Abstract: This paper deals with the question of the political representation of social interests in Upper Silesia, a highly industrialised region of Poland. Such a question seems all the more acute and specific that the territorial level must be viewed as determinant in order to understand the representation of political interests in this region. The repeated demand for political autonomy in Upper Silesia will be analysed in relation to the industrial restructuring process that has been threatening the Upper Silesian economy since the beginning of the Polish transition. Consequently, this political attempt must be described firstly as the deliberate strategy of innovative leaders who succeeded in transforming a crucial economic problem into a political one by means of the Silesian identity. To a certain extent, such a conflict represents a case study of transitional processes affecting old mono-specialized industrial areas in a former popular democracy of Central and Eastern Europe. Paradoxically, the decentralization process that intervened since 1998 in Poland led to decreasing influence of the Silesian autonomist movements. Main explanations must be sought in reference to the structure of the political representation inside the decentralized regional institution and also, in relation to the limited function of the regional institutions in term of public policies, mainly monopolized by the central state level and the European Union.
The political literature dealing with the post-communist transformation in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) often uses the Rokkan paradigm in order to explain the emerging political cleavages that emerged in this geographical area (Kitschelt 1999, Zarycki, 2000). In this connection, this literature has to be completed by the specific historical path of these societies. According to the sociologist Daniel Seiler, the political cleavages in CEE cannot be defined solely according to the usual Rokkan matrix which is generally used to explain the political parties divisions in Western Europe (Lipset, Rokkan, 1967). On the contrary, the post-communist transformation in CEE must be considered as a third revolution that has some close links with the former national and economic revolutions: this latest revolution should go from capitalism to capitalism through the State socialism, which can be considered as the main characteristic of these societies (Seiler, 2002, p.131). Consequently, two other cleavages can be added to the Rokkan’s traditional matrix. Whereas the first one deals indeed with the ideological and political divisions that emerged during the communist period (communist vs. dissident, post-communist vs. democrat), the second one is related to the challenge of the present transformation, mostly in term of choice and rhythm of the economic break (radical vs. progressive or free market economic liberalism vs. social market economy).

Nevertheless, can we say that parties are the expression of political cleavages due to society? The answer should be affirmative if we consider that political parties mainly aim at expressing social interests (Sartori, 1976), working therefore as transmission belts to channel socials demands in order to translate them into political programs and public policies (Kirchheimer, 1966). On the contrary, and according to some scholars, the response should be negative as far as politics is concerned in CEE. Since lots of political parties have no social roots in this part of Europe (Seiler 2003), consequently they can only be considered as the result of a “built will” (Schumpeter, 1942) or, more accurately, as an appropriate tool for political leaders competing and fighting in order to come to power (Michels 1906, Weber 1919). In this connection, the recent empirical and analytical studies conducted in CEE tend to validate this second hypothesis, either they insist both on the size of party infrastructures and the communication strategies used by parties in CEE (Toole, 2003), or when they underline the “structural gap” existing between social groups and political parties (De Waele 1999).

In this context, the Silesian autonomist demands that have emerged in Poland since the 1990’s are likely to confirm this structure of analysis. At first glance, if this autonomist demand might be analyzed as the exception to the usual rule of the non-existence of the centre – periphery cleavage in a unitary state like Poland (De Waele 1999; Zarycki, 2000), the burgeoning and plural demand of autonomy in Upper Silesia¹ can also be explained as the outcome of a long term historical conflict between this periphery and the Polish State. Besides, the reappearance of this claim after the frozen period of communism in Poland can also be interpreted as an exceptional political attempt for limiting the social consequences of the industrial restructuring in Upper Silesia. Consequently, if the political representation of this demand can hardly be interpreted as expressing the social concern of the Silesian society, it should be suitable to assume that the political representation of social interests in Silesia has

¹ From 1975 to 1998, the geographical area of Upper Silesia gathered together four deconcentred regional structures (Voivodships units): the Katowice voivodship in the centre, the Opole voivodship in the West, the Bielsko-Biała voivodship in the South and the Częstochowa voivodship in the Northern part (see map 1 in annex). Generally speaking, it is commonly agreed that Upper Silesia refers above of all to the voivodships of Katowice and Opole since the Bielsko-Biała and Częstochowa parts present different characteristics in historical, economic and cultural matters. Our study will be mainly focused on the specific case of the Katowice voivodship, which was the core of this autonomist demand and, also, the main industrial centre of this region.
been mostly originated by some innovative local leaders trying to come to power through such a political strategy\(^2\) in the historical moment of the Polish transition. This assumption seems particularly relevant if we define transition as a historical moment of political vacuum that politicians try to counterbalance thanks to new political strategies (Dobry, 1986). On the contrary, if we consider that the consolidation process refers very often to the marginalization of the transition leaders, we can thus understand why the autonomist strategy failed in Upper Silesia; this failure can be indeed ascribed not only to the “structural gap” existing between autonomist movements or parties and the social interests they try to represent, but also to the major role that the Polish State played in the consolidation process. Finally, it will be necessary to show the impact of the European enlargement process on the formation and representation of social interests in Silesia, considering however, that in this respect, the conclusions will be here temporary even contradictory.

1. The historical background to the autonomist demand in Upper Silesia: political dependence and economic centrality of an industrialised region.

The study of Upper Silesia, usually described as “Silesian question” (Bafoil, 1996), not only emphasizes the complexity of the factors interacting on the development of this borderland region, but also, to represent an example of the transformation process that is taking place today in a high industrialized and borderland region of CEE. In this context, the “Silesian question” is first a question of collective memory peculiar to a peripheral region that belonged to Poland from the 10\(^{th}\) to the 16\(^{th}\) century, then, to Prussia from 1763 and lastly, partially to Poland during the interwar period (Davies, 1981). This peripheral region was again also highly coveted by both German and Polish States during the 20\(^{th}\) century history. Furthermore, whereas after the Second World War Poland gained control over the whole Silesia, the “Silesian question” reappeared in Poland immediately after the fall of communism and must be interpreted as the partial failure of the contemporary Polish regimes in achieving the political and ideological integration of such a periphery. Lastly, the turmoil of history and the belated control of the Polish central state over Silesia enabled, from 1989 the alternative official histories built in reaction to the official history of one single Polish nation, to emerge. In this context, the main reactions arouse undoubtedly in the Opole Silesia and in Upper Silesia, i.e. in the two parts of Silesia where the problem of nationality has been so acute since the 1920’s.

In Upper Silesia, the nature of the present claim is mainly voiced by cultural associations like the Związek Gornoslaki (the Upper Silesian Union) and the political party Ruch Autonomii Słaska (the Silesia Autonomy Movement). The legitimization of their fight is based on the invocation of a historical autonomist consciousness in relation to the peculiarities of the Silesian group considered as being different, in term of collective destiny, from German and Polish groups. In this connection, the Silesian demand chiefly represented by the reversion to the specific tradition of Upper Silesia is therefore justified by the long term history of Silesia used in a contradictory way. That’s the reason why one can consider the Silesian demand as a classically autonomist one, since it has been a political project simultaneously based on the refusal of the periphery domination and also, on the will of autonomy of this territorial community inside a larger system. Consequently, if local history is invoked in reference to some institutional pillars of the Silesian community such as family,

\(^2\) NB: Due to the distinctive nature of the autonomist demands in Silesia, our study will be only focused on the specific case of the Upper Silesian political representation of social interests which must be considered as different as the political representation of German minorities in the entire Silesia; about this latter question, see Karl Kordell, “Upper Silesia and the Politics of Accommodation”, Regional and Federal Studies, Vol.5, No3, Autumn 1995, pp.307-325.
the catholic religion, the Silesian dialect, the ethos of toil in the collieries and in the blast furnaces, history is also useful to underline the memories of the popular uprisings which occurred during the first part of the 20th century in Upper Silesia. The last one is all the more emphasised in that it is still considered as a founding event since it allowed the integration of a strategic part of Upper Silesia in the new Polish State (May 1922) whereas a democratic plebiscite conferred the whole Upper Silesia on Germany (March 1921). In this way, while the 3rd of May is the National Fest in Poland (in memory to the Polish uprising of the 3 May 1791), this day refers also to the beginning of the third Silesian uprising whereas old Silesian natives still remember some legendary battles that occurred in this crucial moment. Generally, history tends to mingle with the mythology of a Golden Age which refers precisely to the 1920’s in Upper Silesia, as the region gained a relative political autonomy inside the Polish state in term of finances (the so-called Silesian Treasury) and political representation (Sejmik Slaskiego or Silesian Parliament). This political autonomy was however cancelled in the 1930’s because of the economic crisis and the authoritarian attitude of the Polish government. On the other hand, the Silesian history refers negatively to the so-called structural dependency of Silesia facing to the domination of foreign powers such as Germany and Poland competing for ruling Upper Silesia without respect for the right of peoples to self-determination since most of the Silesian natives used to define themselves neither as German nor as Polish but as Silesian (Rykiel, 1988).

In accordance with this specific world vision, the communist period was considered to continue the political, cultural and economic domination that a foreign power has exerted over the Silesia region. From a political point of view, in Upper Silesia, the communist period was defined as repressive since the central authorities forbade all sort of Silesian irredentism which was considered corruptive due to the numerous Silesian natives who had collaborated with the Nazis forces during the Second World War and secondly, as an archaic form of national consciousness hindering the emergence of the communist consciousness in Poland. As a consequence, the communist period in Upper Silesia is generally described by such movements as an internal colonisation process implemented by the deliberate policy of the Polish centre. According to the Upper Silesia Union and the RAS party, this internal colonisation was indeed reinforced by the settlements of rural populations coming from the eastern territories lost by Poland after 1945 and who have been employed in the collieries and blast furnaces of Upper Silesia. This demographic colonisation was also economic as the communist regime developed the collectivization and the specialization of the Silesian industry which was essential for the economic development of the whole Poland (Tkocz, 1995; Riley, Tkocz, 1998), even if such industrialization had deep consequences for Silesia with respect to its social dependency in relation with industrial activities (see tables 1 and 2) and as regards ecology.

**Table 1: Structure of employment in Upper Silesia (1988)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Employments (in th.)</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*In the Nationalized Sector</td>
<td>843</td>
<td>48,8</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy</td>
<td>477</td>
<td>57</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metallurgy</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electro mechanics</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other nationalized industrial activities</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*In the private sector</td>
<td>49</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>10,8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail Trade</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>8,8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others private activities</td>
<td>553</td>
<td>30,2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1702</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Sources: Rocznik Statystyczny Wojewodztw (1988), p. 52 and 138*
Table 2: Economical importance of Upper Silesia in the Polish economy (Years 1987-1988)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Upper Silesia</th>
<th></th>
<th>Poland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In absolute terms</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>In absolute terms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surface (km²)</td>
<td>6 650</td>
<td>2,1</td>
<td>312 683</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population (in th.)</td>
<td>3 971</td>
<td>10,5</td>
<td>37 764</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial employment (in th.)</td>
<td>893</td>
<td>18,2</td>
<td>4 894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coal mining (million of tons)</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity (Twh)</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cars construction (in th.)</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Rocznik Statystyczny Wojewodztw (1988), p. 128 &137

As far are we are concerned, the main question does not refer to the veracity of such history. Of course, such an historical point of view is inevitably subjective and partial as it is built on both the selection of facts legitimating this history and the oblivion of contradictory facts such as the dramatic role of the Silesian communist elites in the economic development of Silesia during the 70’s thanks to the First Secretary Gierek who was indeed a native of Silesia. It is worth considering such a historical interpretation as a weberian world vision or an ideology as it allows giving a sense and a legitimization for the political struggle that took place in Upper Silesia quite immediately after the fall of the communist regime in Poland.

2. The transition process and the autonomist movement in Upper Silesia: resolving the dilemma of simultaneity.

The sudden reappearance of the Silesian demands for political autonomy after 1989 must be understood as the validation of the Tocqueville assertion according to which revolutions generally do not happen when situations are deteriorating but, on the contrary, when bad or weak governments begin to reform themselves. Consequently, the revival of this political question in the post-communist Poland is a relevant example of the transition process in CEE insofar as this autonomist demand must be presented as singular attempt to solve in Upper Silesia the dilemma of simultaneity (Offe, 1996) which refers to the simultaneous tasks that the CEE societies have had to perform after 1989 in matters of territorial, democratic and economic issues.

At first glance, regarding Upper Silesia, the use of the dilemma of simultaneity concept could be considered rightfully as excessive or inappropriate since the core of problem was first of all an economic one, in connection with the Balcerowicz Shock Therapy and the Government-program of industrial sector restructuring in Upper Silesia resulting from the World Bank requirements (1990-1991). In addition, the main opposition against such a policy had first of all social origin as it is pointed out by the general strike of December 1992 decided by the Solidarność trade-union that was willing to reject the massive plan of industrial redundancies programmed by the Polish government. With respect to the national extent of the social protest, the latter was compelled to withdraw his program and to negotiate in the future with the different social actors involved in the economic field of collieries and blast furnaces in Upper Silesia. Thus, such events could be considered as the catalyst and the starting point of the collective action impetus given by Silesian organisations in order to build a territorial respond against the next governmental projects. Two Silesian organisations played a strategic role in such a reaction, even if their respective importance was by far unequal since the political function of the Silesia Autonomy Movement was minored in comparison with the ideological and lobbying function exerted by the Upper Silesian Union.
2.1. The Silesia Autonomy Movement.

From the beginning of its creation in January 1990 in the town of Rybnik (Upper Silesia), the Silesia Autonomy Movement has been defining its own project on the political field. In some ways, we can consider that the genesis of this movement looks like the story of the Upper Silesia Union since each project of both organisations refer permanently to the restoration and the strengthening of the Silesian identity and also to the rebuilding of a community of individuals gathered together round same values, traditions and cultural roots. These autonomist movements, nevertheless, resort to opposite strategic means to accomplish their goals. As a matter of fact, whereas the Upper Silesia Union views the Silesian restoration through the constitutional and legal framework of the present Polish Republic, the Silesian Autonomy Movement aim at a full political autonomy of this region as it is underlined in the first article of its political program of 1990:

“Considering that the present structures of the Polish state don’t favour the development of the inhabitants and the social sphere of the Silesian region, and taking the economical potential of Silesia into account, it is necessary to get the right for self-determination in order to determine the future of Upper Silesia. And first of all, it is necessary to come back to the pre-existing structure implemented during the inter-wars period in the Polish part of Silesia, with the gathering of the whole Silesian natives around their Silesian Parliament in order to get a complete autonomy.”

Not surprisingly, this insistence on the dramatic role of the Silesian identity must be related to the specific context of economic and social crisis that occurred at the same time in Upper Silesia. Moreover, one can notice that such a project is also found in “nationalist – populist” (Delannoi, Taguieff, 1991) parties which have been flourishing throughout Europe since the 1990’s. In this context, identity is viewed as being the one and only resource for restraining the territorial crisis which hampers the social cohesion in Upper Silesia. Thus, it is necessary to emphasize that this point of view already existed in Poland during the communist period that was characterized by the well-known traditional dichotomy between the “we” (the genuine Poles, the genuine Silesians) and the “they” (the oppressors whoever they are, Russians, Germans or Communists as far as Poland is concerned, and even Polish as regards the Silesian point of view). The “we” insistence is all the more emphasized that it is a crucial element of this nationalist mythology based on two complementary operations. The first one refers to the identification of the threat pressing hard on the “we”, while the second operation refers to the salvation of the community (“we”) through the revival of the Golden Age period existing in Upper Silesia during the inter-wars period (Gerlich, 1990).

In the untidy political context that characterizes Poland during the first years of the transitional process, this Silesian political movement was relatively successful since it was represented, after the general election of 1991, by two members of the Polish Parliament (Sejm). Nevertheless, the weakness of its membership (less than one thousand according to the party assertion which is of course hardly credible in the absence of official data) was all the more penalizing that the movement was by far enable to enlarge its electorate and social base, because of both its extremist program and its “ad hoc” characteristic. The latter explanation supposes to be underlined if we consider that the movement made some unfruitful efforts to lead the social protest of December 1992 in Upper Silesia, especially by means of the creation of its own trade-union. Of course, such a strategy failed because of the hegemonic
position of the Solidarność trade-union in the Silesian labour sphere whereas the lack of local
and intermediate networks was blatant as far the Silesia Autonomy Movement was concerned.

2.2. The Upper Silesia Union.

Contrary to the former movement, the Upper Silesia Union tried to develop an
alternative strategy which was successful in all respects. The conditions of its genesis refer
one more time to the specific context of the spring 1989, as its creation intervened under the
patronage of the Katowice Catholic Church through the merger of the Upper Silesian Catholic
clubs with others cultural and religious groups. The Upper Silesia Union rapidly improved its
organisational structure so that it was able to extend its influence not only on the single town
of Katowice but on the rest of Upper Silesia thanks to the membership of influent persons
such as journalists, scientists, artists and above all, local and regional politicians like the
Voivod and the Vice-Voivod of Upper Silesia, the Chairman of the Regional Parliament and
numerous mayors of the Silesians parishes. Within two years, the Association was able to
establish more than sixty local units in Upper Silesia with the support of officially three
thousands members and six thousands sympathisers (with a large majority of retired or old
people recruited thanks to the local Church).

Like the Silesia Autonomy Movement, this organisation was not yet able to overcome
the disability of its communitarian and even ethnical world vision whereas the communitarian
structure of Silesia is indeed very complex. That’s the reason why the use of the concept of
Silesia community by this association has been by far very blurred and inconsistent if we
consider for instance the speeches of its leader, Mr Klazik, who spoke alternatively about the
community, the group and the nation of Silesia. In the same way, because of 40% of the
population can be considered as genuine Silesian whereas 60% came in Silesia after the Great
War (Błasiak and al., 1994), this union looks upon the former as Silesian in order to increase
the size of the Silesian group. Besides, even if its sphere of action is undeniably political, the
Upper Silesia Union is above all a political lobby and not a political party because of the
deliberate strategy of its leaders. Such a choice is understandable if we consider the
narrowness of its political support, its blatant lack of political structures outside Upper Silesia
and the weakness of its financial and human means apart from the strategic support of the
Upper Silesia Catholic Church.

At last, its political influence must be considered as essential in the Silesian conflict
since the Upper Silesia Union was the ideological matrix of the Silesian collective action
leading to a political compromise between the Polish state and the Upper Silesia region. Its
ideological function must be analyzed in reference to the Claus Offe dilemma of simultaneity
as main part of its explanation refers to the assertion of the political and economic
marginalization of Upper Silesia by the Polish State that continues to treat Silesia as an
internal colony and Silesian natives as second class citizens. Last but not least, the problem
solutions are above all both political and territorial since the political relations between
Poland and Upper Silesia must be redefined by taking account the cultural and territorial
specificity of this region.

2.3. The Upper Silesian praxis: the Regional Contract for the Katowice

From 1993, the representatives of local self-government and others people coming
from the socio-political, professional and economic spheres of action prepared a restructuring
program for Upper Silesia that included six main axes in term of education, social security,
environment, territorial self-government, regional economy and territorial public finance. Not
surprisingly the whole negotiations happened through the deliberate exclusion of the main national political parties since they were considered by the Upper Silesian representatives as unacquainted with such an agreement because of their suspected partiality in favour of the Poland’s interests. In this way, the result must be viewed as the validation of the Upper Silesia Union strategy insofar as the final agreement achieved in 1995 (the so-called Regional Contract for the Katowice Voivodship) was based on its own recommendations both as regards the Silesian identity and the economic future of the region. In short, the Regional Contract legalized an explicit division of labour between the Polish Centre and the Silesian periphery. In accordance with the final agreement, it fell to the former the management of all negative aspects of the industrial restructuring (in term of labour and ecological consequences) in Upper Silesia while the salvation of the whole industrial jobs was obtained thanks to a *sine die* adjournment of the restructuring process. More generally, it fell to the central state the management of the negative costs of the post-communism or the costs of “Upper Silesia decolonisation” according to the Upper Silesia Union interpretation, whereas the regional actors had to manage the positive aspects of territorial initiatives in term of economic development, culture, private activities i.e., in short, the main positive aspects of post-communism in this region.

Even if Upper Silesia was able to gain from the political centre a specific and a better treatment than the others Polish regions, we are not able to conclude, at least for the time being, that the centre-periphery cleavage is the more relevant and the more tangible for analyzing the Silesian situation. In this way, the peripheral situation of Upper Silesia must be sought more in reference to history and to its borderland characteristics than in reference to an internal colonisation led from Warsaw since Upper Silesia was and still is one of the wealthiest regions of the present Poland. The extent of the mass protest in Upper Silesia is more the consequence of an economic process threatening the productive apparatus of Silesia than the result of its political marginalisation. Consequently, the main political polarization in Upper Silesia might be analysed more in reference to the classical political divisions in CEE between radical and progressive approaches in relation to the rhythm, extent and social costs of the economic reforms (De Waele, 1999). The main skill of the Silesian elites was their capacity to hide or to transform an economic problem into a political one, thanks to the use of the Silesian identity or nationality, even if such a concept seems vague or blurred as regards Upper Silesia. That’s why we cannot consider that the initiative of such a demand emanated from citizens; on the contrary, local lobbies and territorial elites played a determinant role in such a conflict by structuring and channelling the protest. In this regard, and in this specific period of the Polish transition, they must be considered as “innovative leaders” (Linz, 1993) succeeding in influencing the political agenda and the political solutions.

3. The political representation of Silesian interests in the decentralized Poland: the paradoxical end of the Silesian exception.

Less than ten years after the signature of the Regional Contract, it is worth mentioning the fall of the Silesia question in the Polish political life. Such a disappearance seems all the more surprising given that the decentralization process occurring in July 1998 in Poland was generally viewed as a major opportunity for improving the political autonomy of the Polish peripheries against the central state, mainly in Upper Silesia. In this way, such a hypothesis was all the more admissible that the Polish territorial and administrative reform led into the creation of sixteen regional self-governments democratically elected in order to manage the regional economic development. Paradoxically, the regionalization of politics didn’t lead to
an increasing role of the autonomist movements in political representation and in the agenda setting as far as Upper Silesia is concerned. In our opinion, such a surprising paradox must be explained mostly in reference to the relation between politics and policy, considering that both the political consolidation and the European enlargement processes seem to lead to a progressive disjunction between politics and policies so that political parties toil at representing social interests while the content of public agenda tends to be defined at a central level in close relation with the European Union.

3.1. Political parties and the representation of social interests in the new Silesia region: regional interest v. sub-regional interests.

The decreasing influence of autonomist lobbies or parties in Upper Silesia must be sought firstly in reference to the partisan structure inside the decentralized institution of Silesia, both as regards the Regional Parliament of the Silesia voivodship (Sejmik Ślaskiego) democratically elected through regional elections every four years and the Regional Board invested by the former in order to implement the regional strategy.

In accordance with such legislation, it should have been feasible to go on the assumption that local and regional parties would be able to promote and to perform the regional interest. At first sight, such a hypothesis is admissible if we consider the general consensus that prevailed in September 2000 when the Development Strategy of the Silesia Region was approved unanimously by the Regional Parliament of Silesia. Unanimity was in fact purely formal if we consider the strength of the political reactions inside the regional parliament during the preliminary working sessions. Political reactions were, in fact, structured around two different and complementary cleavages. The first one was classically “left – right”, in accordance with the sharing of political parties inside the Regional Parliament where the main Polish parties (i.e. SLD, AWS and UW) were represented. The second one was by far the more determinant, transcending the first one as it referred to the structure of social interests at the sub-regional level. Such a parameter is all the more determinant in that it results precisely from the decentralization process that led to increase the area of the regional levels by merging the forty nine former Voivodship into sixteen. But the gain in size had been generally counterbalanced by a weakened feeling in term of regional identity since the territorial reform amalgamated different sub-regional units that had often no common references as regards local history or economic development. In this respect, the example of the new Silesia region is by far very significant since the present regional unit was enlarged by the adjunction of two others units whose interests were strongly different from the Upper Silesian industrial core since the North part (the area of Częstochowa) is basically rural, economically less developed and turned towards the Northern regions while the South part (Bielsko Biała) is also rural, better developed and historically turned towards the former Austrian Hungarian Empire (see map n°2). Consequently, whereas regional deputies originating from Upper Silesia tried hard to promote the interests of the Upper Silesian collieries and blast furnaces, they had also to face the strong opposition of the non-Silesian deputies who considered that the interest of the Silesia voivodship no longer had to be mingled with the separate interests of Upper Silesia.

That’s why the first cleavage was very often transcended by the second one during the preliminary sessions while the achievement of the consensus was at last reached though the passing of a strategic program sufficiently general to overcome the partisan and sub-regionalist reactions in order to strengthen the legitimacy of a precocious institution still enable to define the major part of its own agenda.
3.2. Social interests and Europeanization in Silesia: the contrasting effects of the European enlargement process.

It’s commonly agreed that the coming integration of Poland inside the EU arouses lots of expectations in this country, even if euroscepticism has been increasing for the last few years because of the harsh structural adjustments implied by such a process. This general observation seems corroborated when the domestic impact of Europeanization is questioned as far as regions are concerned (Ferry, 2003). Responses can neither be sure nor unequivocal since it should be wrong to deal with the Europe Union as a monolithic block able to express itself with one voice (Smith, 1996; Wallace & Wallace, 2000). On the contrary, the fragmented design of the European Institutions must be considered simultaneously as an opportunity and a constraint for social actors. As far as Silesia is concerned, the ambivalence of Europeanization must be considered both in references with the judicial battle for the legal recognition of the so-called Silesian nation and with room for manoeuvre of the regional institution in term of public policy.

As regards the question of national minorities in Poland, the Silesian autonomist movement was undeniably the first one in Poland to grasp the opportunity to get a European legitimacy at a political and judicial level. Not surprisingly, the Silesian Autonomy Movement is still the spearhead of this battle insasmuch as the European recognition is viewed as a strategic resource for counterbalancing its political weakness at the regional level. On the one hand, the Silesian Autonomy Movement gets the status of observatory in the European Free Alliance MEP’s which gathers European autonomist parties fighting for the rights of minorities to be recognised and safeguarded in the enlarged European Union. On the other hand, and thanks to the support of the European Free Alliance MEP’s, its action was above all judicial by addressing complaints to the European Court of human Rights (May 2001) for obtaining the legal registration by Poland of its own Association of People of Silesian Nationality created in 1996 in order to gather citizens who define themselves as Silesian, i.e. 173 000 individuals according to the surprising results of the Polish census in 2002³. The Strasbourg court then unanimously voiced the opinion that the refusal to register the association was justified because of the lack of objective criteria for the legal recognition of the Silesian nationality, which was the confirmation of a first judgement by the Polish Supreme Court concluding in 1987 that the Silesian nation does not exist. The first judgement was subsequently reiterated by the Polish appeal court in 1998 which stated that it was contrary to the public order to create a non-existing nation which would be able to profit from the privileges conferred by law solely on national minorities while these privileges include exempting political parties from the requirement to surpass the threshold of 5% of votes cast in order to win a seat in the National Parliament. In the same way, the Poland’s State Electoral Commission issued a ruling on 28 April 2003 declaring that the activities of the Silesian Autonomy Movement were not linked with the subject of the referendum campaign on European Union membership on 7 and 8 June 2003. However, it is not worth insisting on the Silesia Autonomy Movement insasmuch as its political role is still relatively marginal in politics with the exception of some Silesian parishes where its influence is noticeable. The legitimacy of its political engagement is weak as neither Poland nor the European Union (until now) never recognized legally the Silesian nationality which is the essence of its own political existence. The revival of this party must be understood in reference with the window of opportunity it tries opening both at the European level and at the territorial level in a

³ This declaration emanated from the own initiative of the respondents despite reports of census enumerators refusing to accept Silesian as a declaration of nationality and of local officials changing “Silesian” to “Polish” on people’s census forms.
context of irresistible structural crisis in Silesia that the regional self-government is not able to curb.

As far as the Silesian self-government is concerned, it is commonly agreed that it had lots expectations about the so-called “Europe of regions”, like the other fifteen regions of Poland. Their hope was based on the assumption that the European partner could be the ideal one in order to counterbalance the domination of the central state which is still frequently viewed in Poland as an inheritance of the communist period. By virtue of the reception of the European structural funds by the Polish regions, this financial godsend was initially considered as an efficient mean for increasing the political autonomy of the regional institutions which could become liberated from the state supervision. In accordance with such an interpretation, territorial development was viewed as the favourite instrument of this regional autonomy, while the representation of the local social interests would be performed by the political parties inside the regional self-government. In fact, such an assumption is not confirmed at all seeing that the entire preparation process and the programming of structural funds in Poland tends to a paradoxical marginalization of the regional tier in favour of the central level in term of political decision (Aïssaoui, 2003; Bafoil, 2003). Strictly speaking, the paradox is not one if we consider the still intact power of the central administration since the beginning of the Polish transition which was able to become the favourite partner of the European Commission in the implementation of the different assistance programs for Poland since 1989. Yet, it should be wrong to blame the incoherence of the European Commission for explaining such an observation. Previous surveys about the structural funds in the Western Europe had already concluded that the Europe Commission couldn’t be necessarily considered as the champion of the so-called “Europe of regions” since this institution was much more interested in finding credible partners (and whatever the territorial level concerned) than in the necessary promotion of the regional units (Smith, 1996). In Poland like in the whole CEE, the European Commission let a major initiative to the opposite partners for organising the implementation of the structural assistance, even if it led in Poland into a recentralization of the decisions at the central tier because of the deliberate incompletion of the decentralisation process (Gorzelak, 2001). Negative consequences are particularly noticeable as far as the regional tier is concerned, for instance in the Silesia region. Not surprisingly, regional representatives in Silesia complained that the delayed restructuring process of collieries and blast furnaces was eventually implemented by the central level without the slightest dialogue at the territorial tier. Such a complaint is all the more understandable that it was easy for the Polish central state to disclaim its own responsibility, pleading that decision resulted from a European agreement while the main negative consequences of the restructuring program were mostly transferred at the local and territorial tier now in term of structural unemployment which rises till 40 or 50% in some places that were depending from the sole colliery. Not surprisingly, major political discr edits are incumbent to the local and territorial self-government units that have been blamed frequently for their political idleness whereas their political and financial power was by far very limited. More generally, this lack of dialogue between the different tiers is the main characteristic of the structural funds governance in Poland, so that the main aspects of the Silesian regional strategy were permanently contradicted by the decisions of the Polish Ministry of Economy which is in charge of the preparation and the programming of structural programs in Poland.

Political consequences of this region tier weakness are particularly obvious as far as local political parties are concerned. First, even if they are virtually able to exert an important influence on local agenda-setting, this ability is limited by their political incapacity for defining and fulfilling their own policies since the main solutions provides from the central level. Not surprisingly, their inability to perform their duty had dramatic repercussion in electoral terms since the discredit of the leading team was very important at the time of the
regional election in October 2002. As with the general election of September 2001, the outgoing coalition AWS-UW previously in charge of the regional self-government lost this election while the dissatisfaction with voters was translated by the importance of the non-voters and the relative electoral success of protesting parties such as the League of the Polish Families, the Silesia Autonomy Movement or the Samoobrona rural movement of self-defence, the latter one being assigned to form a going against nature coalition with the left-wing party SLD which might not be considered as the most proper solution to enhance the decreasing credibility of political parties in Silesia and, more generally speaking, in Poland.


To what extent the specific situation of Upper Silesia can be put into general use, mainly if we take into account the marginal characteristic of the centre-peripheral cleavage in Poland? On the one hand, Upper Silesian situation can hardly be generalised insofar as the problem is exceptional because of the marginal dimension of national minorities in the present Poland inside which 97.6% of the people define themselves as Polish. But one can rightfully wonder whether the Silesian problem is a proper one when, according to the surprising results of the Polish national census, only 173,000 persons define themselves as Silesian, i.e. less than 0.5% of the whole Polish population and less than 3.6% of the population living nowadays in the Silesia voivodship. Consequently, the Silesian problem supposes to be analysed less in connection with the centre-periphery factor than with the crucial question of economic transformations in a hyper-industrialized area that local innovative politicians tried to perform through an ethnic or national stake. In that sense, the relative failure of this strategy is firstly the local validation of general observances about the weakness of the social interest structures, the tenuousness of parties roots in occupational or socio-economic groups and the underdevelopment of the bottom-up representation in Poland and, more generally, in the whole CEE (Lewis, 2004). In Silesia, this weakness is all the more salient that this autonomist strategy comes up against a double problem. The first one is linked to the legitimacy of such a partisan representation whereas neither the Polish state nor the European Union recognizes, till this moment, the slightest legal value to the so-called Silesian nationality: consequently, the political representation of social interests by such autonomist groups is doomed to failure since they are not legally admit to the political representation at least at the national level. The second one refers, through the example of Silesia, to the political ability of the whole Polish parties to control the questions on the agenda and the corresponding solutions in term of public policies which are more and more defined and monopolized by the European Union and the central state level. Such a problem is indisputably the most current and the most crucial in this specific historical moment of the European enlargement process since it raises the unsettled question of the impact of Europeanization on the political institutionalisation in CEE and also, the question of the linkage between State and parties that already arouse for years in Western Europe (Mair, 1994).
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Annexes: Maps of the Polish Territorial Reform between 1975 and 1998.

Map 1: The 49 Polish Voivodships after the Administrative Reform Act of 1975

Map 2: The 16 new Voivodships after the Administrative and Territorial Reform of July 1998