Regionalist Parties and the European Union

Summary

European integration and regionalization have been parallel processes over the past five decades, leading to a multilevel system where decision-making powers are allocated across European, national, and regional governments. In this encyclopaedia entry we provide a systematic overview of the literature to explore how and to what extent regional institutions have been entrenched in the EU system of multilevel governance. More precisely, we look in how far EU policy-making includes a 'third-level' of governance at the EU level as well as the impact of the EU on regions and regional actors within the member states.

We start by describing the parallel trends of increasing regionalization (decentralization reforms) and increasing regionalism (vote shares won by regional parties), discussing the main logics and the actors of regionalization. We identify four ways in which the regions and regional actors are involved in the EU policy-making process: (1) through the Committee of the Regions, (2) through establishing regional lobby offices in Brussels, (3) through the representation of regionalist parties in the European Parliament, and (4) through the participation of regional ministers in the Council of Ministers. Turning our analytical lens towards the member states reveals four ways in which the EU have impacted regions and regional actors domestically: (1) cohesion policy conditionality regarding regional governance, (2) regionalist parties positioning on European integration, (3) intergovernmental meetings between national and regional governments to coordinate EU affairs, and (4) subsidiarity monitoring of EU legislation by regional parliaments.

The picture that emerges from our analysis sees regional government as an important institutional feature within the EU system of multilevel governance. However, there are still important gaps across countries regarding the role that regions play in the EU multilevel system. Only the 74 regions with legislative powers –concentrated in eight of the twenty-eight member-states and representing 43 per cent of the total EU population– can wield significant impact on EU policy-making at the EU level as well as domestically. These regions are all situated in Western Europe; in Central and Eastern EU member states, the role of regions is still very limited, due to a lack of self-government. A second important finding is that regions with legislative powers prefer to impact EU policy domestically rather than at the EU-level. This is because the institutional setting of member-states gives them greater leverage than the EU's. Our analysis leads us to conclude that regions are there to stay in the EU's multilevel governance system but that a 'Europe with the regions' has not become and is not likely to become a 'Europe of the regions'.

Keywords

Regional governance, regions, regional authority, multilevel governance, European Union, regionalism, regional parties.

1. Introduction

A brief look at the budget of the European Union (EU) suffices to observe that the EU is heavily involved in regional policy (see fact box). EU regional policy started with the establishment of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) in March 1975. The main objective of the ERDF was the promotion of industry and infrastructure and the funds were designed to address unequal development across regions. At the start the ERDF constituted a small portion of the total EU budget (around five per cent) and national governments dominated policy making (Brunazzo 2016). The budget allocated to ERDF grew towards 9.1 per cent in 1986 to adapt to the increasing number of less-developed regions due to EU-membership of Greece (1981) and Portugal and Spain (1986). An important turning point in EU regional policy occurred during the early 1990s when the EU required national governments to co-develop plans with subnational government on how the EU cohesion funds will be spent. Regions came to be seen as equal partners in developing and implementing EU Cohesion policy and regions established offices in Brussels to lobby EU policy-makers (Marks et al. 2002). Regional funding increased to more than 30 percent of the total EU budget by 1993 and constitutes more than a third since 2000.
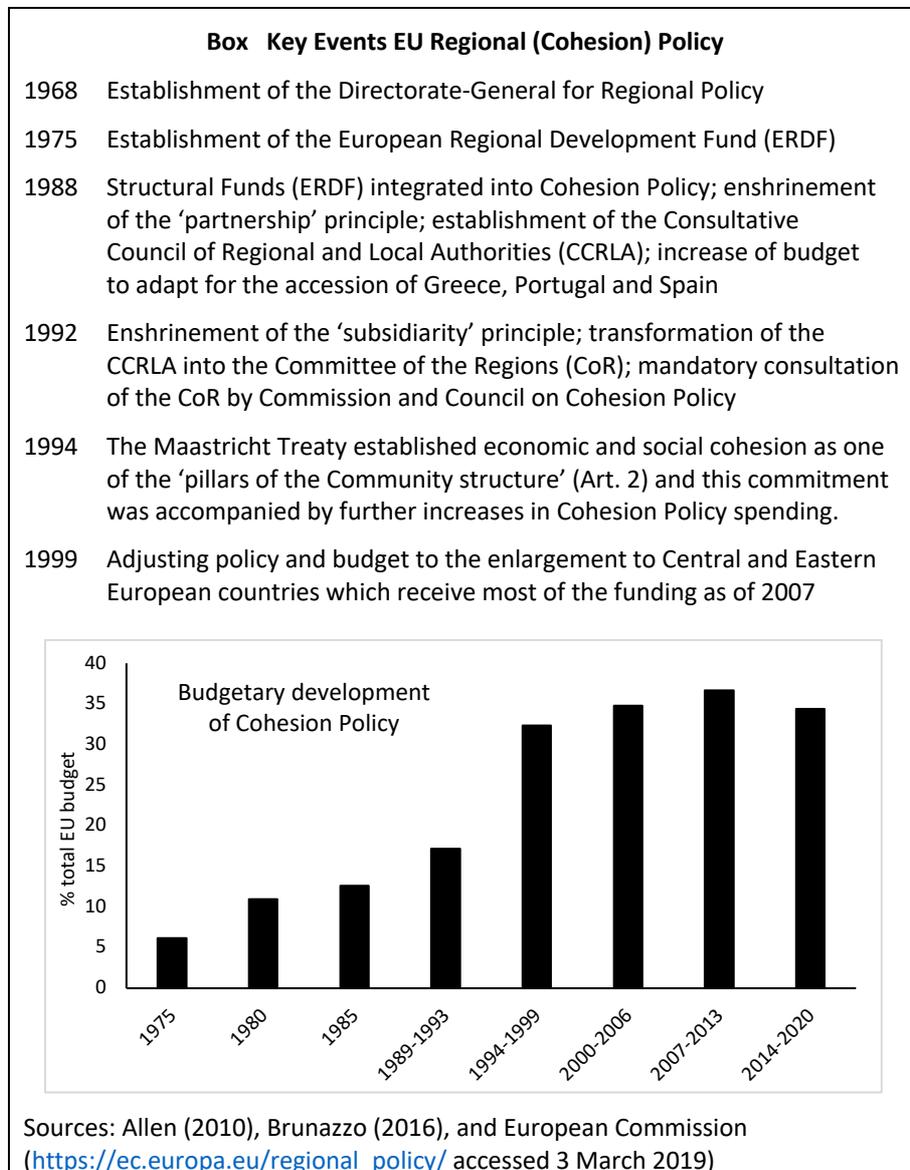
During the same time span when the EU became more involved with regional policy, many member states decentralised authority to regions and many even established new regional tiers (Loughlin et al. 2013). By 2014, no less than twenty-three out of twenty-eight EU member states, accounting for 99 per cent of the EU population (499 out of 502 million) have regional government.[1] Only the small countries of Cyprus, Estonia, Luxembourg and Malta do not have regional government. The Committee of the Regions -an EU advisory body with members from subnational authorities from the EU member states- estimates that nearly 70% of EU legislation is implemented by local and regional authorities (Committee of the Regions 2009: 3) and it is therefore fair to say that EU governance implies regional governance. The increase in regional governance also includes a strengthening of multilevel democracy. In 1979, about half of the people (53 per cent) who could vote in European elections could also vote in regional elections and this increased to 83 per cent in 2014 which amounts to 328 million citizens (Schakel 2019).[2]

The twinning processes of decentralization within the EU members states and the increasing involvement of subnational governments in the formulation and implementation of EU Cohesion policy led to the idea of a 'Europe of the Regions' during the 1990s, i.e. a vision that foresaw the creation of a multi-level governance system in which the EU and the regional levels would gradually gain ever more competences at the expense of the member-states, whose powers, if kept at all, were to be greatly diminished. While this vision of a federal/regionalized European Union has never really materialized, with member-states still

[1] Regional government is defined as an intermediate tier in between a local and national tier which has on average at least 150,000 inhabitants across the units. This population criterion is relaxed for individual jurisdictions that stick out from a tier of government that meets the population threshold, i.e. special autonomous and asymmetric regions (Hooghe et al., 2016: 15).

[2] The nine EU member states which do not hold regional elections are small countries with five million people or less except for Bulgaria which has around 7.4 million citizens. These EU member states are Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, and Slovenia. Out of the nineteen EU member states that hold regional elections only Croatia has less than five million inhabitants (i.e. 4.2 million).

maintaining their crucial role, it has inspired scholars to study whether and how regions impact EU policy and whether and how European integration impacts on decentralization reforms within the EU member states. Indeed, the emerging literature sees the EU acting as an additional structure of political opportunities that some regions are willing and able to exploit effectively (Piattoni 2009).

Box   Key Events EU Regional (Cohesion) Policy

1968   Establishment of the Directorate-General for Regional Policy

1975   Establishment of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)

1988   Structural Funds (ERDF) integrated into Cohesion Policy; enshrinement of the 'partnership' principle; establishment of the Consultative Council of Regional and Local Authorities (CCRLA); increase of budget to adapt for the accession of Greece, Portugal and Spain

1992   Enshrinement of the 'subsidiarity' principle; transformation of the CCRLA into the Committee of the Regions (CoR); mandatory consultation of the CoR by Commission and Council on Cohesion Policy

1994   The Maastricht Treaty established economic and social cohesion as one of the 'pillars of the Community structure' (Art. 2) and this commitment was accompanied by further increases in Cohesion Policy spending.

1999   Adjusting policy and budget to the enlargement to Central and Eastern European countries which receive most of the funding as of 2007

Budgetary development of Cohesion Policy

Sources: Allen (2010), Brunazzo (2016), and European Commission (https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/ accessed 3 March 2019)

In this encyclopedia entry we set out to provide a systematic overview of this expanding literature. We start with an overview that provides more detail on increasing regionalization (decentralization reforms) and increasing regionalism (vote shares won by regional parties) in Europe. In the second section we explore the literature that studies in how far the EU and its institutions have adapted to the trend of increasing regionalization. In the third section we revert our perspective and we survey the literature which looks at the impact of the EU on regionalism within its member states. The final section concludes and discusses the question in how far the EU has encouraged and adapted to regionalism in Europe and in how far a 'Europe of the Regions' has materialized.

2. Increasing Regionalization and Regionalism in the Europe Union

In this section we trace the development of regionalization, as an institutional process, in the European Union, and we discuss the rationales for regionalization and the actors of regional reforms. The Regional Authority Index (RAI) presents an indicator which traces the development in regional authority in 28 EU member states since 1950 (Hooghe et al. 2016). The RAI consists of two dimensions, self-rule and shared rule, which are familiar concepts in the federalism literature (Elazar 1987: 33-79). Self-rule is the authority exercised by a regional government over those living in its territory and shared rule is the authority exercised by a regional government or its representatives in the country as a whole. Both dimensions are further broken down in five sub-dimensions.[3] Self-rule and shared rule scores are summed, and scores may vary in between zero (no regional government) to a maximum of 30 but scores may go beyond 30 because scores are summed when a country has multiple regional tiers.

Figure 1 presents average RAI-scores for 11 Eastern and 17 Western European countries since 1950 whereby country scores are weighted by population size before taking an average so that the lines represent average regional authority per citizen in Eastern and Western Europe. A first notable observation is a significant increase in regional authority across Europe. In Western Europe, the average RAI-score was 13 points in 1950 which gradually increased to around 24 points in the 2010s. The average RAI-score has also significantly increased in Eastern Europe, from 2 points in 1950 to 8.2 points in 2016.

The significantly higher average RAI-score for Western Europe in comparison to Eastern Europe can be attributed to two main differences. First, the more populous countries tend to have more regional tiers in between local and national government and the most populous countries are in Western Europe. For example, France (64 million), Germany (80 million), Italy (59 million), Spain (47 million), and the United Kingdom (63 million) all have two or more regional tiers whereas the most populous Eastern European countries -i.e the Czech Republic (10 million), Poland (38 million) and Romania (20 million)- all have just one regional tier.[4] Many new regional tiers were established over the last four decades in Western Europe: the establishment of *regioni a statuto ordinaro* in Italy in 1970, the launch of *régions* in France in 1972, the gradual introduction of *comunidades autonomas* from the late 1970s onwards in Spain, and, more recently, devolution to Scotland and Wales in 1999 and to the Greater

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[3] The five sub-dimensions of self-rule measure the extent of independence of a regional government from national government (*institutional depth*), the range of a regional government's authority over policy in its jurisdiction (*policy scope*), the authority a regional government has over taxation within its own jurisdiction (*fiscal autonomy*), the authority of a regional government to borrow on financial markets (*borrowing autonomy*), and whether a regional government is endowed with representative institutions (*representation*). The five sub-dimensions of shared rule measure the extent to which a regional government co-determines national policy-making (*law-making*), the extent to which a regional government co-determines national executive policy in intergovernmental fora (*executive control*), the extent to which a regional government co-determines how national tax revenues are distributed (*fiscal control*), the extent to which a regional government co-determines the restrictions placed on borrowing (*borrowing control*), and the extent to which regional government can initiate or constrain constitutional reform (*constitutional reform*).

[4] The *powiaty* in Poland constitute an intermediate tier between local and national government but the average population size is below 150,000 inhabitants and thereby do not classify as regional according to the criteria set by the RAI.

London Authority in 2000 in the United Kingdom. These new regional tiers were placed on top of pre-existing regional tiers at a lower territorial scale: *départements* in France, *province* in Italy, *provincias* in Spain, and counties in the United Kingdom.
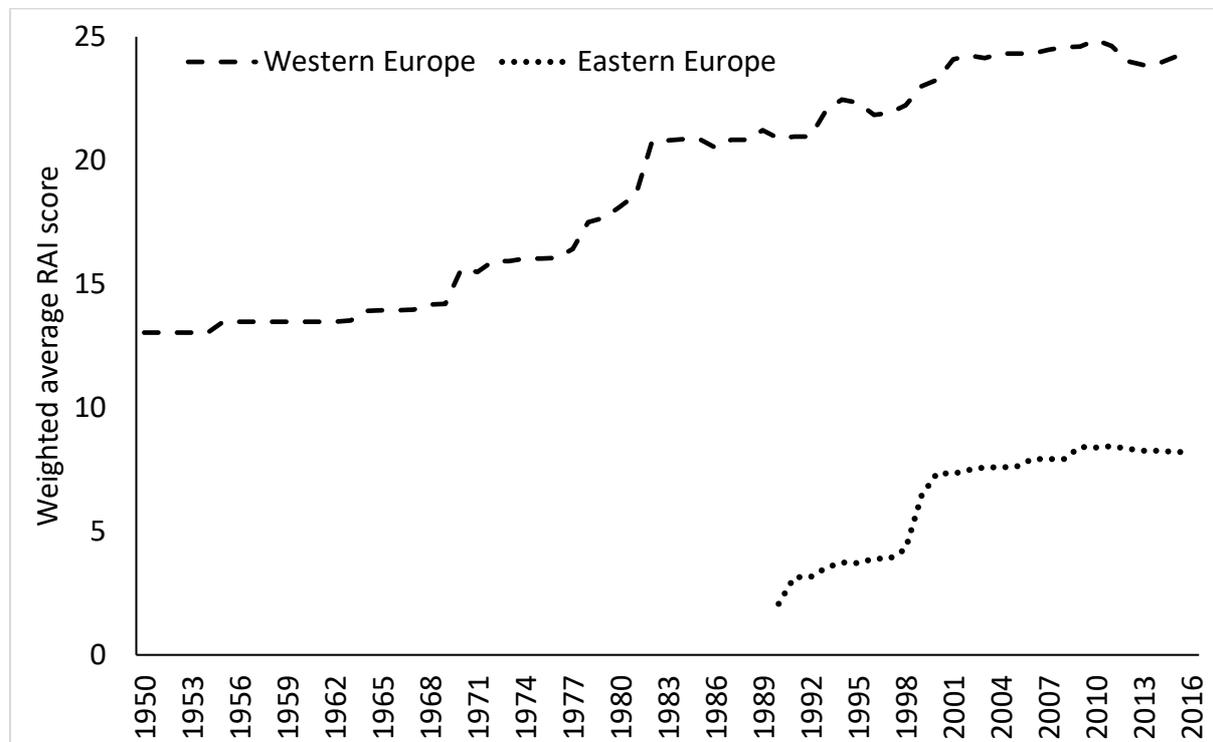

Figure 1. Development in regional authority in Eastern and Western Europe.

*Note*s: Shown are average regional authority index (RAI) countries weighted by the country's population size (in 2010) for 11 Eastern European and 17 Western European countries. Eastern Europe (N = 11): Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia.
Western Europe (N = 17): Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxemburg, Malta, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain Sweden, and the United Kingdom.
Sources: Hooghe et al. (2016) and Schakel et al. (2018).

A second reason why the average RAI-score is higher for Western Europe than for Eastern Europe is because the (upper) regional tiers in Western European countries tend to have more authority, both on the self-rule and shared rule dimensions. Regional government in Eastern Europe were established during the 1990s and early 2000s when these countries underwent democratization after Communist party rule. Most Eastern European countries established regional tiers with only self-rule that entails some degree of autonomous decision making powers (2 points) over a small range of policies (1 to 2 points), with limited taxing (1 point) and borrowing powers (1 point), often with a directly elected assembly (2 points) coinciding with a indirectly elected executive who has to share authority with a centrally appointed officer (1 point). In contrast, Western European regions often decide over a broad range of policies (2 to 3 points), can set the base and rate of a minor tax or for a major tax such as

personal and corporate income tax (2 to 4 points), and are allowed to borrow with or without prior approval by the central government (2 to 3 points). Eastern European regions do not exercise shared rule, that is, they do not co-decide national policy[5] whereas many regional governments in Western Europe exercise shared-rule either through intergovernmental meetings with national government or through selecting representatives to an upper chamber of national parliament.

The patterns displayed in Figure 1 reveal an unequivocal trend of regionalization within the EU member states. This has not gone unnoticed by scholars who have taken a keen interest to investigate what is driving regionalization.

2.1 The Logics of Regionalization

The parallel processes of European integration and sub-state regionalization are key components of a wider process of territorial restructuring and policy rescaling (Keating, 1998, 2013), which virtually concerns all territories, from global to local (Moreno, 1999). Yet, limiting the analysis to sub-state regionalization, and particularly to sub-state regionalization within the context of the European Union (Sharpe, 1993), four specific logics can be identified: democracy; identity, economy and Europeanization.

First, regionalization has been sought or justified as an instrument to enhance the quality of democracy. This rationale is the most pervasive as it is directly or indirectly connected to all others. The main argument behind this rationale is that of bringing government closer to the people, in a view to address and satisfy territorial variation on policy preferences. As the prevailing preferences on several policy areas might diverge across regions, establishing democratically elected regional institutions is seen as the most appropriate response to the need of the overall political system to adapt to such territorial variation (Sharpe 1979). The final objective is, therefore, to enhance the democratic legitimacy of the system, by increasing the 'input points' through regional self-rule and the 'veto points' through regional shared-rule, in a view to favour more territorially tailored policy outputs. Following this rationale, provided that the overall political system maintains the capacity to fulfil crucial functions (such as providing protection from external threats and guaranteeing equality of rights and duties within the state), the more powers are devolved to the regions the more the system gains in democratic legitimacy. It has to be noticed that, in Europe, regions have entered in competition for the allocation of powers not only with the state but, as the process of European integration advanced, with the European Union too.

Secondly, the logic of democratic legitimacy is enhanced (and partially transformed), if territorial variation does not merely concern policy preferences but also the existence of different ethno-territorial identities. Regionalism can, indeed, be defined as the belief that a specific region, due to the presence of a separate ethno-territorial identity, represents a different body politic vis-à-vis the rest of the state and that, for this reason, the region deserves some kind of self-government (Fitjar 2010). When these ethno-territorial identities are politicized as competing/alternative vis-à-vis the national identity, the very concept of

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[5] An exception are *županija* in Croatia where citizens from the region directly elected representatives in an upper chamber of parliament between 1993 and 2000. The upper house was abolished in 2001.

nation-state is put into question (Alonso 2012; Friend 2012; Keating 2001; Rokkan and Urwin 1983). As it will be discussed below, political claims based on ethno-territorial identities represent a potent motor for the creation and subsequent empowerment of regional institutions. The compelling normative argument in favour of this kind of regionalization (or federalism), which draws regional boundaries in respect of claimed ethno-territorial identities, is the idea of a right of national self-determination. Indeed, if such right is not sufficiently enjoyed within the democratic institutional framework of existing states, it might be claimed in the form secession (Koskenniemi 1994; Moore 1998).

Thirdly, regionalization can be advocated on the basis of economic arguments (Trigilia 1991). These arguments can change (and have indeed changed) depending on the interplay between the regional, state, EU and international economic context, as well as on the basis of the prevailing political economic theoretical perspectives (e.g. Keynesian vs. Neoliberal). Broadly speaking, until the 1970s, redistributive and developmental approaches emphasized the allocation of resources to the regions by transfers from the state budget. High levels of interregional transfers, as manifestations of national solidarity, were underpinned by relatively closed economies in which the state-subsidized income of people in one region translated, through consumption in the private market economy, into the income of other people in other regions, before going back, via taxation, to the state and re-start the cycle. Within this 'spatial Keynesianism' (Brenner 2004), there was neither need nor widespread request for strong regional institutions (Pastori 1980): development agencies and/or elected institutions with administrative powers sufficed in implementing nationally designed development projects and welfare policies. Since the 1980s, the opening up of national economies and the shift from co-ordination to competition in the international economy has considerably eroded the capacity of states to guarantee financial transfers to (and investments in) the regions. In this new context, following a trend already experienced by the states of the US (Kincaid 1990), the European regions gradually found themselves engaged in coercive competition, within the national context, for the allocation of state resources and, within and beyond the national context, for private investment, technological advancement, productivity rates and markets' penetration (Bristow 2005; Porter 2001). With the rise of competitive regionalisation/federalism (Shannon and Kee 1989), two types of regionalist claims have emerged. In relatively rich regions, requests for further autonomy –including (crucially) fiscal federalism– were justified by the need to maintain and possibly enhance regional competitiveness in the international economy (Harvie 1994). In contrast, relatively poor regions, have tried to counter the worst effects of this trend (starting from decreasing interregional transfers) questioning the foundations of this macro-economic approach in favour of a return to well-funded welfare services. The precise strategies and discourses put forward in these regions has varied depending on whether 'identity' regionalism has been stronger, leading to threats of secession in a view to create an independent (welfare) state (e.g. in Scotland); or weaker, resulting in attempts to stop or limit competitive fiscal federalism (e.g. in Eastern Germany, Southern Italy, and Wallonia).

Finally, a fourth important driver of regionalism can be identified within the wider process of European integration (Carter 2010). The European Union has promoted regionalism on the basis of all the three rationales discussed above. Although the general principle of 'subsidiarity' is presented in EU treaties with a technical jargon evoking questions of systemic capacity and efficiency (Treaty of Lisbon 2009, Art. 5(3)), the philosophical roots of the

concept, at least from Toqueville (2003 [1835-40]) onwards, are inherently linked to issues of democratic legitimacy within the political system. In addition, the EU has been constantly concerned with the economic conditions and performances of regional economies. After the establishment of the Directorate-General for Regional Policy in 1968 and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) in 1975, the EU Cohesion Policy and Structural Fund took off with the landmark regulatory reform of 1988 (Brunazzo, 2016). More recently, and in spite of the continuation of the Cohesion Policy, emphasis has moved towards regional economic competitiveness (Annoni and Dijkstra 2013). Finally, with the creation of the Committee of the Regions in 1993 (Piattoni and Schonlau 2015), the EU has tried to institutionalize the role of the regions within the emerging European system of multi-level governance (Piattoni 2010). These reforms have created more favourable conditions for regionalist actors pushing for regionalization/federal reforms, including those engaged in identity regionalism (Loughlin 1996). 'Europe of the Regions' became a widespread slogan and vision amongst regionalist parties in the 1990s (Hepburn 2008), which reflected a political initiative by EU institutions (Hooghe 1996). While Europeanization has been an important source of pressure for regionalization reforms in Western Europe, particularly in the UK and in Italy (Dardanelli 2005, Fabbrini and Brunazzo 2003), the most evident effect of the EU has been on Central-Eastern European member-states which needed to comply with the political conditionality attached to the access process (Brusis, 2002; Hughes at al. 2005).

We will explore the impact of European integration and EU Cohesion Policy on regionalization in Western and Eastern European countries below. But first, we explore who have been the main actors propagating and inducing regionalization reforms.

2.2   The Actors of Regionalization Reforms

As we shall see in the next sub-section, regionalization or federal reforms are primarily advocated by regionalist parties, particularly looking at the experience of Western European member-states. However, since these reforms have to be approved by national parliaments, it is up to state-wide parties to decide whether to pass these reforms or not (Toubeau and Massetti 2013). In addition, under specific circumstances, state-wide parties can even be the main proposers of regional or federal reforms, especially in the case of reforms that create (or move the institutional system towards) symmetric arrangements. The strongest autonomous motivation for state-wide parties advocating and/or implementing these types of reforms is that of increasing their chances of getting in office at national and/or regional level (Sorens 2009). Parties that are usually successful in getting in office at national level, such as the Christian Democracy party in Italy (DC) in the period 1946-1992 or the Spanish Socialist Party of Workers (PSOE) in the period 1982-1996, are more reluctant to devolve powers indiscriminately to the regions; whereas parties that remain in opposition for long periods, such as the Italian Communist Party (PCI) or the French Socialist Party (PS) in the period 1958-1981 or the Popular Alliance/Popular Party (AP/PP) in Spain in the period 1977-1996, become eager to access some power at regional level. Yet, also successful parties of government can accept to devolve powers to all regions –like the DC in Italy in 1968 or the PSOE in Spain in 1992– if the concession is necessary for forming a new government coalition or if chances of a further re-election in office decrease, especially in the context of compelling constitutional requirements. In addition, state-wide parties might advocate regionalization reforms if they think that the proposal is popular nation-wide and its implementation will

translate in a vote gain at the next general election. Clearly, these reforms need to be substantively symmetric[6] (or need to move in the direction of reducing existing asymmetries) if they are to enjoy support from state-wide public opinion.

However, vote or office-seeking motivations are not the only explanatory factors to account for regionalization reforms. Ideology and policy preferences also seem to play a role. For instance, a recent study advances the hypothesis that asymmetric reforms are implemented by state-wide actors as a means of 'ideological authority insulation', i.e. only when the region to which powers are devolved is likely to be governed by the same state-party or by a regionalist party that is ideologically close in terms of left-right positioning (Roth and Kaiser 2018). More in general, state-wide party ideology plays an important role in determining the general attitude towards different types of regionalist claims. Leftist and liberal state-wide parties appear to be more inclined to accommodate 'identity' regionalism than national-conservative parties; whereas, liberal and conservative parties are more inclined to accommodate (neoliberal) 'economy' regionalism (e.g. competitive fiscal federalism) than leftist parties (Toubeau and Wagner 2015).

Regionalist parties are self-contained political organizations that are present only in a limited territory of the state because their mission is to protect and enhance the specific identities and interests of that territory vis-à-vis the central institutions and the other regions of the state (Massetti 2009). In line with their mission, a key characteristic of these parties is their advocacy for some kind of regional self-government (De Winter 1998). Therefore, it should not be a surprise that, where and when they are present, these parties represent the main motor of regionalization reforms (Alonso 2012; Swenden 2006; Toubeau and Massetti 2013). It is worth stressing that many regionalist parties are also ethnic, in the sense that they politicize not only territorial boundaries but also ethnic ones. Roughly speaking, the emphasis posed on ethnic boundaries tends to be predominant in Central-Eastern European countries; while the territorial boundaries dominate the discourse in Western Europe. However, there are many exceptions on both sides of this gross dichotomy. For instance, regionalist parties in Northern Ireland do politicize an ethnic divide. Likewise, regionalist parties representing the German speaking minorities –e.g. in Belgium and Italy– have a clear and evident ethnic connotation (Pallaver 2006; Van Ingelgom 2008). In fact, in Western Europe we can even find parties that are only ethnic and not regionalist, such as the Swedish People's Party in Finland (Raunio 2006). In the same way, regionalist parties that emphasize territorial more than ethnic boundaries have emerged in some Central-Eastern European countries, such as in Istria and Slavonia within Croatia, in Vojvodina within Serbia, and in Silesia within Poland (Kukec 2019; Solska 2019; Zuber 2013).

Several attempts have been made by academics to develop fine-grained taxonomies of the different kinds of self-government that regionalist parties demand for their region: from the mildest forms of autonomy to full secession (De Winter 1998; Massetti 2009; Rizankoska 2018; Rokkan and Urwin 1983). Some scholars have also distinguished amongst secessionist claims, based on the party's final project: making the region a new independent state on its own (independentist); (re-)uniting the region to another existing state (rattachist); (re-

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[6] A reform introducing fiscal federalism might be formally symmetric, as it concedes to all regions the same taxing powers within their respective jurisdictions. However, *de facto* it can be considered as an asymmetric reform, as it tends to penalize relatively poor regions vis-a-vis relatively rich regions (Gordon 1983).

)uniting the region with other regions from different states to create a new state (irredentist) (Dandoy 2010). However, the most salient analytical distinction amongst different degrees of self-government claimed by regionalist parties remains the one between autonomist parties, which do not aim to break-up the host state, and secessionist parties, which do pose a threat to the territorial integrity of the host state (Massetti and Schakel 2016a).

Although regionalist parties gather a limited share of state-wide vote, their electoral weight has constantly and substantively increased in the last four decades (see Figure 2). Figure 2 also suggests an interesting relationship between regionalism and regionalization (see Figure 1), whereby the former pushes for the latter, which in turn creates more favourable conditions for the former. Indeed, the figure clearly shows that regionalist parties obtain better electoral results in regional than in national elections. Finally, it is interesting to note how regionalist parties are stronger, from a strictly electoral point of view, in Central-Eastern Europe than in Western Europe, especially in national elections.

Given their limited electoral weight at national level, regionalist parties seldom participate in national governments (Elias and Tronconi 2011; Tronconi 2014). However, there are several ways in which they can try and push regionalization reforms through. The most basic way is to win votes in national and, if they exist, regional elections (De Winter 1998). As discussed above, 'stealing' votes from a state-wide party might lead that party, when it is in office, to devolve powers to the region, in a bid to recover some of the lost votes (Rudolph and Thompson 1985). Alternatively, regionalist parties might try and use regional institutions, if they already exist, to put pressure on the national government, especially when they are the sole or main party in regional office. Obviously, the most direct form of pressure resides in acquiring a black-mail or coalitional potential in the central parliament, even if it does not translate in direct participation in government (Field 2013; Tronconi, 2014).
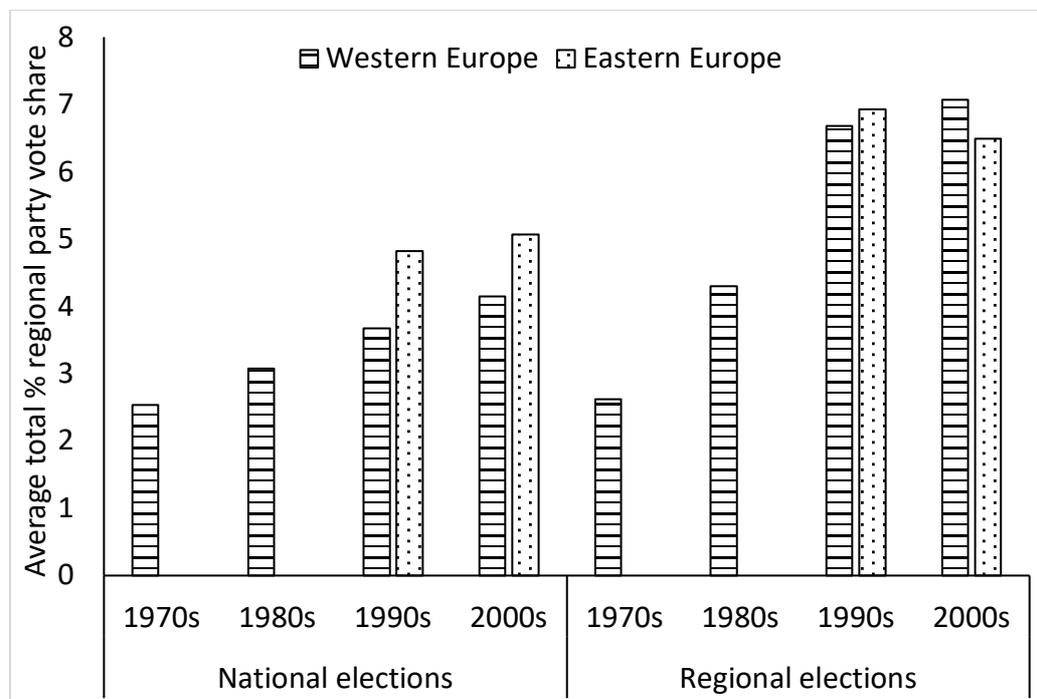

Figure 2. Electoral development of regional parties in regional and national elections in 11 Central-Eastern and 17 Western European EU member states since 1970.

Notes: Shown are average regional party vote shares across regions whereby regional party vote shares are summed over the regional parties competing elections in the region. The averages includes vote shares for *regional* parties -i.e. parties that win vote share in one region only- and *regionalist* parties -i.e. parties that win vote share in one (or few) regions and which uphold a mission to protect and enhance the specific identities and interests of the region vis-à-vis the central institutions and the other regions of the state.
Sources: Dandoy and Schakel (2013) and Schakel (2017).

In their struggle to extract powers and resources from the state, regionalist parties have often seen the process of European integration and the institutions of the EU as important allies (Hooghe 1995; Jeffery 2000; Keating 1995; McGarry et al. 2006). They have been rather active within EU institutions, creating a European party group, the European Free Alliance (EFA), which has established a strategic partnership with the Greens in the European Parliament (De Winter and Gomez-Reino 2002; Lynch 1998). Indeed, some works have identified the regionalist party family as the 'Europhile fringe', due to their convinced, constant and widespread support to European integration (Jolly 2007, 2017). However, other scholars have come to different conclusions, stressing the self-interested and instrumental foundation of regionalist parties' (highly changeable) attitudes towards European integration (Lynch 1996). A recent study has provided partial confirmation to this thesis by revealing the importance of the distribution of Structural Funds across regions (Massetti and Schakel 2016b). More in general, the literature appears to converge on the view that regionalist parties' positions on European integration has been overwhelmingly positive only in the late 1980s and the 1990s -the 'Europe of the Regions' period– while it has been cooling down since the 2000s (Elias, 2008b; Hepburn 2008). In addition, other studies have suggested that, in any considered period, regionalist parties' position on European integration has never been homogeneous but, rather, influenced by the very different ideological orientations of the individual parties (Massetti 2009).

3. Regionalism and Its Expression at the EU Level

The previous section has shown that regionalism and regionalization are on the rise across the whole of Europe. How has the EU and its institutions contributed and adapted to these trends? And how have regional governments made use of their authority and resources to gain access to decision- and policy-making at the EU level? In this section we will systematically trace how regionalism has manifested itself within the EU institutions and we explore in how far regions are able to impact EU policy.

The development of EU regional policy is shown in the box in the introduction. At the start the ERDF constituted a small portion of the total EU budget (about six per cent) and at this point in time national governments still dominated policy making (Brunazzo 2016). This started to change dramatically with the establishment of Cohesion Policy in 1988 -which subsumed the ERDF- whereby the partnership principle was enshrined into the regulations. This principle stipulates that (implementing) decisions about operational programs should be taken in partnership between the Commission, the member state governments, regional

governments, and other public bodies and non-governmental organizations (Allen 2010). Adopting the partnership principle was an important change in how EU regional policy was shaped. Before 1988, the Commission dealt exclusively with national governments which developed regional projects and which selected eligible regions. After the 1988 reform, Commission administrators visited the regions and consulted and asked for input from subnational administrators regarding the kind of programmes they want in their regions and subnational representatives were also involved alongside member state representatives in the monitoring of the implementation of the operational programmes (Marks 1992, 1993). The daily practice of EU regional policy induced Gary Marks (1993: 401-402) to describe the future of the EU as "a system of multilevel governance in which supranational, national, regional, and local governments are enmeshed in territorially overarching policy networks" whereby "decision making is span away from member states in two directions, up to supranational institutions, and down to diverse units of subnational government."

The concept of multilevel governance in the EU has spawned a tremendously broad literature on explaining the horizontal and vertical dispersion of governance but at its core, at least during the 1990s and early 2000s, the focus was on how regional actors could impact EU policy making (Piattoni 2010). Following a well-established literature (Bauer and Börzel 2010; Bomberg and Peterson 1998; Hooghe and Marks 1996, 2001, McLeod 1999; Scherpereel 2007; Tatham 2008, 2011) we identify four (major) 'channels' along which regions are integrated into the EU's institutional framework: the Committee of the Regions, regional lobby offices in Brussels, regional party presence in the European Parliament, and regional minister presence in the Council of Ministers. These channels have been set up during the 1990s and since then they have strengthened multilevel governance within the EU. In our discussion we will address for each of these four 'channels' how the main EU institutions have adapted to increasing regionalism and we explore whether and in how far regional actors can impact EU decision-making. Some channels of subnational representation provide direct influence whereas offer indirect influence, and some channels can be exploited only by regions which are strong domestically whereas other channels are accessible for most regions.

3.1   Committee of the Regions

The predecessor of the Committee of the Regions (CoR) was the Consultative Council of Regional and Local Authorities set up by the Commission in 1988 with consultative rights over the formulation and implementation of regional policy. This council was turned into the Committee of the Regions (CoR) with the Maastricht Treaty (Art. 198) in 1992. The CoR consists of 350 representatives from regional and local governments who should hold a regional or local authority electoral mandate or are politically accountable to an elected assembly (Art. 300(3) TFEU). At the start, the CoR had to be consulted on "social and economic cohesion, public health, trans-European networks in the fields of energy, transport and telecommunications, education and youth, culture" (Art. 198c). Since the Lisbon Treaty, consultation is mandatory in numerous areas, including economic, social and territorial cohesion, employment, social affairs, education, youth and culture, public health, transport, sport, environment, energy and climate change. The Commission reports to the CoR how its opinions have been taken into account even there is no obligation on the part of the

Commission to do so.[7] In addition to mandatory opinions, the CoR can submit opinions on its own initiative (Art. 307 TFEU) or when asked to by the Commission, Council or Parliament (optional consultation).

The Treaty of Lisbon also granted the CoR the right to challenge the legality of Union acts in an action for annulment before the Court of Justice in order to protect its own prerogatives (Art. 263 TFEU). In addition, the CoR can now also bring actions on subsidiarity grounds against legislative acts, for the adoption of which the CoR has to be consulted.[8] The CoR has not brought a case on subsidiarity to the ECJ so far (Tilindyte 2016).

Box   Key Events Committee of the Regions

1986   Establishment of the Consultative Council of Regional and Local Authorities

1992   Establishment of the Committee of the Regions (CoR) and mandatory consultation by Commission and Council on key areas of regional concern

1997   CoR's remit extended to cover over two thirds EU's legislative proposals and the European Parliament can consult CoR

2001   Members of the CoR are required to be elected by or accountable to an elected regional or local assembly

2007   CoR obtains the right to appeal to the ECJ to safeguard its prerogatives and the subsidiarity principle

Sources: Caroll (2011); Piatoni and Schönlau (2015).

It is clear that the CoR has increased its authority over time (see also Kaniok and Dadová 2013), however, the CoR has largely remained a marginal force because its powers remain restricted to providing advice, it's members lack of a common purpose, and because of its internal divisions such as legislative versus non-legislative regions, local and regional authorities, poor (eastern) and rich (western) regions (Christiansen 1997; Christiansen and Lintner 2005; Hooghe and Marks 1996, 2001: 81-82; Hönnige and Kaiser 2003). In addition, some members have alternative and more effective ways for influencing European policy. Regional governments in Austria, Belgium, and Germany have a voice directly in the Council of Ministers and regions in Italy and Spain meet with their central governments to discuss their member state positions to be taken up in the Council of Ministers (discussed below).

Given the internal divisions and limited influence of the CoR it may be not surprising that the CoR is not the only organization representing regional (and local) government interests in Brussels. The most important inter-regional organisations outside the CoR are the Assembly of European Regions (AER), the Conference of Regions with Legislative Competences (REGLEG), and the Conference of European Legislative Assemblies (CALRE).[9] The AER brings together over 250 regions from 35 counties together with 16 interregional organizations. This

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[7] Art. 14 Protocol on the Cooperation between the European Commission and the Committee of the Regions.
[8] Art. 8 Protocol No. 2 on the Application of the Principles of Subsidiarity and Proportionality.
[9] Subnational governments have established many transnational networks in Brussels ranging from other all-embracing peak organizations such as the Council of European Regions and Municipalities, networks representing regions with common territorial interests such as the Association of the Alpine States and the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions, and Euro-regio partnerships who collaborate on issues such as public transport and regional economic policy. These transnational networks are generally not considered to be powerful tools for regions to influence EU policy compared to the CoR, REGLEG and CALRE.

organization had some influence prior to the Maastricht Treaty when it pushed for the creation of the Committee of the Regions which, once established, took away much of the Assembly's profile and rationale (Bußjäger 2015; Jeffery 2000). The CALRE and REGLEG both aim to influence European policy-making and they represent the so-called 75 regions with legislative powers from eight EU member states, CALRE represents the legislative assemblies whereas REGLEG represents the executives of those legislative assemblies.[10] Various attempts to merge REGLEG and CALRE or to strengthen cooperation and coordination between the two organizations have failed (Bußjäger 2015). One may wonder in how far having two different 'lobby organizations' is more effective than having one. The CALRE may have been established to counter the dominance of regional executives in EU affairs and Cohesion Policy in particular. The CoR is the only organization which is part of the EU institutional framework with rights and obligations laid down in the Treaties. The AER, CALRE and REGLEG are informal organizations which have no legal basis in international law and which can only influence EU affairs through lobbying.

The diverse membership prevents the CoR from acting as a unified actor speaking clearly with one voice but the CoR has explored other avenues to contribute to EU policy beyond its consultative role in the EU legislative process (Caroll 2011; Kaniok and Dadová 2013). For example, the CoR is involved in organizing the annual 'Open Days – European Week of Cities and Regions' that brings together more than 5000 experts, practitioners, policy-makers, and EU institutional representatives to discuss EU issues in more than 100 workshops. However, these activities serve two purposes which may compete with each other: to provide expertise and practical feedback on the implementation of EU policy and to provide for political legitimacy to EU policies (Schönlau 2016).

In sum, the CoR did not evolve into a 'regional legislative chamber' and its influence is limited because its powers are consultative and its informal influence is constrained by internal divisions. As a result, the most assertive regions have become rather disillusioned with the CoR, which does not have a major impact at the EU level (Jeffery 2007).

3.2   Regional Lobby Offices in Brussels

In response to the information demands of the European Commission, regional governments have established organizations to represent them in Brussels. These organizations enable regions to lobby and have direct contacts with Commission officials and members of the European Parliament, to monitor EU policy and regulations, and to guide their proposals for funding through the EU decision-making process. The most important role that regional offices see for themselves is that of an information broker: gaining information about funding opportunities and EU legislation relevant to the region and to explain a region's position on issues to EU decision makers as to influence the EU decision-making in favor of the region (Greenwood 2011; Marks et al. 2002; Tatham 2017).

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[10] There are 74 regional parliaments in eight member states which possess legislative powers: nine Austrian *Landtage*, five regional and communal parliaments in Belgium, the parliament of *Åland* in Finland, 16 Germany *Länder* parliaments, 19 parliaments of ordinary and special regions plus two parliaments of two special provinces in Italy, the parliaments of Azores and Madeira in Portugal, the 17 parliaments of the *comunidades autónomas* in Spain, and the parliaments of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales in the United Kingdom (Committee of the Regions 2013).

The first offices were set up by English local authorities and German Länder in 1984, there were 15 of such offices in 1988, and this number increased to 54 in 1993 and 70 in 1996, over 160 in 2002, and to more than 200 plus 78 trans-regional associations in 2013 (Callanan and Tatham 2014; Donas and Beyers 2013; Greenwood 2011; Hooghe and Marks 1996; Marks et al. 2002; Tatham 2010). The size of these offices varies highly across regions and they "range from poorly funded bureaus, staffed by one or two part-time officers, to large quasi-embassies employing (in the case of the Catalan office and several Länder offices) as many as twenty representatives in addition to secretarial staff" (Hooghe and Marks 1996: 83).

Regions with more self-rule and financial resources and regions harboring regionalist political parties are comparatively much more active in establishing offices and tend to occupy prominent positions in various trans-regional associations (Donas and Beyers 2013; Greenwood 2011; Hooghe and Marks 1996; Marks et al. 2002). However, the presence of regionalist parties appears to be a crucial factor for explaining the presence and the activities of regional offices in Brussels (Donas and Beyers 2013; Tatham and Thau 2014). In addition, regions with substantial self-rule mostly interact with offices that represent regions from their own country (Beyers and Donas 2014) and regions with law-making powers and financial autonomy appear to favour cooperation with central government, whereas weaker regions concentrate on direct participation at the European level especially when national opposition parties hold executive power in the regions (Beyers, Donas, and Fraussen 2015; Brusis 2014; Callanan and Tatham 2014). Regions collaborate intensively with central state authorities rather than bypassing them (Beyers, Donas and Fraussen 2015; Callanan and Tatham 2014) but contextual factors such as different parties in government at the regional and national levels, (fiscal) resources of the office, and length of exposure the integration process may affect the incidence of bypassing versus cooperation (Tatham 2010). Finally, regions with a large policy portfolio are more confronted with the implementation of EU law and have a higher inclination to monitor EU affairs but also to make the EU institutions aware of regional preferences regarding EU policy (Donas and Beyers 2013). These factors can largely explain why one can find differences in activities by regional offices between Western and Eastern European regions, regions in the East tend to have less institutional powers (see section 2) and their offices tend to have less staff and fiscal resources. In other words, once these factors are controlled for, offices from Eastern Europe hardly differ from offices from Western Europe (Tatham 2014).

Regional representation in Brussels has raised the question what regions want to achieve by being present in Brussels, i.e. is it a quest for more self-rule, to bypass national governments, or to preserve political autonomy? Being present in Brussels can be considered as part of a multilevel power play among different layers of government whereby the activities of a regional office could serve to increase the political leverage of regional governments regarding their national governments (Beyers and Donas 2014). A region may decide to set up an office when its political demands conflict with those of its national government. As Callanan and Tatham (2014: 194) point out, this seems to be an obvious hypothesis because there is no point in bearing the cost of setting up an office in an effort to bypass the central state in the absence of important divergences between the region and the state's policy preferences. However, conflicting or differing interests may also occur when citizens in a region have a distinct identity or distinct political orientation that is not represented in the

national government. Such factors help explain the presence in Brussels of subnational offices representing Galicia, the Canary Islands, Brittany, Northern Ireland, Wales, Scotland, Northern England, Catalonia, and the Basque Country (Hooghe and Marks 2001: 87). Therefore, a distinctive identity especially if expressed by the presence of important regionalist parties, entails an enhanced activism at the EU level. Yet, this regionalist assertiveness does not always translate in harmonious and collaborative relations with the EU institutions. In fact, it could even backfire. As shown by comparative studies, regional governments with regionalist parties have 68 per cent less chance of carrying out activities with the European Parliament and 71 per cent less change of co-operating in the Commission's working groups than regional government without regionalist parties (Huwyler et al., 2018).

3.3   Regionalist Parties' Presence in the Parliament

In their struggle to extract powers and resources from the state, regionalist parties have been very interested in the process of European integration, often evaluating the ensuing changes in their opportunity structure as favourable for their cause and the institutions of the EU as potential allies (Hooghe 1995; Jeffery 2000; Keating 1995; McGarry et al. 2006). In spite of their ideological heterogeneity and their electoral irrelevance in European elections, they have tried to organize themselves at the European level since the first election to the European Parliament in 1979 (see box). In the very first years, the initiative of the well-established Flemish *Volksunie* (VU) only found the support of marginal regionalist parties, primarily from French regions. However, the 1980s represented a period of important expansion, as some of the new European Free Alliance (EFA) member-parties -such as the *Partito Sardo d' Azione* (PSdAz), *Eusko Alkartasuna* (EA), the *Lega Lombarda* (LL) and the Scottish National Party (SNP)- showed a certain capacity to elect MEPs. Yet, the total number of MEPs remained extremely limited, forcing the EFA regionalist representatives to join forces with various maverick parties in order to create parliamentary groups. EFA's parliamentary nomadism appears to have ended in 1999, when a stable Greens/EFA group was created, also building on the previous experience of the 1984 Rainbow Group.

Box Key Events EFA Group/Party	
June 1979	After the impulse of the Flemish *Volksunie* (VU), eight parties representing the regions of Alsace, Aosta Valley, Catalonia, Corsica, Flanders, the German-speaking area of Belgium, Friesland and Wales, met in Brussels to sign the Charter of Cooperation for the Construction of a Europe of the Nations (alas Charter of Brussels)
August 1979	The same parties, plus the Basque National Party (PNV), met in Bastia and signed a Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples (alas Declaration of Bastia)
January 1981	A Convention was called in Brussels to study "Stateless Peoples, Regionalism, Autonomy and Self Government in Europe". The Convention produced a new document – Declaration of the Brussels Convention - which merged and elaborated upon the Charter of Brussels and the Declaration of Bastia, under the heading 'European Free Alliance' (EFA).
July 1981	Nine parties gave formal birth to EFA by signing the Declaration of the Brussels Convention in Strasbourg: VU, *Partei der deutschsprachigen Belgier-Pro*

	Duetschsprachige Gemeinschaft (PDB-ProDG), *Fryske Nasjonale Partij* (FNP), *Strollad ad Vro* (SaV) from Brittany, *Elsass Lothringischer Volksbund* (ELV), Independent Fianna Fáil (IFF) from Ireland, a cultural organization forerunner of the *Partit Occitan* (PO), *Unione di u Populu Corsu* (UPC) and *Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya* (CDC). The latter three only signed as observers.
1984-1999	EFA MEPs join the heterogeneous Rainbow Group (1984-1994) and the European Radical Alliance (1994-1999) in the European Parliament.
1999-present	EFA MEPs form a stable alliance with Green parties, creating the Greens/EFA group in the European Parliament. Since 2004, the group is also joined by MEPs of the European Pirate Party.
October 2004	The EP recognises EFA as a formal European Political Party.
2000-2019	The number of EFA member parties has grown from just over twenty to forty-five, also thanks to the inclusion of new regionalist (or ethnic) parties from Central-Eastern Europe.

Sources: Lynch (1996); De Winter and Gomez-Reino Cachafeiro (2002); https://www.e-f-a.org/

Finally, since 2004, EFA has become a recognized European Party, though it still needs to join forces with the Greens to form a group in the EP. The creation of a European party was the prelude to a considerable increase in the number of member-parties in the following years, also due to the Eastern enlargement, which brought in several new regionalist and/or ethnic parties. Today, EFA includes forty-five member-parties, ten of which from Central-Eastern European member-states and one of which from extra-EU Nagorno-Karabakh (EFA website: https://www.e-f-a.org/member-parties/). However, parliamentary representation at the EU level overwhelmingly comes from Western European member-parties, with only one Eastern European party, the Latvian Russian Union (LKS), contributing with one MEP. More importantly, EFA never managed to attract or to permanently include major ethno-regionalist parties, such as the Basque National Party (PNV), *Convergencia i Unio* (CiU) and its successor Democratic European Party of Catalonia (PDeCAT), the Northern League (LN), the South Tyrolean People's Party (SVP) and the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR), which have been able to regularly elect their candidates in the EP. As a result, with the exception of the 1989 European election, EFA has been able to attract roughly between a fifth and a half of the MEPs elected by ethno-regionalist parties (see figure 2 below). This has meant that not only regionalist parties have had a virtually insignificant weight in the European Parliament but also that the role EFA MEPs within the Greens/EFA group remains rather marginal, as they make up only about a fifth of the parliamentary group.
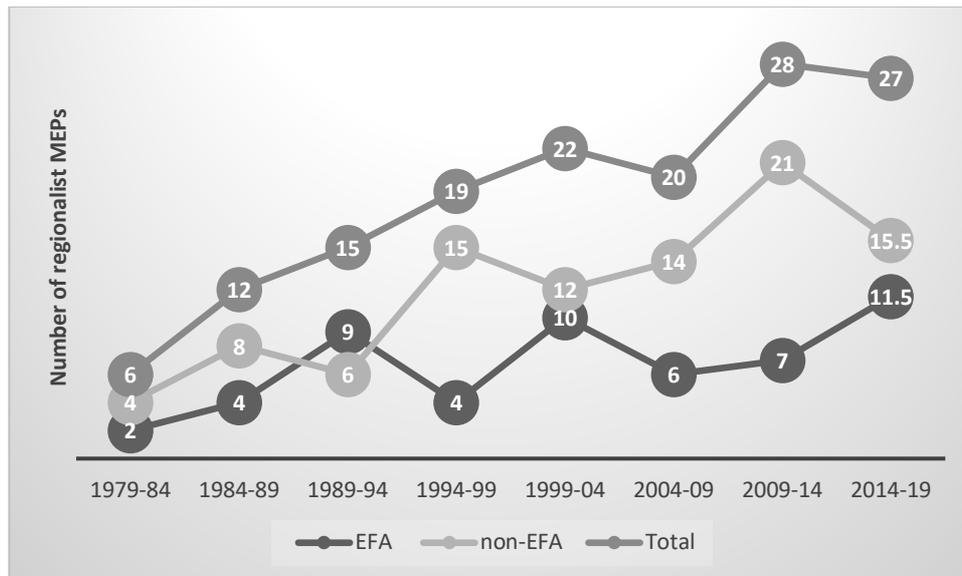
Figure 3. Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) elected by ethno-regionalist parties.

Source: elaborated by authors on the basis of data from ParlGov database (Döring and Manow, 2019).
Notes: In the 2014 EP election, one of the coalitions formed by regionalist parties in Spain gained one seat. That seat has been shared (on a rotation basis) between a non-EFA party (EH-Bildu) and an EFA party (the Galician Nationalist Bloc - BNG). For this reason, the figures have decimals.

The main reason why regionalist parties' capacity to co-operate at EP level has been rather limited is the considerable ideological heterogeneity with the regionalist party family along the left-right dimension (Massetti 2009; Massetti and Schakel 2015). The EFA stable co-operation with the Greens and the progressive ideological profile of the main original EFA member-parties has meant that radical (especially radical-right) regionalist parties, such as the Northern League and the Flemish Block/Flemish Interest (VB), have either stayed away or have been suspended/expelled. Other important regionalist parties, which are not radical and would have been accepted within EFA, have nonetheless decided to join other European parties (such as the EPP or ALDE) that they feel as ideologically closer than the Greens.

To sum up, regionalist parties' capacity to influence EU politics and policy via the European Parliament is severely constrained by a series of compelling factors. Their ideological heterogeneity entails that they rarely agree on most political issues, limiting their capacity to co-operate. In addition, in those few issues in which their position converges, most notably in the advocacy of regionalist claims vis-à-vis any member-state, their extremely limited weight in terms of vote/seat shares and their dispersion across several EP groups hinders their capability to actually matter. For instance, in the most acute phase of the still ongoing crisis between the Catalan and the Spanish governments, just after the October 2017 referendum on Catalan independence, regionalist MEPs from virtually all EP groups –from the radical-right VB (within the ENF group) to the radical-left EH-Bildu (within the GUE-NGL group) – have denounced the heavy-handed intervention of the Spanish authorities and urged EU institutions to sanction the Spanish government (European Parliament Debates, 13

November 2017). However, the position of the major EU institution has oscillated between neutrality (e.g. President of the Council) and open support to the Spanish government (e.g. President of the European Parliament).

3.4 Access of Regional Ministers to the Council of Ministers

The Maastricht Treaty (Art. 146; now Art. 16(2) TEU) introduced a possibility for representation by regional ministers in the Council of Ministers. This provision was heralded as a major achievement for regional representation at the EU level. And, indeed, many regions gained access to the heart of EU decision taking. Table 1 provides an overview of the regulations within the member states on when regional ministers replace their national ministers. It is important to note that these rights are complemented by mechanisms of 'internal cooperation' between central and regional governments which enable common positions to be agreed upon in preparation for Council meetings (these are discussed in depth in section 4.3). In addition, possible presence at the Council of Ministers also entails acces to (in principal) all Council working groups that prepare the decisions of the Council. For example, as of 2004, Spanish *comunidades autónomas* are allowed to participate in formal meeting of the Council of European Union as well as in its working groups relating to agriculture, education, employment, environment, health, and social affairs (Noferini 2012). Furthermore, most of the regions with access to the Council of Ministers and its working groups also have an 'observer' dedicated to transmit information on EU policy and legislation to the regions. For example, Spain has a 'councilor for autonomic affairs' since 1994 -installed following a coalition agreement between the CiU, a Catalan regionalist party, and the Aznar government- and the Austrian and German *Länder* have a *Landerbeobachter* (Hooghe and Marks 1996; Noferini 2012).

Some authors consider the access of regional ministers to the Council important because to the very least it signals that central governments are not the only relevant decision makers (Tatham 2008, Tilindyte 2016). However, most regions in Europe have little prospect to gain access in the Council of Ministers. Table 1 reveals that none of the regions in Central-Eastern Europe have access to the Council of Ministers and in Western Europe only the 75 regions with legislative powers are granted rights of access. In addition, central state representatives are always present and exercise extensive constraints on the freedom of action of regional representatives and some areas where regions share relevant competencies, such economic and financial affairs, remain under strict control of the central governments (Jeffery 2000; Noferini 2012). As Table 1 reveals, for many regions with extensive autonomy, central governments act as 'gate-keepers' and arrangements regarding regional minister access to the Council of Ministers depends on the agreement of central government (Högenauer 2008; Tatham 2008). For example, a representative from a *comunidades autónomas* in Spain can speak during the formal sessions of the Council under three conditions: (1) comunidades autonomas competences are affected; (2) a joint common position among the 17 comunidades autonomas has been reached; and (3) the head of the Spanish delegation deems the intervention to be opportune (Noferini 2012).

Table 1. Regional representation in the Council of Ministers.

Member state	Representation in Council Meetings
Austria	If a matter belongs to the competence of the Länder or is of interest to them the federal government may allow a regional minister to represent Austria in the Council. The regional minister will have to collaborate with the representative of the federation.
Belgium	Representation by the national government for exclusive federal responsibilities; exclusive representation by Communities or Regions for those areas exclusively within their responsibility; a federal or regional minister mixed representation for shared responsibilities.
Finland	The Finnish government does not have a duty to uphold Ålands position The Åland government may request to participate in the work of the Finnish delegation to the Council when the issue on the agenda falls within the competence of Åland and to become part of the delegation.
Germany	Representation by a regional minister when a draft EU act concerns the exclusive competences of the Länder designated by the Bundesrat. The representative must act 'with the participation of and in coordination with' the federal government.
Italy	In matters of exclusive legislative competence of the regions, a regional representative may be appointed as head of delegation. In practice this rarely happens and participation of regional ministers is limited to consultation by national government.
Portugal	There is no obligation for the Portuguese delegation to uphold the regional position in the Council. Azores and Madeira have the right to participate in the Portuguese delegation when matters that concern them are on the agenda.
Spain	A regional representative may be authorized to speak during Council meetings but is not entitled to vote on behalf of Spain. A regional representative is admitted to the Spanish delegation for matters of regional interest.
United Kingdom	Decisions regarding ministerial attendance at Council meetings are taken on a case-by-case basis by the competent UK minister. A regional minister (from Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales) may be allowed to act as the UK spokesperson in the Council.

Sources: Högenauer (2008); Tilindyte (2016).

On top of the limitations experienced at the EU level, regions that have access to the Council of Ministers need to agree domestically on their input because they represent their member state as a whole (these institutions are in section 4.3). For example, once the *comunidades autónomas* find an agreement on a joint position domestically then this joint position is transferred to the corresponding central state ministry and the participation of *comunidades autónomas* is officially guaranteed by including a regional representative in the Spanish delegation which represents Spain in the Council (Noferini 2012). Furthermore, the requirement that there has to be one regional view entails that finding a common position among five Belgian, nine Austrian, 16 German, 22 Italian and 17 Spanish regions leads inevitably to a fairly low common denominator (Jeffery 2007).

3.5   Discussion

Overall, we may conclude that since the adoption of the Cohesion Policy in 1988 which enshrined the partnership principle into EU regulations and the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 which gave regional and local governments a 'voice' in Brussels through the establishment of the Committee of the Regions, regional actors have tremendously gained informal and formal presence and representation within the EU institutions. Although the number of access points has increased and multilevel governance within the EU has consolidated, the literature remains sceptical about the impact regional actors may have on EU decision-making. However, practically all regions make use of the channels that the EU provide including regions with legislative powers which can make use of 'intra-state channels' to influence their national governments (Huwyler, Tatham, and Blatter 2018). Regional actors invest much in direct mobilisation and presence at the EU level and the EU institutions provide ample of opportunity for these efforts.

The competences of the EU have significantly increased especially after the Single European Act and the Maastricht Treaty. The EU started to adopt legal acts on matters which, in some countries, constitutionally are devolved to the regions such as agriculture, regional development and the environment. During the 1990s, the EU was increasingly encroaching on the constitutional powers of regions without increasing their role in the EU decision-making process in return. This has led regions to request participation and have an influence on EU policymaking as well as to claim the enforcement and the formal acknowledgement of their role in the EU decision-making process (Madrino 2008). These concerns were particularly raised during the Convention on the Future of Europe which resulted in the Lisbon Treaty. Regions did not get what they wanted and most of the innovations introduced by the Lisbon Treaty appear to be more formal than substantial (Madrino 2008). This leads to the question why regions keep on being present in Brussels? The answer according to Moore (2008) is because regions seek to deliver concrete benefits to their populations such as attracting EU funding and modifying EU legislation so that it takes the specific circumstances of a particular region into consideration. The idea of a 'Europe of the Regions' may be dead but a 'Europe with the Regions' (Marks and Hooghe 1996) or a 'Regions in Europe' (Moore 2008) is alive and kicking.

4. Regionalism and the EU in the Member States

We identify four EU impacts on regional governance within the EU member states: Cohesion policy conditionality, regionalist parties positioning on European integration, intergovernmental meetings to coordinate EU affairs, and the subsidiarity monitoring by regional parliaments.

4.1 Cohesion Policy Conditionality

Perhaps one of the most visible aspects of the EU on the ground is its Cohesion Policy (CP) which directly impacts local and regional economies and which enabled large infrastructural projects in local and regional communities. Especially in Eastern Europe, an EU conditionality effect was expected because candidate countries were required to establish regional governance structures capable of implementing CP. And when candidate countries did not have (adequate) regional government they were expected to create it (Piattoni 2009). In Western Europe an EU conditionality effect was expected after the 1988 reform of CP which enshrined the partnership principle. This principle stipulates that (implementing) decisions about operational programs -i.e. the plans to implement and spent the funds- should be taken in partnership among the Commission, the member state governments, regional governments, and other public bodies and non-governmental organizations (Allen 2010).[11] In addition, considering that many member states would benefit substantially from CP it was expected that the EU would exert a significant and detectable impact of the EU on sub-national governance in these countries.

Involvement of subnational authorities in CP varies widely across member states and seems to depend on the level of autonomy of pre-existing self-governing regional tiers (Kettunen and Kungla 2005; Radzyner et al. 2014). In depth case studies among the Central-Eastern European member states reveal "a cross-national preference for minimalist and formal rule adoption, including a bias against politically empowered regions" (Hughes, Sasse, and Gordon 2005: 7) which results from pre-accession negotiations being dominated by the Commission on the EU side and national elites from the candidate countries which result in a lack of involvement of sub-national actors (Bruszt 2008, Dobre 2009). The EU can act as a catalyzer for regionalization but other factors may intervene and limit the potential for regionalization (Saarts 2019). Especially in South-East Europe central governments appear to be resilient and central governments "adapts to the changing policy environment to retain a pivotal role in key decision areas" (Bache et al. 2011: 136). As a result, regional governance tends to remain task-specific and in many instances has not developed into multi-purpose government. Pre-existing political cultures, policy-making approaches, and administrative traditions may all constrain the potential for regional empowerment in centralized countries such as Greece and Portugal (Polverari 2016: 245).

Paradoxically, in those countries where the Commission had potentially the greatest leverage for encouraging national government to establish regional institutions it induced national

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[11] See also the so-called Common Provisions Regulation on European Structural and Investment Funds which sets out multilevel governance as a principle to govern partnership agreements with subnational authorities in the implementation of CP (Regulation No. 1303/2013, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:32013R1303, accessed 26 April 2019).

elites to comply with EU conditions but at minimal cost, that is, to introduce very 'thin' regional tiers with limited self-governance. Concerns about administrative capacity in the newly-established regional governance structures prompted the Commission to approve centralist models during the pre-accession phase (Ferry and McMaster 2013). We concur with Piattoni (2010: 128) who notes that "it is one thing to expect cohesion policy to empower the regions of Europe, in the sense of making them more capable of contributing to the policy-making process (policy empowerment), while it is an entirely different issue to expect cohesion policy to bring about a redefinition of the institutional or even constitutional setup of the member states (institutional empowerment)." Indeed, the constitutional position of regional governments within the member states is a key determinant whether they are able to successfully exploit the opportunities for access to new resources and influence cohesion policy, both in the Eastern and in the Western EU member states (Baun and Marek 2008; Brusis 2014; Lyssek and Rysavy 2018). EU Cohesion policy may have a significant 'Europeanization' impact (e.g. Scherpereel 2010) but the impact of the EU on setting up and strengthening regional governance in a formal and durable way is limited at best.

4.2   Regionalist Parties Positioning on European Integration

Part of the literature postulates that regionalist parties have a general interest in supporting European integration as the latter undermines the sovereign state which they fight against (Hix and Lord 1997) and facilitates transfers of powers from the state to the regions (Marks and Wilson 2000). These theses are based on earlier studies which saw regionalization and Europeanization as self-reinforcing processes which produced a general trend towards territorial restructuring (Keating 1995, 1998, 1999). However, amongst studies focusing exclusively on regionalist parties, only the quantitative analyses presented by Jolly (2007, 2015) fully support the idea of a strong, consistent and a coherent Europhilia amongst regionalist parties. Some qualitative studies, while restating an overall support for European integration, pointed out some intra-party family variance, including cases of openly Eurosceptic parties (De Winter and Gomez-Reino 2002). In addition, other qualitative comparative studies highlighted how some regionalist parties have considerably changed their positions towards European integration during their history (Elias 2009; Hepburn 2010), often following an instrumental logic (Lynch,1996), including the amount of structural funds devoted to their regions (Massetti and Schakel 2016b). Moreover, some scholars have even suggested that a general shift from Europhile towards Eurosceptic positions has been going on in the 2000s (Elias,2008; Massetti 2009). A thesis which is partially supported by the data presented in the most recent comparative works (Bakker et al. 2012; Szocsik 2013).

While the most compelling explanation for regionalist parties' shift towards Euroscepticism has been framed in terms of their disillusionment with the idea of a 'Europe of the Regions' (Keating 2004; Hepburn 2008; Elias 2008), other factors might also have had an impact. In particular, since regionalist parties are extremely heterogeneous in their left-right positioning, covering virtually the whole spectrum (De Winter 1998; Massetti 2009), part of the intra-family variance could be explained in these terms. Indeed, recent comparative studies have found some evidence in support of a link between regionalist parties' positioning on the left-right dimension and on European integration (Elias 2009; Massetti 2009). While Massetti (2009) has found an overall confirmation for the inverted U-curve relationship (i.e. left-right radical parties more Euroscpetic and left-right mainstream parties more Europhile),

both studies have pointed to a certain resistance by leftist regionalist parties towards European integration, especially in periods in which the EEC-EU was perceived as an expression of free-market capitalism, like in the 1970s (Lynch 1996; Elias 2009), or of a neo-liberal project, like in the 2000s (Massetti, 2009). However, the core of regionalist parties' ideology, pertains to the centre-periphery cleavage (De Winter 1998), not to the left-right divide. Indeed, previous studies emphasized how regionalist parties can be expected to evaluate European integration "through the lenses of the centre-periphery cleavage" (Elias 2009: 30). Regionalist parties that aim to create a new independent state might be in favour of European integration but they can be expected to be eager to use the (re-)acquired sovereignty in an intergovernmental European context, rather than in a European federal state. In addition, the deepening of European integration might render secession a more difficult and less meaningful objective. In contrast, autonomist regionalist parties that see the future of their region within the 'hosting state' would not feel threatened by the moving of the European project towards a European federal state.

4.3   Intergovernmental Meetings to Coordinate EU Affairs
The Maastricht Treaty introduced the possibility of regional ministers replacing national ministers and to discuss European legislation affecting regional competences (discussed in section 3.4). However, when regional ministers represent the member state they have to be in a position to commit their member state. A single and shared member state position requires a negotiation process committing both central and all regional governments and, as a result, member states with the prospect of delivering regional ministers to the Council introduced various kinds of intergovernmental meetings between national and regional governments to discuss EU affairs (Jeffery 2007). Procedures for central-regional government coordination on EU affairs have been established in Austria, Belgium, Finland, Germany, Portugal, Spain, and the UK (see Table 2). Compared to regional mobilization at the EU level (section 3.4) one may actually conclude that the real transformation in the role of regions regarding EU affairs has taken place in the intra-state arena where regions have undermined the capacity of central governments to maintain a monopoly over EU policy (Jeffery 2000).

A deepening European integration process meant that the EU was encroaching upon competences in the domain of regional government within the domestic political arena. In areas where regions were internally competent, they claimed and often subsequently won access to decision-making where those areas, or parts of them, had fallen under the ambit of European institutions (Jeffery 2000; Marks et al. 1996). Regions -especially those in federal and regionalized states- have come to learn that a confrontational and bypassing strategy towards the central state does not pay off and that their interests are best served by participating in central state decision-making (Börzel 1999). Indeed, research has shown that regions which get more involved in domestic European policy-making (i.e. the regions in the member states displayed in Tables 1 and 2) are less prone to bypassing but these regions will resort to bypassing strategies in cases when they are dissatisfied or disagree with the national position (Högenauer 2014; Jeffery 2007; Tatham 2011, 2012). Overall, it appears that regional governments which share the competence to represent their Member State in the process of the EU policy-making mobilize this right *through* rather than beyond the established structures of the Member State (Börzel 1999; Jeffery 2000; Keating 2008).

Table 2. Intergovernmental councils for European Union affairs in the EU member states.

EU member state	Intergovernmental council	Year	Decision making
Austria	Integrationskonferenz der Länder	1993	Each Land has a veto
Belgium	Interministeriële Conferentie voor het Buitenlands Beleid*	1994	Regions /Communities have a veto
Finland - Åland	EU-ministerivaliokunta/EU-ministerutskott	2004	Åland does not have a veto
Germany	Europaministerkonferenz	1993	Qualified majority (13 out of 16 regions)
Italy	Comitato interministeriale per gli affari comunitari europei	2005	Regioni/province have no voting rights
Portugal	Bilateral consultation central-regional governments	2004	Azores and Madeira do not have a veto
Spain	Conferencia para Asuntos Relacionados con la Unión Europea	1988	No voting rights until 1997; then simple majority
United Kingdom	Joint Ministerial Committee European Session	2008	Devolved entities have no voting rights

Notes: * Conférence interministérielle de la politique étrangère/Interministerielle Konferenz für Außenpolitik.

Sources: Hooghe et al. (2016); Högenauer (2008); Lanceiro (2015).

**4.4	Subsidiarity Monitoring by Regional Parliaments**

The Lisbon Treaty assigned a new role to national parliaments in the subsidiarity monitoring process and added an explicit reference to the regional and local dimension of the principle of subsidiarity. National parliaments have an ex ante possibility to review legislation before it is discussed and enacted at the EU level and they have a chance to raise objections and prevent EU action (Abels 2015). The mechanism works as follows. Each member state has two votes which are both assigned to unicameral national parliaments or divided between the lower and upper chamber in the case of bicameral national parliaments.[12] A draft legislative act is forwarded by the Commission to national parliaments at the same as to the Union legislator (Art. 4 Protocol No. 2). National parliaments have eight weeks to scrutinize and respond to the policy proposal and they can raise their objections by issuing a reasoned opinion to the European Commission but only objections relating to subsidiarity concerns are legally valid (Art. 7 Protocol No. 2). Subsidiarity concerns may also involve regional autonomy and "it is for each national parliament to consult, where appropriate, regional parliaments with legislative powers" (Art. 6 Protocol No. 2). When national parliaments representing at least a third of the votes raise objections -a quarter of the votes in case of judicial cooperation (Art. 76 TFEU)- the Commission may decide to withdraw, amend or maintain the proposal and reasons must be given for the decision (this is the so-called yellow card procedure). When negative opinions are raised by national parliaments representing a simple majority of the votes then the draft legislation must be reviewed and the European Parliament and the Council of the EU have to examine the reasoned opinions alongside the legislative proposal in case the Commission maintains its draft (Art. 7 Protocol No. 2). When the Union legislators agree with raised objections then the legislative proposal will not be given any further consideration (this is the so-called orange card procedure).

The early warning system for the principle of subsidiarity presents an opportunity for regions, and in particular regional parliaments with legislative powers, to be involved in European law making. The subsidiarity principle was itself a response to the democratic deficit (Caroll 2011), however several issues of representativeness and influence may be raised regarding the early warning system (Tilindyte 2016).

First, the representativeness of regional parliaments for the regional populations can be questioned. Regions with legislative powers can be found in eight member states which means that subnational parliaments in 20 member states are not (formally) involved in the early warning system and subsidiarity monitoring is solely a task of national parliaments in these 20 member states. Regional assemblies in relatively populous member states such as France, Poland, Romania, and the Netherlands have no opportunity to raise objections to the subsidiarity principle. There is also a territorial bias, the eight member states with legislative regions are all West European countries and none of the regional assemblies in Eastern European member states have to be involved when national parliaments issue objections to EU legislation. Although the 74 regions represent 43 per cent of the total EU population (i.e. 217 million out of 506 million people), the second-order nature of regional elections across Europe, including elections for regional parliaments with legislative powers, raise questions about the representativeness of regional parliamentarians. Turnout in regional elections is

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[12] Full detail on the early warning system for the principle of subsidiarity can be found in Kiiver (2012).

relatively low and those citizens who take the effort to cast a vote tend to base their vote choice according to national instead of regional issues (Dandoy and Schakel 2013; Schakel 2017).

Second, the subsidiarity monitoring process appears to give regional parliaments limited influence on EU governance within the member states (Bursens and Högenauer 2017). First, the process requires collective action among regional and national parliaments which requires at least three (in the United Kingdom) up to 21 (in Italy) regional parliaments to agree with the lower and upper chambers of national parliament (national parliaments in Austria, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom are all bicameral). Collective action is easier for the islands regions of Azores and Madeira in Portugal and the Åland islands in Finland which need to agree with a unicameral parliament. However, the very small population sizes of these islands regions -less than five per cent of the total population- may prevent them from being able to put political weight behind their objections. Furthermore, collective action is also complicated by the time frame of eight weeks within which a reasoned opinion must be submitted to the European Commission. Furthermore, Protocol No. 2 on the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality requires national parliaments to consult regional parliaments only on those matters which are encompassed by a region's legislative powers. Thus, objections against breaches of the subsidiarity principle can only be issued for those powers that are within the competences of regional legislatures.[13] In addition, national parliaments determine whether and how regions can provide their input because they hold the votes.

Several case studies reveal the limited impacts of the subsidiarity monitoring systems within the member states (Abels 2015; Bursens, Maes, and Vileyn 2015; Castellà Andreu and Kölling 2015; Högenauer 2015; Miklin 2015; Nicolini 2015). Although there is some increased activism among regional parliaments, total activity remains modest. Interestingly, regional parliaments in strong identity regions such as Catalonia and Scotland have become especially active in EU affairs, striving for stronger competences vis-à-vis their national governments (Abels 2017). The main reason for the general trend of limited amount of activity seems to be a lack of resources to process all the information parliaments receive in EU affairs, i.e. an information overload. There have been some structural changes but these have been inconsequential so far. For example, most regional parliaments have set up EU affairs committees when they did not have one previously, many regional parliaments have changed their (internal) regulations or rules of procedure, and some regional parliaments negotiated legally non-binding inter-institutional agreements on information rights and scrutiny power regarding EU affairs (Borońska-Hryniewiecka 2017, Committee of the Regions 2013). Regional governments (executives) appear to be more active and dominant in subsidiarity monitoring

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[13] Similar limitations on the influence of the early warning system on EU policy making have been raised for national parliaments (Abels 2015). Reasoned opinions require collective action among one quarter to one third of the votes for national parliaments within a time frame of eight weeks. Reasoned opinions must be based on subsidiarity concerns and the early warning system does not include real sanctions for the Commission and offers merely a reactive approach. As a result, the 'orange card' procedure has never been used whereas the 'yellow card' procedure has been only been issued three times. In the first instance in 2012, the European Commission withdrew its proposal, but not on the basis of subsidiarity concerns. In 2013 and in 2016 the Commission decided to maintain its legislative proposal (https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/law-making-process/adopting-eu-law/relations-national-parliaments/subsidiarity-control-mechanism_en, accessed 20 April 2019).

and regional parliaments often rely on their executives for support. Though, the early warning system does not provide regional executives with an additional influential 'channel' to impact EU policy compared to other 'channels' such as the intergovernmental meetings between national and regional governments dedicated to EU affairs (section 4.3) and the right for regional ministers to replace national ministers in the Council of Ministers (section 3.4). Since national parliaments appear not to be very keen to significantly strengthen the constitutional or participatory rights of regional legislatures (Raunio 2015), the most effective way for regional parliaments to influence EU affairs is to make good use of their scrutiny power vis-à-vis their executives (Abels 2017, Auel and Große Hütmann 2015, Högenauer and Abels 2017, Patzelt 2015).

5. Conclusion

In spite of important differences between Western and Central-Eastern European countries, as well as between small, medium, and large countries, regions have become stable and important institutional feature of European states and the EU system of multilevel governance. The regionalization reforms that have created this state of affairs have been due to the expansion of multilevel electoral democracy, the growing strength of regionalism, economic dynamics, and to European integration itself. Although empirical research on the complex causal relationship between these factors is still far from providing certain findings (Bauer and Börzel 2010), our analysis supports the thesis that the European Union has adjusted itself to the regionalization that has taken place within the member states and which has been primarily induced by domestic factors. The EU does not seem to have opened new important windows of opportunities for the regions. Rather, a Matthew effect appears to be present: regions with a high level of authority within their member states can be pro-active players in EU policy making, whereas regions with only administrative authority are, at best, relegated to an implementation role (Bauer and Börzel 2010).

Given the lack of self-government in the CEEC, there is a large territorial uneven distribution in the role regions play in the European multilevel governance system. Indeed, the entrenchment and empowerment of a 'third-level' in Europe only concerns the 74 regions with legislative power in eight member-states -which represent 43 per cent of the total EU population- which can significantly impact EU policy (Scherpereel 2007). Another trend over time is that regions have turned their attention to their central state governments as their favoured interface with the EU and to ring-fence regional autonomy within the member state and thereby also against an expanding EU (Jeffery 2007: 11).

Region-building, restructuring regional tiers of governance, and the politicization of minority nationalist identities proceeds across Europe and is not expected to wither away. The interplay between the EU and the member-states should be able to accommodate these various forms of regional governance that are emerging (Keating 2008). However, so far, the EU has been relatively 'constitutionally blind' to the development of a third level in Europe (Tatham 2014). That is to say, successive treaties have gradually acknowledged the existence of regions but only subject to the will of the respective member-state and with the powers that the respective member-state would concede. It is likely that regionalism and regionalization will remain impacting EU governance above and within the member states

(see also Tatham 2018) but the pace and scope of changes in the EU multilevel governance system still depend by and large on the national governments of the member states.

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