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Sub-National Authorities in the EU’s Post-Socialist States: Joining the Multi-Level Polity?

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ABSTRACT This paper gauges the extent to which sub-national authorities (SNAs) from the EU’s post-socialist member states are attempting to affect EU policy making and considers whether their efforts heretofore have proven successful. The paper finds (a) that SNAs are engaging four of the five ‘channels of representation’, (b) that significant cross-national and intra-country variation characterizes emerging patterns of mobilization, and (c) that territorial balances of power in post-socialist states remain heavily tipped in the favour of central states. SNAs from central and eastern Europe are rapidly integrating into the EU’s multi-level polity, but the pre-eminence of central state authority in the region is not fundamentally threatened.

KEY WORDS: Sub-national mobilization, multi-level governance, central and eastern Europe, authority, governance

Introduction

In the past decade, scholars have scrutinized the evolving roles of municipalities, regions and other sub-national authorities (SNAs) in European Union (EU) decision making. A broad consensus has emerged about the scope of SNA activity: since the mid-1980s, SNAs have asserted themselves in new, often creative ways. Realizing that EU policy can affect them deeply, that they can gain access to EU funding and that mobilization can facilitate the presentation of local and regional identities and concerns to broader audiences, they have tried to weave their way into European policy making. The intensity of SNA activity has varied both among and within EU member
states; German Länder have been more active than, for example, Irish municipalities, and some German Länder have been more active than others. But the general trend is clear — sub-national authorities are mobilizing at the European level.

There is significantly less scholarly consensus about the ultimate results and implications of mobilization by sub-national authorities. Do SNAs’ activities threaten established territorial balances and increase SNAs’ leverage vis-à-vis central states? Does SNA mobilization actually affect policy making? Proponents of multi-level governance (Hooghe 1995; Keating 1998; Hooghe & Keating 2001; Hooghe & Marks 2001) have tended to answer these questions in the affirmative. They paint sub-national mobilization as a phenomenon of major empirical and theoretical significance. Empirically, they identify sub-national mobilization as a strong indicator of the emergence of a European polity, where actors outside of Brussels and state ministries come to grasp Europe as their own. Theoretically, they see SNA mobilization as a threat to approaches that focus exclusively on central states and supranational actors. Other analysts (Grande 1996; Bache 1998; Allen 2000; Peters & Pierre 2002) are less convinced. They critique and/or significantly modify the multi-level governance framework. They tend to stress the marginality or only occasional effectiveness of SNAs in EU policy making. They suggest that sub-national mobilization is highly conditional on pre-existing territorial balances, that weak SNAs are particularly unlikely to gain power as a result of integration, and that central-state monopolies — while possibly under threat in the circumscribed case of regional/cohesion policy — are very resilient indeed. The theoretical upshot, in this view, is that sub-national mobilization — while interesting — has limited effects, and that reports of the emergence of a ‘Europe of the Regions’ or a ‘Europe with the Regions’ have been exaggerated.

This article brings evidence from the new member states of central and eastern Europe to bear on debates about the extent and effects of SNA mobilization in Europe. Are SNAs in the new member states following the trail blazed by SNAs from the EU-15? Is supranational mobilization boosting the status of SNAs as policy actors and threatening central state authority? After a brief discussion of the state of sub-national authorities in post-socialist member states, this paper considers these questions. Regarding activities, it considers, in turn, the five channels of European-level representation discussed originally by Hooghe & Marks (1996) — the Committee of the Regions (CoR), transnational SNA associations, SNA lobbying offices in Brussels, the European Commission (via cohesion policy) and the Council of Ministers. It shows that EU enlargement has opened up new representational pathways for sub-national actors from CEE member states and that patterns resembling those observed in the EU-15 are emerging. Regarding the consequences of these activities, it argues that, to date, the effects of SNA mobilization have been modest. Central-state actors continue to dominate EU politics in the new member states. While the analysis has more in common with those who have criticized the multi-level governance framework, the paper concludes by stressing the importance of cross-national variation
within central and eastern Europe and suggesting that the ultimate effects of SNA mobilization in CEE remain to be seen.

Sub-National Authorities in Post-Socialist EU Member States

The context of SNA mobilization in the new member states has been conditioned by reforms of territorial relations that have been worked out in the decade following the collapse of state-socialism. As politicians and ‘ordinary citizens’ in CEE embarked on their paths away from socialism, they revoked certain similar aspects of inherited public administration systems. Some states (i.e. Poland and Hungary) had tinkered with the traditional three-tiered territorial model of socialist administration in the waning years of Communist rule. Regardless, systems throughout the region by 1989/1991 were ‘top-heavy’, subservient to and penetrated by party interests, and incapable of operating in market-based conditions. Furthermore, few citizens felt strong sympathies toward ‘their’ local state bodies. This was not surprising. In theory, these bodies had been accountable to citizens and to higher bodies in the system of state administration. In practice, though, power was exercised from the top down, and local party organs kept close watch over local administrative bodies.

At the beginning of the transition, all states sought to ‘inject democracy’ into local governing structures and to empower local representative bodies. Although the specific powers transferred to local self-governments varied, all states attacked the previous system and passed laws recognizing municipalities as the backbone of their respective young democracies. Citizens and local leaders reacted favourably to these developments. They often seized the chance to establish small, self-governing municipalities, whether because such units would increase the personal power of local elites, or because the act would signify the decisive defeat of socialist centralism, or both (Illner 1999).

Beyond the common rhetoric of decentralization and the shared desire to establish self-governing municipalities, the various countries took different subsequent steps. In each country, a multitude of questions arose: how many levels of sub-national self-government should exist? How many levels of de-concentrated state administration should exist? Should the borders of territorial state administration coincide with the borders of intermediate tiers of self-government? Which historical and/or international models might guide contemporary reforms? Which specific administrative competencies should be transferred to the various levels of state administration and self-government? The list of questions could go on and on — as indeed it did, in each state across the region.

In addressing the questions, national leaders were influenced by many considerations — geographical, demographic, historical, economic and, most importantly, political. Various policy players (including political parties, sub-national interest groups and supranational institutions) affected politicians’ calculations and ultimate institutional choices. After more than a decade of debates and reforms, the institutional
configurations that currently characterize the eight CEE member states vary dramatically, and these configurations will continue to evolve in the coming years.

Some of the most striking institutional variations involve intermediate or ‘meso’ tiers (tiers between the local and national levels) of self-government and state administration. In the four post-socialist EU-25 states with the largest populations — Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia — debates about the borders and/or competencies of regional self-government raged throughout the 1990s. Hungary effectively decided to maintain the inherited boundaries of twenty regional units (megyek, or counties) while overhauling the roles they played in the national political system. Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, despite years of false starts and delays, ultimately bowed to EU and domestic pressures, establishing self-governing regions in the late 1990s and early 2000s and transferring or sharing responsibility for certain policy areas to them.

Even in the latter cases, however, specific configurations differed. Poland, for example, has established two intermediate levels of self-government (powiat and województwo), while the Czech Republic (kraj) and Slovakia (samosprávny kraj) have established only one. The Czech Republic has opted for a ‘unified’ system of territorial self-government and state administration, while the other states have separated offices of regional state administration from regional self-governments. Nor have debates about ‘intermediate tiers’ been absent in the smaller post-socialist states. All of these countries (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Slovenia) have regionalized administratively without regionalizing politically. Tasks of state administration have been de-concentrated, but ultimate responsibility for these tasks has remained with appointees of the central government (as opposed to elected, democratically accountable politicians).

This brief survey of the contemporary lay of the land demonstrates an obvious — but important — insight: the term, ‘sub-national authorities’, is an extremely general descriptor, an umbrella under which many diverse authorities fall. These authorities can be politicians or bureaucrats, employees of national states or sub-national self-governments, representatives of millions or hundreds of citizens. No post-socialist EU member state has a federal constitution and all have strong legacies of central control. Still, if a major suggestion of studies of sub-national governance in the EU-15 has been that “there is a striking heterogeneity” within the universe of sub-national authorities in the EU (Forsyth 1999, 201), evidence from the new member states gives no reason to amend this suggestion. A large German Land is much different from a small Irish municipality, which is different still from an Italian provincia, a Czech kraj and a Polish voivodship. The picture becomes even more complex once the range of actors involved in the programming and implementation of EU cohesion policy is considered. In short, when “sub-national authorities in the European Union” — whether a Union of fifteen or twenty-five — are considered, an extraordinarily diverse field is discussed (Loughlin 1997).
The Supranational Activities of Sub-National Authorities From CEE Member States

Examining West European cases, Hooghe & Marks (1996) suggested that sub-national authorities have pursued at least five “channels of representation” in hopes of affecting EU decision making. This section examines each of the five channels in turn, gauging the extent to which SNAs from post-socialist member states are taking them up.

The Committee of the Regions (CoR)

The Committee of the Regions recently celebrated its tenth anniversary. Established by the Treaty on European Union, the CoR is comprised of representatives of SNAs from member states in approximate proportion to states’ populations. The Committee was designed to formally incorporate local and regional voices into the Union’s policy-making process. Authorities from states with strong regions — Belgium, Spain and, above all, Germany — played major roles in lobbying for the establishment of the Committee, but the body that emerged after long rounds of intergovernmental bargaining was significantly weaker than the one these sponsors had supported. The CoR is an advisory body. The Commission, the Council and the European Parliament may ask the CoR to issue opinions on specific legislative proposals, or the CoR may act on its own initiative. No matter what the origins of an opinion, though, EU institutions are under no obligation to heed the CoR’s advice.

In 1997, the Committee made its first contacts with SNAs in applicant states. The authorities generally welcomed these contacts and called for deeper exchanges with the CoR. In May 1998, the Committee responded, creating an ad hoc group within its executive bureau. The laboriously named ‘Committee of the Regions/Central and East European Country–Cyprus Liaison Group’ took modest steps toward intensifying contacts in the region and sponsored the CoR’s first resolution on enlargement, which passed the CoR’s plenary on 17 November 1999. In April 2000, the Liaison Group was reshaped, renamed the ‘CoR-Applicant State Liaison Group’, and put under new leadership. Though the reconfigured Liaison Group (and, in particular, its chair, Lord Hanningfield) achieved a relatively high profile in numerous candidate countries, the body was dissolved at the beginning of the CoR’s third four-year mandate in 2002. At that point, enlargement-related activities were folded into the Committee’s commission for external relations (RELEX).

The CoR’s approach to SNAs in the applicant states was therefore inconsistent over time. None the less, SNAs used the CoR’s initiatives to deepen contacts with counterparts from existing member states. In each candidate country, the Liaison Group cooperated with national associations of local and (where they existed) regional authorities to organize a national conference. The conferences facilitated information sharing — CoR members would discuss the role of the Committee in the EU system and their experiences with EU policy making and implementation, and representatives
from the candidate countries would discuss the status of territorial governance in their countries and the particular challenges of enlargement.

After each conference, the Committee would generally invite a delegation of ten elected local and regional representatives from each country to visit Brussels during a CoR plenary. Once there, delegation members would attend plenaries, meet with the Liaison Group, offer input to rapporteurs of draft opinions, liaise with representatives from regional offices and lobby groups, and network with other Brussels-based organizations. In July 2002, the Committee invited twelve representatives from the candidate states to address the CoR plenary and, in July 2003, observers from the accession states began to participate (on a regular basis) in CoR plenaries, commission sessions (commissions are the functional equivalents of committees in the CoR) and party-group meetings. Each accession state was represented by the same number of observers as it would have members after 1 May 2004. Because the Treaty of Nice stipulated, for example, that Poland would have twenty-one members and twenty-one alternates, twenty-one observers and twenty-one alternate observers represented Polish sub-national authorities between 2003 and 2004.

Thus, in spite of the CoR’s haphazard approach to enlargement, select individuals from the accession states had, by May 2004, become quite familiar with the body’s uses and limitations. Small groups of ‘CoR experts’ — people with significant experience in and regular contacts with the CoR — emerged within each accession state. Most individuals who had served as observers and alternate observers before enlargement, for example, became official members or alternates after enlargement. Thus, at its first post-enlargement plenary on 16–17 June 2004, 79 of the 95 (83.2 per cent) members from new member states had previously served as observers or alternate observers (see Table 1).

These data suggest that most members from acceding states have hit the ground running. At the same time, they highlight cross-country variation. In Poland and Lithuania, for example, only 61.9 per cent and 44.4 per cent of current CoR members have previously served as CoR observers or alternates. Contrast this with delegations from the smaller states — Slovakia, Estonia, Latvia and Slovenia — which are comprised entirely of individuals with pre-2004 experience. Though this variation might suggest an initial leg-up to members from the smaller states, it must be noted that CoR-accession state relationships before accession were not equally densely institutionalized. Three of the 2004 accession states — Poland, the Czech Republic and Cyprus — had established joint consultative committees (JCCs) with the CoR in the years before the CoR accepted accession-state observers. These committees, comprised of eight members from the candidate side and eight members from the CoR side apiece, met periodically to discuss issues similar to those covered by the conferences. In short, SNAs from new member-states are clearly utilizing the CoR, but they come to the Committee with different experiences. New members who lack experience as observers or JCC members may have steeper learning curves and less initial influence than counterparts with more CoR experience.
Transnational Associations and Networks

According to Hooghe & Marks (1996, 89), “the open-textured nature of networking makes it very difficult to come up with reliable data on the density” of transnational networks and associations that link representatives of various sub-national authorities. As EU membership has expanded, this task has become even more difficult. In the past decade, ‘older’ networks linking SNAs to each other have expanded to include members from the new member states, and new networks have come into existence. The quality and mission of these networks vary from one network to the next — some are densely institutionalized with very specific goals, others are loose agglomerations with very general aims. This section aims to show the diversity of networks linking sub-national authorities and to demonstrate that authorities from the new member states are actively participating in the many different kinds of European SNA networks.

The two largest and most visible associations of regional and municipal authorities are the Assembly of European Regions (AER) and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR). While not always agreeing with each other, both organizations have thrown weight behind major institutional and operational innovations of the last two decades, including the establishment of the CoR, the reform of the structural funds and an expansive interpretation of the principle of subsidiarity. Most members of the AER are individual regions, while national associations of municipalities comprise the CEMR’s membership. Both organizations’ membership rolls are expansive and have grown rapidly in recent years. The CEMR’s membership, for example, comprises national municipal associations from all EU-15

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number of seats in CoR</th>
<th>Number of CoR seats filled by ex-observers or alternate observers (2003–2004)</th>
<th>Number of CoR seats filled by individuals without significant CoR experience</th>
<th>Percentage of seats filled by ex-observers or alternate observers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>61.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>83.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>91.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>44.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malta</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>83.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
states and all ten new member states, plus national associations from Bulgaria, Romania, Albania, FYRO Macedonia, Iceland, Israel, Serbia-Montenegro, Switzerland and Ukraine. As of July 2006, three Czech regions, all Hungarian counties except Csongrád and the capital region, five Polish voivodships, three Slovak regions and five Lithuanian administrative regions were members of the AER. Eurocities, an association that lobbies on behalf of the continent’s largest cities, has also become a major player in Brussels in recent years, all the while absorbing members from acceding post-socialist states. AER, CEMR and Eurocities have all initiated formal or informal mechanisms of deepening connections between members from ‘old’ member states and members from new member states. They have established special committees, sub-committees and/or working groups and have sponsored conferences aiming to increase mutual understanding and networking among western and eastern members.

Beyond these most visible transnational associations, observers of transnational networks of European SNAs have differentiated between ‘top-down’ networks supported by the Commission and voluntary, ‘bottom-up’ networks spearheaded by individual sub-national actors. The Commission, working largely through ‘initiatives’ that form a small portion (approximately 5 per cent) of the structural fund budget, has encouraged the formation of multiple networks. One initiative, INTERREG III, seeks to stimulate knowledge sharing and increase the administrative know-how of European regions. Under one plank of INTERREG III (INTERREG IIIC East), for example, regions from different states within four ‘programme zones’ are encouraged to design joint projects and apply to the Commission to fund the projects. The eastern INTERREG IIIC zone, for example, encompasses portions of Germany, Italy, Greece and Poland and the entire territories of Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia. Although the total sums available from INTERREG IIIC are not overwhelming and the procedures for acquiring assistance are rather serpentine, the initiative has actually succeeded in facilitating substantive cooperation among regions from the EU-15 and regions from the ‘accession ten’. The Commission has also supported the creation of multiple ‘thematic networks’ (i.e. BASAN — the Baltic Sea Agro-industrial Network, Innoba-SME — Overcoming Innovation Barriers in SMEs, CAFÉ — Consortia for Agro-Food in Europe, and many others) that bring together regions across the EU-25.

Fecund as the field of Commission-supported networks is, ‘bottom-up’ networks have also recently expanded to include members from the post-socialist world. The Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions, for example, has expanded to include member regions from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. Authorities from the same four states have also joined the Baltic Sea States Sub-regional Cooperation (BSSSC) network, and authorities from across the post-socialist EU have joined the Association of European Border Regions and various sectorally organized sub-networks within the AER. Local authorities from across the region have also pursued (and achieved) membership in networks with truly global coverage, such as the network of Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI).
All of these examples demonstrate that integration of SNAs into supranational networks has gone hand in hand with integration into the EU.

**Brussels Offices of Sub-National Authorities**

SNAs from the EU-12 began establishing offices in Brussels as the integration process gained momentum in the mid-1980s (Jeffery 1996). The regional offices — some heavily staffed and handsomely outfitted, others quite humble affairs — have sought since their establishment to “lobby, gather information, and network with other regional actors and with EU political actors” in Brussels (Hooghe & Marks 1996, 83). Not all SNAs have established offices, however. Whereas all German Länder eventually forged a presence in Brussels, for example, certain Spanish autonomous communities have chosen not to do so. Some cities and regions have established offices of their own, others have formed joint offices with other SNAs or national municipal/regional associations, and others have opted not to represent themselves in Brussels. Marks and his colleagues have sought to explain the variation in decisions of sub-national authorities about whether to form or not to form Brussels offices (Marks *et al.* 1996). They have found that “subnational governments with the most extensive political role in their respective domestic political systems are ... the most likely to open an office in Brussels” and that “regions that are politically and culturally different from their respective national societies” are more likely to establish offices (Hooghe & Marks 1996, 182–185).

Table 2 lists the SNAs from new member states that have established offices in Brussels. While Marks and his co-authors restricted their analyses to regional offices, Table 2 also contains information on offices established by municipal authorities. The table illustrates significant cross-country variation, in particular between smaller and larger new member states. As of July 2006, a limited number of SNAs from smaller states (Tallinn, Riga and associations of Estonian and Latvian local governments) had established offices in Brussels, and no SNA or group of authorities from Lithuania or Slovenia had set up shop. SNAs from larger accession states have been more assertive. Polish voivodships have taken the lead, with only one of sixteen voivodships (Podkarpackie) deciding not to invest in a regional office. SNAs from the three remaining central European members have levels of Brussels-based activity that fall between the Polish and small-state cases. Six of eight regional (NUTS III) SNAs from Slovakia have established Brussels offices, together with four of twelve Czech regional (NUTS III) authorities. Hungarian counties and development regions have, thus far, taken a cautious, diverse approach, with one planning region, one NUTS III region and one aggregate ‘regional interest’ office establishing operations.

What factors might explain this variation? A thorough answer to this question requires more systematic research. On the surface, though, two of Marks *et al.*’s explanations seem plausible. First, other things being equal, the stronger an authority’s constitutional position, the more likely it is to
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Table 2.  Regional offices in Brussels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country (notes)</th>
<th>Level of representation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NUTS II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland (fifteen of sixteen voivodships have established a regional office)</td>
<td>Dolnsośląskie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wielkopolskie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kujawsko-Pomorskie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Łódzkie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Łódź</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic (six of fourteen regions (five kraje and the capital city) have established a regional office)</td>
<td>Hlavní město Praha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Středočeský kraj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary (Cautious approach; none of Hungary’s counties (megyek) has established a stand-alone regional office)</td>
<td>West Panon region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia (‘House of Slovak Regions’ established in May 2005; six of eight self-governing regions (kraje) have established a regional office)</td>
<td>Bratislavský kraj</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
establish an office in Brussels. The Polish voivodships, though much weaker than German Länder, Spanish autonomous communities and Belgian regions and communities, are constitutionally stronger and politically more assertive than Czech and Slovak regions, Hungarian counties, and municipal authorities in all eight states. Second, politically and/or culturally distinctive regions are more likely to establish Brussels offices than less distinctive regions. Voters in Bratislava, Budapest and Tallinn routinely disagree with voters in peripheral regions of their respective states. Still, the standards that Marks et al. used to measure “political and cultural difference” in Western Europe are not terribly well suited to the CEE context, and systematic testing of the hypothesis linking cultural/political difference with representation in Brussels would likely require new standards for measuring the independent variable. It is also notable that one of CEE’s traditional cultural regions — Moravia, whose nearest contemporary political equivalent is Jihomoravský kraj — has so far decided not to establish a Brussels office. A third possible explanation has not been tested by Marks et al. This explanation involves contagion/mimetic institutional isomorphism. Polish voivodships and, more recently, Slovak regions, have established Brussels offices in rather quick succession, one after another. Perhaps ‘lagging’ voivodships and regions (those that were not among the first wave of office establishers) have done so because, as more of their colleagues established offices, this step came to be seen as appropriate. On the surface, then, three explanations suggest themselves. Statistical tests and interviews with the individuals who have pushed for Brussels offices would be necessary, however, to arrive at more certain conclusions.

Table 2. Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country (notes)</th>
<th>NUTS II</th>
<th>NUTS III</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Estonia (Lacks a layer of regional self-government)</td>
<td>Tallinn</td>
<td>Association of Estonian Cities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia (Lacks a layer of regional self-government)</td>
<td>Riga</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia (Lacks a layer of regional self-government)</td>
<td>Latvian Ass’n of Local &amp; Regional Gov’t’s</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1Lubelskie and Podlaskie share an office, and Liberecký and Středočeský share a building; Středočeský kraj also qualifies as a NUTS II region.
2The Representation of Hungarian Regions represents Budapest, Debrecen, Miskolc, Szeged, Pécs and Győr.
The Council of Ministers

If the establishment of the CoR was a qualified victory for advocates of regional voice in the European Union at Maastricht, so too was Article 146. Article 146 (subsequently renumbered Article 203) allows ministers from sub-national governments to represent their member states in the Council of Ministers. On the surface, this was a significant institutional innovation. The Council is the Union’s primary legislative decision maker, and its *raison d’être* has always been the representation of national interests. Like the CoR, the adoption of Article 146 owed much to the mobilization of regional actors from states (Germany, Belgium) with strong federal units. While it has facilitated the physical entry of sub-national actors into the EU’s primary decision-making chamber, Article 146 has affected states and their territorial balances differently. Nor has it automatically facilitated increased influence for those sub-national actors who have gained entrée to the Council. Ministers from German Länder, Austrian Länder and Belgian regions and communities, for example, have represented their states in the Council, but only after coordinating their positions with their respective central states. Following devolution in the UK, Scottish and Welsh ministers have been allowed to sit in on various Council formations, and Spanish autonomous communities have made deals with successive governments in hopes of increasing their contributions to Council business.

To this point, sub-national authorities in new member states have not attempted to use Article 146/203 to increase their profile within the Union. No CEE SNA has ‘broken in’ to the Council. There are few signs they will do so soon. Sub-national actors from accession states have not seriously pressed central states to recognize a right to represent their states in the Council; participation is unrealistic or even unthinkable.

Links with the European Commission

The most complex and intensely studied channel of sub-national representation in the EU involves links between SNAs and the European Commission. In particular, this channel involves networks formed via the Union’s cohesion policy. Multiple policy instruments comprise cohesion policy, the largest and most important of which are the structural funds. Cohesion policy gained steam in the mid-1980s, as member states committed themselves to completing the single market, and a coalition of poorer member states and the Commission pressed to increase the cohesion budget and overhaul procedures governing the structural funds. One procedural innovation introduced by the 1988 reform was the partnership principle, which called for active cooperation between the Commission, national authorities and SNAs in the design and implementation of programmes supported by the structural funds.14 Theoretically, the nature of cohesion policy and the specific structural fund regulations open significant opportunities for SNAs in EU decision making.
It is not surprising, given the facts (a) that cohesion instruments have grown to consume the second largest chunk of the Union’s budget (approximately one third of the 2000–2006 financial framework) and (b) that the primary objective of cohesion policy is to assist the development of less-favoured regions, that the availability of structural assistance was an important pull factor attracting post-socialist countries to the Union. National leaders in acceding states frequently used the promise of structural assistance as a keystone of their defences of enlargement. Throughout CEE, SNAs have sought to assert themselves in the process of structural-fund programming and implementation. Before enlargement, they did this in the context of pre-accession funding, when a large percentage of EU assistance was earmarked to pre-structural funds. Most EU-sponsored infrastructure/investment projects required the active cooperation of sub-national representatives and were modelled, administratively, on the structural funds. On 1 January 2004, acceding states became eligible for support from the structural funds, and SNAs continued to clamour for a voice in establishing priorities and implementing programmes.

The most significant question for present purposes is whether SNAs are truly gaining voice through programme design, management and monitoring. Is their activity paying off? Are they able to oppose or counterbalance the developmental priorities that central states and the Commission defend? Or are they merely sitting around tables, rubber-stamping plans and projects developed and endorsed by others? The following section addresses these questions, not only for the structural funds, but for the other channels as well.

The Consequences of Supranational Mobilization

To this point, the analysis suggests that SNAs from CEE are indeed taking steps to join the multi-level polity. Desiring to affect EU decision making, they are pursuing four of the five generally recognized channels of representation. Like SNAs from the EU-15, however, they are engaging with Europe in different ways. Some SNAs (i.e. the Polish voivodships) are acting on multiple fronts. Others (i.e. many municipalities, numerous Czech and Slovak regions) are doing comparatively little. This observation raises at least two questions: First, what might explain the variation in ‘Euro-engagement’ among SNAs from new member states? And, secondly, what are the ultimate consequences of SNAs’ activities? The first question is ripe for future research, and the literature from the EU-15 provides hypotheses that might explain this variation. This section, however, is concerned with the second question. To discern whether SNAs’ activities are paying dividends, it is necessary to gauge (a) whether each channel is playing an important role in the EU policy-making process and (b) whether CEE SNAs are playing important roles within each channel. Using this standard, evidence of SNA impact is quite weak.

Although the CoR has been more effective than some observers expected (Warleigh 1997), there is little evidence to suggest that members from
post-socialist states are influencing EU policy through the CoR. Some early analysts (Van der Knapp 1994; Christiansen 1996) suggested that the CoR might fall victim to squabbles between representatives of municipalities and regions, between strong regions and weak regions, among member-state delegations and/or among warring party groups. But successive generations of CoR leaders, since 1994, have taken steps to mitigate the centrifugal pressures; they have established quasi-consociational power-sharing arrangements, for example, and relatively strong party groups (Scherpereel 2005). The Committee has made marginal gains in each treaty reform since Maastricht (including Amsterdam, Nice and the Constitutional Treaty), there are a number of anecdotal examples suggesting the importance of CoR opinions in affecting draft legislation (Farrow & McCarthy 1997) and the Commission, through a structured dialogue procedure established in 2003, now consults with the CoR before presenting its annual work programme or launching major policy initiatives that have a territorial impact. But the CoR’s public profile remains very weak. It consistently fails to register on the radars of policy makers in the member states, the Commission and the Parliament. The CoR, in other words, is still a marginal player in the EU’s policy-making game.

Even if the CoR were stronger, evidence of new-member state power within the Committee would be weak. Their different experiences with the CoR notwithstanding, new CoR members have not yet been fully absorbed into the Committee’s work. The Committee’s governing Bureau has been adjusted in the wake of enlargement so that new member states are given seats in approximate proportion to their populations. Poland, for example, has three seats; the Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania and Slovakia each have two; and Estonia, Latvia and Slovenia have one apiece. But the presidencies and first vice-presidencies of the CoR’s commissions (the CoR’s committee structure) continue to be held by members from the EU-15. In addition, of the eighty-four opinions discussed in the CoR plenary between May 2004 and November 2005, only three were prepared by rapporteurs from the new member states. Furthermore, civil society in the new member states appears ignorant of or indifferent to the CoR. In the Czech Republic, for example, a recent year-long survey of press and network media outlets (Kostalecký 2005) turned up zero hits on the CoR. For the moment, CoR members from CEE states are among the weakest members of one of the EU’s weakest bodies.

Evidence that transnational associations have empowered post-socialist SNAs is slightly stronger, though far from overwhelming. Comparing the CoR and transnational associations, Jeffery (2000, 4) has suggested that while the former’s time has not yet come, the latter’s has already passed. According to this argument (see also Weyand 1997, 178), transnational associations effectively represented SNAs at EU level before the establishment of the CoR. With the CoR established, though, the bodies that had lobbied for their creation — especially the AER — became obsolete. While attractive, this argument rather underestimates the fact that transnational associations have adapted to the post-Maastricht landscape, repositioning themselves in the EU policy-making space. The AER recently celebrated its twentieth
anniversary. Along with the CEMR and Eurocities, it has consistently lobbied EU policy makers to keep cohesion policy budgets robust and to reinforce broad commitments to subsidiarity. What is more, new networks of SNAs — particularly the network of regions with legislative powers (REGLEG) — have arisen to amplify the voices of the EU’s strongest sub-national authorities.17

The emergence of REGLEG has been of limited relevance to the constitutionally weak SNAs of CEE. To date, though, CEE SNAs’ record of acquiring leadership positions in transnational associations is at least marginally better than their record in the CoR. The AER’s president (Riccardo Illy) is French, and none of the AER’s seven vice-presidents represents a new member state (although seven of forty-six bureau members of the AER bureau do).18 In the CEMR, Czech politician Oldřich Vlasák (who has significant municipal experience but currently serves as an MEP) is one of three executive (vice) presidents, and Lublin (Poland) mayor Andrzej Pruszkowski is one of eight members of the executive bureau. Still, all CEMR committees and working groups are chaired by representatives from the EU-15. A similar pattern can be seen in Eurocities, where Danica Simšič (mayor of Ljubljana) and Miroslav Kochalski (acting mayor of Warsaw) sit on the twelve-member executive committee, but the chairs of various working groups and committees all belong to cities from the EU-15. Detailed case studies are necessary to determine the relative influence of SNAs from new member states in the various organizations. It is clear, however, that CEE SNAs continue to lack proportional representation in all of the major transnational SNA networks.

As noted above, more systematic research is necessary on the Brussels offices that SNAs from new member states have established. Available evidence, however, indicates that these generally small, administratively strapped offices are having little independent effect on decisions made by the Commission, the Parliament and other Brussels-based actors. Of course, it cannot necessarily be assumed that all SNA offices truly want to affect decisions made in Brussels. Marks et al. (2002), for example, surveyed regional office personnel from the EU-15 and found that many SNA offices see themselves as both ‘listening posts’ and ‘lobbyists’. Almost all SNA offices believe that they are responsible for transmitting information on pipeline legislation to political actors ‘back home’ and many (particularly those representing strong regions) also see themselves as political players capable of shaping the legislation that eventually emerges from the Quartier Européen. A third possibility, however, is that SNAs — as represented in Brussels offices and the other channels of representation — are not primarily concerned with EU legislation, but with advancing their positions vis-à-vis their respective central states. Jeffery (1996; 2000), who sees Brussels offices and supranational mobilization more generally as a new dimension in long-established histories of nationally nested territorial politics, expressed this possibility:

SNAs in the EU have not moved in anything other than limited and symbolic senses beyond the nation-state. Insofar as sub-national
mobilization in Europe has produced change in the ‘structure of author-
itive decision-making,’ it has done so within the framework and logic of the Member State. The shift has been an internal one, rooted in a changed and changing relationship between central and sub-national authorities (Jeffery 2000: 7).

This conception has important implications for the current analysis. The preliminary glance at the CoR, transnational associations and regional offices suggests that SNA influence over Brussels-level developments has been limited. But if the primary goal of sub-national mobilization is to change the structure of authoritative decision-making ‘at home’ — by giving SNAs more say (a) in the formulation of priorities that central-state representatives eventually take to Council and (b) in the formulation of national policy more generally — then the focus should shift to what Jeffery calls “European domestic policy processes”.

These policies are seen as playing out most directly in the final two channels of representation — those involving cohesion policy and access to Council decision making. Both channels involve interaction between SNAs and central states directly. The debate about the extent to which cohesion policy has boosted the decision-making power of SNAs in the EU-15 remains vigorous. Some stress that EU cohesion policy has empowered SNAs vis-à-vis central states, others suggest that states remain the dominant actors, while still others argue that cohesion policy’s effects vary significantly from one state to the next. What can the experience of the CEE states contribute to this debate?

While it is still too early to reach definitive conclusions, regional influence in the first, abbreviated (2004–2006) programming period seems to have been limited. Work in the EU-15 (Hooghe 1996; Börzel 2001) suggests that SNAs that start from a position of strength (e.g. German and Austrian Länder, Belgian regions and communities) are more likely to play strong roles in regional programming and management than SNAs that start from a position of weakness. Insofar as nearly all SNAs in post-socialist Europe are recent creations whose incumbents are still adjusting to the realities of democratic and European governance (Hughes et al. 2004), they all face significant hurdles.

Secondly, as noted above, impressive sums were earmarked for pre-structural funding in the new member states between 1999 and 2004. While this experience has given SNAs some experience with the EU’s technical, bureaucratic procedures, both the Commission and central states were routinely underwhelmed with the technical and political savvy of CEE SNAs. The Commission repeatedly faulted candidates for lacking the administrative capacity to take advantage of the funds and for failing to establish clear lines of authority for programming and monitoring. It repeatedly noted that uncertain systems of territorial relations endangered candidates’ chances of designing quality programmes and availing themselves of pre-structural and structural funds. This also suggests that all CEE SNAs face major obstacles.
And yet there are some indications of emerging cross-country variation in CEE. Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic hoped that the act of establishing self-governing regions might convince the Commission and other critics that they appreciated the complexities of EU funding and were committed to reinforcing regional capacity (Brusis 2002). But it is unclear, to date, whether the steps they took in response have helped or hindered SNAs’ attempts to determine how EU regional policy is conducted and how the structural funds are allocated. Functioning self-governing regions and capable regional planning are not necessarily connected. In fact, the existence of self-governing regions and the assertiveness of democratically accountable regional incumbents may actually complicate efforts to design and carry out high-quality programmes, at least in the short term.

Illustration of this point requires a more detailed review of structural funding procedures. In the 2000–2006 budgetary period (which the new member states ‘joined’ in 2004–2006), structural funds have financed three main objectives — promotion of growth in regions with lagging development (Objective 1), promotion of economic and social conversion in regions experiencing structural difficulties (Objective 2) and promotion of training and employment in regions that do not qualify for Objective 1 assistance (Objective 3). Of the objectives, Objective 1 is by far the most important, consuming 70 per cent of the EU’s total structural-fund budget. New member states are most concerned to draw from Objective 1 funding, for which they became formally eligible on 1 January 2004.¹⁹

According to the rules of structural funding, Objective 1 regions are those in which per capita GDP does not exceed 75 per cent of the EU’s average per capita GDP. To determine the boundaries of the ‘regions’ in question, the Commission makes use of NUTS (Nomenclature des Unités Territoriales Statistiques) standards. According to the current EU NUTS regulation, a NUTS I unit should have a population between three million and seven million; a NUTS II unit between 800,000 and three million; and a NUTS III unit between 150,000 and 800,000.²⁰ Member states use these population guidelines to determine their particular NUTS boundaries. EU-15 states have traditionally taken existing intra-state borders (political borders, administrative borders, or both) into account when drawing NUTS borders.

In three of the four regionalized post-socialist member states (Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic), there is not a one-to-one correspondence between the boundaries of self-governing regions and the boundaries of NUTS II regions. Statistically, most self-governing regions in these three countries have populations that fall within the NUTS III band and have been designated by their governments as NUTS III regions. This statistical fact has had important practical implications. Because structural funds are distributed to NUTS II (rather than NUTS III) regions, these countries have effectively had to undergo dual processes of regionalization. On one hand, they have established self-governing regions at the NUTS III level. On the other hand, they have established administrative regions (also sometimes called ‘planning regions’ or ‘cohesion regions’) at the NUTS II level in order to draw from pre-structural and structural funds. It is generally recognized
that politicians and/or bureaucrats from self-governing (NUTS III) regions should participate in the regional development institutions at the NUTS II level. Precisely how this is to be accomplished, however, has been a critical question in all three states. What, in other words, should be the relationship between self-governing regions at the NUTS III level and planning bodies established at NUTS II level for the purposes of the structural funds? In Poland, the answer to this question has been relatively clear cut. All sixteen of the country’s voivodships qualify as NUTS II regions; there is a one-to-one correspondence between self-governing voivodships and NUTS II regions.

Even Poland, though, has struggled with questions concerning how much voice regional assemblies should have in designing and implementing regional policy (Ferry 2003). How much representation should they be given relative to representatives of the central state, social partners (employers’ organizations, labour unions, environmental and other NGOs), municipal and county (powiat-level) authorities from the regions, and other concerned citizens? In all cases, countries have relied upon national laws, regulations and/or informal decisions to answer these questions. Preliminary evidence suggests that the Polish voivodships have developed a relatively strong foothold vis-à-vis the Polish state. The state has given self-governing bodies at the voivodship level a clear role (in partnership with regional representatives of the central government) in developing regional operational programmes for the structural funds; the voice of the regions has been heard. Hungarian self-governments, though, have been relatively neglected by the state (Pálné Kovács et al. 2004), and Czech and Slovak regions have been somewhere in between these poles (Baun 2002).21 The relationship between self-governing regions and programming bodies at NUTS II levels, however, remains imprecise in both of the latter cases.

Post-socialist member states that lack self-governing regions (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Slovenia) are small enough, for the purposes of structural funding, to be considered NUTS II regions in toto. The entire territories of their states, in other words, qualify for Objective 1 structural funding. This fact has not necessarily made it easier for the smaller countries to establish strong institutions for structural programming (Dieringer & Lindstrom 2002; Marcou 2002). The Lithuanian government, for example, had planned to establish self-governing regions and implied that such regions would play a role in structural programming. In 2001, however, the government abandoned these plans, and counterpart plans for managing structural funds had to be adjusted to reflect the fact that elected regional representatives would not be involved. The Slovak, Czech and Hungarian cases suggest that uncertainty regarding self-governing regions at NUTS III level complicates the process of establishing strong institutions at the NUTS II level. The Lithuanian, Latvian, Estonian and Slovenian cases suggest that the absence of self-governing regions at the NUTS III level does not necessarily make it easier to establish strong institutions at the NUTS II level.22

Although there is emerging variation in the volume of SNA voices across the new member states, most SNAs face uphill battles. Even in ‘frontrunner’
Poland, “many of [the] new regions will struggle to compete and/or co-operate with regions, nation-states and Brussels in an enlarged EU” (Ferry 2003, 1113). CEE cases where SNAs have played primary roles in regional programming are, at least for the 2004–2006 programming period, the exception rather than the rule. Close empirical research is necessary to determine how these dynamics develop in the future and, in particular, whether sub-national voices become stronger in future programming periods than they were for 2004–2006. For now, central states still clearly possess the upper hand in this major element of European domestic policy.

This brings us to the final channel, the Council. As noted above, no new member state has authorized sub-national actors to represent it in the Council; steps in this direction are extremely unlikely. Empowerment through this channel has not occurred. All the same, it will be necessary to monitor, in coming years, the development of domestic procedures in the policy sectors — including environment, transportation and culture — where both supranational and sub-national actors play a direct role. There are at least two possible trajectories here. In one scenario, central states will move toward partnership, incorporating SNA input before proceeding to Council negotiation. In the other, central states will exclude or marginalize SNAs, reasoning that a state monopoly already compromised through participation in Community decision making should not be further compromised by systematic inclusion of sub-national voices. Given histories of central-state dominance, the current weakness of SNAs in the other channels of representation and the frequency of SNA complaints about central-state dominance of enlargement negotiations, the second channel is distinctly more likely.23

Conclusions

The eight post-socialist countries that entered the EU on 1 May 2004 share a history of centralized, single-party rule. None of the 2004 accession states has adopted a federal constitution. Even the countries that have established self-governing regions have taken their time in doing so and have been reluctant to transfer competencies and finances to lower-level units. SNA participation in pre-structural and structural funding has not constituted a uniform strike against central-state authority. The door to the Council of Ministers remains closed and central states continue to keep tight reins over most elements of European domestic policy. All of these facts point to an important conclusion: central state authority is alive and well in the new member states.

But it is important to note, all of these facts notwithstanding, that current systems of territorial administration and self-government exhibit significant variation and that sub-national mobilization is becoming more intense. Territorial frameworks in CEE range from the centralized unitarism of the Baltic states and Slovenia to the differing degrees of regionalized unitarism in Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary. This point challenges claims (e.g. Malová & Haughton 2002) that EU enlargement has promoted
convergence in the formal structures of states in CEE without denying that membership grants all post-socialist SNAs opportunities to challenge their traditionally marginal political and fiscal positions. Many post-socialist SNAs are discerning compelling reasons (whether ‘rational’ or ‘appropriate’) to mobilize at the European level. They are doing so at a time when new domestic governance structures are being constructed and opportunities for cooperation between sub-national and supranational authorities are multiplying. These are propitious conditions for questioning received wisdom about central-state authority. Evidence that we are witnessing a ‘great leap’ from a state-centred Europe to a federal Europe or a ‘Europe of the Regions’ is scant. Much evidence suggests, though, that supranational and sub-national actors — sometimes separately, sometimes in coalition — are questioning particular elements of central-state authority, pushing for more policy-making voice and clamouring for increased political responsibility. It is highly unlikely that all of their efforts will succeed, but equally unlikely that all will fail.

The article’s general finding — that SNAs are taking up multiple channels of representation but that territorial balances remain heavily tipped in central states’ favour — suggests that Europe’s multi-level polity is expanding and that SNAs’ spatial horizons are broadening, but that the pre-eminence of central state authority in the region is not fundamentally threatened. Along with the more specific findings, this helps to establish a framework for continued research on the causes and consequences of sub-national mobilization in the new member states and for comparison with past and present trends in the EU-15. Future research should seek to develop more nuanced appreciations of the roles that each channel plays in decision making, both in Brussels and ‘at home’. It should also seek to explain variation in SNAs’ utilization of the various channels. Are SNAs with certain characteristics more likely to invest in specific channels? If so, why? Does participation in one channel ‘spill over’ into participation in other channels? Or do the SNAs that lack representation in certain channels pursue other channels to compensate for their under-representation? Answers to such questions would grant significant insight into the evolving nature of governance and authority in Europe.

Notes
2. Latvia is a difficult case to classify. The state is currently divided into twenty-six districts. A council is convened at the level of each district, but the council is elected indirectly, consisting of representatives of the (directly elected) municipal councils contained within each district. Following common practice, the term ‘self-governing’ is restricted to those councils whose representatives are accountable directly to voters.
4. Hanningfield’s May 2001 trip to Bratislava, for example, was covered closely by the local press. At the Bratislava conference, Hanningfield commented directly on the debate about regionalization that was currently raging in Slovakia: ‘Slovakia has made enormous progress ... but we must be realistic: there is still a long way to go. The main obstacle to accession is still the state of the administration.'
The current level of centralisation in Slovakia is unacceptable for the EU. You will not be able to become a member until you have decentralised”. Hanningfield’s statement as reported in the CoR online press room, available at http://www.cor.eu.int/en/prss/cprss2001/ucp_5550.html.

5. The proportion was only slightly lower for alternate members from the new member states: 72 of 95 (75.8 per cent) alternate members had previously served as CoR observers or alternate observers.

6. In addition to individual member regions, the AER also includes ‘interregional organization members’, such as the Assembly of European Wine-Producing Regions, the Alps–Adriatic Working Community, and the Association of European Border Regions. A number of these interregional organizations have themselves expanded to include members from the acceding states. Győr-Moson-Sopron (Hungary), for example, is a member of the Alps–Adriatic Working Community (AKA Alpen Adria), and the current president of Alpen Adria is Hungarian.

7. Regions from non-member states are also well represented in the AER — as of July 2006, two regions from Bulgaria, thirty-five from Romania, fourteen from Croatia, seven from Bosnia-Herzegovina, two from Moldova, eleven from Norway, four from Russia, three from Georgia, twenty-two from Switzerland, one from Serbia-Montenegro and six from Ukraine had joined the Association.

8. The distinction between ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ networks, while illustrative, is none the less imperfect. While the CEMR, for example, has developed through voluntary cooperation, 15 per cent of its operating budget is currently provided by the Commission.


10. In Slovakia, the Košice NUTS III region spearheaded an effort to establish a ‘House of Slovak Regions’ in Brussels. The House of Regions, which was established in a single building In May of 2005, is designed, simultaneously, to facilitate cooperation between all Slovak NUTS III regions and to give each region its own voice in Brussels. As of May 2006, though, neither Zilinský nor Trnavský kraj had sent personnel to staff ‘their’ desks at the House of Regions.

11. To measure the relative strengths of national and regional identities, for example, Marks et al. (1996) used a question from the Eurobarometer survey that asks respondents about their relative attachment to the region in which they live. As the discussion above has suggested, however, ‘region’ is a particularly tricky word in CEE. Two neighbours claiming equally strong attachments to ‘their’ region may actually be professing connection to geographically distinctive areas.


13. Another possible contrast between West European and East European Brussels offices involves the primary motivation for establishing the offices. Whereas the Länder’s initial decisions to establish Brussels offices were primarily a defensive tactic (designed to combat or counteract federal moves to shift previously prodigious Länder-level competencies upward toward the EU level), post-socialist regions’ initial motivation may have been more offensive in nature (shoring up domestic constitutional status that was tenuous to begin with).


15. Most EU assistance for infrastructural development was administered through the Phare programme. Phare, the acronym for Pologne et Hongrie: Actions pour la Reconversion Économique, has been the major programme of Community assistance for CEE states since 1989. As the 2004 accession neared, the Commission reoriented Phare from a ‘demand-driven’ instrument into an ‘accession-driven’ instrument. From 1999 onward, Phare had two major goals — investment/development and strengthening administrative capacity.

16. The most commonly defended hypothesis (see Marks et al. 1996; Jeffery 2000) predicts that the stronger the constitutional position of an SNA and the greater the scope of policy competences it enjoys, the more intense its mobilization will be. Working on the specific case of regional offices, Marks et al. also identified a “resource-pull hypothesis” (where SNA mobilization is a function of the sums earmarked for regional support), a “resource-push hypothesis” (where rich SNAs mobilize more than poor SNAs), an associational-culture hypothesis (where regions with stronger civic cultures mobilize more than regions with weaker civic cultures), and a regional distinctiveness hypothesis (where SNAs that are culturally or politically distinctive vis-à-vis their central states mobilize more than SNAs that closely resemble their central states). Other hypotheses could link SNA age, geographical peripherality, exclusion from alternative channels and other variables to the likelihood of SNA mobilization.

18. While representatives of CEE member states are uncommon in the AER’s governing structure, non-member states from CEE are relatively well represented. Istrian regional president Ivan Jakovcic is a vice-president, and twelve of forty-six bureau members come from CEE countries that are not currently members (including Albania, Bosnia/Herzegovina, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Serbia/Montenegro and Ukraine). Thus, there is significant ‘eastern’ representation in the AER’s governing structure.


20. For a basic description of the NUTS system, see http://ec.europa.eu/comm/eurostat/ramon/nuts/basicnuts_regions_en.html (accessed July 2006). In practice, the NUTS population figures serve as basic guidelines. Allowances in the population ranges have sometimes been made to accommodate the classification of certain political or administrative units as belonging to a certain NUTS category.

21. For a slightly more optimistic view of Hungary’s institutional preparations for the structural funds (and a strong early analysis of the challenges of EU cohesion policy in post-socialist states), see de Vet (no date).

22. A concise account of contemporary regional issues — including the lack of a tradition of regional policy in central and eastern Europe, the challenges of the structural funds and the ambiguous relationship between self-governing regions and NUTS II regions in certain post-socialist states — is provided by Marcou (2002).

23. Even in states where SNAs are effective in cohesion policy procedures, central states may be reluctant to encode ‘partnership’ in other policy-making sectors. Indeed, a ‘ghettoization’ of partnership in the sector of regional planning is a distinct possibility.

References


