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## How Regions Assemble in Brussels

### The Organizational Form of Territorial Representation in the European Union

Tom Donas

Jan Beyers

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**Abstract.** Subnational authorities (SNAs) are increasingly mobilized at the European level and much research has been conducted on the liaison offices that represent these sub-state jurisdictions. Yet, liaison offices are only one of the available organizational forms SNAs rely on in Brussels. In this article we investigate multiple organizational forms – such as trans-regional associations and national associations - and how regional entities combine them. This broader perspective leads to the conclusion that the scope and diversity of EU-level territorial mobilization is much more extensive than liaison offices only. However, resource-full SNAs, SNAs benefiting from a high level of self-rule or SNAs harboring regionalist political parties are comparatively much more active in establishing liaison offices and occupy a prominent position in various trans-regional associations.

## **Introduction**

The presence of regions, provinces, counties and cities in Brussels has, next to the more institutionalized channels of representations for subnational authorities (SNAs) such as the Committee of the Regions and/or representation through the EU Council, become a commonplace phenomenon in the EU interest group community (Hooghe 1995; Tatham 2008). One of the earliest systematic studies on territorial interest representation in the EU has been conducted by Marks et al. (1996) who explained the increasing number of liaison offices in Brussels through a multi-level governance (MLG) perspective emphasizing how regional distinctiveness triggers the establishment of liaison offices. While Marks et al. identified 54 liaison offices in 1993, today we count in addition to more than 200 offices many other forms of regional representation. All this points to the validity of the MLG argument, namely that sub-state territorial interests are capable of building an independent and sustained presence at the EU-level (Marks et al. 1996; Nielsen and Salk 1998).

Brussels based regional offices are distinct from other organized interests in the sense that they represent the public sector, democratically elected executives and territorial jurisdictions. However, somewhat less attention has been given to the fact that sub-state jurisdictions have various ways to represent themselves, for instance creating or joining a territorial interest association. Such associations can be created at the national (e.g. the *Mid Sweden EU Office*) or the European level (e.g. the *European Chemical Regions Network*). The fact that SNAs adopt collective forms of representation makes them somewhat similar to functional interests, although at other times – for example, when relying on a liaison office that functions as an unofficial embassy – they take on state-like properties. Clearly, many of the activities SNAs deploy in Brussels, in particular their attempts to represent their interests through collective forms of representation, can be considered as equivalent to interest group

behavior. In this regard it is no surprise that some earlier studies on regional offices strongly relied on interest group literature (for instance Marks et al. 1996; Marks, Heasley et al. 2002).

SNAs use multiple organizational forms for making their voice heard in the EU. Some forms entail collective forms of representation, while others concern one single SNA. The two most mentioned forms in the literature are the liaison offices and the trans-regional associations. The first one, the *liaison office*, is the individual presence of a sub-national executive that establishes an office in Brussels. The second one, the *trans-regional association*, is a collective form and consists of SNAs originating from different member-states. These organizations group several SNAs, focus on particular policy fields, and their activities are similar or equivalent to functional interest groups (Piattoni 2010, 250-1). Some of these associations have a very broad and generic focus – for instance REGLEG, the *European Network of Regions with Legislative Powers* – while others have a more sector or function focus – for instance, the *Association des Régions Européennes des Produits d'Origine*. Because of their encompassing nature – multiple regions with interests in a particular area – these associations may play an important role in the Brussels lobby circuit (Tatham 2008). In addition, to strengthen their lobby efforts individual SNAs may make strategic use of these associations and in many cases liaison offices provide the structural logistics (offices, staff) for these organizations, especially at the time of their establishment. Some authors pointed at other collective forms of representation (Jeffrey 1997; Marks et al. 2002; Huyseune and Jans 2007). Firstly, SNAs may share representation costs with other SNAs of the same country by establishing a joint office. As these associations do not need to cover all SNAs in one single country, we call them *partial national associations*. An example is the joint office of Schleswig-Holstein and Hamburg. Although these partial national associations fulfill more or less the same function as a liaison office, within these associations

a limited number of regional executives originating from one member-state share the infrastructure and the costs of an office. Secondly, all SNAs in one member-state may decide to establish one single representation in Brussels, which we call a *complete national association*. For instance, the *Irish Regions Office* (IRO) encompasses all regions of Ireland.

Organizational form is an important component in our understanding of concrete lobbying practices and capabilities (Halpin 2012; Halpin and Nownes 2012). For instance, the value of organized interests to policymakers depends on their capability to foster coordination among different actors, which is connected to organizational form. However, collective forms of representation may also constrain interest representation. A complete national association allows the representation of widely supported positions, but given the fact that it covers a whole member-state its position and strategy may often tend to be complementary with what the central state executive presents in the EU Council. Complete national associations need to reconcile the views of an encompassing membership and the substantial number of regional executives involved makes that this form does not entail direct and distinct interactions between an individual SNA and EU policymakers. The membership of a partial national association may affect the representation of regional interests in a similar way. For example, in one of our case-studies we observed a low level of activity of Swedish regions regarding the Trans European Network program (TEN-T), not because of a lack of interest, but because of conflicting interests among the members of a Swedish partial national association. As some proposed transport lines would not cross through all members' territory, its members did not share similar interests on this particular issue.

The aim of this article is to explain varying organizational forms SNAs use when mobilizing in Brussels. Although the literature is aware of these various forms of territorial representation (Hooghe 1995; Hooghe and Marks 1996; Bomberg and Peterson 1998; Tatham

2008; Blatter et al. 2008, 2009), few have analyzed and compared multiple forms of territorial lobbying. A systematic mapping of multiple forms is particularly needed in order to understand better the scope and diversity of the Brussels' territorial interest community. While some view the EU institutions and the emergence of collective and individual forms of regional mobilization as an opportunity for peripheral regions (Barolini 2005, 269), others are more skeptical as they expect that mostly the wealthy and prosperous regions get represented (Borras 1993). The latter argument resembles a repeatedly heard conclusion in the interest group literature, namely that interest representation tends to be biased toward a few selective interests and that most interest group populations are skewed towards resourceful and well-endowed actors (Baumgartner and Leech 2001; Lowery and Gray 2004; Beyers, Maloney et al. 2008; Scholzman 2010). Is the EU best described as a plural system where a large variety and diversity of regional representations compete and forge coalitions? Or, is EU governance more accurately portrayed by elitism whereby a limited number of resourceful regions tend to dominate the influence production process (Greenwood 2011)?

This article offers a large-n study analyzing the multiple organizational forms sub-state jurisdictions rely on in Brussels. In the next two sections we discuss our theoretical framework and we outline the hypotheses that guide our empirical analysis. Then we present our newly created dataset on the involvement of 297 regions from 20 member-states in 275 different EU-level representations. The final section includes the multivariate data-analyses with which we test our hypotheses. Our results demonstrate that although all European SNAs have some presence in Brussels, substantial differences exist in the sense that resource-full SNAs are very active through multiple forms and occupy a prominent position in several trans-regional associations.

## **Theoretical perspectives on EU territorial lobbying**

One of the earliest and most systematic studies on territorial mobilization in the EU has been conducted by Marks et al. (1996), who relied on data from before the enlargement waves. Marks et al. situated their expectations within a MLG framework, which they contrasted with a state-centric perspective. A state-centered approach would highlight the gate-keeping capacities of central state executives as constraining the number and diversity of territorial interests that get mobilized in Brussels. However, conceptually and empirically it is not always clear where to draw the line between what is state-centered and MLG. Much empirical evidence suggests that contrasting a state-centered versus a MLG-perspective and emphasizing the cooperative or conflictual relation of an SNA vis-à-vis the central government, is possibly not that fruitful for explaining variation in territorial lobbying. For instance, when looking at the lobby strategies liaison offices adopt, Tatham shows that many regions – particularly those with much self-rule – develop cooperative and mutually supportive relations with their central state government (Tatham 2008/2010; see also Beyers and Bursens 2006; Moore 2008; Morata 2011). This finding does not fit well with the notion of political distinctiveness which would expect us to see bypassing and autonomous regionalist behavior in Brussels. Increasingly, we see a system whereby regional actors seek a place within the work of the central government in Brussels (Jeffrey 1997). True, at times, this relationship is conflictual, but quite often the dominant interaction mode is cooperative.

We conceive MLG as part of a more general perspective on interest representation and state-society relations. In many ways, interesting parallels can be drawn between MLG and neo-pluralist accounts of interest representation (Smith 1990; Dunleavy and O'Leary 1992; McFarland 2004; Lowery and Gray 2004), which responded to some more traditional lines of thinking, in particular traditional pluralism and elitism (Truman 1951; Schattschneider 1960;

Olson 1965). MLG and neo-pluralism have in common that they are statements about how contemporary political systems developed, more precisely that during the past decades important structural transformations took place in ‘the business of rule’. Another shared theoretical idea is that the pivotal role of the central state government as a unitary actor that mediates between and aggregates societal interests has eroded substantially and cannot be taken for granted anymore. Increasingly, the state has disaggregated itself into multiple, often devolved, agencies that are capable of pursuing sectional interests concentrated in a particular field or territory.

Neo-pluralist and MLG thinking emphasize the importance of complex multi-level arrangements for explaining the extent to which contextual variables shape the development of organized interests and their political strategies (Dunleavy and O’Leary 1992). Important is that both stress the non-hierarchical or ‘network’ character of contemporary policymaking (in contrast to more hierarchical modes in earlier times). Early scholars of MLG mostly emphasized the novel opportunities created by supranational levels of government and argued that these supranational venues stimulate sub-state entities to bypass the central government. Stressing the vertical dependencies and the juxtaposing of sub-state authorities versus central state authorities leads to a research focus on SNAs establishing their own representation and ignores the multiple organizational forms SNAs may rely on. This perspective, which focuses primarily on strategic considerations of individual SNAs, gives only a partial image of the Brussels’ based community of territorial interests.

Instead, this article maps multiple organizational forms and investigates the extent to which regions rely on individual or collective forms of lobbying. Our research expectations will be embedded into contemporary empirical and theoretical literature on population ecology, interest representation and state-society relations (Lowery and Gray 1995; Gray and

Lowery 1996, 2000; Messer, Berkhout et al. 2011). A central theoretical idea in this literature is that the composition of interest communities is shaped by the overall context in which constituent entities operate. Various ingredients of population ecology models form a useful starting point for a more general theoretical understanding of EU territorial lobbying and most of the hypotheses that we elaborate below will be situated within this theoretical perspective. Key is that we take the internal characteristics of an region as a starting point (such as its economic prosperity or the presence of regionalist parties) and combine this with contextual and structural factors that shape territorial mobilization at the EU-level (such as its relative position vis-à-vis other SNAs and the type of political autonomy the SNA enjoys).

### **Research expectations**

Assessing resource levels is the most common feature of any analyses of interest representation, and it is not different here. Firstly, the resource *push* hypothesis predicts that especially large and resourceful SNAs will mobilize in Brussels by establishing their own office. In their analysis of 54 regions with their own office in 1993, Marks et al. (1996) found no support for this hypothesis, but recent research by Blatter et al. (2008/2009) on 81 regions from six federalized and regionalized European countries showed that resources do positively affect the extensiveness of EU-level activities (see also Tatham 2010). In our empirical analysis we measure and test the effect of absolute resource endowment through the regional GDP.

Although absolute resources might explain the emergence of liaison offices, on its own this factor does not explain properly the origins of complete and partial associations. Prosperous and affluent regions are not always big in terms of absolute size (Tatham 2010). For instance, Scandinavian regions are resource-rich, but small in terms of population size and

GDP. For these SNAs, establishing and running a liaison office might be considered as costly compared to the potential benefits, but the sharing of representation costs with a small number of other prosperous might be a valuable option. Therefore, we expect that absolute resources will negatively impact on collective action among regions of the same member-state, but that prosperous regions, measured in terms of GDP per capita, are more likely to establish partial national associations. The situation is different for weaker regions in terms of absolute resources and prosperity; for these SNAs we expect a strong reliance on complete national associations.

A strong Brussels' presence of resourceful regions shapes the overall environment in which Brussels' liaison offices operate, which in turn affects the emergence of other organizational forms (Gray and Lowery 2000, 69-74). If the population of liaison offices consists primarily of wealthy regions, then the set of trans-regional associations will reflect this environmental variable. Although, it sounds plausible that less resourceful regions would rely more on trans-regional associations as this allows them to share the burden of representation, an organizational ecology perspective leads us to expect that especially sizable and resourceful regions are the drivers behind these associations. Resourceful regions are more capable of developing their own distinct strategies, which includes both the opening of Brussels' office, and having staff that stays and regularly travels to Brussels. All this makes them better acquainted with the Brussels scene and increases their involvement in a large number of trans-regional associations.

Another way to understand the role of resources is to look at relative resources, which can be measured in terms of the share (in percentage) of the regional GDP in the national GDP. Some scholars expect that large regions, in terms of their share of a domestic resource variable (population, GDP, etc.), will mobilize more on their own. For instance, Hooghe

claims that regions with a firm status in domestic politics would be eager to represent their interests effectively at the EU-level (2002). However, others suggest that particularly small regions would mobilize as these are less capable of influencing the central government. For instance, Nielsen and Salk argue that absolute size stimulates representation in Brussels, while relative size stimulates cooperation with the central governments as the latter are more able to be influenced by the former (Nielsen and Salk 1998, 239; see also Tatham 2010). One of the reasons why much can be said in favor of the latter expectation is that SNAs with a large relative GDP mostly contain a country's capital, which locates these regions more proximate to the central state government. Yet, as these centrally situated SNAs are usually also very resourceful, they tend to establish their own office and are members of a higher number of trans-regional associations. This may result in both effects – being resourceful and having a pivotal position – canceling each other out. Nonetheless, because the relative resource position is much more important for partial and complete national associations, we expect that regions with a weaker relative position to be inclined to act collectively.

In addition to this resource *push* hypothesis, Marks et al. (1996) formulated a so-called resource *pull* hypothesis stating that SNAs that receive substantial EU funding are more active. The potential of government agencies to redistribute resources energizes and stimulates interest representation (Gray and Lowery 2000, 69-74). Still, one has to be careful with this expectation as most regional funds are distributed according to socio-economic criteria and depend on intergovernmental bargaining. Thus, regional mobilization will hardly affect the actual distribution of these funds. Although lobbying for EU funds is unlikely to 'pull' regions directly to Brussels, SNAs receiving funds are involved in the development of operational programs and the implementation by the Commission. Also the strong interests of some regional authorities in the overall design of regional and structural policies may

stimulate them to become active in Brussels (Hooghe 1996; Bache 1998; Leonardi 2005). This expectation holds mostly for the individual representation of SNAs (liaison offices) as fund-seeking has some re-distributive implications, while SNAs that benefit from EU funds are less eager to act collectively as this may imply the sharing of realized benefits.

This argument portrays SNAs as fund-seeking. However, in addition to seeking tangible financial benefits, SNA mobilization is largely policy-seeking. It can be expected that, because they are potentially more affected by implementation problems related to EU law, SNAs with larger portfolios of competencies need more information on EU policies compared to SNAs with smaller portfolios. To put it in organizational ecology parlance, these SNAs may perceive their policy environment, including the impact of the EU, as more disruptive (Gray and Lowery 2000, 74). As SNAs with a large portfolio of competencies are more confronted with the implementation of EU-law, they potentially face more uncertainty originating from the EU and, therefore, the inclination to monitor and watch out for policy changes will be greater. While Marks et al. measured regional autonomy with one composite index (1996; Lane and Errson 1991), we suggest that it is not autonomy as such that matters, but that one should consider the type of autonomy a region enjoys.

For regions with a large portfolio of self-rule – autonomous authority exercised by the SNA executive over the constituency living in the region – we presume a higher need to influence EU policies (Marks et al. 1996; Hooghe et al. 2010). These regions mobilize more because the cost of remaining inactive may be high, but also because more policy benefits can be realized (Marks et al. 1996, Nielsen and Salk 1998, Tatham 2010; Blatter et al. 2008; 2009). More competencies imply a larger number of policy areas in which one has a stake and a larger need for additional specialized and functional representation. Therefore, we expect that regions with more self-rule tend to be involved in a larger number of trans-regional

associations. Moreover, as EU regulatory policies have less tangible redistributive implications for SNAs with a shared stake in one particular area, SNAs seeking to influence regulatory outcomes may profit from collective forms of representation..

Self-rule needs to be separated from shared-rule whereby all sub-state jurisdictions enjoy some level of autonomy, but in addition also jointly exercise collective authority in the country as a whole (Hooghe et al., 2012). Given the fact that many regional competencies in shared-rule systems are also central government competences, SNAs with much shared-rule are required to collaborate with SNAs of the same country, for instance in order to influence the national position. Therefore, an increase in shared-rule will positively impact the establishment of partial, but in particular complete, national associations, as the latter group represents all the SNAs within one country. For trans-regional associations we expect a negative effect, because of the opportunities to shape EU policies at the domestic level makes these SNAs internally rather than externally oriented. Finally, more shared-rule, however, does not affect the likelihood of opening a liaison office, as the opportunities and constraints of a liaison office are unrelated to the amount of shared-rule.

Self-rule indicates the extent to which SNAs are able to cultivate regional distinctiveness and policy diversity within a member-state. Additionally, divergence in terms of party politics can also be considered as a sign of distinctiveness. Variables, such as party politics and domestic intergovernmental relations have been used in various studies, mostly for explaining variation in SNA influence and lobbying style. Concerning party politics, Tatham pointed out that SNAs governed by parties that are excluded from the central state government, are more likely to adopt a non-cooperative style of advocacy and tend to bypass the central state executive (2010). Tatham's variable refers to regional distinctiveness in terms of how a region is governed compared to the central state level. In his study on regional

strategies aiming to influence the process of EU Treaty reform, Bauer observed that the intersection of territorial politics with national party political struggles carries significant explanatory power with respect to accounting for conflictual behavior (Bauer 2006).

We do not analyze governing coalition overlap as it is doubtful whether a particular governing coalition, which might be a temporary political situation, affects the establishment of a specific organizational form such as a liaison office. Establishing an organizational form differs from the concrete practice of lobbying to which Tatham and Bauer refer. Yet, the presence of parties that strive for more regional autonomy – regionalist parties – heats up the autonomy debate within a region, which is something that may stimulate an SNA executive to develop its own presence in Brussels (Bauer 2006; Tatham 2010). The fact that regionalist parties are often EU-oriented and/or pro-European triggers EU-level political strategies (Marks and Wilson 1999; but see Hepburn and Elias 2010), which makes that SNAs that harbor such parties are more likely members of a trans-regional network. On the other hand, we expect these regions to be less interested in developing cooperative ties with other regions from the same country and, therefore, they will be less visible in complete and partial national associations.

### **Mapping organizational forms**

Our mapping of SNAs' representations in Brussels relies on data collection techniques that are becoming increasingly common in research on organized interests, namely the systematic mapping of actors that are mobilized in a particular venue (Halpin and Jordan 2012; Berkhout and Lowery 2008). More concretely, for 2010 we combine directories published by private organizations with registers created by European and Brussels institutions. We started with directories on European interest associations, namely *The*

*European and Public Affairs Directory* and *The Directory of EU Information Sources*, which both compile data via annual surveys in which organizations are requested to fill out a short form. In addition to these two sources, we use four specialized sources on territorial interest organizations: (1) a list of the Committee of the Regions with all the registered Brussels offices (COR), (2) the Open Days Directory which provides contact information of all participating SNAs, (3) the voluntary EU representatives register, and (4) the Brussels Region's Regional Register (BELO). Our dataset combines these six sources in order to create a comprehensive overview of territorial interests. By combining these six sources and leaving out the doubles, we get a list of 410 organizations that are active in Brussels, namely 237 liaison offices, 51 partial national associations, 44 complete national associations and 78 trans-regional associations active in Brussels.<sup>1</sup>

We then broke down each organization and identified all the SNAs represented by it. We only kept the SNA-membership of an organization if these SNAs are located at the first level below the central government (1), are not a de-concentrated administrative unit (2), and have on average a population of at least 150.000 inhabitants (3).<sup>2</sup> As a consequence, we exclude development regions in Greece and the *commissaoes de coordenacao* in Portugal since they are generally classified as de-concentrated administrations (Hooghe et al. 2010). Likewise, the Bulgarian *oblasti* are left out as the average population of the *oblasti* within Bulgaria is below 150.000. However, the Finish region of Aland Island with a population of

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<sup>1</sup> In addition, we found 18 trans-regional networks for which we were not able to collect any further data on their members.

<sup>2</sup> For various reasons we use a threshold of an average population of at least 150.000 inhabitants for one subnational level within a country. First, without this threshold we would have to include the lowest level of countries such as Cyprus, Slovenia and Luxembourg. As a result, small villages and communes would vastly outnumber larger regions, counties, provinces or cities in our sample. Second, the 150.000 threshold is the same as the one uses in Hooghe et al. (2010); data on self-rule, shared-rule and economic indicators are only available for jurisdictions of this size.

around 27.000 is included because the average size of a Finnish region at this level is 265.000. This procedure led to a total of 297 SNAs located below the central state level. Note that this is a very heterogeneous set that reflects various types of territorial politics within the member-states and differences related to the varying histories of state formation. Some countries have many ( $\geq 20$ ) subnational authorities, namely Romania, France, Sweden, Italy, Finland and Hungary, while other countries, mostly the smallest member-states, like Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta and Slovenia, have no SNAs that fulfill the above named criteria.

For each of these 297 SNAs we have data on the forms through which they organize their Brussels' representation. These 297 SNA are involved in the 175 (74 percent) liaison offices, 25 (49 percent) partial national associations, 7 (16 percent) complete national associations and 68 (87 percent) trans-regional associations we identified. This distribution already shows that large territorial entities, namely those below the central government level with an average of more than 150.000 inhabitants, are quite likely to have their own office and be part of a trans-regional association. Of the 410 organizations we identified, 275 (67 percent) represent at least one of the 297 SNAs below the central state level.<sup>3</sup>

In total, 159 SNAs, which is 54 percent of all 297 SNAs below the central state level, have their own office in Brussels. Second, 74 SNAs (25 percent of the 297 SNAs) are represented through partial national associations. These are mostly Swedish, Finish and Dutch regions. In comparison, the 7 national associations that represent all SNAs in one country act

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<sup>3</sup> The other 33 percent (or 135 of identified organizations that mobilize other SNAs than the ones we identified) consists of 62 liaison offices, 26 partial national associations, 37 complete national associations, and 10 trans-regional associations. On 15 of these organizations we could not find data; in many of these cases a website said the organization had stopped its activities. Of the remaining 120 organizations 12 originate from an member-state without a regional tier of government that fits our sampling criteria (Bulgaria 5, Estonia 2, Latvia 2, Cyprus 2 and Slovenia 1). The other 108 organizations represent lower level jurisdictions that are nested in a higher level jurisdiction which has its own liaison office or a partial national association.

on behalf of 110 SNAs, which is 37 percent of all the regions below the central state level. Almost all, more precisely 283 SNAs (or 95 percent), are member of one of the 68 trans-regional associations. By identifying the total number of SNAs using one or more of these organizational forms, we observe that 214 SNAs of the 297 identified SNAs have a partial national association and/or liaison office based in Brussels. Adding SNAs represented through a complete national association increases this to 259, and, finally, adding SNAs that are member of a trans-regional association leads to the conclusion that all 297 SNAs utilize at least one of these mobilization options. So, a mapping that includes multiple forms of representation and combines various sources demonstrates that all SNAs at the first level below the central government are, in one way or another, active at the EU level. For instance, also economically weaker SNAs (such as the Czech *kraj* or Polish *Vojdovojships*) or SNAs from unitary countries (such as the Danish regions or the Dutch provinces) are in one way or another represented in Brussels. The observation that all European SNAs have some presence in Brussels lends credit to the argument that sub-state representation has become a natural ingredient of EU interest representation.

Before we analyze our different independent variables, we discuss the combination of different forms more closely. SNAs do not rely exclusively on one, collective or individual, organizational form, often they use both (Hooghe 1995, 186). In this regard, there is no great difference between territorial lobbying and traditional interest group politics, as also other societal interests combine a multitude of influence strategies and organizational forms (Baumgartner and Leech 1998). Evidence on these combinations is important as this points to the extensiveness with which SNAs invest resources in their Brussels representation.

**Table 1. Relationships among organizational forms (n=297, Cramérs V and Pearson Correlation Coefficient, df=1, \*\*\*<.001)**

|                  | Established a partial national association<br>Cramérs V | Established a complete national association<br>Cramérs V | Average number of trans-regional memberships<br>Pearson correlation coefficient |
|------------------|---|--|---|
| <b>LO n=159</b>  | -32***  | -.25***  | .42***  |
| <b>PNA n=74</b>  |   | .08 (ns)   | -.07 (ns)   |
| <b>CNA n=110</b> |   |  | -.31***   |

Table 1 shows the association between the adoption of a particular form and the use of other organizational forms. As expected SNAs with a Brussels office are less inclined to be part of national collective forms, but most of them belong to a high number of EU-level trans-regional associations. Combining an office with a complete or a partial national association is rather uncommon; this concerns respectively only 26 percent and 12 percent of the SNAs. More than 90 percent of the SNAs have at least one membership tie to a trans-regional association, but the number of such ties strongly relates to the adoption of other organizational forms. SNAs that are represented through an office have a significant higher amount of involvements in EU-level collective forms ( $\bar{x}$ =6.88 compared to  $\bar{x}$ =3.11;  $F=63.08$ ,  $p<.0001$ ), while SNAs that rely on a complete national association show a significant lower involvement ( $\bar{x}$ =3.32 compared to  $\bar{x}$ =6.19;  $F=31.23$ ,  $p<.0001$ ).<sup>4</sup> Whether or not an SNA is part of a partial national association shows no significant difference in terms of collective trans-regional participation ( $\bar{x}$ =5.30 compared to  $\bar{x}$ =4.59;  $F=1.37$ ,  $p=.2436$ ). In sum, although all European SNAs get represented at the EU-level, a first look at the combination of forms shows that EU-level collective action by SNAs with their own office is quite high. In contrast, those relying on national level organizations show a substantially lower amount of EU-level collective action.

<sup>4</sup> Typical examples are the 52 SNAs from Spain, Italy, Portugal and Greece of which 75 percent established their own office (compared to 54 percent in the overall population) and no membership in complete or partial national associations is observed. In contrast, these SNAs are on average part of 9.10 trans-regional associations (compared to 5.12 in the overall population).

**Table 2. Dependent and independent variables, hypotheses, and operationalization**

|                                      | Dependent variables               |   |  |   | measurement of independent variables   |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|--|---|--|
|                                      | Established regional office<br>LO | Established partial national association<br>PNA | Established a complete national association<br>CNA | Average number of trans-regional memberships<br>TRA |  |
| Resource push: absolute resources    | +                                 | -   | -  | +   | Regional GDP<br>Sources Eurostat, OECD   |
| Resources push: resources/per capita | No effect                         | +   | -  | +   | Regional GDP/capita of the Region<br>Sources Eurostat, OECD  |
| Relative resources                   | No effect                         | -   | -  | No effect   | Share of the regional GDP in the national GDP, in percentage<br>Sources Eurostat, OECD   |
| Regional and structural funding      | +                                 | -   | -  | -   | Amount of support (in Euros) from cohesion and structural policies fund per capita (period 2007-2013)<br>Source Eurostat   |
| Self-rule                            | +                                 | -   | -  | +   | Hooghe et al. 2010; a combination of 4 items that measure institutional depth, policy scope, fiscal autonomy and representation  |
| Shared-rule                          | No effect                         | +   | +  | -   | Hooghe et al. 2010; a combination of 4 items that measure law making, executive control, fiscal control, and constitutional reform   |
| The presence of regionalist parties  | +                                 | -   | -  | +   | Dichotomous*<br>1 = region harbors a party that is member or observer of the European Free Alliance (EFA), and/or is coded by Massetti (2009) and/or Jolly (2006) as regionalist.<br>0 = regions harbors no such parties |

\*In order to determine whether a region harbors a regionalist party we build upon three largely overlapping lists. We use the lists of Massetti (2009) and Jolly (2005) who conducted a comprehensive study of West-European regionalist parties. However, in order to get a sense of Eastern European regionalist parties we added the members and observers of the EFA. Obviously, not all regionalist parties are member of EFA. Yet, we are not coding parties, but whether or not a region harbors one or more regionalist parties. In many cases when there is one regionalist EFA-party, there is a regionalist party competitor that is not part of EFA. We simply code an SNA as having a regionalist parties, irrespective of whether this party has MPs or MEPs elected or not (as the number of elected officials is strongly affected by the electoral system).

## **Explaining variation in organizational forms**

This section presents the multivariate tests with the adoption of a particular organizational form as a dependent variable. Table 2 above lists the operationalization of the dependent and independent variables included in our models. For dichotomous dependent variables – establishing an office, belonging to a complete or partial national association –, we estimate the effects of the independent variables with logistic regression.<sup>5</sup> As the membership of trans-regional associations is a count variable, we use a Poisson regression model (Menard 1995; Long 1997).

Because SNAs are hierarchically nested within member-states, the assumptions of independence and constant residual variance are potentially violated. The potential lack of variance or homogeneity within clusters makes that conventional estimation techniques can result into downward biased standard errors and a higher chance of accepting the null-hypothesis. We conducted our analyses in two steps. First, we analyzed the data ignoring potential clustering and carried out an extensive analyses of standardized residuals and predicted values. Based on the fact that the constant variance assumption was not violated, we decided to rely on model-based standard errors for evaluating the significance of the estimates (see table 3).<sup>6</sup> Next, in order to control for potential nesting, we tested a small set of random coefficients models and checked whether or not significant effects in the conventional models are caused by variation between member-states only (see table 4).

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<sup>5</sup> As only nine SNAs established more than one office, we decided to dichotomize this variable.

<sup>6</sup> We have 30 cases with standardized residuals ranging between 2 (or -2) and 3 (or -3), but not higher. The residuals are not correlated with the predicted values, the Q-Q plots demonstrate that the standardized residuals follow a normal distribution and plots of residuals versus predicted values do not show clustering. Finally, collinearity should not be a serious problem as all VIF-values are substantially below the critical threshold of 5.

**Table 3. Explaining the adoption of organizational forms (logistic and poisson regression results, N=296)<sup>ab</sup>**

|  | Logistic regression results<br>B, (se)                                      |  |   | Poisson<br>B, (se)  |
|--|---|--|---|---|
|  | Liaison office  | Partial national association   | Complete national association   | Membership of trans-regional associations   |
| Constant   | -1.56<br>(2.99)   | -8.12***<br>(2.52)   | 28.10***<br>(3.90)  | -2.63***<br>(.61)   |
| Absolute resources (natural log)                     | 2.02***<br>(.28)  | -.39*<br>(.17)   | -.54**<br>(.18)   | .17***<br>(.03)   |
| Absolute resources/capita (natural log)              | -2.03***<br>(.39)   | 1.33***<br>(.28)   | -1.98***<br>(.35)   | .18***<br>(.06)   |
| Relative resources                                   | -.01<br>(.03)   | -.10**<br>(.04)  | .06**<br>(.03)  | -.001*<br>(.00)   |
| Regional and structural funding/capita (natural log) | .20<br>(.18)  | -.44**<br>(.15)  | -.98***<br>(.19)  | -.06*<br>(.03)  |
| Self-rule  | .28*<br>(.09)   | -.03<br>(.07)  | -.09<br>(.08)   | .12***<br>(.01)   |
| Shared-rule  | .10<br>(.10)  | .00<br>(.07)   | .53***<br>(.08)   | -.03*<br>(.01)  |
| Regionalist parties                                  | .97*<br>(.42)   | -.93**<br>(.31)  | -.48<br>(.28)   | .29***<br>(.06)   |
|  | Likelihood = 202.55***<br><br>Nagelkerke = .66<br>Correctly predicted = 92% | Likelihood = 65.25***<br><br>Nagelkerke = .28<br>Correctly predicted = 77% | Likelihood = 154.01***<br><br>Nagelkerke = .55<br>Correctly predicted = 89% | -LL= -659.30<br>df = 288<br>$\chi^2 = 380.95$<br><br>Model improvement versus null-model<br>2*(-LL - -LL)=321.90*** |

a) significance levels are based on model-based standard errors (in parenthesis), b) one missing value

\* < .05  
\*\* < .01  
\*\*\* < .001

Overall large, sizable and rich regions are likely to establish their own office, while absolute resources have a negative impact on the involvement in partial and, particularly, complete association.<sup>7</sup> Basically, these multivariate effects are confirmed by comparing average GDP-levels; the overall economic clout for regions with a liaison office is 2.5 times larger compared to regions with a partial or complete national association. Our hypotheses on how resources lead to a strong involvement in trans-regional associations is confirmed, which demonstrates, as suggested by the qualitative literature, that these associations are mainly driven by the strong and large European regions (Weyand 1996; Sodupe 1999). Finally, while absolute resources are important for establishing a liaison office, SNAs with their own office are not necessarily the most prosperous in terms of relative resources. The GDP/capita of regions with an office is 28 percent lower than those regions without an office. This results from the fact that the most prosperous regions – in terms of GDP/capita – are not those with their own liaison office, but those who form a partial national association. This positive effect for partial national associations results from a 24 percent higher GDP/capita for their members compared to other SNAs.

There is an interesting result for relative resources among the partial and complete national associations. Relative resources – the relative share of the regional GDP as part of the national GDP – affect the establishment of partial national associations negatively, e.g. the higher this share, the lower the chance that an SNA belongs to a partial national association.

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<sup>7</sup> We also analyzed models with population density in order to capture the size of an SNA. The results are almost identical. Yet, as population size correlates substantially with GDP, we decided to use only GDP data, in order to avoid problems with collinearity. One might argue that GDP is too remote a proxy for the overall SNA resources and that data on the size of the regional administration or the regional budget would be better. The problem is that reliable and comparable budget data are not readily available for most SNAs in our sample. However, the regional GDP can be considered as a close proxy of an SNA's capabilities; the partial correlation of our GDP-measure with the budget-data of Blatter (2009, N=80 regions) is .81, when controlled for the self-rule, shared rule and GDP/capita (and .74 when the outlier Ile-de-France is included). Moreover, as Blatter's data is substantially correlated with Hooghe's et al. index of self-rule ( $r=.49$ ,  $p<.0001$ ), we presume that GDP can be considered as a more independent measure of capabilities.

However, we are talking about a rather small effect. An increase in relative GDP from 1 percent to 50 percent makes the SNA only 1.3 percent less likely to be represented by a partial national association. The effect is reversed for complete national associations, here a positive change in relative share increases the adherence to a complete national association. Also significant is that relative resources do not predict the establishment of liaison offices which demonstrates that it is not a strong or weak relative position that stimulates actors to seek access to Europe. It is interesting to interpret this result in combination with other results regarding the partial national associations. Basically, these associations consist of prosperous regions, with a limited level of self- and shared-rule, no regionalist parties, but – at the level of the separate jurisdictions – a lower share of the total national resources.<sup>8</sup> Apparently, such regions carry less economic and political weight – on their own – and the political elites in these regions conceive collective action with similar (and in most cases adjacent) regions within their country as a tool to improve their leverage at the European level.

With regard to the possible dependence on EU funds, SNAs with their own office, those who are members of many trans-regional associations, or another type of representation (complete or partial), are not pulled to Europe because they gain substantial EU funds. This finding is further corroborated by the negative effect for complete and partial national associations, implying that regions who establish such a representation gain on average 50 percent less, and not more, EU-funding. This is not completely surprising as less prosperous regions, who on average get more EU funding, are generally less capable to invest in EU-level lobbying.

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<sup>8</sup> The average self-rule (range 2-14) and shared-rule (range 0-9) for SNAs belonging to partial national associations is 7.88 and 0.44 respectively compared to 9.54 and 2.03 for SNAs that have established their own office (on a scale that ranges from 2-14; Hooghe et al 2010).

Our results on shared- and self-rule demonstrate that self-rule, as hypothesized, significantly predicts the emergence of liaison offices. For instance, an increase of self-rule from 3 to 10, on a scale that ranges from 2-14, boosts the establishment of offices with 24 percent, from 70 percent to 94 percent respectively. The expectation that self-rule would have a negative effect for partial and complete national associations has to be, although the signs of the estimates point into the right direction, rejected. Apparently, self-rule affects mobilization through liaison offices and trans-regional associations, but it does not stimulate SNAs to collaborate at the national level. Complete national associations group SNAs that score lower on self-rule, but regions that benefit from much shared-rule are more likely to be members of complete national associations. As hypothesized, self-rule and shared-rule have respectively a positive and negative significant impact on the membership in trans-regional organizations. While more self-rule increases the trans-regional membership, more shared-rule diminishes this type of membership.

Basically, this demonstrates that the domestic constitutional order, more precisely the role and position of sub-state jurisdictions therein, strongly affects the Brussels community of territorial interests. In particular, self-rule can be considered as a proxy for heterogeneity as it indicates the ability of SNAs to develop policies that are distinct from the rest of the country. Note that this largely political-institutional indicator may not be confused with cultural, linguistic or ethnic heterogeneity. In analyzing our data we added controls (not shown in table 3) for other factors measuring heterogeneity, namely the indices of linguistic, religious and ethnic fractionalization as developed by Alesina et al. (2003) as well as a simple count of the number of SNAs within the member-state. One might expect that heterogeneity and a high density of jurisdictions inhibits collective action in the form of complete and partial national associations, but stimulates the opening of liaison offices. However, controlling for these

factors did not yield any systematic relation between heterogeneity, the number of jurisdictions and organizational form. True, for countries such as Ireland homogeneity may make forming a complete national association easier, but there are no similar practices in other rather homogeneous countries such as Poland or Sweden.

The findings on regionalist parties confirm our expectations. The effect is substantial as regions without a regionalist party have 80 percent less chance of establishing a liaison office, while more than 90 percent of the SNAs with a regionalist party have their own office. Only 5 percent of the SNAs in partial national associations harbors regionalist parties, compared to 31 percent of the SNAs that have a liaison office. Moreover, the presence of regionalist parties not only stimulates the emergence of regional offices, but also the membership of trans-regional associations. Regions with regionalist parties are more strongly tied to a larger number of trans-regional associations, while their propensity to invest in cooperative strategies with other SNAs from the same member-state is significantly lower. This finding is interesting in contrast to the non-result for relative economic position, in terms of GDP-share, which has no impact on the opening of liaison offices. Basically, regional distinctiveness needs to be mobilized politically, otherwise it remains something hidden and less important.

Finally, some results might be caused or moderated by the member-state from which SNAs originate. For instance, the result for self-rule could be a country-level effect, namely regions nested in the same country have similar capabilities and will therefore develop similar political strategies. The impact of the member-state context could be tested by random coefficient regression analysis. However, the small sample size (297), the small and heterogeneous group size (ranging from 2 to 42), and in particular the low number of groups (20) may cause highly inaccurate parameter estimates (see Maas and Hox 2004, Hox 2010,

235). This is especially the case if we would control simultaneously for multiple random effects, which might be appropriate as we have several independent variables clustered at the member-state level (for instance, self-rule and GDP). Because of these limitations we tested a small set of random coefficient models including only covariates that already showed a significant impact in the single-level models (table 3). The models reported in table 4 are those where the random part showed a statistical significant moderation effect that can be attributed to the member-state of the SNA.

On the outcomes for complete and partial national associations we can be brief (not reported in table 4). For these two forms we observed significant between country variation, but no random effect if variables are added to the random component and no significance for any of the fixed effects. This implies that most variation with respect to these organizational forms concerns variation across countries, not within countries. This country-effect is primarily due to the fact that these national associations consist of SNAs from the same member-state that all adopted a similar organizational form. Although this observation puts our findings in a broader perspective, this does not necessarily invalidate all of the aforementioned conclusions, as mixed models tend to underestimate the leverage of covariates that are country-invariant, especially when keeping in mind that we have a limited number of groups (countries) and an unequal distribution of partial national associations across these countries. For instance, regionalist parties are much less preponderant in SNAs that have a complete or partial national associations compared to those that have a liaison office (8 percent and 5 percent respectively compared to 46 percent). In addition SNAs in complete or partial national associations, are on average smaller in size and capabilities compared to those with their own office (see above).

**Table 4. Explaining liaison offices and trans-regional network membership (random coefficient models, N=296)<sup>ab</sup>**

|   | Trans-regional associations |                             | Liason offices             |                             |
|---|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
|   | Random: absolute resources  | Random: regionalist parties | Random: absolute resources | Random: regionalist parties |
| <b>Fixed effects</b>                    |                             |                             |                            |                             |
| Intercept                               | -12.89*<br>(4.56)           | -5.94<br>(4.56)             | .39<br>(.73)               | -8.09<br>(4.27)             |
| Absolute resources (natural log)        | .82*<br>(.30)               | 1.44***<br>(.19)            | .13***<br>(.03)            | 1.41***<br>(.19)            |
| Absolute resources/capita (natural log) | .63<br>(.53)                | -.69<br>(.55)               | -.14<br>(.07)              | -.51<br>(.53)               |
| Shared-rule                             | .23<br>(.17)                | .26<br>(.17)                | -                          | -                           |
| Self-rule                               | .34**<br>(.13)              | .36*<br>(.14)               | .03*<br>(.02)              | .50***<br>(.11)             |
| Regionalist parties                     | 1.81***<br>(.46)            | 1.85**<br>(.57)             | .09<br>(.05)               | 1.91***<br>(.60)            |
| <b>Random effects</b>                   |                             |                             |                            |                             |
| Intercept                               | 66.92*<br>(36.74)           | 3.98*<br>(1.80)             | .95*<br>(.50)              | 3.07***<br>(1.28)           |
| Covariance                              | -7.72<br>(4.13)             | 2.75<br>(1.41)              | -.08<br>(.05)              | 2.36<br>(1.38)              |
| Slope                                   | .91*<br>(.47)               | 1.68<br>(1.67)              | .01*<br>(.00)              | 1.90<br>(1.86)              |
| Residual                                | 5.43***<br>(.47)            | 5.83***<br>(.51)            | .07***<br>(.01)            | 5.91***<br>(.51)            |
| <b>Model fit</b>                        |                             |                             |                            |                             |
| -2LL                                    | 1395.5                      | 1409.3                      | 135.5                      | 1409.6                      |
| Wald $\chi^2$                           | 88.41***                    | 74.56***                    | 123.03***                  | 73.80***                    |
| N SNAs (level 1)                        | 296                         | 296                         | 296                        | 296                         |
| N countries (level 2)                   | 20                          | 20                          | 20                         | 20                          |

a) standard errors in parenthesis, b) one missing value

\* < .05  
 \*\* < .01  
 \*\*\* < .001

Table 4 shows some results for liaison offices and trans-regional associations. These analyses demonstrate that, despite some country-level moderation, most first-level effects reported in table 3 are rather robust. One important conclusion is that the impact of shared-rule loses significance when controlling for contextual variation at the country-level, while self-rule remains significant in all the models. When we add self-rule to the random component, we observe no significant impact in the random part, but its fixed estimate remains significant. This implies that self-rule is, especially compared to shared rule, a quite robust predictor of both liaison offices and trans-regional network membership. True, self-rule varies mostly between countries and not within countries. However, at similar levels of self-rule within countries we observe substantial variation in organizational form, implying that the variation in the dependent variable cannot be accounted for by self-rule only.

The results are also relatively robust for regionalist parties for which we observe that fixed effects remain significant once controls for contextual factors are added. If we insert evidence on the occurrence of regionalist parties to the random component, the random intercept becomes significant, entailing more offices and trans-regional network membership for all regions in member-states where such parties exist (compared to member-states without such parties). This contextual effect implies that if a small set of regions within a country harbors regionalist parties, not only are these regions more active, but other regions within the same country lacking regionalist parties become ‘infected’ by their immediate context and get mobilized at the European level. This is what we see in countries such as Spain and Italy where we find some regions with strong regionalist currents, but a high rate of offices and associational membership for all SNAs. Yet, the insignificant slope indicates that the marginal effect of harboring a regionalist parties is invariant across countries. Although the intercept

varies between countries, this is not true for the slope of harboring a regionalist parties.<sup>9</sup> For the Italian or Spanish regions the change in the predicted memberships of trans-regional memberships due the presence of a regionalist party differs not from the effect observed in the UK.

For both trans-regional and liaison offices, our evidence points at an interesting moderation effect. First of all, there are significant differences between the member-states in the sense that SNAs from rich countries have, on average, more liaison offices and show a higher involvement in trans-regional associations. Basically, this effect is due to the differences between Central European SNAs and SNAs from other member-states. Of the 110 Central European SNAs only 39 percent have their own office (compared to 74 percent in the overall population), while their average membership incidence is 2.09 (compared to 5.12 in the overall population). In addition, there is a significant random slope, which means that as member-states have a higher GDP, the importance of economic differences between SNAs for explaining varying levels of membership and office establishment grows. To make this somewhat more concrete, as we move from Central Europe to Southern and Western Europe, in particular large and more prosperous SNAs become much more likely to open their own office and to belong to a trans-regional association. Or, the impact of varying economic capabilities is significantly larger for SNAs in rich and core member-states than for SNAs in more peripheral member-states. In other words, for regions in countries with a steep slope (such as the Belgian, Italian and Spanish regions) an increase in GDP increases the predicted number of memberships much more substantially compared to those with a more gradual slope (such as the Irish, Czech, Polish and Greek regions). Consequently, in order to predict

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<sup>9</sup> A bivariate visualization of this result, as well as the clustered effect of GDP-levels, can be found in the online appendix.

its trans-regional membership rate, it makes a difference in which member-state a resourceful region is located.

### **Conclusion and discussion**

While most studies on territorial mobilization in the EU concentrate on liaison offices only, this article demonstrates that SNAs rely on and often combine multiple forms. Moreover, our comprehensive approach shows that all SNAs at the first level below the central government are, in one way or another, active at the EU-level. Not all forms are equally combined and there are substantial differences between SNAs. For instance, SNAs with a liaison office are connected to many more trans-regional associations than SNAs that are represented by complete national associations.

This variation can be explained by various domestic factors and contextual variables. First, SNAs with an office appear to be wealthier and more autonomous. Second, SNAs with a partial national association have a much smaller overall GDP, but their GDP/capita is larger compared to other SNAs. Overall, these are prosperous and resourceful regions – as they do not need to share resources with all other SNAs within a member-state in order to establish a representation – but for whom the added value of setting up their own office is possibly not high enough. Third, SNAs that rely on a complete national association are weaker in terms of their overall GDP and, in particular, their GDP/capita. They usually have, compared to regions with an office, not much self-rule, but a substantial amount of shared-rule. Finally, an extensive membership of trans-regional associations is strongly resource and competence driven; the more resources and the more self-rule, the higher the investment in trans-regional associations. In addition to resources and competencies, party politics matters. Regions

harboring regionalist parties are generally more active in trans-regional associations and they are more likely to establish their own liaison office.

Organizational form is important as it may affect how regional interests organize, the costs of their lobbying-efforts as well as their political influence and access. For instance, in discussing business lobbying, Bouwen argues that organizational form relates to the type of ‘policy good’ that can be supplied to policymakers, and that this explains varying levels of access (2002; see also Halpin 2012; Halpin and Nownes 2012). As the EU institutions have varying informational needs, the multiple organizational forms adopted by SNAs will shape their relation with European policymakers. Yet, although we were not able to elaborate on how SNAs interact with EU institutions, our findings give a first answer to some basic questions on EU territorial lobbying. On the one hand, the fact that all European SNAs have some presence in Brussels gives credit to the argument that sub-state representation has become a natural way of interest representation in the EU. On the other hand, our results show substantial differences in the sense that resource-full SNAs are very active through multiple forms and occupy a prominent position in several trans-regional associations. The fact that these SNAs combine different forms allows them to mobilize a large variety of ‘policy goods’ and considerably improve their chances to gain access and attention from EU policymakers.

Our current data-set does not allow us to test the full implications of this unevenness. For this, more research is needed on how regional representatives strategically rely on functional forms of representation. Often, the role of an SNA is conceived vertically, namely in relation to the central government, whereby the extent to which an SNA bypasses or collaborates with the central state agencies is put central. These are important issues, but in addition to this vertical perspective, more attention should be given to the horizontal dimension of territorial lobbying. Instead of focusing solely on the cooperative (or non-

cooperative) interaction with the central state, a deeper and richer understanding of territorial mobilization in Brussels will depend on knowledge regarding how SNAs strategically forge coalitions or are in conflict with other SNAs and/or EU-level organized interests, including business associations, labor unions and NGOs.

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