

# New Tribalism in Europe

**Abstract:** Our paper is dedicated to tendencies of tribalism which appear in contemporary Europe. We can see them also in post-communist societies, e.g. in Poland, Czech Republic and Lithuania. Post-modernity is similar to the traditional order characterized by an ethnic mosaic and so-called fragmented identity. These tendencies are located in opposition to the project of homogeneous modern state nation. They are a real challenge for nation states. The question concerning relation between tribalism and European integration processes is still open. We can see positive aspects of tribalization for the realization of the idea of united Europe. It weakens the power of nation state which supports the process of building supranational structures. However, the situation is more complicated. New ethnic nations can ultimately be guided by ethnical selfish. In this time they disintegrate nation states but in the future their disintegration activity could be directed at the European Union.

**Key words:** tribalism, Europe, neo-medieval Empire, postindustrial civilization

The modern state is dealing with two kinds of forces, it is *centripetal forces*, meaning progressing globalization and integration at the regional level, as well as with *centrifugal forces*, connected to emancipation and the processes of empowerment of local and regional communities and regional ethnic or national minorities. The concomitance and intermodality of both kinds of forces, which in fact leads to relativization of the state sovereignty in the inner and outer perspective, fills in the logics of civilizational changes, meaning the transition from

the industrial civilization to the post-industrial civilization [Polak 2001: 16-19]. What is characteristic for industrialism, it is the massiness, centralism, the concentration of power and resources or the particular uniformity, nowadays is being substituted with the opposite tendencies: individualization, decentraliza-

tion and deconcentration, pluralism and global or regional universalism. The world is becoming a multifacetedly pluralized *global village*, inhabited not by *the global tribe* as it was seen by Marshall McLuhan [2001: 179], but rather by numerous particular groups of ethnic and national character, which by the emancipation from the industrial social structures create a new identification, described by the term *new tribes*. The French sociologist Michael Maffesoli claims that the development of *tribal mentality* in the postmodern world is perceptible. Humanity, or the part of humanity existing in the postindustrial phase, is experiencing the passion of community. In the perspective of the researcher it touches all the social institutions, i.e. politics, public administration, education, university, the media and churches [Maffesoli 2008: 16].

Europe, together with the non-European Anglo-Saxon countries, is the area where the civilizational transformation is the most distinct and

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complete, in the economic, sociopolitical and cultural dimension. Europe, even more than North America or Australia and New Zealand, is characterized by some trends which are characteristic to the post-industrial civilization. In the European area, more than anywhere else, the post-industrial tendencies like the relativization of the nation state sovereignty and the relativization of national identity, are being revealed. The *centripetal forces* and *centrifugal forces* have the effect both on sovereignty and national identity. The first forces are connected to globalization and regional integration (e.g. European integration). The other are the result of ethnical and regional awakening. These are that kind of forces which are the subject of our consideration. That awakening or, in other words, the revival of particularisms in their radical shape takes the form of separatisms. It leads to the creation of the abovementioned *tribal mentality*. These processes breed the questions of the future of united Europe, its future institutional shape and the question whether the united Europe is to survive as a political project. The questions of the future of nation states and the national identity as their universalizing identification formula appear as well.

Civilizational changes are characterized by the logics of spiral development, which means cyclicity and linearity. On the path of progress we come across the restoration of bygone institutions and sociopolitical values. It is why in post industrialism we can see the reference to the archaic, agrarian forms of identification and institutional solutions. They are not, of course, the exact copies but possess important common traits. In journalism, as well as in scientific researches, the idea of *New Middle Ages* appeared. It compares the post-industrial united Europe to the pre-modern medieval Europe. The creation of united Europe and the gradual severance from national particularisms was meant to be the answer of the Europeans to the challenges connected to the shaping of the post-industrial order and the collapse of modern order, engineered, among others, by the idea of the state nation and the nation state. In the seek for the way to describe this new political order of the post-industrial Europe it was pointed at its similarity to the pre-modern, medieval political order. [Cf. Zielonka 2006].

Medieval Europe was different from Europe created by the Reformation, the Peace of Westphalia, bourgeois revolutions and the Enlightenment. It consisted of autonomous socio-economic units hierarchized according to the system of feudal dependencies. These units were diverse, people used different languages. It was a very fragmentized world with local economies, build on highly diverse, pluralized identities, consisting of various political units organized according to local conditions and traditions. Political stabilization was being secured by cooperation and negotiations between particular groups and when this mechanism was failing, conflicts, even military confrontation, occurred. Medieval sociopolitical order was created by the multitude of political units, plurality of various *centers of power*.

There was no one power capable of dominating the world. The specificity of medieval Europe was in the fact that there existed an independent power uniting Europe, having universal and pan-European character. It was The Catholic Church and its representatives established the educated and pan-European elite, using a universal language – Latin. They were securing the European unity and protecting its collective culture and the system of values. The other element of the European universe was the empire as the universal political community.

This situation made most of the European citizens live as if in two worlds. The first was their local world, the usage of a local dialect, participation in local culture and customs. At the same time they were living in the pan-European world, the world of universal Christian ideas, the world of Latin, common customs and Catholic ceremonials [Rapley 2006 ].

Medieval Europe did not survive the confrontation with modernity, what was connected to the development of capitalism and sociopolitical changes accompanying it, especially the appearance of nationalisms and the idea of nation as well as the appearance of sovereign, centralized nation state as the elementary unit organizing political life<sup>1</sup>.

The evolution of capitalistic economy in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century challenged the sense of the existing sociopolitical order. Capitalistic economy started to operate at the global scale using modern tools and the technologies of mass communication. Under these circumstances the structures and institutions of modern world became outdated and started to collapse. The pressure of borderless economy enforced the appearance of sociopolitical structures that could function above the existing divisions and borders legitimized in the period of modern states (Westphalian order) [Ohmae 1990].

The idea of united Europe appeared as the opposition to modern, national projects. Many commentators pointed to the fact that we are dealing with the specific *New Middle Ages*. It represents the return to local identities and to the coexistence of two complementary dimensions of identity: the local and the universal.

The notion *New Middle Ages* refers to the construction of post-industrial sociopolitical order, comparable to the situation of medieval Europe. *New Middle Ages* means in that case coexistence of various overlapping identities, affiliations and group loyalties united by dint of the existence of universal ideas and values. In this way one may describe the sociopolitical organization of the medieval world, characterized by the existence of a complicated network of sociopolitical relations sustained by the existence of universalistic forces in the form of *The Empire* (universalistic, medieval European political idea of *Holy Roman Empire*) and The Church. Analogically the post national world is characterized by the existence of a complicated network of social identities sustained by *the new Empire*, it is the idea of universal Europe and transnational economic relations, which took place of The Church from the medieval period [Friedrichs 2001: 475-502].

In the more advanced conceptions of the European integration the new idea appears. It says that the post national Europe is to be united by the development of European civil society, led by the values of humanism and the tradition of Enlightenment. Such Europe is led by the idea of *unity in variety* as the paradigm of the ecumenical civilization. The foundation of European unity would be the faith in common values, originating from the tradition of Enlightenment and/or biblical tradition, especially the evangelical tradition. The universal humanistic civilization would be the civilization of common values, manifesting in the variety of world cultures as the identity of mankind. It would be the civilization where community unites people much deeper and stronger than the organization, and the shape of life of men is more important than fleeting pragmatic relations [Suchodolski 2003: 136-143]. This vision unites particularisms with universalism and both together constitute the completion of the elements of human existence. Such vision of universalism presumes the vision of European community united in cultural variety. It is an antithesis for the xenophobic nationalism hiding in the claustrophobic space of besieged national-ethnic stronghold [Modrzejewski 2009: 191].

The question of the future of Europe arises: *What happens if the universalistic forces appear to be weaker than those of the particular character? What happens with the united Europe with "The Empire" missing and the influence of The Catholic Church marginalized?* There is no *secular religion*, spoke of by Emil Durkheim. It could be the base for communal integration when the economic boundaries come loose, and in the face of economic depression the idea of autarchy, autonomy and isolation from the world in crisis returns.

*What is the shape of Europe when the universal idea, the legitimization of political organization and the basics for enforcing group solidarity, disappears?* In the modernity period the idea of nation played that role. All the citizens were organized in political units described as nation states. The legitimization of the state power stemming from the fact that the ones in power represent the nation and the political institutions act on behalf of it. Group solidarity and bearing the costs for the benefit of the community resulted from the fact of belonging to a specific group – the nation.

As we mentioned before, under the influence of social and civilizational changes, being the consequence of technological revolution and the transformation of modern societies, the foregoing identity marks, including the idea of nation, became to erode. The question of what identity is to take their place arose. The idea of European solidarity and common European values appeared. It was the base for the shaping of sociopolitical institutions of united Europe. However, in the face of depression it appeared that the idea is an illusion and has no strength to legitimize the costs to be borne by its particular communities for the benefit of *the common Europe*. The particularisms started to revive, not only of the national but also of the regional origin, whether the majority of politicians announced *the crisis of Europe*. It seems that the contemporary crisis of the idea of integration stems from the lack of universal idea, welding the diverse communities. Consequently, in the European political system there is no power capable of dominating the political space – there are numerous political factors and the states lose their sovereignty and their attributes of power, as well as their enforcement possibilities. The political structure of contemporary Europe is the arena comprising multitude of sociopolitical and economic organizations. No one center of power exists. Similarly to medieval Europe, where power was dispersed among feudal lords, princes, local warlords, bishops and the clergy, in contemporary Europe power is dispersed and divided, whereas the principle of territorial sovereignty is illusory. The difference is that universalistic institutions of medieval Europe, such as The Holy Empire or The Catholic Church, possess no such power. What was to replace their universalistic influence, it is the ideas of Europeanism and the economic boundaries, at this time are on the retreat. The process of creating various institutions of managing the European space is not sufficient to produce a coherent economic, political and social construct. Social stability is possible due to the existence of common patterns of operation. Their appearance derives from a consensus concerning values and the orientation of the participants of social actions to values, which are recognized intersubjectively.

One can extrapolate that contemporary Europe, like the rest of contemporary world, has entered the phase of de-globalization, where the idea of economic and political integration of the world and Europe, is being questioned. Presumably it is a temporary reaction to financial depression, which causes much concern among the citizens who begin to perceive the process of integration in the terms of a threat. If such attitude is only the reaction to the worldwide financial depression and European debt crisis, the contemporary questioning of the idea of European integration may be seen as the transitional phase of the process, which in the longer term cannot be stopped. The question is to what extent this kind of attitude may transform to the more permanent form and threaten the universalistic vision of Europe, united in the community of European values and the existence of solid European civil society. In the wider perspective the negative attitudes toward the processes of integration and referring more frequently to local particularisms is a defensive reaction to the rapidly changing social world, which became more chaotic and less controllable. As it was written by Manuel Castells people all over the

world resent the loss of control over their lives, their natural environment, their work, their economies, their governments, their countries. Thereby, according to the laws of social evolution, resistance opposes domination and alternative projects challenge the logics of the new global order. However, these reactions and mobilization emerge in unusual forms and develop in unexpected ways [Castells 2008: 76].

The processes described by Manuel Castells are connected to the analyzed phenomenon of the revival of local identities, which begin to create an important alternative to national identity (i.e. the Pole) or supranational identity (i.e. the European). The overlap of these two tendencies leads to the situation when local identities are frequently treated as the element of resistance against globalization/Europeanization, which more and more often is being perceived as the process which brings no profits and generates the costs of responsibility for strangers. In the process of consolidation of the global order the maladjustment of numerous social groups to the tempo of changes unveils. The whole groups of *the excluded* appear, who do not benefit from contemporary civilizational changes, including the processes of European integration. *The excluded* seek the sense of security in narrow social groups, often isolating themselves from public life. The effect is a progressive process of tribalization of the European space. Instead of the *common European home* we face conflicted groups, throwing accusations at each other and trying to pursue their own goals with no regard to the interest of the community. The notion of Europeanness and the process of European integration is being strongly questioned and contested. More and more frequently mutual social, political and economic ties are showing to be not beneficial but burdensome. The necessity of saving the Greek state or the Cypriot banking system produce a violent reaction and protest against bearing these costs, which for the most citizens of European countries are absurd. When the charm of *common Europe* disappeared the *wearing neighborhood* remained, and it becomes the source of burden and trouble. The reference to local identity is the opposition against the European elite of *globapolites* and comprador national elites. Belonging to a local "tribe" gives the sense of distinction, identity, adherence and at the same time allows to protect one's own interests.

This is why, with the deepening of the economic crisis and the growth of social discontent from the character of European integration, this *New Middle Ages* in the understanding of the separatist movements may be treated as an alternative to the liberal, internationalist project of common Europe. As the result we may witness not the shaping of the *New Middle Ages* but rather a post national *Europe of tribes*. Europe has always been the area of high political and cultural diversity. Practically there had been *many Europes*. This diversity contributed to the richness and the strength of Europe but it was also the source of multiple conflicts. Nowadays we face the revival of the diversity and the question arises: what is the future of European sociopolitical space? Ulrich Beck, who in his book *Power in the Global Age* considers the future of the state says that the future may lie in the ethnic state. Analyzing the forms of the state in the second modernity Beck claims that the transformation of contemporary statehood may lead to the domination of political space by the ethnic-national states. Ethnical nationalism of the second modernity is a *postmodern* back to basics, has an illusory character and is politically dangerous. New mass communication technologies simplify the transnational entwining and mobilization of ethnic communities in the opposition to both national state and the elites of cosmopolitan culture, which may lead to the development of anti-global ethnocentric internationalism. We cannot exclude the scenario of an ethnocentric and supranational union of *fortified states* aiming at the separation from economic depression, terrorism, migration and

“strangers” [Beck 2005: 322-323]. As it was pointed by Beck, the postmodern ethnicism of the present day is different from the modern nationalism. The latter is aiming at the outside – the conquest and assimilation of the others – whereas ethnicism does not presume any expansion or universalism for it demands the exclusion of cultural strangers and does not agree for coexistence. [Beck 2005: 323]. Beck’s vision may seem to be more than pessimistic, however in the present situation of repeating crises and social unrest we have to consider what happens if the alliances that stabilize Europe fall apart, if the revived trade protectionism spreads or if it becomes necessary, or one decides it is necessary, to control everyone at the borders, to control every packet or package for the sake of epidemics, terrorism or other purposes.

Modern phase of de-globalization does not imply, despite of the expectations of nationalistic political movements, the return of the nation state but rather the development of ethnical state. Frequently heard questioning of the idea of Europeaness and the legitimization of cosmopolitan political elites made by the Eurosceptical parties, referring to national identity, cannot bring back the nation state and won’t stop the progressing crisis of modern national identity. Paradoxically, it may reinforce the regional and separatist movements standing out against the idea of nation. Optimistic expectations of the political leaders appealing to the perishing national identity may appear to be false for in modern Europe we are experiencing an interesting phenomenon of strengthening of local identities. The affection towards linguistic and religious differences, customs and habits is visible. One can observe the reinforcement of minority order, separatism or localisms of social life. The growing number of people who are unable to adjust to the demands of postmodern cultural and civilizational life seek *shelter* in so called primeval forms of collective life. The search for kinship in small communities, including the ethnical divisions, appears [Chodubski 2013: 17].

The renaissance of localism has triggered the emerging of many political movements, which appeal to regional identities and present themselves as the defenders of local communities, identity that vanishes in European *melting pot* and the defenders of political and economic rights of local communities. The development of regional separatist movements in modern Europe, which appeal to the idea of regionalism and autonomy, is becoming clearly visible. Many European countries experience the growing strength of regional parties referring to local, ethnical identity. The process concerns France (Brittany, Basque Country, Corse), Spain (Catalonia, Basque Country), Great Britain (Scotland) or Italy (Padania). Ethnical-regional parties such as Plaid Cymru, Scottish National Party, Christlich Soziale Union or Vlaams Belang gain more and more support of voters while basing on the slogans referring to regional particularisms and questioning European or national universalism. These parties base on the regional identification of their electorate as the Scottish not the British, the Flemish not the Belgians, the Bavarians or the Welsh [Falkenhagen 2009: 396-402]. The parties appeal to particular interests, putting the local before the European or the national. They appeal to localism, not to common solidarity. It concerns not only the European solidarity but also the Spanish, British or German solidarity, placing the local identity above the national or European identity.

Many lot of these movements gain considerable political influence by introducing the problems of autonomy and regional separatism to the public discourse. Parties like i.e. Scottish National Party raise the question of independence openly. In the elections to the local Scottish parliament Scottish National Party turned to be the winning side, defeating the former most important political power, Scottish Labour Party. The leader of Scottish National Party, Alex Salmond, was appointed new prime minister of regional government and brought forward the

Scottish Independence Referendum Bill, what resulted in the referendum which actually took place in 2014. Only small percentage of voters decided of the rejection of the Scottish independence. In Catalonia the party in power, *Convergencia e Unio*, with Catalanian prime minister Arturo Mas, had pledged to call for plebiscite concerning the breakaway of the autonomous region from the rest of the country and creating an independent state. The referendum concerning Catalonia's independence from Madrid was also held in 2014. The supporters of independence won fair and square, however the referendum was recognized to be illegal by the Spanish authorities.

In many cases the decision about breaking the ties with central metropolis has a pragmatic dimension. In case of Scotland their representatives gained so much popularity not by appealing to the Scottish identity but to economical demands from the central authorities in London. Scotland demanded the incomes from oil and natural gas of Scottish shores to stay in Scottish hands. The present shape of Scottish autonomy does not enable it to happen. In case of Catalonia its nationalistic leaders point to the fact that this wealthy region, producing almost 20% of the Spanish GDP, is forced to provide for the poorer regions and the central government in Madrid is depriving Catalonians their wealth [King 2012; Hassan 2011; Munoz, Guinjoan 2013].

The existence of regional separatist movements may question the idea of European integration and dramatically change the political map of Europe. The European Union is a voluntary union of countries joined by the unity of economic, social and political rules. It may consist of countries but also of the regional communities. In the conception of a Europe of Regions it is presumed that the European nation states are to be substituted with regions, which are to become the main subjects of relations with EU. However, this conception presumes the existence of universal values uniting Europe and the existence of supra-regional European solidarity. Meanwhile the separatist regional movements predominantly appeal to particular interests, and in the extreme to the fear of the European integration process as threatening the local identities.

### Note

<sup>1</sup> Middle Ages are sometimes described as Long Middle Ages, which ends with The French Revolution and the creation of nation state as the consequence of the revolution [LeGoff 2008: 81].

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