1. Regional governance in the EU or: what happened to the ‘Europe of the regions’?

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The European Union (EU) is perceived to be a ‘multilevel’ system. If ‘multi’ is to be more than two, logically, we have to consider not only the supranational EU and the national member state level in our analysis of EU governance, but also a third level, i.e. the subnational or regional level (Keating 2017a). We can, indeed, observe an increasing interest in the role of regions and the dynamics of territorial politics in Europe since the 1980s. The ‘rise of regional Europe’ (Harvie 1993) potentially leading to a development towards a ‘Europe of the regions’ (Borrás-Alomar et al. 1994; see also Hrbek and Weyand 1984) was an idea widely praised until the mid-1990s. It was as much a ‘vision’ as an ‘incitement’ (Piattoni 2016: 68). This development has its roots in economic, political and cultural developments of the 1960s (see Piattoni in this volume); varying intensity and outcomes have actually led to ‘regionalisation in different shades’.

Firstly, we can observe striking territorial dynamics leading to increasing regionalisation as decentralisation in many European countries (see, for many, Keating 2009; Hendriks et al. 2010; Scully and Wyn Jones 2010). This goes along with changes in the democratic fabric of states (Loughlin et al. 2010). This development is most interesting for comparative research on federations and federalism, but also has an impact on EU studies.

Secondly, in 1966 Ipsen famously considered European integration to be ‘*landesblind*’ or ‘federal blind’ (quoted in Finck 2017: 5); this blindness has at least changed or diminished with stronger recognition of regions in the EU ‘constitutional’ order since the Maastricht Treaty. Thus, today the EU is rather ‘myopic’ (Tatham 2014: 42) than totally blind. Regions became aware of the changing opportunity structure restricted and simultaneously provided by the multilevel nature of European integration. For many this was connected to the chance to circumvent the nation state. A result of this activism was, for example, the establishment of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) in 1994 (Piattoni and Schönlaue 2015) or

a growing number of regional liaison offices in Brussels – today more than 225 (Hepburn 2016: 206). Furthermore, Europe witnessed the creation of regional associations, the establishment of more direct channels of representation of regions in EU institutions (Hooghe 1995; Hooghe and Marks 1996; see also Jeffery 2000). These developments were interpreted as ‘evidence of a more profound transformation in the nature of the political process within a multilevel, multi-actor, non-hierarchical and increasingly complex European political system’ (Elias 2008: 485).

Thirdly, European integration has had a profound effect on restructuring of regions in the domestic context; for example, EU policies have created incentives among regional actors (e.g., Piattoni 2016). EU cohesion policy, for example, fostered regional mobilisation (Hepburn 2016). Especially regions with strong identities and regionalist parties and movements, but also other identity-driven stronger and more ‘fit for Europe’¹ regions perceived changing governance structures as encouragement for action. When more and more competences were transferred from the national to the European level, thus, also away from the regions’ reach, many regions started responding to this. They began developing more activist ‘leave us alone’ strategies aiming at a stronger role in EU policy-making more independent of their home country. Clearly, the degree of regional authorities varies greatly, as illustrated by the Regional Authority Index (RAI) (Hooghe et al. 2016; see also Seys in this volume). Yet, the overall trend is towards more decentralisation of authority.

Fourthly, in the last decade we observe the development of another transnational shade of regionalisation in the form of ‘macro-regionalisation’. Since 2009, macro-regional strategies have been developed in different parts of Europe, including numerous EU member states and sometimes also non-EU countries. Several scholars perceive macro-regions as a new mode of integration from below and examples of ‘experimentalist governance’ (see Gänzle and Kern 2016; also see Gänzle in this volume). In addition to the already existing strategies, there is at least discussion about creating more macro-regions.

The starting point of this book is that regions are obstinate or, in the words of Scully and Wyn Jones (2010), ‘persisting’ – even if nation states do not become ‘obsolete’ in European governance (to play around with the title of Stanley Hoffman’s seminal work (Hoffman 1966)). Yet, from this general finding we can derive questions of what the role of regions is in European governance, what it should be, and how we can conceptualize it. Thus, this volume adopts an empirical, conceptual and normative perspective on regions in the EU setting, contributing to what is often called ‘new regionalism’. The key question guiding this volume is: If the initial, maximalist and high hopes for a ‘Europe with the regions’ that dominated

the debates of the 1980s and 1990s did not materialize, can we develop the notion of a 'Europe with the regions', which is fairly modest but allows for more flexibility and ambiguity?

Let us briefly recap the previous debate. Indeed, there was great scepticism about the potential of a 'Europe of the regions' from the very beginning (Borrás-Alomar et al. 1994). Fairly soon the rise of the 'Europe of the regions' encountered a fall (Hepburn 2008) and, in fact, as Elias (2008: 485) put it: 'It quickly became clear that a "Europe of the Regions" . . . had failed to materialize.' For example, the CoR never developed into a third legislative chamber, as some had hoped, leading to a great deal of frustration and the search for alternative channels of regional input into EU policy-making. Nevertheless, today the regional dimension in EU politics and the role of regions in EU governance is different from the mid-1980s; the EU today is 'finally able to see below the member state level, but such a vision is still rather weak' (Tatham 2014: 42).

Simultaneously, the EU has changed in the last 30 years in terms of enlargement and moving to an 'ever closer Union'. Especially the effect of widening from 12 in the 1980s to today's 28 member states has been ambivalent with regard to regional implications. While Wyn Jones and Scully (2010: 2–3) identify enlargement as one of the reasons why regionalism has been in decline and why the strong role of the state has been cemented, Swenden and Bolleyer (2014) argue that increasing 'regional mobilization in the "new Europe"' has profited from enlargement. However, a key trigger is the 2009 Lisbon Treaty, because this document has recognised the role of regions and has significantly strengthened the principle of subsidiarity – regionalism's holy grail – by introducing the new subsidiarity control mechanism. The economic and financial crisis, which has rattled Europe since 2008/09, has further left its mark on regions. These factors may have an impact on how regions respond to European integration. Yet, it would certainly be exaggerated to assume that this leads to a new wave towards a 'Europe of the regions', because until today the influence of regions has remained limited (see Tatham 2015).

Apart from the empirical developments, the conceptualisation of regions has also changed since the mid-1980s. Of paramount importance is, of course, the development of the multilevel governance (MLG) approach (Piattoni 2010). This European integration theory strongly contributed to rethinking the role of regions as actors in EU governance in the 1990s and early 2000s (Hooghe and Marks 1996, 2001; Marks et al. 1996; Marks and Hooghe 2004; see, for many, Benz 2015; Pagoulatos and Tsoukalis 2012), and has already left a deep mark on the political debate on EU governance (CoR 2009). Within integration theory MLG is today less prominent than it was (see Stephenson 2013; Tortola 2017). Especially in the light of the

ongoing poly or ‘triple crisis’ (Caporaso 2018) and ongoing debates about the future of European integration, the discussion today is rather dominated by intergovernmentalism and functionalism – and their liberal, neo/new and post variations. Prevailing theories emphasise the role of member states in governance and in crisis management in the EU.²

Recently, a more intense debate was started about the future of a post-crisis (and post-Brexit) EU. Key documents are, for example, the European Commission’s ‘White Paper on the Future of the EU’ as of March 2017 presenting five different scenarios, or the September 2017 Sorbonne speech by French President Emmanuel Macron. It is striking that – with regard to the role of regions – there is a clear lack of recognition in these scenarios, and no vision for them in the future EU. This is a prominent gap that requires academic as well as political attention.³

Based on our premise that regions are obstinate or pertinent, this volume concentrates on two research questions: (1) What kind of territorial governance dynamics can we observe at and across different levels? (2) What are the implications for democratic governance in the EU? Thus, this volume addresses questions of regionalisation – within member states as well as transboundary. Furthermore, we assume that it is key to adopt a multidisciplinary approach to grasp and assess the role of regions in the future EU. So far, political science literature mainly shies away from other disciplines dealing with similar empirical phenomena and conceptual problems. Bringing together insights from political science, political geography and legal studies helps pin down the state of the art in EU regional governance. For example, in political geography the concept of scale is widely used today, offering more flexibility than levels and, thereby, allowing for the study of the dynamics of territorial politics. The legal contributions highlight the constitutional background and how it shapes governance structures (at and across different levels). Thus, both disciplines represent valuable additions to the political science perspective. Therefore, we aim at engaging in an interdisciplinary dialogue. This requires that we will, firstly, at least sketch out what we mean by regions, regionalism and regionalisation in the EU context and relate this to conceptual issues discussed in the contributions in Part I of this volume. The intention is (1) to sketch out the academic debate on these four key issues addressed in the four parts of this volume, and (2) to embed the chapters in this debate. Our overall objective is to take stock of previous developments and take them further by addressing the notion of a ‘Europe *with* the regions’, whose theoretical, empirical and normative dimensions and their implications for (democratic) governance in the future EU we want to explore. That is the underlying rationale of this volume. The findings will be discussed in more detail in our conclusions to this volume.

PART I WHAT IS A REGION? A NORMATIVE AND CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVE ON REGIONS, REGIONALISATION AND GOVERNANCE

'Region', 'regionalisation' and 'regionalism' are, indeed, polysemic words (see Piattoni 2016: 75; see also Gänzle in this volume). Especially in the EU context they are opaque and multi-dimensional. With regard to EU cohesion policy, for example, we find a technocratic Euro-speak of Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS) regions: the EU classification distinguishes between NUTS-1 (98), NUTS-2 (276) and NUTS-3 (1,342) regions. Also in the national context the understanding of what a region is varies. This becomes clear, for instance, when looking at who is delegated by the member states to the CoR. While all 350 CoR members (or alternates) must – in their home country – be democratically elected and/or hold a political mandate, this can lead to very different rules on who is delegated to represent a member state's region. The German delegation, for example, consists of many members of the *Länder* parliaments or governments; in this context region means above all *Bundesland* (state). The French delegation consists of mayors and representatives of the new 'grand regions', which are – in terms of competences – very different from German *Länder*. Luxembourg, Cyprus or Slovenia, for instance, are states without regions; all CoR delegates come from the municipal level. Some of the Croatian delegates represent prefectures, while the Polish CoR members come from voivodeships, which are administrative regions.

The composition of the CoR is just one example illustrating both the constructed and contested nature of territoriality; Keating (2017b: 10) argues, it is 'not just a topological concept but a sociological one, which is socially constructed'. He highlights the dynamics of territoriality and speaks of a fundamental 'rescaling of the European state' (Keating 2009, 2013, 2017b). Simultaneously, regions are also *politically* constructed by the way European integration impacts on territoriality and triggers the dynamics in regional governance. This understanding of regions is also supported and conceptualised in Seys's contribution to this volume, where – rooted in the strand of 'new regionalism' – he argues that 'drawing regional boundaries' is a normal part of domestic politics but can follow different logics. Many authors in this volume explicitly refer to the social construction of regions by domestic and European politics.

In line with this approach we conceptualise regions as 'soft spaces'. This involves an understanding that transcends the usual (federalism-inspired) territorial perspective, and instead adopts a more functional one. In this sense regions are simultaneously territorially and functionally defined (see Seys in this volume). This conceptualisation was developed in political

geography. The ‘scaling’ approach to regions allows for more fluidity and is less institution-centred than political science or legal discussions about levels of governance (cf. Lang and Sauer 2016; also see Sielker and Stead in this volume); nevertheless, the MLG approach to regionalisation is still valid and important (see Piattoni in this volume).

With regard to the national context, *regions are formalised, maybe even constitutionalised intra-state subnational units* – the meso level (between the local and the national level), which can be endowed with merely administrative but also wide-ranging legislative competences. However, regional boundaries are not static, but are delimited based on different criteria, as Seys illustrates. Also Piattoni (in this volume) argues that European integration ‘exposed the fiction inherent in the distinction between state and region’ and emphasises the constructed nature of delimitations.

In addition, regions are not confined by national borders. In fact, we speak of regions and regionalisms in different contexts and on different levels (see Gänzle in this volume). With regard to the EU, the external, trans-border perspective on regions is also important. In this sense, regions can be less formalised *trans-border soft spaces*. ‘Euregios’, for example, can involve a number of regions from several states. Since 2009 several ‘macro-regions’ have been created by EU political strategies. These trans-border regions, e.g. the Baltic Sea Region, are functionally based (policy-oriented) spaces resting on a multilevel governance structure.

In sum, the term ‘region’ is polysemic; the concept of territoriality is contested; and, in empirical terms, it is evident that ‘Europe’s regions are, by any standards, an extraordinarily diverse group’ (Wyn Jones and Scully 2010: 3). Together this creates an analytic and conceptual challenge.

Finally, there is normative ambiguity. Thinking about regions (and their relations to one another and to nation states) involves thinking about their role in the dynamics of democratic legitimacy. All contributions in this volume address this issue – at least to some degree – and most argue in favour of stronger regions in EU governance. This focus is most prominent in the contributions in Parts I and IV of this volume. For Piattoni (in this volume), regions and regionalisation are concerned with finding the right size to secure democratic legitimacy and administrative efficiency in a polity. Given that EU member states and also regions in the EU are representative polities, the role of regional parliaments is a key concern when addressing the democratic quality of governance. The Lisbon Treaty was the first ever official recognition of regions and their role in EU governance. Moreover, it has granted a sub-group of regional parliaments – those endowed with legislative competences – particular yet limited rights in EU policy-making via the so-called Early Warning System (EWS) of subsidiarity control. This system is clearly important and has created an incentive

for many regions to develop stronger scrutiny powers especially vis-à-vis their regional governments and vis-à-vis the European Commission (see Abels 2015; Abels and Högenauer 2018). However, these extended rights are limited to only a sub-group of 73 regions from six member states (including Scotland; see also Högenauer in this volume). Conceptualising regional governance in the EU requires a broader perspective on good governance, which involves the question 'whether, how and to what extent local and regional participation in EU decision-making processes contributes to good governance in the EU' (Panara in this volume). This question clearly necessitates an input from political science and its expertise in analysing democratic governance; but also legal, constitutional perspectives are important and fruitful, as the contribution by Panara illustrates.

PART II THE DYNAMICS OF INTRA-STATE REGIONALISATION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

In the last decades, territorial politics has unfolded an incredible dynamic in many EU member states affecting not only the institutional dimension but also issues of political culture, parties etc. as well as policies (see Scully and Wyn Jones 2010; Detterbeck and Hepburn 2018). Both supranationalisation (favouring the EU) and decentralisation of state power affect the regions – with ambivalent results. As Tatham (2014: 36) observes, 'the EU has seen its member states devolve more and more powers and competences to the sub-state level'. In the last decades a number of EU member states, 'Belgium, France, Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom have all devolved large amounts of competences to the sub-state level while many unitary-centralized countries have decentralized or at least "deconcentrated" some power to various territorial levels' (Tatham 2014: 35). Instances of public authority, especially implementing powers, being transferred to regions have become more common. The recent reform of regions in France is a good example of this dynamic even in highly centralised, unitary states (Pasquier 2015). But other member states have also increased the degree of regionalisation (see Borghetto and Franchino 2010). However, there is 'no linear, unidirectional regionalization [trend] of the EU' (Tatham 2014: 40).

Often such regionalisation satisfies the ambitions of regions and promotes efficiency and legitimacy of the state and the region. Yet, it may also trigger a centrifugal dynamic prompting calls for greater autonomy or even secession. Especially in regions with a strong identity (e.g. as nations) and with regional actors promoting such developments this can set off detrimental dynamics, such as in Catalonia (see Kölling in this volume) or

in some Italian regions (see Nicolini in this volume). This raises the question of if and what kind of alternatives to secession exist (Sturm in this volume). These developments are closely linked to European integration because usually regions aim for independence from their ‘home country’ but want to stay in the EU and may even seek protection from the EU against the national government, e.g. Catalonia. Sometimes, secession may be even triggered by European integration; the situation in Scotland – in the light of the Brexit referendum – is an example of this.

While regions are clearly affected by processes of domestic decentralisation, they are also affected by a recentralisation of competences at the EU level. All treaty changes since the 1990s have involved transfer of competences to the EU level. While this transfer may go hand in hand with supranationalisation (the famous Community method), this is not necessarily the case, since it can also involve more intergovernmentalism (the Union method) fostering a ‘post-democratic executive federalism’ (Habermas 2012) – due to its detrimental effects on parliaments at all levels, including regional parliaments when their regional competences are affected (often culture, education, tourism, environment, health, etc.). The loss of authority is not compensated for in EU bodies such as the CoR, which still has a rather weak influence on EU policies (see, for example, Hönninge and Panke 2013; Piattoni and Schönlaue 2015).

PART III MACRO-REGIONAL DYNAMICS AND EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

For a comprehensive picture of regional governance it is important to focus not only on the vertical, but also on the horizontal dimension. Inter-regional networks play an increasing role: they can be intra-state and transnational – including networks among regional offices in Brussels (cf. Beyers and Donas 2014) – and may include a wide range of actors. Macro-regions are a fairly new governance strategy that fosters transnational regional cooperation by involving a number of regions, a wide range of governmental and civil society actors, and diverse policies. They bring together cross-border regions from EU and sometimes also non-EU member states. Some consider these macro-regions as laboratories for experimentalist governance and future regional integration (see Gänzle in this volume). They are analysed as ‘soft spaces’ (see Sielker and Stead in this volume) allowing us to address and enhance the region’s problem-solving capacity. As Perrin (in this volume) argues, these macro-regions can have a positive effect on the development of a (trans-)regional culture, which may have a positive impact on European identity. So far these macro-regions are still

in the making and require further academic attention; yet, their potential is at least promising.

PART IV REGIONS IN SUPRANATIONAL DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

As mentioned, normative concerns are addressed in a number of contributions in this volume. The challenges of territorial interest representation in the EU policy process and the involvement of regional actors in supranational governance are explicitly addressed in the final part of this book. Problems of democratic accountability are not specific to the EU, and indeed all multilevel systems – including national federations – have to tackle such problems (see, for many, Papadopoulos 2008). In this sense, a federalist perspective has much to contribute to theorising EU governance. It allows, as Keating (2017b: 615) argues, opening the EU levels ‘as a political arena, examining policy-making and interest mediation and the complex relationships between national and European levels. It [the federalist perspective] reintroduces normative issues like balancing power, subsidiarity, sovereignty, representation and solidarity.’ While in studies on national federations the democratic involvement of lower levels in national decision-making is a key concern and different parliamentary models do exist, scholarship on European regionalism is afflicted with an executive bias. The focus is very much on regional administrations and governments while parliaments are often neglected. This, however, is – among other things – problematic from a normative-democratic perspective, because parliaments are key institutions for securing democratic legitimacy. Given the multilevel or scalar nature of the EU, important adaptations have to be made to the existing challenges.

There is empirical evidence that parliaments in the EU system develop networking capacities in order to sustain their democratic role. This finding pertains in principle also to parliaments at the regional level, even if their capacities for domestic and trans-border inter-parliamentary networks are much more limited (see Abels and Eppler 2015). Bursens (in this volume) emphasises the deficits in the institutional design of the EU and the way that regional parliaments are involved. The parliamentary deficit, which is widely discussed in the literature on the democratic deficit of the EU, is linked to what Bursens identifies as a trilemma between market integration, parliamentary democracy and national sovereignty. He calls for the development of a multilevel parliamentary system which, firstly, also involves regional parliaments and is not restricted to inter-parliamentary cooperation between the European and national

parliaments, and, secondly, goes along with a politicisation of EU issues at the national and regional level.

Inter-parliamentary cooperation is an important channel, but not the only one. Regional actors have developed several channels. Jeffery (2005) once distinguished between ‘let us in’ and ‘leave us alone’ strategies. The structure of territorial relations in the national (constitutional) context has a major impact on the strategic choices for regions and their parliaments. Högenauer (in this volume) outlines some of these choices and how they are made use of in the Early Warning System on subsidiarity control. While, overall, the findings are sobering, the EWS has nevertheless created important incentives.

A different channel is conceptualised by Tatham (in this volume). Interest group politics is a strong feature of the EU, and this pertains to functional as well as territorial interest representation (Knodt et al. 2012). Regional actors have created new avenues attentive to their needs and interests. In this sense, regions have begun acting like interest groups – and they do so across a wide range of policy fields. European policy-makers have become, to some extent, more open and responsive to these ‘regional lobbyists’, even though the nation states are and will remain the key actors. And greater responsiveness at the EU level has created further incentives for stronger engagement. Yet, interest group politics is also a difficult strategy for regions (Högenauer 2015; van Hecke et al. 2016). According to a recent study by Tatham (2015: 396), the degree of ‘supranational embeddedness’ correlates with the degree of regional influence; and regions do have an interest in exerting influence. Thus, the EU has promoted the mobilisation of regional actors. This could or should – according to Tatham – be used to develop a ‘stakeholder democracy’ in the EU context. Such a conceptualisation promises, in addition, to further output *and* input legitimacy, which is lacking in EU governance.

As the contributions in this volume illustrate, ‘the regional level still plays a vitally important role in European governance’, even if the ‘maximalist hopes’ of the 1980s for a ‘Europe of the regions’ were over-optimistic and, hence, quickly disappointed (Scully and Wyn Jones 2010: 244). Given the diverse trends in (intra-state and trans-border) regionalisation leading to a wave of ‘new regionalism’ in practical-political as well as in scholarly terms, there is a need for academic analysis. This book takes up key issues and discusses the development from what used to be called a ‘Europe of the regions’ to what we label as a ‘Europe with the regions’. It will account for the theoretical, empirical and normative dimensions and implications of regional governance in the future EU. The ongoing crisis in European integration is also a crisis of the nation state. Against this background we claim that regions, as the level closest to the citizens, can contribute

to stronger democratic legitimacy of European governance. However, manifold pitfalls related to regionalism do exist, and many contributions in this volume speak to the downside. In this sense, the making of a 'Europe with the regions' deserves further inspection.

NOTES

1. For example, for the German *Länder*, which qualify as regions in the EU context, being 'fit for Europe' (*europafähig*) became an influential ideal structuring reform in the administrative and parliamentary arena.
2. Yet, governance approaches still have a voice in the integration theoretical choir (cf. Abels and Macrae 2016; Wiener et al. 2019).
3. The goal of the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence PRRIDE (Positioning Regions and Regionalism in a Democratic Europe; 2015–2018) was to address some of these gaps. For more detailed information: <https://uni-tuebingen.de/fakultaeten/wirtschafts-und-sozialwissenschaftliche-fakultaet/faecher/fachbereich-sozialwissenschaften/ifp/institut/lehrende/abels/research/jean-monnet-centre-prride/#c590221>.

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