

SUMMARY OF THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION ENTITLED
“PADANIA. FROM THE SOURCES OF IDEA TO AN ATTEMPT
TO CREATE A NEW NATION IN NORTHERN ITALY”
BY MAŁGORZATA MARIA FIJAŁ
PREPARED UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF
PROF. JOANNA SONDEL-CEDARMAS

The doctoral dissertation entitled “Padania. From the Sources of Ideas to an Attempt to Create a New Nation in Northern Italy” deals with the concept of Padania, understood as an example of (ethno)nationalism which sought to create a separate nation in northern Italy. The main aim of the dissertation was to analyse the origins and development of the concept of Padania with a particular emphasis being placed on its ethnic and cultural background. The main intention was to supply a detailed identification and verification of 1) the determinants of the concept and its unique aspects; 2) the factors and symbolism influencing the process of the construction and reconstruction of Padanian identity; 3) the importance of Padania in modern Italy and; 4) the direction of the evolution of the concept.

The Lombard laborer and would-be doctor, Umberto Bossi, founded the Northern League in 1989, from the alliance of the Lombard League with other autonomist groups. He set himself the goal of awakening pride in regional belonging among the population of northern Italy. Using historical memory, Celtic mythology, and tribal culture, he sought to emphasize the uniqueness of the cultural community of the territory of Padania - which, however, is in many aspects more imaginary than real. It should be emphasized that the area of Padania is far from homogeneous whether considered culturally, linguistically, economically, geographically or historically.

The project of separating the northern regions of Italy from the rest of the country, despite having a large number of supporters, a political base, and the support of some Italian intellectuals, turned out to be impossible to implement in the form proposed. The concept of creating a new nation and state in northern Italy, one independent of the position of the central authorities in Rome, failed. The question concerning the motives for this state of affairs and others - about the conditions and character of Padania, and the quality of its relations with the united Italian state, are the starting point for this dissertation. The research question which set the direction of the analysis not only concerns the reasons why the aspirations of the northern

Italian (ethno)nationalists gathered around the Northern League failed, but also the specificity of the Padanian concept: what is it and what are its formative influences? As part of the problem formulated in this way, detailed questions were posed and grouped into several categories:

- 1) on a theoretical basis: what is Padania? Is it a geographical concept, a cultural or political entity? Are there any grounds for its existence as a nation?;
- 2) connected to its functioning: where should the sources of this concept be found? How did intellectual and cultural elites influence the development of ideas? What did the Padanian separatists expect and strive for? Can the Northern League alone be considered the *spiritus movens* of this concept?; Why has the party abandoned its secessionist demands over the years?;
- 3) a consideration of the factors determining the state of affairs: what are the determinants and conditions of Padania? Is it a question of place of birth, blood ties, or rather the language, ethnicity, culture, geography, or self-identification of those concerned?;
- 4) in terms of the nature of relations with other actors: is it an exclusive or inclusive phenomenon? Would the Padanians be able to accept “strangers”, albeit those who identify with their idea? What are the consequences for the Italian socio-political system of the development of this concept?

The main hypothesis refers to the specificity of the concept and assumes that Padania is an imaginary community that, based on cultural premises, was to play a fundamental role in the implementation of the political goals of the Northern League. This led to the mythologization and instrumentalization of the original cultural idea by subordinating the historical narrative to the needs of socialization and the current political strategy of the party. The first of the sub-hypotheses posits that the example of Padania shows that a geographical area can become the basis for claims of a political and economic nature. The second is that the uniqueness of Padania was constituted to a greater extent by internal rather than external conditions. The third assumes that the project of Padanian ethnonationalism, popularized by the Northern League and political and cultural elites in the last decade of the 20th century and motivated by a sense of ethnic separateness and cultural issues, was an expression of the crisis of Italian national identity. Another points to Padania as a unique example of the phenomenon of the transformation of regionalist ideas into separatist ones in comparison with other known movements of this nature in Southern Europe.

The dissertation is an attempt at a synthetic approach to the issues of Padania against the background of the history of the united Italian state from the interdisciplinary perspective. A cultural and political science approach was used, based on the foundations of both cultural and political anthropology, as well as history and the sociological sciences. The perspective of the nation adopted in the work largely refers to the modernist paradigm. This means that it situates the concept of the nation in the socio-cultural and political sphere and considers it a contemporary creation. The concept of (ethno)nationalism was recognized as both a social movement with its own cultural background, but also as an idea that legitimizes this movement. The nation is understood here as a form of an imagined community, constituted around key cultural values, such as language, tradition or customs, but also a common historical memory. It includes, apart from the memory of historical events, also myths and legends about the community's past. It is characterized by the existence of a social bond and a common sense of belonging, but at the same time striving to achieve self-realization on the political level.

The time caesura adopted in the work, covering the years 1979-2013, highlights the contemporary nature of the research, although it was difficult to omit the historical context, considered necessary for the logic of the argument. The specificity of the Padanian concept expresses a thought-provoking connection with both the 19th-century risorgimento movement or the activities of the medieval Lombard League, but also with the already prehistoric expansion of Celtic and, subsequently, Langobard peoples in northern Italy. Without these references, it would be impossible to comprehensively address the issues of the contemporary concept of Padania concept. Similarly, it was not easy to ignore the events and phenomena of *hic et nunc* confirming the dynamics of the analyzed concept. The time frame for the considerations is, on the one hand, the turn of the 1970s and 1980s, i.e. the beginning of the alliance of northern Italian autonomist movements. The closing date is the date when leadership of the Northern League was assumed by Matteo Salvini and the independence idea was ultimately abandoned.

The structure of the work, which corresponds to the methodological assumptions adopted, is created by chapters that are also important areas of the implemented research strategy. The work opens with Chapter I, dealing with the sources of the concept of Padania against the background of the formation of the idea of the state and nation in the period of the unifying risorgimento movement of the mid-nineteenth century, without which it is difficult to imagine the growth of later (ethno)nationalist or separatist tendencies. The primary role is played by the memory and interpretation of the history of historical Italy and the ideological programs of individual visionaries of a united state, whose idea of the future of Italy was based

on federalist or confederalist thought (Vincenzo Gioberti, Cesare Balbo, Giuseppe Ferrari, Carlo Cattaneo).

Chapter II indicates the sources of the modern concept of Padania, taking into account the panoramic socio-political situation of northern Italy from the unification to the present day. Endogenous and exogenous cultural, religious, political, social, and economic conditions are also discussed in a synthetic way - recognized as indirectly influencing the dynamics of the development of "Padanianness".

A separate chapter in the formation of the concept of Padania was undoubtedly written by the Northern League for the Independence of Padania. The circumstances of the creation of this party, its development, program and role are discussed in Chapter III. The instrumental attempt to achieve self-realization on the political level by League politicians, based on cultural premises and the way of using the cultural community in the political project of the party, allows Padania to not only be defined as a cultural concept but also as a political one.

Chapter IV analyses the vision of the new state and nation with a particular emphasis on the organizational structure of Padania, created as part of the political activity of the Northern League. Actions taken by the party to foster the creation of national identity are indicated, such as the creation of an independent parliament and government or constitutional proposals, as well as nation-forming elements - choosing a capital, national symbols (flag, anthem, coin) and popular and sports culture.

Chapter V focuses on the charismatic leadership of Umberto Bossi, the legendary founder and leader of the Northern League (in the years 1991-2012), and at the same time the father of the idea of "the Padanian nation".

The next chapter, number VI, analyzes the symbolism of the Padanian myth in the political discourse of the League. It presents the beginnings of the independence of the northern Italian community related to the activities of the medieval Lombard League. The leitmotiv of her activity - the legendary oath of the northern Italian communes in Pontida and the Battle of Legnano - was considered the first key cultural artefact and the starting point for identifying the sources around which the contemporary provincial Padanian identity was shaped based on tribal rituals. Over the centuries, the events of the Middle Ages were not only an important element in the collective consciousness, but also in artistic creativity. Hence, this chapter also presents the artistic use of the motif of the medieval Lombard League as a symbol of the struggle for national unity in the risorgimento period. In the context of the symbolism of the cultural identity of the northern Italian community, the myth-making role of Italy's longest and largest river, the Po, was also analyzed. An important part is also the inclusion

of selected elements of Padanian/Northern League rhetoric.

Chapter VII focuses on aspects related to the development of the concept of Padania as an attempt to create a “pseudo-nation” in the North of Italy, taking into account selected factors determining the Padanian sense of identity. The subject of discussion is essentially the cultural premises inherent in the concept of “invented tradition”, based on socio-historical experience and used by the League to create the alleged “northern cultural community”, such as ethnicity, territory, as well as dialect and religion.

The final chapter attempts to analyze the ideological dimension of the concept by indicating the various dimensions of its perception and creation by the elites, as well as individual ideologues and intellectuals, such as Gianfranco Miglio, Gilberto Oneto, Giancarlo Pagliarini, Mario Borghezio, Roberto Calderoli or the secretary of the League in 2012-2013, Roberto Maroni. This part presents the participation, patterns of behavior, role, and fundamental influence of the elites, both cultural and political, on the process of the evolution of concepts and the formation of attitudes and ideas of Padania in society.