



National Regionalist Party Discourses in the Turbulent Years of Europe: 30 Years after Europe of the Regions

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Abstract

National regionalist parties have been pursuing territorial-based interests and representing local voices at the different levels of decision making. Since the 1970s, they have benefitted from the European integration with its resulting multi-level governance and new opportunity structures, while chanting Europe of the Regions as a rallying concept. Noting the three recent major challenges, namely migration, terrorism and the rise of the extreme-right, this article seeks to examine how party discourses in regards to the EU among the national regionalists have evolved between 2014 and April 2018. It studies the change in the discourses of three moderate national regionalist parties and a region, i.e. Plaid Cymru of Wales, Femu a Corsica - Pè a Corsica of Corsica, Christian Social Union of Bavaria and Västra Götaland region – the four regions representing the four EU member states that have undergone the three major challenges most severely. In light of this, the article employs Slocum's and Van Lagenhove's conception of identity as discourse and adapts Tierney's three main constitutional aspirations to examine the status and the aspirations of the national regionalist parties. The comparison shows a divergence in their responses to the recent developments. The article argues that the parties are forced to rethink their strategy and reframe their primary focus, particularly aiming

their immediate agenda at the state, thus the continued fading of Europe of the Regions. The lack of local forces and identity explains the little change in the perception of Västra Gotäland on the EU. The determining factors are internal; Brexit dilemma for Plaid Cymru, unification of Corsican nationalists for Femu a Corsica - Pè a Corsica, rise of AfD and euroskepticism for CSU, and state-led regionalization for Västra Gotäland. Nevertheless, it is also argued that the change in the party discourses seems to be a temporary pause to concentrate on what is at hand.

Keywords: national regionalist parties, Europe of the Regions, European Union

Introduction

Among the political actors in Western Europe, those with territorial-based interests rooted in distinct identity, namely the national regionalist parties have gone through remarkable transformations throughout the past half century. Once downplayed and neglected, they have regained influence and relevance in politics particularly through the opportunity structures provided by the European Integration.¹ At the peak of national regionalist wave around 1990, there was an expectation that Europe of the Regions would become the new course for the integration.² Despite all the excitements by national regionalist parties, *Europe of the Nations* was clear to persist by the mid-1990s.³ Nevertheless, this political family have re-established themselves into the national and European decision makings and decentralization soon arrived in most Western European states. The regions, as a set of actors and a political arena, have contributed to the multi-level governance in Europe.⁴

Since the last European Parliament election in May 2014, the European Union (EU) has had a difficult time.

1 Lieven De Winter and Margarita Gomez-Reino Cachafeiro, "European Integration and Ethnoregionalist Parties," *Party Politics* 8, no.4 (2002): 483-503.

2 Anwen Elias, "Introduction: Whatever Happened to the Europe of the Regions? Revisiting the Regional Dimension of European Politics," *Regional & Federal Studies*, 18 no.5 (2008): 483-492, doi: 10.1080/13597560802351655.

3 Michael Keating, "A Quarter Century of the Europe of the Regions," *Regional & Federal Studies* 18, no.5 (2008): 629-635, doi: 10.1080/13597560802351630.

4 Elias, "Introduction: Whatever Happened to the Europe of the Regions? Revisiting the Regional Dimension of European Politics."

Three major challenges can be identified. The migrant crisis in 2015 brought in over a million of migrants and refugees into the European soil. Terrorist attacks became frequent in many important cities, triggered with November 2015 Paris attacks. The two challenges consequently created tensions within and between states that facilitate the rise of extreme-right populist actors. Moreover, the challenges are exacerbated by the Brexit vote by the British majority in the June 23, 2016 referendum. With a new European Parliament election looming ahead in 2019, it is clear this Member of the European Parliament (MEP) term has witnessed the turbulent years that have shaken the EU altogether.

Although national regionalist parties are generally committed to the European Integration,⁵ the exact demands and their conceptions of the EU are flexible as to ensure their national regional interests and identities. This article thus seeks to examine how party discourses on the EU among the national regionalist parties have evolved between 2014 and April 2018. Plaid Cymru (Party of Wales) of Wales, Femu a Corsica – Pè a Corsica (Let's make Corsica-For Corsica) of Corsica, Christian Social Union (CSU) of Bavaria, and Västra Götaland (West Sweden) region will represent the United Kingdom (UK), France, Germany and Sweden respectively. Party manifestos in regional, national and European elections are examined along with other channels of communication

5 Seth Kincaid Jolly, "The Europhile Fringe?: Regionalist Party Support for European Integration," *European Union Politics* 8, no.1 (2007): 109-130, doi: 10.1177/1465116507073290.

to the voters. Using Tierney's three main constitutional aspirations⁶ and identity as discourse provided by Slocum and Van Langenhove,⁷ this article argues that the framings of the EU by national regionalist parties do not converge in face of the three major challenges. The explanation to these diverse adaptations is internal, whether they be intermediate challenge, electoral strategy or attitude of the electorate. Moreover, the responses to the turbulent years of the EU are largely determined by the current positions of the parties in regards to the decision making at the national and European levels. The article also argues that the trend of the regional nationalist parties to move their discursive focus from Europe towards the state is likely a temporary process to recalibrate their political strategy, all while harnessing the available opportunity structures to advance their interests.

The article will start by providing general frameworks used to guide the study. Europe of the Regions will be discussed as a background for the workings of national regionalists today, followed by turbulent years of the EU since 2014 and objects of study selection. Each case will be examined. Then findings from the comparison will be discussed before a short conclusion. This article contributes

6 Stephen Tierney, "Flexible Accommodation: Another Case of British Exceptionalism?," in *Constitutionalism and the Politics of Accommodation in Multinational Democracies*, Jaime Lluch, ed. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 160-163.

7 Nikki Slocum and Luk Van Langenhove, "Identity and Regional Integration," in *Global Politics of Regionalism*, Mary Farrell, Björn Hettne and Luk Van Langenhove, eds. (Pluto Press, 2005), 137-139, <http://jstor.org/stable/j.ctt18fs9dj.13>.

to the limited literature regarding national regionalist actors and updates the status and attitudes of these parties towards the EU.

Identity and Constitutional Goals

The most popular definition of national regionalist⁸ party postulates that it stresses the group's unsurmountable cultural difference from the population and seeks structural changes of the government in order to better serve its interests, as posited by Lieven De Winter.⁹ However, some parties with strong national regional roots that are already in satisfied positions may not demand further changes on the structure of government, such is the case of Bavaria's CSU. This definition thus needs some complements as follow.

National regionalists are foremost characterized by their strong territorial-based identity. This sense of identity is shared collectively in a kind of Imagined Community.¹⁰ The demands and the policies of these actors are aimed to enhance the interests and the status which are built upon

8 Also referred to as sub-state nationalist, ethno-regionalist, ethno-nationalist, regional nationalist, autonomous parties and minority nationalist.

9 Lieven De Winter, *Non-state wide parties in Europe* (Institut de ciències polítiques i socials, 1994), 198, quoted in Frédéric Falkenhagen, "Les électors ethno-régionalistes en Europe occidentale : Etude comparée en Bavière, Ecosse, Flandre et au Pays de Galles," (Doctoral thesis, Ecole Doctorale de Sciences Po, 2010), 21-25.

10 "Imagined community," *Oxford Reference*, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095958187> (accessed on April 30, 2018).

their identity. Seiler concisely frames national regionalist parties as identity political parties.¹¹

The important aspect of identity that is employed in this article is the one used by Slocum and Van Langenhove. Since the content of identity is “dependent upon the way it is used in a particular context and is thus situation specific”, one must examine “the ways in which the concept is used and to what ends.”¹² *National* identity, including *regional national* identity, is thus discursive and serves as an instrument for political mobilization. The unfinished project of nation-building and the concept of national identity, for instance, aim to harmonize a country into one single homogenous identity.¹³ Seeing the open nature of globalization in the 21st century, an individual may identified oneself with any point of reference (a region, a nation or a supranational organization) and also attached oneself to more than one identity, increasing the relevance of regional identity.¹⁴ With the perspective of identity as a discourse, it is interesting to see how national regionalist parties project the image of the EU and how they align themselves in relations to it, and why they do so.

11 Daniel-Louis Seiler, “Les partis régionalistes,” *La pensée de midi* 21, no.2 (2007) : 49-56, <https://www.cairn.info/revue-la-pensee-de-midi-2007-2-page-49.htm>.

12 Slocum and Langenhove, “Identity and Regional Integration.”

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

The other useful framework is provided by Tierney. Although it was intended for substate national societies within plurinational states, in practice, our concerned regions share important elements with the original intention. Consequently, the framework is applicable in our study. Drawing from his work, national regionalists have three main constitutional aspirations; autonomy, representation and recognition.¹⁵ Autonomous self-government denotes the ability for the regional actors to have control over their internal affairs. Representation means the ability to represent their interests in national or international decision making. Lastly, recognition signifies that the status of the regions as a distinctive and equal entity with(in) the central state is acknowledged and ensured, especially in the constitution. In practice, these three demands are overlapping and complementing, but they may not be granted so by the central state. It is important to note that the constitutional status reflect the “principle of national equality”, more than just “accommodation” by the dominant socio-political group.¹⁶ The three general aspirations are very useful in determining the current positions of each party in relations to the central state and the EU. As will be shown below, the original status is vital to the goal setting of the national regionalists and will be a determinant factor to the changes of their discourses over the years.

15 Tierney, “Flexible Accommodation: Another Case of British Exceptionalism?”

16 Ibid.

Lastly, the European Integration produces a globalist trend of New Regionalism where regional actors pursue a bottom-up view on regionalism and autonomy in order to achieve economic and socio-cultural demands through transnational partnerships and paradiplomatic relations, often in contradiction with national authority's policy.¹⁷ The evolved landscape shaped by the EU proves to be instrumental for national regionalists as discussed in the next section.

Europe of the Regions – Then and now

Although the center-periphery cleavage is the most ancient Rakkianian cleavage, its relevance has always persisted. One reason is because the cleavages juxtapose one another and so transform the system altogether.¹⁸ The other reason is that there are always identity political actors who act in defense of the distinct local society, which are positioned on the opposite spectrum from the uniform central government. Accordingly, the origin of regional interest movements emerged along with the origin of nation-states.¹⁹ The European Integration, especially since the 1970s, has opened up new opportunity structures for the national

17 Jörgen Gren, "New Regionalism and West Sweden: Change in the Regionalism Paradigm," *Regional & Federal Studies* 12, no.3 (2002): 79-101, doi: 10.1080/714004766.

18 Falkenhagen, "Les électors ethnico-régionalistes en Europe occidentale: Etude comparée en Bavière, Ecosse, Flandre et au Pays de Galles," 21.

19 Seiler, "Les partis régionalistes."

regionalist parties to involve in the EU decision making.²⁰ It also allowed national regionalists to form an alliance to represent common agenda in the European Parliament, since the direct election of MEPs in 1979, under the formation of European Free Alliance (EFA).²¹ During this same period, the discourse of Europe of the Regions, in contrast with Europe of the Nations, was widely pronounced. The exact meaning of the concept to each party, however, varies.²²

Hepburn outlines three stages of the support for a Europe of the Regions.²³ Between 1979 and 1987, nationalist and left wing regionalists' opposition to the European Integration was prevalent. However, when the European platforms were clear to give advantages to the regionalist parties, their demands became converged aiming for regions' autonomy in Europe between 1988 and 1994. It is the same period that the discourse of Europe of the Regions became fervent, not only among the national regionalists. Since 1995 until 2005, the EU proved not to be the fortune as it was once expected and the parties reframed their strategies back aiming at their respective central states. In terms of economic growth, Borrás-Alomar, Christiansen and

20 Romain Pasquier, "La fin de 'l'Europe des regions'?", *Politique européenne* 50, no.4 (2015): 150-159, doi: 10.3917/poeu/050.0150.

21 De Winter and Gomez-Reino Cachafeiro, "European Integration and Ethnoregionalist Parties."

22 Elias, "Introduction."

23 Eve Hepburn, "The Rise and Fall of a 'Europe of the Regions'," *Regional & Federal Studies* 18, no.5 (2008): 537-555, doi: 10.1080/13597560802351572.

Rodríguez-Pose argue that economic activities are still largely defined by nation-states and their borders.²⁴

Nevertheless, the development during these periods increases the relevance of territorial politics and national regionalist parties.²⁵ The growing regionalist demands and the supranational nature of the EU act as two-way pressures reducing the state's power.²⁶ Other than the fact that the EU may not always share the same ends and means with its member states, it also helps national regionalists to evade state pressures while directly respond to some of their demands.²⁷ Structural and Cohesion Funds provide an alternative to regions' dependence on the central states. Local languages, the strongest cultural aspect of these regions, are protected through international frameworks such as the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.²⁸ National regionalist actors also have a number of channels

24 Susana Borrás-Alomar, Thomas Christiansen and Andrés Rodríguez-Pose, "Towards a 'Europe of the Regions'? Visions and Reality from a Critical Perspective," *Regional Politics and Policy* 4, no.2 (1994): 1-27.

25 Elías, "Introduction."

26 A globalist tendency that can be seen in James N. Rosenau, "Citizenship in a Changing Global Order," in *Governance without government: order and change in world politics*, James N. Rosenau and Ernst-Otto Czempiel, eds. (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 280-285.

27 Deniel Hermant, "Editorial. Nationalismes et construction européenne," *Cultures & Conflits* 7 (1992): 1-11, doi: 10.4000/conflits.658.

28 Although European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages is a treaty under the Council of Europe, it has brought a considerable debate in many European countries. In French case, see Michel Feltin-Palas, "Langues régionales: avec ou sans Charte, le gouvernement peut agir," *L'express*, October 28, 2015. https://www.lexpress.fr/region/langues-regionales-avec-ou-sans-charte-le-gouvernement-agit_1730181.html (accessed on April 28, 2018).

to act both as decision makers and as interest groups at the European level, at times at the cost of central governments.

The pressures from both below and above pushed western European countries to adjust their government by decentralization and devolution in the 1990s. In the UK, Tony Blair's government pushed devolution reforms which inter alia created National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Government in 1999. The Assembly gradually gained more power through referenda in 2006 and 2011, notably possessing legislative power independent from the Westminster Parliament. For Corsica, the French government decentralized by establishing the Assemblée de Corse (Corsican Assembly) in 1982. In 1991, Corsica was elevated from a region into Collectivité Territoriale de Corse (territorial collectivity of Corsica) equipped with the Executive Council, the Assembly and the Economic, Social and Cultural Council. From two departments, the island became unified in 2018 with a symbolic fusion into a single Collectivité de Corse (Collectivity of Corsica). The Freistaat Bayern or Free State of Bavaria did not undergo important transformations in recent years due the great autonomy and competences that a land (state) has under the German Federal system. Finally, the case of Sweden, Västra Gotäland was created a "region", legally a län (county), in 1998 by combining three smaller counties. This is purely an experiment by the Swedish government. Despite being a strong unitary state and having no substantial debate on federalism in Sweden, it is suggested that the actual functioning of

Swedish government is a hybrid between a strong central government and autonomous local governments, especially at the municipality level.²⁹ In short, developments during the peak of Europe of the Regions has contributed to the increase of autonomy, representation and recognition of national regionalist parties.

Apart from indirect influence through nation states, by mid-2000s national regionalists have six main channels of direct regional interest representation to the EU; Committee of the Regions, Council of Ministers, European Commission, European Parliament, Regional Brussels offices, and European networks and associations.³⁰ It is important to note that the ability to represent their interests and influence the European decision making is largely dependent upon their status and their competences granted by their own central governments.³¹ The status and competence are based on regions' affluence and influence and can therefore be translated into national regionalists' autonomy, representation and recognition at home and at the EU tables. Under seemingly conditions, they can overrule their central government policies and influence decisions of the EU.³²

29 Niklas Eklun, "Sweden: Federalism in the land of centrally guided regionalization," in *Routledge Handbook of Regionalism and Federalism*, John Loughlin, John Kindaid and Wilfried Swenden, eds. (Routledge, 2013), 302-316.

30 Michaël Tatham, "Going Solo: Direct Regional Representation in the European Union," *Regional & Federal Studies* 18, no.5 (2008): 493-515, doi.10.1080/13597560802351523.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

The European Parliament is remarkably significant for the national regionalists. MEPs have considerable power in the EU, also over the Commissioners since the latter are under checks of the MEPs and need the approval of the European Parliament in the legislation process. Most important of all, MEPs are representatives of the electorate and thus arguably have more legitimacy than the bureaucratic and distant Commission. Most national regionalists are united under the EFA with self-determination for stateless nations and identity diversity as core demands.

There was a concern when the 2004 European Parliament election saw EFA MEPs reduced by half to only five seats, mainly due to the effects of European enlargement.³³ Fortunately, the number bounced back to eight MEPs in 2009 election and seven seats in 2014 election, proving the persistent relevance of regionalist interests. The impact of 2004 election along with other disappointments in the EU opportunity structures, however, was grave. It is widely agreed that as Europe of the Regions wanes away,³⁴ national regionalist parties moderate their EU-enthusiastic discourses and become somewhat more realistic in relation to the EU.³⁵ One significant element is that the national

33 Peter Lynch and Lieven De Winter, "The Shrinking Political Space of Minority Nationalist Parties in an Enlarged Europe of the Regions," *Regional & Federal Studies* 18, no.5 (2008): 583-606, doi. 10.1080/13597560802351606.

34 Elias, "Introduction." And Keating, "A Quarter Century of the Europe of the Regions."

35 Lynch and De Winter, "The Shrinking Political Space of Minority Nationalist Parties in an Enlarged Europe of the Regions." Also in Hepburn, "The Rise and Fall of a 'Europe of the Regions'."

regionalist electorates are not as much enthusiastic to the European project as the political parties themselves.³⁶ Moreover, national regionalist actors constantly received criticisms for the lack of cooperation and harmonization at the European level.³⁷

Supposedly, national regionalists today are more pragmatic in terms of demands and means of mobilization than they were a few decades ago. It is interesting to see if the explanations provided a decade ago are still applicable today, especially in the time of great challenges and opportunities.

Turbulent years of the European Union

Apart from the motive to update on the recent developments of national regionalist parties, the article selects the timeframe from 2014 to April 2018, which is the time of research, for two main reasons. First, the timeframe covers most of the current MEP term (2014-2019). Important issues during this period have been directly dealt with and debated in the parliament. Diverse political groups and their composition in the European Parliament also reflect general attitudes and trends in the European politics. The

36 Lynch and De Winter, “The Shrinking Political Space of Minority Nationalist Parties in an Enlarged Europe of the Regions.” And De Winter and Gomez-Reino Cachafeiro, “European Integration and Ethnoregionalist Parties.”

37 Lynch and De Winter, “The Shrinking Political Space of Minority Nationalist Parties in an Enlarged Europe of the Regions.”

article hopes to reveal some reflections which may shed some lights for the next European Parliament election set in May 2019.

Second, since the European Parliament election in May 2014, the EU has undergone grave challenges. While countries are recovering from the Euro crisis and are having tense debates on the future of European Integration, there have been three major challenges that shook Europe; migration, terrorism and the rise of the extreme-right. The migrant crisis was triggered by the Civil War in Syria bringing waves of migrants and refugees into the European continent, bringing altogether over 1.8 million refugees and migrants only in 2015, according to Frontex.³⁸ The humanitarian open-door policy of German Chancellor Angela Merkel draws both applauses and criticisms, especially from member states who deny taking in refugees. Border controls were extraordinarily re-imposed within the Schengen areas, affecting the borderlines of the EU. Terrorism caused serious distress as terrorist attacks became more frequent and more deadly. The Islamic State (IS) has inspired perpetrators, many of whom are homegrown, and present a great challenge to internal and external security agencies, disrupting directly the security and wellbeing of European citizens altogether.

The perception of mainstream parties' inadequacy to tackle these "threats" facilitates the rise of extreme-right

38 "Migrant Crisis: Migration to Europe explained in seven charts," *BBC*, March 4, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34131911> (accessed on April 30, 2018).

populist actors in many western European countries.³⁹ The incursions of the extreme-right have caused troubles for government formations and the internationally oriented policies. In general, electoral results reflect dissatisfactions to the European functioning and the current politics. Most shocking of all, the decision of the UK to leave the EU in June 23 Referendum defies the unity of the EU altogether. The three challenges evidently make this MEP term a virulent time for the EU and its member states.

Within the same periods, there have been some hope for national regionalists to become independent from the central states. While Scotland is contemplating leaving the UK to remain in the EU, Catalonia took the risk in declaring independence from Spain in October 2017. The political act was soon overruled by central authorities and many complications ensued to the Catalan *independentistas*. “Catalonia will not become an EU member state the day after that vote. It would have to follow that same procedures as other countries have taken.”⁴⁰ The verdict was given by the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker on 14 September 2017, poignantly to all the “radical” national regionalists.

39 Apart from party discourse of populist radical right parties, see Kirk A. Hawkin, Madeleine Read and Teun Pauwels, “Populism and its Causes,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, Cristóbal Kaltwasser, Paul Taggart, Paulina Ochoa Espejo and Pierre Ostiguy, eds. (Oxford University Press, 2017), 265-286.

40 Everton Gayle, “Independent Catalonia would have to apply to join EU – Juncker,” *Euronews*, September 14, 2017, <http://www.euronews.com/2017/09/14/independent-catalonia-will-have-to-apply-to-join-eu---juncker> (accessed on May 1, 2018).

In this article, Corsica, Bavaria, Västra Gotäland and Wales each represents France, Germany, Sweden and the UK respectively. The four selected countries are Western European EU member states that have undergone directly all the three major challenges most severely.⁴¹ Corsican, Bavarian and Welsh regions are selected based on their pronounced identity and the existence of “moderate” national regionalist parties with representations and influence at all the regional, national and European levels between 2014 and 2018. Consequently, Femu a Corsica – Pè a Corsica, CSU and Plaid Cymru will be the object of study for each region. These actors have active roles in protecting and representing regional interests and identity, presence in electoral arenas and legislative bodies, and moderate strategies of pushing their agendas through constitutional and democratic means rather than the use of violence. Moreover, the three sample parties do not, for the current time being, seek independence as an immediate goal, justifying the selection of Wales instead of Scotland. Of course, Sweden is an exception as no regional identity is present. However, Västra Gotäland is selected as a substitution in order to examine the impact of the three challenges in a state-led region with a possibility of inorganic regional identity development.

41 According to Eurostat, between 2015-2017, there have been 276,340 asylum applications in France, 1,404,550 in Germany, 205,405 in Sweden, and 96,755 in the UK. Some major terrorist attacks in the four countries include November 2015 Paris attacks, Berlin Christmas market attack on 19 December 2016, Stockholm attack on 7 April 2017, and Manchester Arena bombing on 22 May 2017. During the same period, there are rises of extreme-rights parties from Front National and Alternative for Germany to Swedish Democrats and UKIP.

The article now turns to each of the selected cases in the following order; Plaid Cymru, Femu a Corsica – Pè a Corsica, CSU and Västra Gotäland. Each section starts with the impacts of the three major challenges whether directly on the region or indirectly on the central state. General platforms and status of the parties will be discussed before examining party manifestos in important electoral competitions between 2014 and April 2018. An analysis on the direction of the party discourse regarding the EU will be given, along with some remarks. Since the party discourse is positioned to advance some demands, it is expected that the national regionalist actors would adapt their discourses regarding the EU to cope with or to take the advantages from the aforementioned developments, i.e., both the European challenges and the EU debate.

Plaid Cymru – Bitter Brexit

The UK encounters first and foremost Brexit. The country voted 51.9% for the leave on 23 June 2016. The Brexit process was triggered on 29 March 2017, counting down the two-year clock of negotiation. The referendum result was explained to be the combination of factors, predominantly immigration concerns along with right-wing views and English national identity.⁴² On 22 May and 3 June

42 Ailsa Henderson, Charlie Jeffery, Dan Wincott and Richard Wyn Jones, “How Brexit was made in England,” *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 19, no.4 (2017): 631-646, doi: 10.1177/1369148117730542.

2017, London and Manchester was the target of IS-inspired terrorist attacks. For Wales, the internal pretext proves to be crucial since 52.53% of Welsh voted leave in the referendum. This score, as will be discussed, is an important restraining condition for Plaid Cymru.

In the Labour-dominated country of Wales,⁴³ the electoral arena has been heavily based on centralist planning and public-spending oriented politics up until 1990.⁴⁴ Although Welsh national identity consciousness is widely accepted, Welsh independence, which is the long-term goal of Plaid Cymru, has received little support.⁴⁵ This has changed with the process of Welsh devolution in the late 1990s when Plaid Cymru regained relevance in the elections of all three political levels, adding to its marginal existence in the Westminster. Under the first-past-the-post electoral system, however, Plaid Cymru has remained a marginal party in Westminster Parliament. The party always belongs the opposition in the National Assembly of Wales. Yet in the European Parliament elections, Plaid Cymru has consistently scored one MEP over only four available seats in the Welsh constituency since 2004. Its main electoral bastions are in the west coast, particularly Gwynedd and Ceredigion, where in overall the Welsh identity is more present.

43 Each constituent “country” in the United Kingdom is considered as a nation in its own rights by the influence of the history.

44 Kenneth O. Morgan, *Revolution to Devolution: Reflections on Welsh Democracy* (University of Wales Press, 2014), reviewed by Paolo Morisi in *Political Studies Review* 13, no.4 (2015): 610.

45 Ibid.

The Welsh identity is identified, first and foremost according to Van Morgan, by the use of the Welsh language and also by living in Wales.⁴⁶ Once the data is compared with Galicia, it implies the economic grievances and a relatively nativist tone among the Welsh voters who often say that English migrants took economic opportunities away from the locals. The Welsh identity is indeed the essence of Plaid Cymru since its foundation in 1925. The main concepts and values enshrined in the party constitution⁴⁷ are; Independence for Wales in Europe, decentralist socialism, *national* community, bilingual society and the revival of the Welsh language, and membership of the United Nations. Most of these are long-term aspirations in which the last concept, pragmatic step-by-step approach, applies. It is noteworthy that the long-term demands fit perfectly with Europe of the Regions, in a radical sense for independence. Yet, the nature of the platforms is moderate, with a bilingual society as the main identity aspiration.

Assessing Plaid Cymru's status, it can be said that the party's modest electoral success hinders its enjoyment of the autonomy granted through the process of devolution. Wales, as a nation, has a certain amount of autonomy, but less when compared with Scotland and Northern Ireland.⁴⁸

46 Sydney Van Morgan, "Language politics and regional nationalist mobilization in Galicia and Wales," *Ethnicities* 6, no.4 (2006): 464-465, doi: 10.1177/1468796806070718.

47 "2014 European Election Manifesto," *Plaid Cymru – Party of Wales*, 2014.

48 England, surprisingly, do not have devolved competencies since decisions on England are decided in the Westminster.

Representation ability of Plaid Cymru is largely curbed by its opposition position. The party explains that the aim for a full membership in the EU is to ensure Wales' better representation instead of being a part of English-dominated delegation.⁴⁹ The fact that direct participation in the Council of Ministers is at the disposal of EU member states, which has downplayed Welsh involvement, explain its demands for representation in Britain and in Europe. Although culturally conscious in Wales, Plaid Cymru still feels insufficiently recognized in Westminster and in the EU, especially in terms of identity and culture.

Between 2014 and 2018, Plaid Cymru's general position is the following. The party is in support of European Integration explicitly for one reason; Wales benefits greatly from the EU with all its funds. One of the medium-term demands, resonating with the EFA, is the need to reform the EU. Europe requires democratization to make the functioning more accountable and more aligned with the interests of the people rather those of the transnational corporations. A vision of a Social Europe is based on the principle of subsidiary, as appropriate to each issue area. There is also an essential need to promote more Welsh recognition at the European level.

During this period, the prospect of the eventual Brexit is the most urgent challenge before Plaid Cymru. The complexity for the party is that, despite its Remain campaign,

49 "2014 European Election Manifesto," *Plaid Cymru – Party of Wales*.

52.53% voted to leave the EU. The vote means that the voters decided to abandon existing opportunity structures provided by the EU to this marginal country. This intricacy constrains the party's position towards both the UK and the EU. Four manifestos and one program for opposition will now be examined for the party's discursive direction.

In the 2014 “Wales First” European election manifesto,⁵⁰ party leader Leanne Wood marked that the threat of UK withdrawal from the EU makes it imperative for “Wales’ voice to be heard loud and clear in Brussels”. While pushing for Welsh to be an official language of the EU, the party aims for a long-term membership of Wales in the EU although retaining the use of pound sterling. In case of Brexit, Plaid Cymru calls for public reports on future substitution of EU funding. To make Wales’ voice clear, the referendum votes in Wales must be counted separately.

The 2015 Westminster Election Manifesto⁵¹ confirms its pro-EU position but remains “critical” on certain issues. Apart from the demand for more “Wales’ voice in Europe,” there is a resonance of Europe of the Region. Plaid Cymru wants to see Wales as an “independent nation within the European Union” and that a withdrawal from the EU would “put hundreds of thousands of jobs in Wales at risk.”⁵² The national regionalist party even blames the Labour-controlled Welsh Government for not building sufficient direct ties

50 Ibid.

51 “2015 European Election Manifesto,” *Plaid Cymru – Party of Wales*, 2015.

52 Ibid.

with the EU in the 2016 Welsh Assembly Manifesto.⁵³ The document shows concerns that Westminster may steal some competences from Wales that would be transferred from the EU.

The 2015 and 2016 manifestos act as a prelude to the Brexit referendum in 23 June 2016. Both documents stress the Remain campaign of Plaid Cymru but the calls were somewhat reserved. No detailed arguments were presented. What is apparent though is the positive strategy used in the campaign. The party emphasizes the benefits, particularly economic, Wales have from being in the EU. Plaid Cymru's MEP Jill Evans states explicitly that "We won't be trying to frighten people to vote because we are afraid of the alternative."⁵⁴ The verdict, the Leave won in Wales, inexplicable by the party's earlier electoral results.

There was a swift change in the tone and the message after the Brexit vote. Clearly pronounced in the Programme for Opposition 2016-2021, an "independent and outward-looking" International Wales must enhance ties with the EU as much as possible.⁵⁵ The core determination is to retain the existing status quo. Alternatives like European Economic Area (EEA) or European Free Trade Association (EFTA)

53 "2014 European Election Manifesto," *Plaid Cymru – Party of Wales*, 2016.

54 "The European Referendum on June 23rd is crucial for Wales and for Plaid Cymru," *Plaid Cymru – The Party of Wales*, http://www2.partyof.wales/refferendwm_referendum (accessed on April 24, 2018).

55 "Plaid Cymru Programme for Opposition 2016-2021," *Plaid Cymru – Party of Wales*, 2016.

are considered. To ensure that future decisions on Wales are made in Wales, Plaid Cymru advances that final Brexit terms must be ratified by each nation's assembly. This echoes a federal form of government that exists elsewhere. In a continuation, the 2017 "Defending Wales" Action Plan for General Election assures that Plaid Cymru will "secure the money promised to Wales by the Leave campaign" and "ensure that Wales can continue to buy and sell to Europe without any costly barriers."⁵⁶

Another observation to post-Brexit party discourse is the negative turn on the mobilization strategy. Despite what Jill Evans said prior to the vote, "the very foundation of our nationhood, and our European values, have been challenged."⁵⁷ "Our economy, our communities and even our very identity as a nation is under threat,"⁵⁸ especially if Scotland became independent.⁵⁹ All the party platforms respond to these immediate threats, including by attacking the Tories who would put "Welsh people's futures at risk."⁶⁰ One national regionalist Assembly member even flirts with the idea of Welsh independence referendum, if Plaid Cymru

56 "Action Plan 2017," *Plaid Cymru – Party of Wales*, 2017.

57 "Plaid Cymru Programme for Opposition 2016-2021," *Plaid Cymru – Party of Wales*.

58 "Action Plan 2017," *Plaid Cymru – Party of Wales*.

59 Caroline Mortimer, "Wales could disappear into England under hard Brexit, Welsh nationalist leader warns," *Independent*, April 30, 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/brexit-wales-england-general-election-2017-nationalist-plaid-cymru-leanne-wood-a7711031.html> (accessed on May 1, 2018).

60 "Action Plan 2017," *Plaid Cymru – Party of Wales*.

gains control over the Welsh government for two terms.⁶¹ At the beginning of 2018, the Assembly voted in favor of a Plaid Cymru motion for a bill to guarantee Welsh interests from damaging Brexit deals, which could divert European competencies to the Westminster.⁶² Yet the party is hesitant to establish new ties or advance concrete forms of cooperation with the EU.

In conclusion, Plaid Cymru's long-term, even distant, goal of Independence in Europe remains intact. However, immediate challenges force the party to opt a new discourse centered at the protection of Welsh status quo. The message also comes with a negative tone, contrary to the pre-referendum strategy. Essentially, there is an ambivalent position towards both the UK and the EU. It is half-hearted to leave the UK due to economic and political dependence while reluctant to create new relations with the EU due to the referendum result.

61 Aled ap Dafydd, "Plaid Cymru 'would hold Wales independence referendum'," *BBC*, March 24, 2018. <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-wales-politics-43520301> (accessed on May 1, 2018).

62 James Williams, "Assembly votes to defend Welsh powers after Brexit," *BBC*, January 17, 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-wales-politics-42717303> (accessed on May 1, 2018).

Femu a Corsica – Pe a Corsica – United Force

In the case of France, there have been numerous terrorist attacks triggered by the major Paris attacks in January and November 2015. State of emergency was declared and extended. The country has been home to migrants and refugees throughout the years and has constantly faced problems to deal with them. In front of these challenges, there was a surge in the support for extreme-right populist Front National party and its leader Marine Le Pen who passed into the second round of the 2017 presidential election. Corsica has not suffered any Islamic terrorist attacks, although Corsican nationalist violent incidents are existent on the island. Concerning the rise of the extreme-right, there have been violent anti-Muslim incidents on the island. The electoral rise of Front National actually came earlier in 2014 when the party came first in the European Parliament election, winning 24 over 74 French seats. Corsican national regionalist actors have directly suffered electoral loss in the election when Jean-Marie Le Pen of Front National won a landslide over the incumbent national regionalist MEP François Alfonsi. Yet, the mentioned developments are incomparable to the internal shift of the political strategy within the remote island, as will be shown below.

National regionalist forces in Corsica came into existence since the French Third Republic. Based on regionalist interests, they soon evolved into an autonomous movement

and then towards separatism when the recognition of special culture and language translates into the rejection of the republic and its institutions.⁶³ Corsican nationalist movements today can be traced back to the formation of Action Régionaliste Corse (Corsican Regionalist Action) in 1967. French economic and cultural discrimination against local people was the main driver of Corsican nationalism, along with other five factors; experience of independence, Corsican language, insular geography, economic hardship and political fragmentation.⁶⁴ The widespread discourse on the island is the local hostility towards the state's internal colonization.⁶⁵ National regionalist forces are characterized not only by its economic and political demands entrenched on distinct cultural and linguistic identity, but also by the fragmentation within the Corsican national spectrum. The main division is the means of achieving Corsica's self-determination between violent force and democratic competition. By the 21st century, the electoral path to power became dominant. Yet there is a division between the moderates aiming for autonomy and the radicals seeking outright independence.

63 Ange Rovere and Jean-Paul Pellegrinetti, "La Corse, c'est la France !," *L'Histoire* 287, no.5 (2004): 100.

64 André Fazi, "The Multilevel Politics of Accommodation and the Non-Constitutional Moment: Lessons from Corsica," in *Constitutionalism and the Politics of Accommodation in Multinational Democracies*, Jaime Lluch, ed. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 137.

65 François Alfonsi, "Femu a Corsica," *Enbata.info*, September 26, 2016, <http://www.enbata.info/articles/femu-a-corsica/> (accessed on May 2, 2018).

To assess the status of national regionalist parties in Corsica, there is relatively little autonomy under the French centrist Jacobin state. Representation of Corsican interests both in France and Europe is low, seeing that the fragmented forces have to overcome the electoral threshold to be able to negotiate with the central government in an unequal playing field. Recognition of Corsica in Paris is contested among the deputies in the National Assembly but is absent in the constitution. Vertical recognition in the EU is somewhat more noticeable since MEP François Alfonsi himself is currently the EFA 2016-2019 President. Horizontally, it can be briefly summarized that Corsica has economic, legal and political ties with the EU and cultural and linguistic ties with the Mediterranean regions. The position of the Corsican nationalists is largely defined by the structure of the French state and also by its little electoral success. It may have some influence to the European decision making, but it seems to lack the ability to determine the goings of those decisions.

Tides began to turn when Femu a Corsica emerged in 2010 as a coalition in the territorial election, uniting the moderates. The coalition proves a big success, making the nationalists the third largest group in the Corsican Assembly and a “major force in the insular politics”.⁶⁶ Despite the aforementioned loss in the 2014 European election to

66 Ibid.

Front National,⁶⁷ Femu a Corsica joined the junior radical Corsica Libera (Free Corsica) between the two rounds of the 2015 territorial election under a new coalition Pè a Corsica. Enhanced by the disarmament of militant-wing FLNC in 2014, Pè a Corsica symbolizes the unification of all major Corsican nationalist forces. The formation won the 2015 territorial election with 24 seats over 51 and the regional nationalist leader Gilles Simeoni took control of the Executive Council of Corsica for the first time in the recent history.

Femu a Corsica's platform that contributed to 2015 success brands "The time has come" to make Corsica "a future of dignity and liberty".⁶⁸ It demands for more decentralization, economic and social "reacquisition", constitutional recognition of Corsica for its specificity, co-official status of the Corsican language, and raises the question of rapprochement and of Corsican "political prisoners". The central theme is to reclaim the due recognition of Corsican people and their rights "to build an emancipated, peaceful and united country".⁶⁹ The call for more autonomy is vibrant, in which the term emancipation is intentionally coined. "There cannot be a political emancipation without economic and social emancipation."⁷⁰ However, when examined closely, the goal is actually for Corsica to be

67 The 2014 loss of the only Corsican MEP can also be explained by the low turnout rate at 35%. The other important constraining factor is the French MEP constituency that group Corsica with mainland southeast regions.

68 "Elezzone Territoriale 6 è 13 di dicembre di u 2015," *Femu a Corsica*, 2015.

69 Ibid.

70 Ibid.

emancipated from inequality and injustice. The framework for this autonomy is inherently based on its conception of Europe.

“Make the Nation in Europe” is the slogan of Corsica’s European framework. Femu a Corsica demands for a direct participation in the European construction, the recognition of Corsica as a special territory eligible for EU various funds, the setting of Corsica’s bureau in Brussels, participations in European bodies and authorities, flexible European policy formation, and a Mediterranean integration. Apart from legal bases for autonomy in France, Femu a Corsica employs Europe and Mediterranean cooperation as a platform to pressure the state to make concessions to the regional nationalist demands. There is an impression of a struggle between Corsica and the central government, between more decentralization and the upholding of a uniform unitary state. The international ties, even on secondary issues can be summarized in the remarkably positive slogan “Together, let’s build a peaceful, developed Corsica that is open to Europe and the Mediterranean.”⁷¹ In the EFA website, Femu a Corsica will pursue its national autonomy at the heart of “Europe of the *Peoples*”.⁷² As one of the three pillars in the 2015 territorial election campaign, Europe is

71 Ibid.

72 “Femu a Corsica : Une fusion au service de l’auto-détermination du peuple corse en europe !,” *European Free Alliance Youth*, July 28, 2016, <https://efay.eu/2016/07/28/femu-a-corsica-une-fusion-au-service-de-lauto-determination-du-peuple-corse-en-europe/> (accessed on May 2, 2018).

evidently a mobilization instrument for the national regionalists.

By mid-2017, the extreme-right populist wave was relieved by the fact that pro-EU Emmanuel Macron won the French presidential election in May, doubled with the overwhelming victory over Front National in the legislative election in June. Corsican regional nationalists do not have formal party platform for these national elections. Nevertheless, the rise of national regionalists on the island secure three deputies over four available seats. This is another step-up since the local forces have for some time declined to compete in the national electoral arena, realizing that “important decisions are taken in Paris”.⁷³ Some internal conflicts delayed the candidate announcement but the intention to unify nationalist forces in this election was clear, seeing that Pè a Corsica leader Gilles Simeoni himself lost the previous legislative election in 2012.⁷⁴

Everything leads to the 2017 territorial election where Corsica became unified under a more devolved single Collectivity of Corsica. This time the agenda is to confirm and validate the Corsican nationalist mandate. Ten “Pè a

73 Jean-Marc Raffaelli, “Legislatives : la Corse envoie trois nationalistes à l’Assemblée,” *Les Echos*, June 18, 2017, https://www.lesechos.fr/18/06/2017/lesechos.fr/030391419386_legislatives---la-corse-envoie-trois-nationalistes-a-l-assemblee.htm (accessed on May 2, 2018).

74 “Législatives – Le pari de Per a Corsica dans la première circonscription de Haute-Corse,” *France 3 Corse Viastella*, May 14, 2017, <https://france3-regions.francetvinfo.fr/corse/haute-corse/pari-per-corsica-premiere-circonscription-haute-corse-1253421.html> (accessed on May 2, 2018).

Corsica Strategic Agreements”⁷⁵ outline a ten-year plan to build a 21st century Corsica for every Corsicans. Peace and democracy makes the first point, vowing the formation’s determination to achieve its goals through institutional, political and democratic means. Three points speak the same language of unification and compromise among the regional nationalists; the movement must be open for all Corsican to participate; dialogue and strategic convergence must reach out to nationalists who are for now in disagreement with Pè a Corsica; and policies must remain progressive to “build bridges and (...) cohesion for every Corsicans.”⁷⁶ Lastly, it calls for the French state to resume the negotiation since it has not lived up to its part as the “European standard would require”.⁷⁷ In the proposals, the future statute of autonomy clearly opts for more autonomy in France, in a clearly compromising manner.

Yet, “the freedom of the Corsican people can only be achieved through Europe.”⁷⁸ Proposals regarding the EU include more Corsica’s presence in Brussels, participation in Euro-Mediterranean solidarity, and a redrawing of circumscription for European Parliament election to ensure that there are MEPs who will represent Corsica’s interests in the EU. In general, however, there is no substantive party

75 “Un Paese da fà !,” *Pè a Corsica*, 2017.

76 Ibid.

77 Ibid.

78 François Alfonsi, interviewed by Vannina Bernard-Leoni and Vincent Casanova, “La Corse, c’est l’Europe ?,” *Vacarme* 64, no.3 (2013): 172-185, doi: 10.3917/vaca.064.0172.

discourse on the EU that is sent to the local constituents. In line with the pragmatic move in 2015, Pè a Corsica's framing of Europe can be put as "autonomous Corsica in a connected Europe".

Therefore, Femu a Corsica – Pè a Corsica have framed Europe in their party discourse as a channel for Corsica to pressure the French state to come to terms with their demands and to better forward their interests and identity. François Alfonsi's vision of "Autonomous Corsica in a Federal Europe" illustrates this hope.⁷⁹ The big change in this period is rather the internal transformation of the status of the national regionalists themselves due to the electoral surge that has given them a lot more influence on and opportunity for all the three constitutional aspirations. In turn, the success is a direct result from the change of political strategy that unite the fragmented groups of national regionalists into a single unified political force. In consequence, the central focus of the party discourse targets the state, while little is said about the EU. It remains to be seen if they can successfully achieve their demands, seeing that the message of Emmanuel Macron's visit on the island in February 2018 has substantially and symbolically overruled the Corsican nationalists' demands.⁸⁰

79 Alfonsi, interviewed by Bernard-Leoni and Casanova, "La Corse, c'est l'Europe?."

80 President Emmanuel Macron objected the mentioning of Corsica in the French constitution and the co-official language status of Corsican. Instead, he supported the idea of a bilingual society. The President also condemned in murder of prefect Claude Érignac in 1998. Gilles Simeoni, the leader of Pè a Corsica and the President of the Executive Council of Corsica was himself ...

Christian Social Union – Moving Right

Germany's number-one challenge is the one million migrants and refugees that the country host since 2015. The open-door acceptance of migrants may benefit the German economy, but tensions and anxiety of the locals are not well coped. Bavaria itself spent 3.3 billion euro on accommodation and social services provided to the migrants (accounting for 15% country-wide). Königsteiner Schlüssel, or the quota that regulates the distribution of registered asylum-seekers among German länder assign 16% to Bavaria based on tax receipts and population (second most among the länder). Together with a number of terrorist attacks, the situation induced the rise of right-wing extremist Alternative für Deutschland (AfD). The 94-seat entry into the Bundestag of AfD was actually preluded by 7 MEPs won in 2014 European Parliament election over 96 seats Germany-wide. CSU, which has established itself to be politically interchangeable with Bavaria,⁸¹ was the biggest loser in the last European election. CSU lost three MEPs, retaining only five. The main cause is the rise of AfD which gained 8% of the vote in Bavaria.⁸²

the defense lawyer of Yvan Colonna, who is convicted for the assassination of Érignac. In the sidelines, however the French President said he will take into considerations other demands including the question of the nationalist prisoners for reconciliation. See "En Coulisses / Corse : le bras de fer ;" *C Politique*, February 11, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ar8FB23LL9Q&t=18s> (accessed on May 2, 2018).

81 Eve Hepburn, "The Neglected Nation: The CSU and the Territorial Cleavage in Bavarian Party Politics," *German Politics* 17, no.2 (2008): 184-202.

82 Piotr Kubiak, "European Parliament elections in Germany: A commentary on election results," *Bulletin of the Institute for Western Affairs* 165 (June 2014).

Another explanation for CSU's result is the contradiction that the party criticizes the European institutions while endorsing it internationally. As the article proceeds, both reasons are equally instrumental in understanding the party's discourse and demands.

CSU is a staunchly conservative Christian democratic political party. Founded in 1945, the party joined CDU in a lasting parliamentary group dubbed simply as the Union. Both parties jointly compete with same political platform in federal elections, but separately at the *länder* level. In practice, CSU retains the Freistaat Bavaria as its sphere of influence, which CDU agreed not to interfere. Based on Bavarian culture and values, the party dominated the land for almost the entire existence of the party. However, this domination is based on electoral success that can be challenged and once forced CSU into a coalition with FDP in the 2008 Bavarian election.

The image of the party is its determined protection of Bavaria's interests. The identity of Bavaria is centered on the constructed concept of *Heimat* (homeland) which "evokes a sense of love and belonging to a place, people, culture and traditions".⁸³ CSU projects Bavaria as economically and socially strong, progressive but traditional, inclusive and proud.⁸⁴ What is distinct in the case of Bavaria is that the party has never flirted with the idea of independence,

83 Hepburn, "The Neglected Nation."

84 "Regierungsprogramm 2008-2013," CSU, 2008.

nor has its electorate. CSU is committed to the democratic and electoral participation in the land and federal politics. They, however, demands for more autonomy for Bavaria, particularly through the reformation of the German federal system to build a “sustainable federalism”.⁸⁵

With a definite presence in the federal politics and its affluence, not counting direct participations in federal governments, Bavaria already occupies a lot of influence at both national and European levels. “Bavaria is a special land...It is highly respected in Europe and the world”⁸⁶ reflects that Bavaria is strong and has guaranteed autonomy, recognition and representation in multi-level governance. Consequently in its manifestos, CSU constantly reminds the voters that the party will always protect this strength and stability of Bavaria.

It should be noted that the status of CSU and its involvement in federal politics make its policies truly international. Many policies are intended to be pursued directly though EU channels which hint that CSU has already benefited from the use of such channels. Moreover, seeing that the 2014-April 2018 period does not cover any state election in Bavaria, this article also examines the 2013 Bavarian state election.

85 Ibid.

86 “Der Bayernplan 2013-2018,” CSU, 2013.

Internationally, CSU is open-oriented and active in “shaping globalization and representing Bavaria’s interests in the world”.⁸⁷ Most of the party policies regarding the EU are consistent since 2008. However, there has been various terms for Europe projected by CSU. “We want Europe of the Regions”⁸⁸ but no further explanation is made. Later in the same document, “We want European Integration, but not a federal Europe” and CSU wants “a Europe of the regions and not a European central state”.⁸⁹ As further discussion will show, the Bavarian party actually frames Europe as a “Confederation of independent and autonomous nations/states”.⁹⁰ The internal settings will further push the party discourse in that direction.

In the 2013 Bayernplan⁹¹ for the Landtag election, the document emphasizes the Euro crisis in a continuation from the 2008 manifesto. The party ardently calls for non-pooling of debts in the Eurozone and insists that a country has to take care of one’s own financial burden. Strict financial discipline must be upheld. The European Central Bank must not interfere important national banks. Member states should have the right to declare bankruptcy and also the right to leave Eurozone temporarily. These opt-out propositions

87 “Regierungsprogramm 2008-2013,” CSU.

88 “Der Bayernplan 2013-2018,” CSU.

89 Ibid.

90 Instead of nation-state, CSU also regards Bavaria as a nation. This enlarges the units not just for EU member states but also for nations or regions that are deemed sufficiently independent and autonomous.

91 “Der Bayernplan 2013-2018,” CSU.

picture self-reliant nations voluntarily coming together into the EU, rather than the permanent pooling of sovereignty. In consequence, Bavaria as a “strong and independent state” must reform the EU. Apart from calls for debureaucratization and democratization, CSU proposes to hold referenda for important European issues; enlargement, creation of new offices in Brussels, or even international monetary decisions. There must be non-interference. Member-state must have complete autonomy over its internal affairs, including by increasing the power of Bundestag and Bundesrat in order to control the EU. It is apparent that CSU is redrawing the borderline within the EU by transferring competences back into the hands of the member states.

The European Parliament election in May 2014 witnessed a considerable loss of CSU MEPs as mentioned above. While CSU is limited by common platforms at the federal election, here it presented a separate and more radical terms for the European election, in line with the Bayernplan 2013.⁹² The fear of right-wing surge across Europe is reflected in the mentioning of that exact concern in the party manifesto.⁹³ The result of the election confirms its fear, and pushes the party rightward. This direction is exacerbated by the migrant crisis in 2015 and 2016, as discussed above.

92 “Germany’s CSU to fight European election on Eurosceptic platform,” *Reuters*, April 27, 2014, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-germany-europe/germanys-csu-to-fight-european-election-on-eurosceptic-platform-idUK-BREA3P0HQ20140426> (accessed on May 3, 2018).

93 Ibid.

In 2016, the party presented Grundsatzprogramm⁹⁴ updating its stances on various issues. Previous proposals on the EU reform and on the Euro crisis have not changed. Nevertheless there are two novelties. First, competences that was to be transferred to member states now permeates into sub-state levels. To ensure the principle of “subsidiary” which is not pronounced in earlier documents, “Europe and federal government must allow more regionality and open up more room for maneuver”.⁹⁵ In addition, more autonomy should be brought to the level of municipalities.

Second, the immediate issue shifted from Euro crisis to the migrant crisis. Mass and continuous migrations are “a danger to any state order”.⁹⁶ The party’s response is more regulations to the migrant flow, together with strong emphasis on conservative values. Competencies should be able to be retrieved temporarily and easily in exceptional situations. Among other international measures, there should be clear, and reduced, quota for refugee distribution and Germany must retain sovereignty over border and migrant flow. Then there is a mentioning of West-Christian culture of Europe, a clear move to incorporate the more Eurosceptic and migrant-averse voters. Tensions between CSU and CDU on migration issue may contribute to CSU’s move for more länder autonomy.

94 “Grundsatzprogramm der Christlich-Sozialen Union,” *CSU*, 2016.

95 Ibid.

96 Ibid.

Der Bayernplan⁹⁷ for 2017 federal election is the final stage of the party discourse transformation. Two words echoes throughout the document, safety and security. There is a direct message to the migrant crisis and accommodation of the rising right-wing conservative attitudes; Bavaria's Leitkulture (dominant culture) is the "opposite of multiculturalism and arbitrariness"; migrants "must integrate into our culture" as a prerequisite for permanent right of residence; in Germany, "German law governs, not the shariah"; and burqa and niqab must be banned in public.⁹⁸ On the other hand, CSU wants to "strengthen decentralized structures", including more direct democracy. European cooperation must be flexible, respecting "national identities and regions".⁹⁹ For instance, decision making on security issues "must remain with the länder, here in Bavaria".¹⁰⁰ Later during the coalition talks, CSU held a party meeting in January 2018 where migration policy is on top of the agenda. Alexander Dobrindt notes that the rise of AfD showed the German people do not want to see another wave of immigrants.¹⁰¹ In a controversial yet symbolic gesture, the party invited Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orbán to speak at the venue.

97 "Regierungsprogramm 2017-2021," *CDU-CSU*, 2017.

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid.

100 Ibid.

101 Ben Knight, "Germany's CSU returns to far-right political battleground," *Deutsche Welle*, January 4, 2018, <http://www.dw.com/en/germanys-csu-returns-to-far-right-political-battleground/a-42031195> (accessed on May 3, 2018).

To sum up, there is a slight shift in the CSU's discourse on Europe from a "Confederation of independent and autonomous nations/states" towards a more "Europe of the People" or "Confederation of independent and autonomous nations". The main issue diverted from the Euro crisis to the migrant crisis. Solutions to the concerns are now stressed at the state or sub-state level instead of the European level. The tone certainly becomes more Eurosceptic and more conservative. This is explained by the fact that the prominent status of CSU is grounded on consecutive electoral success. AfD's surge in national politics and the decrease of Europhile attitudes among CSU voters present a direct challenge that induced the rightward shift in the party discourse. Most important of all, the next Bavarian state election is approaching in October 2018 and CSU cannot lose the battle at its home ground.

Vastra Gotaland – Potential Inorganic Identity?

In Sweden, more than 95,000 registered as asylum-seekers only in 2016 in the Scandinavian country of ten-million population.¹⁰² The country's capital Stockholm was struck by an IS-inspired terrorist attack on 7 April

102 "First instance decisions on asylum applications by type of decision - annual aggregated data," *Eurostat*, <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/refreshTableAction.do?tab=table&plugin=1&pcode=tps00192&language=en> (accessed on May 20, 2018).

2017. Similarly, the country witnesses the rise of far-right populist political party when Swedish Democrats became the third-largest party in the unicameral Riksdag in the general election in September 2014. Concerning the latter two challenges, Västra Gotäland has not experienced such events directly.

The Swedish case is an exception among the four selected countries. The uniform and homogenous nature of Sweden has shaped its political system. The Swedish political administration has been described as an hourglass; strong central government, impotent counties and regions, and another strong layer of municipalities which implement national policies including the Swedish welfare system.¹⁰³ There has been very little regional identity and interest groups, and local identity is equally non-existent. While there are some debates on regionalization, few political forces actually incarnate this agenda. The Centre Party was once a core supporter of the reform, but later faded as the general political direction incorporates this concept.¹⁰⁴ So the local municipalities possess a lot of competences, i.e. autonomy, which is based on economics and social services. But concerning this article, there is no national regionalist party in Sweden, primarily due to the lack of national regionalist identity that this article deems central to the mobilization and motivation of territorial forces.

103 Malin Stegmann McCallion, "Regionalism in Sweden," *Assembly of European Regions (AER)*, November 2014.

104 Eklund, "Sweden: Federalism in the land of centrally guided regionalization."

The novel Västra Gotäland is engineered by combining three counties under the Regional Pilot Project in July 1997, formally established in 1998, and confirmed a permanent region in 2010.¹⁰⁵ This pioneer region has directly elected assemblies and has competences over regional development and long-term planning, which includes the allocation of EU funds and regional transport infrastructure.¹⁰⁶ This administrative experiment is a result from the European-level development, especially the EU regional policy.¹⁰⁷ The European Integration creates a need for an intermediate level of government responsible for development agenda.¹⁰⁸ Eklund posits that the EU has revived the “vertical dimension of politics back on the Swedish agenda”.¹⁰⁹ The region currently enjoys 325 billion euro benefits from various European supports over the 2014-2020 period, for example; sectorial and structural funds, cohesion policy, and social fund.¹¹⁰ This shows that the region is relatively independent from the central government and possesses ample autonomy.

Västra Gotäland cannot be examined using the same method as the other three case-studies. That is because

105 Västra Gotäland is created along with Skåne. In 2013, Västra Gotäland has the second-largest population after the Swedish capital Stockholm. See Main Stegmann McCallion, “Regionalism in Sweden.”

106 Ibid

107 Ibid

108 Eklund, “Sweden: Federalism in the land of centrally guided regionalization.”

109 Ibid

110 “EU-program,” *Västra Gotäländsregionen*, December 14, 2017, <http://www.vgregion.se/regional-utveckling/verksamhetsomraden/externa-relationer/VastraGotalandiEU/eu-program/> (accessed on May 2, 2018).

there is no national regional identity in the region, not mentioning the entire country. Even though there is the Sjukvårdspartiet Västra Götaland (Healthcare Party) that is based on some territorial platforms, the issue-specific populist party does not have any representation since 2011. Consequently, the rest of this section will discuss the status of the region and its future potentials. Evidences show that the state-led nature of regionalization in Sweden is still a prevailing framework to understand recent developments of the region.

Employing the concept of New Regionalism, Gren¹¹¹ argues that Västra Gotäland presents an example where the state is forced to devolve power under supranational pressures. Greater economic integration erodes the ability of Swedish central government to intervene in local affairs. The region pursues its interests at different levels of decision making, taking advantage of the supranational influence. Remarkably, Västra Gotäland has conducted cross-border cooperation and paradiplomacy, including the presence of four Europe Direct offices in the region.¹¹² This means that the region has a certain level of representation and recognition in the EU although not in the same fashion as the national regionalists. In Gren's study, however, one

111 Gren, "New Regionalism and West Sweden: Change in the Regionalism Paradigm."

112 "Europa Direkt Västra Götaland," *Västra Gotäländsregionen*, April 30, 2018, <http://www.vgregion.se/regional-utveckling/verksamhetsomraden/externa-relationer/VastraGotalandiEU/om-oss/europa-direkt-vastra-gotaland/> (accessed on May 2, 2018).

important element that reflects New Regionalism is absent – regional consciousness.¹¹³ Therefore, Västra Gotaland is inherently a newly founded region whose main interests are economic and development, not identity and cultural.

It is perhaps too soon to judge whether the region could forge its own identity. From preliminary observation, it is unlikely. One reason is that the regionalization debate in Sweden so far has central focus at the municipalities, rather than counties or regions.¹¹⁴ This is seen in the recent decentralization move that gave local authorities more competencies over welfare services and local economic growth issues. Moreover, the Centre Party is still the only political party that has regionalization platform.¹¹⁵ The second reason is that there is no sign of identity building. Documents issued by the Regional Council show no sign of the intention to create regional identity, which is a gruesome and enduring task. Such a project is entirely dependent upon internal forces, which is mostly uninterested in this issue. In turn, the currently non-existent national regionalist identity is instrumental for political mobilization and fundamental for the actors to influence the decision making at different levels.

113 Gren, “New Regionalism and West Sweden: Change in the Regionalism Paradigm.”

114 Eklund, “Sweden: Federalism in the land of centrally guided regionalization.”

115 Ibid.

According to an officer working at Västra Götaland's Brussels Office,¹¹⁶ the people still identify themselves more with the municipalities and Sweden than with the region. This is partly due to the provision of tangible services by the municipalities. Since its creation, there is still no interest groups that seek to directly represent the region's interests at the EU. In terms of status, the officer is in support of more representation at both national and European levels. The region's direct implementation of policies deserves more say in the national decision-making, which would be beneficial to both sides. At the EU, formal channels of direct interest representation available to Västra Götaland are mostly advisory. In general, the working of the region in the EU still represent the larger Swedish society, not exclusively the region. Finally, in relation to migration crisis and terrorist attacks that challenge Europe, the region's strategy towards the EU has not changed. This confirms the unlikelihood of a Västra Götaland identity in the coming years and shows that the regionalism reforms in Sweden is largely state-led.

Comparison – A Pause on Europe

Three national regionalists parties have been examined, along with one regional architecture. It can be seen that under the same categorization of national regionalism,

116 Personal communication via email with a Västra Götaland official in the Brussels Office, May 2018.

there are still great variations in terms of status, aspirations and the vision of Europe.

Comparatively, there is no sudden change in the conceptions of Europe among national regionalists, reflected in their long-term goals. Plaid Cymru still maintains its aim for an independence in Europe through a step-by-step approach. Femu a Corsica – Pè a Corsica continue to curtail the French state through autonomy in a connected Europe. Bavaria's CSU has a slight shift but remains intact on the vision of a confederate form of Europe. This is contrasted to Västra Gotäland which still functions as a state's administrative body.

The effects of the turbulent years, however, redefine their medium-term and immediate goals of national regionalist parties. Plaid Cymru, which has been threatened by Brexit, promises to ensure the Welsh status quo as its top priority. Demands for autonomy, representation and recognition are clear and crucial to the wellbeing and the existence of Wales in time of crisis. Femu a Corsica – Pè a Corsica do not frame their agenda on the current crises in Europe. Instead, the party discourse paints a new era for Corsica under the united Corsican nationalist political coalition. The demands are constitutional, not crisis prevention or mitigation, with the most immediate one being the political dialogue with the central government. Turning to CSU, the party becomes more Eurosceptic in tone and in policies towards Europe. The party still seeks to determine the decision making through state's traditional means, but

at the same time urging more independence from Brussels. The party starts to project ideas of strong sub-state entities, bringing competences back from the EU.

One observation from this development is the parties' adaptations to only one or two challenges that directly affect the region. The party has little or no response to other European distresses elsewhere. The other observation is the tendency for national regionalist forces to reframe its immediate agenda at the state. Plaid Cymru fears the British government's failed negotiation on Brexit. Femu a Corsica – Pè a Corsica strikes the French government to sit at the same table with the Corsican mandate. CSU searches for its opt-outs as Angela Merkel's government continues to pursue generous policies towards migration and integration.

The comparison gives an impression that Europe of Regions concept is ever more fading. Regions divert its energy from European issues to focus on state and sub-state negotiations. In a closer look, one will see that Corsica's diversion of attention is due to its positive rise, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the movement to pressure the state using all its power. However, they do not abandon their networks with the EU. Party policies regarding Europe and international frameworks still endure. Rather, based on current judgment, this is merely a pause for each party to fully concentrate on what is at hand.

Investigating the change in party discourses, the European-level analysis does not suffice. The phenomenon

is better explained by national and regional factors. These internal factors include the party identity, the status, the strategy, the opportunity structures and the electorate. Plaid Cymru sees the unexpected Brexit vote as a bitter desertion of its European opportunity structures. The party cannot seek immediate independence from the UK since the status and influence of the nation is dependent upon the resources and opportunities offered in the UK. The Welsh Party nevertheless reserves its proposals on future ties with the EU due to constraining Brexit vote in Wales. Femu a Corsica – Pè a Corsica agenda at this moment is fundamentally built upon this monumental phenomenon which unites all the main factions of nationalist forces. The party platforms give attention to the renewal of the mandate and strategies to guarantee and hopefully to enlarge this unity of political force. Compromises are made among the regional nationalists but the leaders still keep a firm stance for more autonomy in the political negotiations with Paris. CSU rightward move is best understood by the growing concerns on the rise of the AfD and the shifting of voters' attitude at home due to the perceived foreign threats. The Bavarian party's powerful status is founded on its electoral success. Successive noxious threats within a single Landtag term raise the concerns of securing its votes at home. It must be noted that CSU's reputation has always been its ability to keep Bavaria strong, safe and prosperous.

In the case of Västra Gotäland, European turmoil has done little to the region's perception of Europe. In the

same light, the absence of change can be explained by the lack of local forces and identity which are the main driver of discourse construction. One can suspect that if there were to be a distinct identity of Västergötland, challenges that may disrupt that identity would easily stir agitation among the locals. Or in reversal, that identity could be used as an instrument to mobilize political forces to thwart such challenge.

Therefore, the turbulent years of Europe are indeed a crucial and dynamic period for European national regionalists. There has been a refocus on immediate issues which can be best understood through the position and the power of the national regionalist parties, their changed opportunity structures, their new political strategies and the attitudes of their electorates.

Conclusion

Thirty years after Europe of the Regions, the national regionalists have to temporarily suspend its immediate pursuit of interests through European direct channels. The challenges that rocked Europe have indeed forced the national regionalist parties to rethink their strategy and reframe their primary focus. The party discourses on the EU in general continue to view it in a positive light as a set of opportunity structures that can be used to advance national regionalist interests and identity while pressuring the states to concede to their demands. This, however, is

still largely defined by the parties' baseline status in terms of autonomy, representation and recognition, along with the actual power to determine the decision making both at the capitals and in Brussels. The position and power among national regionalists indeed prove a great variation.

This article has examined the development of party discourses on the actual and the desired Europe in party manifestos and related channels of communication of Plaid Cymru, Femu a Corsica – Pè a Corsica, CSU and also the region of Västra Gotäland. The comparative study shows that despite major challenges that defy Europe altogether, the national regionalist forces concentrate their energy and discourse on the ones that truly affect their respective regions and cause concerns among their respective electorates. In consequence to these deviations, there is a divergence in the party discourse developments. The determining factors for party discourse direction are internal; for Plaid Cymru the immediate threat of Brexit vote, for Femu a Corsica – Pè a Corsica the successful unification of Corsican nationalists, for CSU the rise of AfD and the growing Eurosceptic voters, and for Västra Gotäland the state-led regionalization in Sweden.

The development of these national regionalist forces in the near future will answer these determining questions. Will Plaid Cymru be able to retain its multi-level influences through the EU or will it reframe its demands according to what is left available to Wales? Will Pè a Corsica be able to force the French government to accept its demands or will it risk pursuing its goal unilaterally? Will CSU rightward

move succeed in accommodating the negative attitudes of its voters, or will the new strategy cause tensions and prove unsuccessful? Will there be an emergence of actors seeking to exclusively protect the interests of Västergötland as a first step towards further potentials? Will the general public be in favor of this overall nationalist direction in the next European Parliament election? Most importantly, it remains to be seen how nationalist discourse will resume after this pause on Europe.