War”. He also likes film music by Michał Lorenc. Especially score from the film *Brute* (In Polish: *Bandyta*). In a free time he loves to listen to Pink Floyd, Bruce Springsteen, Dire Straits, David Bowie, and the Polish bands: Kult and Republika.

The first important book of his life was *Uncle Tom’s Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly* by Harriet Beecher Stowe. Bartek has pointed out that this childhood book made huge impression on him. What he found particularly disturbing is the injustice of slavery so vividly portrayed in the book. At present he enjoys reading non-fiction literature. The books about the recent war in the Balkans by Dawid Warszawski (*Defence of the Sarajewo Post*) and by Emir Suljagić (*Postcards from the Grave*) and books by Antony Beevor were among those that made a significant impression on him in recent years. He has also enjoyed reading such books as *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations* by David Landes and *Ethnic Landscape of Europe* by Edmund Lewandowski. Clearly the two last titles have also enabled him to better understand his own ‘otherness’.

Bartek loves an abstract sense of humour and when people can make fun of themselves. That is why among his favourite films are *Miś* (Teddy Bear) and *Rejs* (The Cruise) two Polish comedies which parody the communist system and *Monty Python's The Meaning of Life*. On the list of his best-loved films there is also *Life is a Miracle* by Emir Kusturica and *Seventh Stamp* by Ingmar Bergman.

Future of Silesia and Future of RAŚ

On the whole, Bartek is happy with the way his life has evolved so far. At the same time, during the interview, he did not hide his ambitions of leading an even more “colourful and interesting life”. This he has strongly associated with the prospective success of his movement. He hopes that the influence and position of RAŚ will only grow in strength in the future. As a realist he does not believe that the movement will get 50 per cent of votes in the regional elections, but thinks that it has a fair chance of attracting more votes if the electoral campaign is organised intelligently and professionally.

Above all, Bartek strongly hopes that the Silesian region, after years of crisis, will again become an important cultural and economic centre. In his opinion it is to a large extent an issue of elite circulations. He thinks that new people that possess vision and passion have the capacity

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to bring forth a renaissance in Silesia. He has expressed hope that in the future the Silesian region would cease to be 'a black hole' between Krakow and Wrocław, or a place on the way from the former to the latter, but a place to which people would be coming to listen to its philharmonic orchestra and to watch its theatre plays.

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