

A Europe of the Regions vs. the Regions in Europe: reflections on regional engagement in Brussels.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper addresses the somewhat paradoxical situation whereby on the one hand, the concept of a “Europe of the Regions” has largely been discredited and has generally fallen out of favour, whilst at the same time, the level of regional engagement in Europe continues to grow at an exponential rate. Regions themselves continue to operate actively in Europe. The number of offices in Brussels representing regional authorities from member states has grown exponentially over the past twenty years (Jeffery, 1997; Bomberg and Peterson, 1998; Heichlinger, 1999; Moore, 2006a). Regions from the new member states have been racing to set up representative bureaux in Brussels and thus to get ahead of ‘the competition’ or at least, be in the game. Beyond this, the older and more established regional representations are expanding their capacity in Brussels by deploying more resources, hiring more staff and moving to larger, better-located premises in the city (Moore, 2006b).

The question this paper seeks to answer is how we can best explain this paradox. Why should the ‘Europe of the Regions’ be such a marginal idea when there is clear evidence to support a stronger and increasingly mobilised regional level establishing itself at the heart of the decision-making centre in Brussels? What contribution does a regional presence in Brussels make to territorial politics? How is regional engagement in EU affairs manifesting itself and what are the implications for the future of regional Europe? These core questions underpin the reflections presented in this paper.

In seeking to address this paradox, the paper is structured into three sections. The first section considers the institutional dimension of regional engagement in Brussels, arguing that the presence of a regional grouping around the EU decision-makers contributes substantially to regional interest mediation. The permanence of this engagement can be regarded as the institutionalisation of a regional voice in Brussels. The second section then addresses the scope and extent of that regional voice, examining the core measures by which we can identify an increasing presence for regional actors within the EU. It considers the ‘value added’ of this regional grouping both to the EU decision-makers and to key actors within the home regions. The third section of the paper then focuses on the fact that a number of different clusters of regional actors are emerging within the Brussels arena today. Analysis of divergent roles and strategies provides further explanation for the declining salience of the

concept of a “Europe of the Regions”, given the contrasting aims and agendas of different types of regional actors.

FROM MOBILISATION TO INSTITUTIONALISATION: EXPLAINING THE PERMANENT PRESENCE OF REGIONS IN BRUSSELS

The simple explanatory factor in understanding regional engagement in Brussels is that EU policy matters for regional actors. On the one hand, most EU legislation involves local and regional governments in its implementation, and has thus engendered a set of active regional players seeking to shape that legislation (Greenwood, 2003: 231). In addition, estimates suggest that around 60-80 per cent of legislation passed by regional legislatures itself originates from the EU (Scottish Parliament, 2002a; NIA, 2002), and this figure is growing. On the other hand, the progressive decentralisation in the majority of member states in recent years has increased the capacity of regional actors to hold national governments to account over policy preferences and their support for EU aims (Loughlin, 2001: 18).

The relevance of EU policy and legislation for regional actors offers one explanation as to why they ‘mobilise’ in Brussels. Evidence of ‘sub-national mobilisation’ (Hooghe, 1995) can be seen in many different guises, such as the creation of cross-border regions, trans-national associations of regional actors or European federations of local government associations and such like. The emergence of regional representations has only ever constituted one element within a wider process of mobilisation, and the multiplication of channels for regional interest mediation in the EU since the mid-1980s when the mobilisation phenomenon began (Bomberg and Peterson, 1998; Keating and Hooghe, 2001). Nonetheless, representations in Brussels provide an independent profile for regional actors, and are the most visible form of this new regional dynamic.

Alternative interpretations of the growing regional presence in the EU have sought to establish cultural, ethno-political motivations underpinning the mobilisation of regions. Language, cultural practice and party political support at the regional level which is at variance from that dominant in the national political arena have variously been seen as potential motivational factors driving regional engagement with EU institutions (Marks et al., 1996; Keating and Hooghe, 2001; Marks et al., 2002). On the surface at least, regional representations in Brussels, situated alongside those of national governments, offered the potential for such regions to “outflank” national positions (Marks, 1992: 218; Benz, 1998: 117), or to “mobilise Commission support against their own national governments” (Ansell, Parsons and Darden, 1997: 350).

However, a number of developments have undermined these approaches. Firstly, there is now blanket coverage of regional representations from all member states, irrespective of ethno-political concerns. This fault line has not emerged as a salient political force in the mobilisation agenda. Secondly, regional representations have not emerged as a significant means of “bypassing” national governments in pursuit of regionalist aims. Despite initial tensions, no member state government has been moved to legislate *against* regional representations; indeed, these now tend to view them rather as partners to whom some of their own tasks – notably the provision of information to universities, small businesses and such like – can be hived off (Börzel, 2002: 77). Empirical evidence therefore suggests that regional actors are concerned

primarily with the practical issue of engaging with EU policy and legislation rather than using representation as a means to champion domestic political and constitutional change.

Since the first representative office was established in 1984, the level of regional engagement in Brussels through the form of an independent representation has grown exponentially.

Figure 1: Number of regional offices in Brussels, 1984 – 2007¹ (all member states)

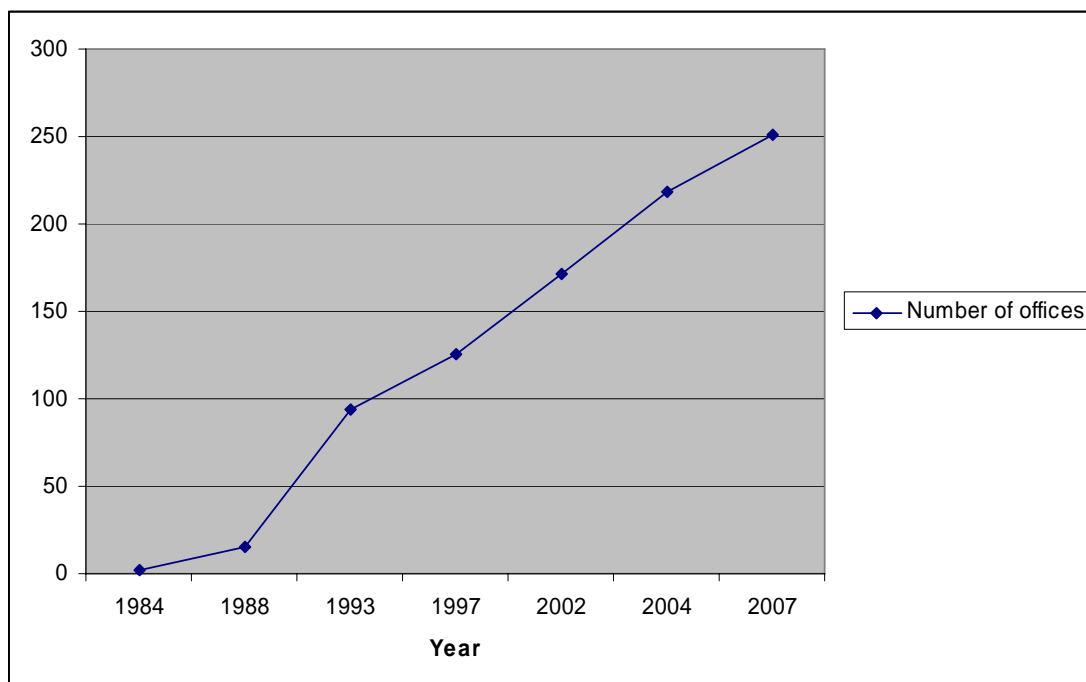


Figure 1 illustrates the extent to which the maintenance of a regional presence in Brussels has become the norm. In fact, those regions which do not have some form of individual office are the exception, and tend largely be those regions in the new member states which have not yet managed to secure either funding or personnel to do so.

This pattern of representation illustrates the extent to which a regional presence in Brussels has become a core element of EU membership. A modern EU region is one which is actively engaged in Brussels networks through some form of representative office. Regional administrations in the new member states are keenly aware of the significance of regions as part of the overall political currency in Brussels, and of the weight of precedent set by the model of engagement set by former EU15 regions. “It would be strange if we weren’t there”, the comment of one Polish regional official, illustrates the extent to which this model has permeated administrative thinking in the new member states on the appropriate forms of engagement with the EU. On the basis

¹ This graph illustrates figures noted in the following sources: Marks et al., 1996; Jeffery, 1997b: 183; Badiello, 1998: 322; Greenwood, 2003: 243; Committee of the Regions, 2004, 2007.

of a form of “lesson-drawing model” (Schimmelpfennig and Sedelmeier, 2004), the practice of representing regional interests in the EU through a permanent office in Brussels has been imported into the action plan of regional administrations across the new member states.

In the light of this overwhelming empirical evidence, it can be said that the model of a regional representative office has been institutionalised within patterns of interest mediation in Brussels. If we understand the concept of an ‘institution’ as capturing a set of rules, norms and understandings (March and Olsen, 1989: 21), then it is clear that emergent practices of policy initiation and development in the EU sphere draw on the weight of regional expertise situated in and around the key institutions. Relationships are structured on the basis of appropriate modes of interaction (Peters, 1999: 28); regional representatives offer a perspective on policy implementation, for instance, that can improve future policy design. Regional actors also have the weight of democratic legitimacy at the sub-national level to support their policy preferences, a factor which facilitates their engagement in a number of policy networks (Moore, 2006a). On areas such as competition law or financial services regulation, for instance, they have a more marginal contribution to make. Nonetheless, there is a general expectation on the part of the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Permanent Representations of the member states and indeed, other regional actors, that any given region will be represented and can be accessed through some form of permanent Brussels base. To this extent, the form of engagement of a regional-level representation in the European Union, has become institutionalised; all actors involved are investing resources which facilitate a continuing relationship (Mazey and Richardson, 2001: 78).

THE REGIONS IN EUROPE: THE SCOPE OF REGIONAL REPRESENTATION IN THE EU

The paradox of regional engagement in the EU today is that despite the decline of the “Europe of the Regions” agenda, regional activity in the Brussels arena continues to strengthen. On any measure, it is clear that the regional presence in Brussels is swelling; not only has the number of regional offices grown at an exponential rate (see Figure 1, above), but those representations themselves continue to expand, employing more staff and moving to more prestigious, visible and strategically positioned locations (Table 1). Two of the German Länder representations recently moved into larger premises, closer to the European institutions, whilst at the same time increasing their staffing numbers by around one third. The Welsh Assembly Government in 2006 re-located from a side street to a prestigious building on the Rond Point Schuman, right next to the Commission’s renovated Berlaymont headquarters, and a location from which they can drape their Welsh Dragon flag across the roundabout from the Scottish Saltire which decorates Scotland House. However, it was with the opening of the grand new Bavarian representation, in a renovated palace sandwiched between the Committee of the Regions and the European Parliament building, that set a new precedent amongst regional representations in Brussels (Moore, 2006b).

This expansionist tendency is also in evidence amongst the regional representations from the new member states. In the early phase of development, from 1999 when the first accession state regional office was opened by a Polish delegation, the tendency

has been to draw on partnership agreements with established, EU15 regional representations in Brussels. These effectively saw office space ‘donated’ to partner regions in the acceding and new member states, who paid only for their own staff costs and facilities. Already, however, this initial grounding phase has given way to an era of upgrading amongst new member state regions. For instance, the Liberec region of the Czech Republic initially co-located in an office rented from Scotland Europa in Brussels, but has since established an independent office. The Polish capital region of Masovia in 2006 bought new premises in Brussels near to the Commission’s Headquarters, and on moving in, increased its staffing levels from one person to three full time members of staff, along with interns. The overall trend, therefore, is upward, towards a larger regional presence in Brussels.

Table 1: Sample resources of regional representations in Brussels

Regional Representation	Members of staff	Annual Budget (Euros, 2006)
Central Bohemia (CZ)	3	250 000
Pilsen (CZ)	1	180 000
Lower Silesia (PL)	1	120 000
Wielkopolska (PL)	3	125 000
West Midlands (UK)	13	1 604 535
Bavaria (D)	13	n/a

It is a truism that no rational actor will ever waste resources by investing in an operation that does not deliver any form of a return. The representative offices of regions in the EU are controlled by a broad array of subscribing partners in the home regions, all of whom dictate operational strategy and lines of accountability. Irrespective of the nature of governing arrangements in the domestic region, be they federal, decentralised, unitary or other, a few common features are determinable:

- Representations in Brussels operate according to a business plan that is determined in the home region, in consultation with the EU office leadership
- To a greater or lesser extent, the strategy implemented by the Brussels office is complementary to broader strategic policy objectives of the home administration(s), both with regard to Europe and sectoral concerns
- A reporting function will demand that regional offices account to the stakeholders for their action, and offer an overview of the achievements and deliverables secured by the office, normally on an annual basis.

Whilst the actual shape and scope of operations and control processes vary widely, these basic principles go some way to ensuring value for money to the end users in the regions.

Many of the functions delivered by regional representations in the EU are ‘soft’ benefits, such as the creation of networks, shaping policy proposals and ideas at an early stage in the EU legislative process, or bringing school and citizen groups to European Parliament debates, few of which are measurable in financial terms alone. It is for this reason that quantitative analysis of inputs and outputs remains a highly unsatisfactory approach to explaining why regional representations continue to exist (Marks et al., 2002). Whilst measuring precisely their added value is necessarily an impossible undertaking (Jeffery, 1997), it can be assumed that regional offices are delivering value for money if they are fulfilling the objectives set for them by the sponsoring authorities; the *effectiveness* of regional offices in relation to their operation is probably best defined as “whether they really get what they want”. If those objectives are set only at a low level, then they may be more easily obtained than more ambitious goals (Heichlinger, 1999: 19). The objectives of regional representations necessarily vary in line with the characteristics of the end users who demand some form of return on investment from their EU office. Thus, an appreciation of the divergent stakeholders who run regional representations in Brussels is crucial in appreciating the full complexity of the regional lobby in the EU.

From the perspective of public administration, the operation of a Brussels office delivers a return in terms of a trained European “cadre”, with expertise in European Union policies, institutions and funding mechanisms. If managed effectively, this expertise can be captured within domestic administrations to provide a degree of European capacity within the home region.

However, a model of seconding staff from the home regions to Brussels to staff these representations on a rotating basis is in operation only in a few member states, though it is clearly an ideal model to which many aspire. The larger regional administrations, such as Bavaria, often send two and possibly even three officials from home ministries to work in the Brussels representation. It is rare that a Land ministry does not have anyone within the Brussels representation supplying it directly with EU intelligence. Experience in the Brussels office is regarded as a core experience for career civil servants in the Bavarian administration and is regarded as facilitating promotion on return. Something approaching this rotational secondment model has been adopted by the Devolved Administrations of the UK since their Brussels operations were established, with key policy staff seconded from the home ministries as a form of capacity building on Europe.

However, it is primarily these larger regional administrations that have the resources to be able to facilitate secondment to the EU office and to capture the expertise of staff on their return. Offices representing regions with smaller administrations and fewer domestic constitutional resources, for instance in the new member states, where there is no clearly defined career structure within the regional administration, tend to rely on locally-hired staff with the appropriate language skills to staff their offices in Brussels. Whilst the heads of office have largely been secondments to date, no human resources policies are in place to reward the time spent in Brussels with promotion on their return to the home administration, nor to capture the expertise of any staff in the EU office. Staff turnover has been high in all but a handful of the regional offices representing territories in the new member states, and it is noticeable that the offices where staff have been retained for a period of time are considered to be more efficient and effective operations. These offices, notably that of Poland’s Wielkopolska region,

are regarded as leaders amongst their peer group precisely on account of that stability. The extent to which that capacity and expertise on EU matters can be harnessed to the benefit of the home administration remains largely untested as yet, given the relatively short history of new member state regional offices, but in the absence of overarching human resources policies for the Brussels offices, question marks remain.

A DIVERSIFICATION OF GOALS: THE PRACTICAL LIMITS TO A 'EUROPE OF THE REGIONS'

We can begin to understand the paradoxical situation of increasing regional representation in the EU at a time when the "Europe of the Regions" idea has fallen out of favour, by unpacking firstly the real meaning of the concept of a "Europe of the Regions". This was always a very malleable concept, used by different actors in pursuit of differing goals. Nonetheless, the one unifying factor inherent in its imagery of a Europe driven not simply by nation states was that it could be harnessed in pursuit of a regional agenda – greater political participation for regional actors on EU issues, both at the member state level and at the Brussels level. Ultimately, it was in finding solutions to satisfy the varying intensity of demands for regional access that the concept fell apart; the scope and extent of that access varies from one member state to another. No Europe-wide solution could be developed given the increasing diversity of regional actors in the EU.

Indeed, despite the fact that the regional presence in Brussels continues to grow rapidly, it has failed to crystallise into a single powerful and coherent regional lobby due in large part to the sheer diversity of its make-up. The increasing diversification of this regional voice in Brussels can be attributed to three core developments:

1. Devolution and decentralisation across the EU's member states have not resulted in anything approaching a single 'Third Level' of constitutional actors. Significant variations in policy competences are identifiable across even the strongest tier of actors below the national level, limiting the extent to which these actors can lobby jointly on policy issues in Brussels beyond the constitutional regions issue.
2. Where the constitutional regions movement has been most significant is in lobbying to differentiate constitutional regions from mere administrative regions, arguing forcefully in favour of powers in the EU which recognise their unique legal status. The mobilising factor has been dissatisfaction with existing channels of interest mediation. In addition to forming a powerful force in constitutional lobbying, on those policy areas where there is agreement, there is a clear preference for constitutional regions to form ad-hoc advocacy coalitions which consciously exclude weaker, non-constitutional regions from their membership.
3. Alongside the constitutional regions/administrative regions divide, a new fault line has emerged between regions from the EU15 and regions from the new member states. Regions from the new member states tend to be relatively new, administrative creations. Unlike many of the strong EU15 regions, these do not constitute historic or linguistic regions, as national governments sought consciously to cross-cut inter-ethnic, religious and linguistic cleavages within their states in their territorial restructuring programmes throughout the 1990s. In addition, as relatively young and weak actors in the domestic system, there

is limited support for engaging on grand European constitutional issues, with a clear preference for day-to-day policy work in Brussels, notably drawing down EU funding. Thus far, it has been non-constitutional regions who have formed the strongest partnerships with this new set of regional actors in Brussels, particularly when this can support a broader advocacy coalition on a sectoral policy concern or facilitate an EU-funded project in their own region. The constitutional regions in Brussels have had limited contact to the new member state regional representations.

This diversification amongst Europe's regions manifests itself through the manner in which they choose to direct their Brussels representations. A diversification of strategic aims and priorities can be identified, as can a diversification of implementing strategies, that is, the actions taken to operationalise the objectives set by their governing bodies. Thus, in the EU today, there are multiple dimensions of regional representative activity, and it is worth considering each of these in turn.

Constitutional regions in Brussels

The constitutional regions in Brussels represent a unique subset of regional actors in the EU with a delegated set of legislative competences. The Spanish Autonomous Communities, the German and Austrian Länder, the Belgian provinces and the Devolved Administrations of the UK constitute a vocal group of powerful regions, who together press for greater recognition of their unique governmental status in Europe, and a more powerful say within European decision-making processes. For instance, the convention on the future of Europe acted as a galvanising force, with constitutional regions using this debate as a platform to press for change (Keating, 2004: 201)

This group of regions is happy to remain an exclusive club in Brussels. There is a strong preference to work with other *constitutional* regions on issues of policy interest in the EU, though there are national variations. The German Länder, for instance, are more willing to join coalitions of non-constitutional regions in pursuit of domestic policy goals than are the Devolved Administrations of the UK, for two reasons. Firstly, the UK's constitutional regions are complemented in Brussels by non-governmental actors who tend to cover the more broad policy issues and interests of stakeholder groups in the region, allowing the Devolved Administration representations the freedom to pursue the political interests of the Executive alone. This representative picture is generally not the case for other constitutional regions in Brussels. Secondly, the German Länder are more confident of their constitutional status, and as such, are less concerned to profile themselves exclusively within a club of constitutional regions. There is an awareness within Brussels networks of the strong constitutional resources and domestic political hitting power which the German Länder can bring to any advocacy coalition. The Devolved Administrations, by contrast, are relatively young institutions, and remain focused on raising their profile as constitutional regions in Brussels circles. "Often, people I speak to don't even realise that Wales now has an elected regional government", was one Welsh policy officer's comment.

Common to all of the constitutional regions' representations in Brussels is a strong political dimension to their work. Their role is clearly defined through the European

policy priorities of their domestic governments, who are their both their sponsoring agencies and their end users. These offices seek to carry out policy work for ministers, help to define future policy programmes and agendas, and arrange ministerial meetings and briefings with key EU decision-makers. Their institutional focus is largely directed in Brussels towards those institutions with the most authority, and where they themselves are keen to extend their influence: primarily to the Council of Ministers and the Permanent Representations of their member states. The constitutional regions are unique in that, unlike any other 'regional' representations in Brussels, they can facilitate and support the work of decision-making officials within the Council, under the legal arrangements of Article 203 of the EU Treaty, allowing regional ministers to take the negotiating lead, albeit with the support of the respective national government. Thus, maintaining good links to both the Council and the Permanent Representations are core political objectives of these regional representations' work. The institutions of lesser importance to these offices are largely the European Parliament, whose officials take policy lines which may well conflict with that of their sponsoring governments, along with the Committee of the Regions and the Economic and Social Committee. Links to the Commission remain very important for these actors, but there is little sense of any privileged partnership over the linkages established between Commission actors and other types of regional representations.

The representations of administrative regions in Brussels

For administrative or 'non-constitutional' regional representations in Brussels, the strategic objectives and policy goals are less clear-cut. For these offices, strategy is determined through consultation with their sponsoring stakeholders, which can range from simply one small team within a domestic, regional administration, as is usually the case with new member state, administrative regional representations, to a broad range of regional partners, involving local government actors, education institutions, voluntary associations, business groups and even private companies, such as is the case for the Scandinavian regional representations and the English regional offices. The work plan for the Brussels office is therefore decided through discussions within some form of management board, with a lowest common denominator approach necessarily resulting from their negotiations. The constraints imposed by having such a diverse membership generally mean that common ground tends to cover the less 'political' dimension of EU policy work, such as those issues which support the economic development agenda of the region as a whole, and those which foster collaboration with other regions, for exchange of ideas and best practice, the creation of business links and opportunities, as well as the submission of project proposals to EU funds. The focus of their work tends to be on EU funding opportunities and the funding programmes than on seeking to shape EU legislation. They monitor funding opportunities published by the Commission, raise awareness of these schemes amongst eligible actors within their regions, look to link such actors to potential partners in other EU regions through the networks they engage with in Brussels.

The conduct of this type of direct funds-seeking is characteristic of the representations of administrative regions in Brussels. Direct funds seeking remains only a marginal activity of constitutional regions' EU representations, and they do not provide any harnessing services to individual companies or organisations in the regions. Furthermore, whilst administrative regions tend to employ a dedicated EU funding

officer, this post is absent within the staff profiles of constitutional regions' representations; as funds-harnessing processes are very resource intensive, they are increasingly being sidelined by the constitutional regions in favour of a stronger focus on policy. Constitutional regions have largely carved off responsibility for this type of activity to other regional bodies with a presence in Brussels, such as local government associations, city representations or companies.

As membership organisations, this kind of regional representation ultimately has to meet stakeholder demands, and its strategy is driven by deliverables and targets. Generally, unlike most Constitutional Regions, administrative regions produce some form of publicly available annual report, which highlights expenditures, incomes and tangible outputs over the past year. The ethos of this activity is that found in most private sector organisations, with the Brussels office reporting back to shareholders on an annual basis. This approach is underpinned by the ongoing questions of “value for money” and “effectiveness” that are common to any client/service relationship, and as such, replicate the logic of collective action found within European lobbying organisations (Greenwood, 2003).

The political dimension of these offices' work is more low-key than that of the constitutional regions. They do seek to engage in policy networks which allow regional actors in Brussels to share experience and develop joint opinions to deliver to Commission consultations or directly to the relevant policy officials. Some of these groupings are quite formal in nature, meeting on a regular basis with rotating presidencies and regular contacts to the Commission, for instance; others remain more ad-hoc in nature and are short lived, generally over the lifecycle of an individual policy proposal. As a result, their primary interlocutors in Brussels tend to be officials within the European Commission, where they often find themselves pressing against an open door in response to the “demand pull” from the many DGs who seek their participation (Mazey and Richardson, 2001: 79). Links to the Committee of the Regions are also generally strong, given the favourable and receptive climate to their policy proposals within that institution. Relations with MEPs are variable, given the explicitly political nature of their work.

The representations of regions from new member states

A third cluster of strategic aims and priorities is identifiable amongst the representations of regions from the new member states in Brussels. At present, these form a separate subset of regional representations in the EU due to the fact that they share similar characteristics and are faced with similar sets of challenges in their work. Despite a limited degree of constitutional capacity, notably in Poland, the regions from the new member states do not further the cause of the ‘constitutional regions’ lobby in Brussels, and instead, represent a group of relatively new regional constructs with limited recognition amongst EU actors and a strong focus on an economic development agenda.

Firstly, the EU representations of new member state regions are clearly identifiable by their size. By and large, they remain much smaller than those of their EU15 counterparts. For the time being, the largest offices retain a staff of 4 policy officials, alongside interns – the Prague region – alongside Masovia and Wielkopolska, two Polish regions which both have 3 policy staff. The majority of offices, however, are

poorly resourced, staffed by only one key individual. Both the Slovak and Hungarian regions have chosen to locate their representations together, in one single “House of Slovak/Hungarian” regions, in an effort to pool resources, and there is a certain degree of support amongst Czech regions for also adopting this model; some Czech officials argue that with a national population size equivalent to that of Bavaria, the only way they can begin to approach the model of a huge and effective lobbying machine in the EU is if they join forces.

Running a one-person operation in Brussels is widely agreed to be a sub-optimal solution. Any individual representative has conflicting demands on their time, and as a result, they are chronically limited in their ability to carry out any substantive activities. This lack of resources in Brussels generally stems from a lack of awareness within the home region as to what an EU office can deliver. With no clear business plan to guide operation at the EU level, it is very hard for a one-person office to be effective.

Secondly, the EU representations of regions from the new member states have generally had to face criticisms within their home regions, from the press and from opposition parties, as to the value of such a representation. The question as to whether they are “worth the money” is something many of them have had to justify publicly within the home region. Euro-scepticism within the home region often leads management boards in the sending authority to take the short term view and demand tangible results from the office, at the expense of some of the ‘softer’ benefits which often only bear fruit after a long period of cultivation. This constant demand to justify their presence is an echo of the early situation faced by EU15 regions when they first opened representations in Brussels. Early criticisms did fade over time as the benefits to the region from having an EU presence became evident. This suggests that there is a developmental trajectory for regional representations, and that this constant demand to provide validation of their role will ebb in years to come.

Thirdly, the buzzword amongst regional representations from the new member states is very much that of “promotion”. The challenges for these regions are different to those faced by many EU15 regions when they first opened representations in Brussels: there are simply many more lobbyists and regional actors competing for ear-time in the EU institutions than ever before, so carving out a profile and a niche role is much more difficult than in the past. As relatively new administrative constructs, their names have low levels of recognition within EU circles: few people have any idea that West Pannon and Eszék-Alföld are regions in Hungary for instance, or where in Poland the Lubuskie region is, whereas they may well have an idea where the Salzburg region is or the Midi-Pyrénées region is situated. This in some senses justifies the model adopted by Slovak and Hungarian regions to co-locate in one building, though such collaboration has drawbacks in allowing regions to present an individual profile to Brussels circles.

The primary focus of the activities conducted by representations of regions from the new member states is on securing funding for regional actors, and on establishing the kind of networks with EU actors such as Commission officials and other regions which will facilitate this ultimate objective. Regions from the new member states are directed by the EU affairs team of their regional administrations, who are themselves faced with constant demands to justify expenditure in Brussels. This necessarily

results in a focus primarily on engaging in funding opportunities. Certain Polish regions, such as Lubelskie, for instance, are accountable not to the Europe directorate of the domestic administration but to the Department of Promotion and Tourism. Actors based in Brussels do recognise the value of contributing to ongoing policy debates, but are hamstrung in their ability to do so both by limited means and by the reporting and accountability restraints in the home region which have an exclusively results-oriented focus.

The intensity of the links established between the representations of regions from the new member states and other actors in Brussels reflects this unique set of challenges. The European Commission remains the primary focus of actions, and their engagement is welcomed on the part of Commission officials seeking to gather viewpoints from the full EU27. Relations with Permanent Representations of their member state are positive, having overcome initial difficulties and legal challenges. The Permanent Representations are keen to engage closely with the regional representations as part of a larger national voice in Brussels and to share responsibilities. Relations with other EU regions based in Brussels, particularly partner regions, are crucial to delivering successful results for their own region. The emphasis on ‘promotion’ also makes the Committee of the Regions a much more important interlocutor than for other subsets of regional actors in Brussels, given their propensity to run profile-raising events, such as the Open Days, and exhibitions. Relations between the offices from their own country do tend to vary, with smaller member states generally developing better models of co-operation than the larger member states. The Czechs for instance form a closely-knit group in Brussels where resources and intelligence is exchanged freely; the Poles tend not to have met all of the other Polish representatives, and in fact refer to them as “the competition”. Polish regions in Brussels regard access to intelligence and resources as prized elements of comparative advantage, much more than do their Czech counterparts.

THE EMERGENT DIMENSION OF “REGIONAL REPRESENTATION” IN BRUSSELS: REGIONAL PARLIAMENTARY ENGAGEMENT

One of the most notable and innovative developments in the picture of territorial interest representation in the EU since devolution has been the recent establishment of regional *parliamentary* representations in Brussels, alongside those of regional executives, regional administrative actors and stakeholder-driven regional coalitions. This move illustrates the increasing diversification of the “Europe of the Regions” agenda in the EU today.

During 2005, both the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales opened representative bureaux in Brussels, alongside the existing parliamentary representations of the region of Sicily and two of the Belgian provinces. Whilst neither British office claims to have a diplomatic role or function, the sheer presence of a regional legislature and assembly in Brussels, housed in offices alongside those of their executives, marks a qualitative new step in regional engagement in the EU. Both offices stress that their primary role encompasses two strands of activity. The first is as an add-on function to the existing members’ research services based within the home centres, the aim being to provide a dedicated research service on EU matters for the full spectrum of committee work in Edinburgh and Cardiff. The second is a representative function, which seeks to situate these parliamentary bodies within the

wider networks of information and influence which pulsate in and around the EU institutions in Brussels.

It remains to be seen whether the representation of regional parliaments and assemblies across the EU becomes the model which other constitutional regions will seek to emulate. There are few signs at present to indicate that this will be the case; interpretations of the UK regional parliamentary representations instead suggest that their creation is most likely accountable to the pro-active stance of the young democratic institutions of the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales in exercising their EU competences.

It is notable, however, that horizontal networks between regional parliamentary representations have rarely been established. A common set of legislative interests and policy preferences does not necessarily emerge between regional parliamentary representations in the EU. Rather, regional parliamentary representations are more likely to work with other interest groupings from their own region, simply because they represent the same constituencies and their interests and policy concerns are necessarily more closely aligned. In the one area where these bodies do share common concerns, legislative competencies in the EU at the regional level, a coalition has not yet been mobilized, and it is unlikely to do so in the absence of any specific initiative in this field around which such interests could coalesce.

Nonetheless, the growing emphasis within debate on the future of European integration on the role of *national* parliaments, which has in itself catalysed the recent astonishing establishment of national parliamentary offices in the EU, growing from a mere two to 22 within the period 2003 – 2006, suggests a growing role for regional parliaments as well. A renewed focus on parliamentary scrutiny and accountability has concentrated attention onto the parliamentary dimension of EU integration and could well catalyse further mobilization of regional parliaments in Brussels.

CONCLUSIONS: A EUROPE OF, WITH OR FOR REGIONS?

The paradox of regional Europe is that whilst the “Europe of the Regions” concept fails to provide an accurate reflection of current power relationships within the EU, appropriate and effective engagement in the EU remains a fundamental objective of all regional actors across the EU27. The direct engagement of regions in EU matters is, however, differentiated and depends on the nature of the sponsoring agencies within each individual region. The reality of the “Europe of the Regions” is clearly much more complex and more nuanced than this tagline would suggest.

The role of regions in the EU has not been further formalised beyond the high point of mid-1990s, when the CoR was established and the Article 203 of the EU Treaty provided for – limited – regional leadership within the Council of Ministers. This has been due largely to growing discrepancy between “regional” priorities, limited coherence in the group’s demands and the emergence of a distinct, constitutional regions agenda, as articulated, for instance, through the RegLeg group of EU regions with legislative competences. Even the limited advancements for regions presented under the terms of the Draft Constitutional Treaty would do little to consolidate any sense of “Third Level” engagement in the EU; equally, the Open Method of Co-ordination also offers little scope for regional actors to develop key leadership roles.

As a result, simply to equate the current situation to a Europe *with* the Regions (Hooghe and Marks, 1996) fails to reflect the differentiation in the activities and the demands of an increasingly diverse set of ‘regional’ actors across the EU27. Regional co-operation in policy formulation and legislation drafting is variable both across *type* of region and across policy sector concerned.

Empirical analysis shows how the scope of regions’ engagement in the EU has a largely pragmatic focus. It is strategically oriented activity, which seeks to deliver direct benefits to end users, and these vary between *types* of regions active in the EU sphere. This notion of a Europe *for* the regions is an idea recently championed by many of the offices representing non-constitutional regions in Brussels. This approach would emphasise the tangibles delivered to the regions as a result of direct, permanent representative activity in Brussels, such as the establishment of business links, joint projects, EU funding of visible schemes and developments in the local area or EU legislation which takes into consideration the specific circumstances of a particular region². Regardless of the long term prospects for a Europe of the Regions, there are clear incentives to be part of the long-term game *in* Brussels.

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² In 2001, the Welsh Assembly Government EU Office and the now-defunct Wales European Centre both claimed success in changing the wording of an EU Directive on large combustion plants (LCP Directive) and their emissions, specifically to allow Aberthaw, an important combustion plant in South Wales, to remain open for a further 12 years, thereby securing jobs in the region.

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