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Separatist and autonomous tendencies in modern Italy

Introduction

Abbiamo fatto l'Italia, ora dobbiamo fare gli italiani

We have made Italy, now we have to do Italians

– Massimo Taparelli d'Azeglio¹, *I mieiricordi*

On October 22, 2017, a consultative referenda (Italian *referendum consultativo*²) took place in Veneto and Lombardy regions in Italy, during which residents could express their views on the possible extension of the autonomy of these administrative units. However, it should be clearly stated that in referenda was not about gaining independence and separating from the Italian Republic, which would be incompatible with the Italian Constitution, that in Article 5 states that the state is uniform and indivisible³. This provision also expresses the principle of regional autonomy, i.e.: “the Republic [...] recognizes and supports local self-government; implements the widest decentralization of administration in the activities of the services subject to the state; adapts the rules and system of its legislation to the requirements of self-government and decentralization”⁴. The wide scope of regional autonomy does not mean that in contemporary Italy there are no visible separatist tendencies and attempts to expand autonomy, as exemplified by the aforementioned referenda. However, such plebiscites are not legally binding. The result (in the case of Veneto and Lombardy, a strong victory for advocates of extending autonomy was noted; see Table 1) may be an impulse for local authorities to negotiate with the state authorities to increase the regions' powers.

¹ Massimo d'Azeglio, Italian writer, politician, statesman living in 1798-1866.

² M. Rovelli, A. Sala, *Referendum sull'autonomia*, http://www.corriere.it/referendum-autonomia-lombardia-e-veneto/diretta-live/17_ottobre_22/referendum-autonomia-quorum-superato-veneto-lombardia-voto-305percento-14f27496-b75c-11e7-9b0d-a33e3b4f370f.shtml [access on: 18.12.2017].

³ Costituzione della Repubblica Italiana, “Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana”, 1947, No. 298, http://www.cortecostituzionale.it/jsp/consulta/link/costituzione_en.do [access on: 29.12.2017].

⁴ *Ibidem*.

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Table 1. Results of the referenda in the regions of Veneto and Lombardy on October 22, 2017

Region	Veneto	Lombardia
Turnout	57.2% entitled to vote 2,328,949 people	38.25% entitled to vote 3,010,434 people
For the autonomy	98.1%	95.29%
Against the autonomy	1.9%	3.94%
Invalid votes	–	0.77%

Source: based on the data of the Italian Ministry of the Interior (Italian *Ministero dell'Interno*).

Broadening the autonomy of the regions in political practice depends to a large extent on the political will of the government. It is worth noting that in northern Italy, for example in the mentioned Lombardy, for many years there have been groups and organizations, such as the Northern League (*Lega Nord*), that base their political activity on separatist premises (Italian *tendenze separatistiche*), thus striving to separate the northern regions from the rest of Italy and create a separate state with the capital in Milan. In this context, the situation arising from the decisions of the elections to the Chamber of Deputies and Senate (March 2018), which brought victory for the Northern League in the center-right bloc, is interesting, and its leader Matteo Salvini has become one of the serious candidates for the prime minister's chair⁵.

Focusing on the autonomous diversity of the Apennine Peninsula, we cannot omit five regions enjoying the special statute (Italian *statuto speciale*), which – as it is often pointed out in journalism – the other fifteen regions envy. Possessing an extraordinary statute through the Aosta Valley (Italian *Valle d'Aosta*), Sardinia (Italian *Sardegna*), Sicily (Italian *Sicilia*), Trentino-Upper Adige (Italian *Trentino-Alto Adige*), Friuli-Venezia Giulia (Italian *Friuli - Venezia Giulia*) results directly in the provision of Article 116 of the Constitution of the Italian Republic. These regions retain autonomy in the legislative sphere (Italian *autonomia legislativa*), administrative (Italian *autonomia amministrativa*) and financial autonomy (Italian *autonomia finanziaria*). Their specific position does not result directly from the separatist tendencies and the insular nature of Sardinia and Sicily, or the presence in the territories of the other three linguistic and cultural minorities.

The aim of the article is to present the problems of separatist and autonomous aspirations in contemporary Italy. Assuming the importance of historical conditions and the economic, cultural and political diversity of the Apennine Peninsula, both in the past and now, questions about the scale of separatist and autonomous aspirations, factors affecting them, and the role of political organizations and groupings that increase the independence of regions or disconnecting them from the state become important. It is also worth paying attention to the condition of modern Italy regarding the ability of

⁵ At the time of publishing the text (beginning of May 2018), coalition talks between the Five Stars Movement and the Northern League regarding the creation of a joint government lasted. There were, however, no clear political statements related to the name of the future prime minister.

the state to maintain its internal order, ensuring integrity and territorial cohesion. The considerations made here are part of the theoretical context of national separatism, to which I attribute a significant role in contemporary relations in Western Europe. The intuitive method was used to analyze the concepts and problems. The descriptive (monographic) method was also applied, helpful in demonstrating the multi-faceted nature of the subject and recognizing the matter associated with it. The argument is based on the analysis of sources and literature in Polish and Italian.

At the outset, it is also important to note the difference between the terms “separatism” in the title of the sketch and the text; “separatism”, “separatist” and “autonomy”, “autonomous”, and the awareness of the author of these considerations as to their separateness. Separatist tendencies are treated as disintegrating, splitting, isolationist, and autonomous as independent, self-governing, independent or sovereign. This explanation is necessary because a misleading expression may arise that these terms used collectively (e.g. “separatist and autonomous tendencies”) are perceived as identical.

Separatism and its determinants

An important role in international relations is played by the national factor, which in recent years has become more and more significant in the countries of the Old Continent. National worldviews of the nineteenth century, and among them nationalism, evolved in the direction of separatist aspirations that are the will of the nations to mark their separateness, and thus, justify the need to create their own sovereign state⁶. Monika Topczewska rightly notes that the renaissance of nationalist ideologies that give first place to national values constitute a contribution to the opposition of regional or national particularisms to state nationalism⁷.

As in the case of separatism, the sources of autonomous concepts should be sought in the nineteenth century, which was obviously related to the nationalist processes revived at that time, the formation of national states or just the ambitions of nations. Autonomy, referring to the concept of territorial units, is generally defined in the literature of the subject as an admission of administrative and legislative independence. Moreover, there are two basic types of autonomy, i.e. national and territorial ones, which constitute the right of self-determination according to a larger whole by residents living in a given area. The desire for autonomy is usually manifested in actions taken by national, linguistic, and religious minorities⁸. Nowadays, as the researchers emphasize, national autonomy is of territorial character and is usually found in countries with a multi-ethnic structure, which results in the autonomous unit achieving partial independ-

⁶ See: E. Gellner, *Narody i nacjonalizm*, Warszawa 1991, pp. 58-60.

⁷ M. Topczewska, *Separatyzmy narodowe w Europie Zachodniej*, “Studia Europejskie” 2001, No. 1, p. 101.

⁸ *Leksykon współczesnych międzynarodowych stosunków politycznych*, edit. Cz. Mojsiewicz, Warszawa 2004, p. 32.

ence, the limits of which are provisions formulated in basic acts or other legal acts⁹. This is the case in Italy.

Returning, however, to the phenomenon of separatism defined – which has been accentuated above – as a form of nationalism, which is definitely a broader concept, one can see the factors conducive to its creation and evolution. The structural determinants often decide about the emergence and development of separatist tendencies, which means that the minorities displaying separatist tendencies are territorially compact. The economic aspect that manifests itself in the economic disproportions of the state or the region, but also the problems resulting from the recession and crises or the persistent divisions between the rich and the poor is of great significance. In this case, there is often a sense of inequality in the distribution of goods and the disproportionality of the gross domestic product. For example, richer regions are reluctant to share their earned profit with poorer territorial units, and these have a sense of harm and loneliness. In both cases – and here we can see another factor conducive to separatist tendencies – there may be individuals, groups of people, organizations, political groups whose activity undermines the existing political and territorial order, thus creating a vision of a better life after a possible secession or winning a wider area autonomy. However, the situation is much more complicated. An important question is whether the new statehood distinguished as a consequence of strong separatist tendencies, and *de facto* disintegrating the state in its current shape, will indeed be based on solid legal, political, economic, and social structures. This doubt is justified by the fact that modern separatist, secessionist and independence movements are often accused of promoting slogans based on populist demagogy¹⁰. Grażyna Michałowska, considering the multinational states, emphasizes that the new statehood, in which the national minorities will exist, cannot become a source of further tensions¹¹. Incidentally, it is worth pointing out that in research on separatism, the basis for scientific investigation is formed by the assumptions of the theory of ethnic conflicts and ethnicity¹².

In the above context, a separate problem is the legality of the separatist aspirations. In a discussion, including an academic one, this issue boils down to the relationship between the principle of territorial integrity and the right to self-determination of nations.

⁹ B. Stoczewska, *Autonomia narodowościowa jako koncepcja rozwiązywania problemu mniejszości narodowych w europejskiej (głównie polskiej) myśli politycznej w XIX i XX wieku*, "Krakowskie Studia z Historii Państwa i Prawa" 2010, No. 3, p. 357.

¹⁰ See: *Autorytarny populizm w XXI wieku. Krytyczna rekonstrukcja*, edit. F. Pierzchalski, B. Rydliński, Warszawa 2017; M. Canovan, *Trust the people! Populism and the twofaces of democracy*, "Political Studies" 1999, No. XLVII, pp. 2-16; J. Miecznikowska, *Prawicowe i lewicowe partie populistyczne po wyborach do parlamentu Europejskiego w 2014 roku na przykładzie Wolnościowej Partii Austrii oraz Partii Lewicy w Niemczech*, "Rocznik Integracji Europejskiej" 2015, No. 9, pp. 529-549.

¹¹ G. Michałowska, *Współczesny nacjonalizm a państwo*, [in:] *Państwo we współczesnych stosunkach międzynarodowych*, edit. E. Haliżak, I. Popiuk-Rysińska, Warszawa 1995, p. 24.

¹² H.E. Hale, *The Foundations of Ethnic Politics. Separatism of States and Nations in Eurasia and the World*, Cambridge 2008, p. 58.

In legal solutions of countries where separatist tendencies are strong, there are restrictions and blockages (e.g. constitutional) that prevent the region from *de facto* separating from the state or increase the scope of autonomy.

Among other factors that awaken the secessionist and autonomous movements there are cultural reasons, concerned with, i.e. history, customs, language or religion. Cultural distinctiveness is one of the forms of identity¹³. Its accentuation and confrontation with others plays an important role in the process of mobilizing separatist moods. In the history of civilization, the problems of cultural identity were often the source of conflicts and internal wars. You can look at them from two perspectives. The first is the so-called objective cultural features that are part of the historically conditioned elements of cultural heritage. They may be anarchic, partly outdated, but they are a “baggage of experience”. Historically shaped elements of cultural heritage play an important role in the lives of minorities, groups seeking secession and important functions. Nevertheless, they must be socially sanctioned by it, which in turn implies taking into account the historical and political fate on which the group is located. The second perspective, understood as the subjectively felt separation, is above all the awareness of the existing differences in relation to culture, history, origin. It is also an educated bond at the ethnic or regional level. It binds the individuals with their own group, region, nation, and state¹⁴.

Discussions on the phenomenon of separatism and attempts to define it are based primarily on the concepts of the nation and the state. One of the most known and widespread definitions of the state in science is that created by Georg Jellinek – “a permanent relationship of people permanently inhabiting certain territories, subject to supreme authority”¹⁵. The bond between the nation and the state is the idea of a community based on convergent values. It is obvious that the nation is a more permanent human community than the state, but the role of the state understood as a community of people is to satisfy their needs. This is the great value of a state that embraces the nation and performs the functions that it serves. Thus, the concepts of the state and the nation strongly affect each other. In a model perspective, the state-creating role of the nation manifests itself in the activities of national groups in multinational countries that are oriented towards the creation of their own state. The state can play a creative role in relation to the nation, in the case of young countries or those that do not yet have a well-established state tradition. Katarzyna Konieczna, as an example of the nation-forming role of the state, gives unsuccessful attempts by the authorities of the Soviet Union or Yugoslavia, where the project of unification of the existing nations within the common state failed¹⁶.

¹³ A. Szyfer, *Tożsamość kulturowa: implikacje teoretyczne i metodologiczne*, “Studia Etnologiczne i Antropologiczne” 1997, No. 1, p. 159.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 164.

¹⁵ G. Jellinek, *Ogólna nauka o państwie*, Warszawa 1921, p. 312.

¹⁶ K. Konieczna, *Istnienie państw w czasie i przestrzeni w świetle działalności ruchów separatystycznych*, “Pisma Humanistyczne” 2014, No. 12, p. 182.

Italy – a divided state?

In 2011, Italy loudly celebrated the 150th anniversary of the unification of the state¹⁷. Following Luigi Barzini, one can assume that this is a society of a thousand years old and a very young country inspired by foreign models¹⁸. After the official establishment of the Republic on June 18, 1948, the process of building constitutional principles that were based in the Constitution of the Italian Republic, adopted on December 22, 1947 (entered into force on January 1, 1948). For a century in Italy, the constitution was the Alberta Status, i.e. the act – as “an eternal and irrevocable basic act of the monarchy” – granted on March 4, 1848 by the king of Sardinia, Charles Albert¹⁹. Contemporary Italy is a country with clearly marked territorial boundaries, taking the shape of a high-heeled shoe “kicking” Sicily. Karolina Golemo points out that when we talk about Italy, we usually mean this integrated state form. The homeland of Italians has a short history as a unified state and there are opinions that it has not yet achieved the expected level of consolidation in the economic, administrative-political or socio-political sense. For centuries, the Apennine Peninsula was divided into smaller units in the form of kingdoms, principalities, and republics, to which such expansive policies were influenced by such powers as Spain, France and Austria²⁰. The republic in its current shape is inhabited by over six hundred million people, mainly Italians, and there are also Sardinians, Tiroleans, Slovenians, Albanians and French. The country is divided into twenty regions, of which five – as already indicated above – are special regions. The landscape, cultural, gastronomic or linguistic diversity of Italy means that – as Maciej A. Brzozowski emphasizes – “every region seems to be a separate state”²¹.

The road to the unification of Italy (Italian *Risorgimento*) was bumpy and winding. In the mid-nineteenth century, Italy was a mosaic of nationalities included in the brace of two monarchies, i.e. the Kingdom of Sardinia (also called Piedmont) and the Kingdom of Both Sicily. The Pope’s Church State was also distinguished by its size. The Austrians held the north-eastern part of the Apennine Peninsula. The political disintegration of Italy was, in a way, a consequence of the division perpetuated after the Congress of Vienna in 1815²². Political ambitions of the ruler of the Kingdom of Sardinia, Victor Emmanuel II of the Savoy dynasty (Italian *Vittorio Emanuele II di Savoia-Carignano*)²³, determination of Piemonte Prime Minister, Camillo Benso di Cavour (later the first

¹⁷ M. Cotta, L. Verzichelli, *Il sistema politico italiano*, Bologna 2016, pp. 32-36.

¹⁸ L. Barzini, *Europejczycy*, Warszawa 2001, p. 195.

¹⁹ G. De Vergottini, *Geneza i ewolucja Konstytucji Republiki Włoskiej*, “Przegląd Sejmowy” 2007, No 6, p. 30.

²⁰ K. Golemo, *Włoskie zjednoczenie i “dwie Italie”. Tradycyjny podział na Północ i Południe oraz jego współczesne konsekwencje*, [in:] *Włochy wielokulturowe. Regionalizmy, mniejszości, migracje*, edit. K. Golemo, Kraków 2013, p. 29.

²¹ M.A. Brzozowski, *Włosi. Życie to teatr*, Warszawa 2014, pp. 13-14.

²² A. Gaca, Z. Witkowski, *Podstawy ustroju konstytucyjnego Republiki Włoskiej*, Toruń 2012, pp. 68-69.

²³ N. Davies, *Zaginione królestwa*, Kraków 2010, pp. 555-596.

Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Italy), revolutionary moods and actions against Austrian princes, absolute rulers of Parma, Tuscany and Modena, an uprising against the Kingdom of Both Sicily (known in history as a consequence of the “march of a thousand red shirts”, the expedition initiated by the revolutionary Giuseppe Garibaldi), led to the creation of the United Kingdom of Italy and the crowning of Vittorio Emanuele II as king. In fact, *Risorgimento* ended in 1871 after Rome had been annexed by the Kingdom of Italy, which henceforth became the capital of the kingdom (at the same time, it also meant the end of the Papal States), and earlier – the Veneto region.

It should be noted that not everyone shared and shares the enthusiasm resulting from the unification. For example, the aforementioned Golemo cites in his article the name of the Italian historian Gianfranco Miglio, a representative of researchers who with reserve approached the “unification mythologies”. Miglio, attempting to overthrow the stereotypes rooted in the Italian unitary tradition, opposed the perception of *Risorgimento* as the success of a political class wishing for unity. For the historian, the unification of Italy was the result of a military operation, while the Savoyard dynasty treated the lands of the Apennine Peninsula as areas to be conquered, which in turn led to the creation of a “giant dressed in dwarf robes”. According to Miglio, those seeking unification did not have adequate knowledge about the realities of other Italian states that were to be incorporated into the new Kingdom of Italy²⁴.

It is a fact that the newly-created state struggled with a number of legal, administrative, economic, social, ethno-linguistic, and political difficulties. It was therefore necessary to undertake a series of reforms leading to the unification of the state. In practice, the legal and administrative order was introduced in Piedmont²⁵. It was a natural consequence of the role that it played in the process of unification of Italy. On the other hand, it translated into a strong differentiation between the North, where industry and modern agriculture dominated, and the poor South torn between the nobility and the peasants who rebelled against the economic exploitation of landowners. In addition, production centers were located in northern Italy in such cities as Milan, Turin and Genoa. In the opposition to them, there were so-called parasitic cities (e.g. Naples), which mainly consumed, and did not produce new goods. Thus, voices quickly appeared about the need to develop a model of centralization or administrative decentralization, which in fact contributed to a broad discussion about the organization of the Italian state in general. In this context, it should be noted that the first centralized project following the unification in 1861 was adopted by virtue of a relevant law in 1865. The premise for undertaking such and no other decision was the fear of breaking the state, the more so since it is difficult to talk about the strong national identity of the Italians with regard to this

²⁴ G. Miglio, *Le regolarità della politica. Scrittiscelti, raccolti e pubblicatidagliallievi*, Milano 1988, pp. 14-17, cited from: K. Golemo, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-31.

²⁵ See: *Da Regionalismo alla regione*, edit. E. Rotelli, Bologna 1973.

period. These were also problems in the south of the kingdom, the revolutionary moods resulting from social dissatisfaction revealed separatist tendencies.

Referring to national identity and consciousness, it is worth emphasizing the role and importance of Italian nationalism, which was born and evolved under disappointment with the political situation of Italy at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Italian nationalists emphasized not only the fragility of the state and organization, but the lack of sufficient actions that would unite the Italians around the slogan of common belonging to one nation-state²⁶. The issue of the lack of a sense of national identity of Italians is also present in contemporary political thought and discussions about the condition of the state. In 1987, the Italian historian Renzo De Felice stated that Italy is a country that aims to deprive itself of its roots, because the national tradition that has been ignored by most Italians has disappeared. In turn, the philosopher Norberto Bobbio pointed out that “Italy is no longer a nation, because the younger generations no longer cultivate national feelings, those that were once called ‘love for the homeland’. Italy has become little more than a geographical term, and the Italians – ‘a scattered and unnamed crowd’”²⁷.

In the post-unification ideas for the organization of the state, regionalist concepts also had their place, according to which it was pointed out that the division of competences between the state and the region – according to the geographical criterion – would contribute to increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the state in many areas. The political considerations on this subject were also accompanied by issues of autonomy added to the regions as an expression of the responsible participation of the local community in the administration of the country. One of the representatives of this trend, Giovanni Mann, said: “governments are passing away, administration remains”²⁸. However, soon after the First World War, new autonomous tendencies appeared in Sicily, Sardinia and Valle d’Aosta. Witold Misiuda-Rewera correctly observes that the sense of separateness of regional identities gave rise to modern regionalization of Italy and the emergence of regions with special statutes and ordinary statutes, which was formulated in the Constitution of the Italian Republic passed in 1947. The researcher argues that the development of regional autonomy may contribute to the strengthening of state structures and the harmonious implementation of its functions, while regionalization and local self-governance based on statutory, legislative, financial, and administrative autonomy is not an attempt to unity of the state, but an improvement and building the institutional order²⁹. However, it should be noted that in reality there is a problem of dissimilarity

²⁶ J. Sondel-Cedarmas, *Nacjonalizm włoski. Geneza i ewolucja doktryny politycznej (1896-1923)*, Kraków 2013, p. 11.

²⁷ Cited from: *ibidem*, p. 12.

²⁸ G. Manna, *Il diritto amministrativo del regno delle Due Sicilie: saggio teoretico, storico e positivo*, Napoli 1840.

²⁹ W. Misiuda-Rewera, *Włochy. Republika autonomii*, Lublin 2005, pp. 11-12.

of social, political, and economic structures of regions belonging to the North and the South. This difference translates into political practice, culture, consciousness, and political customs of the inhabitants³⁰.

Not without significance for the current situation and condition of the regions was a deep political crisis that affected Italy at the beginning of the nineties of the last century³¹. Transformations on the Italian political scene, the emergence of new parties³², changes in the electoral law³³, instability of governments³⁴ and the need for systemic reforms³⁵, financial problems, etc., projected directly or indirectly on the local government. Reforms at the regional level were necessary. In this context, changes in laws and constitutional reforms that have been postulated and introduced should concern the transformation of the local government system³⁶, including the issue of regional autonomy. In general, researchers agree that the reforms implemented so far have translated into a strengthening of the regionalism process in Italy, including increasing the scope of competences and powers of regions. A separate issue is their economic problems and the level of satisfaction of residents with the changes and the role of political organizations, which undermine the well-established order – focusing on the fight against immigration, capitalism or elites – they proclaim the slogans of extending the region's self-governance.

Problems and challenges – the political dimension

Benedetto Croce, an Italian philosopher, publicist and politician, wrote in *La storia come pensiero e come azione* that “we are products of the past and we still live in it”³⁷. Considering contemporary Italy, it is impossible to omit the historical context in the form of ideas, trends, events that have been rooted in the past and have an impact on the present. The tendencies referred to in this text are not new phenomena, but nowadays they are increasingly becoming an element of political play. Italy is experiencing this. In a situation of economic crisis and serious economic problems caused by the poor condition of the Italian banking sector, as well as migration problems, radical slogans – including

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

³¹ Z. Machelski, *System polityczny Włoch*, Warszawa 2010, pp. 201-211.

³² M. Lorencka, *Ewolucja systemu partyjnego po 1993 roku*, “Toruńskie studia polsko-włoskie. Studi polacco-italiani di Toruń” 2011, Vol. VII, p. 89-110.

³³ G. Rivoecchi, *Reformy instytucjonalne i system dwuizbowy we Włoszech – analiza stanu reform*, “Przegląd Sejmowy” 2007, No. 6, pp. 95-108.

³⁴ M. Lorencka, *Niestabilne gabinety rządowe we Włoszech*, [in:] *Rządy mniejszościowe wybranych państw świata*, edit. R. Radek, Katowice 2014, pp. 103-122.

³⁵ M. Lorencka, *Próby reformy włoskiego systemu politycznego w latach 1997-1999*, “Pisma Humanistyczne” 2000, Vol. II, pp. 83-93.

³⁶ Z. Machelski, *op. cit.*, p. 262; M. Lorencka, *Reforma regionalnego prawa wyborczego we Włoszech*, “Acta Bythoniensia” 2006, No. 1, pp. 27-34; M. Lorencka, *Włoskie państwo regionalne*, “Przegląd Sejmowy” 2005, No. 4, pp. 53-83.

³⁷ Cited from: J. Hooper, *Włosi*, Warszawa 2015, p. 34.

those of a separatist character – fall on fertile ground. An example is the activity of the separatist Northern League with Matteo Salvini (from 2013), who is accused of a policy threatening the unity of the state. It is enough to mention that in the parliamentary election in March 2018, the group managed by him received a very good election result (in the elections to the Chamber of Deputies 17.3% votes, 17.62% to the Senate) and to the surprise of many *Lega Nord* – ahead of *Forza Italia* of Silvio Berlusconi (Chamber of Deputies 14.01%, Senate 14.43%³⁸) – became the leader of the center-right bloc, and Salvini himself a serious candidate for the head of government.

The groupings called Leagues and covering northern regions of Italy (Veneto, Lombardy, Piedmont, Liguria, Emilia-Romagna) appeared on the Italian scene in the eighties of the last century. They were a response to the growing sense of Italians' frustration and dissatisfaction with the situation on the political scene. In their political programmes, these groups postulated, in territorial and administrative dimensions, the necessity of autonomy of the northern lands of the Apennine Peninsula. Ilvo Diamanti, an Italian political scientist and sociologist, distinguishes four periods of the League in Italy. The first, related to the years 1983-1987, the researcher links with the formation of the League in Veneto and the proposal of the autonomy of the region due to the existence of the Veneto nation. It is worth noting here that the region is still characterized by strong separatist moods – clearly emphasizing the historical conditions conducive to the phenomenon. In 2014, 89% of voters voted in the informal internet voting for disconnection from Italy (with 73% of those entitled to vote, i.e. 2.3 million people)³⁹. The second period presented by Diamanti is 1987-1990. Then the Lombard League was formed, whose leader was Umberto Bossi, later the leader of the Northern League. The politician defines the region as an area of interest of socio-economic importance. In the third period, 1990-1992, the League is united in the Northern League under the aforementioned Bossi. In the rhetoric of the leader there was opposition to existing political parties and state institutions, and he also proposed the division of the Italian country into three macro-regions, i.e. North, Center, South and eight administrative structures – five regions with a special statute and three republican ones: Republic of Padania, Republic of Etruria, Republic of the South. Systematic increase of public support for *Lega Nord* and parliamentary elections in 1992 resulted in 8.65% of votes to the Chamber of Deputies (55 seats) and 8.19% of votes to the Senate (25 seats). Zbigniew Machelski indicates that the Northern League became the second party after the Christian Democracy in Lombardy⁴⁰. The period since the elections in 1992, Diamanti describes as the fourth stage. A good election result of the League boldest Bossi, who proposes that the North should influence Rome's policy. In his statements the leader of the grouping be-

³⁸ Data from: Italian Ministry of the Interior (Italian *Ministero dell'Interno*).

³⁹ Włochy: referendum ws. "niepodległości" Wenecji Euganejskiej, <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/wlochy-referendum-ws-niepodleglosci-wenecji-euganejskiej/h23b4> [access on: 7.03.2017].

⁴⁰ Z. Machelski, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

gins to use the slogans of federalism, ethnic federalism, economic federalism, thus blaming the allegations of striving for separatism⁴¹.

Nevertheless, in the later activities of the Northern League, the secessionist aspects are visible. It is enough to mention that on September 15, 1996, the grouping proclaimed the creation of the Federal Republic of Padania, and the goal remains to win independence for it. Padania, in the shape given by the Northern League, includes the Aosta Valley, Piedmont, Lombardy, Liguria, Trentino-Upper Adige, Veneto, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, the northern part of the Emilia-Romagna region. As Karolina Golemo points out, considering the Padanian's case, the Padanian ethno-cultural and historical community felt by the League's advocates and their allies became the basis for political and economic claims in the nineties. Interestingly, the first mentions of the creation of a community of areas of Padania or Padanian micro-region appeared already in the seventies of the last century⁴².

In the first decade of this century, the League ceased to proclaim such radical separatist slogans as those of the last decade of the twentieth century. However, it should be emphasized that in place of separating the North from the Italian Republic and creating a completely new state, the League stressed the administrative autonomy and efforts to strengthen federalism in Italy. However, the separatist slogans returned with the economic crisis. "At the rallies during the feast of the Padanian Peoples in Venice in autumn 2011 and 2012, they called again for the creation of Padania"⁴³ – points out Golemo.

Indeed, the economic crisis that Italians are facing has sharpened the political rhetoric of the Northern League, which more boldly formulates secession and autonomous postulates, thereby exploiting the Italians' reluctance to maintain the current *status quo*. It is not surprising that diagnoses and postulates – often populist, similar to those formulated by the Movement of Five Stars (Italian *Movimento 5 Stelle*) – meet with social acceptance. For years, representatives of the League have been accusing the South of the bad economic situation. In a similar vein, they express about the European Union by postulating – as in Great Britain – a referendum and "detachment" – in the institutional sense – from the European community. Ignazio Visco, the president of the Central Bank, arguing with such ideas, argues that it is the illusion to think that solving economic problems was easier outside the economic and monetary union, and abandoning the euro would not cure structural diseases of the Italian economy⁴⁴.

In the tone of secession and autonomous slogans, the League representatives spoke about the migration crisis, calling on left-wing governments of Matteo Renzi and Pao-

⁴¹ K. Golemo, *Zielone słońce Alp. Padania – między mitem a samodzielnością*, [in:] *Włochy wielokulturowe. Regionalizmy, mniejszości, migracje*, edit. K. Golemo, Kraków 2013, p. 73.

⁴² *Ibidem*.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 74.

⁴⁴ Cited from: *PKB sprzed kryzysu w kolejnej dekadzie*, <http://forsal.pl/artykuly/1047243,wlochy-pkb-sprzed-kryzysu-w-nastepnej-dekadzie.html> [access on: 28.12.2017].

lo Gentiloni to stop the flow of illegal immigration to Italy, calling the phenomenon of “invasion”, while ships patrolling the Mediterranean and saving people from pontoons – “taxis for migrants”. The slogan: “Stop illegal immigration” (Italian *Stop immigrazione clandestina*) became one of the main messages of the League in 2016 and 2017, despite the fact that the party has been building its political position on anti-immigrant slogans for years. By threatening Italians with immigrants, the representatives of the group argue about the threat to the national and cultural identity of the state, the destruction of the economy, the tourism sector or the problem of terrorism. In the matter of the statements of *Lega Nord* politicians and its chairman, Salvini, even the Italian Roman Catholic Church took the floor. In 2015, the Episcopate of Italy condemned the League, accusing it of using demagoguery and fostering xenophobia to try to improve its ratings in electoral polls.

Inciting the inhabitants of the North, mainly using economic arguments, representatives of the League propose that the richest regions of Italy obtain a status similar to Trento-Upper Adige, which has the right to dispose of up to ninety percent of taxes levied in the region. It's enough to mention that in Lombardy, one-fifth of the GDP of whole Italy is created. Thus, one can see a strong tendency to deepen fiscal autonomy, not necessarily to create a separate state.

Of course, the Northern League is only one (but the largest) of regional organizations displaying separatist ideas and autonomous aspirations in their programmes and activities. One can even refer to the activities of the National Movement for the Liberation of the Venetian People (Italian *Movimento di Liberazione Nazionale del Popolo Veneto*), which promotes national-radical postulates proclaiming the need to dissolve the Italian Republic, establishing regional, independent states, including sovereign Venice. Similar radical entries can be heard not only in the north of Italy. For example, the Southern League (Italian *Lega Sud Ausonia*) aims to protect the interests of the south from the values that are imposed by the inhabitants of the northern areas. Among the demands there is a demand for detachment from Italy and the creation of Ausonia⁴⁵ – a name from Ausones, an ancient Roman tribe that inhabited in antiquity in central and southern Italy. The rationale of separatist and autonomous tendencies in southern Italy is similar to those formulated in the northern regions, i.e. they are mainly of an economic nature. The economic problems of the South, recession, unemployment, backwardness towards the central and northern parts of the country, evoke nationalist moods. Among the more active autonomous organizations you can also include Tuscan Autonomous Movement (Italian: *Movimento Autonomista Toscano*) and Tyrolean Autonomous Party of Trento (Italian: *Partito Autonomista Tirolese Trentino*).

In the above context, it is worth paying attention to one more important topic that must be understood as a challenge which the state is facing. Accepting the assumption

⁴⁵ Lat. *Ausonia*, the former poetic name of Italy.

that autonomy eliminates the tendency to separatism and ethnic alienation, following Witold Rewerit, is a good idea to postulate the need to guarantee the autonomy of ethnic and linguistic minorities, which, moreover, are not lacking in Italy. The researcher writes about the need to implement this idea.

[...] in the contemporary realities of an increasingly vivid sense of local and regional identity of individual ethnic and linguistic minorities. [...] A positive criterion for the implementation of the law of ethnic linguistic communities approaches the concept of regional and cultural autonomy to secure the proportionate participation of representatives of a given minorities in regional bodies, i.e. in the parliament (national and regional) and local self-government bodies⁴⁶.

National relations in a country are usually associated with the system in force in a given territory. In undemocratic systems, there are deeper divisions and differences in the protection of minority interests rather than in those based on democratic values. In theory and political practice, adherence to established principles of the democratic system counteracts decentralist tendencies – of course, with the presumption that minorities are comparable in numbers, they have equal access to power and the level of social and economic development is similar⁴⁷. The sense of justice and security, if not eliminated, certainly reduces the risk of rejection of the *status quo* and the emergence of asymmetry fostering separatist tendencies and aspirations for expanding autonomy. An important role – in the political sense – is played by the elites functioning in the state, having the ability to relieve tensions and disputes, and the shape of the political system, stability of the political scene, governance based on rational premises, not populist emotions and slogans, the level of political culture. Moreover, the analyzed issues are the result of a long and multi-faceted process influenced by the past, sense of community, identity, and national consciousness.

Conclusions

In the course of the above deliberations, the subject of separatist and autonomous tendencies in contemporary Italy was taken. Undoubtedly, the differences between the separatist and autonomous aspirations should be emphasized once again. The sources of their separateness should be seen in historical processes, as well as – as it is evident in the example of the Italian Lombardy – for economic purposes, deepening fiscal autonomy, and not the desire to create their own state. Analyzing the issue being the subject of this argument, the most important determinants of secession-related attitudes were specified. They do not, of course, exhaust the entire catalog of conditions, circumstances or factors affecting those attitudes. Therefore, the above-mentioned crises should be treated as a contribution to the discussion and in-depth research, both theoretical and

⁴⁶ W. Rewera, *Historyczne mniejszości językowe we włoskich regionach o statutach specjalnych. Rozważania o pojęciu autonomii i gwarancjach ochrony prawnej*, Lublin 2017, p. 139-140.

⁴⁷ M. Topczewska, *op. cit.*, p. 111-112.

(which would be extremely valuable) empirical. The more so because the issues discussed are characterized by timeliness, multi-faceted and incredible dynamics. As the topic of economic diversification has repeatedly been mentioned here as one of the reasons for the existence of separatist and autonomous tendencies, one can expect that in subsequent years these phenomena will be subject to rivalry and disputes, socio-political excesses, but also numerous scientific observations⁴⁸. We live in a time when the economic criterion increasingly differentiates individuals, nations, societies, and states. The division into rich and poor or as defined by David S. Landes – “winners and losers”⁴⁹ – determines the development of inter-state, international and global relations, but also has a smaller significance, i.e. intra-state differences, where the rich become richer, and the poor poorer, which stimulates the development of secession tendencies. In addition to economics, political organizations and groups are also an important factor, which in their programmes proclaim separatism and autonomy, but also put up – often in the name of cold political calculation – as defenders of the weaker. These, in turn, put in their hopes for a better tomorrow.

It is worth noting, however, that the role of the state is to provide all citizens with equal, decent living conditions and to prevent situations where territorial disintegration would contribute to the destabilization of the socio-political system. Hence, governments, in many different ways, try to limit the decentralist movements by, for example, observing the rights of ethnic and national minorities enshrined in basic laws, recognizing their rights to cultural, linguistic, economic or political autonomy, but also protecting means of electoral rights, decentralization, federalization⁵⁰. Developing an effective model in this area is not easy and fast. Moreover, the creation of a model of the functioning of a state based on regional autonomy (Misiuda-Rewera, calls Italy “Republic of autonomy”⁵¹) and universal acceptance of such a system does not mean that the demands for expanding the self-governance of regions are marginal and devoid of purpose in the broad public debate, as exemplified are Italy.

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⁴⁸ In this place, for example, it is worth noting the scientific conference on separatist movements in the modern world, which took place on May 9, 2018 at the Faculty of Political Science of the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin. The purpose of the meeting was, among others, indication of potential directions of separatist movements and the opportunities and threats resulting from this phenomenon.

⁴⁹ D.S. Landes, *Bogactwo i nędza narodów. Dlaczego jedni są tak bogaci, a inni tak ubodzy*, Warszawa 2015, p. 196.

⁵⁰ M. Topczewska, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

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Abstract: The article focuses on the autonomous and separatist pursuits that occur in present day Italy. The work was inspired by the consultative referendums of 2017 in the regions of Veneto and Lombardia. Their aim was to give the residents a chance to express their views regarding the possible expansion of the autonomy of these two administrative units. As a result of the plebiscites, a significant majority voted for the expansion of the autonomy, which might trigger the pursuit of more permissions for the regions. One has to remember that in accordance with the constitution, Italy is a unanimous and non-divisible state. However, this does not mean that presently (as well as in the future) there are no separatist and autonomous tendencies. The tendencies have historical, economical, cultural, social or political reasons. The aim of the article is to analyze these tendencies on the basis subject literature and sources.

Keywords: Italian Republic, autonomy, separatism, Italian regions, Lega Nord

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