

Regional parliaments: Effective Actors in the EU multilevel parliamentary system?

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Introduction

The European Communities originally started with a set of institutions and a power balance that was heavily tilted in favour of executives. As the powers of the European level expanded over time, the democratic nature of European decision-making gained increasing importance. This led to a strengthening of the European Parliament, but also to the growing recognition of subnational levels of government, and thus to the gradual emergence of a European system of multi-level governance.

Yet, even today, European multi-level governance relies heavily on executives: general policy guidance is set by the heads of state or government of the member states in the European Council, concrete proposals are developed by the European Commission, and the stronger one of the two European legislators – the Council of Ministers – is composed of national (and occasionally subnational) ministers. In addition, a growing number of agencies, such as the European Central Bank, are granted substantial autonomous decision-making powers while also legislation is increasingly replaced by executive measures (such as delegated acts) and soft coordination instruments (e.g. within the Europe 2020 agenda). Despite the empowerment of the European Parliament since the 1980s and of national parliaments in recent years, it is safe to conclude that European integration is still leading to a certain “de-parliamentarization” of policy-making in Europe (O’Brennan and Raunio 2007).

The question of how national parliaments cope with European integration has received great attention in recent years, with numerous studies and projects measuring their activities, their institutional strength, their institutional adaptation, their resources and their performance (Cooper 2012; Raunio 2011; Winzen 2012; Heffler et al 2015). By contrast, academics have largely ignored the topic of subnational parliaments, with the exception of country-studies. This may seem surprising in light of the extensive literature on multi-level governance and regional *governments*, and especially since there are eight member states that contain regional parliaments with legislative powers (Germany, Austria, Belgium, the United Kingdom, Spain, Italy, Portugal and Finland). One can

think of two reasons for this oversight. On the one hand, comparative research into regions is complex, as it requires detailed knowledge not only of the European and national, but also of the regional contexts (Ladrech 2015). On the other hand, regional parliaments have only been officially recognized as a potential actor in EU policy-making since the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009. It is also their limited level of EU-oriented activity in the past that contributed to the emergence of a system of multi-level governance in the absence of effective multi-level parliamentarism.

However, if one accepts that parliamentarisation is an important part of the response to the European democratic deficit (Follesdal and Hix 2006), and that Europe does not have one unified demos, but multiple national/regional demoi (Nicolaidis 2013; Cheneval and Schimmelfenning 2013), then national (and in at least eight member states also regional) parliaments have an important role to play (Weiler 2012). The Treaty of Lisbon has also acted as a wake-up call for regional parliaments and triggered various institutional and procedural reforms designed to improve the scrutiny of EU affairs at the subnational level. At the same time, there is considerable variation in the level of scrutiny that is currently performed by different regional parliaments, as well as in the conditions under which such scrutiny takes place.

The aim of this paper is therefore to probe further into the question of what role regional parliaments can play in EU policy-making. Its aim is to identify the key factors that shape the focus of regional parliamentary scrutiny, its extent and its effectiveness and thus to set out a comprehensive research agenda regarding regional parliaments in the EU. For this purpose, it will first review the ways in which regional parliaments are important for a democratic European Union, then the channels of influence that are available for regional parliaments, and finally the key questions and factors that need to be investigated in future research.

A Role for Subnational Parliaments in EU Democracy?

The nature of democracy in the EU is a much debated topic among EU scholars. Different views are rooted in different conceptualisations of the EU. We agree with those who argue that the EU has moved beyond being a mere international organization or a mere regulatory agency controlled by its member states (cf. Follesdal & Hix 2006). The set-up of the EU since the Lisbon Treaty is at least hybrid: it contains next to intergovernmental features also supranational (if not federal) characteristics generating policies and even laws, implying that the EU is a proper political system that needs to be democratically legitimated as such. As the EU is composed of multiple layers, also the democratic set-up needs to be multilevel. Securing democratic legitimacy – in any political system – can be done in several ways. This paper focuses on parliamentary representation. Besides

direct individual representation (e.g. through referendums) and functional representation (e.g. through interest groups), the most substantial way of representation runs through political parties in parliaments as this channel can provide answers to the critiques addressed to the other channels. Crum and Fossum (Crum & Fossum 2009) indeed argue convincingly that parliamentary representation is the most suitable way of ensuring political equality and public deliberation, which are crucial criteria for democratic legitimacy (see also Bellamy & Kröger 2012a). Moreover, the EU treaty itself defines the EU as a representative democracy (Bellamy & Kröger 2012b). Article 10(2) TEU states that 'Citizens are directly represented at Union level in the European Parliament. Member States are represented in the European Council by their Heads of State and Government and in the Council by their governments, who are themselves democratically accountable either to their national parliaments, or directly to their citizens'.

Representation through parliaments is not only crucial for unitary political systems, but also for multilevel polities such as federal states and, for that matter, the EU. It is exactly in the area of parliamentary representation that arguably the most important democratic shortcoming of the EU is to be found. The well-known and widely accepted problem is that the EP has only very gradually been granted extensive parliamentary powers. Even after the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty, the EP is still deprived from legislative powers in a number of domains that belong at least partially to EU competences (Rittberger 2005) and the EP still lacks the right to initiate legislation. One solution at the European level would be the full parliamentarisation of the EP, as proposed by Hix and others (Hix and Follesdal 2006): granting the EP the right to initiate and vote laws on all EU competences. However, several authors contend that parliamentarisation at the EU level is not sufficient and that at least part of the solution must (also) be found at the level of the member states. Weiler (2012) argues that EU will ultimately need to base its legitimacy on national democratic institutions, including national parliaments while Cooper uses the concept of virtual third chamber (Cooper 2012) or even tricameralism (Cooper 2013) to call for the activation of national parliaments. Likewise, Puntcher Riekman and Wydra (2013) add the national level ('representation of the parts') to EU level ('representation of the whole'). Finally, also Sprungk's argument (2013) of transformation of parliamentary democracy points to the involvement of domestic parliaments in the EU polity.

The representative character and scrutiny opportunities of national parliaments should not be overestimated, however. Paradoxically, this is even induced by the multilevel context they are confronted with. Bellamy and Kröger (2012a; 2012b) argue that national parliaments are limited in their capacity to serve the representative role. National parliaments and national parties are left with less policy space as competencies have been transferred to the European level. National parliaments and national parties also have less policy repertoire due to the single market dominance at the EU

level while supremacy and direct effect of EU laws combined with activist Court of Justice set the margins of national parliaments and parties. All this results in less capacity to offer voters alternative policies. In addition national parliaments lack ex ante scrutiny of the bargaining positions of national governments, they suffer from informational asymmetries and evacuate EU policies from the plenary sessions. Moreover, the increasing use of mechanisms such as the open method of coordination (OMC) exclude NPs from participation in policy-making. Finally, political parties are not very responsive as they hardly compete on EU issues. The reaction of national parliaments has been to gain more information on EU policies, enhance institutional capacity and scrutinize EU policies (e.g. through establishing European Affairs committees and the Early Warning System).

Despite the shortcomings of national parliaments, what is put in place in the EU context can be considered as a multilevel parliamentary system, which comes down to a balancing act between direct representation of citizens (through the European Parliament) versus indirect representation of its constitutive units (Warleigh 2003: 3). This approach has been taken by Hurrelmann (2007), Lord and Pollak (2010) who have coined the term of compound representation and Crum and Fossum (Crum & Fossum 2009; 2012, Crum 2015) who have proposed the notion of the Multilevel Parliamentary Field.

There is still an element missing, however, as all these approaches hardly ever include the role regional parliaments can play in the EUs multilevel parliamentary system. This is remarkable as a growing number of EU member states are confronted with an evolution towards internal multilevel governance, be it federal states (Germany, Austria, Belgium), quasi-federal or devolved states (Italy, Spain, the UK) or asymmetrically decentralized states (Portugal and Finland). The regional constitutive entities of these member states have directly elected legislatures, which have varying but often substantial competencies in a large set of policy domains, including EU policies. For all of these member states, the analysis of the multilevel parliamentary system needs to be complemented with the regional legislatures. Here, we disagree with Crum (2015) who argues that national democracy is qualitatively different from subnational or European democracy only allowing for institutional and sociological exceptions (e.g. UK, Belgium, Spain). We contend that also long-standing federations like Germany or Austria should be included. In both countries, the constitutions foresee that all competences are by default regional competences, *unless* the constitution states otherwise (Art. 15(1) B-VG, 25. Juli 2012; art. 30 GG, 23.12.2014). It would therefore be strange to defend a system whereby the national parliament consults the regional parliaments only if and when it pleases it.

Moreover, a Special Eurobarometer (307/2009) revealed that while only one third of Europeans tend to trust their national governments (34%), half of the citizens express trust towards their regional

and local authorities (50%). The same survey showed also that a majority of Europeans feel that public authorities at the subnational level are not sufficiently taken into account in EU policy-making (59%). These findings imply that EU citizens not only entrust regional legislators with significant scope of political responsibility, but they also expect regional responsiveness to the possibility of 'being consulted' on EU related issues. As there is an extensive overlap between regional and EU competences in various policy areas and subnational parliaments implement over 70% of EU legislation and programs, their knowledge of EU policies affect the quality and timeliness of the legal transposition.

Despite all this, regional parliaments have hardly been discussed in scholarly work. The recent 2013 Journal of European Integration special issue on representation in the EU or the even more recent 2015 West European Politics special issue on parliaments in the EU pay attention to regional parliaments. It is the aim of this contribution to expand the research agenda of the EU parliamentary system by incorporating the regional parliamentary level in the analysis of multilevel parliamentarianism in the EU.

Having said all this, it seems to be up to the regional parliaments to start using the tools they have at their disposal, granted either by their domestic constitutional settings or by the EU Treaty. Regional parliaments should not wait until they are invited to get involved EU politics by parliaments or executives of their own level or any of the other levels within the EU polity. The European Parliament regards itself as the sole guarantee for democratic representation in the EU whilemost national parliaments did not root for a stronger role for regional parliaments either (Raunio 2015). Indeed, even the national parliaments of federal and decentralized states showed only lukewarm support for regional parliamentary involvement during the Convention.

What exactly then can the function of regional parliaments (or even national for that matter) be in the multilevel system of the EU? We start from what the domestic parliamentary level can do in the EU, both within-level as across-level, as this has been covered in the literature so far. According to Sprungk (2013) national parliaments take up new roles in the multilevel environment that has been established by European integration. She mentions the gatekeeping, scrutinizing and networking functions. The first refers to the Early Warning System which enables NPs to stop the European Commission from formally proposing legislative acts when these are considered breaching the subsidiarity or proportionality principles. The scrutinizing role points to the classic control function of parliaments. Sprungk adapts this in the EU context to the establishment of a uniform mode of national parliamentary control on governments' EU policies. Also the networking role stems from the multi-parliamentary environment and points the horizontal and vertical relations between

parliaments. A similar division is presented by Abels (2013) who distinguishes between two types of functions. Her type 1 consists of legislative, control, budget and elective functions. Abels stresses that the first three are heavily affected by European integration: national parliaments and regional parliaments need to accommodate the traditional way of law-making and scrutinizing to the European multilevel context. Abels' type 2 encompasses communication and networking, the latter coinciding with Sprungk's third dimension. Control and networking are also the two elements in Högenauer's analysis of the Scottish Parliament (2015b). She argues that domestic parliaments should adapt and enhance their participation and scrutiny of national EU policy-making and should invest in interparliamentary relations within the EU multilevel parliamentary system. In the following we take the encompassing concept of parliamentary scrutiny to list the opportunities regional parliaments have to get involved in EU policy-making.

How to Scrutinize EU Policy-Making

Regional Parliaments have two different ways of participating in EU policy-making: They can try to control the activities of EU institutions, and they can try to control how their national and regional governments act in EU policy-making. Both of these options still suffer from severe limitations, which explain why the EU is lacking effective multi-level parliamentarism.

On the European level, regional parliaments have two options. Firstly, a limited number of representatives of regional parliaments sit on the Committee of the Regions. The Committee of the Regions is an advisory committee in EU policy-making that has to be consulted on a wide range of issues and that has the right to adopt opinions on its own initiative in the remaining policy areas. Under the Treaty of Lisbon, it furthermore gained the right to bring before the ECJ cases for annulment of laws on grounds of subsidiarity. However, in May 2013 only about 10 percent of the members of the CoR represented legislative assemblies (Högenauer forthcoming), which means that once again parliamentary concerns play a marginal role.

Secondly, the Treaty of Lisbon allows regional parliaments to participate in the new Early Warning System (EWS), albeit only through their national parliaments. The Early Warning System – defined in the Protocol on Subsidiarity and Proportionality – allows each national parliament to review EU legislative proposals for conformity with the principle of subsidiarity within an eight-week period after the publication of the proposal in all official languages of the EU. Each national parliament has two votes, which means that in the case of bicameral parliaments, each chamber has one vote. If national parliaments amounting to more than one third of all votes adopt "reasoned opinions" detecting a breach of subsidiarity, the European Commission has to review its proposal. It is,

however, not obliged to withdraw or amend it. Within this consultative system, national parliaments are encouraged to consult regional parliaments where appropriate.

While this new opportunity has triggered much interest among national parliaments and also a number of reforms among regional parliaments (Vara Arribas and Högenauer 2015), its importance should not be overstated. The level of influence that regional parliaments can wield under the EWS is limited by its features:

- Most importantly, the national parliaments cannot force the European institutions to withdraw a proposal or even just to amend it. Even if over half of the national parliaments adopt reasoned opinions (something that has never happened to date), the European Commission is only obliged to amend or withdraw the proposal if the Council of Ministers or the European Parliament support the national parliaments.
- Secondly, the narrow deadline of eight weeks makes it difficult for national parliaments to adopt a reasoned opinion. For regional parliaments this period is even shorter, as they have to give their national parliament time to process their opinion.
- The focus of the EWS is rather narrow: technically all objections have to be couched in terms of subsidiarity.
- The threshold for votes is relatively high, in light of the actual level of activity of most national parliaments. So far, the required number of votes has only been reached in two cases.
- Last but not least, national parliaments are not obliged to take the views of regional parliaments into account (Crum 2015): The Protocol on the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality leaves the consultation of regional parliaments to the discretion of national parliaments. As Vara Arribas (2015) points out, some parliaments like the British or Spanish one only mention regional opinions, if they themselves also adopt a reasoned opinion. Otherwise regional parliamentary opinions are not necessarily passed on to the EU institutions.

Overall, regional parliaments thus only benefit from a limited range of options if they wish to influence legislative proposals of the European Commission. With respect to other policy measures that equally affect regional competencies no formal participation of regional parliaments is envisaged by the EU legal framework. This is a remarkable observation given the relevance of for instance the Europe 2020 agenda in the areas of social, economic and environmental policies, which often belong to the regional policy portfolios.

However, another option for regional parliaments is of course to focus on controlling the position of the regional executive within the domestic EU policy coordination. In those countries that have regional parliaments with legislative powers, the regional executives would normally either be able to attend meetings of the Council of Ministers at different levels (working groups, COREPER, the level of Ministers), or they would at least be consulted in the national coordination of the member state position. However, regional governments benefit from two advantages over regional parliaments in this respect. Firstly, they have an information advantage, as they attend European negotiations or national coordination meetings, whereas national parliaments have to rely on minutes or reports. Secondly, they benefit from the fact that the complex negotiation and coordination systems allow them to disguise to some extent their precise position, what exactly they agreed to give up in return for what other concession and how quickly they were willing to give in. Thus, in the same way in which national governments can blame other member states or “Europe” for unpopular decisions, regional governments can blame “Europe”, other member states and the national government and potentially even other regional governments.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that regional parliaments have a range of options at their disposal to control regional governments EU policies: They can request information and explanations via parliamentary questions, they can organize debates on controversial issues and they can ask the regional government to report on issues in parliament. Increasingly, regional parliaments are trying to receive not only reports after meetings of the Council of Ministers (e.g. Belgium), but also before such meetings take place (e.g. the German Länder). As part of such ex-ante meetings, certain regions are starting to develop strategies for mandating, i.e. are trying to impose their view on the government and to control after the Council meeting how their views were represented (Abels 2015).

Next to the parliament - executive relation within the regional level, regional parliaments can also become involved in controlling national executives. They can engage in scrutiny of national EU policies, formally through second chambers of national parliaments or joint committees, or informally through party links. And if they do so, they can act individually (bilaterally) or collectively (multilaterally). Furthermore, the object of their scrutiny activities can be regional EU policy or national EU policy, but also the (domestic) intergovernmental relations through which EU policies are established (Hazell 2010).

Finally, a third (and more informal) way to influence EU policy-making is to network with other regional parliaments and/or regional governments to gain strength through numbers. The Subsidiarity Monitoring Network of the Committee of the Regions or CALRE – the Conference of

European Regional Legislative Assemblies – are examples of such cooperation. In addition, regional parliaments and individual members of regional parliaments can try to engage in formal and informal contacts, copying the activities of their national colleagues. Examples of formal interparliamentary cooperation include the Joint Committee Meetings, the Joint Parliamentary Meetings, the Interparliamentary Committee Meetings, ECPRD and IPEX. MEPs and national representatives sometimes also formally meet in committees for European Affairs. In addition Informal interparliamentary cooperation between MEP's and members of national parliaments often occurs along party lines.

Of course, the existence of these different options also means that regional parliaments have a choice of channels and that different parliaments may opt for different strategies. It will be an empirical challenge to map the various ways that are exploited by the different regional parliaments throughout the EU. In particular, one has to bear in mind in this respect that the powers of regional parliaments vary across member states (and sometimes even within member states) and that the options are therefore not equally attractive to all parliaments. In addition, studies of regional parliamentary scrutiny of EU affairs have so far found a substantial amount of variation between parliaments (e.g. Fleischer 2014).

Research agenda

The existing literature on regional parliaments is mostly providing us with national perspectives on the institutional strength of one member state's regional parliaments and their networking practices. The aim of our research agenda is to go beyond that. In trying to answer whether regional parliaments are an effective actor in EU policy-making, we are raising three inter-connected questions.

The first of these is about what it means to be an effective actor? **What is the role of regional parliaments?** Is it similar to the one that they used to take up in a one-level environment? Or has the emerging multilevelness forced regional assemblies to adapt their behaviour? Ladrech (2015) asked correctly whether regional parliaments were merely a “more local version” of national parliaments, thereby implying that maybe the role and focus of regional parliaments is somewhat different.

Our hypothesis is that the focus of regional parliamentary scrutiny compared to national parliamentary scrutiny will lie somewhat less on influencing legislative outcomes, and more on the local and regional dimension of EU policies, for example implementation issues. This expectation has two sources: On the one hand, the analysis of EU-related parliamentary questions in the Scottish parliament shows that very few questions concern ongoing legislative processes or the position of

the regional government therein (Högenauer 2014). On the other hand, in their country studies, numerous authors point to the fact that the work of regions (and by extension regional parliaments) involves a higher share of implementation compared to the national level (Reutter 2015; Miklin 2015). We identify two factors as the source of this focus: Firstly, in the case of regional parliaments, elections tend to focus on local or regional issues (except in so far as they are not influenced by the satisfaction with national politics). It is unlikely that voters will go to the urns at this level and vote for or against a party because of its position on specific EU policies. The electoral incentives for MPs to scrutinize EU policies are thus even lower than on the national level. By the same token, the decision of a candidate to stand in an election is more likely to be motivated by local or regional issues.

The second factor are the constitutional provisions or political traditions of a country. Thus, in addition to legislative regions generally having a relatively strong implementation role, certain national specificities further weaken their legislative roles. In the case of Germany, for example, Abels (2015) argues that the regions allowed their legislative competences to be curtailed in return for a stronger role for the Bundesrat. A similar pattern exists in EU affairs, where the Bundesrat plays a much stronger role than the regional parliaments. The Bundesrat is, however, a representation of regional *governments*, which means that regional parliaments have lost out in the process. In the case of Italy (Nicolini 2015), but also Austria, there is also a tradition, whereby the elaboration of laws relies more on intergovernmental cooperation, with regional parliaments playing a role in the implementation process. In those countries where the Upper House consists of a regional representation (esp. Germany and Austria), this constitutional set-up may further lead to a division of labour, whereby the Upper House sees itself as the actor responsible for the scrutiny of EU legislative proposals, whereas regional parliaments are responsible for scrutinizing regional governments.

A second important question is **how strong is the position of regional parliaments domestically?** The discussion of the Early Warning System has already highlighted the fact that the EWS is implemented in different ways in different countries. Our hypothesis is that the strength of regional parliaments in the domestic coordination of the EWS depends to a large extent on the constitutional strength of the region. For instance, national parliaments have interpreted the Protocol on Subsidiarity and Proportionality in very different ways. The regional parliaments with the most extensive powers under the EWS are the Belgian regions. In line with the constitutional principle in *foro interno* in *foro externo*, regional parliaments can vote directly in the EWS in policy areas that affect their competences (Bursens et al. 2015; Högenauer 2014). They are not being “consulted” by the national parliament, but instead their opinions are being forwarded verbatim to the EU institutions. In the case of Finland and Portugal, the parliaments of legislative regions cannot vote directly in the EWS,

but their opinions are generally sent to the European Commission, even in cases where the Finnish or Portuguese parliament do not adopt a reasoned opinion themselves (Vara Arribas 2015). In the UK and Spain, by contrast, regional opinions are considered to be purely consultative. If the national parliament itself does not adopt a reasoned opinion, regional opinions are usually not sent on to the EU institutions (ibid.). This means that the efforts of regional parliaments in those countries are wasted if the national parliament does not adopt a reasoned opinion. And their efforts are arguably unnecessary if the national parliament adopts a reasoned opinion anyway.

Finally, a comprehensive assessment of the question *to what extent regional assemblies are effective actors in the European system of multi-level governance* also requires an understanding of the different levels and patterns of activity of regional parliaments. If we want to study the multilevel parliamentary system in the EU, we need to empirically grasp the activities of regional parliamentary assemblies and of their members in this multilevel context. One important issue to keep in mind here is the question regarding the level of analysis. Parliamentary behaviour can be examined on an aggregate institutional level, i.e. on parliaments as unitary actors, or an individual level. Surveys among individual members can shed light on how the multilevel environment is perceived, whether members have changed their behavior or to what extent individual members engage in multilevel activities. On either level of analysis, we expect substantial variation in the different types of activities we outlined in this paper. The challenge will be to account for this variation. We distinguish three factors that influence the mobilization of regional parliaments.

The first factor is the absence or presence of Eurosceptic parties at the regional level, as well as the state of public opinion. Raunio (2009) and Ladrech (2015) argue that the presence of Eurosceptic parties backed by a Eurosceptic public generally favour effective scrutiny. In the case of regional parliaments, we can see that the Belgian regional parliaments are relatively inactive despite the fact that they have stronger rights under the EWS than other regional parliaments. Bursens et al. (2015) generally explain this with the low level of salience of EU issues in Belgium. This low political salience is the result of the fact that there is a strong pro-European consensus that is not perturbed by Eurosceptic parties.

Apart from factors influencing the motivation of parliaments to scrutinize EU issues, there are factors that influence their capacity to do so. Thus, regional parliaments have generally very limited staff resources (Högenauer 2014). The effect of this is that regional parliaments struggle to effectively filter problematic legislative proposals from among the roughly 25.000 legislative documents that the EU sends out every year. They have also limited expertise in the drafting of reasoned opinions and the short deadlines under the EWS further exacerbate these problems. In this context, we expect better-staffed parliaments to be more active than those with more limited resources.

However, there are also ways in which regional parliaments can potentially compensate this weakness. In a certain number of cases, regional governments and regional parliaments cooperate in the scrutiny of EU proposals. The Viennese parliament can, for example, use the administration of the executive to get advice on subsidiarity (Miklin 2015). Similarly, various German Länder and the Scottish executive advice their parliaments on subsidiarity (Högenauer 2014; Vara Arribas 2015). By contrast, the extent of executive-legislative cooperation in Spain is limited (Castellà Andreu and Kölling 2015). There is thus further need to examine domestic traditions of cooperation between different actors.

Finally, different regional parliaments show different levels of interest in cooperation with other parliaments. One possible factor may once again be the dual or cooperative federalist logic underpinning the set-up of the member state. Thus, cooperation between regional parliaments seems to be relatively low in the UK, Belgium and Spain (Bursens et al. 2015; Högenauer 2014; Castellà Andreu and Kölling 2015).

Conclusion

European integration has created a multilevel political system comprising European, national and regional levels. The resulting governance system has been far more elaborated on the side of the executive than on the side of the legislative. We argued that this unequal development has resulted legitimacy issues for the EU. As representation is key to democratic legitimacy, scholars have engaged in studying the role of national and European parliamentary assemblies. The conclusion so far is that national parliaments are gradually learning to play the multilevel game and are slowly gaining more formal and informal powers to control national and European executives. Because a growing number of member states is characterized by increasingly relevant regional authorities, the issue of parliamentary representation in the EU needs to be broadened to the regional level as well. However, data on regional parliaments' involvement in EU affairs is still very scarce and often anecdotal.

In this paper we therefore propose to embark in a systematic analysis of the regional parliaments' role in EU policy-making. This first of all presupposes a detailed mapping of the activities of regional parliaments and of their individual members. We need to describe the way they scrutinize EU policies directly at the European level and indirectly at the domestic level by holding regional and national governments accountable during domestic EU policy coordination. In addition, we need to study the formal and informal information and communication networks regional parliaments build with other legislatures and executives at the different level of the EU polity. Consecutively, we point to the need

to analyse a series of analytical and explanatory questions regarding the exact role of regional parliaments, their strength in their domestic environment and, most importantly, their varying effectiveness in scrutinizing EU policies. The main future challenge lies in developing theory-embedded hypotheses to explain variation between regional parliamentary involvement in the multilevel parliamentary system of the EU.

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