

Trans-border interregional alliances in Europe: toward fading away national boundaries of regional identities?

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Abstract

In the uniting Europe, numerous local and regional authorities in border zones have proclaimed so-called Euroregions as territorial frameworks for trans-border co-operation and integration. Development of these trans-border regions is endorsed by the states and promoted by the pan-European organisations Council of Europe and European Union. In particular since the European Union's INTERREG Programs have started in 1990, trans-border regions are proliferating along the internal and external borders of the EU and its future Central European extension.

Regarding their institutional structure and the nature of internal co-operation and integration the myriad of trans-border regions is extremely diverse. This may be partly attributed to differences in stage of development, but it is not realistic to assume that they are all developing toward a uniform outcome. From a processual point of view, opportunity, endorsement and promotion of trans-border regions and the related discourses have become an active force in the regional dynamics of border zones, of which direction and outcomes are channelled by structural conditions and the agendas of regional actors.

A contemporary trend in the territorial political organisation of Europe is a growing significance of regions. Regions should be considered as social constructions that can be build up, modified or disappear. Although this implies that regions are not historically or culturally determined, history and culture can provide for potent cognitive and discursive sources for construction of regions, such as regional self-awareness and ideological platforms to supply political legitimacy. From this perspective the question is easily raised whether the boost given to proliferation of trans-border regions, has spread seeds for potential trans-border regions with a strong regional identity and a political significance. In particular those border areas where historical regions and ethnic populations are split by international boundaries seem to have structural conditions to be potential breeding grounds for such a development. A combination of cultural-linguistic bonds of similarity linked with ethno-nationalist ideologies can provide for appealing cognitive and discursive sources. Regions in concerning border-zones often have a recent history of regional assertiveness and corresponding gain of political independence that gives regional actors more freedom to manoeuvre.

Against this background, development of trans-border regions in three areas will be dealt with in this contribution. The three cases are: • the Belgian-German border zone, which has the German-speaking Community at the Belgian side; • the Basque Country in Spain and France and • the area of the former Habsburg province of Tyrol that covers the Austrian federal land of Tirol and the autonomous region of Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol in Italy.

Introduction

In the uniting Europe strong efforts are made to divest the inter-state borders of their role as institutional barriers between adjacent border regions. Numerous local and regional authorities or institutions in border regions are engaged in trans-border

alliances with the aim to foster trans-border co-operation and integration. Compared to the NAFTA zone, trans-border co-operation in Europe is characterised by intensive involvement of public authorities and political institutions (Scott 1999). These developments are endorsed by states and promoted by the pan-European organisations Council of Europe and European Union. In particular since in 1990 the European Union's INTERREG Programs have started, with financial support for trans-border co-operation between regional and local public authorities and semi-public organisations, many forms of trans-border initiatives are proliferating along the internal EU borders and the external borders with Switzerland and the applicant member states in Central Europe.

As a category, the myriad of trans-border alliances is extremely diverse. There are great differences in size of the working areas, number and kind of participants and scope and substance of co-operation (Christiansen & Jørgensen 2000). From a cynic point of view it can even seem that some instances are only of symbolic nature, or are mainly based on the opportunity of getting financial support from outside. But there are also long established and more substantial platforms of co-operation that have been institutionalised in trans-border networks and rudimentary political spaces.

Future development of the trans-border interregional alliances is far from clear yet. It is not realistic to assume that they are all developing toward a uniform outcome. Though it may be doubted if all recent initiatives will progress to the same extent as the most advanced so-called Euroregions of today, it is plausible that the number of firmly established cases of interregional trans-border co-operation will substantially increase. The further development of these more advanced cases is not finished yet and still open.

A contemporary trend in the territorial political organisation of Europe is a growing significance of regions by raising profiles of regional identities as well as by extension of powers of regional authorities. Also in respect to this process regions should be considered as social constructions that can be build up, modified or disappear (Keating 1998). According to Paasi construction of regions depends on four simultaneous and interrelated aspects. "The formation of territorial, symbolic and institutional shapes of a region, and its establishment as entity in the regional system and social consciousness of the society concerned" (Paasi 2001, p. 16). Although regions are not historically, or culturally 'given', history and culture, in particular language, potentially play a significant role in the structure of thinking about a region as a region (Paasi 1991). Scott (1999) claims that cross-border regionalism should be understood from a constructionalist point of view. He distinguishes next to material sources of cross-border regionalism such as institutional frameworks, also cognitive sources such as regional self-awareness, and discursive sources such as ideological platforms that provide political legitimacy.

From this perspective the question is easily raised whether the boost given to proliferation of trans-border alliance and co-operation, has spread seeds for potential trans-border regions with a strong regional identity and a political significance. In particular those border areas where historical regions and ethnic populations are split by international boundaries seem to have structural conditions to be potential breeding grounds for such a development (Murphy 1993). A combination of cultural-linguistic bonds of similarity linked with ethno-nationalist ideologies can provide for appealing

cognitive and discursive sources. Regions in concerning border-zones often have a recent history of regional assertiveness and corresponding gain of political independence that gives regional actors more freedom to manoeuvre.

Against this background, development of interregional trans-border alliances in three border areas will be dealt with in this contribution. The three cases are: • the Belgian-German border region, which has the German-speaking Community at the Belgian side; • the Basque Country in Spain and France and • the area of the former Habsburg province of Tyrol that covers the Austrian federal land of Tirol and the autonomous region of Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol in Italy. Before arriving at these cases, some aspects of the increasing significance of regions and of trans-border alliances are discussed.

Regionalisation and Regionalism in Europe

In the evolution of a unified Europe, there is an evident tendency toward a more complex territorial organisation. Next to the strengthening of the European-wide institutions of the Union there is also a strengthening of the sub-state level. It is a challenging thought to imagine under the European-wide umbrella a postmodern future, with a complex co-existing and interacting mixture of territorial, transterritorial and functional forms of association and authority (Anderson 1996). However, in the direct advancement of relaxation of étatism territoriality still plays a prominent role.

In the second half of the twentieth century, several centralised states in Europe have turned to regionalisation by allocating competencies to democratically elected regional bodies. In the 1950s the Federal Republic of Germany and Austria were the only decentralised states among the present fifteen members of the European Union. Since then, the federal model has been de facto adopted in post-Franco Spain, and de jure adopted in Belgium. The regionalisation of Italy that was enshrined in the constitution of 1948 has been implemented in the early 1970s. The UK has devolved political powers to Scotland and Wales. Even centralist France has introduced a regional tier in its state structure. The only unitary states that are left in the EU are smaller ones, and even here regional governance is an issue for discussion (Bullmann 1997).

Also at the level of the EU the regions are recognised. In discourses on the future of the Union the models of “a Europe of the States” and “a Federal Europe” were supplemented with the radical alternative of “a Europe of Regions”. Although the regions envisaged are usually of a larger scale than intra-national regions, it would imply dismantling of states. Decentralisation was sanctioned by adoption of the subsidiary principle in the Maastricht Treaty. The Union has established the consultative Committee of the Regions, with regional and local representatives. Constituent regions of the federal member states can be represented in the EU Council of Ministers. The EU commission has liaison offices in numerous regions and many regions have themselves represented in Brussels. Interest in regional affairs is also manifested by EU support for regional cultures like the subsidising of the European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages and the research project Euromosaic on the effect of the single market project for sub-state language groups (Biscoe 2001). Regions are clearly interested in the European dimension of politics, as appears from several European associations of regions.

Despite evident differences in the direct occasions for the regionalisation projects in the countries mentioned above, the overall trend of increasing regional weight is commonly attributed to two forces. The first is a need to decentralise competencies from the state-level, due to the increasing inability of national governments to manage regional affairs in an environment of global competition and a European economic space supervised by European-wide institutions. Since the crisis of the 1980s capacity of central authorities has ceased to conduct redistributionalist regional planning policies and to support regions with a one-sided agricultural economic base or an obsolescent industrial structure by directing exogenous industrial investments (Dostál c.s. 1988). Instead, regions had to take over responsibility and foster their own indigenous development and to organise their competitive strength in the open European market for exogenous investments (Keating 1998). More in general, central governments reconsidered the efficacy and efficiency of the territorial administrative system and chose for the neo-liberal approach of slim central bureaucracy. In addition to this, decentralisation of responsibilities to democratic regional institutions must also be seen as a way to maintain and improve legitimacy of the political system (Grasse 2001).

The second force is the emergence of pressures from regional actors demanding greater political independence. This regionalism is linked with dynamics of distinct identities of regions and regional populations. The region is represented as an imagined community linked to a territorial homeland. Rising regional awareness and assertiveness has multiple grounds. The most eye-catching examples are associated with claims on sovereignty for ethnic minorities in their historical homelands. This could possibly be explained from a latent failure of nation-building, from ethnic reactions to economic exploitation or from inter-ethnic competition (Nielsen 1985).

However, the regionalism of today cannot merely be considered as a manifestation of ethnicity (Agnew 2001). There are also examples of so-called 'bourgeois regionalism' in economically advanced regions that do not have populations with particular ethnic identities (Harvie 1994). It seems more realistic to consider the identities of regions and their populations that play a role in the regionalism of today, as social constructs, that can be created or liberally reproduced from history. These constructions are forged in a specific context under the influence of social, economic and political pressures (Keating 1998). From this point of view the pressures from globalisation and European unification play a crucial role. The need for decentralisation of responsibilities from the state-level is mirrored by a desire of regional elites for a free hand to come up for their interests in a European and global system. As local players lack the necessary weight to play a role in this game, bundling of local interests into regional ones is an adequate strategy.

The spirit of regionalism can also be attributed to another phenomenon from the context of globalisation and the present condition of human society (Featherstone 1993). The strong position of national cultures and national communities as points of reference for human identities is challenged by global communication, the declining visibility and significance of national institutions, and the withering prestige of state power in Europe. In multiple patterns of territorial, cultural and political identities, national identities have become relatively less important. To great extent this can also be claimed

for identities affiliated with religion and class, that have lost much of their appeal due to the intensive secularisation in Europe and the complexity of social stratification in the post-industrial societies. The relative vacuum that is left by weakened attractiveness of these traditional nodes of identity makes it easier to mobilise groups around regional identities. All the more because the relatively small-scale regional communities, and their attributes and symbols, are easily recognisable compared to more distant and abstract alternatives (Agnew 2001). To increasing recognition of, and identification with, a regional environment and community adds increasing reflexivity and the demand for capacities to make conscious decisions on its future developments.

Although these forces seem to be at work all over Europe, there is by far not emerging a uniform pattern of regions filling the European space. The processes going on have different effects and outcomes in accordance with different structural conditions at the level of the regions and also at the level of their respective states. Regions do vary considerably in scale, from millions of inhabitants to a few hundreds of thousands. They also differ in character. Keating (1998) distinguishes between regions with strong cultural and historical identities, regions that lack these identities but have firm institutions, and regions that are purely administrative entities. Between and within the states are considerable differences in the degree of regional identification vis à vis national identification (Chauvel 1995). There is also a wide range in the extent to which regionalism is politicised. Within the EU, manifestations of regionalism can range from an apolitical form of folklore, to violent political activism. Regionalisation policies in the EU were mainly restricted to the larger states (Bullmann 1997). Among the smaller ones, regionalisation is modest or absent, with Belgium and Austria as evident exceptions. There is also considerable differentiation concerning the uniformity, the related concept of regions, and substance of regionalisation. France with its rational system of territorial administration has newly introduced a uniform pattern of administrative regions consisting of bundled départements. In Spain, the UK and Belgium the pattern is asymmetric with different arrangements for historical regions in Spain and the UK and 'sui generis' regions in Belgium. The English core of the UK has remained under centralist rule. Italy is somewhere in between, with a uniform pattern of twenty regions among which five regions with a strong cultural and regional identity have a special autonomy.

Developments so far do not only clearly reflect differing structural conditions of size and institutional legacy, but they should also be considered as structural conditions for further developments including possible emergence of trans-border regions. Further developments do also depend on agents and actors with different motivations and agendas. The initiatives from above and from below seem to conjuncture in a concerted effort, but it might be better to consider them as interacting forces producing incentives and opportunities. There is a distinction between the drives behind regionalisation and those behind regionalism. According to Grasse (2001) considerations from the centre point-of view are functionalistic, while the considerations behind the regionalism from below are more based on a mixture of emancipatory aspirations. In relation to this, a rigid application of the metaphoric dichotomy between above and below is open to debate (Häkli 2000). This dichotomy has proven its usefulness as a generalising analytical framework for understanding a variety of manifestations of growing

significance of regions. But, stressing the horizontal associations at the level of the region and at the levels of the state or the EU inclines to disregard possibility of vertical association between certain regional actors and actors at higher levels of action.

The rise of interregional trans-border co-operation

First initiatives in the 1960s and 1970s to establish official cross-border relations at regional scale were made by non-central government authorities (Murphy 1999; Reichenbach et al. 1999a; Schulz 1999). These older cases are located along the internal borders in the historical core of the EU comprising the Benelux-countries, Western Germany, France and Italy, and also around the Swiss border cities of Basel and Geneva. Peripheral agricultural and old industrial areas in the Benelux and France with unemployment and abundant space bordered adjacent parts of the flourishing economies of Germany and Switzerland.

The main aim of these alliances was to ease co-ordinated policies and functional integration, although some also claimed to seek objectives like promoting awareness of historical bonds and common regional identities. The more idealistic aim of breaking down nationalist thinking by bringing together populations from different countries was primarily adopted by local authorities, who set up non-regionalised twin city associations (Reichenbach et al 1999a). However, also the functionalist economic co-operation in the beginning of the EU was part of a political project intended to contribute to reconciliation, in particular between France and Germany (Shore 2000). In the original EU with six members the idea of unification was promoted by associating it with the precedent of Charlemagne's Empire, which is a part of all six national histories.

The trans-border alliances between the non-central authorities in the regions took a territorial shape, raised institutions, such as councils, secretariats and working groups, and were attributed with names such as "Regio Basiliensis", "Saar-Lor-Lux" or just "Euregio". Euregio or Euroregion now has become a general expression for trans-border alliances of adjacent non-central territorial authorities. In the beginning legal formalisation of institutionalised co-operation was handicapped by differences between national administrative and legal systems, and reservation of foreign relations under public law for central governments. In a later phase, the many local trans-border alliances have become facilitated by participation of higher levels of government and bi- and tri-lateral treaties on cross-border co-operation of local authorities (Schulz 1999; Lötscher 1991; Bakouros 2001).

In the 1970s also emerged some platforms of trans-border interregional alliance at a much higher scale-level. In 1972, a group of ten German and Austrian federal lands, Swiss cantons and Italian regions in and around the Central Alps, founded ARGE-ALP. This was followed by the partly overlapping ALPEN-ADRIA further to the east, and COTARO with cantons and regions in Switzerland, France and Italy in the western Alps. Since 1988 the four economically advanced regions of Baden-Württemberg in Germany, Rhône-Alps in France, Catalonia in Spain and Lombardy in Italy co-operate in a trans-national network sponsored by the EU program for research and development.

Since 1980 increase and amplification of trans-border alliances, is fostered by the Council of Europe and the European Union. The Council of Europe is involved

because it aims at encouragement of non-centralist democracy and a free international co-operation of democratic institutions. In 1980 the Council of Europe concluded the "Madrid Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities", better known as just "Madrid Convention". This document provides for a framework to back up cross-border co-operation by agreements under public law. Although this convention is only binding for member-states after ratification, and gives just a framework, it became a significant political incentive for national governments to enable legal bases for trans-border alliances between non-central authorities (Perkmann 1999).

In 1990 the European Union introduced its first INTERREG Program, succeeded in resp. 1994 and 2000 by INTERREG II and INTERREG III. INTERREG provides for financial incentives. One of the purposes is to promote trans-border co-operation between regional and local public authorities and semi-public organisations, by funding locally initiated programs and projects for integrated economic development. In particular since the European Union's INTERREG programs have started in 1990, many forms of cross-border initiatives are proliferating along the internal and external borders of the EU.

First steps toward trans-border co-operation in the 1960s and 1970s were prudent and not very dynamic. But probably the 'learning effects' of these first superfluous meetings and consultations should not be underestimated (Christiansen & Jørgensen 2000). In the historical core of the EU, several trans-border regions are considered to have had a successful path of development (Uijen 1999). Experiences of the longer established regional alliances in the border areas in the original EU of six show that these have made progress in strengthening trans-national institutions and the widening of contacts (Aykaç 1994). Local authorities co-operate in physical planning, infrastructure, mutual use of public services and developed common projects (Cappelin & Batey 1993; Schultz 1999). In particular co-operation in the functional city-regions of Basel and Geneva has achieved substantial results. An appealing example in the Regio Basiliensis is a regional airport opened at French territory, which serves the whole adjacent area in France, Switzerland and Germany. However, from the opposite point of view it is also claimed that even in older trans-border regions co-operation and integration is still confined by institutional, political and cultural-psychological obstacles (Reichenbach et al. 1999b). The activities in the framework of the Euroregions are predominantly focussed on co-operation in non politicised functional and technical matters. In Saar-Lor-Lux, substantial co-operation was mainly an affair for the small-scale local authorities close to the border (Schulz 1999). In line with this, the institutions, symbols and discourses in many Euroregions are not very powerful as instruments in the construction of social consciousness of border regions. In Saar-Lor-Lux the institutions are unknown to the average inhabitant (Schultz 1999). Survey research in the Euroregions Enschede-Gronau, Rhine-Meuse-North, and Meuse-Rhine has shown that over 70 percent of the respondents did not know the Euroregion or its institutions (Spoormans 1999). A study on Meuse-Rhine demonstrated that development of the socio-cultural dimensions of region building had not followed the progress of formal institutionalisation (Beek 1996).

It seems that the recent boost to trans-border co-operation by the INTERREG-programs are not giving strong incentives to more intensive construction of trans-

-border regions. INTERREG is a part of the Structural Funds policies of the EU, and as such it is primarily aimed at promotion of economic development. Although the Structural Funds policy is mainly concerned with development in regional settings, the INTERREG programs aim at removing of barriers and blind spots in a network pattern of economic development over a common European economic space (Capelin 1993). INTERREG is focused at two types of regions of completely different kind and scale (COM 2000). It promotes trans-national network co-operation at all levels of governance in extended macro-regions for large scale physical planning, infrastructure and environment. These macro-regions, such as North-West Europe, North Sea Area, the Alps, Western Mediterranean Area, South West Europe and Atlantic Area, partly or completely cover several countries and sometimes overlap.

The INTERREG programs also support cross-border co-operation between authorities in so-called NUTS 3 regions along borders, in regional development, physical planning and environmental policy. Co-operation in these trans-border regions, for instance in the field of infrastructure, is seen as beneficial for development of these areas themselves, but should also contribute to open the gates in national boundaries that cross the European economic space. The more than thousand NUTS 3 regions in the EU are the third stage of increasingly refined administrative-statistical regional subdivision. These territories are relatively small and have a low political significance (Casellas & Galley 1999). Because of their small scale they usually fall within larger territories with more significant regional characteristics.

Moreover, the implementation of the NUTS 3 sub-program does not very strongly enforce trans-border regional institutions. Church and Reed (1996; 1999) found in the area surrounding the English Channel that cross-border institutional networks tend to be flexible and variable depending on opportunity structures. According to Perkmann (1996), INTERREG cross-border co-operation is an example of successful multi-level governance, but mainly within the national administrative hierarchy. The EU funding is mediated by national authorities or federal sub-state authorities, which are also responsible for supervision.

The discussion above reveals that interregional trans-border co-operation as such should not be considered as a powerful and overall agent to construction of trans-border regions with strong regional identities. However, it also appears that in course of time trans-border functional integration is advancing and incentives and opportunities for regional actors to build up interregional alliances have considerably increased. From a processual point of view, opportunity, endorsement and promotion of trans-border co-operation and the related discourses have become an active force in the regional dynamics of border zones, of which direction and outcomes are channelled by structural conditions and the agendas of regional actors.

The Belgian-German border region

Almost along the whole distance of Belgian-German border, population at both sides speaks German. The territory of the German-speaking Community in Belgium covers two separated areas with 70.000 inhabitants in the Walloon province of Liège. These lands belong to Belgium since the end of World War I with an interruption

during World War II when they were annexed into Germany proper. During the nineteenth century the areas were a part of Prussia and the unified Germany. Great majority of the population considers Hochdeutsch as their principal official language. In the 1930s about half of the population voted for pro-German lists (Verdoodt 1968; Rosensträter 1985).

Due to common historical experiences around the two World Wars and the constitutional division of Belgium in linguistic territories in the 1960s, the shared linguistic identity of the population of the two areas has become a regional identity (Jenniges 1998). This was further enhanced by the federalisation of the Belgian state in the early 1990s. In the dual federal model of the Belgium, with parallel divisions in three regions and in three communities the German-speaking have an own community equivalent to the French and the Flemish communities. The German-speaking Community with a government and a parliament has fairly extensive competencies including the capacity to conclude foreign treaties. Because its jurisdiction coincides with the German language area it is in fact a regional government. It even has assumed a number of originally regional competencies from Wallonia.

At the German side of the border the political territorial situation is far from symmetric. The two parts of the German-speaking Community border on the German federal lands of North Rhine-Westphalia and Rhineland Palatinate as well as on the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg in the south. The northern part is only a few kilometres away from the German border-city of Aachen (Aix-la-Chapelle). Due to the long lasting economic crisis, socio-economic orientation and commuter-flows to the industrial areas of Wallonia have slackened off. The northern part is becoming integrated in the urban field of Aachen, with intensive cross-border commuting and even considerable dwelling of German citizens. The rural southern part is adjacent to comparable rural areas abroad, and tends to commute to southern Luxembourg (Markusse 2000).

The German-speaking Community is engaged in two different trans-border interregional alliances. In the north they participate in the Euroregion Meuse-Rhine. In the south they take part in an alliance that is provisionally baptised as "The Greater Region" (Grossregion/ Grande Region), while some of its institutions also use the name Saar-Lor-Lux-Rhine.

In the northern Euroregion Meuse-Rhine the private law based Regio Aachen just across the German border is an important participant. However, the territory of the Euroregion has a much larger scale than the functional region of the agglomeration of Aachen. This Euroregion that was founded in 1976 also covers the Dutch province of Limburg and the Belgian provinces of Limburg and Liège, and includes two other major border-cities of Liège and Maastricht. The German-speaking Community became a participant after the federalisation of Belgium in 1992 (www.euregio-mr.org). This Euroregion allying regions with French, Dutch and German-speaking inhabitants in three countries, cannot be considered as an ethnic German Euroregion.

The same applies for "The Greater Region" further to the south (<http://www.granderegion.net>). This region has its core in the triangle Saar-Lor-Lux of the German federal Saarland, the French departement of Lorraine and the independent Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, Trans-border co-operation in this area was in line with the spirit of the beginning European project. The Saar-Lor-Lux triangle has coal-mining,

iron ore deposits, and related iron and steel plants within close distance at different sides of borders. It has a history of border shifts and Franco-German warfare. Around this core, trans-border co-operation widened its scope in several institutional frameworks with different territorial extents (Schulz 1999). Soon subdivisions of the German land of Rhineland-Palatinate became involved and since the mid-1980s also regional authorities in southern Belgium. Today “the Greater Region” is a territorial conglomerate of Saarland, Rhineland-Palatinate, Lorraine, Luxembourg, the Walloon region, the French Community and the German-speaking Community.

It is clear that neither the Euroregion Meuse-Rhine, nor “the Greater Region” can be considered as impetus for an ethnic-German trans-border region in the German-Belgian border zone. Both incorporate populations with different national and cultural backgrounds. They aim at functional co-operation and integration to foster regional socio-economic development. They were initiated in the 1960s and 1970s, long before the German-speaking Community was founded and could get involved in the trans-border interregional alliances.

There have never been calls or initiatives to add an ethnic German Euroregion to the existing trans-national interregional alliances. This should of course be explained against the background of World War II, and the subsequent public rejection of German nationalism at both sides of the border. However, after half a century of peace and German reunification it is not realistic to consider aversion of aggressive German nationalism as the sole obstacle for a benign ethnic German Euroregion. The present regional identities of the German-speaking populations at both sides of the border have developed in the separate and very asymmetric settings of the Belgian and the German states. Moreover, there is not a real or a perceived historical territory that could serve as a reference. At the German side are two different large federal lands. Smaller regional units in Germany such as the Eifel or the functional region of the Aachen agglomeration, border each on only one of the two separated parts of the German-speaking Community and do not have much in common with the other (Eisermann & Zeh 1980). The history of annexation and the federalisation of Belgium have brought about a common regional identity for the two parts of the German linguistic territory in Belgium. Although the high degree of political independence for this relatively small area must be mainly attributed to the outcome of the struggle between the two larger linguistic groups in the country, it has also fulfilled regional demands from the German-speaking themselves (Markusse 1999a). But, this does not imply that they feel strong bonds with their German neighbours. The self-chosen name for their German-speaking Community, that strikingly contrasts with the name French Community chosen by the French-speaking Belgians, has never been contested.

The Basque Country

Basque is spoken by people in the three provinces of the Autonomous Basque Community and the northern part of the adjacent autonomous Foral Community of Navarra in Spain, and in the territory of three historic provinces in France which is now part of the departement Pyrenees-Atlantique. The extension of the Basque Country is defined by the Basque ethno-nationalist ideology as a historical

homeland. It is impossible to clearly delimitate a territory of Basques-speakers or even a Basque cultural area, as knowledge of the Basque language is not universal and population of the areas cannot be considered to have common cultural characteristics (MacClancy 1996). Basque nationalism that has mobilised one of the most vigorous ethno-regional movements in Europe was originally based on the conception of a Basque race of people, with the partially lost language in a symbolic role. In nationalist discourses the "Greater Basque Country" includes the whole territory of the Basque Community, Navarra and the three former provinces in France (Raento 1999). However, Basque identity is confessed by only 34 percent of population in Navarra, against 74 percent in the Autonomous Basque Community. In the part at the French side of the border 48 percent declares Basque identity (Mansvelt Beck 1999).

There is a great asymmetry in the political status of the concerning administrative units at both sides of the borders. At the Spanish side the Basque Community and Navarra have autonomous governments with ample competencies. Their natural counterpart at the French side is the Region of Aquitaine. This territorial body has an elected government with sufficient competencies to take part in control of institutionalised of trans-border co-operation. The region covers five départements. The 250,000 inhabitants of the Basque lands are less than half of the population of their département Pyrenees Atlantique. In the whole region they are only one tenth of the total population. Basque demands for an own separate département have always been refused by central authorities. In the 1980s the French socialist government even broke an earlier promise (Letamendia 1997). As a soft alternative the French Basques are allowed to have themselves represented by a Basque Country Development Council with membership from different sectors in public life and a Council of Elected Representatives with members recruited from the departemental and community councils.

At the end of the 1980s regional authorities in this area have embarked on trans-border co-operation. In 1989 the foundations for a Euroregion were laid by a collaboration protocol between the Autonomous Basque Community and the Region of Aquitaine. In 1992 they were joined by the Foral Community of Navarra. Due to the incorporation of the whole region of Aquitaine, the territory of the Euroregion Aquitaine-Euskadi-Navarra by far not coincides with the "Greater Basque Country". This is strikingly expressed by an unofficial web-site of a so-called "Euroregion" Greater Basque Country, showing a map of the Basque Autonomous Community and Navarra with only the Basque historical lands at the French side of the border (<http://www.euskalherria.org>). The site-owner has included shortcuts to the web sites of the autonomous governments of the Basque Country and Navarra in Spain and of the Council of Elected Representatives in the French Basque lands. In fact, the French Basques are hardly represented in the trans-border interregional alliance between Aquitaine and the two Spanish regions because they lack a necessary territorial governmental institution.

In 1993 local authorities and sponsoring higher authorities agreed upon the foundation of a so-called "Basque Eurocity" in the zone along the Atlantic coast from the French city of Bayonne to the Spanish city of San Sebastian. This interregional alliance aims at the formation of a trans-border urban zone in this corridor between France and Spain. Evidently the territorial extent of this trans-border region covers only a smaller

part of the Greater Basque Country as a whole, as well as of the French Basque lands. The main participants are the province of Guipuzkoa in the Autonomous Basque Community and an intermunicipal board in the agglomeration of Bayonne-Anglet-Biarritz, together with a limited number of smaller Basque municipalities at both sides of the border. At the French side the project is sponsored by the departemental authorities of Pyrenees Atlantique and the regional authorities of Aquitaine (website Eurocité Basque: <http://www.eurocite.org/fran/index.html>).

It is obvious that the absence of a Basque territorial authority at the French side of the border is a main obstacle to the formation of a Basque trans-border Euroregion. Basque unification is not a concern for the regional elites of Aquitaine. Due to the absence of a Basque departement it is even hard to link the French Basque territories to the Spanish Basque territories in a softer institutionalised way. Motivation of Aquitaine to start co-operation with the Basque Autonomous Community and Navarra must be sought in the expectation of regional economic benefits, in line with the EU philosophy of promoting trans-border networks in larger macro-regions within the open economic space. The discourses on trans-border co-operation focus on transforming this peripheral area in the south-west of France into a node in a future "Axe Atlantique" that can meet with the axes of economic gravity and dynamism further to the east (Letamendia 1997).

The French centre has always been able to resist Basque regionalist demands for a departement at relatively moderate costs. Although there are some radical activist groups, who adhere the ideal of a greater Basque Country, the level of mobilisation and of pressures and violence is not comparable to that at the Spanish side of the border. Basque nationalism is a century old, and has developed from quite different conditions at both sides of the seventeenth century border. French Basque regionalist demands seems to be much more inspired by cultural protectionist and regional welfare considerations than by nationalist ideology (Douglass 1998).

Moreover, also at the Spanish side of the boundary there is too much division of minds to firmly associate trans-border interregional alliance with a Greater Basque Country discourse. This idea is the most rigidly embraced by the radical factions of the Basque nationalist movement. In Navarra radical Basque nationalism has limited support. Considerable share of population and the elected autonomous bodies adhere a Navarrese regionalism that does not regard this region as a part of a unified Basque country. In the Autonomous Basque Community Basque nationalism has much wider support, but there is a marked division between the radical wing and the moderates who have decisive participation in the autonomous government. Although the last do not explicitly reject a Greater Basque Country, they seem to be satisfied with the autonomous status of the Basque core region within the Spanish state and try to keep a balance between the attractive potential of ethno-nationalism and the risks of radicalisation.

The territory of the former Habsburg province of Tyrol

The Habsburg province of Tyrol is divided between the Austrian Republic and Italy after World War I. The Austrian part is now the federal land of Tyrol with a population of 670,000. The Italian part has become the autonomous region of Trentino-Alto

Adige/South Tyrol. This Italian region is subdivided in the two provinces of Bolzano (Alto Adige/South Tyrol) in the north bordering to Austria, and Trento (Trentino) in the south. To avoid unnecessary confusion below, the name Trentino-Alto Adige will be used for the region and the names South Tyrol and Trentino for the provinces.

The population of 470,000 in Trentino is almost homogeneously Italian-speaking. In South Tyrol seventy percent of the 460,000 inhabitants are German-speaking. Here is a large minority of Italian-speaking with an immigrant background. These population numbers imply that the German-speaking are a majority in the province of South Tyrol but minority in the region. The region of Trentino-Alto Adige, is in fact a rather hollow overarching institution. After firm ethno-nationalist resistance of the German-speaking in the 1950s and 1960s, far-reaching autonomous competencies were granted to the two provinces that have the status of autonomous provinces within the autonomous region (Alcock 1970). The autonomy statute of 1972 has brought political stability in this border zone after a period of conflict and terrorist violence.

The German-speaking population in the province of South Tyrol and the German-speaking in Austrian Tyrol have always confessed a common Tyrolese identity. In the past, Austrian politicians have taken responsibility to the German-speaking at the Italian side of the border. The autonomy for their province of South Tyrol is based on an international agreement between Italy and Austria. In the ethno-nationalist discourses of the German-speaking, figure not completely overlapping versions of Tyrolese identity. There is a well-developed Tyrolese nationalist ideology that refers to the shared history of the entire population in the historical county of Tyrol. This Tyrolese imagined community includes the territory and Italian-speaking population of Trentino, although there is in fact an ethnic cleavage between the German-speaking and the Italian-speaking in the region (Cole & Wolf 1974). A somewhat version presents the German-speaking Tyrolese in Italy and Austria as a cultural-linguistic core-community of historical Tyrol inhabiting the largest and most central part of its territory. The German-speaking Tyrolese nationalists do not really insist on incorporation of Trentino. The Italian-speaking population of Trentino does not participate in Tyrolese nationalism, but is inclined to Trentino regionalist discourses (Markuse 1996).

Since the end of World War II, there have been special relations between Austrian Tyrol and the province of South Tyrol (Markuse 1999b). In 1949 Italy and Austria concluded a treaty that allowed free trade of local agricultural and artisan products between the different parts of historical Tyrol. The German-speaking university in the Austrian Tyrolese capital of Innsbruck, is at both sides of the border officially considered as an institution for the whole area of Austrian Tyrol and South Tyrol. Here one can graduate in Italian law, and the Austrian medical qualifications have become recognised in Italy.

The regional political structures at both sides of the border are much more symmetric than in the two other cases of the Belgian-German border zone and the Basque Country. The Austrian federal land of Tyrol and the autonomous provinces of South Tyrol and Trentino belong to a larger group of relatively autonomous regions in the German, Swiss, Italian and once Yugoslavian parts of the Central Alps and the adjacent Adriatic. Since the foundation of ARGE-ALP and of ALPEN-ADRIA in the 1970s, the different regional authorities in the territory of the former Habsburg Tyrol co-operate in the

much wider setting of macro-regional trans-border alliances, that cannot be considered as emerging Tyrolean trans-border regions (Staudigl 1998).

Formal trans-border interregional alliance at the lower scale level of the historic Tyrol has started much later. Since the beginning of the 1990s the conception of Euroregion Tyrol was more and more used in the smaller variant of Austrian Tyrol and South Tyrol as well as in the larger variant including Trentino. In 1995 the name Euroregion Tyrol was used for the joint representation of the three 'regions' to the EU-commission in Brussels. In 1998, the Euroregion "Tirol-Alto Adige/South Tyrol-Trentino" was proclaimed by the joint assembly of their three parliaments. The new Euroregion is not attributed with institutions (Perkmann 1996). The only symbolic institutionalisation are triennial joint meetings of the regional parliaments, but this symbolic co-operation antedates the proclamation of the Euroregion.

In contrast to the Euroregions in the Basque Country and the Belgian-German border zone, this Euroregion coincides with a historical region with an inherited identity that is still strong. Also majority of its population can identify with this region. While the former cases have shown structural obstacles for formation of Euroregions with strong identities, here can identify more moderate obstacles raised by prudence of regional actors who want to avoid discourses on a restored historical Tyrol in a unified Europe.

Although most of the German-speaking in South Tyrol seem to be satisfied with the present situation, fear for latent German-Tyrolean nationalist aspirations is not completely unrealistic. In the 1990s a prominent German-speaking politician published a plan for a gradual integration of South Tyrol into Austria (Pahl 1991). In the same period a mass-meeting for Tyrolean unity was going to attract so many people, that the authoritative heads of government of Austrian Tyrol and South Tyrol found it wise to take over the initiative in order to give a symbolic interpretation of unity in moderate speeches (Markusse 1996). Discussion on the issue is considered to raise tensions between the German-speaking and the ethnic Italian immigrant community in the province, among which considerable number are dissatisfied with the ethnic German domination of affairs enforced by the provincial autonomy (Markusse 1997). All the more because there have been calls for abolition of the overarching autonomous region of Trentino-Alto Adige with its Italian-speaking majority (Barozzi 1997).

The moderate German-speaking Tyrolean nationalists, who control the governments in South Tyrol and in Austrian Tyrol, seem to be satisfied with the situation of substantial autonomy for the province of South Tyrol, which implies a dominant position for the German-speaking majority. They show reluctance to take actions that potentially menace peaceful inter-ethnic relations in the province by awakening aspirations among extreme German-Tyrolean nationalists and following reactions from the Italian side. Although these risks are more and more diminishing, they still played a role in discussions on the establishment of a Euroregion when Austria joined the EU in the early 1990s (Luvéra 1996).

From a governance point of view, there is no urgent need for establishment of a Euroregion as an instrument to promote cross-border co-operation. German-Tyrolean politicians and officials from South Tyrol and Austrian Tyrol have always maintained friendly and co-operative relations. Moreover, since the 1970s they also have a formal platform for co-operation in the framework of ARGE-ALP and ALPEN-ADRIA.

When incentives to found a Euroregion in Tyrol increased in the 1990s, there were good reasons to avoid an exclusive union of Austrian Tyrol and South Tyrol with a dominant majority of German-speaking with a Tyrolese identity and a significant minority of ethnic Italians. The inclusion of the whole of historical Tyrol with Trentino neutralises the ethnic German Tyrolese nationalist meaning of the new Euroregion. This strategy is reflected in the history in the joint meetings of the regional parliaments (<http://www.euroregione.info>). These meetings have begun with a session of the two parliaments of Austrian Tyrol and South Tyrol after the conclusion of the agreement on the provincial autonomy for South Tyrol. In 1991 the regional parliament of Trentino and even that of the Austrian federal land of Vorarlberg were found prepared to participate in these meetings. Vorarlberg was once, for a limited period, joined with Tyrol but does certainly not share the German-Tyrolese identity. This most western federal land of Austria that is more interested in trans-border co-operation with adjacent Switzerland and Germany, later drew back its full participation but is still involved as observer.

Conclusion

It is not very likely that there will be a great number of Euroregions with strong regional identities and significant political positions in the foreseeable future. The three cases above have shown, that even in border zones where historical regions and ethnic populations are crossed by international boundaries this is not self-evident.

In the Belgian-German border zone and the Basque Country structural asymmetries between the two sides of the border avoid coincidence of territories of transborder alliances with regional territories having a historical or ethnic meaning that can serve as a powerful source for construction of a Euroregion with a strong regional identity. In the Basque case, the most important incongruence results from the different approaches to regionalisation in Spain and in France, in particular because at the French side regionalisation has ignored Basque regionalist demands for own territorial governance. In the case of the Belgian-German border area, incongruence includes regional identities. Regional identity is most pronounced at the Belgian side. It developed within the confines of the Belgian state and has overruled common German national identity and germs of common regional identities shared with the population across the border in Germany. Also in the Basque case identification with the Greater Basque Country is not equally shared in its constituent parts. Apart from the internal Spanish complication that the greater Basque discourse is juxtaposed by Navarrese regionalism, it is much less powerful at the French side of the border than in the neighbouring core of the Spanish Basque Country.

In the former Habsburg province of Tyrol, structural conditions of regionalisation and territorial patterns of regional identities seem to result in more favourable structural conditions for emergence of a Euroregion with a significant regional identity. In particular for a smaller variant that only includes Austrian Tyrol and South Tyrol. Here, inclusion of Trentino and careful institutionalisation of the Euroregion proofs, that dominant regional actors have not chosen for a strategy to adopt this opportunity. In contrast to more marginal radical actors, the dominating regional actors are not

inclined to use new opportunities to challenge the Italian state at the risk of resurgence of conflicts. Obviously, their regionalist demands have been adequately satisfied with the present autonomy arrangement.

Because of the more complicated situation, agendas of dominant regional actors in the Basque Country are more difficult to trace. Conflicts are of greater magnitude than in Tyrol and surpass the delicacies of alternative strategies for regionalisation of trans-border co-operation. Although dominant moderate regional actors in the Autonomous Basque Community officially subscribe to the claims of complete independence of a Greater Basque Country from Spain and France, they do not seem to seek alternatives for the present politically neutralised transborder inter-regional alliance as an instrument toward that aim.

Generalising from the three cases, it appears that even in the border zones where historical regions and ethnic populations are split by international boundaries can be many obstacles to institutionalisation of transborder regions with strong regional identities. To this must be added that the situation in Tyrol, where a historical political unit with a politicised identity was split in parts that still exist as autonomous regions, is exceptional in the present EU as well as in its coming Central European extension. In Central Europe most countries are small, and there are no signs of substantial regionalisation or foundation of autonomous regions. Identification with historical regions is often lost by substantial movement of people, such as in Poland and the Czech Republic. Even in the case of the Slovak border zone with Hungary with a Hungarian minority at the Slovak side, it is hard to discern a transborder regional unit with a distinct identity.

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