

FOUR STAGES IN EUROPEAN REGIONALISM

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For more than a decade regionalists from all over Europe have gathered regularly under the aegis of the Danish Foundation for International Understanding. The past proceedings of the "Europe of Regions" Conventions offer an unmatched vantage point over the great variety of regional predicaments and activities in every corner of Europe, and the links of mutual interest and communication which sustain them. As well as detailed and scholarly reviews of particular regions, participants have, over the years, given much thought to the question of what defines the ism in regionalism, exploring its philosophical foundations, historical antecedents, and present implications for jurisprudence, for politics, and for cultural life. It has not always been easy to define what regionalists have in common, given the diversity of movements that claim the name, as well as the many which explicitly reject it, including of course most of the Celtic nationalisms. The importance of manifesto documents such as the Declaration of Copenhagen prepared by our predecessors in 1978, or the Council of Europe's Charter of Bordeaux, also in 1978, is that they transcend the internal differences within the regionalist movement; this lecture will instead try to break them down analytically and identify the relations between them.

Some of the important connections are historical. My second purpose is to look at European regionalism in time, asking how one thing has led to another. However, we shall find that historicism - an ideology resting upon some theory of inexorable historical destiny - has its dangers in this area of political reform just as in any other. To speak of the stages of regionalism does not imply that they fall one after another in an orderly historical sequence, still less that there is any dialectical inevitability about them. In some senses it might be more satisfactory to speak of the four types or dimensions of European regionalism. But the title of our gathering, "Europe of Regions" contains an implicit historical challenge, which the lecture will try to take up. So let us identify the Four Stages of European Regionalism, one by one.

STAGE I : CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC REGIONALISM

All regionalisms originate in the nation state and the contradictions and anomalies caused by the political partition of the earth's surface into a global state system of 183 territorial units. The ultimate moral justification for the state is that it corresponds to a political community. Yet the actual process of state-building has not, realised the nationalist vision of independent statehood for every ethnic or people, and never could do so. States and nations are consequently very imperfectly matched. In a recent analysis, Nielsson shows that only just over a quarter of sovereign states could be defined as nation-states in the sense that a single nation-group accounts for more than 95% of the population (1985, pp. 30-2). Most states are poly-ethnic to a greater or lesser extent, quantified by

Nielsson. European countries are no exception despite the numerous forced migrations of minorities that occurred during the 1940s. Additionally, we must not overlook the strong contrasts of dialect and culture within Europe's dominant nation-groups, reinforced maybe by economic and political inequalities, or as in the case of a country like Norway, by sheer geography. All state-building involves some form of cultural engineering, which uses a combination of education, historical indoctrination, social symbolism, and repressive devices to bind disparate elements into a cohesive political community. As we know, it is not always successful, and the defensive mobilisations that result can be considered the first stage of regionalism.

Before the war the issue of what were then generally known, in League of Nations terminology, as national minorities, was seen by ethnic elites in terms of the right to secession and sovereign statehood, and by central governments and the international community in terms of individual human rights. Since 1945 an important shift has occurred, with both sides defining the issue more in terms of the development of autonomous territorial institutions. Or, in a word, regionalism. At the international level, the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN, founded 1949) and the International Institute for Ethnic Groups' Rights and Regionalism (INTERREG, founded 1977) have played a significant role in promoting regionalism, and INTERREG's researches document a remarkable history of achievement by stateless peoples in winning legal recognition for their cultures, and the economic resources to sustain them, remarkable particularly by comparison with the doctrines of national indivisibility upheld by most European states within living memory (Veiter 1984). Sociologists have spent much ink explaining the resurgence of the "national question" which they predicted would vanish as a result of postwar prosperity. More to our present purpose is to understand how hitherto unthinkable demands have come to be accommodated. The answer is surely geopolitical. The postwar power structure, based on super-power zones of influence, has diminished the ancient internecine rivalries between European states and removed the temptation to exploit each others' ethnic minority claims subversively as an instrument of realpolitik. A jealous and repressive nationalism no longer has functional value; as Gordon Smith puts it, "the passing of the hard-shell state implies that the binding force of strong national loyalties is no longer needed" (1981, p204).

What are the distinguishing features of the many regionalisms that have taken root under the lighter penumbra of the postwar European state? Most of all, their individuality. The claim of each region is for recognition of its own distinctive personality against the levelling uniformity of mass culture. Negotiations for regional autonomy are generally bilateral, negotiated vertically between regional and national elites, and often hinge upon claims for the territorial recognition of historic communities deliberately divided by the Jacobin architects of the modern state. Cultural regionalism also usually has a significant but implicit economic dimension, for language provision and media channels require discriminatory expenditure. A measure of its success is the extent to which such provision has come to be seen as a basic human right and a legitimate compensation for having been incorporated and peripheralised.

STAGE II : THE DEMAND FOR DECENTRALISATION

The story does not end with cultural and linguistic regionalism. Whatever reforms are won, on a basis of exceptionalism, by one regional community, will have reverberations on others. This horizontal effect leads to the second stage of regionalism, in which the demand for autonomy is taken up into a more widespread demand for decentralisation of state power. It may occur in two ways.

First there is the specific stimulus which peripheral nationalisms may give to the formation of territorial lobbies in neighbouring areas which share certain common characteristics of economic or political peripherality but belong culturally with the core. So, drawing our examples from the Celtic fringe, we can see how Scottish, Breton and Galician nationalisms respectively stimulated the emergence of the Movement for the North, the Mouvement Normand, and autonomist tendencies in Leon Asturias and Cantabria.

Perhaps more important is the general effect of Stage I regionalism on political expectations throughout the system, and the stimulus it has given to decentralising movements of a more general character. Regionalism, in this second, larger sense, becomes a movement not for the defence of any single culture but an attack on all aspects of statist centralism. In most countries, it has been a minor but highly persistent movement of political thought associated with the work of individual writers and activists, and taken up from time to time by national parties. Smith (1964) Banks (1971) and Keating (1982) have chronicled the history of British regionalism in this sense. Occasionally specialised pressure groups have campaigned for the cause. The earliest and most celebrated example, the Federation Regionaliste Francaise (1900-1945) owed its origins to the particular movements in Alsace, Languedoc and Brittany, but became a national campaigning organisation for the wholesale reform of state structures throughout France. A similar doctrine of regionalismo developed in Spain during the 1890's and strongly revived after the death of Franco, when the restoration to the three historic nations - Galicia, Euskadi and Catalonia - of the autonomy they had won under the Second Republic, stimulated one of Europe's boldest experiments in the wholesale decentralisation of state power.

Notice the fundamental differences between the Stages I and II. In the first, the issue is defined in terms of uniqueness and particularity, and the frame of reference is defined vertically, in terms of relations between region and state centre. In the second, the frame of reference is horizontal and the chief issue is that of comparability and equity between regions, and their shared position viz-a-viz centre. In this perspective, the cultural difference of minority nations is seen to crystallize out and make apparent problems of a more general character. So, within the United Kingdom, while Scots and Welsh have always been the most alert to detect state centralization, because for them it shows up as Anglicisation, what they are identifying is can to some degree be reinterpreted as a structural problem affecting all parts of the country.

However, as both the British and Spanish examples well

demonstrate, primary regionalist movements often look with considerable suspicion on secondary regionalism. To the SNP, Plaid Cymru, PV and CiU, general schemes for the territorial redistribution of power may well appear a Machiavellian diversion to water down the wine of their own nationalism, particularly as the new regions within Spain, and any that might in some future reform be created within England, are new-fangled institutions with little historical weight or community loyalty behind them - a problem to which I shall return shortly. Some primary regionalist movements become deeply divided on the issue of whether their claims should become implicated in a more general reform. For instance, this is one of the questions which has fragmented into three separate parties the already small Cornish regionalist movement.

What, to summarise, is the relationship between primary and secondary regionalism? Many would query the use of the single term for both. In the German speaking tradition the tendency seems to be to reserve regionalismus exclusively for culturally or linguistically based movements whereas the Spanish regionalismo, French regionalisme and Anglo-American regionalism tend rather to refer to challenges to the territorial organisation of the state, ethno-cultural mobilisations being classified as a form of nationalism. Setting semantics aside, we should simply note how a single historical logic has led from the consolidation of the state system, through the mobilisation of peripheralised peoples, into a more general concern, particularly to the centre-left of the political spectrum, with reform of the territorial division of power within states. That concern leads logically to our next stage.

STAGE III : CONSTITUTIONAL REGIONALISM

Perhaps the best measure of the long-term importance of regionalism as a political idea is the extent to which it has been incorporated into constitutional theory and practice. It used to be axiomatic that all states fell into one of two contrasted constitutional types, the unitary and the federal, depending on whether sovereignty was undivided or shared between two distinct levels of government. In the postwar years this dichotomy has been broken down by the intrusion of an intermediate type, the regional state, in which ultimate sovereignty rests with the centre (as in a unitary state) but the Constitution also establishes regional governments with an inviolable status and a range of exclusive powers which are constitutionally entrenched, (as in federalism). The philosophy of the regional state derives particularly from the work of the Italian constitutional lawyer Professor Ambrosini in the 1930s and was embodied in the regional provisions of Italy's 1947 Constitution, which were finally implemented in 1970. The subsequent implementation of Spain's 1978 Constitution, has helped to establish beyond doubt the credibility of regionalism as a constitutional type.

Note the contrast with previous forms of regionalism. Ethno-linguistic movements have an active, romantic character, and an intrinsically localised territorial appeal. Decentralists tend by contrast towards the idealist end of the philosophical spectrum. The constitutionalist is different again. He must create systems that work in legal and political reality and have

the present consent of the people. The frame of reference is that of the state in its entirety, including all those functions such as foreign and economic policy, and the awkward practical implications for administrative reform and local government reorganisation which enthusiasts for regionalism in the abstract may sometimes gloss over.

In its treatment of these issues, does regionalism differ in any significant way from federalism? May the difference between the two be simply that the word regionalism is newer and usefully ambiguous and so more politically acceptable across a wider range of opinion? Possibly so. But with the Spanish and Italian cases in mind, we can see two distinctive features of the regional model which have prompted very wide international interest in this world of imperfect nation-states.

First, it is assumed in the theory of federalism that the federating units need to be broadly comparable or symmetrical in status, and that they strike their federal compact at a single point in time. But the point of departure for regionalism is its acceptance of the fact that neither condition may be possible; which is why in both the Italian and Spanish cases the constitutional framework explicitly distinguishes Stage I regions characterised by historic nationhood, language or culture, from Stage II regions which lack these attributes. We see the dichotomy in Italy's two categories of regions, the five created under special statutes in 1948, the remaining 15 under ordinary statutes in 1970; and again in Spain, where Catalonia, the Basque Country and Galicia assumed autonomy directly under Article 151 of the Constitution, while the other 14 Autonomous Communities followed by a slower route set out in Article 148. Interestingly, both opposition parties in Britain, Labour and the SDP-Liberal Alliance, appear to be converging upon a comparable scheme of devolution a deux vitesses, with prompt moves to establish assemblies for Scotland and Wales combined, in a single constitutional scheme, with provision for a subsequent regionalisation of England. Of course, the regional state can only accommodate variations in scale and timing of devolution up to a certain point, given that the feature distinguishing "regions" from local government is their ability to assume decentralised powers hitherto exercised by the central state. It may be particularly difficult to reconcile the claims of small cultural regions with the requirements of a decisive administrative reform at the centre; in this regard, we can foresee that the case of Cornwall will pose serious difficulties for any future regionalisation of the United Kingdom.

The second and possibly even more radical aspect of regionalism in contrast to federalism is that the boundaries of the territorial units do not have to be defined in advance. In the Italian case, the Constitution laid certain ground rules for the minimum population size of regions, though in practice they vary enormously, from 110,000 (Val d'Aosta) to 9,000,000 (Lombardy). The Spanish Constitution made no attempt to draw the map of the Autonomous Communities. Instead it wisely did no more than lay down procedural rules through which the regions were to be established. The resulting regions vary significantly in size and resources, but the evolutionary and voluntaristic approach adopted has the strong advantage that not too much political

energy was wasted, and ill-will generated, as in the setting up of many federal systems, on contentious attempts to impose a single uniform scheme (Hicks, 1978). Regionalism acknowledges the near impossibility of solving at a stroke all the intractable and highly complicated problems of constitutional design. And, as the late Professor Mackenzie saw as long ago as 1951 when he first alerted British readers to the emergence of this new constitutional type, its elasticity makes it highly suitable for countries such as Great Britain, where one or more national minorities - each a ready-made candidate for autonomy status - coexist with a dominant and numerically preponderant nation-group whose regional lines of division are not ready-made, and have to be discovered or invented (1975). And another lesson from the Spanish Autonomous Communities is that, as with some of the new Länder in postwar Germany, regions which at first appear contrived and artificial may soon establish themselves, if the larger constitutional setting is right, in the hearts and minds of the people.

Constitutional regionalism is not a panacea. Drawing once again on the experience of Italy and Spain, as well as on such abortive experiments as the Royal Commission of the United Kingdom Constitution chaired by Lord Kilbrandon and its aftermath, the failure of desolution in Scotland and Wales, we can identify several kinds of attendant difficulty in the restructuring a unitary state on principles of regional autonomy. The central issue is that a new intermediate tier of government has to be inserted without undue increase in the overall weight of bureaucracy. Put simply, regional institutions must grow at the expense of other levels of government, biting into both local and central administration. Both pose problems.

The relation of regions to local governments is especially problematic. What appears, from a country-wide perspective, to be a decentralising reform taking power to the people, may appear in quite the opposite light from the view-point of municipalities who lose autonomy by the consolidation of new regional centres. The difficulty is especially great in Northern European countries, most of which have already modernised their systems of local government within the last twenty years, reducing the number of units and increasing their geographical size in such a way that the conceptual distinction between "regions" and "local government" is much eroded; indeed, in Scotland since 1974, the reformed upper tier units of local government have actually been called "regions".

The relation of regions to the central government is equally problematic. The essence of regionalism, as a constitutional scheme, is that the region should be not merely an administrative agency but a general government possessing a significant range of executive powers and a degree of legislative autonomy. This implies both an absolute reduction in central bureaucracy and a qualitative change in the nature of national legislation, at least in areas of regional competence, towards what the Italians call *leggi cornice* - framework laws. But any such shifts encounter strong counterforces. Established bureaucracies will naturally resist their own dismemberment, and nationally organized political parties and interest groups have a similar inertia. As the Spanish experience has clearly shown, the unevenness or elasticity of the devolution process within the

regional state, in which primary regions coexist with secondary, each assuming powers at different speeds for all its advantages, may have the unwelcome side-effect of reinforcing the ability of central interests to resist or postpone necessary structural change.

Despite these difficulties, constitutional regionalism retains its attractiveness to large sectors of European political opinion; in passing, we might ask ourselves why? One of the most important factors, especially in regions afflicted by problems of structural adjustment or high unemployment, is undoubtedly a sense of disillusion with traditionally centralised model of economic policy-making, coupled by a growth of interest in decentralised or "bottom-up" forms of intervention. This new concern, which may extend to quite strongly protectionist measures to retain capital and jobs and stimulate innovation within the regional economy, is often characterised by considerable legal ambiguity in contrast with the more standard policy roles performed by regional administrations in fields such as health, education, transport and environment (Hebbert & Machin 1984). However, it is also the focus of considerable political expectation, and much of the impetus behind regional reform derives from the belief that governments operating with their own resources at a regional scale will make a significantly greater contribution to economic regeneration than the "watering can" of national or European regional industrial policy.

So far I have given what I hope to be a reasonably uncontroversial perspective of the historical logic which has led from a regionalism of "special cases" to one which tackles the problems of constitutional design in the round. Now we should consider what all this has to do with European integration.

STAGE IV : A EUROPE OF REGIONS ?

We are familiar with the tradition of argument which sees substate regionalism and suprastate integration as single movement. The title of this Convention is itself often associated with vision of the future in which the national states, starved of authority and loyalty by the emerging regional and continental power-centres, become no more than a ghostly memory like the old Austro-Hungarian Empire (de Rougemont, 1970).

This line of thinking has a powerful historical appeal. The European and regional movements grew up together and both, as Meny has observed, were promoted by men whose European consciousness was heightened because their regions had been the subjects of military or economic conflict between states: Adenauer, a man of the left bank of the Rhine; De Gasperi, an Italian citizen who had been a member of the Austrian House of Tyrol before 1914; Robert Schuman, born in a then German Alsace Lorraine. Moreover, for many of the new elites, the forces vives of postwar Europe, "the expansion of the market at the European level and the development and economic integration of underdeveloped regions were two sides of the same coin, two aspects of the same fight for the well-being of their population" (1985, p.192). Many Euro-federalists still feel strongly this sense of an inexorable historical evolution at the expense of the state (Chiti-Batelli, 1984). Whatever the virtues of this ideal, it is somewhat misleading as an interpretation of present

realities. The states of Europe remain for the time being the practical building blocks of any form of wider organisation. European institutions -the Council of Europe, the European Communities, and others such as NATO and the OECD with a wider geographical span -- have developed not by any process of attrition or erosion of state sovereignty but by a change in the nature of inter-state conflict, which is no longer conducted by warfare but, as Kolinsky well puts it, by "a game ... of seeking competitive advantage within coordinating organisations" (1982 p100). States cooperate at the European level because of their underlying interdependence and their need, by coordination of policies and development of common frameworks, to minimize their vulnerability to unpredictable change in the external world; but they do so without relinquishing identity, sovereignty or the possibility of nationalistic self-defence.

As a consequence, the relationship between the dual developments of European and regional institutions is rather more complicated and ambiguous than we might at first suppose. On the one hand, we already seen how the emergence of the constitutional regionalism in European countries has been facilitated by the larger geopolitical context provided by the EC and NATO. It has proved difficult to export the regional model to other countries, such as Sudan and Ethiopia, and now possibly Sri Lanka, which lack a comparable umbrella of supranational cooperation. Besides, there is no doubt of the enormous direct contribution of continental organizations towards the mobilisation of small and oppressed nations and the growing confidence of their political voice. The Council of Europe has played an important role alongside organisations such as F.U.E.N., the Union of Peoples without a State, the Association for the Defence of Languages in Danger, INTERREG, and the Foundation for International Understanding. The European Communities have not so far contributed greatly, but might do so in consequence of the European Parliament's resolution of March 14th 1983, calling on the Commission "to review all Community and national legislation and practices which discriminate against minority languages, and prepare appropriate Community instruments for ending such Discrimination". The EC's most overt policy presence in peripheral regions is through the European Regional Development Fund, although it tends to attract a degree of attention from regional politicians and administrative elites out of all proportion to its financial significance (Keating and Jones, 1985). Its importance lies mainly in the realm of symbolic politics. And, at a more general level, it is probably fair to say that the markedly Europeanist tendency of regional leaders -- particularly in parties such as the Basque PNV and Catalan CiU whose domestic power base is built upon a narrow territorial nationalism -- owes more to the political rewards of a recognised international standing, than to concrete policy benefits.

Against this we must set the evidence that the institutional beneficiaries of European integration have been national executives, while regional and local government, as well as national parliamentary assemblies must be numbered among the losers. Central government powers have been strengthened by the primacy of intergovernmental bargaining at Community level. Because all relationships between member communities and the EC have been mediated through national governments, the effect of the growth of European legislation has been not to reduce but to

reinforce state centres, and in new forms which have reduced the level of democratic scrutiny of their actions. Parliaments have found themselves unable to control the intergovernmental relations at the heart of the new decision centres, whether between politicians in the Council of Ministers or civil servants in the Committee of Permanent Representatives (Cameron, 1981): and more importantly for our purposes, regional governments have had no standing at all.

The negative consequences of European integration for regional autonomy are the topic of an extensive literature, particularly with reference to the West German Länder, and the Spanish Autonomous Communities (Malanzuk 1985, Hrbek & Schuttemeyer 1979, Ruiloba Santana 1980). The consequences operate at two levels. First, Community legislation has encroached upon several areas for which regional governments have exclusive responsibility, areas such as environmental protection, food standards, the recognition of qualifications, and vocational training. However elaborate the safeguards within a given country's Constitution may be against encroachment by national governments, they are worthless in European law, which, according to the terms of the Treaties, takes no account of internal jurisdictions of member states. Despite this fact, and this is the second point, regional governments enjoy no right of participation in the relevant legislative processes. Informal devices may be developed, such as the "observer", of indeterminate status, who represents all the West German Länder at the EC. Nevertheless, it is ultimately the Federal government alone which defines and presents the German position, even in legal fields which are attributed exclusively to the regions. If the effect of Community membership upon the relatively robust federal system of West Germany has been to reinforce the national centre at the expense of the regions, we may expect it to be all the more pronounced in the context of regionalized states such as Italy, France, Spain, and Belgium, a conclusion supported by the detailed analyses in Keating and Jones' recent book Regions in the European Community (1985).

Chiti-Batelli, analyzing the phenomenon from a "maximalist" stance, freely admits the loss of regional autonomy which is implicit in the growth of Community law and policy, while asserting that the price is worth paying in the interests of political unification (1983 p. 56). That is a logical enough position to adopt, but it is surely not a regionalist position. The latent tension between the two may become more evident as the Single European Act comes into operation. The purpose of the Act is to achieve by 1992 a completely open internal market - "an area without frontiers in which the free movement of goods, persons services and capital is ensured in accordance with the provisions of the Treaty". The many arguments for this measure advanced by the Action Committee for Europe, by the Commission president, and the Dooge and Cockfield Reports, are all based upon supranational considerations relating to Europe's competitive position in the global economy. The prospects for substate governments under the Act are not encouraging. In procedural terms, the effect of the new qualified majority voting rules within the Council will tend to reduce the say of territorial interests, regional and national, while enlarging that of the functional bureaucracy of the Commission. In substantive terms, the abolition of physical, technical and tax

frontiers will aggravate economic differentials between more and less favourably located regions, while regional governments will find themselves less and less able to take defensive action because of the loss of competences to the enlarging sphere of Community law .

So we arrive at the same disconcerting conclusion as did Rhodes (1974) and Scheinman (1977) in their earlier analyses of Europe's relation to the regions : the two tiers of government, subnational and supranational, have emerged over the same period and out of some of the same idealism. It is natural to regard them as mutually reinforcing. But they may also be contradictory, and with further progress towards economic and political union are likely to become more so.

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