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Regional identity and its protection on the example of the Valencian Autonomous Community

Introduction

Since the end of the 1970s, Spain has undergone a series of internal changes: political, social, economic, but also territorial. The result of these changes is growing separatist tendencies in some regions. A special case is, of course, Catalonia, which tried to declare independence in 2017. However, other autonomous communities are also following the path of Catalonia – they have not shown any interest in political independence so far. It is worth taking a look at some social phenomena that also occur in other regions and that previously appeared, e.g. in Catalonia. An interesting example is the Valencian Community. The people of this region shape their cultural and linguistic identity in opposition to both Spanish and Catalan identities. The regional authorities also formulate the priorities of the Valencian identity policy. One of them is the popularization of the regional language through the mass media.

The aim of the article is to present the status of the Valencian language and the main assumptions of the language policy of the regional government, as well as the ways of disseminating the Valencian language in public space. One of them is to support financially the media that use the regional language in their daily publications. The article will present the current situation of the Valencian language and the activity of regional authorities with regard to the Valencian-language media. The main research method will be institutional and legal analysis. This method is used, among others, to study political reality in a limited way. In this analysis, I will use the analysis of legal acts, contracts, constitutional provisions and other normative acts that regulate various political phenomena (Pięta-Szawara, 2013: 145). The area of my research interests are, therefore, various forms of activity of the government of the Autonomous Community of Valencia. In this article, I also rely on historical analysis, in its logographic (ordering facts) and genetic dimensions (searching for causes and analysis of the effects of social and polit-

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ical phenomena) (Pięta-Szawara, 2013: 154). The role of the regulator and promoter of identity ideas is played by the authorities of the Valencia region.

System analysis is also helpful, relating to the study of the influence of the media system on the political system and vice versa. Legal regulations made by the government of the Valencian Community affect the political functions of the media, the structure of the media market and the condition of journalism (Klimkiewicz, 2018: 301). Therefore, the following research questions arise in connection with the activities of the authorities: 1) What is the situation of the regional language in the region and how common is it? 2) Are the residents willing to undertake social initiatives related to the promotion of Valencian culture? 3) Do the media support these processes and to what extent? Therefore, it seems that taking up the topic of the activity of regional authorities in the area of language and media policy may show what strategies are being undertaken to consolidate Valencian regional identity.

Legal guarantees for the protection of the Valencian language

The Valencian Autonomous Community (in Valencian: *Comunitat Valenciana*) was established in 1982 by an autonomous statute. This event was preceded by the reform of the territorial system of Spain, which was carried out after the death of General Francisco Franco in 1975. In 2006, the people of the Valencian region were also recognized as historical nationalities (*nacionalidad histórica*). This term refers to regions that declare their own linguistic, cultural and community identity. The following regions have already been recognized as historical nationalities: Catalonia, Basque Country, Galicia and Andalusia, Aragon, Canary Islands, Balearic Islands (Alberto del Real Alcalá, 2008: 297). The status of historical nationality is based on the Spanish constitution. The Constitution defines Spain as “*nación de nacionalidades y regiones*” (Padres de la Constitución, 1978, Art. 2). When using the word nationality, please note that in Spanish we use two terms: *nación* and *nacionalidad*. This distinction is often difficult to translate into other languages. The term *nación* refers to the entire nation of Spain, which is indissoluble according to the Constitution. On the other hand, *nacionalidad* is a less strict term. It is used in normative acts in relation to the population that has its own language and cultural identity. However, the term *nación* cannot be used interchangeably with reference to *nacionalidad* (Biernacka, 2018: 30). As J. Alberto del Real Alcalá notes, in Spain the concept of *nación* is associated with the concept of sovereignty, but the concept of *nacionalidad* rather means national multiplicity. This diversity is not a problem, but an advantage – a guarantee of fundamental civil rights and freedoms (Alberto del Real Alcalá, 2008: 318). Thus, the specificity of Spain allows for the revival of regional cultures and languages, and the example of the autonomous community of Valencia shows that these trends have intensified in recent years.

The protection of the regional language was ensured by the autonomous statute of 1982. However, it is worth remembering that the first draft of its own autonomous statute in Valencia was prepared as early as 1931. At that time, several regions (including the Basque Country and Catalonia) put forward their proposals for greater independence, and the then republican authorities did not object. The work on the Valencian statute was interrupted by the civil war in 1936 (Mancebo Alonso, 2000: 319-340). The most recent autonomous statute was adopted in 2006. It was a modification of the previous regulations from the early 1980s. The Valencian Autonomous Community was one of the first to report its will to change. The provision for the Valencian language aroused controversy. Against this background, there was a dispute between Catalonia and the Valencian region: some citizens consider Valencian a separate language, and some believe that Valencian is a variant of the Catalan language. Regional institutions take the position that the autonomous community is distinguished by its own cultural and linguistic heritage (Academia Valenciana de la Llengua, 2006: 14). The 2006 Autonomous Statute confirmed the status of the Valencian language as a separate language and additionally established L'Acadèmia Valenciana de la Llengua – an institution dealing with Valencian standardization (Autonomía de la Comunidad Valenciana, 2006, Art. 41). Article 6 of the statute states that the regional authorities should ensure adequate resources for the use and dissemination of both Spanish and Valencian. Moreover, they ensure protection and respect for the renewal of the position of the language in the region (Autonomía de la Comunidad Valenciana, 2006). Valencian was also made an official language. The inhabitants of the region have the right to communicate in their own language in the public sphere. On the other hand, officials of the autonomous administration should know the regional language (Autonomía de la Comunidad Valenciana, 2006, Art. 40) and apply the standards set by L'Acadèmia Valenciana de la Llengua.

The popularity of the Valencian language today

The situation of the Valencian language varies greatly in the autonomous community. It can be observed that the level of understanding and common use of the language varies from province to province. In 2015, a large-scale survey was conducted on the use of the Valencian language across the region. The study covered inhabitants of different parts of the Valencian-speaking territory. The largest numbers of people who understand Valencian very well live in the regions of València (68.8%) and Alcoi-Gandia (67.9%). Much less inhabitants of the metropolitan region and the capital of the community understand the language (41.2%). Speech skills are much lower. In the two main Valencian-speaking territories, around 58% of the population speaks perfectly well, while in the city of Valencia around a quarter of the inhabitants speak the language freely. The situation of the written language is the most difficult. This skill is perfectly possessed by 36.5% of the inhabitants of the Alcoi-Gandia region, and only by 16% in the capital of the com-

munity and its vicinity (Generalitat Valenciana, 2015b: 7). It is also worth looking at the knowledge of the language in individual age groups. This is an important signal for the region's authorities, who can monitor education policy in this way. The highest percentage of people who know the Valencian language at the highest level is among young people (between 15 and 24 years of age): 80.2% of men and 84.5% of women in this age group understand the language very well, 72.2% of men and 82.1% of women can read Valencian perfectly, 60.9% of young men and 69.7% of young women speak the regional language very well and write at a similar level (respectively: 60.8% and 70.1%) (Generalitat Valenciana, 2015b: 9).

One of the most interesting elements of the study is the determination of the language proficiency level in relation to political views. It turns out that the more left-wing the respondents declared, the higher their linguistic competences were (Generalitat Valenciana, 2015b: 17). Inhabitants of the Valencian Autonomous Community learn to speak Valencian most often in their immediate vicinity, i.e. mainly from family members (52.7%), while to write and read mainly at school (48.2% and 60.7% respectively). The results concerning the use of the Valencian language online are interesting. Only a small proportion of the population living in the Valencian-speaking region uses the Valencian language on the Internet. It is estimated to be around 18% of the population. However, the situation also varies in different parts of the territory of the autonomous community. In electronic correspondence, between 15% and 19% of respondents mainly use the regional language. In turn, the inhabitants of the Castelló region most often use the Valencian language in social media (on Internet forums, blogs, chats, etc.) – 37.2% (only 1.4% of the people use only the regional language for this activity) (Generalitat Valenciana, 2015b: 24).

The people of the autonomous community of Valencia were also asked to express their views on the situation of the language today and in the future. Only 5% of the respondents believed that the Valencian language is used very often today, while 40% believed that it is still an uncommon situation. 48% of the respondents were of the opinion that the level of language dissemination was the same compared to the past. 43% of the respondents believed that this level should be increased, and 11% – decreased. From the perspective of preserving cultural and linguistic heritage, the results on the future of the language are important. 30% of the respondents believed that the position of the Valencian language would increase in the autonomous community, but at the same time 26% of the respondents believed that it would be decreasing. 38% of the people thought that this situation would not change (Generalitat Valenciana, 2015b: 26).

It is worth mentioning how often the Valencian language is used in public administration, which is obligatory to promote the cultural and linguistic heritage of the region. 56.7% of the officials have a perfect understanding of the Valencian language, 26% speak it very well on a daily basis, 43.1% read it very well, but only 14.8% write in Valencian flawlessly. These indicators can be compared with the percentage of the people

employed in the offices of the autonomous community who do not speak the regional language: 0.2% do not understand it at all, 4.2% do not speak it at all, 1.9% cannot read Valencian, and 14.7% cannot write in it. The latter indicator is comparable to the percentage of the people who can write very well in Valencian (Generalitat Valenciana, 2016: 5). The linguistic situation in the public space is therefore not well-established to speak of stability. The officials themselves, when asked whether they should use the regional language more often in their work, mostly answered yes – 69.9%. The main argument for using Valencian in public administration was: “for attending in the language in which they speak to us” – 37.3% (Generalitat Valenciana, 2016: 24). Thus, a social need to communicate with the residents in their native language was noticed. Among those who saw no need to use the Valencian language more frequently in public administration (18%), 30.8% believed that the appropriate level had already been achieved and that it was not necessary to further promote the regional language, and 35.9% believed that the inhabitants of the community speak Valencian is simply rare, so it is not a popular language (Generalitat Valenciana, 2016: 24).

Over the years, the popularity of the language among the inhabitants of the community has gradually increased. In 1986, 77.12% of the respondents declared that they understood Valencian, and in 2011 – 84.78%. In 1986, 49.49% of the region's citizens spoke Valencian, and in 2011 – 51.18%. The greatest progress was made in the field of reading and writing: in 1986, 24.36% of the inhabitants read and only 7.03% wrote in Valencian, and in 2011 it was 58.35% and 31.77%, respectively (Generalitat Valenciana, 2015a: 5). Therefore, one may suspect that the official language policy of the government of the autonomous community has a real impact on society.

Official surveys on the knowledge of the regional language are carried out irregularly among the inhabitants of the Autonomous Community of Valencia. It is difficult to make a real comparison of the changes that have taken place in the last few years. Baròmetre Municipal d'Opinió Ciutadana conducts research of this type more frequently on other topics related to the life of the region's inhabitants. Data from April 2019 indicate a constant trend in the use of the regional language on a daily basis (N = 2.301). 2.7% of the respondents use Valencian as their first language, 85.4% of the respondents mainly use Castilian (official Spanish), 8.5% alternating both languages, 3.4% other languages (this probably applies to the situation of immigrants in the region) (Ajuntament de València, 2019).

Media and the Valencian language

Immediately after the creation of the Autonomous Community of Valencia, the regional authorities adopted the law on the use and teaching of the Valencian language (Autonomía de la Comunidad Valenciana, 1983). Citizens' rights in terms of access to the media in both Spanish and Valencian were identified from the outset. In particular, the

act provides for the obligation to use the regional language in public administration, education and the media. The tasks of the government of the Valencian Community include: ensuring the presence of the regional language on radio and television and other media under the Generalitat, but also encouraging and supporting these media to use the Valencian language widely. Another task is the promotion of artistic and cultural events and literature in the mother tongue (Autonomía de la Comunidad Valenciana, 1983, Art. 25). The law guarantees the right to be informed by the media and by the authorities, both in Spanish and Valencian, on equal rights and in various forms: oral and written (Autonomía de la Comunidad Valenciana, 1983, Art. 26). Pursuant to the provisions of the autonomous statute and the law on the use and teaching of the Valencian language, the government of the region is obliged to support the financial development and activity of the Valencian media. The problem of regional media in Valencia was the Catalanization process. The activities of the Valencian authorities were to prevent this process by granting subsidies to those editorial offices that tried to use Valencian in their publications. It seems that investing in the development of the regional language in the public space is an important move from the perspective of shaping the sense of regional identity. One of the important players in the Valencian-language media market is the regional public television. In the community of Valencia, the audience watches TV an average of 209 minutes a day (the average for all of Spain is 213) (Asociación para la Investigación de Medios de Comunicación, AIMC, 2020: 19) Until 2013, a public broadcaster, Canal Nou and Nou Ràdio, operated on the media market. The latter medium had a small share in the overall media market – between 0.1% and 0.2% in 1999-2013 (AIMC, 2020: 32). Its place was taken by the radio station À Punt, which began official broadcasting at the end of 2017. Contemporary television À Punt started in 2018 and replaced the Canal Nou, which was part of the public broadcaster in Valencia. This broadcaster was closed in 2013 due to financial embezzlement committed by the management of regional public media (Peris Blanes, 2014: 195-234).

Valencian public media emerged later than Basque, Catalan or Galician ones. Canal Nou started airing in 1989. At the beginning of its operation, Canal Nou enjoyed quite high average viewership. Compared to other autonomous broadcasters, it came out quite high in the rankings. In 2003, its share in the regional media market was as high as 18.2%. However, in the years leading up to its closure, a sharp decline can be observed – to 4.6% in 2013. In 2016, the new Valencian parliament passed an act establishing the Valencian Media Corporation. It is this institution that currently manages, among others public TV channel À Punt. The new TV broadcaster started its operations with a small market share – 0.4% of accumulated daily viewership and 1.3% share among TV broadcasters in the region (AIMC, 2020: 37, 41). As in the whole of Spain, a decline in interest in audiovisual media in favour of the Internet can be observed for several years. In Valencia, in 2003, the average TV time was 261 minutes a day. Nowadays, it is over 50 minutes less (AIMC, 2020: 38). Public radio operates under the same

name. This broadcaster replaced two previously functioning stations: Nou Ràdió and Si Nou Ràdio (radio formatted for music and cultural broadcasts). À Punt Radio has been broadcasting exclusively in the Valencian language since 2017.

One of the most popular dailies in the Valencia region is *Levante-El Mercantil Valenciano* (between 0.8% and 0.5% of the audience in 2003-2019). It has been published since 1872 and belongs to the large publishing group Prensa Ibérica. Some sections in the Valencian language appear in the journal. Its website is one of the most visited by Internet users in Spain (1.2% of unique users in the last 30 days in 2019) (AIMC, 2020: 64). Its main competitors include another regional daily, *Las Provincias*, whose profile can be described as conservative, regionalist and anti-Catalan. This trend was particularly marked since the 1970s, when María Consuelo Reyna became the head of the journal (Mateu, Domínguez, 2011: 69-87). The editorial office clearly promotes values related to the Valencian culture and is opposed to linking the regional movement with Catalan interests (Iranzo, 2014: 535-544). It also belongs to a commercial publisher – the Vocento group, but the journal has regular columns in the Valencian language. The journal has been published on the market since 1866. Its popularity rates among regional press titles are between 0.6% and 0.3% in 2003-2019 (AIMC, 2020: 46). An electronic Valencian-Spanish translator can be used on the websites of both newspapers. The third important daily is *El Periódico Mediterráneo*. From 1938, it has been published in the province of Castellón, and at the very beginning of its existence, it was closely associated with Prensa del Movimiento. Over time, its editorial line has evolved and is now a less ideological journal. It has its electronic version in Valencian (*Mediterráneo en valencià*). Its popularity has been constant for years – approx. 0.2% of readers per day (AIMC, 2020: 46). The website of this journal is one of the most popular websites in the region. It is estimated that it has an average of 80,942 unique users per day (Oficina de Justificación de la Difusión, OJD, 2020). The first place (83,783 unique users per day) is taken by an online newspaper, mainly presenting the news from Valencia, *Valencia Plaza* (valencia-plaza.com) (OJD, 2020). This journal was created in 2010 and publishes articles in Valencian and Spanish. As in other regions of Spain, Valencia's media offer is very diverse. However, the media dominate and present only a small part of the content in the native language. In the press sector, these are the Spanish national dailies: *El Mundo*, *El País*, *ABC* and *La Razón*. It should be added that the press in Catalan also reaches Valencia, such as *El Punt Avui*, *La Vanguardia* or *El Periódico* (but also, for example, at the pages of *Levante-El Mercantil Valenciano* there are articles in Catalan), which may make it difficult to stabilize the Valencian language in confrontation with large publishing houses (Beltran, 2009: 315-328).

As in Catalonia, Galicia and the Basque Country, also in Valencia the autonomous government decided to subsidize the media publishing in the regional language. The main purpose of this kind of help is to spread the Valencian language in everyday life. One of the last projects from June 2020 provides that both audiovisual media and the

printed press, as well as Internet media and news agencies, can apply for funding. Emphasis was placed on the development of children's and youth magazines in the Valencian language. For each type of media, there are specific regional language content requirements. Television and radio should, therefore, broadcast at least 6 hours of programmes a day in the Valencian language between 8 a.m. and midnight. To apply for a subsidy, they must be operational at least one year prior to submitting the grant application. On the other hand, the printed daily press should publish at least 15 pages a week in Valencian, with the exception of advertising. Magazines for children and adolescents wishing to benefit from a grant of the regional government must publish their entire content in Valencian with a minimum circulation of 500 copies and appear at least four times a year. On the other hand, Internet portals are required to publish at least 30 new pieces of information every week in Valencian. The requirements for Internet radio or television are the same as for all audiovisual media. News agencies can count on financial support if they deliver news from Valencia to clients located in the autonomous community and, of course, entirely in Valencian (minimum 30 new pieces of information per week). A score is assigned to each condition, on which the subsidy is then calculated (Generalitat Valenciana, 2020). In the previous competition in 2018, the total subsidy for each sector was: EUR 600,000 for radio, EUR 400,000 for television, EUR 900,000 for the printed press and EUR 900,000 for the digital press (Conselleria de Educació, Investigació, Cultura y Deporte, 2018, Art. 2).

Conclusions

The Valencian Autonomous Community is an example of another region in Spain whose government has launched an intensive policy of developing its cultural and linguistic heritage. Such actions are an expression of the pluralism of Spanish society. Diversity is inherent both in the tradition of the inhabitants of the Iberian Peninsula and in the formula of the political system. In comparison to other regions, Valencia is no exception, but rather a confirmation of the rule that every citizen has the right to emanate the values in which he or she was brought up. Moreover, the state has a duty to facilitate the development of an environment that is friendly and open to a diverse culture.

When answering the research questions posed at the beginning of this article, it should be stated:

Q1) The situation of the regional language is not as good as in other communities with a strong regional identity (Catalonia, Basque Country). The level of knowledge of Valencian indicates rather passive use of this language by the inhabitants of the community. It is surprising that the relatively low percentage of people use this language as the first one. The region has received all competences in the field of language policy, so the dissemination of the regional language should be high enough

for the majority of the population to use it willingly and in everyday life. The authorities undertake initiatives related to both the dissemination of Valencian in education and in administration, and in recent years, more and more often, they also financially support the Valencian media. The inhabitants of the autonomous community are divided in their opinions on the necessity to use the regional language. This is probably related to the great diversity of the community itself. Some parts of the region are inhabited by Valencian-speaking people, and in the regional capital, the majority are Spanish-speakers. This situation is also probably the result of labour migrations from other parts of Spain.

- Q2) The statistics suggest that the inhabitants of the Community appreciate the various initiatives taken by the community authorities in the field of language promotion, but they moderately improve their language skills on their own. In most cases, language education ends with the general, formal education system. The largest number of examples of people with the highest level of knowledge of Valencian can be observed in the group of pupils and students. I also observed the use of media in the Valencian language at a constant, but still low level.
- Q3) Initiatives to popularize the presence of the Valencian language in public space appear in the media. However, they are not of a common nature. There is a lack of media that focuses on publishing or broadcasting materials exclusively and entirely in Valencian. Nevertheless, virtually every press title or radio or TV station presents content in a regional language and does it periodically. In the activities of the media, initiatives related to the popularization of the Valencian language can be seen, but they are still treated as an addition to the basic information and entertainment function.

The case of the Valencian community is quite special. It is the region with a great cultural and linguistic potential; it differs from the Castilian part, although it has not shown any separatist tendencies so far. Recently, the authorities have actually used this potential as an element that binds together and creates a community identity. The regional government, following the example of other historical regions, saw that citizens may also have needs to articulate their expectations and to be informed in the regional language. However, observing the regularity of the activities of the Catalan authorities in the field of subsidies, it can be expected that also in the media operating in the Autonomous Community of Valencia, the regional language will become a permanent element of publications in the mainstream media. The decision to relaunch a public autonomous broadcaster broadcasting only in Valencian is the first step towards this goal.

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Abstract: The article systematizes the knowledge about the Valencian Autonomous Community and the activities of its authorities in the field of language policy. The author has reviewed the legal solutions strengthening the status of a regional language in public space and discussed the main laws that emphasize the importance of the language as a cultural heritage of Valencia. The article also presents statistical data on the situation and ways of using the language by the inhabitants of Valencia. The last part of the article discusses the Valencian-language media market. The regional government financially supports the presence of the language in public space. The position of the Valencian language remains constant, albeit low, both among the population and in the media. Therefore, the subsidies proposed by the government of the Valencian Community should change this situation and strengthen the presence of the Valencian language among the population of the region.

Keywords: regional identity, autonomous community, language policy, Spain, media system

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