Regional Parliaments Questioning EU Affairs

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Introduction

Since the early 2000s, academic interest in the role of national parliaments in European policy-making has sharply increased. Policy-makers discussed whether the democratic deficit could be closed by reforms of European institutions alone or whether the democratic legitimacy of national parliaments was a necessary ingredient. Academics focused more on the degree of Europeanization of national parliaments, their capacity to engage in European affairs scrutiny, different styles of engagement, the influence of national parliaments or lack thereof and interparliamentary cooperation (e.g. Maurer and Wessels 2001; Auel and Benz 2005; Tans et al. 2007). The provisions on new competences for national parliaments in the failed Constitutional Treaty and successful Lisbon Treaty further fuelled this debate and lead to further research consortia such as OPAL and more individual scholarship on the adaptation of national parliaments to Lisbon and on whether the Lisbon provisions went far enough to make a difference (e.g. Hefftler et al. 2014). In Protocols No 1 and 2 of the Lisbon Treaty, national parliaments gained extensive information right and the right to scrutinize new legislative proposals on whether they respected the principle of subsidiarity (the Early Warning System – EWS). If a third (or in the case of Justice and Home Affairs a quarter) of votes allocated to national parliaments objected to a legislative proposal on grounds of subsidiarity, the European institutions had to review – but not necessarily withdraw – the proposal (cf. Christiansen et al. 2013). In addition, in anticipation of the Lisbon Treaty, the President of the European Commission invited national parliaments in 2006 to participate in a political dialogue with the Commission. While the political dialogue is purely consultative, the EWS was criticized for presenting high hurdles for effective action, while at the same time only promising limited influence (Raunio 2011).

The Lisbon Treaty also strengthened the role of regional parliaments, but in a more modest way. Protocol No 2 mentions that national parliaments may consult regional parliaments with legislative powers in the Early Warning System, but it does not make it mandatory. The impact on academic research was also modest. While most of the studies pre-Lisbon were single country studies or collections of case studies loosely framed by general chapters (Heggie 2006; Carter and McLeod 2005; Abels and Eppler 2011; Hrbek 2010), post-Lisbon scholarship has focused mostly on the adaptation of regional parliaments in terms of procedures (Vara Arribas and Bourdin 20011; Abels
2013; Abels and Eppler 2014). Now – with some delay compared to national parliaments – the first studies on the activities of regional parliaments post-Lisbon appear (e.g. Boronska-Hryniewiecka 2013). However, most of the literature is pessimistic as to the extent of regional parliamentary engagement in practice. Be it the lack of incentives or the lack of capacity, a large number of regional parliaments have still not used their new powers (Vara Arribas and Bourdin; Buzogany and Stuchlik 2011; Boronska-Hryniewiecka 2013). Even where parliaments invest in thorough institutional reform and an extensive review of those reforms, participation in practice can remain low, as demonstrated by the Scottish case (Högenauer 2014).

The fact of the limited use of the EWS by regional parliaments should draw academic attention back to other means of parliamentary control, for example control of the regional executive, which is usually involved at least in domestic EU policy-making if not in policy-making in Brussels in the case of legislative regions. In the case of national parliaments, there is an extensive literature on the use of ‘normal’ parliamentary instruments such as mandates, debates and question for the purpose of EU affairs scrutiny (Raunio and Wiberg 2010; Navarro and Brouard 2014; Heffler et al. 2014). In the process, Gattermann et al. have noticed a trend towards the mainstreaming of parliamentary scrutiny in Europe. Increasingly, formal powers for scrutiny are delegated to sectoral committees rather than European Affairs Committees, which may also affect the organization of parliamentary staff and the selection of MPs for participation in interparliamentary cooperation. In addition, Gattermann et al. expect the mainstreaming of European affairs to a wider range of committees to also result in wider interest in European affairs within a parliament, i.e. in a larger number of MPs taking up European issues (2013). These instruments are scrutinized both to measure parliamentary strength and to measure the extent of Europeanization of a parliament. In the case of regional parliaments, the academic analysis of the actual use of those instruments is still underdeveloped. However, in some ways these activities can tell us more about the Europeanization of a given parliament than the use of the EWS, which requires a high capacity for action. As national parliaments have an eight-week deadline to submit their views under the EWS, regional parliaments have considerable less time to form an opinion as they have to submit their views to the national parliament in time for the national parliament to include them into their final submission (Vara Arribas and Högenauer 2014). Parliamentary questions and debates are not subject to those extreme time pressures and can thus be used more easily also in smaller and less well-staffed parliaments.

The aim of this paper is therefore to analyse the extent to which regional parliaments are Europeanized with reference to traditional means of scrutiny. In particular, it seeks to address three interrelated questions:
1) To what extent is the work of regional parliaments Europeanized?

2) Who are the MPs participating in such scrutiny (e.g. party dynamics, periphery-centre dynamics)?

3) To what extent can regional parliaments offer a distinctive voice from national parliaments? To what extent do they express territorial concerns?

These questions are to be studied through the analysis of written questions. Written questions have a number of advantages as the object of research: They exist in all parliaments and are thus relatively comparable across countries and legislatures (Norton 1993). They tend to be well-documented. And they can be used by individual MPs irrespective of party or committee membership and thus reveal how widespread interest in European issues really is. Methodologically, the advantage is thus that written questions allow a study of how many MPs have an interest in EU affairs and what their characteristics are.

In this paper, the case of Scotland is analysed on the basis of data on written questions for the years 2012-2014. Scotland is a best case for regional interest in the EU, as the referendum on independence forces a number of hypothetical questions onto the agenda: Would an independent Scotland be a member of the EU? With what currency? How would EU policies in Scotland be affected by this (e.g. funding schemes)? In addition, in terms of formal powers, the Scottish parliament is fully mainstreamed, i.e. sectoral committees are in charge of European issues that fall into their policy area (Carter and McLeod 2005). It would be interesting to see whether this leads a wider number of Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) to use parliamentary questions to gain information on EU affairs. In addition, MSPs are elected through a mixed-system, whereby 56 MSPs are elected on regional lists, whereas 73 MSPs are elected in constituencies. The Scottish case thus allows us to study the effect of different electoral incentives in a controlled environment, with all else being equal.

In the long term, data is also to be gathered on a Belgian and a German case to obtain a larger data set. The aim is to allow for cross-national comparison (different degrees of Europeanization, impact of different formal rules in terms of mainstreaming of committee scrutiny, impact of electoral systems...).

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1 EU-related questions were identified with the search machine of the Scottish parliament by using the search term ‘euro’ (i.e. covering Europe, European, Euro...). The results were coded manually. It is therefore possible that some questions may have been overlooked if the question referred to a Directive or Regulation without mentioning Europe. However, as the search machine also selects those questions for which only the answer contains ‘euro’, the number of omitted questions is likely to be low.

Duplicate questions were not coded, as this would distort the comparison across MPs. This means that in cases, where MSPs had to reformulate a question several times to get an answer, only the last question is coded. The number of such cases is below five.
The Function of Parliamentary Questions

Parliamentary questions are an instrument used by virtually all legislatures and usually in great numbers – easily in the tens of thousands per year. This popularity stems in part from the fact that they can be tabled by individual MPs or smaller groups of MPs. Parliamentary questions in general and written questions in particular are one of the instruments that experiences the lowest degree of party pressure, leaving MPs free to focus on the issues that interest them most (Rasch 2011). As a result, the study of questions is an appropriate tool to study the preferences and priorities of MPs (Navarro and Brouard 2014) as well as the representative orientation of the questioners. In particular, questions allow us to study whether MPs have an international or national policy interest or a constituency orientation (Martin 2011). In general, they can be used to fulfill a number of functions, including:

a) Imposing parliamentary accountability on government (Wiberg 1994; Proksch and Slapin 2011). From a principal-agent perspective, voters delegate authority to MPs who delegate it to government. Parliamentary questions are an important tool for obtaining information on policy development and implementation and for ex-post control (Martin 2011; Saalfeld 2000).

b) Obtaining information about a policy or state of affairs more generally (Navarro and Brouard 2014).

c) Highlighting concerns of the MP and pushing issues onto the agenda (Martin 2011).

However, not all MPs or parties ask the same amount or type of question. In general, Raunio and Wiberg (2010) expect the share of EU-related questions compared to the overall number of questions to be low, as the EU is of low salience to most citizens. However, they also noticed a steady increase in the use of questions, which means that questions do appeal to MPs. Rozenberg and Martin (2011) expect written questions in particular to be a useful tool to ask about local issues and to received detailed, precise and opposable information from the executive. Based on the existing literature one can expect:

a) More questions from opposition MPs, who wish to distance themselves from the policy of the government (Sitter 2001).

b) More questions from eurosceptic MPs (Raunio 1996). However, Navarro and Brouard (2011) find that moderate parties use written questions more for technical issues, whereas eurosceptic parties use questions more for politicization.
c) More questions from MPs who are elected via a constituency-based electoral system (Martin 2011), who need to satisfy the needs of their constituents. However Russo (2011) shows that one third of questions in the Italian parliament are constituency-oriented despite the closed-list proportional electoral system.

d) More questions from MPs from border regions or regions at the periphery.

e) More questions from MPs with policy specialism (European Affairs Committee – EAC – or relevant sectoral committee, Raunio 1996)

Methodologically, it is important to look not only at the number of question asked, but also at the content and/or style of question. For example whether an MP is constituency-oriented should not be assessed on the basis of the number of questions asked, but by looking at whether the questions are linked to the constituency in terms of content (Martin 2011). For the purpose of this study, what is of interest is especially the extent to which Scottish MPs are linking European issues to regional (Scottish) or sub-regional issues in their questions, as this allows us to assess whether regional parliaments can play a role in EU affairs scrutiny that is distinct from that of national parliaments.

Parliamentary Questions on Europe in Holyrood

The extent of Europeanization

In the years 2012-2014, MSPs logged a total of 16,312 written questions. Out of these, 245 were questions that explicitly referred to EU affairs. That represents only a share of 1.5 percent. This number may underestimate the real share of EU-related questions slightly, as duplicate questions were not coded. In other words, in those instances where an MPS had to ask a question several times with slight modifications to get an answer, only the successful question is being coded. Those cases are, however, very rare. In total the number of such instances was below five. While the share of EU related questions is generally low among European Parliaments, this is, for example, only half of the share of EU questions in the Finnish parliament (about 3 percent, Raunio and Wiberg 2010). However, this effect is likely to be limited and it is clear that the overall Europeanization of written questions in the Scottish parliament is low.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EU-related</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total questions</td>
<td>6311</td>
<td>5957</td>
<td>4044</td>
<td>16,312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of EU</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.5</td>
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</table>
Table 1: The share of EU-related written questions

However, if we look at the total number of MSPs who asked an EU-related question in this period, the result is more promising. Thus, it now seems to be the case that around one fifth to one quarter of MSPs take into account EU affairs every year. The lower proportion of MSPs asking EU-related questions in 2014 may well be related to a general steep drop in the total number of written questions (cf. table 1). Overall, the level of participation clearly goes beyond the circle of member of the European Affairs Committee (seven member) and its substitute members (three substitutes) and thus suggests that the decision of the Scottish Parliament to “mainstream” EU affairs, i.e. to put sectoral committees in charge of EU affairs falling into their area of expertise, has produced an effect.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of MSPs asking an EU-related question</th>
<th>Percentage of total MSPs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>28.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>18.6</td>
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Table 2: The number of MSPs asking EU-related questions

Who is asking?
If European issues are thus clearly raised by a circle of MSPs that extends far beyond the EAC, this raises the question as to who is asking? To what extent are the members of sectoral committees now involved in the scrutiny of EU affairs?

In fact, the analysis of written questions shows that the EAC itself is not particularly active. EAC members only account for 7.3 percent of the EU-related questions between 2012 and 2014, with EAC substitute members accounting for a further 6.1 percent. 86.5 percent of questions – a vast majority – were thus asked by MSPs who were not associated with the EAC. Only four of the full members of the EAC asked EU-related questions during this period. While two of them were very active in 2012, asking a total of 15 written questions on EU issues, the EAC members only asked two EU related questions in 2013 and one in 2014. ‘Ordinary’ MSPs have thus become even more dominant in the last two years.

Overall, the spread of EU-related questions among members of the Scottish parliament would support the claim by Gattermann et al. (2013) that European affairs scrutiny is no longer confined in the hands of European affairs committees and involves a wider range of MPs. Of course one can argue that the Scottish parliament is a best case for a wider circle of interested MPs, as scrutiny of
European affairs is largely delegated to the sectoral committee that works in the policy area affected by the European issue. However, given the relative activity of EAC members compared to non-EAC members, it would seem that European affairs scrutiny has not only moved to other committees in terms of formal procedures, but also in terms of level of activity in practice.

At first glance, these results also appear to be a confirmation of Raunio’s hypothesis that MPs with policy specialization tend to be more active (1996). If one considers the EAC to be a generalist body that understands European procedures well but lacks specific policy competences, whereas sectoral committees are committees with a particular interest in specific policy issues, then one would indeed expect the members of sectoral committees that work on the relevant policy issues to show more interest that the generalists in the EAC. However, are those 86.5 percent of EU-related questions asked by non-EAC members really the result of policy specialization in sectoral committees? The data suggests that this is only partially the case. Thus, we have coded the question based on whether they are relevant for the remit of the committee of the MP who is asking them, and on whether they are relevant for a committee on which the MP is a substitute member. Interestingly, only 31.8 percent of questions match the primary committee membership of the MSP who is asking them – and this already includes EAC members. If we also take into account substitute members, this explains another 15.9 percent of the questions. But even then, 52.2 percent of the EU-related questions have no relevance for any of the MSPs’ committees. Thus, contrary to Raunio’s expectation, more than half of the questions have little to do with policy specialization and division of labour within the Scottish Parliament.

If we look at the questions per committee (regardless of the relevance of the questions for the committee), the most active committee was the Devolution committee with 40 questions, followed by the Public Audit committee with 36 questions and the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment committee with 32 questions. At a distance, the Public Petitions committee (22), the European Affairs committee (19) and the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments committees (17) follow. The level of activity of the Devolution committee and the Public Audit committee is inflated, though, in that Tavish Scott – a member of both committees – asked 33 of the EU-related questions.

If EAC membership can only explain less than 10 percent of the questions, and policy expertise more generally around 50 percent of the questions, what other explanations are there? One explanation could be related to constituency needs and electoral incentives. The Scottish electoral system is a mixed system, whereby 73 MSPs are constituency MPs and 56 are elected from regional lists according to a proportional system. One could have two contradictory expectations with regard to
EU-related questions. On the one hand, one could expect constituency MSPs to focus less on Europe and to focus on domestic politics, as many voters do not regard Europe as a salient topic (Raunio and Wiberg 2010). However, on the other hand, one could expect constituency MSPs to be particularly active, if there are EU issues that are salient for their constituents (e.g. fisheries, agriculture, structural funds, state aid and public procurement in the case of Scotland). Constituency MSPs need to be aware of their constituents’ needs, if they hope to be reelected, which leads Rozenberg and Martin (2011) to expect them to be particularly active. Such constituency concerns could also explain why questions are not always related to committee remits. Written questions are a particularly good tool to ask technical questions about local concerns (ibid.)

Between 2012-2014, only 47.8 percent of questions – less than half – were asked by constituency MSPs, despite the fact the constituency MSPs make up over half of the parliament. However, there is an interesting difference in the pattern of Europeanization of constituency and list MSPs: Over half of the list MSPs (53.6 percent) asked at least one EU-related question in the three years under investigation. On average, each MSP asked 4.3 questions. By contrast, only 24.7 percent of constituency MSPs asked at least one EU-related question – on average 6.5 questions per constituency MSP. Thus, while less constituency MSPs are interested in EU affairs, those that are interested are on average more active than interested regional MSPs. This holds true even if we take out the most active MSP in each of the categories to minimize the impact of outliers: without Tavish Scott and his 33 questions, interested constituency MSPs still ask on average one more question than interested list MSPs (minus Kenzia Dugdale and her 11 questions).

In addition, constituency MSPs are indeed more likely to ask questions that are not related to their parliamentary committees (cf. table 3). Phi is -.211 (i.e. a constituency MSP is less likely to ask an EU-related question that relates to his or her committee), and the relationship is highly significant (.001). Thus, it seems as if constituency concerns do indeed explain part of the written questions.
In addition, we would expect MPs from peripheral regions to be more active than MPs from the centre. Existing research has shown that the distance from the capital explain the degree of localism of MPs. In other words, MPs from peripheral regions were more focused on local concerns (Heitshusen, Young and Woods 2005; Martin 2011). In addition, we would expect MPs from peripheral regions to be more active, as Scotlands peripheral regions are particularly affected by EU policies (e.g. fisheries, subsidies to transportation, structural funds, nature sites etc.).

Overall, the geographic distribution of written questions only provides limited evidence to the hypothesis that MSPs from peripheral regions ask more questions. The highest number of questions does indeed come from the Highland and Island region, which is the most remote region in Scotland. However, it is followed by Mid Scotland and Fife, Lothian, West Scotland and South Scotland – at least some of which are very central.
However, a closer look shows that there are again different dynamics for constituency MSPs and list MSPs. Whereas most questions that come from central regions come from list MPs, most questions coming from the Highlands and Islands and from North East Scotland come from constituency MSPs (cf. table 4). The relationship is again significant (Phi=.19, with a significance of .003). In addition, two of the constituency MSPs form the southern border regions together asked over a quarter of the questions coming from South Scotland, despite them making up 1/8 of Southern MSPs. Thus, localism plays again a stronger role for constituency MSPs.

**Chart 1: Written questions with an EU content by electoral region**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constituency</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>% within remote</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highlands and Islands</td>
<td>58.5%</td>
<td>41.5%</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid Scotland and Fife</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lothian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Scotland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>South Scotland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Scotland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Glasgow</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>NE Scotland</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>remote * Constituency Crosstabulation</th>
<th>Constituency</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>regional</td>
<td>constituency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No count</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes count</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>46</td>
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</table>
Finally, the questions is to what extent written questions on EU affairs are a tool used primarily by opposition MPs, as argued by the literature. Table 5 shows that the hypothesis that opposition parties use questions more actively than governing parties holds true in this case. In terms of the absolute number of questions asked, the governing party (SNP) is still in the middle with 29 questions (but accounting for only 11.8 percent of the total questions. Once we take into account the size of the different party groups and thus the number of questions per seat in parliament, it becomes evident that government MSPs are much less active than opposition MSPs. The difference in questions per MSP between the least active opposition party (Conservatives) and the SNP (governing party) is pronounced. The fact that Scotland has currently a single party government may further contribute to this trend. Some authors argue that some governing parties in coalition governments (e.g. in Dutch coalitions) use parliamentary questions actively to hold their coalition partners in check and to push for an approach that is more in line with their own preferences (Strom et al. 2010). Single party governments make such an approach unnecessary. It should nevertheless be noted that the second most active MSP is a SNP constituency MSP (with 14 questions). There are thus individual exceptions to this trend.

\[ \begin{array}{|c|c|c|c|} \hline \text{Party} & \text{Frequency} & \text{Percent} & \text{Per MSP of the party} \\ \hline \text{Scottish Greens} & 8 & 3.3 & 4 \\ \text{Conservative and Unionist Party} & 27 & 11.0 & 1.8 \\ \text{SNP} & 29 & 11.8 & 0.4 \\ \text{Liberal Democrats} & 56 & 22.9 & 11.2 \\ \text{Labour} & 125 & 51.0 & 3.4 \\ \text{Total} & 245 & 100.0 & \text{---} \\ \hline \end{array} \]

Table 5: Written questions on EU issues by party

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2 Two SNP members who asked written questions have become independent in the course of this legislative period. This is not taken account of in the data, which therefore somewhat overestimates the activity of the SNP.
However, the hypothesis that more eurosceptic parties will ask more questions is clearly not confirmed here. The Conservatives – the most eurosceptic party in the Scottish parliament, are actually by far the least active opposition group when size is taken into account.

The concerns of MSPs
When analyzing the content of written questions, particular attention was paid to three elements: the timing of the question as regards the policy cycle (if applicable), the purpose of the question and the territorialization of European affairs concerns.

First of all, it would be interesting to know to what extent MSPs focus their European questions on the regional or subregional impact, as such a distinct focus would justify stronger powers in EU affairs on the part of regional parliaments. In order to establish the territorialization of the parliamentary questions, the questions were coded based on whether they contained an explicit reference to a geographic location or actor at the national, regional or subregional level or if (in all other cases) they were about general concerns. To illustrate this with two examples: The question ‘How does the Commission evaluate the impact of fertilizer A on the environment? What action does it plan to take?’ would express a general concern. The question ‘What will the costs of Directive X be for Scotland?’ would be a regional concern.
As is clear from chart 2, the vast majority of questions focus on the regional level: how is Scotland affected, how is the government planning to implement a policy in Scotland etc. Beyond that, a little more than one fifth of all written questions focuses on a general/European level (e.g. how will the policy work in general? Do you know what x means?). This is followed by some interested in specific subregional or local concerns. Almost none of the questions focus on the national level in the UK.

This clear focus on regional/subregional issues in in part bolstered by the timing of the study and the specific political circumstances. The decision to hold a referendum on Scottish independence in 2014 has raised a number of hypothetical questions about the future of Scotland in the EU which are all primarily about Scottish policies/concerns within the EU context. Thus, 40 questions are about independence, although not all of these focus just on the regional level and the impact on Scotland.

The second factor that explains the strong regional focus is that around 153 of the 245 questions focus on implementation or transposition issues, only 44 are about policies in the making and 48 fall into neither category. Due to the nature of devolution, the Scottish government is in charge of implementing a large number of EU policies (e.g. environment, fisheries, CAP, energy etc.). Thus, every time an MSP wants more information about how something is implemented or whether implementation will be improved or what can be done about implementation, the question asks
about the actions and positions of the *Scottish* government (cf. chart 3). However, what is striking is that there is virtually no interest in information about the UK government, how it is trying to implement policies or how the UK as a whole is affected by European policies. Thus, it is clear that the main frame of reference for MSPs is Scotland. What is interesting in that respect is that the questions themselves are used mainly for the purpose of gaining information. None of the questions fell into the fourth category of clear criticism of the government (which is therefore missing from chart 3). There were a few questions that sounded like the author was trying to gain ammunition against the government, especially in the context of the politically charged independence question. But outside the issue of independence, virtually none of the questions could be described as openly critical. Thus, while questions are predominantly used by opposition MSPs, their immediate objective appears to be to gain information. This may of course be used to attack the government at a later stage, for example in plenary debates.

![Chart 3: The aim of the question](image)

As a result, the data highlights again a specific function of regional institutions. The multi-level governance literature generally presents regions as the key implementing authorities and regions themselves demand more influence by pointing towards their role as implementing authorities. The parliamentary questions reflect the extent to which regional institutions focus on that role.

Finally, in terms of the policy areas that are the most Europeanized, the clear leader is environmental policy, followed by the independence question, the Common Agricultural Policy, the Structural funds
and fisheries. This is unsurprising, as these policies generally coincide with devolved competences and policy concerns on the ground.

Conclusions and Outlook

To conclude, this paper has argued that studies on the role of regional parliaments in European affairs need to look more at the activities of regional parliaments, as formal rules can be deceptive. Institutional reforms – even if carefully prepared – do not always translate into concrete action. Regional parliamentary participation in the Early Warning System is particularly patchy. As a result, researchers should look beyond the sporadic Opinions under the EWS or political dialogue and include traditional instruments of parliamentary influence into their analyses.

The goal of this study was to make a step in this direction by analyzing the use of written questions in EU affairs scrutiny. In the first case analyzed here, Scotland, it is shown that the Europeanization of traditional mechanisms of scrutiny is in practice also progressing slowly. The number of questions
about EU affairs is low compared to the total number of written questions. However, on a positive note, a relatively high proportion of MSPs have asked at least one question about EU affairs during each of the three years under investigation. Also, the vast majority of these MSPs are not member of the EAC, which shows that there is in fact substantial awareness of EU affairs among other MSPs outside the EAC. This is further demonstrated by the number of questions on specific directives, regulations or policies. That said, the policy specialization of MSPs still only explains about half of the written questions with an EU focus. About half of the questions have no relationship to the primary or secondary committee membership of the MSPs.

The preliminary findings confirmed that the electoral system has a certain impact on the strategies of MSPs: While the proportion of interested constituency MSPs is much lower than the proportion of list MSPs, those constituency MSPs that are active display on average a much higher level of activism. In addition, constituency MSPs are much more likely to ask about issues that are not related to their committee membership. A possible explanation is that this is again due to constituency pressures.

In terms of party politics, eurosceptic parties are less active than other opposition MPs. However, there does appear to be a clear government-opposition divide, where opposition MPs are considerably more likely to table parliamentary questions.

Finally, in terms of style and content, a substantial number of parliamentary questions in the Scottish parliament focus on the transposition or implementation of EU policies, while policy formulation and negotiation plays a secondary role. In addition, there seems to be a strong focus on the Scottish frame of reference, fuelled further by the discussions on the future of Scotland. The British interest in general, by contrast, is virtually never invoked. This suggests that regional parliaments can indeed have an added value in EU affairs scrutiny that distinguishes them from national parliaments: they cater to a different set of interests.

**Bibliography**


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