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On the Emergence of Political Identity in the Czech Mass Media: The Case of the Democratic Party of Sudetenland

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Abstract: Six days after the dissolution of Czechoslovakia on 6th January 1993, an article appeared in the Czech national daily *Rudé právo*. It reported two events – a meeting of the preparatory committee of the Democratic Party of Sudetenland (Cz. *Demokratická strana Sudety*) and a subsequent news conference given by its chairman, Jaroslav Blümel. The party and its chairman were previously almost unknown to the public. The two events, however, turned out to be politically significant. What Blümel had said was reported in most of the Czech mass media, and elicited public reactions from major Czech politicians.

The materials we use in this paper include most of the articles in Czech national newspapers during the period which dealt with J. Blümel and the Democratic Party of Sudetenland (DPS), together with a relevant TV programme. We focus on how the political identity of the DPS was established and contested in the Czech mass media. The category ‘DPS’ was to begin with almost inter-subjectively empty. We demonstrate how this was fleshed out by binding to it the views, intentions and actions of its incumbents and its opponents. We find that in the case of the DPS the ‘fleshing out’ was by no means a consensual matter; Blümel and his political opponents never converged on a common definition of the DPS.

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Introduction

In this paper we investigate the emergence of the identity of a political party – the Democratic Party of Sudetenland (Cz. *Demokratická strana Sudety*) – in the Czech mass media. We begin with an assumption that political identity can be treated as a ‘membership category’ and analysed using techniques of ethnomethodology, in which the concept originated [e.g. Sacks 1992, Jayyusi 1984, Hester and Eglin 1997, Psathas 1997]. According to membership category analysis (MCA) ‘membership categories’ are constituted by ‘category bound predicates’, which may include activities, dispositions to act, aims, beliefs, and values [see Watson 1978]. Categories are organised by members in collections, and together with the rules of application they become ‘membership category devices’ [Sacks 1972]. Social and ethnic identities have been analysed as membership categories previously [e.g. Moerman 1974, Watson 1983, Nekvapil 1997]; this paper extends the approach to the domain of politics. The domain matters – political parties are usually unique agencies. There is, for instance, only one Conservative and Unionist Party in the

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UK. We could assume that political identity is a category with one member only, but it is also possible to allow predicates to bind to proper names designating political parties. The Democratic Party of Sudetenland (DPS) was certainly a situated collectivity and as such it falls within the scope of MCA [cf. Hester and Eglin 1997: 3]. With this proviso, and for convenience, we will not just treat political identities as categories, but also refer to them in that way.

Much of the work on membership categories has been on relatively crystallised categories (such as ‘mother’, ‘baby’) and how these are used in talk. We are dealing with a complementary problem here: how does the social identity of a new political body – a new category – emerge? Such a category obviously cannot be static: it has to be produced, changed and used in new contexts. This typically happens in discourse and, as we shall see, it often involves arguments about which predicates should contribute to the identity. Sacks addressed a similar problem in his classic ‘hot-rodder’ paper [cf. Sacks 1979]. (From *our* perspective a ‘hot-rodder’ is a young person who drives souped-up and customised cars.) Sacks was not actually concerned with how the category emerged, but rather with its relationship to other applicable categories (such as ‘teenager’) and with who ‘owned’ and ‘administered’ the category application. We shall nevertheless borrow Sacks’s term, and characterise our problem as in part concerning the *administration* of an emergent category.

A new political agency does not emerge in a vacuum. Its relationships to other agencies – contemporary or historical ones – may be an important practical consideration in establishing its political identity. We have observed this to be the case in political mass media debates in the UK which involved Sinn Fein – the participants’ focal concern was the relationship between the Sinn Fein and the Irish Republican Army [Leudar 1998]. According to MCA, participants in talk organise categories in, for instance, ‘collections’, ‘classes’, and ‘relational pairs’. We cannot say in advance of an investigation with which existing political bodies the participants will associate the emerging DPS, nor how they will formulate the relationships. These are practical problems for the participants to address in talk. Our main concern was to establish and make explicit how the participants jointly ‘administered’ relationships between categories.

Our main interest is therefore in how categories and the relationships between them emerge as interactive achievements. The important aspect of our study is that we investigate the formation of political identity in the mass media – in TV debates, news conferences and newspaper articles. We make use of the concept of a ‘distributed discursive network’ [Leudar 1995, 1998; Nekvapil and Leudar 1998]. This concept is easy to define as ‘conversation’, but it draws our attention to the following observations. Politicians speaking on a theme in the mass media frequently address other politicians who are not present in the studio, at a news conference, or a briefing. The mass media are networked (newspapers report what has been said on the radio or TV and people ‘on the air’ refer to newspaper reports) and both political events and their reports are often loosely duplicated. Political challenges made in the mass media are therefore likely to be heard and responded to (providing, of course, that the opponent has access to the mass media). This means that even opponents who do not wish to be seen meeting face to face can argue in public; sometimes, it may in fact be impossible to establish with any certainty that two politicians are responding to each other. In other words, politicians can engage each other in public without entering into direct communication, which would entail recognising each other as communicative partners. We will demonstrate that the indirect engagement

possible in the discursive networks was one means whereby the DPS was ‘dealt with’ but denied political status. We shall not, however, describe here the actual network in which the identity of DPS emerged [for details see Nekvapil and Leudar 1998].

It is clear that we are not investigating the emergence of situated categories in ‘conversation’. Arguments in discursive networks are obviously not exactly like arguments in ‘conversation’, especially if we compare their sequential structures and turn-taking. We shall see, however, that MCA formulated in the analysis of conversations is useful in analysing social identity in the mass media [see also Francis and Hart 1997].

Blühmel Network

The following short article appeared in the Czech national daily *Rudé právo* on 6/1/1993.¹

RP/6/1/93²

DP of Sudetenland wants to cancel Beneš decrees

Pilsen (vh) – The cancellation of the so-called Beneš decrees is being demanded by the preparatory committee of the Democratic Party of Sudetenland, which met on Tuesday in Pilsen. The change in the stance of this committee to the past property of displaced Germans is clear. The best solution, as the chairman of the preparatory committee Jaroslav Blühmel told journalists after the meeting, would be, we are told, if it was returned ((to the owners)). If the Czech government is not so generous, the original owners are even ready to buy back their factories.

The report was one of the first mentions of the DPS and J. Blühmel in *Rudé právo*. Like the readers of *Rudé právo* we have therefore a unique chance to witness the emergence of the identity of a new political organisation in the mass media. Leudar [1998] reported on how the political identity of the Sinn Fein and its spokesperson Martin McGuinness was contested in the British mass media (Was he representing a political party aiming for peace or fronting a terrorist organisation?). That ‘contest’, however, involved an attempt to *change* radically an already crystallised political identity. Our aim here is to document how the identity of the DPS was *formed* in the mass media.

So what did the article RP/6/1/93 say about the DPS? The first predicate bound to the DPS was the goal to cancel ‘Beneš Decrees’. The headline formulated this as a DPS ‘want’, the first sentence as a ‘demand’ DPS had made. The headline made a claim about a disposition of the DPS; the article warranted this ascription by reporting what the ‘preparatory committee of the DPS’ demanded. This reporting strategy – disposition-claims by a journalist, warranted by a speech report – is not unique to Czech newspapers. We have also observed it being used in British national newspapers [Leudar 1995, 1998].

¹) We mainly use here articles from *Rudé právo* because of space limitations. This choice is arbitrary but *Rudé právo* gave the DPS affair the widest coverage. We did collect articles on the DPS from all other Czech national papers [for details see Nekvapil and Leudar 1998], and we found that the coverage was very similar. We do use, however, materials from other newspapers when their presentation of the DPS differs from or extends that of *Rudé právo*. All the Czech materials were translated into English by Ivan Leudar. Jiří Nekvapil moderated the translations. We only present here English translations of the original Czech transcripts and of the newspaper articles. All the analysis was, however, conducted using the originals. (On the general situation of the Czech newspapers see [Nekvapil 1996].)

²) In the headings of the news reports, the initials in capitals identify the newspaper, the numerals the date of publication (RP = *Rudé právo*; HN = *Hospodářské noviny*).

The Beneš Decrees are a sensitive issue in the Czech Republic and demanding their cancellation may have been one reason why national papers took notice of the DPS. *Rudé právo* presupposed knowledge of the Beneš decrees, but it described them subsequently as the basis on which ‘Sudetan Germans lost their property after the war and had to leave Czech territory’ (see RP/12/1/1993 below). Cancelling the decrees would be a necessary condition for returning the confiscated property. The confiscated property is indeed the theme of the article – the journalist VH reported that the DPS

- was concerned with the return of the confiscated property (lines 4-5),
- would prefer the return of property (‘best solution... would be if ...’, lines 5-6), and
- had privileged knowledge of the displaced Germans’ preferences (‘the original owners are even ready to buy back their factories’, lines 7-8).

Note that the journalist VH did not herself simply define the DPS. Instead, she presented it in the voice of its representative J. Blümel. *He* declared the preference, concern and knowledge, not the journalist. The assessment that the stance of DPS had changed was, however, presented in the journalist’s own voice.

The journalist VH also told her readers that the DPS was just coming into being – it had a ‘preparatory committee’. In the Czech context this formulation afforded two inferences: that the DPS was not yet recognised as a *political* party, and that public support for the DPS was probably small (since only a body with more than 1,000 active supporters could register as a political party in the Czech Republic).

The article placed the DPS in Pilsen, and so it specified the territory of the party’s current activities. Pilsen happens to be the centre of a region bordering Germany which once had a strong German community. The *Rudé právo* article could have been read to imply that the DPS was ethnically aligned – the predicates bound to the DPS jointly afforded the inference that the party had links with the displaced Sudetan Germans. The activities of the DPS were presented in *Rudé právo* in terms of current (democratic) political discourse, and so arguably as legitimate. This was not so in all the papers. All that is necessary is to compare the headlines of the corresponding news reports:

- **DP of Sudetenland wants to cancel Beneš Decrees** (*Rudé právo* – the DPS was presented as a political subject.)
- **Sudetan Germans want property** (*Mladá fronta Dnes* – the DPS was presented as an ethnic grouping.)
- **Sudetans (Cz. *Sudeťáci*) in Pilsen** (*Svobodné slovo* – the DPS was presented as an ethnic grouping using the term of abuse *Sudeťáci*).

This means that the ethnic connection of the DPS, implicit in *Rudé právo*, was explicit and foregrounded in other national papers. The DPS was an *ethnic* organisation of Sudetan Germans. We shall see below that Blümel denied any such alignment. His problem was not unique: representatives of Sinn Fein had to dissociate it in public perception from the IRA [see Leudar 1998]. Blümel had to dissociate the DPS from organisations generally perceived by Czech politicians as antagonistic. So one problem a new political agency has in establishing its identity is to manage its relationships to the other political bodies, and this involves administering a collection of categories in discourse.

Let us summarise the formulation of DPS by *Rudé právo* and other Czech national newspapers so far. It aimed to get the ‘Beneš Decrees’ cancelled and the confiscated

property returned. It was presented as an ethnically aligned party or even as an ethnic organisation. Can we say here which of these predicates was crucial to the DPS identity, and were any of them just incidental? We shall see that this was a matter for the participants to resolve.

Three voices were used in the article to achieve the binding. The voice of the journalist assessed the party or rather its preparatory committee. The voices of the preparatory committee of the DPS and of its representative J. Blümel avowed the party's aims, preferences and knowledge. The use of three voices should not however obscure the fact that it was the journalist who administered the category DPS in *Rudé právo*. There were relatively few occasions when the DPS could publicly speak for itself.

The next time the *Rudé právo* reader would hear about the DPS and Jaroslav Blümel was in the following report five days later.

RP/11/1/1993

What ((to do)) with criminality, Germans and Moravia

Prague (zs) – Ten guests on the Sunday programme 'From the political scene' tried to deal with the problematic of Romanies, the criminality in Northern Bohemia, the possible return of Germans into the Sudetenland, and the question of the standing of Moravia.

((the lines dealing with the problematic of Romanies omitted.))

On the theme of the possible return of Sudetan Germans also spoke Jaroslav Blümel – the chairman of Democratic Party of Sudetenland, which is not yet even registered. He said that their goal was to make healthier what was once the territory of Sudetenland, which today, according to him, has the greatest criminality and ill health, and to re-evaluate the question of returning the property of Germans – so guaranteeing the property to those who currently own it.

((the lines dealing with the standing of Moravia omitted.))

The journalist ZS presented J. Blümel as 'the chairman of the DPS', which was, however, 'not yet even registered'. So again, the provisional political status of DPS was kept in view in *Rudé právo*, as it was in most other national newspapers.

The identity of the DPS was further developed in this article by reporting what Blümel himself publicly avowed about the DPS. One aim he declared was to 're-evaluate' the current position on returning the property of Germans. Somewhat paradoxically, this would, according to him, now guarantee the property of current Czech owners. The first *Rudé právo* article (RP/6/1/93) mentioned only that the DPS aimed for a property settlement. The DPS now entertains the possibility that this could involve the return of the former German owners. This would alarm many Czechs, as we shall document below. Not surprisingly these two aims turned out to have been focal in the definition of the DPS in the eyes of the Czech public.

Rudé právo was the only newspaper which reported Blümel saying that the DPS aimed to 'make healthier what was once the territory of Sudetenland' (and actually expressed what this presupposes, that the territory was in a terrible state).³ This aim of the DPS was, as we shall see, *not* taken up subsequently by Blümel's Czech political opponents. This predicate was not contested, it was treated as irrelevant and simply ignored.

³) 'Bringing health' to a territory is clearly itself a categorised activity – it could concretely range from planting trees to closing factories.

So we have seen that the DPS was aligned by the mass media to Sudetan Germans explicitly and in terms of its aims. By focusing its activities on Sudetenland, the party was re-establishing this area as a distinct territory and in need of care. A report in *Hospodářské noviny* three days later is relevant. It presented even the founding of the DPS as disreputable (line 1-2).

HN/13/1/1993

The Assembly of Germans in Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia distances itself from the attempt to establish a political party to protect the interests of Germans in Czech Republic. This was said in an interview for ČTK by the president of this organisation, Ervin Šolc. In his view, it is nonsensical that the word 'Sudetenland' should appear in the name of such party, as it does in the case of the Democratic Party of Sudetenland being established in Pilsen.

HN/13/1/1993 used the voice of 'the Assembly of Germans in Czech, Moravia and Silesia' to attack the DPS. Its representative Šolc was reported to have rejected any need for an autonomous *political party* for Germans in the Czech Republic, and the use of the term 'Sudetenland' in its name. This is significant: *Hospodářské noviny* did not attack the DPS in its own voice but instead used a representative of an organisation of *German* residents in Czech Republic. The attack was in the voice of a group one might expect to be an ally of the DPS. The second interesting feature of this short article is that at that time in the Czech Republic rejected political activities were unique to the DPS. *Hospodářské noviny* attacked DPS by attacking the activities uniquely bound to it (see [Sacks 1992, Vol. I: 301], on identifications through naming a category-bound activity). The mere emergence of the DPS became a controversial matter.

The article RP/11/1/93 was one reaction in the mass media to what J. Blümel had said in the TV programme 'From the political scene' (*Debata*). There were many similar reactions in almost all the national papers. In order to understand why, it is important to bear in mind the nature of occasions on which he spoke. The first article, RP/6/1/93, placed his comments at a provincial press conference. Blümel's second performance (the one reported in RP/11/1/93) was much more public. *Debata* of 10/1/93 belonged to a series transmitted after lunch every Sunday in the early nineties. The programme discussed the most important events on the Czech political scene that happened during the previous week (the original name of the programme was 'What the week brought'). The debates were attended by important Czech politicians (unlike in the UK, where they rarely meet face to face in the studio). The programme still holds an important place in Czech political culture; the debates are political events in their own right and are referred to in the same evening's main TV news reports.

The context of the debate on 10/1/1993 was further unusual due to its position in the sequence of political events. On 1/1/1993 Czechoslovakia ceased to exist as one state, and independent Slovakia and Czech Republic came to being. *Debata* took place just one week after the dissolution of Czechoslovakia at a time of general uncertainty. The invited guests were almost all eminent politicians who discussed problems likely to be crucial for the new Czech Republic. What was said could be understood as a sign of problems to come. It was therefore not surprising that the DPS became highly visible and Blümel's public appearance had some influence on how the identity of the DPS was constituted. In fact, a *Rudé právo* article published two days after the debate voiced the complaint that:

‘...the so called Democratic Party of Sudetenland was given *exceptional space* in the Sunday lunch-time debate’ (RP/12/1/1993, our italics).

So what did Blühmel actually say in *Debata*? Did it warrant the reports in the national papers? How was the political identity of DPS formulated in *Debata*? The first point is that Blühmel had to propose a political identity for the DPS against the background provided by the programme makers in the introduction to the programme. In summary, the introduction claimed that: ‘many Czech citizens fear the possible return of Germans; this has begun already; Germans are here becoming more widespread; if they come as businessmen they could have a positive effect but this may require a total financial settlement over confiscated property’.

ČT1/10/1/1993⁴

001 Hostess: in the Pilsen area er a relatively er vocal political grouping has been forming, the Democratic Party of Sudetenland, er which er as yet is not officially registered or is it?

002 Blühmel: not yet. not yet.

003 Hostess: nevertheless this association has a relatively ambitious programme. [...] what are your aims Mr Blühmel.

004 Blühmel: first I’d want to preface, that I will not be speaking here for any grouping er of Germans in Bohemia, much less for the ger- Sudetan-German Association, with which that is with the leadership of the Sudetan Association we have no we have nothing in common, we have seen Mr Neubauer in newspapers on television but otherwise nothing, we interact with only wi:th er with local groups, [...] in Germany and in Austria, with land associations, and where we determine, [...] their views moods etc etc.

The hostess started the debate in *Debata* by saying that in the Pilsen Region a new ‘vocal political grouping’ was being formed. It called itself the ‘Democratic Party of Sudetenland’ but it was not yet registered (see 001). Blühmel (introduced in *Debata* as the chairman of the DPS) confirmed that the DPS was not yet registered and the hostess immediately downgraded it to an ‘association’. So in *Debata*, the DPS had begun as an organisation with an uncertain legal status (a political party, an association, a political grouping?).

The hostess characterised the aims of the ‘association’ as ambitious, and asked Blühmel to expand (see 003). This is important – *Debata* was one of those few public occasions when Blühmel could himself speak for the emerging DPS. (He was quoted in newspapers previously but this is not the same as speaking for oneself!)

The problem he oriented at in the first place was: Who am I speaking for? Nobody *in the studio* had said that Blühmel represented ethnic Germans or their organisations, but it is precisely this categorisation which he tried to forestall. He rejected it explicitly (see 004, line 1-3). As a spokesperson of the DPS he said that he did not represent any ‘grouping of Germans in Bohemia’. And he explicitly dissociated the DPS from the leadership of the ‘Sudetan-German Association’ or ‘Landsmannschaft’ (see 004, lines 3-4).⁵ To put it more generally, Blühmel started defining the DPS in *Debata* by managing its relationship to other *political* bodies and he used his time to say who his party was *not* related to.

⁴) In the headings of the TV transcripts, the capital initials identify the company, the numerals the date of transmission (ČT1 = Czech Television channel 1).

⁵) ‘Sudetan-German Landsmannschaft’ is a term used in Czech Republic to refer to organisations of displaced Sudetan Germans and their descendants.

(This is closely analogical to Sinn Fein representatives appearing on British television having to ensure that they were not seen to represent the IRA, [see Leudar 1998].) This confirms our argument in the introduction that establishing the identity of a new political body involves not just binding predicates but also sorting out its relationship to other categories. Blümel did accept that the DPS was in contact 'with local groups in Germany and in Austria' and 'with land associations' (see 004, lines 5-6). But this was only logical since, as he went on to say, the DPS was established to solve the problems between Czechs and Sudetan Germans (see 004 cont. 1, lines 1-2). (The interesting point is that the identity work in this part of *Debata* was explicit and need not be inferred by the analyst.)

ČT1/10/1/1993

004 (cont. 1) Blümel: our party arose, [...] er for one simple reason. we think that if the problem of Sudetan Germans and Czechs is not dealt with. at this time which is a good time. to find [...] a solution. that here er in the future maybe in five ten years will arise problems which, [...] er may end badly. we do not want to spread fear but really, [...] we can see it in Italy, which which inherited a bit of Germany. Tyrol, and to this day power pylons have been blown up over there and so on. so we want to prevent this.

In turn 004 (cont. 1) Blümel continued to speak in the voice of the DPS, and he was treated in that way by the other participants. This is evident from how he used the pronouns 'our' and 'we' (lines 1, 4, 6) and from what he was invited to comment on by the programme hostess (e.g. see 005). The first DPS aim which Blümel declared was to decrease the tension between Czechs and Sudetan Germans. He warranted the need for this by saying that otherwise the future might become dangerous. He likened the situation in Sudetenland to that in the Tyrol, warning of the danger of terrorism. The other participants in the studio ignored this predicate, but Blümel's warning of possible terrorism was taken up as a threat in many subsequent newspaper reports. We cannot provide these here because of the space limitations.

ČT1/10/1/1993

004 (cont. 2) Blümel: on the other hand we are appalled by the state [...] of Northern Bohemia, [...] the state of Ostrava region criminality. [...] ill-health ci- of the local citizens. the living environment is in such a state. that will not be seen anywhere else in the world.

005 Hostess: so what is your programme.

006 Blümel: our programme. [...] first of all. is to bring health into what was once Sudetan territory, we know that it was not a land as such, that it is only. [...] a name of this part of the Czech Republic, but er there is simply concentrated the highest incidence of criminality the highest ill health, these are problems which burn us always, there we want to focus on that territory, and there we want to really [...] achieve something, somehow er to get the people active, so they really do something for that land.(we think it) Sokolov area Most area, there [...] it is awful. Mr Pithart would fly over, the old minister of government, the chair of government, he would look shake his head and fly away, to this day nothing has happened there.

Blümel went on to describe the desolate state of the territory of former Sudetenland – the criminality, illness and ecological disaster (see 004, cont. 2). This description did not define the propensities of the DPS, and the moderator asked him 'So what is your programme?' (see 005)? In response Blümel declared another aim of the DPS: to make the former Sudetan territory healthier (see 006, lines 1-2).

The interactive nature of category-work is clearly evidenced by what happened next in *Debata*. The moderator did not accept the DPS aims declared so far by Blümel as sufficient. He ignored what Blümel had just said about the state of Northern Bohemia, and instead he himself introduced another aim of the DPS – to negotiate the return of confiscated property to Sudetan Germans (see 007).

ČT1/10/1/1993

007 Host: you had a press conference () last week, and there was talk also about the reappraisal of the return of property to ||Sudetan Germans. ()||

008 Blümel: ||yes. yes. I did|| only er talk about the first point, [...] the other point is the reappraisal [...] er of the return er of property to Sudetan Germans.

To provide some ethnographic background, the problem of confiscated property is a perennial in Czech-German relationships. This means that the aim of the DPS to ‘reappraise’ the question of ‘return of property to Sudetan Germans’ was basic and without it its identity would have been incomplete. Blümel indeed reluctantly confirmed that the DPS had the aim to address the problem of Sudetan property, but on his list it came second (see 008). The importance of a predicate in a political identity can therefore depend on the participants’ perspectives and can be disputed.

The important point is that even though the host introduced this aim of the DPS himself, he did it in the voice of the DPS. We have seen this gambit already in the newspaper articles. But why present predicates in the voice of the agency whose identity is in question? This could simply be a matter of reporting genre. The result was, nevertheless, that the felicity of the DPS presentation was not warranted by the host’s own knowledge, but by the avowal of the DPS representative. Avowals produce commitments and so they can be used normatively to ‘bind predicates to categories’.

How did the other guests in the studio react to the DPS raising the issue of Sudetland? Vladimír Šuman, the chairman of the ‘committee for judicial defense and security’ of the Czech parliament explicitly rejected not just the return of the confiscated property, but even any consideration of the issue (see 018, lines 2-3). According to him this was unnecessary (because only one of the five *landsmannschaft* organisations demanded property return.) Note also that this aim of the DPS was presented as inconsistent with existing law by the hostess of the programme (see 017).

ČT1/10/1/1993

017 Hostess: Mr Šuman these are demands which are in a direct contradiction to the law of restitution.

018 Šuman: I am sorry. I think that [...] chh not think I am sure that it is necessary in principle to reject all considerations whatsoever about returning property to er Sudetan Germans who were displaced. that is simply a matter which is completely unacceptable, and I also think, that [...] it is unnecessary [...] the formulation of these problems that somebody from Germany from the Sudetan Germans demands it, that this is misleading in the sense that as far as I know there are several organisations of Sudetan Germans in the Wes- in the German Republic. there are I think about five.

019 X: yes. ||yes.||

020 Šuman: ||which|| have quite a different approach to the solving of ||this problem.||

021 X: ||certainly. certainly.||

022 Šuman: and that only one of them er threat- somehow puts forward these er claims.

023 X: yes.

024 Šuman: I think that it is a problem which [...] is not solvable in a short period, which is necessary to solve [...] through long-term dialogue, [...] between our citizens and between the citizens of the German Federal Republic.

Seeking a property settlement had already been established in *Debata* as the aim of the DPS. This aim was now either unacceptable or unnecessary, and possibly against the law. The implication was that the party is either 'unnecessary', 'unacceptable' or even illegal. This concurs with E. Šolc's assessment seen previously in *Hospodářské noviny*. It might well have been asked whether the DPS still belonged among a collection of legal political agencies.

With regard to the aim of the DPS to enable the return of displaced Sudetan Germans to the Czech Republic implied in *Rudé právo* the day after *Debata*, this was not in fact first raised by J. Blühmel but by Bořek Valvoda, the Mayor of Most. (Most is a major town in the border region to which the Sudetan Germans would return.) Valvoda asserted that such a return was unacceptable (033, lines 1-2). Blühmel only confirmed the return as an aim of DPS later in *Debata* (040, lines 6-8).

ČT1/10/1/1993

031 Host: Mr ||Valvo||da. you are from the north of Bohemia. [...] do you have the same view?

032 Blühmel: ||therefore||

033 Valvoda: look, I- I think that it is necessary simply unequivocally to confirm that which has been said. er the return is not possibly. er it is unacceptable. and if the German side want to co-operate with us. and want to invest here. well let them invest, of course because [...] we: need the investment funds. in fact it was obvious there in those excerpts, that the citizens are in fact even now afraid of that- from the- er from the [...] coming of German capital here. so it is a question rather, it is unrelated excuse me I think that it is unrelated to the Sudetenland. the problem er Sudetan of Sudetenland really ought to be unambiguously solved for us, and we should deal in this way with all our German partners. they must also accept in- in all dealings there are two sides. and [...] that our, our approach must be absolutely clear.

Blühmel tried to reassure 'Czech people' that there was no danger that individuals would lose property, but he also re-asserted that the Czech government should compensate 'those Germans'. This can be taken as a demand to the Czech Government, which raises whether or not the DPS is a proper political partner for the Czech Government. *Debata*'s hostess herself posed this question (see 035 and 037).

The significance of the attempt by the DPS to initiate negotiations with the Czech government was accepted by the participants in *Debata*. The point is that the DPS could not achieve political status until it was accepted as a political party. Would the Czech government reply to the DPS 'demands'? If the DPS had been received by Klaus, this would have reinforced its identity as a political agency. Blühmel probably recognised the problem. When the hostess asked 'So did the government react to your demands?', he shifted the topic and did not answer the question put to him (see 040, lines 1-2). Ladislav Body (an MP) however reinstated the topic and formulated the activities of the DPS as

‘coercive action’ (see 051 and 053).⁶ Blümel accepted that as a possible interpretation but rejected it – the DPS was against any coercion.

ČT1/10/1/1993

035 Hostess: you have Mr Blümel also addressed [...] the Czech Government. with your
036 X: || () ||

037 Hostess: with your requests. if I remember correctly, then Mr Klaus several times
said that [...] or this theme or for this theme there is for him only one or partner [...] the Ger-
man government.

038 Blümel: yes yes yes.

039 Hostess: so ||did the government react|| to your de||mands?||

040 Blümel: ||I would not want for us|| ||to look here || as a party somehow
that we want to take property from the Czechs, and give it to the Germans. excuse me
please not that.I did ((say)) here already before (before it started,) I am not a great rhetori-
cian. so you can’t expect from me [...] some verbal turns and dodges. I say what I think.
Czechs who live in Sudetenland. have the right to that property. nobody will be taking
away from them. the Germans who will request the property. should be [...] e:nabled [...] con-
duct business here in the same way as Czech businessmen. so they could return. as Sudetan
Germans. and so Czech Germans. grown out of this land, in it they were born. or maintain
the property of Czech people who hold it, and to those Germans who ask for it or (who al-
ready) would like to return. and live in Bohemia with us. we can give
(11 turns omitted)

051 Body: on the contrary I think, || () || Mr Blümel could not

052 Blümel: || () ||

053 Body: it be a coercive action. some () || () ||

054 Blümel: ||no, nobody wants|| a coercive
ac||tion||

055 Body: ||we ||will invest, but.

056 Blümel: precisely against that coercive action we will make a stand.

In fact Czech premier Klaus rejected the ‘opinions’ of the DPS without talking to the party or its representatives. His reaction was made public in a statement to the Czech News Agency (ČTK) two days after *Debata*. It was reported in all the main national newspapers, including in *Rudé právo* (RP/12/1/1993).

RP/12/1/1993

Klaus rejects Sudetan demands

Prague – On Monday Premier Klaus described as unacceptable for the Czech Government the demand to cancel the so-called Beneš decrees, on the basis of which Sudetan Germans lost their property after the war and had to leave Czech territory, as well as the demand to compensate them.

“The starting point of the government is that the conditions which were created after the war in agreement with the victorious powers and strengthened over almost fifty subsequent years cannot be changed without disturbing the basic rights of the current citizens of the Czech Republic, without shaking legal certainties, and as a result of this seriously destabi-

⁶) Body was the only participant in *Debata* to address Blümel directly. Neither Šuman nor Valvoda addressed their comments to Blümel, even though he was sitting next to them. This was very clearly so in the video. They were dealing with the points Blümel raised without talking to him.

lising the political situation in the Czech Republic,” said Prime Minister Klaus in a reply provided for ČTK to the question regarding the demand of the chairman of the preparatory committee of the Democratic Party of Sudetenland, J. Blümel. “The government is obliged by valid legal norms, including in the first place the restitution laws and by its own decree of June of last year, in which it undertook to prevent any change in the legally set limits on restitutions. The creation of the region ‘Sudetenland’ would in present conditions be completely not organic. **The opinions of the chairman of the preparatory committee of the Democratic Party of Sudetenland, Mr Jaroslav Blümel, are for the Government of the Czech Republic unacceptable,” states the Prime Minister.** (bold in original)

The title of the article RP12/1/93 provided us with Klaus’s reaction to the DPS ‘demands’ – a rejection. But the article RP/12/1/1993 documents that Klaus in fact did not react directly to Blümel and the DPS. According to RP/12/1/1993 he provided a statement to the Czech News Agency. But at whose instigation? This was clarified in the ČTK release ČTK/11/1/93/22:26.

ČTK/11/1/93/22:26

Klaus: Demands of Democratic Party Sudetenland are unacceptable

Praha 11th January (ČTK) Premier Klaus described the views of the chairman of the preparatory committee of the Democratic Party of Sudetenland, Jaroslav Blümel, as unacceptable for the Czech Government. Last week he voiced amongst other things the demand for the cancellation of the so-called Beneš Decrees, on the basis of which Sudetan Germans lost their property after the war and had to leave Czech territory.

“The starting point of the government is that the conditions which were created after the war in agreement with the victorious powers and strengthened over almost fifty subsequent years cannot be changed without disturbing the basic rights of the current citizens of the Czech Republic, without shaking legal certainties, and as a result of this seriously destabilising the political situation in the Czech Republic,” said Prime Minister Klaus in a written reply to Czech and Moravian-Silesian Agricultural News in response to a question regarding the demands of the Democratic Party of Sudetenland. The premier also made the reply available to ČTK.

“The government is obliged by valid legal norms, including in the first place the restitution laws and by its own decree of June of last year, in which it undertook to prevent any change in the legally set limits on restitutions. The creation of the region ‘Sudetenland’ would in present conditions be completely not organic. The opinions of the chairman of the preparatory committee of the Democratic Party of Sudetenland Mr Jaroslav Blümel are for the Government of the Czech Republic unacceptable,” states the Prime Minister.

The representatives of the party hold the view that the property of Sudetan Germans should be returned, or that they should have the chance to buy it back more cheaply. After this step, the Czech Republic would become an interesting country for investment by Austrian and German firms, whose interest, according to the Democratic Party of Sudetenland has ebbed substantially.

The party so far has 600 members and was founded last November in Pilsen. It has, however, to this day not been registered. It wants to be a party of Czechs, Sudetan Germans and of people of other ethnic groups, who live both in and outside ČR. The main aim of the party is to resolve justly questions of Sudetan Germans and of the prosperity of the Czech border country.

(rok pel)

The question was put to Klaus by the daily Czech and Moravian-Silesian Agricultural News (ČMSAN) (2nd paragraph, lines 5-6). However, it was not necessarily the case that Klaus reacted only to ČMSAN, which is not an important national paper. He may well

have been reacting in the light of *Debata* and under its impression. Klaus certainly did not address his reply just to ČMSAN, but also to the Czech national press agency, ČTK (2nd paragraph, line 7-8).

In this way, the representative of the Czech government rejected the ‘views’ and ‘opinions’ of the DPS but without being drawn into a dialogical engagement. Klaus did not talk to the DPS, he commented on their ‘opinions’ (3rd paragraph, lines 4 and 5). Blühmel and the DPS had to read the comments reported in national papers like most other people. If Klaus had received the DPS for face-to-face talks he would have thereby ratified their political status. The upshot was that the DPS was not treated as an acceptable dialogical partner.

It is interesting to note what the Czech national dailies ignored in *Debata* and in the ČTK release. The declared aim of the DPS to care for the Sudetenland was left behind. The ČTK release also reported that the DPS aimed to be a party of ‘Czechs, Sudetan Germans and of people of other ethnic groups’. This aspiration to become an inter-ethnic political party was not taken up by any national newspaper. Instead, as we have seen, the national newspapers aligned the DPS with ethnic Sudetan Germans and this became the steady state of the DPS.

We are now nearing the twilight of the DPS. RP/5/2/1993 presented Blühmel’s appearance in *Debata* in terms of Czech reactions: ‘it raised widespread protest’. It is therefore not surprising that Blühmel was removed from his function by his own party. The journalist reported this in the voice of ‘L. Duda, the spokesperson of the preparatory committee’ of the DPS.

RP/5/2/1993

Blühmel removed

Pilsen (vh) J. Blühmel, who as the chairman of the preparatory committee of the Democratic Party-Sudetenland raised widespread protest by his appearance on TV, was removed from his post. This was conveyed to the reporter of RP by L. Duda, the spokesperson of the preparatory committee with the comment that the views presented by J. Blühmel do not correspond to the programme of the party. “We are democrats, we do not want to impose our goals by force, but to persuade by discussion.” he declared. What is concerned, amongst other things, is the demand to cancel the so-called Beneš Decrees, which, we are told, still creates apprehension amongst potential German investors, because their property could be taken in the future. According to the declaration of L. Duda new members from Olomouc, the Opava region, and Brno are joining the party. The number of members is according to his information more than 800. The new nominee of the preparatory committee for the post of chairman is J. Schottenbauer from Jirkov.

Duda explained Blühmel’s removal saying “We are democrats, we do not want to impose our goals by force, but to persuade by discussion.” The reader may remember that Blühmel never threatened terrorism, he warned of its possibility. What mattered was, however, not what he said but the effect he achieved. The change of leader however did not save the party. This is not surprising: the identity which emerged characterised the DPS as a social agency, not Blühmel as a person. In any case, the DPS could not raise sufficient public support and was in effect disbanded.

Conclusion

We began this paper by outlining the basics of Membership Categorisation Analysis (MCA). We proposed that the identity of a political agency can be defined in terms of

predicates expressing its agentive propensities such as, for instance, its aims, preferences, common beliefs and activities.

MCA enabled us to follow the development of the identity of the DPS. It emerged – and ceased to exist – as an organisation with a contested identity. It endeavoured to present itself as a trans-ethnic political party to restore Sudetenland, to represent the people there, and to forestall future conflict. In the majority of cases it was received as an ethnically aligned organisation, the aims of which were to facilitate the return of displaced Sudetan Germans, and to secure compensation for the property confiscated after the Second World War. The DPS never secured a political status for itself or, to put it in MCA terms, it did not join other political parties in the collection ‘political parties’.

The technical term ‘predicate’ is a useful shorthand for the activities, aims, and beliefs of a political agency. The main finding of our case study is, however, that ‘binding predicates’ to a social category (a technical term of MCA) is essentially a mundane dialogical process. In our case study, predicates defining the DPS (for instance, its aims) were typically avowed by its representatives. Where predicates were proposed by the opponents of the DPS, the ‘binding’ was either done by reporting the speech of the DPS representatives (in their voice) or its ascription was warranted by reporting an avowal. This strategy seems to have been relatively independent of the mass media genre – it was used both on television and in newspapers. The individual avowals were, however, not sufficient for predicates to become aspects of the identity. The avowed predicates had to be accepted by political opponents. We have seen, however, that the proffered predicates could be ‘just noted’, ignored or rejected. This was in fact the source of the bifurcation of the political identity of the DPS.

It is clear that everything a political agency does or expresses does not become an aspect of its identity. This problem is not addressed in any detail in our paper. One interesting point is, however, that the personal characteristics of the DPS representative J. Blümel were never presented in the Czech dailies. We learned nothing about who he was (for example that he had German father and Czech mother, that he only spoke Czech, that he was a trade unionist and worked as a tram driver.) His identity throughout the affair was very much bound to that of the DPS. The identity of the DPS was partly constituted in his activities but it was not bound to his personal identity.

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Transcription conventions

?	rising intonation
.	falling intonation
,	continuing intonation
:	lengthening of the previous syllable
[.]	a very short, still audible pause
[..]	a longer pause
[...]	a long pause
-	a cut-off of the prior word or syllable
(but)	items enclosed within single parentheses are in doubt
()	no words could be distinguished in the talk enclosed within single parentheses
((cough))	in double parentheses there is a comment by the transcriber
<u>out</u>	underlining indicates emphasis
	the onset and the ending of simultaneous talk of two speakers (overlap)
X	speaker who could not be identified

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