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The Foreign Relations of European Regions: Competences and Strategies

JOACHIM BLATTER, MATTHIAS KREUTZER,
MICHAELA RENTL and JAN THIELE

The article traces the foreign relations of 81 European regions by looking first at the constitutional competences which these regions enjoy within their nation-states. We discover that the regions in federal states have expanded their competences in two directions: conducting autonomous foreign activities and influencing national foreign policy. How far the Belgian regions, as well as the German and the Austrian Länder go in both directions depends very much on the scope of their competences in domestic politics. In non-federal states (France, GB, Italy), regionalisation brought rather more leeway to conduct a certain level of autonomous foreign activity than regional influence in national foreign policy. When we – in a second step – trace the strategies or directions of international activities which the regions pursue it becomes obvious that setting up an office in Brussels in order to adapt to political integration is very common among West European regions. In contrast, much more variety can be observed when examining the regions' strategies to adapt to fundamental economic and cultural transformations. Some European regions invest heavily in economic promotion offices and in transnational partnerships while others lack the motivation or ability to invest in these forms of foreign relations.

Discussions on foreign relations of sub-national governments in Europe mainly come under the heading of 'multi-level governance' and are closely connected to the contacts between European regions and the institutions of the European Union (Bache and Flinders 2004; Benz 1998, 2000, 2004; Hooghe and Marks 2003; Jeffery 1997a; Marks *et al.* 1996). The peculiarity of the European discourse in focusing on supra-national decision-making is becoming obvious by comparing it with the scholarly discourse in North America. Here, the international and transnational activities of sub-national governments have been studied under the headings of 'perforated sovereignty', 'globalisation' and 'paradiplomacy' (Duchacek 1990; Dyment

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2001; Hocking 1993; Keating 2002; Lecours 2002; Michelmann and Soldatos 1990). The latter term was taken up first by European scholars from countries like Belgium and Spain (Aldecoa and Keating 1999; Philippart 1998). In these countries the tensions between parts of the nation-state are much more fundamental than in Germany and the United Kingdom, which are the dominant empirical cases for the multi-level governance discourse (e.g. Jeffery 1997b). However, this broader view is now becoming established in Germany, too (Bosold 2004; Hrbek 2003a). In comparison to the multi-level governance discourse these analytical concepts and the resulting empirical findings stress much more economic and cultural activities as well as motivations as characteristic for the trans- and supranational activities of sub-national governments (Dymont 2001; Fry 1993, 1998; Philippart 1998).[1]

To place the debate on foreign activities of sub-national entities within a wider historical debate about the transformation of the Westphalian system of sovereign nation-states (Ruggie 1993), we have to overcome the focus on the relationship between the supra-national and the sub-national level within the political system. Instead, we have to compare the sub-national governments' attempts to build connections to the supranational political decision-making level with other foreign activities which represent adaptations and strategic responses to more general transformations at the turn of the millennium.

The most important transformations at the turn of the millennium can be seen (Beck *et al*. 1996; Blatter 2007; Brenner *et al*. 2003; Castells 1996, 1997; Robertson 1998):

- first, in the Third Industrial Revolution, which moves us toward an economy and society in which information and communication take centre stage;
- second, in the 'rescaling' of socio-economic and political spaces (globalisation, continental/supranational and sub-national/supra-local/metropolitan forms of regionalisation); and
- third, in the quest for individual and collective identities as a consequence of the renewed and radicalised contingencies that this latest wave of modernisation produces.

The first goal of our research project is to develop a comprehensive conceptual approach to the foreign relations of European regions and to align specific strategies to these fundamental socio-economic, political and cultural transformations. Our second goal is to provide empirical information about the formal competences and the actual activities of European regions in a systematic manner. The project builds on earlier work (Blatter 2002) in which the role of sub-national governments in the foreign policy of three federal states (Switzerland, Germany and Austria) was examined since the Treaty of Westphalia. One finding has been that

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even in rather similar states the constitutional competences of the sub-national governments have developed quite differently although we can detect similar tendencies over the centuries and an increasing role of sub-national governments in foreign relations in all three states in recent years. In this current work we want to complement the earlier research which had a long historic perspective but limited variety in respect of the cases (all were federal states) with a comparison which takes into account a broader and more diverse set of countries. Furthermore, one of the basic findings of the first research project has been that a study of the constitutional competences is not able to capture the reality and relevance of the foreign relations of sub-national governments. Many activities abroad are taking place despite or below/besides the constitutional rules. Additionally, nationwide rules do not account for the diversity of foreign activities which the different sub-national governments perform (Blatter 2002: 358). Our empirical analysis will therefore put most emphasis on the actual activities and will provide data on the level of individual regions.

In a further publication (Blatter *et al*. 2008) we systematically trace the necessary and sufficient preconditions for the three types of foreign relations which we identify in this paper.

Different Types of Foreign Relations

Autonomous Activities and/or Influence on National Foreign Policy

If we are interested in power shifts within the political-administrative system, formal rules and constitutional assignments of competences are important because of two reasons. First, they determine to what extent the national executives hold a 'gate-keeper' position within the multi-level government system which gives them the opportunity of exploiting information asymmetries within both the international and the domestic arena (Blatter 2002: 340). Secondly, they are also strong symbolic representations of the dominant perspective on the appropriate distribution of tasks between the layers of government.

Those who focus on the relations between sub-national governments in Europe and the European Union usually differentiate direct linkages between sub- and supranational actors from the efforts of sub-national actors to influence European decision-making through intra-state channels (Börzel 2000, 2002; Hooghe and Marks 2001: 81–92; Jeffery 2000). In the broader literature on sub-national governments' foreign relations we find a similar distinction between 'primary strategies' and 'mediating strategies' (Hocking 1999: 30). In our empirical analysis we will address the question of which path has been taken by looking at the constitutional competences within different countries. Do we find constitutional or other legal changes which provide the sub-national governments with the power to influence the preference-building and

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ratification process within the nation-states and/or do we find changes which provide the regions with more opportunities to perform an autonomous foreign policy?

Economic, Cultural and/or Political Activities

If we want to expand our view on foreign activities of sub-national governments beyond the political-administrative system and the usual focus on EU policymaking, it makes sense to differentiate foreign activities of sub-national governments according to the main transformations at the turn of the millennium. These transformations can be assumed to trigger specific reactions from regional governments. Such an approach comes close to the approach of Keating (1999: 3–5) who discerns three sets of motivations for regions to go into the international arena: economic, cultural and political. In consequence, in order to get a comprehensive and differentiated view on the foreign relations of sub-national actors, we differentiate three types of activities:

1. Activities which provide links to important socio-economic places to adapt to processes of economic integration. The sub-national governments try to defend or enhance the economic prosperity in their region and to secure their own financial revenue.
2. Activities which provide links to similar political entities to adapt to processes of socio-cultural reconstitution. The sub-national entities try to defend or expand the recognition of their institutional peculiarities in order to secure their cultural identity.
3. Activities which provide links to supra-national political decision-making centres in order to adapt to processes of political integration. The sub-national entities try to defend or to expand their political autonomy or their political influence in order to secure the relevance of domestic preferences or interests in policymaking.

State of the Art

Our knowledge about the foreign activities of sub-national governments is coloured by a concentration on the most prominent regions. Within the European multi-level governance discourse, it has been the activities of the German Länder which captured the imagination of scholars and reputedly served as role models for other European regions (Engel 2001).

With respect to the question whether European regions have tried to expand their intra-state influence on European decision-making or whether they pursued an autonomous approach with direct linkages to the EU there are different findings. Whereas Jeffery (2000) provides arguments and evidence that the intra-state channels are the more important access points

to European policymaking and some authors provide empirical evidence of a turn towards a more cooperative approach in countries like Spain (Börzel 2002) or Canada (Dyment 2001), others discover a trend toward a more autonomous approach in Germany (Knodt 2002). Most authors, however, see an expansion of both paths (Criekemans and Salomonson 2000; Hrbek 2003b).

Existing comparative studies provide some insights about the content and scope of regional activities in Brussels (Jeffery 1997b; Marks *et al.* 2002; Neunreither 2001). This research shows the tremendous growth of sub-national activities in Brussels during the last 20 years. Furthermore, it makes clear that the creation of the Committee of the Regions in 1993, which serves as the official channel of sub-national interest formulation and aggregation within the institutions of the European Union, has not stopped the more informal activities. Indeed, the Committee of the Regions seems to have been a catalyst. The number of sub-national governments' offices in Brussels rose from 54 in 1993 to over 160 in 2001 (Marks *et al.* 2002: 1). Whereas the debate first focused on the growth of sub-national involvement in Brussels, it later changed to stressing the existence of strong differences between European regions with respect to the goals and intensity of their engagement in Brussels (e.g. Jeffery 2000). An important insight has been that not all offices in Brussels are trying to influence EU policymaking. Most serve mainly as antennas for the sub-national governments. Indeed, the main flow of information is top-down. The information from Brussels helps the sub-national governments to mobilise activities at home in order to influence political preference formation within the state or help to adjust to EU policy programmes in order to reap financial profit. Only those with a large budget and staff in Brussels aim to influence EU policymaking (Marks *et al.* 2002; Neunreither 2001).

We have not found any comprehensive attempt to map the market-oriented foreign activities of European regions – in contrast to the situation in North America (e.g. Fry 1998). Overviews of transnational partnerships and networks between sub-national governments show the multiplicity and diversity of the transnational relations between European regions (Schmitt-Egner 2000, 2005). Scholars differentiate between cross-border cooperation among neighbouring regions, 'functional cooperation' between regions with similar economic structures to lobby for their interests in Brussels, 'profile-raising cooperation' like the 'Four Motors', and groupings that are formed to influence 'constitutive politics' within the EU (Jeffery and Palmer 2003). Nevertheless, these overviews and categorisations are not founded on a systematic and broad-based empirical investigation.

We can conclude that we have some clues but no solid empirical base regarding the variety among European sub-national governments in respect of specific types of foreign activities. This is even more the case with our comparative knowledge across different kinds of foreign activities. There are

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many case studies which present the whole range of foreign activities of singular sub-national governments or cursory overviews of the diverse activities of sub-national governments within one nation-state (e.g. Dyment 2001; Eissel *et al*. 1999; Feifel 2003; Meier-Walser 1999; most contributions in Hocking 1993; Hrbek 2003a). However, these case studies either have no theoretical framework or use quite different ones, making it very difficult systematically to derive general conclusions.

Overall, there remain major gaps, ambiguities and uncertainties in our knowledge of the foreign activities of sub-national governments. Totally missing are systematic studies which capture the breadth of foreign activities and compare the various strategies. The following empirical information is a first step to fill this void.

Case Selection and Data Collection

In our case selection we faced a trade-off. The aim of representativeness would have led us to select countries which represent the entire range from federated states to unitary states. This would have been adequate to complement the analysis of the constitutional competences of sub-national governments which has been done just for federal states (Blatter 2002). Nevertheless, our main empirical interest has been to trace the intensity by which regional governments really pursue different types of foreign activities. Here, the interest is much more to show how far this phenomenon has been developed and whether we can discover huge differences between the regions within a nation-state. The latter goals led us to select countries/regions where we expected a rather high level of foreign activity. We will show awareness of the resulting bias in respect of the entire population of European regions when we interpret the findings.

In consequence, we decided to restrict our sample to sub-national governments on the first level below the national level (e.g. *régions* and not *départements* in France) and to select regions from countries which are either federal states or regionalised states. Furthermore, in order to come closer to the ideal of ‘comparable cases’ (Lijphart 1975), we only take into account regions which have a rather similar socio-economic background and no dramatic change in their political system. This leads to the exclusion of East European regions. In consequence, we included all regions from Germany, Belgium, Austria, Great Britain, France and Italy which lead to an overall sample of 81 regions.[2]

The data for the German, Belgian, British and French regions was collected by Jan Thiele in 2004 and are extensively documented in his PhD thesis (Thiele 2006). The data for the Austrian and Italian regions was collected by students during a university course conducted by the first author in the winter term 2005/2006 (Kreutzer and Schwarzkopf 2006; Stepan 2006). The comparative analysis of the constitutional competences is

based on secondary literature and some interviews with legal experts. The information about the actual activities is primary data which has been collected by directly contacting the regional governments.

The Constitutional Competences

As laid out before, in order to compare the formal competences of sub-national governments in the field of foreign relations we distinguish between two different aspects. First, how much is a region allowed to conduct an autonomous foreign policy in a specific policy field without formal procedures of control from the national government? Second, what formal role do regional governments play in the conduct of national foreign policy (including European policy)? These questions will be briefly answered country by country before we offer a comparative summary. Since these competences are in flux, it is important to point to the fact that the following description represents the situation in 2004/2005, when the data for the foreign activities was also collected.

Austria

The competences of the Austrian Länder to conduct an *autonomous* foreign policy are weak and limited to bordering states and their regions. Article 16, Paragraph 1 of the Austrian constitution states that in matters within their own sphere of competence the Austrian Länder can conclude treaties with states, or their constituent states bordering on Austria. However every treaty must be approved by the federal government.

The ability of the Austrian Länder to influence the foreign policy of the federal government is stronger. Article 10 paragraph 3 of the Austrian constitution stipulates that the federal government must allow the Länder an opportunity to present their opinion before conclusion of international treaties, when the treaties affect the Länder's autonomous sphere of competence. In European matters, Article 23d obliges the federal government to inform the Länder regarding all projects within the framework of the European Union which also affect the Länder's autonomous sphere of competence or could otherwise be of interest to them. Similarly, the Länder must be given the opportunity to present their views on these projects. If the Federation is in possession of a uniform comment by the Länder in their fields of legislative competences, the Federation is bound thereby in negotiations with, and voting in, the European Union. The Federation may deviate from this comment only for compelling foreign integration policy reasons. Insofar as a decision in the European Union also affects matters of land legislation, a representative nominated by the Länder can be part of the Austrian delegation during the Council's proceedings. In very rare circumstances when EU decisions are only affecting Länder competences, the federal government can give the Länder representative the opportunity

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to speak for the Austrian delegation (Blatter 2002; Pernthaler 2002; Zwicker 2000).

Belgium

The constitutional and legal rights of the Belgian regions to maintain *autonomous* foreign relations are considered to be the most strongly developed worldwide (Paquin 2003: 627). Within their own competences the regions are completely free to conduct international activities (Schick 2003: 68; Woyke 2003: 401). This includes, as stated in Article 167, Paragraph 3 of the Belgian constitution, concluding treaties with other regions or states. Because the Region of Flanders has merged with the Flemish community, the competences as well the scope for foreign relations of the Flanders region are larger than those of the Walloon region and the region of Brussels.

The Belgian regions exercise very strong *influence on Belgian European policy*. Here every region, as well as every community and the Belgian state, has the right to veto any decision. In practice, however, the regions use their veto right only in matters where they have the constitutional competence. Additionally, one of the Belgian regions represents Belgium in the European Union's council of ministers when the subject in question falls within the responsibility of the regions (Delamartino 2003; Paquin 2003; Schick 2003: 69).

France

France grants its regions very little scope to maintain *autonomous* foreign relations. Only the national government has the right to conclude treaties and there are no provisions in the constitution that give the regions any rights concerning international relations (Charpentier 1992: 135). However, the *Deferre* Law of 1982 marked the beginning of the process of decentralisation and included the possibility for French border regions to initiate, after consent of the state government, regular contacts with regions across the border. The competences of the regions were enhanced in 1992 with law No. 92-125, which introduced the so-called *coopération décentralisée*. Since then the French regions are allowed to conclude agreements within their fields of responsibility with foreign regions but not with foreign states (Reigner 2001: 186). Overall, their autonomous competences have to be rated as weak. There is also no provision that allows any formal participation of the French regions concerning the formulation of *French foreign policy* or French European policy (Auel 2003: 131).

Germany

The German Länder enjoy quite strong constitutional rights to conduct their foreign relations *autonomously*. Paragraph 3 of Article 32 in the

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German constitution gives the German Länder the right to conclude treaties with foreign states with the consent of the federal government insofar as the Länder have power to legislate. Furthermore, Article 24, Paragraph 1a allows the Länder to transfer sovereign powers to trans-border institutions in neighbouring regions insofar as they have the competency in the relevant policy field domestically (Fischer 2001: 19; Laufer and Münch 1998: 119; Niedobitek 2003: 20–26).

Even stronger than the autonomous competences are the opportunities to influence the foreign policy of the federal government. Regarding the European policy, Germany's Article 23 GG (*Grundgesetz*/constitution) foresees that the federal government may transfer sovereign powers to the European Union only with the consent of the Bundesrat, the parliamentary representation of the German Länder. The federal government must inform the Länder in matters concerning the European Union (paragraph 2) and the Bundesrat is always involved in the decision-making process of the federal government (paragraph 4): 'Insofar as the Federation has legislative power, the federal government shall take the position of the Bundesrat into account.' To the extent that the legislative powers of the Länder are primarily affected, the position of the Bundesrat shall be given the greatest possible respect in determining the Federation's position. In matters that may result in increased expenditures or reduced revenues for the federation, the consent of the federal government shall be required (paragraph 5). When legislative powers exclusive to the Länder are primarily affected, Germany's representation in the European Union shall be delegated to a representative of the Länder designated by the Bundesrat (Clostermeyer 2003; Diedrichs 2003).

Great Britain

While foreign affairs, including international relations and European policy, are formally reserved to the British government, it is now accepted that the various British regions *autonomously* conduct some international activities within their respective spheres of competence. Because of asymmetric devolution in the United Kingdom, the different regions are endowed with various competences; therefore Scotland has a far greater scope for international activities than Wales, which in turn enjoys a wider margin than the English regions. In 1999, a memorandum of understanding granted the devolved regions of Scotland and Wales the right to set up independent representations in Brussels and be represented in the committee of the regions (Schwab 2003).

There is no provision that grants the various British regions any rights in influencing British foreign policy. In European policy there is some limited leeway for the devolved regions. The memorandum of understanding installed a Joint Ministerial Committee that established a subcommittee aimed at coordinating the European activities of the British, Scottish and Welsh governments. Additionally, another agreement principally commits

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the British government to include the devolved regions in the formulation of British European policy in matters touching on the competences of the devolved regions. Moreover, regional ministers can, on invitation by the British government, take part in the British delegation to the EU's council of ministers and even take the lead for Great Britain. Nevertheless, there is no formal right that guarantees any participation of the devolved regions (Bulmer *et al*. 2002; Jeffery and Palmer 2003; Keating *et al*. 2003; Wright 2004).

Italy

The constitutional and legal rights of the Italian regions to maintain *autonomous* foreign relations have been expanded within the last decade. With law No. 52/1996 the Italian regions obtained the right to establish independent representations to the European Union in Brussels. Furthermore Article 117 of the Italian constitution grants regions and autonomous provinces the power to sign agreements with foreign regions and countries in their spheres of competence (after consultations with, and agreement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

In contrast, the Italian regions only have limited means to influence the foreign policy of the Italian state. It is the task of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to communicate constantly with the Italian regions to guarantee a constant flow of information between the regions and the Ministry concerning any international activity of the Italian state or one of the regions. However, there are no further rights in influencing national foreign policy other than being informed. The only exceptions are matters concerning the European Union. Building on the so called *LaLoggia* law of 2003, in March 2006 the Italian government gave the Italian regions the right to be represented with one regional president in the Italian delegation to the European Union's council of ministers. This rule applies only in matters of the exclusive legislative competence of the Italian regions. Furthermore, in contrast to the respective provisions in Belgium or Germany, there is no possibility for the regional representative to lead the Italian delegation. The margin of the Italian regions to influence Italy's foreign policy thus must be considered weak (Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2007; Palermo 2003: 125).

Summary of Competences

Since the 1990s, the formal competences of sub-national governments in foreign relations have been expanded in all countries. Nevertheless, strong differences among the countries remain. The dramatic shift in domestic policy competences in Belgium from the national to the regional level has been mirrored by a similar shift in the field of foreign policy. Belgium is probably the only country in the world where the national government has ceased to be the clearly dominant level in foreign policy. This devolution of

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competences allows for a more autonomous foreign policy of the regions and secures a strong intra-state influence. In Germany the constitutional changes enable the Länder to conduct their autonomous foreign policy, albeit with a much more geographically and functionally limited scope. The rights to influence the national foreign policy are assigned to the Bundesrat as a federal institution representing the Länder's common interests. Although the influence of the individual Länder is much more restricted in comparison to the individual veto rights of the Belgian regions the Länder's rights are remarkably strong when it comes to institutional matters (where a consensus among the Länder is likely).

Furthermore, a look at Table 1 reveals that the classic centralised states (France, Great Britain) have given (some of) their regions some leeway to conduct autonomous foreign policy rather than any right to influence national foreign policy. Developments in Italy point in the same direction. The formally federal but culturally unitary state of Austria shows a different trajectory by restricting the scope of autonomous foreign policy fairly strictly to cross-border activities of the Länder. Regarding the influence on foreign or (more precisely speaking) European policy of the federal government, the Austrian Länder have been able to follow the German example, but since their domestic policy competences are much smaller, their factual influence on the Austrian foreign policy is also quite limited. Belgium looks to be in the transformation from a federation to a confederation because the national government has not only lost its monopoly but also its autonomy in conducting foreign policy.

The Different Strategies: Content, Intensity and Extensity

As laid out before, we differentiate between economic, cultural and political strategies because we assume that regional governments react to basic transformations in all of these fields. These governments try to collaborate with different actors who are important in order to adapt successfully to these transformations. For our empirical research these general strategies were operationalised by selecting more specific activities which we expect to

TABLE 1
CONSTITUTIONAL COMPETENCES IN THE FIELD OF FOREIGN RELATIONS

	Competences to maintain autonomous foreign relations	Rights to influence the national foreign policy
Austria	weak	moderate
Belgium	very strong	very strong
France	weak	none
Germany	strong	strong
Great Britain	England: none	none
	Scotland: moderate	none
	Wales: weak	none
Italy	moderate	weak

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be typical and relevant to these strategies. We assume that the presence of external offices of regional governments can be seen as an economic (rather than a cultural or political) strategy. This is because foreign activities of this kind are also performed by the individual states of the United States which are commonly interpreted as being an adaptation to the integrating global economy. Furthermore, we assume that institutionalised and intensive transnational partnerships and networks between regions represent cultural activities. These partnerships embody the idea of a 'Europe of the regions' most clearly. They can be seen as symbols of mutual recognition, an important element in times when the international order is challenged or in transformation (e.g. Spruyt 1994). Finally, in accordance with the literature discussed on multi-level governance (e.g. Marks *et al.* 2002), we assume that large offices in Brussels are the prime examples of political strategies.

In the following sub-section we provide the empirical results for the three types of activity. First, we describe a few examples to give a better impression about the form and content of these activities. This information serves us methodologically as a congruence test – we control qualitatively whether the findings on the dependent variable are congruent with the theoretical expectations (Blatter, Janning and Wagemann 2007: 150–57). Here, we discuss critically whether the selected activities are pure representations of economic, cultural and political strategies or whether they serve mixed purposes. Secondly, we present the quantitative data in the form of ranking tables (Tables 2–4) for every kind of foreign activity in order to reveal how far-reaching the investments of the most active regions are (the intensity of foreign activities). Additionally, these tables show how broad activities are spread throughout the European regions (their extensity).

Economic Activities

Form and content. A look at the forms and activities of the regional offices abroad confirms to a large extent our expectation that these offices represent economic strategies.[3] For example, in the case of the Belgian region of Brussels the focus on economic issues is already visible in the title: Brussels' *Direction du Commerce extérieur* has 55 offices worldwide. In these offices so-called *attaches économique et commerciaux* are clearly focusing on the promotion of Brussels' economic interests. With the exception of the so-called Hanse-Office in Brussels, run by the Senate Chancellery, Hamburg's offices abroad are mostly organised and financed by economically oriented marketing organisations owned by Hamburg but operating under private law: the *Hamburger Gesellschaft für Wirtschaftsfoerderung,* the *Hamburg Tourismus GmbH,* and the *Hafen Hamburg Marketing e.V*. The same picture applies to the regions in the other countries. Both the form and location of the organisation indicates economic activities. The British region East of England maintains two offices in San Jose (USA) and Jiangsu (China), the French region Poitou-Charentes in Houston (USA) and Tokyo (Japan), the

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TABLE 2
OFFICES ABROAD – ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

No	Region	Offices
1	Wallonia	100
2	Flanders	93
3	Brussels Capital	61
4	Brittany	41
5	Scotland	21
6	Hamburg	21
7	Bavaria	18
8	Wales	16
9	Vienna	15
10	Rhineland-Palatinate	13
11	West Midlands	13
12	Hesse	12
13	East Midlands	12
14	Alsace	12
15	Saxony	12
16	North Rhine-Westfalia	10
17	Baden-Württemberg	10
18	Rhône-Alpes	10
19	North East	10
20	Schleswig-Holstein	9
21	South East	8
22	Lower Saxony	8
23	Yorkshire and the Humber	7
24	North West	7
25	Emilia – Romagna	7
26	South West	5
27	Lower Austria	5
28	Brandenburg	5
29	Saxony-Anhalt	5
30	Tuscany	4
31	Liguria	4
32	Bremen	4
33	Pays-de-la-Loire	3
34	Nord-Pas de Calais	3
35	East of England	3
36	Berlin	3
37	Burgundy	3
38	Poitou-Charentes	3
39	Lorraine	3
40	Salzburg	2
41	Lower Normandy	2
42	Upper Normandy	2
43	Thuringia	2
44	Limousin	2
45	London	2
46	Tyrol	1
47	Aqutaine	1
48	Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur	1
49	Carinthia	1
50	Saarland	1
51	Mecklenburg-West-Pomerania	1
52	Midi-Pyrénées	1
53	Upper Austria	1
54	Styria	1

(*continued*)

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TABLE 2
(*Continued*)

No	Region	Offices
55	Centre	1
56	Franche-Comté	1
57	Picardy	1
58	Champagne-Ardenne	1
59	Île de France	1
60	Abruzzo	0
61	Auvergne	0
62	Aosta Valley	0
63	Veneto	0
64	Vorarlberg	0
65	Basilicata	0
66	Trentino - Alto Adige	0
67	Umbria	0
68	Friuli - Venezia Giulia	0
69	Lombardy	0
70	Marche	0
71	Molise	0
72	Corsica	0
73	Languedoc-Roussillon	0
74	Lazio	0
75	Campania	0
76	Burgenland	0
77	Sardinia	0
78	Sicily	0
79	Piedmonte	0
80	Apulia	0
81	Calabria	0

Austrian Land of Salzburg in Düsseldorf (Germany) (Kreutzer and Schwarzkopf 2006: 36). Nevertheless, for some of the most active European regions the findings are not as clear-cut. For example, some of the offices of Wallonia have a very clear political orientation (e.g. in Quebec, Baton Rouge, Paris, Hanoi, Dakar or Kinshasa), but even here, many more offices are set up by the export promotion agency *Agence Wallonne a l'Exportation (AWEX)*.

Intensity and extensity. Table 2 shows how much some European regions invest in their economic promotion activities but it also indicates that the intensity of economic activities differs significantly among the European regions (a calculated standard deviation is 16.89). The number of offices abroad that the Belgian regions maintain is outstanding: Wallonia: 100, Flandern: 93 and Brussels: 61. Interestingly, some French and many British regions (e.g. Brittany: 41, Scotland: 21 but also East Midlands: 12) can keep up with the strongest German and Austrian Länder (e.g. Bavaria: 18, Vienna: 15). Nevertheless, overall the regional investments in foreign offices are limited. The bulk of regions have between zero and ten offices.[4]

The fact that almost half of the regions have no office abroad at all, or just one in Brussels, makes clear that not all European regions are motivated or able to react to the changing economic contexts with promotional offices

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TABLE 3
PARTNERSHIPS – CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

No	Region	Moderate	Intensive	Points*
1	Wallonia	33	19	128
2	Flanders	15	17	100
3	Bavaria	24	10	74
4	Vienna	38	2	48
5	Styria	37	2	47
6	Baden-Württemberg	16	6	46
7	Berlin	18	4	38
8	Emilia - Romagna	9	4	29
9	North Rhine-Westfalia	18	2	28
10	Tyrol	12	3	27
11	Bremen	11	3	26
12	Vorarlberg	11	3	26
13	Rhône-Alpes	20	1	25
14	Upper Austria	15	2	25
15	Hesse	8	3	23
16	Brandenburg	12	2	22
17	Salzburg	7	3	22
18	Piedmonte	12	2	22
19	Lower Saxony	12	2	22
20	Friuli - Venezia Giulia	16	1	21
21	Lower Austria	10	2	20
22	Rhineland-Palatinate	9	2	19
23	Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur	13	1	18
24	Hamburg	7	2	17
25	Trentino - Alto Adige	7	2	17
26	Île de France	15	0	17
27	Veneto	2	3	17
28	Aqutaine	12	1	17
29	Brussels Capital	17	0	17
30	Carinthia	6	2	16
31	Schleswig-Holstein	11	1	16
32	Mecklenburg-West-Pomerania	10	1	15
33	Lorraine	8	1	13
34	Burgenland	8	1	13
35	Limousin	7	1	12
36	London	12	0	12
37	Midi-Pyrénées	12	0	12
38	Poitou-Charentes	11	0	11
39	Wales	11	0	10
40	Nord-Pas de Calais	9	0	9
41	Pays-de-la-Loire	8	0	8
42	Languedoc-Roussillon	9	0	8
43	Thuringia	6	2	16
44	Lombardy	5	2	15
45	Saxony	5	2	15
46	Burgundy	5	2	15
47	Umbria	4	2	14
48	Alsace	6	1	11
49	Saarland	4	1	9
50	Picardy	4	1	9
51	Scotland	7	0	8
52	Sicily	3	1	8
53	Saxony-Anhalt	7	0	7
54	Aosta Valley	7	0	7

(*continued*)

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TABLE 3
(*Continued*)

No	Region	Moderate	Intensive	Points*
55	Centre	7	0	7
56	Upper-Normandy	6	0	6
57	Brittany	6	0	6
58	Corsica	6	0	6
59	Franche-Comté	6	0	6
60	Champagne-Ardenne	6	0	6
61	Liguria	4	0	4
62	Tuscany	4	0	4
63	Marche	3	0	3
64	Lazio	3	0	3
65	Basilicata	3	0	3
66	Apulia	3	0	3
67	Sardinia	3	0	3
68	Abruzzo	3	0	3
69	Basse Normandie	6	0	3
70	Campania	3	0	3
71	Calabria	3	0	3
72	North East	2	0	2
73	Molise	2	0	2
74	North West	2	0	2
75	Auvergne	1	0	1
76	East of England	1	0	1
77	West Midlands	1	0	1
78	East Midlands	1	0	1
79	Yorkshire and the Humber	0	0	0
80	South East	0	0	0
81	South West	0	0	0

Notes: *moderate partnerships: 1 point; intensive partnerships: 5 points.

abroad. This holds true for almost all Italian and most French regions. Besides Brittany, Alsace, and Rhône-Alpes with over nine offices in foreign countries, all other French regions have only between zero and two offices abroad. Some (East) German Länder also seem incapable of such investments. Nevertheless, these findings reveal that the majority of European regions do perform economic activities abroad.[5] Even if we take into account that our selection of regions only from federalised or regionalised countries leads to a conformation bias, we can conclude that there exists a broad based development among European regions to promote and defend their economic interests abroad.

Cultural Activities

In order to trace cultural activities we counted international partnerships.[6] We also differentiate between intensive and moderate partnerships. Intensive partnerships are characterised by a strong institutionalisation (e.g. a formal agreement or a standing committee), a broad set of joint projects and an involvement of actors from both the public and the private/non-profit sectors.

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TABLE 4
PERSONNEL IN BRUSSELS – POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

No	Region	Personnel	Proportion*
1	Bavaria	28	24.43
2	North Rhine-Westfalia	25	35.48
3	Brussels Capital	25	
4	Baden-Württemberg	23	21.04
5	Lower Saxony	21	15.71
6	Wallonia	20	
7	Flanders	20	
8	Saxony	15	8.43
9	Schleswig-Holstein	13	5.55
10	Hamburg	13	3.41
11	Wales	12	4.37
12	Scotland	12	7.62
13	Saxony-Anhalt	12	4.90
14	Lombardy	11	13.81
15	Veneto	11	6.91
16	Sicily	11	7.37
17	Rhineland-Palatinate	10	7.97
18	Hesse	10	11.95
19	Brandenburg	10	5.04
20	West Midlands	9	7.93
21	Berlin	9	6.65
22	Bremen	8	1.30
23	Thuringia	8	4.62
24	South West	7	6.06
25	London	7	18.96
26	Lazio	7	7.74
27	Emilia - Romagna	6	6.11
28	Mecklenburg-West-Pomerania	6	3.38
29	Yorkshire and the Humber	6	6.12
30	East of England	6	8.11
31	Saarland	6	2.07
32	Calabria	5	2.96
33	Vienna	5	11.48
34	Lorraine	5	3.95
35	North East	5	3.78
36	Tuscany	5	5.30
37	Île de France	5	18.73
38	Styria	4	8.58
39	Campania	4	8.51
40	Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur	4	7.71
41	Alsace	4	2.97
42	Sardinia	4	2.43
43	Liguria	3	2.34
44	Marche	3	2.23
45	Upper Austria	3	9.98
46	Abruzzo	3	1.91
47	Nord-Pas de Calais	3	6.84
48	Lower Austria	3	11.20
49	Midi-Pyrénées	3	4.36
50	Aosta Valley	3	1.79
51	Friuli - Venezia Giulia	3	1.77
52	East Midlands	3	6.28
53	South East	3	12.04
54	Rhône-Alpes	3	9.66

(*continued*)

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TABLE 4
(*Continued*)

No	Region	Personnel	Proportion*
55	Aqutaine	3	4.97
56	Salzburg	3	3.76
57	Burgenland	2	2.01
58	Umbria	2	1.26
59	Apulia	2	5.98
60	Picardy	2	4.36
61	Limousin	2	1.21
62	North West	2	1.01
63	Carinthia	2	4.05
64	Trentino - Alto Adige	2	1.43
65	Pays-de-la-Loire	2	5.51
66	Piedmonte	2	6.33
67	Brittany	2	4.97
68	Molise	1	4.72
69	Centre	1	4.17
70	Upper Normandy	1	3.05
71	Franche-Comté	1	1.91
72	Burgundy	1	2.75
73	Tyrol	1	4.88
74	Corsica	1	0.44
75	Poitou-Charentes	1	2.81
76	Champagne-Ardenne	1	2.30
77	Vorarlberg	0	2.72
78	Basilicata	0	8.77
79	Auvergne	0	2.24
80	Languedoc-Roussillon	0	3.93
81	Lower Normandy	0	2.43

Notes: *Regional proportion of employees in national representation. Proportion = Number of Employees in Representation of the Nation State x Population Region/Population Nation State.

Form and content. The involved partners, projects and policy fields addressed by partnerships provide much support for our assumption that they should be understood as 'cultural activities'. The French region Brittany, for example, has a partnership with Wales in order to promote their common Celtic culture. In 1991 Baden-Württemberg set up a Joint Commission with the state of Hungary based on the strong ethnic ties of the 'Donauschwaben'. Scotland and Catalonia cooperate under the proposition of both being 'Historical European Nations'. Many but not all choices of partners seem to be based on such cultural fundaments. Sometimes, the common identity is based not on social or cultural ties but on institutional identities. Typical for capital cities, Berlin has set up formal partnerships with 15 capital cities around the world.

A look at the projects and policy fields reveals the same picture. In almost all partnerships we find exchange programmes in the fields of culture and education. Interestingly, many French regions support their language through those partnerships whereas the German Länder put a heavy emphasis on administrative exchange programmes – especially within their

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partnerships with Central and Eastern European countries. Economic activities also take place within these partnerships, but they are clearly pursued only on the sidelines or indirectly.

With the exception of cross-border cooperation between neighbouring regions, we did not find any strong legal anchorages for transnational partnerships. This means that sub-national governments are still far away from being recognised as international actors in legal terms. Nevertheless, German Länder and Belgian regions have longstanding Joint Commissions not just with other sub-national governments but also with nation-states (from Central and Eastern Europe) – a clear success in their attempts to gain international recognition.

Intensity and extensity. The Belgian regions of Wallonia and Flandern are extremely active in setting up and maintaining transnational partnerships. We counted 19 intensive and 33 moderate partnerships for Wallonia and 17 intensive and 15 moderate partnerships for Flandern. Most German and Austrian Länder are also investing intensively in this form of foreign activity. Furthermore, in France, Great Britain and Italy we found a few regions with a large number of partnerships (Ile de France, Rhône-Alpes, London, Emilia-Romagna, Piemonte).

There are only three (British) regions in our sample that do not maintain partnerships to other regions. Most regions possess between five and 15 partnerships. Therefore, we can conclude that partnerships are a very common phenomenon among European regions – both in federalised and regionalised states. Nevertheless, the differences between the various regions are especially strong.[7]

Political Activities

Form and content. We concentrated our data collection efforts on the number of personnel within the regional offices in Brussels. Therefore, we have not been able to collect further empirical evidence in order to confirm the assumption, which we have drawn from the literature, that only offices in Brussels with a rather large staff pretend to influence EU policy-making and that smaller offices serve only as receptive antennas. Nevertheless, our ranking of the regions in accordance to their personnel in Brussels provides some interesting insights into the scope of this kind of foreign activity.

Intensity and extensity. Not surprisingly, the regions which have the largest offices in Brussels are all German Länder: Bavaria, North-Rhine Westphalia, Baden-Württemberg, and Lower Saxony, each of which has more than 20 employees. The next four regions are also German Länder, but with considerably smaller staff numbers. The first non-German regions are Scotland and Wales, followed by the Italian regions Lombardia, Sicilia and Veneto. The Belgian regions provided data which show that they have

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specific offices for their contacts to the EU and have staffed these offices above the average. The French and almost all British regions, but also most Austrian regions, have only small offices in Brussels. Only five regions do not have any personnel in Brussels at all. Most regions maintain between two and nine employees in Brussels.[8]

In order to judge the intensity of regional investments in Brussels, it is interesting to compare the staff numbers of the regions with the amount of personnel that the nation-states have in their European Union embassies. We collected data about personnel numbers of national representations (Austria: 60, France: 102, Germany: 162, Great Britain: 86, Italy: 86) and assigned the regions an amount of personnel in the national representation that is in accordance with their share of the national population. This reveals that several regions have more personnel in their regional representation in Brussels compared to their 'share' in the national representation. Apart from Austria every country has some regions whose number of employees in their regional office exceeds their proportion of employees in the national representation. Altogether, this applies to 36 out of 81 regions. Not only in Germany but also in Italy, the regions together pay more employees in their offices in Brussels than we find in their national embassies to the EU. This data should not lead to wrong interpretations about relative influence in EU policy-making. The much stronger formal role and the specialisation of the personnel of the national embassies ensure that the national governments will remain the more influential players in EU policy-making. Nevertheless, the strong presence of regional personnel in Brussels clearly undermines the gatekeeper position of national administrations regarding the flow of information in the European multi-level system. Furthermore, individually and collectively (Grosse Huettman and Knodt 2006 show that at least the German offices are increasingly coordinating their activities) the regional offices make sure that territorial interests are present in Brussels – and not just the functionally specific interests of private lobby groups.

Comparison between the Different Kinds of Activities

Altogether, we can conclude that opening up offices in Brussels is the most widespread attempt of sub-national governments to react to changing contexts. Almost all regions in federalised and regionalised states in Europe react in this way to the political challenge of European integration and the emerging multi-level system. Only the German Länder and a few exceptional regions from other countries invest enough to assume that they are aiming more or less successfully to influence European Union agenda-setting and decision-making. Nevertheless, the other offices also undermine the gatekeeper position of national governments at least in information transmission, and their large number make sure that the regional dimension of Europe is present and visible in Brussels.

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Our analysis clearly shows that Brussels is not the only inter- and transnational challenge to the European regions, and that some regions invest heavily in other foreign activities to defend cultural and institutional identities or to promote their economic interests. This is especially the case with the regions in the federalised states of Belgium, Germany and Austria. Nevertheless, many regions do not want to or are unable to invest in these kinds of activities and therefore there exists a much larger variety of these international activities.

Finally, we can conclude that those regions strongly involved in Brussels are also the ones that invest heavily in economic and cultural activities abroad. The correlation between political and economic activities is 0.55 and the correlation between political and cultural activities is 0.54. The strongest correlation can be found between economic and cultural activities (0.71) but this result depends strongly on the Belgian regions. Without these three regions the correlation drops to 0.19. Indeed, there are many regions which are strongly investing in partnerships but not in offices abroad (e.g. Aquitaine, Friuli-Venezia, Lombardy, Piemonte, Ile de France, Provence-Alpe, Berlin, Bremen, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, and most Austrian Länder) and there are some regions which have a strong presence with offices abroad but create only a limited number of partnerships (e.g. Brittany, Brussels, East Midlands, West Midlands, North East, Scotland, Hamburg, Saxony). Most Italian regions and Austrian Länder prefer to invest in partnerships whereas English regions tend to pursue economic strategies.

Summary and Conclusion

Our study provides a much broader view on the phenomenon of foreign relations of sub-national governments in Europe than we had before. Establishing an office as an antenna or lobbying instrument in Brussels is not the only activity European regions currently perform in order to adapt to a changing and integrating world. Most regions also invest in foreign activities as reactions to economic and cultural transformations. Our descriptive analysis confirmed our assumptions a) that regional offices in other countries serve mainly economic purposes and b) that partnerships with other regions, and sometimes with nation-states, most often have a cultural foundation and are dominated by cultural contents. Nevertheless, a look at the activities of 81 regions from federalised and regionalised countries in Europe reveals that there exist huge differences between these regions in respect of these cultural and economic activities, whereas being present in Brussels with an office is now almost a necessity for European regions. In a further paper, we trace the necessary and sufficient preconditions for pursuing these strategies systematically (Blatter, Kreutzer *et al.* 2007).

Although almost all regions have set up an office in Brussels, only about one-quarter have staffed these offices so fully that we would assume strong

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attempts to influence EU policy-making. On the other hand, almost half of the regions in federalised and decentralised countries have more staff in their own office in Brussels than we could assign to them in their national representation.

What further conclusions can we draw from these findings? We are witnessing a dramatic increase in foreign activities of sub-national governments. Nevertheless, these activities are far from challenging the dominant role of the nation-state and its executive branch in political decision-making. We realise the full meaning and relevance of these developments only if we escape the confines of a zero-sum logic that characterises the foci on power relations and lines of influence in decision-making.

In the political realm, a focus on the power distribution between the levels of governments would interpret direct links between sub- and supranational administrations as a fact that undermines the power of the nation-state because it undermines its gatekeeper position. But when we expand our perspective, other consequences come to light. First, the presence of the European regions in Brussels is a counterbalance to strong private lobby groups with their functionally specific interests. Regions, in contrast, represent the public sector and territorial interests. Second, the direct informal linkages between regions and EU institutions might in fact be quite helpful for national interests because they compensate for the disadvantages of formal participation rigidities in the national preference formation process. For example, there is a widespread belief that the German bargaining position in the EU is undermined by the time-consuming process of internal preference formation, in which the German Länder have a strong formal role (Grosse Huettman and Knodt 2006). It is quite probable that the direct linkages of the Länder to the EU reduce not only the time problem in national preference formation (which seems to be more important than the problem of finding a common position). The strong presence of the German Länder in Brussels might well further German interests by influencing problem perception and the priorities of EU institutions, by quick responses to EU funding opportunities or by securing a smooth implementation process for EU regulation.

In a similar vein, the positive consequences of the regions' culturally driven foreign activities are obvious when we leave the zero-sum logic which a focus on political levels implies (European integration and regionalism as a threat to national identities and loyalties). Most partnerships feature a strong involvement of socio-economic organisations and cultural groupings, parliamentarians and lower-level bureaucrats. In doing so, they counterbalance the dominance of political executive elites in the processes of European integration and international cooperation and help to stabilise the decreasing legitimacy of these processes of integration in the wider population.

We want to end with some further interpretation of the European regions' economic activities, since we are convinced that the Third Industrial

Revolution towards the information society is the most fundamental of all current transformations and challenges. In an information economy, the logic of gaining attention and recognition is a major precondition for economic and political success (Blatter 2007). In this context, the investment in marketing and promotion offices in major 'global cities' abroad seems to be an adequate economic development strategy. It is certainly not only a coincidence that larger and wealthier regions are not the only frontrunners in pursuing this strategy. Regions with strong cultural identities like Wallonia, Brittany or Scotland are also highly innovative. These European regions are contributing to the European Union's Lisbon agenda, but they also adapt to and actively shape the more general processes of 'glocalisation' (Blatter 2006).

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Notes

1. Furthermore, recently the involvement of American states in foreign security has been revealed (Howard 2004).
2. We had to exclude the Spanish regions because of language limitations. Attempts to approach the Spanish regions in English language failed to generate any substantial feedback.
3. All empirical information about the forms and content of the different kind of activities are drawn from the appendix of Thiele (2006) in which a detailed account of all activities of all regions is given. In addition, we use the two seminar papers for the Italian and the Austrian regions (Stepan 2006; Kreutzer and Schwarzkopf 2006).
4. The statistical average (mean) is 7.7 offices per region, but it drops to 4.7 if we exclude the three Belgian regions.
5. The offices point only to the tip of the iceberg. There exist much less expensive and less institutionalised techniques to promote foreign investment and exports (like visits of the sub-national governments in other countries which almost always have a strong business element) and we assume that those activities are even more widespread. On the other hand it should be mentioned that there exists a broad variety in respect to form and personnel as well as financial capacities of these offices abroad. The range goes from local consultants who represent a foreign region often on a tiny part-time basis to embassy-like endowed representations with deployed expatriates from the 'mother region' who are working exclusively for this region. Whereas the Belgian offices for example are usually staffed very well, including nearly always the deployment of expatriates, especially the English regions have set up these offices on a much less expensive basis by contracting with local companies (Thiele 2006).
6. International partnerships are defined as institutionalised forms of cooperation with foreign regions or states. Those regional partnerships can have a either a bilateral or a multilateral focus (e.g. Arc Atlantique).
7. The statistical mean in respect of the sum of the points for the moderate and intensive partnerships is 16.44, with a standard deviation of 20.21.
8. The statistical mean of the number of employees is 6.3 with a standard deviation of 6.4.

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