

The Internal Enlargement of the European Union and the Surplus of the Intermediate Level of Government¹

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Abstract

In recent years, many of the Member States have experienced dramatic changes in the organisation of their intermediate-level governments, while new ways and channels have been established to enhance the interaction between the intermediate level and the EU institutions. The conditions for what can be described as multi-level governance are changing, and empowered intermediate-level governments are increasingly putting further and new demands on the functioning and organisation of the European Union and its institutions. In this article an overview is given of how the intermediate level of government in the Member States has changed and some of the problems connected with this. Furthermore, different types of interaction between the intermediate level and the EU institutions are examined.

What we see in many Member States today is a situation in which new ways of organising the intermediate level of government have been introduced with the aim of improving efficiency and democracy, while old ways are maintained. Therefore, the intermediate level is becoming increasingly complex. In some unitary states the development is heading in a "federal" direction, whilst federal states seem to be embracing the federal character of government even further. But it is a rather strange type of "federalisation", since in the same country both the degree of autonomy given to different geographical areas and the way in which these new intermediate-level governments are organised may differ quite substantially.

A number of channels such as regional offices, council meetings, the European Parliament and the Committee of the

Over the years a considerable amount of attention has been paid to the problems associated with the external enlargement of the European Union and the so-called democratic deficit that seemed to appear when the integration was deepened. Many have warned that the Union, in order to be efficient, must be reorganised and able to function differently when the number of Member States increases.

However, there is also a parallel development, although perhaps less noticeable, in the debate affecting the functioning and legitimacy of the European Union – the new role played by the intermediate level of government. To put it in more drastic terms: those who expect the Union to comprise some thirty states in ten to twenty years time, may to their surprise find that in reality they will number more than sixty, should the dreams and hopes of the more separatist interests in some of the present Member States come true. The plausibility of this scenario is of course debatable. Nevertheless, what is true is that intermediate-level governments and some local governments are striving for developments which place new demands and stresses on the structure of the

EU decision-making procedure and on the integration process as a whole. However, it is also important to point out that this is not only a one-way process, where the intermediate level tries to influence the EU institutions. The interaction is very much encouraged by the EU institutions and the consequences are not only felt by them but also by national governments. In fact, the Treaty of Maastricht explicitly gave sub-governments (i.e. intermediate and local governments) a new and more pronounced role in the integration process, and the establishment of the Committee of the Regions (CoR) was seen as an important manifestation of their new status.

Furthermore, it is important to remember that the empowerment of sub-governments in many countries has not primarily been motivated by demands formulated at the European level. Instead it has been a way for some Member States to address their own domestic legitimacy problem – as support for and the construction of the welfare state has come under pressure from an increasingly critical public. In short, both the national and the European developments put new demands on the organisation of

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intermediate-level governments and the structures created to facilitate interaction between the intermediate level in different countries and the European institutions. Thus, this article focuses on two basic questions: what types of intermediate level of government do we find in the Member States in terms of how they are organised, and where are they heading? Furthermore what kind of structures (channels) have been created to promote the interests of the intermediate level of government in the European arena. These are two questions that will lay the ground for a discussion about internal instead of external enlargement and of surplus instead of deficit. But before going into further detail, a more fundamental question has to be answered – what is the intermediate level of government?

Regions, Mesos or the Intermediate Level of Government

The governments of nation states are often described in terms of central and local governments, but these two concepts are usually insufficient if a complete picture is to be painted of how a nation state is organised and structured. In most countries we tend to find structures and organisations that are important elements of the national government and its administrative systems, although they cannot easily be classified as part of either the central or the local government. These structures have different names in different countries: for example, we have something called autonomous communities in Spain; regions and communities in Belgium; regions in France and Italy; *Länder* in Germany and Austria; and provinces in the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, and Spain. County councils exist in most of the Nordic countries and in the United Kingdom. In Greece prefectural self-government is the second tier of local government, and regions are administrative units, although rather independent, of the state. In France and Sweden there are prefect systems and in Finland a lot of municipal associations, just to give a few examples.

Of course, some of the problems with the different names are to do with how to translate a concept into the language of another country. However, it also demonstrates a more genuine problem – there are in fact very few public administrative structures at the intermediate level that are similar when different countries are compared.

Today, the concept of the region is often used as a description of structures that are not part of central or local government. This kind of approach tends to neglect the fact that state regional administrative units (decentralised administrative systems) can play quite an important role as actors in the regional arena. Another concept, “meso”, is sometimes used to describe structures that do not clearly belong to central or local government.² The problem with the meso concept is, however, that it tends to overlook the creation of new administrative structures formed through cooperation between municipalities, of which municipal associations are an example.

In order to stress that state regional administrations, as well as municipal associations, can be an important element in the regional administration of a country, the concept of the intermediate level is used in this article. This concept therefore not only includes public administrative structures, such as different types of regional government, but also deconcentrated state ministries or agencies at the regional level and different types of municipal associations. The intermediate level is, in other words, something geographically smaller or below the central state but at the same time something bigger than, or above, the basic level of local government (municipalities).

With this rather broad definition of the concept of the intermediate level one should not be surprised to discover that the intermediate level exists in almost every country, at least in all those that are members of the European Union. Even in those European countries that are often thought of as having no trace whatsoever of a regional government – Luxembourg, Portugal, Ireland, and to some extent Finland before 1995 and Greece before 1996 – it is possible to identify some kind of intermediate level structure. In a small country like Luxembourg, the intermediate level consists, for obvious reasons, mostly of municipal associations. However, visibility does not depend on the size of the country. Denmark, one of the smaller countries of Europe geographically, has no less than 14 county councils.

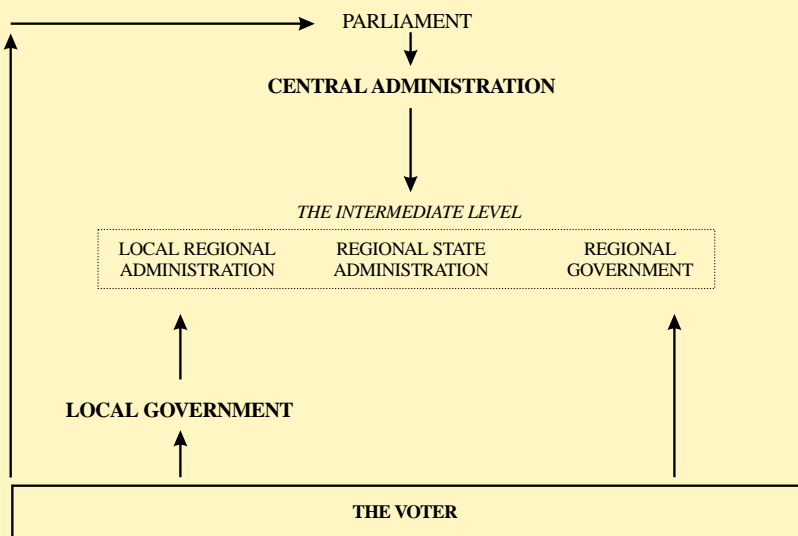
Different types of intermediate-level governments

One of the problems of defining the intermediate level is that intermediate level administrations and governments are constructed in very different ways and for a variety of reasons. In principle, however, intermediate level structures can be organised in three different ways.

To begin with, intermediate administrations can be set up by the central government. These regional state administrations can in turn be of three different types. In many countries certain ministries or central agencies have their own administration at intermediate level which controls and complements the work done by local units. In other countries, the ministries or agencies do not have separate administrative units at the intermediate level, but the administrative tasks of different ministries are carried out by a central (concentrated) administrative unit led by a prefect, who is appointed by the government. However, to complicate the picture a bit further there are examples where two or three ministries cooperate in a joint intermediate administrative unit outside the control of the prefect (or in countries that do not practise the “prefectorial” system). This third type rarely exists on its own, and usually either the prefectorial or the functional model is the predominant one. But it is also common to find some kind of a mixture between two or three of these models. To summarise, the organisation of the state administration at the intermediate level can be concentrated, semi-concentrated or fragmented.

In contrast to the top-down model described above,

Figure 1



another way in which the intermediate level is formed, is when local governments create intermediate level governments or administrations. Basically, this can be done in two different ways. For example, it is quite common for two or more local governments to cooperate and set up a common administrative unit for delivering specific services – so-called municipal associations. Intermediate-level structures are also created by local governments when these authorities are responsible for appointing members to intermediate-level assemblies. In comparison with municipal associations, regional assemblies usually have a broader responsibility and cover a wider range of issues. In many countries both models can be found with local governments creating intermediate levels both through mutual cooperation on specific services and by being the responsible institution for indirect elections to assemblies.

Finally, there is a third way in which structures of the intermediate level are created, and that is of course by direct general election. The residents of a certain area (region) may have the right to elect an assembly, and in some cases even the executive, with a certain degree of home rule. This parliament at the intermediate level can be organised and function in a very similar way to the one at the central or local level. However, it is not unusual for the parliament at the intermediate level to deviate in important ways from the central or local government.

In most countries one of these three principles

high degree of autonomy and the right to make its own decisions.

There are many more examples of different combinations, and the overall structure of the intermediate level can be extremely complex. One reason for this complexity, as the example above indicates, is the historical dimension. The intermediate level was not created at any one time, and changes at that level are not made without the strong influence of the past.

What is remarkable is not the mere existence of many different types of intermediate structures within one country, but their sheer proliferation.

The problems of organising the intermediate level of government

There are of course many problems connected with how the intermediate level is organised in different countries and, as was

said at the beginning of this article, it is certainly difficult to find countries with similar intermediate level structures. The development at the intermediate level is to some extent the organisational response to problems and demands that are created elsewhere. For example, in some countries, where it has been difficult to merge small local governments into bigger ones, the creation of an intermediate level has been seen as a solution to this problem. However, since the government and administration of a country is a comprehensive system, what is seen as a solution in one part of that system may well turn out to be a problem in another part. It is therefore relatively easy to point out some of the problems resulting from the present development of the intermediate level. First of all, if the intermediate level is fragmented there will be, as is already obvious in

dominates. Firstly, the intermediate level may be set up and controlled by central government. Secondly, it may be controlled bottom up by local government, or thirdly, it may be given a mandate directly from the residents of a certain area. However, it is also true to say that in most countries we again find some kind of mixture of these principles. There are countries, for example, where there has been a merger between a previous prefectorial system and a regional government controlled by a directly elected assembly. In these cases the directly elected intermediate level of government has been given the task of deciding on and executing matters on behalf of the central government, while at the same time it enjoys a

some countries, rivalry and competition between the different types of administrative units, and new problems and demands for coordination will soon arise.

The complex nature of the intermediate level will also be a problem when more cooperation between different intermediate levels in different countries is demanded. Who is going to co-operate with whom, when the same types of issues or functions are handled by different types of intermediate-level structures in different countries?

There are also interesting differences between different levels within the countries themselves. In almost all of the Member States, the government at the intermediate level is organised in a rather different way from that at the central level. In contrast to the United States for example, where the organisational model at the state level is more or less copied at the federal level, none of the countries in the Union, with the exception perhaps of Spain, use the same organisational principal at the central as at the intermediate level. In Germany, for example, we find a two-chamber system at the federal level but a one-chamber system at the *Länder* level. In parliamentary systems, the parliamentary principal of a strict division between the ruling side and the opposition is often not applied in directly elected intermediate level structures.

Furthermore, a relatively new phenomenon is that the intermediate level in certain regions of a country may have a different degree of autonomy vis-à-vis the central government to that in other regions. In the past, exceptions such as the Åland Islands, Madeira and the archipelagos of the Azores, had a larger degree of autonomy, but generally speaking the administrative units that made up the intermediate level of government in a country were organised in more or less the same way and had the same competences. Today this is not necessarily so. In Spain for example, some regions have greater autonomy than others, in the U.K. the newly elected Scottish parliament has a greater scope of competence than the Welsh assembly and in Sweden some areas have been allowed, as an experiment, to organise a new type of intermediate level of government.

In some countries a type of democratic dilemma also seems to exist – the imbalance between political legitimacy and the tasks the intermediate level is asked to perform. In some cases when intermediate levels are created they are given a lot of political legitimacy by the use of direct elections to regional assemblies, but subsequently this newly created structure is given rather limited responsibilities, which in the long run tend to

create tensions either between the central and the intermediate level or between the local and the intermediate level.

However, what is remarkable is not the mere existence of many different types of intermediate structures within one country, but their sheer proliferation. It is rather tempting to name this phenomenon “The surplus of the intermediate level in Europe”. This may ring a bell to those who are familiar with the debate about the democratic deficiencies of the European Union. However, although this expression may allude to the democratic debate on the EU, it is important to point out that what we are primarily stressing here is not a democratic surplus but rather an organisational surplus. There are, however, also democratic problems connected with this organisational surplus to which I shall shortly return. But let us first conclude that the surplus of the intermediate level seems to go both in a vertical – as new levels are built above or below the old intermediate levels – and in a horizontal direction – as a new type of administrative units are created at the same level as the old intermediate level.

In short, new structures are created without removing old ones. Finland is a good illustration of this development. Although the provincial state offices (county administrative boards) in Finland were reduced in number from twelve to six, a new kind of intermediate level has emerged through the instalment of nineteen so-called regional councils. And in countries like Denmark and Norway³, where the county councils virtually took over all of the duties of the county administrative

boards many years ago, these boards still exist and have proven themselves to be remarkably skilful in finding new duties to fulfil. In countries like France, Spain and Italy the intermediate level has developed more along the vertical dimension as new levels have been added to the old ones, while Belgium seems to be the best illustration of how the development of the intermediate level can move both in a vertical and a horizontal direction at the same time.

A quick look at almost any of the Member States shows how complex the intermediate level has become, as old structures are kept while new ones are added. One may ask how the public at large is able to understand these new structures and how this development is compatible with the basic democratic principle of transparent government, which makes it possible for the public to participate in controlling the government and thereby fulfil their democratic rights and duties. But to complicate the picture further, the intermediate level of

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government does not only operate in the national arena – the European connection for example is becoming increasingly important.

Structures and channels for interaction between intermediate-level governments and the EU institutions.

In the eyes of the intermediate level of government, the image of the EU as a system differs from the image of the organisation at national government level. In the beginning, as we all know, the European institutions and structures were built for interaction between states, not intermediate levels or local governments. Later, in an attempt to pursue the integration of the Union further, a direct link was created between the citizens of the Member States and the EU institutions (a directly elected parliament). That meant that for many years the intermediate and local governments were more or less in the same situation as all the private interest groups and companies – their principal means of influence was lobbying, either through the national government or aimed directly at one of the EU institutions.

However, one of the more tangible results of the Maastricht Treaty was the creation of a special body, the Committee of the Regions (CoR) with the mandate of fostering better communications and integration. However, contrary to what happened when the people became an actor in the Union by means of the Parliament, the institution designed to handle sub-governmental integration – the CoR – was not made part of the decision-making structure. It was only given an advisory role.

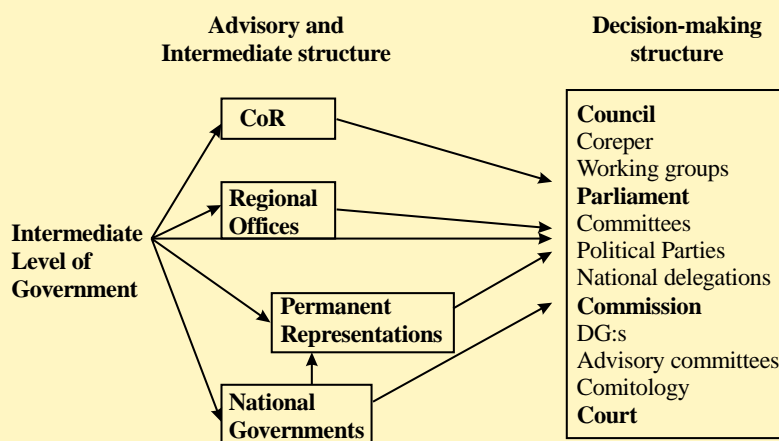
But then, again, we find that when it comes to decision making, intermediate-level government in Belgium and Germany nowadays has the right to be represented at certain Council meetings by regional ministers, ministers representing linguistic communities or *Länder*, instead of being represented by federal ministers. To an ever-increasing extent Germany and Belgium, along with some of the other Member States, also include officials from the intermediate level government in their national delegations and permanent representations, allowing them to participate in Coreper meetings and the working groups of the Council. Officials from intermediate-level governments also have seats on the Commission's advisory committees and other committees. The distinction – shown above – can thus be made between channels with direct access and channels with indirect access to EU institutions. Another difference can be observed between channels with access to the decision-making structure, and channels only with access to advisory bodies.

A key concept when analysing the intermediate level of government and its relations with the European Union is multi-level government. This contrasts with inter-governmentalism, neo-functionalism or neo-realism, which stress either the Member States or the institutions of the European Union, or both, as the essential elements in the European integration process. The focus of a multi-level government approach is mainly, but not solely, on how national and sub-national governments interact with each other and with the European institutions when European policies are formulated. However, this approach often includes actions taken by interest groups and other private organisations. The multi-level approach could also be described as network analysis, finding out how policy networks are established through interaction between several different actors. One of the characteristic traits of this kind of network is the absence of hierarchies and the interdependence of the actors.⁴ The aim of this article is not, however, to describe these networks; the focus is on finding the channels leading into them and examining the decision-making arrangements which facilitate the shaping of these networks – in other words, asking how intermediate-level governments can access this system in order to participate in the shaping of EU-policy.

The regional offices⁵

One of the earliest arrangements, and probably still the preferred method used by sub-governments to influence the EU institutions outside the control of national governments, is setting up regional offices in Brussels. These regional offices can be put into at least three different categories. Firstly, there is the case where a regional office represents one region in one country, in contrast to when an office represents all or several regions in a Member State. Secondly there are regional offices working to both a private and a public principle (in terms of ownership) in contrast to those which only represent either public or private interests. Thirdly, and perhaps the most interesting, there is a difference between

Figure 2



those offices working for regions in only one country

and those working for regions in two or more countries. The regional offices working for regions in more than one country are still very few, but they are widely regarded a future model. There are of course also other important differences to be found between the different types of offices, some have for example vast economic resources at their disposal which makes it possible for them to employ a lot of specialists, while the smaller ones only employ a handful of generalists. Some of the regional offices are best characterised as “mini embassies”, while others are rather “gathering places” (regional houses) for a variety of interests such as regional parliaments, regional executives, houses of commerce and labour unions.

To conclude, some regions/*Länder* are quite happy to invest a substantial amount of money into regional offices of their own, while others do not mind working with regional offices assisting several or all regions of the same country. There are also important differences between the Member States. In Germany for example every *Länd* (region) has its own office, while in other countries only a few regions have found it worth the effort to invest in an office of their own. This point highlights a potential problem, since rich regions will probably have a structural advantage by being able to promote and protect their interests better when decisions are effectively being taken on the sub-governmental level instead of by the national governments.

Paradoxically, the regional offices sometimes seem to be more successful in creating close relations with the EU institutions than in getting support from their national governments. Although the original scepticism showed by the permanent representations towards the regional offices has largely vanished, there is still a long way to go before the regional offices are regarded as really important players by all national institutions in the law-making process of the EU. However, when it comes to implementing EU regulations the picture changes somewhat, but also in this respect we find that national governments like to play a decisive role.

The intermediate level of government of the federal states and its participation in the EU law-making process

A problem for federal or semi-federal states is that the national level (federal level) does not have the competence to take decisions in certain areas – in some

cases it is shared with the regional/state level and in other cases it is exclusively the regional/state level that has the right to take decisions. The federal structure has therefore created a problem in some of the Member States when the EU competence includes or affects other areas than those exclusively submitted to the federal level. The *Länder* in Germany have expressed particular concerns over the possibility that the federal level will usurp their autonomy and competence by means of EU rules. However, the contrary seems to have happened. The *Bundesrat* in Germany has increasingly been given more power in EU matters, especially in areas where the competence of the *Länder* is affected, and special procedures for co-ordination between the *Länder* have been developed outside the direct control

of the federal level in order to be able to formulate a common opinion for the council meetings.

The developments in the four “federal countries” – Germany, Belgium, Spain and Austria – have more or less followed the same pattern. Not only have the regions/linguistic communities/*Länder* been given the possibility of either participating in the working groups of the Council and in Comitology, or of sitting at

the table at Council meetings as negotiators or as part of the national delegation, they have also been given positions in the permanent representations. The fact that a Member State can be represented by an official from *Länder* or regional level instead of the national level has had consequences for how these countries prepare their common opinions for a Council meeting. In the federal states or semi-federal states special arrangements have been developed in order to co-ordinate the opinions of the different regional/state governments before council meetings. Belgium is probably the country with the most elaborate machinery for this purpose. For example, in a way similar to how the EU presidency rotates between the different Member States, each region/community in Belgium represents the nation (or assists the federal representative) in matters that are not exclusive to the federal level, on a six month basis. However, the German *Länder* seem to be the sub-governments that so far have made the most out of the possibilities given to them to participate in different EU settings.

The new arrangement laid down by Article 146 of the EC treaty may give the impression that the intermediate-level governments in federal or semi-

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federal states are given a structural advantage. However, a closer look indicates that this has not yet been manifested in practice. It is perfectly clear for example that the intermediate level does not make use of the full potential given to it to participate in different decision-making bodies. But it is equally clear that the situation of a federal or semi-federal system is different to that of a unitary state, as a closer look of the intermediate level of government in the Netherlands illustrates.

The role of the provinces of the Netherlands in EU matters

Central government is still the most important channel for influencing the decision-making process in the EU, which is of course especially true for unitary Member States. There are basically two ways in which the intermediate level can influence the national government's stance on EU affairs – by lobbying national governments, which then try to influence the decision-making institutions of the EU – or by direct participation in the work of the national government on EU matters, including implementation procedures.

The provinces of the Netherlands have been given a vast – almost exclusive – responsibility for the implementation of EU matters in areas where the EU has sovereign or shared responsibility with the Member States. This is the case for example with the regional funds or environmental policy. Nevertheless, the provinces seem to have rather limited influence when it comes to the formulation of the Dutch government's position on new EU legislation. Of course, there are always informal ways in which individual provinces can relay their opinion on EU matters to the government, but so far no procedure or arrangement has been established giving the provinces a platform to express their common interest on new EU

legislation. Thus there is a clear difference between this system and that of the federal states. What we find is an asymmetric relationship between influencing the implementation procedure and the law-making procedure. Changes may well be on the way, but so far the provinces have not played an important role when the Dutch government has formulated its policy on new EU legislation – not even when the issues clearly affected regional matters. The Dutch provinces have also taken their time to establish regional offices in Brussels – the first one was not operational until late 1994. A large proportion of the lobbying activities have been carried out by an office common to all the provinces, although in recent years offices have been established to promote different parts of the Dutch territory. It can also be noticed that the Dutch provinces also seem to lack confidence in the ability of CoR to influence the EU

institutions – at least if one is to judge by the relative absence of the Dutch delegates.

The Committee of the Regions (CoR)

What many would regard as the flagship of the new role for intermediate and local levels in the EU structure, the Committee of Regions, does not quite exert the influence many expected it would when it was established. The Committee of the Regions, comprising – despite the name – representatives of regions and local governments – has an advisory function, and is only asked to give its opinion on matters which have particular consequences for regional and local policies. How the mix of local and regional representatives is achieved differs from one country to another and in some cases we find that representatives of the regional level dominate one country's representation while other countries have achieved a certain balance. We also find different "statuses" of the representatives in the CoR. Some countries elect rather "well known names" to sit on the CoR, while other countries have chosen more "anonymous" representatives. However, there seems to be an inverted correlation between fame and attendance of the meetings of the CoR – the better-known names participate considerably less in the meetings. Generally speaking the attendance rate is not impressive, only about 50 percent of the delegates are present on average. Nevertheless, compared to the European Parliament where about 30 percent of members are absent when the parliament is in session, the difference is not that great, and if we take into account that the CoR is an advisory body, the attendance rate could even be considered fairly high.

However, so far it has been hard to argue that the CoR has had any substantial influence on the integration process in EU or on the more important decisions

taken by the decision-making bodies of the union, although the CoR has not been totally without influence. Without doubt, the CoR has had problems in finding its proper place in relation to the other EU institutions. Its relations with the European Parliament for example have been more or less non-existent, marked by rivalry for some time now. Recently, initiatives have been taken to improve the situation, but an accurate description of the activities of the CoR would still probably be that they are primarily directed at the Commission and the Council. It is also probably correct to say that the CoR has a more symbolic value, it is not yet an institution for policy-making regarding EU matters – a reminder to everyone of the intention to create an integration process not only for central governments but also for sub-governments. But it is not only when acting via the CoR that the intermediate level finds it difficult to influence

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the integration process, this is also the case when dealing with the European Parliament.

The European Parliament

Experiences drawn from national governments tell us that it is possible to identify at least four different types of channels or arrangements giving sub-governments either direct access to the parliament or facilitating the influence of sub-governments on the parliament: constituencies, regional parties, accumulation of mandates (dual mandates) and parliamentary committees. However, when these four dimensions are applied to the European Parliament the picture that emerges is less clear.

To begin with, only a few of the Member States use more than one constituency in the elections to the European Parliament, although all of them, with the exception of the Netherlands, use more than one constituency in national elections. But it is not primarily the bigger states that use more than one constituency, the smaller states such as Belgium and Ireland do this as well. It is probably in these smaller states where constituencies manage to play a role in bridging the gap between the intermediate level and the European Parliament. In the bigger countries with several constituencies – the United Kingdom, Italy and to some extent Germany – the constituencies tend to be quite large, which probably makes them counter-productive when it comes to creating bonds between the elected and the electorate. Also, only in Belgium and Germany do the constituencies to some extent follow the territorial borders of the intermediate level. Germany also gives the political parties a choice as to whether to use more than one constituency or not, and so far only the Christian democrats in Germany have officially used more than one constituency in nominating candidates for the European Parliament elections.

Another way in which regional interests can gain direct access to the European Parliament is through regional parties. However, this is quite a rare phenomenon and only in a few countries have regional parties managed to get a seat in the European Parliament. It will then come as no surprise that Belgium, Spain, the UK and Italy have regional parties that have made it into the European Parliament: countries where regional parties also have a seat in the national parliament. Once again Belgium is something of the odd man out since it no longer has any national parties – all the parties are regional. The number of regional parties and the number of MEPs from regional parties from the other countries is, however, quite small, so generally speaking one can not say that regional parties are an important way of channelling regional interests into the European

Parliament.

Two countries, France and Italy, are of special interest where it concerns the use of dual (accumulation of) mandates – i.e. the possibility of holding a seat in a regional or local assembly at the same time as being a MEP. However, it is questionable whether the dual mandate system really is an effective way of creating strong and influential channels into the European Parliament. The MEPs with dual mandates seem to be absent more often than not from the European Parliament

sessions and thus should have some difficulties in defending the interests of their own region. Finally, it has to be said that it is not only MEPs with dual mandates who may appear as spokesmen

predominately for just one region in deliberations and decisions in the Parliament – any MEP can take on this role.

How a parliament is organised is also of importance in terms of the possibilities created for the intermediate level to influence and connect to the national assembly. Here the committee structure is of special importance since it is much easier to influence policy areas that are concentrated on one committee as opposed to those divided among several committees. One of the largest committees in the European Parliament is responsible for regional affairs. However, in this case size does not tell the whole story, since the very same committee is not exclusively concerned with regional policy, but also covers policy areas such as transportation and tourism. Furthermore, other issues of importance for regional policy such as agriculture are handled by other committees.

A closer look at the national composition of the Parliamentary Committee of Regional Policy, Transportation and Tourism also reveals that it is not primarily Member States with “strong” intermediate-level governments that are over-represented in the committee, something that would have been expected had the committee been of any real importance in the regional policy-making process of the EU. Instead we find that Member States receiving considerable subsidies from the regional funds have more seats than expected.

The general impression of the European Parliament is that the structural arrangements to promote influence and create links to intermediate-level governments are rather weak. However, this does not exclude the possibility that in some cases these channels have really been of importance.

Conclusions

To summarise this article, the arrangements and channels that have been created in order to enhance the influence of the intermediate-level governments have played a rather limited role so far, and it looks like the activities

Multi-level government today still is more about image-making than reality.

carried out by the regional offices may still in many cases be the most important ones.

However, at the same time, the on-going integration challenges our previous understanding of the intermediate level and how it is organised. To begin with, there is no clear demarcation between local and regional government in the European setting, both for example sit on the Committee of the Regions. Secondly, judging by how some of the regional offices in Brussels are organised, no clear distinction is made between private and public interests either, since an office can have both private and public owners. Thirdly, new means are given and possibilities open up to the intermediate level governments as they can co-operate more freely across national borders outside the direct control of the central government.

The expectations created by the Maastricht treaty have, so far, not been met to any significant extent. The Committee of the Regions is still looking for its place in the EU decision-making process. Furthermore, the channels which can be used by intermediate-level governments to influence the European Parliament have not been used to anywhere near their potential. However, although what is sometimes called multi-level government today still is more about image-making than reality, it can be noticed that the structural settings are different when intermediate-level governments in federal and semi-federal states are compared to non-federal ones.

Countries which once co-operated in the setting of the EEC or EFTA with governments organised in rather similar ways, now differ in important aspects. Some states are both in theory and in practice federal or are heading in that direction, while still others are keeping up the appearance of being unitary states. Consequently the prerequisite of the integration of states, the intermediate level and local governments has fundamentally changed. In the long run we can observe how pressure is put on the EU institutions and structures to adjust to these new conditions. But it is not only the EU institutions that will be put under pressure to change and adapt to the new situation, the intermediate level will also be under heavy pressure to find new ways of organising their activities. We can already see in the more federal Member States how new co-ordination procedures, outside the direct control of the federal level or where the federal level is participating on equal

terms as the intermediate level, are established in order to co-ordinate certain EU-matters. In other words, the intermediate level of government will sometimes find itself in a situation where it is expected to represent a whole country, and not only its own interests.

This observation leads to a final reflection. Could it be the case that, in this new setting where the federal level and the intermediate level unite to act in favour of national, regional and local interests, that federal states come out on top in the EU negotiations?

Could it be the case that ... federal states come out on top in the EU negotiations?

NOTES

- ¹ This article is based on two EIPA publications *The Intermediate level of Government in European States. Complexity versus Democracy* ed. Torbjörn Larsson, Koen Nomden, Franck Petiteville, and a forthcoming report to the Swedish government "The Internal Enlargement of the European Union" ed. Torbjörn Larsson.
- ² *Rise of Meso Government in Europe* ed. L.J. Sharpe, Sage 1993.
- ³ Norway, although not a member of the European Union, has been included in this presentation for comparative purposes – not only Member States experience changes, in other words.
- ⁴ Marks, G. Hooghe, L. Blank, K. "European Integration from the 1980s: State-Centric v. Multi-level Governance". *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 34, No.3 1996
- ⁵ Heichlinger, A. *A Regional Representation in Brussels: The Right Idea for Influencing EU Policy-Making?*, European Institute of Public Administration, Maastricht 1999. □