Abstract

In the 90’s, Europe used to be depicted as the most privileged political arena for regional nationalists to enhance regional autonomy. Back at that time, along with the advent of the principle of subsidiarity, Europe seemed to dissolve sovereignty enabling regional nationalist political parties to prosper in a context where independence could eventually be reached. In spite of these powerful political ambitions, regional nationalists have come to realize that Europe can only provide the “elements of usage” for regional nationalists, now in government, to deliver better patterns of regional governance to reinforce their relative position in power on the attempt to endorse new state reforms. Moreover, the lack of pre-normative judgments in a context where fluid and informal negotiations, on the one hand, and accessible policy networks facilities, on the other, have provided minority civic nationalists with the best conditions to access political power more directly beyond the limits of their democratic legitimacy or constitutional autonomy of their region. In the XXI century, civic regional nationalists have become pragmatic nationalists in the sense that the European venue is now used to solve the “regional problem” and to overcome the “national obstacle” in a realistic way without sticking to strict politics of nationalism. For this particular group of regional nationalists, the European system of governance is now conceived as a “political” and a “discursive” game where regional resources and actors are linked in network by the means of a regional sense of patriotism for gains of political legitimacy and political autonomy. In a complementary vision, they have also learned to use Europe as a discursive element to perform the most adequate refinement of the political image of the region in a perfect alignment with their political plan. Departing from an original rational-sociological new institutionalist approach and applying the concept of “usage” of the European Union, we will demonstrate that the N-VA in Flanders, since 2004, and the SNP in Scotland, since 2007, have become “pragmatic nationalists”. Within this research, “pragmatic nationalism” will be stated as a new partial theory of regional empowerment as well as a sui generis form of "bottom-up" regionalism.

Keywords: 1. Nationalism; 2. Europe; 3. Political parties

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Please do not quote without the author’s permission. These are the first preliminary results of a project research implemented in Flanders and in Scotland between April and June 2010. Comments are the most welcome. Thank you very much.
1. Pragmatic Nationalism: towards a more nuanced theory of regional empowerment in Europe

Since the 90’s, Europe has been depicted as the most privileged political arena for regional nationalist parties (Lynch 1996; De Winter and Tursan 1998; De Winter 2001; Jolly 2007) to enhance regional autonomy which was deeply rooted in the belief in the right of “nation-regions” to govern autonomously (Loughlin 2001:10).

This was an idealistic vision of Europe delivering independence to sub-state actors, namely to regional territorial authorities broadly stated as “regions”; an idea which was strongly inspired by the transformation of the nation-state and by the end of sovereignty (Keating and Mc Garry 2001: 19). Back at that time, Europe seemed to dissolve sovereignty enabling regional nationalist parties to prosper in a context where regional independence could eventually be reached but Europe was more “imagined” than fully understood. These were the days of regional heyday and regional nationalists across Western Europe were among the most ardent defenders of a “Europe of the Regions”, almost overwhelmed with the extra-political space granted by the Maastricht Treaty, especially at the Council of Ministers (article 146).

For many of these regional political actors, Europe was portrayed as the anchor of economic stability which was related to the completion of the internal market, with the easier access to European Structural Funds or even with the advent of the Euro. In a complementary vision, Europe represented also a renewed political hope, especially for those regions which were going through devolutionary processes as it was the case of Scotland and Wales in the United Kingdom, of Flanders and Wallonia in Belgium or of Catalonia and the Basque Country in Spain.

Additionally, with the institutionalization of the Committee of the Regions, subsidiarity became bounded to the European polity project and today it is undeniable that Europe has provided one of the stimuli for “regionalism” emboldening regional nationalists to assert for their territorial autonomy by opening quasi-embassies (Hooghe 1995: 180). And to that respect, Europe has enabled even some of them to get into para-diplomatic activities (Duchacek 1986; Michelmann and Soldatos 1990; Aldecoa and Keating 1999; Paquin 2002 and 2004; Crieckemans 2010) which were used as a nation-building strategy to raise the political profile of a region in preparation for a bid of statehood (Lynch 2001: 159).

In the 90’s, for this “party family” (De Winter and Cachafeiro 2002), irrespectively of nuanced definitions that can be found in the literature, the European venue was used “to bypass” (Jeffery 2000) national forums of

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1 According to Angela Bourne - in Bourne, A. K., “The impact of European Integration on regional power”, Journal of Common Market Studies, 41: 4, 2003, p. 598 - a “region” is narrowly defined as a territorial authority, situated directly below the central state level, which has its own elected political representation. This corresponds to the common understanding of what is a region but a region may be more than a political space, as it can also be defined by its cultural identity, by a sense of belonging. In these cases, a region is more than a mere region: it is also a “nation-region”. For further details on this notion of “nation-region”, see contributions from John Loughlin, namely Keating, M., and Loughlin, J., (eds), The Political Economy of Regionalism, London, Frank Cass, 1997. In this research, the term “region” will be used as an institutional “resource” on the hands of regional nationalist parties, the N-VA and the SNP, which will make the use of these resources in interaction with the European institutions to gain more political legitimacy. Therefore, the term “region” will refer to a territorial authority situated below the state endowed with distinctive political, organizational, economic and identity resources. We could assert that this definition is very “functional”.

2 There is no general accepted definition to be used to refer to regional nationalist parties in the literature. Scholars like Peter Lynch, Ferdinand Muller-Rommel, Lieven De Winter and Huri Tursan among others have tried to define it by emphasizing two main aspects: the regional territorial claims based upon ethnic aspects of regional nationalism. De Winter have preferentially used the term “ethno-regional political actors”, others like Michael Keating or Peter Lynch would rather use the term “minority nationalists” or “regional nationalists”, respectively. In our research we will use the term “regional nationalists” as we wish to move away from a pre-modern or primordialist conception of nationalism which highlights ethnical and cultural dimensions of the nation conceived as “ethnies” (Smith 1998). In our research, nationalism will be
governance on the attempt to solve thorny political issues\(^3\) based on antagonistic views of regional versus national nationalisms which were also opposing different visions of the state's structure and competences\(^4\) (Marks and *all* 1996: 170).

For regional nationalists, Europe was about to prosper as the legitimate argument to engage into “bottom-up”\(^5\) regionalism\(^6\) (Loughlin 2000:10; Down 2002: 172), which can be defined as a regional policy intended to highlight the territorial, cultural or political identity dimensions of a “nation-region” (Suszycki & Karolewski 2007: 12).

In a clear contrast with initial “top-down” forms of regionalism, “bottom-up” regionalism became an attractive opportunity for regionalist movements seeking more autonomy for their region or even a separate state (Keating 1995:2). Irrespectively of particularistic purposes, bottom-up regionalism was deeply rooted in regional forms of nationalism which were based on regional political demands conflicting with the dominance of national forms of nationalism (*ibidem* 2007: 12). Therefore, the denial of exclusive claims on the part of state nationalism (Keating 1996: 18) and the assertion of national rights of self-determination for a community perceived as a “nation” (Smith 2001: 6; Renan 1997) were the main arguments for the European venue.

As a consequence of this conflicting relationship, the European line of action was mainly confrontational and regional nationalist political actors would come to Europe to act autonomously. For many of these actors, the decision to open and maintain a regional office in Brussels was not simply a decision to extend a regional representation to an additional political arena, but the decision to do so autonomously apart from the state (Marks and *all* 1996: 171). Back at that time, most of these regional nationalist political parties were not in government; therefore they would exclusively rely on their own limited resources and would prefer political isolation to slight forms of cooperation with central governments.

Besides this conflictual political practice, antagonist discourses on regional versus national nationalisms were also highly emphasized in Europe. For the Scottish National Party (SNP) in Scotland Europe used to represent “non-England land” (interview 2.1) as much as for all Flemish political parties in Flanders, from traditional Christian Democrats (CD&V) and Liberal Democrats (Open Vld) to traditional nationalists (Vlaams...
Belang) to democratic nationalists (N-VA), Europe used to be portrayed as the protection against a “bigger evil” (interview 1.11): the handy institutional scapegoat against an artificial creation called Belgium.

In the 90’s, “regional empowerment” was expected to happen (Keating 1995: 8). It was defined as a “catch-all formula” that could be applied to “regions” irrespectively of national political contexts and out of any analytical understanding of the interactions between European and regional resources on the hands of a particular regional political actor.

For Michael Keating (2001), “regional empowerment” was measured by the capacity of a “region” to mount a territorial project, to control its economic resources and to pursue formal and informal channels of influence for more “political power”. In other words, the emphasis was put on the “regional capacity” to define what the regional interest is to access more “political power” by the means of the usage of regional resources. By the end of the 90’s, the definition of Keating was already assuming a governance in network where forums of regional representation in Europe, on the one hand, and political and economic regional actors, on the other, would come together to define the priorities of the regional interest in order to be prepared to make a better usage of the extra political space granted by Europe.

In spite of an interesting general formula, Keating left details of coordination out of this network logic. Additionally, he took a minimal definition of the term “region” presented as an intermediate territorial authority between the state and the locality (Keating 1995:9) leaving the dynamics of interaction between unclear regional resources on the one hand, and distinctive political preferences of regional nationalist political parties, on the other hand, out of his concern.

According to Schmit-Egner (2002), Keating’s conceptual reflections were vague in the sense that they weren’t getting us closer to explaining bottom-up regionalism in a systematic way, nor did he provide us with methods and tools to define a general theory of regional empowerment that could simultaneously sustain particularistic preferences of a category of a regional nationalist political actor. In fact, the term “region” used by Keating was almost elusive (Schmitt-Egner 2002:180) in the sense that it was covering a variety of territorial levels and a range of social contents (Keating 1995: 20) across diversified constitutional settlements.

Another scholar, Angela Bourne (2003), would further precise the meaning of “regional empowerment” in Europe. She would describe it as the region’s ability to influence decisions and to escape the control of national political actors (Bourne 2003:598). For this scholar, “regional empowerment” in Europe would therefore mean the possibility of regional nationalists to come to Europe to exert political influence beyond the limits of the authority exerted by central governments.

Just like Keating, she would vaguely mention the relevance of regional resources for a strategic action in Europe and would emphasis the relevance of regional political competences to influence decisions, but she wouldn’t articulate differential meanings of “political influence” with a clear distinction between the region perceived as a political authority endowed and regional political actors.

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7 In his early writings Keating (1995) had already mentioned that regionalism was intertwined with nationalism in Europe and that this relationship was partly conditioned by the definition of the term “region” and its resources. For Keating, it was clear that some regions would be better equipped than others but he wouldn’t provide a systematic account of regional empowerment where this relationship could be clearly stated. He would refer to a differentiation in the political capacity, in their strength of business and social networks, on their civic cultures and their institutional structure (1995:20) but a theoretical model, even a partial one, of regional empowerment hasn’t been defined.
Although she adds precision to Michael Keating’s definition by articulating the regional search of political influence in Europe with an oppositional *élan* against the national “other”, she would only scratch this relationship on the surface, leaving differential meanings of “political influence” out of her explanation. Moreover, she would use indiscriminately the term “region” and “regional actor”, when they cannot be confused even if they interact with each other whenever regional political actors appropriate the resources of their region to perform their strategy in Europe.

Both theoretical attempts of Michael Keating and of Angela Bourne fell short of completion due to the limits of a rational choice insight which has been articulated towards the definition of a general formula that could fit into all processes of regional empowerment in Europe when these processes can only be contextually defined and theories can only be partial. As a consequence of this methodological choice, a proper articulation and distinction between the regional political authority, on the one hand, and regional political actors, on the other, have not been made clear. Moreover, the access to “political power” has been overweighed compared to the definition of the regional interest as much as sociological concerns of coordination between divergent political actors and across forums of governance have been neglected. Last but not least, a clear definition of the “purposes” pursued by regional political parties whenever considering Europe has not been clearly identified.

Both scholars thought that it would be possible to define a general formula for “regional empowerment” which could simultaneously articulate general purposes with particularistic variations of contexts but the limits of a rational choice methodological tool has prevented them from reaching that goal.

It is our conviction that the definition of regional empowerment in Europe of the 90’s has been confined within the limits of a rational choice methodological tool as much as to a biased understanding of the European reality. For scholars of that time, rational choice used to display the most appropriate methodological option to explain the European strategy of a regional political actor acting rationally and using their regional resources to maximize its gains of political power in Europe. The access to more political power was almost portrayed as a blind goal to be achieved by nationalists in Europe which explains why regional empowerment in Europe has always privileged regions with a high political status and it has been positively associated with the degree of overlap between the competencies of sub-national and supra-national governments (Hooghe and Marks 2001; Keating 2009: 127).

But by the end of the 90’s, the learning process of experience of Europe started to demonstrate that the European institutional opportunity structure (Marks and McAdam 1996) was about to shrink as much as to dictate the end of the naïve hype of the “Europe of the Regions” (Elias 2008a; Hepburn 2008).

For regional nationalist actors, it had become clear that whilst regional actors had been granted new access points to European decision-making processes, these were either not available to them - because the access was reserved to parties in regional governments - or the scope of influence that could be exercised was very limited due to the limits of some constitutional settlements (Elias 2008b: 558; Hooghe and Marks 1996; Jeffery 2000; Keating and Hooghe 2001).

On the institutional side, the establishment of the European Free Alliance-Democratic Party of the Peoples of Europe (EFA-DPPE) at the European Parliament in 1981 (Lynch and Winter 2008) and its
participation in the Greens-EFA political group since 1999 soon proved to be “flawed” (Nagel 2004: 59)\(^8\) as much as the Committee of the Regions became a political disappointment due to its political weakness, lack of resources and excessive diversity in terms of authority within it (Elias 2008a; Hepburn 2008).

Soon it became clear that Europe had not delivered (and will never deliver) independence, which means that regional gains of political power in Europe, which refers to an increased capacity to govern autonomously, requires a deeper regional resonance which can only be obtained by the means of “political legitimacy”.

In face of this reality, it became clear that Europe could only benefit regional nationalists in government and endowed with some political competences because Europe can only provide the “elements of usage” (Jacquot and Woll 2003; 2004) to guaranty the access to political power to deliver policies that can positively affect the “political legitimacy” (Heywood 2007:10) of those nationalists governing at the regional ground. Therefore, it is now common understanding that Europe can only be used to secure and endure regional positions in power and the European venue is no longer dictated by demands of straightforward concessions of political autonomy.

Within this context, regional nationalists have gained in maturity and have become realistic. They have realized that Europe can only be used to deliver sensitive regional policies, mainly economic, which will enable them to fulfill two goals at the same time: firstly, it will provide them with the possibility of delivering better patterns of governance which will positively affect (and renew in further elections) their legitimacy to govern to the eyes of their regional citizens; and secondly, it will enable them to overcome the limits of their constitutional settlement which prevents them from reaching full empowerment in Europe.

Now that the main reason and the best conditions to perform in Europe are clearly acknowledged, “regional empowerment” is still perceived as the main political goal to be achieved but the “usage” of the European Institutions has given way to new forms of power structuring. Regional tactics have changed accordingly and regional nationalists have consequently adapted their strategy showing evidences of pragmatic nationalism which is deeply rooted in the notion of the “usage” of Europe and based upon a syncretic rational-sociological new institutionalist approach.

While pragmatism refers to an attitude which is focused in finding solutions to problems in a realistic way, nationalism is perceived as an additional identity resource which becomes part of the solution for regional nationalists to reach full regional empowerment in Europe.

Anwen Elias\(^9\) (2008a and 2008b) and Carolyn Moore\(^10\) (2008) were the first two scholars who have used the term pragmatism to acknowledge scattered elements of a changing attitude in regional strategies in Europe but none of them have used it to sustain a new paradigm of regional empowerment in Europe. In a

\(^8\) In fact, the 2004 European enlargement and many unitary state reforms towards revolutionary trends of administrative and political competences had made traditional center-periphery cleavage (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Bartolini 2005) less salient in European politics which, by the same token, had weakened the organizational strength of the EFA at the European level.
\(^9\) Elias (2008b) has used the term pragmatism to identify one category of regional political actors in Wales and in Galicia who have adapted their regional attitudes towards Europe by limiting their European engagement to the satisfaction of particular policy demands. This approach is the one which is closer to our approach, though it has used to identify a negative reaction to the long-term potential of European integration to meet core nationalist demands (Elias 2008b:562), which is not our case. In our research, a pragmatic approach holds a positive connotation to Europe. It announces the return of optimistic regionalism in Europe and endorses a renewed hope in Europe to achieve long-term political goals.
\(^10\) Carolyn Moore (2008) has used the term pragmatism to identify how regional offices have adapted their interest articulation in Europe. Therefore, the term has been applied to a limited institutional domain of analysis and it has not been expanded to embrace a renewed theory of regional empowerment in Europe.
clear analytical contrast with these scholars, it is our understanding that this concept, *pragmatism*, holds a theoretical potential which requires a more complex new institutionalist approach combining elements of a rational choice insight with a sociological contribution. European Institutions affect regional political behavior in different ways, but they can be complementary rather than incompatible (Bernard 2001: 40).

If it is true that regionalism became semantically intertwined with nationalism which, additionally, have been increasingly discussed in the context of Europeanization (Suszycki & Karoleswski 2007:9); it is also true that research on regional mobilization in Europe has always been caught within the limits of a rational choice insight. The concept of “region” has always been depicted as a broad conceptual category, the impact of Europe has always been perceived from a top-down approach, and the positive effects of socialization have always been neglected. Some scholars like Paolo Dardanelli (2005), Eve Hepburn (2008) or Anwen Elias (2008) have attempted, for the first time, an original bottom-up approach but the cognitive element of identity, which is so central to the reallocation of a nationalist political battle to Europe, has always been absent in their research.

A *pragmatic nationalist* theory of regional empowerment retains the general assumptions of Michael Keating and Angela Bourne but it adds nuanced details which makes it universal in its theoretical assumption but particularistic in its political practice. Moreover, regional empowerment is now sociologically inspired in the sense that regional nationalists have become active policy entrepreneurs (Sweet and *et al.* 2001: 8; Fligstein 1997b) within this process of empowerment as they have learned to use “identity frames” as an additional identity resource to fulfill it.

Bearing in mind that it is not possible to construct a single model of regional empowerment which would explain all cases of bottom-up regionalism in Europe (Keating 1995:9), our intention is to elaborate a partial theory which could be applied to a specific category of regional nationalist political actors. This category of actors would be based upon three criteria’s: it would include regional nationalists in government, in a minority position; they would be endowed with some political competences and sustained by civic forms of nationalism. It is therefore our conviction that, after the European disillusion of the 90’s, optimistic regionalism is “back on track”, at least, for this category of regional nationalists as it is the case of the N-VA in Flanders and the SNP in Scotland.

With this partial theory of regional empowerment, we wish to demonstrate that a renewed vision of Europe has enlarged the possibilities of regional nationalists to be empowered within regions with differential political status as much as it has opened new opportunities for regional nationalists in government, even in a minority position, to expect optimistic “usages” of Europe.

Now that regional empowerment is performed through policy delivery for gains of political legitimacy, the access to political power is still relevant, but it can only be explored as long as regional nationalists are fully aware of the regional interests. Therefore, in addition to concerns of coordination, a clear definition of the regional interest becomes more acute.

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11 In chapter II, we will further elaborate on this notion of reallocation of this political battle to Europe that we shall define as the Europeanization of “regional politics”.

Within this theoretical framework, the scope of political competences still determine how far regional actors can affect policy decisions in Europe but their relative position in power will determine distinctive needs of political legitimacy at the regional ground. In spite of these constitutional differences, Europe will always display the “elements of usage”, either perceived as a “political space” and as a “discursive space” on the common attempt to overcome the national obstacle (Jacquot and Woll 2002).

In the XXI century, regional nationalists have become pragmatic nationalists in the sense that they have learned to use Europe as a source of political leverage, choosing carefully what they consider to be the most appropriate forum of representation interest representation to use to bargain relations in network, across levels of governance and through public-private partnerships, for better patterns of regional governance (Kholer and and Rittberber 2006: 27), through policy delivery using their political, organizational and economic resources (Rhodes 1997), including their identity resource to maximize the political benefits out of Europe.

By doing so, formal and informal channels of regional interest representation in Europe have been tightened-up across levels of governance. Moreover, vertical and horizontal cooperation between national and regional actors have been reasserted and regional politics of nationalism have been framed by civic forms of nationalism, subtly reasserted by a strong sense of regional patriotism. Regional nationalists now act realistically in Europe, within the limits of their regional resources to deliver policies in Europe but they will additionally use their “identity resource” to make sure that coordination across forums and actors works. They will act rationally and socially, and policy delivery will only be the neutral means to overcome the limits of their constitutional settlement which has always prevented them from reaching full empowerment in Europe.

For the N-VA in Flanders, Europe has been used as a “political space” to compensate the effects of Belgian uncoordinated political system which has always prevented Flemish political parties from defining the regional interest by the means of clear policy lines in Europe. For the N-VA the intention is to use its full legal capacity to act to engage others into their political plan and restore stable economic governance to Flanders. The N-VA has accomplished regional empowerment in Europe by establishing a regional office called Vleva, which has enabled them to define the Flemish interest in Europe by linking Flemish political and economic actors across forums of regional interest representation.

For the SNP in Scotland, Europe has been simultaneously used as a “political space” and as a “discursive space” to higher the political profile of the region. If on the one hand, the SNP has privileged the European Council to compensate its lower political capacity to influence and to expand Scottish de facto political competences over meaningful economic policies beyond their legal domain. Good standards of regional interest coordination had been already inherited form previous Scottish Labor’s governance, which means that the SNP had just to focus on accessing political power and make sure that strategic policy decisions were taken. On the other hand, the SNP has also included a selective discursive usage of the European Institutions into their political speech in order to portray Scotland as a leading political and economic region in Europe (interview n°2.4).

For the N-VA and for the SNP, the European challenge now consists of finding the most effective articulation of regional and European resources which will provide them with the best conditions to fulfill regional empowerment, which in turn, will help them to reinforce regional confidence in their capacity to govern in Flanders and in Scotland, respectively.
Because the N-VA and the SNP are confronted with a limited political space to act, both at the national and at the European level, mainly due to their minority positions in power, the N-VA since 2004 and the SNP since 2007, both have learned to “use” the European institutions to expand their small trench of political power in order to guaranty to access to policy decisions, on the one hand, and to articulate political and economic regional actors into one regional plan, on the other.

As we can see, regional empowerment in Europe implies the combination of the two elements already mentioned by Michael Keating – the definition of the general interest and the political capacity to make decisions - as much as it retains the arguments of Angela Bourne by exerting political influence to overcome the national obstacle. Based upon these general assumptions, regional empowerment have gained in precision because it offers a general formula that can be applied to particularistic political preferences of a specific regional nationalist political actor located within one particular regional territorial authority called “region” endowed with specific regional resources.

Regional actors do act rationally to deliver better policies, using organizational, political and economic regional resources (Rhodes 1997) in Europe to maximize their gains in delivering better policies but they will also be concerned with issues of political coordination in a context where ideological political discrepancies over nationalism is evident.

To that respect, experience of Europe has been of a great value and regional actors have become skilled actors (Fligstein 1997b) who have learned to use common “cultural frames” perceived as a regional form of patriotism in Emile Durkheim’s words (Durkheim 1987; Monserrat 1996: 7-45) to exert cooperation across forums of regional interest representation with those who do not share the same political ideology. In Europe, regional actors do not need to share the same political ideology to work together: they just need to be and act as compatriots.

Within this partial theory of regional empowerment, regional patriotism is therefore perceived as a regional sentiment that joins the individual to the political society in so far as those who get to make it up feel themselves (ibidem 1996: 29) attached to it by a rational kind of loyalty to the territorial state (Smith 2007:70) deeply inspired in a civic form of nationalism. Through the learning process of experience, regional nationalists have generated and propagated cultural frames which correspond to shared representations of collective problems and solutions to guaranty that cooperation across forums and actors would take place (Sweet and all 2001: 7). Moreover, they have managed to convince others that a set of decision making would make sense because they are construed as consistent with the basic interest of their common nation.

By nation, Emile Durkheim referred to a group that is both “state” and “nationality” which, in a sense, makes it more a “patrie” than a nation in the traditional understanding of the term (MacCrone 1998:20). This notion of patrie retains the minimal pre-requisite to hold the nation together in times of transition. It is very close to Ernest Renan’s conception (1997) of the nation: it is in essence a soul, a spiritual principle, a kind of a moral conscience (MacCrone 1998:5): an imagined community (Anderson 1996). There is no doubt that this patriotic notion of the nation holds a pragmatic view of nationalism: the one that makes cooperation works.

With this renewed theory of regional empowerment in Europe, it is interesting to notice that traditional center-periphery argument no longer sustains the European venue for regional nationalists and that the usage
of nationalism can effectively modify the modes of interaction between political parties in Europe (Sartori 1976; Mair 2001). These evidences prove, for the first time in the literature, that the reallocation of a political battle called nationalism to Europe can have a significant impact on the mechanics of regional party systems.

Minority nationalists have learned to master their resources, including their civic form of nationalism to induce cooperation and instill coordination across actors and forums. They have become more realistic and more optimistic as long as they have realized, through experience, that Europe can display more nuanced opportunities for gains of political power and that a conflictual relationship with the center is no longer the most rewarding strategy.

For these political actors, the notion of regions bypassing their national governments to forge direct links with the European Institutions appears to be a rather old fashioned notion (Morgan 2000) as much as the sharp distinction between intra- and extra- strategies of the 90’s (Jeffery 1996) to access the European Union has disappeared. They have returned to the more traditional route of influence (Jeffery 2007, 2009a and 2009b) - the state route - and now try to encompass all European forums of regional interest representations within a coherent regional network strategy, irrespectively of political ideological differences with “whom” is governing at the centre.

As we shall see, regional empowerment in Europe may be carried out in cooperation with the center (Borzel 2001:141), by different channels of interest representation (Hooghe & Marks 1996) and may encompass different political expressions but the European venue aims at preparing a more favorable social terrain for further state reforms which will open new gateways towards confederalism in Belgium and federalism in the United Kingdom until independence is eventually reached.
2. The concept of “usage” of Europe:

By doing the apology of a pragmatic nationalist strategy in Europe, our intention is to stress - and add - a sociological dimension to traditional approaches of regional mobilization in Europe. We believe that research on regional mobilization dynamics as well as Europeanization studies have led to an underestimation of the discretion and role of regional political parties (Caporaso, et al 2001:2).

Contrary to the dominant strand of literature on institutional dynamics, however, we would like to insist on two dimensions in particular: the role of actors in the concrete translation of the effects of Europe upon these political strategies and the motives of action that can be identified. What we want to study and explain are regional strategies of specific actors within one particular region based upon the usage of the European Institutions for gains of political legitimacy or political autonomy. And as the cognitive or sociological theory emphasizes, any social action requires an understanding of the environment, in that case the political context which stands beyond the European institutions but interacts with Europe in order to achieve certain results (Jacquot and Woll 2003 and 2004).

We believe that it is necessary to consider a political actor who can choose and learn outside institutional pressures. Paying attention to the role of actors implies studying the mechanisms of appropriation, re-appropriation, engagement and disengagement of the process of European integration (Muller 2000:193). Our intention is not to dismiss the importance of other explanatory factors but to articulate them. In this perspective, an actor is faced with institutions who frame his behavior who opens a realm of possibilities, but who do not determine his behavior.

By referring to what Jacquot and Woll (2003:3) have defined as sociology of the European integration, we would like to insist on two specific elements of the process of European political transformations: the central role of individual actors and the interaction with the micro-level of the actor and the macro-level of the political institutions. The perspective is sociological because it aims to understand how civic regional nationalists and their behavior are constructed and how the institutions evolve dialectically with these individual behaviors.

As such and on the opposite mainstream of rational institutionalism, we believe that change only can be further explained if we also analyze the actions of individual political actors and how the use European institutions for their personal political purposes. According to Sophie Jacquot and Cornelia Woll (ibidem: 6) the word “usage” has two dictionary definitions: the action of using something or the fact of being used. By insisting on the term, we wish to cover the strategic interaction of rational and emotional actors with the European Institutions.

We could define “usage” as practices and political interactions which adjust and redefine themselves by seizing the European Union as a set of opportunities, be they organizational, political, economical or cultural. These practices and political interactions happen as actors go back and forth between the European level and the national, regional and the local levels on which they act, creating a context of reciprocal influence. Furthermore a “usage” is guided by a set of complex of strategies whose objective is to obtain a particular goal. Political opportunities, resources and constraints provided by the European system provide the necessary conditions for these practices we wish to analyze, but they should not be confused with these practices.
“Usage” implies an “intention at work” and cannot be defined by the opportunities alone (Torrow 1998; Marks and McAdams 1996).

2.1. The “elements” of usage of Europe:

Usage depends upon specific elements or tools that actors can seize. Most generally, these elements can be divided into two categories: material or immaterial elements. In the first category, European institutions, policy instruments that we will define as a political element in the second, we have identified discursive references that we will define as a discursive element.

2.1.1. Europe as a political element:

Most concrete elements or tools provided by the European Union are, above all, the European institutions themselves. The access to these institutions, be they formal or informal, may enable regional nationalists to guaranty the access to political deliberation, or can simply contribute to the discussion of policy issues. In more basic terms, the access to the European forums, where policy decisions are taken, can simply provide the access to policy information that would have otherwise been outside their reach.

2.1.2. Europe as a discursive element:

In this case, Europe can be used as a discursive reference integrating in political discourse and aiming at invoking a positive association which would enable civic regional nationalists to fulfill different “logics” and “ends” of usage that we shall not fully explored in this paper due to constraints of space.

2.2. The “ends” of usage: political autonomy and political legitimacy

Within the limits of our research, political legitimacy and political autonomy will be defined as the “ends” of usage of Europe and the two faces of political power. Political legitimacy and political autonomy will be used as analytical categories to define the political purposes followed by pragmatic nationalists in Europe. Whereas the former will be perceived from a democratic point of view and will affect the legitimacy of regional nationalists; the later will be perceived from a constitutional point of view and will affect the political competences of the region. In spite of a clear distinction between these political actors, both concepts will reflect the effects of a social interaction displayed in Europe by the means of a pragmatic strategy. Furthermore, both concepts will directly and indirectly benefit pragmatic nationalists.
2.3. The logics of usage:

2.3.1. Legitimizing logic:

Patrick Hassenteufel and Yves Surel (2000: 19) have described this form of usage the reference to Europe as a way to legitimizing regional public policies. The function of this type of usage is to increase or renew public acceptance by the means of policy decisions. This logic is preferentially used by regional nationalists in government, though in a minority position, who needs to expand or confirm their political power at the regional ground. This minority position can either correspond to a minority government in power or to a minority position in government.

2.3.2. Positioning logic:

The access to policy decisions in Europe enables regional nationalist with the possibility to position themselves more advantageously in the political process because the access to policy measures in Europe provides regional nationalists with the possibility to perform better than their political competitors. The access to policy decisions in Europe relies greatly on the competences of the regional authority within a particular constitutional settlement. Any regional nationalist political party can use Europe to position themselves more advantageously within regional political battle as long as they are in government and as long as their regional authority – their region - possess some political competences.

2.3.3. Influencing logic:

In the influence logic, the goal is to act on the content or orientation of a policy issue, more generally speaking, to weight on a political stake (Jacquot and Woll 2003). The ability of regional nationalists to influence policy decisions in Europe relies on a well-organized regional strategy as well as on the possibility to access political power in Europe. Ultimately, the capacity to exert influence over policy decisions in Europe can only be achieved once both requirements of regional empowerment - coordination of the regional interest and access to political power - are fully fulfilled. This influencing logic also corresponds to the utmost political ambition of all regional nationalist political parties when they consider the European venue.
3. The N-VA and the “usage” of Europe

Flanders has a more privileged political status in the sense that it is a federated region – *deelstaat* - within the Belgian federal state (interview 1.2). Flanders shares, since 1993, a similar legal status as the federal state: both levels of governance work in partnership and are partners in theory. Political practice is much more complex and tricky since few but substantial competences are exclusively retained at the federal level as it is the case for defense, justice, security, social security, fiscal and monetary policy (Leton 2001). Under the economic and Monetary Union, monetary policy has largely shifted to the EU and the fiscal policy is considerably retained by the European Monetary Union (EMU) criteria.

The list of sub-national competencies is extensive. Regions have competencies with a territorial logic. These consist of regional economic development, including employment policy; industrial restructuring; environment; nature conversation; housing; water resources; energy policy; road building; regional airports and public local transport; local government; agriculture and external trade. However, framework rule remains federal in most of the areas (Hooghe 2004:75).

Some federal and regional competences are in practice shared or at least they are complementary in their *praxis* which plunge Belgium into many functional blockage and political discontent. Belgium is commonly perceived as a *dysfunctional* state which justifies Flemish demands for further regionalization of major political competences like social security, justice and fiscal competence.

Furthermore, according to Article 68 of the Belgian constitution, Flanders has competences over its international relations which include the formal representation to the European Union but still, in Belgium, sovereignty is shared and not divided which means that the federal and the regional levels of governance must work out on a (difficult) political consensus in order to participate at the European Council of Ministers. The 1993 reform preserved the autonomy of the federated entities and attributed treaty-making powers to the regions (and communities), applying the principle *in foro interno* and *in foro externo* which means that the policy level in charge of the domestic policy domain also conferred the power to act in the international sphere and to conclude treaties (Kerremans 1997; Jans & Stouthuysen 2007: 214).

A cooperative relationship has been defined in 1993 by the means of a complex institutional framework (Delpérée 1994; Leton 2001; Theo Jans and Stouthuysen 2007) where an inter-ministerial conference on foreign affairs was set up to tackle problems that could occur between the federal and regional ministers of foreign affairs. In Europe, since Art 203 TEC\(^\text{12}\) allowed regional/community ministers to represent Belgium in the Council, a decision had to be made as to which government level – federal, regional or community – would attend each of the nine Council configurations and how the regions – Brussels-Capital, Flanders and Wallonia – and the communities – Flemish, French or German Speaking – would divide the representation tasks in the Council. A six-month rotation system was set up for regional and community governments attending the Council meetings\(^\text{13}\).

An elaborate system of internal coordination between federal and the regional/community governments was set in place. Coordination occurs on a weekly basis within the Federal ministry of foreign affairs and in order to prepare for technical issues or sectoral policy matters in the Council, specialized

\(^{12}\) Article 146 of the Maastricht Treaty.

coordination committees have been set up to discuss and coordinate the positions of the different tiers of government.

The decision rule for the entire internal coordination system is consensus but for the N-VA this institutional coordination system is not as fluid or transparent as the N-VA would hope it to be (interviews 1.4; 1.5 and 1.12). Consensus is very difficult to achieve within a national structure where regional approaches to Europe and interests in Europe are deeply biased: Wallonia is mainly concerned with the European Regional policy when Flanders behaves as a state within the state deploying a political as much as an economic agenda in Europe (interview 1.2).

In Flanders, and across Flemish political spectrum, the best political strategy has remained the Europe of the Regions where the principle of subsidiarity has been raised since the 90’s as the best substitute for a dysfunctional Belgium sovereign state. It has almost become a national dogma: Europe is still perceived as the institutional scapegoat for the lack of Belgitude (Roegiers 2003: 54 and 55) perceived simultaneously as the absence of a Belgium national sentiment and as the lack of functional Belgian governability (interview 1.2).

All Flemish political parties seem to agree on that assertion but the “usage” of Europe by traditional Flemish parties (CD&V and Open Vld) have been very limited and the extreme right nationalist party, Vlaams Belang, is very skeptical of Europe.

In Flanders and in Belgium, Europe has become so obvious that it is too often taken for granted (Deschouver and Van Assche 2005) and no coherent regional strategy in Europe has ever been defined nor implemented. In that context and against all odds, since 2004, the (new) democratic Flemish Nationalist Party, the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie (N-VA), has proved to move successfully throughout Belgian political troubled waters using the European arena as an institutional tool to deliver its nationalist self-government political project.

For nationalist parties like the N-VA, the main purpose is no longer to use Europe to bypass the national federal state actor but rather to use Europe to be “politically empowered” being “efficient” (interviews 1.5 and 1.12) which means the capacity to forge, for the first time, a Flemish coherent economic strategy which could gather the contributions of all Flemish political actors, ideologically divergent, but working together within an European network where Flemish social and economic fabric would also be involved.

The immediate goal is to strengthen the links between the regional and the European levels of governance within this multi-level system of Governance (Hooghe and Marks 2003) where the national level could eventually be diluted but not completely erased until independence comes along.

The N-VA in that matter is very cautious and carefully chooses the words whenever expressing its positioning regarding the role and performance of the Flemish Representation to the European Union and at the Council of Ministers (interview 1.13). The N-VA is fully aware that it needs full attention from their political competitors to negotiate in order to obtain further state reform towards confederalism.

The main target for the N-VA is to “use” Europe mainly as a political space to overcome the Belgian obstacle and compensate the political and economic consequences of the Belgian dysfunctional state (interview 1.2). For the N-VA, Europe is used as an institutional tool to discipline Belgian and Flemish administrations, filling the institutional gap between Flemish and Belgian governments. For the Flemish representation to the European Union, Europe tempers separatism (interview n 1.2) as much as it solves the absence of an efficient political coordination between Flemish and Belgian governments in Europe.
For Frieda Brepoels, the N-VA MEP, (interview 1.4), Europe displays the “handy” institutional solution for a national problem, which is politically visible, economically growing but culturally rooted. Europe is part of the solution for Flemish people as it opens a new possibility to bring Flanders back to economic prosperity (interview 1.9).

For the N-VA, networking in Europe emerges as a new form of governance which allows regional Flemish government to mobilize Flemish political, economical and social resources in a situation where the human and economic resources are widely dispersed across public and private actors in Flanders and in Europe. The result is expected to be a functional interdependence of public and private actors in policy-making as the Flemish government would become increasingly dependent upon the co-operation and joint resource mobilization of policy actors in Europe.
4. The SNP and the “usage” of Europe

Scotland is a nation but not yet an autonomous state. It is no longer considered to be a stateless nation as David Mc Crone (2008) and Michael Keating (2009) have recently confirmed but it remains a political subsystem of the United Kingdom and one of its four nations. For the time being, the ultimate legal sovereignty remains in Westminster, and Scotland remains part of the broader British political system (McGarvey and Cairney 2008:11).

Moreover, the Scotland Act of 1998 have set out a clear list of reserved powers which UK State institutions in Westminster and Whitehall retain, with the rest falling under the jurisdiction of the Scottish Parliament and Government.

The manner in which EU issues were dealt with in Scotland Act 1998 presented something of a political conundrum for the Scottish Parliament and Westminster, and even more so for the two sets of government. On the one hand, devolution ceded responsibility for major EU policy areas such as agriculture, fisheries and the environment to the Scottish Parliament. On the other hand, the EU itself – international relations, broadly speaking – has remained a matter of reserved to Westminster as stated at Schedule 5 of the Scotland Act (Lynch 2001: 157).

Scottish executive ministers are therefore functionally and politically responsible for policies involving significant Scottish-EU overlaps and interactions, but the UK government still has the primacy in relations with the EU.

It is undeniable that devolution has significantly changed the institutional environment for Scotland-EU relations and has created the potential for greater extra-state relations between the Scottish Executive, the Scottish Parliament and the European Union. However, in spite of this development, intra-state mechanisms remain important, and perhaps even more then in the 90’s. The national route remains the European channel of regional interest representation which is the most politically rewarding than the limited avenues for influence available to regional governments in the EU (Michael Aron confidential report, Scottish Office in Brussels: 2005).

Much of Scotland’s role in the EU, even with the SNP minority government since 2007, is not about Scotland in Europe but more about Scotland in the UK in Europe (Burrows 2000: 125).

For Scotland, Europe has become the Europe with some Regions where the political pay-offs have complied with a coherent and well-defined Scottish strategy based in a selective choice over regional partners and over European institutional channels of interest representation - formal and informal- and where traditional political opponents – the Scottish Labour (SL) and the Scottish National Party (SNP) - have always managed to overcome their ideological differences over nationalism on behalf of Scottish interests. With the SNP minority government in power since 2007, the approach to Europe has become more institutionally selective but politically effective.

Regardless of political and economic conquest in Europe, for the Head of Scottish Office in Europe (interview nº 2.2), “political accommodation” is still salient and for Charlie Jeffery (interview 2.5), “continuity” is still the best word to define Scottish approach to Europe.

In Scotland, political institutional arrangement has not changed but Scottish strategy in Europe has always been very coherent, even when Scottish Labour was in power. It has been so since Scotland has become
an active partner in Europe in the late 90’s when devolution was finally settled in 1998 and even before in 1991 when the Scottish regional office - Scotland Europa - opened in Brussels by the hands of Donald Dewar (SL).

For Nicola McEwen (interview 2.11), looking into the actual European “context” is the most important mental attitude to keep in mind if one wants to understand the reasons why regions still come to Europe and if one wants to explain the evolutionary nuances of Scottish and SNP approach to Europe. The European state system is thus historically contingent and not pre-determined (Keating 2009: 12), as it is the nature of regional and national polities. Europe discloses many different meanings which had varied across time and where sharp symbolic distinctions between identity and political layers have been diluted.

If in the 90’s, Europe used to represent the non-England land (interview 2.1) where Scotland could finally anchor a national project aiming at cultural and political recognitions which have always been denied by the conservative dominant position of Margaret Thatcher in Britain, nowadays, Europe has become an expanded political space where oppositional political demands regarding English dominator have been smoothed.

Negative references to Conservatives and Labour parties as “London run” has become less salient and direct attacks to English are no more (Leith 2008 : 89). Discursive references to Europe have become less evident and less stringent. Scotland has definitely learned to balance national political demands with a realistic sense of European polity where straightforward political opposition is no longer the most rewarding strategy.

“Context” implies a dynamic follow-up of the changes: changes in the social, political or economic context both occurred at the regional and at the supra-national levels of governance. In a context of globalization and regional integration, Europe may display many opportunities to enhance regional autonomy as well as it imposes limits in which nationalist parties must nevertheless operate.

On the one hand, the SNP has managed to higher its political profile by neglecting its participation within the Committee of the Regions and within the European informal network of constitutional regions, REGLEG. On the other hand, Scotland has got into more de facto competences - international trade, international cooperation and energy competences – that otherwise wouldn’t be obtained neither outside Europe nor by a radical nationalist position in Europe. Keating and Aldecoa (1999) had already defined it as the “spillover effects of domestic competences” into the international arena.

Scottish MEP’s, Scottish regional antenna – Scotland Europa -, and Scottish Executive Office to the European Union work hand in hand, striving for a functional regional Scottish strategy in Europe. Scottish policy lines are clear and cooperative politics among political actors and across compound European institutional structures are set in place.

For the SNP, the European added-value does not differ much from the pragmatic “nationalist” Scottish Labour’s approach to Europe in the 90’s (McEwen 1996). Some institutional nuances have been added and the main purpose is now to deliver a renewed Scottish image inspiring political reliability, confidence and economic performance: “a net contributing leading European region in the making” as stated by Charlie Jeffery (interview nº 2.5).
5. Conclusion

The main purpose of this paper was to compare two forms of regional mobilization in Europe which will enable us to sustain a pragmatic nationalist theory of regional empowerment in the XXI century.

Departing from an original rational-sociological new institutionalist approach and applying the concept of “usage of the European Union”, we have argued for a more nuanced theory of regional empowerment in Europe and we will announce the return of optimistic regionalism in Europe.

This theory has consisted of a systematic analysis of regional empowerment in Europe applied to one specific category of nationalist political parties: political parties in power; entitled with some political competences and attached to a civic form of nationalism.

Two regions and two democratic nationalist political parties in power, the N-VA in Flanders and the SNP in Scotland, within two multi-national states, Belgium and the United Kingdom, have been carefully chosen for the purposes of this research.

It is not only the similarities but also the differences which have sustained the arguments for this comparative study.

With this paper, we have looked for a more colorful depiction of a renewed theory of regional mobilization in Europe of the XXI century as well as a more refined methodological approach in face of recent empirical data.

The space time studied has been framed by regional nationalist parties in power in Flanders and in Scotland. It will start in June 2004 for the N-VA in Flanders and in May 2007 for the SNP in Scotland until present days. References to past events have been taken into account in order to sustain and pinpoint evolutionary politics in changing polities within a European multi-level system of governance.

Both analyses have included major European institutional changes introduced by the Maastricht Treaty (1993) and reinforced by the Lisbon Treaty (2010), as well as all major aspects of federalization and devolutionary processes occurred in Flanders and Scotland, respectively, between 1993 and 2011.


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