"Decentralisation has, not only an administrative value, but also a civic dimension, since it increases the opportunities for citizens to take interest in public affairs; it makes them get accustomed to using freedom"

A History of Decentralisation by Alexis de Tocqueville
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**Imagine if your city had silent zones, without emissions, yet with efficient public transport. What if you could offer indoor bus stops and the possibility of bringing tourists by bus into sensitive historic areas? In fact, you can. An electrically powered bus fleet is the enabler for all this. And with a complete range of hybrid, electric hybrid and full-electric buses you can cover virtually all public transport needs. So, if you listen to your city, what do you think it would tell you?**
Editorial

by Dr. Hande Özsan Bozatli
President of the Assembly of European Regions

This special edition of the Press Club Brussels Magazine is published on the exciting occasion of the 30th Anniversary of the Assembly of European Regions (AER). It will highlight the achievements and celebrate 30 years of regionalisation in Europe.

Established in 1985 by 47 regions to promote regional interests, AER has been advocating and reinforcing European values across the continent for the past 30 years. By 2015, working with 200 regions from 35 countries and 15 interregional organisations, AER, is recognised as the key partner in an array of affairs related to regional relations and development.

However, the main goal of this issue is not to focus purely on the history of AER but rather to look into the evolution of regionalism since 1985. The role of regions is still great not only within the European Union but also beyond it. This is evident by the fact that AER has members outside of the EU, from countries such as Turkey, Ukraine and Russia. Regions strongly support cultural diversity in Europe and they are major partners in socio-economic development. We will try to show how regions take responsibilities in the policy areas such as culture, the environment, regional and national planning, scientific research, etc. These are some of the areas where they clearly have a competitive advantage at their disposal.

One of the concepts that we are including in this publication is “Regional Branding”. What exactly does it mean? How can a region be branded? It means that we use a region’s identity to differentiate it from others by focusing on tangible or intangible assets such as people, resources, businesses, culture, traditions and so on. That is why we chose 7 unique stories from 7 regions that will convey their current priorities as well as the main accomplishments in the past 30 years.

We have tried, in this anniversary issue, to highlight the main achievements of AER with the contributions of high-ranking Academia’s members. Through its Academic and Training Centre, AER succeeded in gathering 40 experts who committed to share their views on regionalism in their countries. You will find some of their contributions in this publication:

Regions leading change and innovation by Nicolas Bouzou,
Regions and Innovation by Pekka Ketunen,
Interregional cooperation in Europe: The Black Sea Region by Melanie Sully,
The rise of regionalism in Europe by Nico Groenendijk. Finally, you will find the press bubble point of view on regionalism: The future of regional press by Martin Banks is a must read article.

Press Club Brussels and AER hope that you will enjoy reading every page of this magazine as much as we engaged putting it together.
Regions leading change and innovation

by Nicolas Bouzou

Nicolas Bouzou is a French economist born in 1976. He founded Asterés, a consultancy firm, in 2006. He is Director of Studies in the MBA Law & Management programme at the University of Paris II Assas. He often writes articles for the French press (Le Figaro, Les Echos, Le Monde) as well as for the foreign press (Financial Times, Le Temps). He sat on the Conseil d’Analyse de la Société to the Prime Minister (2010-2012). He is also part of the keyer Sûze group directed by Jacques Attali which includes the 26 best French economists. He wrote numerous books, such as Le Chagrin des Classes Moyennes (JC Lattès, 2011), La Politique de la Jeunesse (avec Luc Ferry, Odile Jacob, 2012) and On Entend l’Arbre Tomber mais pas la Forêt Pousser (JC Lattès, 2013). He published in January 2015 by Jean-Claude Lattès the story of a travel around Europe called “Le Progrès c’est ici, Voyage chez les Européens qui aiment l’Avenir”. His areas of work are economic policies, territorial organisation, health and the philosophy of progress.

You wrote in an article, published in “Le Monde”, that the regional economic development inequalities have been increasing for several years. Do you think that a deeper regionalisation of countries may better address this challenge?

It is true that intra-national inequalities are becoming deeper in all developed countries. Paul Krugman clearly demonstrated in the 1990s that modern capitalism was generating “agglomeration effects”. Naturally, economic activity is not evenly distributed in a region, it tends to concentrate in a few centres. The public finance crisis accentuates this trend. Indeed, only a few years ago, the increase in social spending played a role of a social buffer. In fact, it guaranteed a certain level of per capita income in the regions. Therefore, we could distinguish between “productive” regions (with high GDP per capita and high per capita income) and residential regions (with low GDP per capita but high income per capita due to the importance of social transfers). Pressures on public finances require all the regions to become productive which means putting in place their own economic development policies. At the macroeconomic level, we can say that the supply-side policies prevail over the demand ones. However, the industrial policies decided by the State, have little meaning in an economy where growth is driven by innovation provided by start-ups. The right scale for conducting supply-side policies, especially in the fields of innovation, are the regions.

Do you agree that an optimal size or key skills will enable regions to be major players in the development of their territories? Do they need some degree of financial autonomy? If yes, which one?

I do not think there is an optimal size for a region. Look around! Switzerland works well with small regions. In Germany, there are very large and small regions. It all really depends on the history. Thus, merging the Languedoc-Roussillon and Midi-Pyrénées regions makes no sense! These two regions have nothing in common historically, economically or socially. There is no interest in conducting a single policy on this scale.

We must abandon this idea of “big is beautiful” which unfortunately inspired the French territorial reform, saying that the French regions were already quite large before the reform compared to its neighbours. The subject actually refers to the skills and, therefore, responsibilities, whatever the region’s size is. Training (including schools), public employment service and culture should be a part of the responsibilities of the regions. This does not necessarily mean setting up a system of exclusive competences but defining the leaders which, in France, undoubtedly requires a constitutional reform. Evidently, these accountability policies must go hand in hand with greater fiscal autonomy as in Switzerland or the in United States, leaving it to the regions to explain their policies and taxation to their citizens. As Tocqueville noted in the 19th century, decentralisation enlivens the democratic feel.

In this framework, what do you think about the territorial reform in France?

The French territorial reform misses its target and also receives only limited public support although the government could have adjusted its actions on this reform. It was presented as a way to save money whereas the new act of decentralisation was to reform the public sphere and to focus on growth policies. It could have been a positive thing but we made something punitive out of this reform. You will not find anyone more stringent than me in terms of public finance management. But merging Alsace, Lorraine and Champagne-Ardennes to save some pennies is counterproductive. I’m not even sure that savings are going to occur because these regional giants will have to pay enormous structural costs. It was necessary to increase the efficiency of the public sphere, not by merging regions or even eliminating the departments, but by removing all duplications between different layers, merging the national civil service and local government service and, especially, by asking the state to completely transfer some competences to regions to sustainably reduce its overhead cost. The French problem is that the state still refuses to redefine its scope of action and constantly surpasses it.

Youth unemployment is very high all over our continent. How can the regional authorities support their youth?

The issue of youth unemployment is the number one problem in the European Union and I am very angry about this as we know fairly precisely what works and what does not. We know for example that creating public employment or subsidised posts in the public sector is completely counterproductive. We also know that training must be targeted at the unemployed and those who work in firms in difficulty and not at the professionals with permanent contracts in large companies. The regions have indeed a major role to play here. Of course they are not responsible for national policy of exemption from social security contributions or union negotiations on labor law but they are responsible for a portion of training that plays a major role in employability. You have to understand that today economic growth is based on innovation. In other words, the innovation is “biased”: it spontaneously creates skilled jobs but at the same time destroys unskilled ones. If the primary education system (including what is called “La maternelle” in France), continuous and university education are not up to the mark, the growth does not allow to reduce unemployment. This is also why the training systems must enable young people and children to have the skills that are key in the 21st century: reading, writing, counting, having analytical mind, being curious and creative. Young Europeans should be able to practice what the German philosopher Kant called the “extended mind” which means adopting someone else’s point in order to analyse a problem in depth. As such, the Erasmus programme remains very relevant. I am also very interested in the Eurodyssey programme conducted by AER. Since its creation in 1985 it offers traineeships abroad to more than 600 young people per year.
by Pekka Kettunen

Regional policy has in the recent decades changed from redistribution of public means to investing in growth. A recent Espoo report shows that it is possible to find good practices of regional policy-making, by emphasising the following five activities: coordinating actions of actors and institutions, integrating policy sectors, mobilising stakeholder participation, being adaptive to changing contexts and realising place-based/territorial specificities and impacts. In order to practice such a way of regional policy, supporting innovations, requires modernising the way regions interact with the environment. Cooperation per se seems to be the key word. Cooperation as a term has been in the development and innovation vocabulary, and it still seems to be a central way of renewal. Cooperation as networking is, however, not an easy game. It is about crossing boundaries, networking both vertically and horizontally. Regionally this can involve public as well as private actors, cities and rural communities, NGOs, citizen groups and so forth. A parallel line of action can emphasise bringing together research, enterprises and public authorities, such as is the Finnish model of the Strategic Centres for Science, Technology and Innovation. Regions are by definition suitable to coordinating local government actions, and economic activities as a whole. The modernisation of regional activity requires that they act as “learning organisations”. Learning cities, learning towns, learning regions, learning communities are terms now in common use throughout the developed and developing world, mostly because local and regional administrators have recognised that a more prosperous future depends on the development of human and social capital in their midst.

In regional policy there is a growing interest in place-based approach, the concept of which emphasises subsidiarity. However, as Barca argues, the concept includes elements of dialogue and interaction between the different levels of government. The nation states are constantly redefining balance between the national, regional and local levels of government, their tasks and inter-relationships. While a number of factors seem to suggest the upscaling of tasks, there are equally factors suggesting the down-scaling of tasks. What is characteristic for innovative institutional structures is interaction, openness and transparency. These institutional conditions are central to the modern place-base approach to regional development policy. By definition, place-based approach refers to an approach, which does not just deliver an integrated bundle of public goods that addresses different dimensions of well-being at the same time, but applies a combination of endogenous and exogenous forces. Exogenous action is needed to bring knowledge and values from “outside” and change the balance of bargaining power within places – where the tension and conflict between endogenous and exogenous forces is accounted for and governed through appropriate multi-level governance tools. Similarly the concept of Smart growth suggests that the existence of local development milieu, a high level of social capital and networking (flows of people and ideas) i.e. ability to constitute and sustain networks of cities, functional regions, reasonable transport options, and e-connectivity are favourable conditions for growth and learning.

The OECD has called the place-based approach to regional development “the new paradigm of regional policy”. Economically, the idea is rooted in the concepts of market failures and government failures that create inefficiency and social exclusion. Institutions are central to these failures, and there is a risk that past failures compound future problems. The basic point of the above report is that institutions tailored to the needs of places are of critical importance for regional development. Public bodies such as local government are prominent amongst such institutions, but the idea of an “institution” also encompasses things like legislation, practices, shared outlooks and other “soft” factors that shape how organisations work. Linkages with other places also shape the success or failure of place-based initiatives. The theory is also strongly on the need for transparency and evaluation of public interventions and giving everyone the opportunity to have the information, participate and voice dissent. Governing regional policy in a fast-changing environment demands constantly updating the skills and connections. E-government, for example, is expanding rapidly and electronic means are preferred by rising groups of population. Strategic approach is another way of looking forward. In Finland regional councils have invited other partners to elaborate in concert a number of strategies such as welfare, infrastructure and economic development. Depending on the context, regional actors can take the leading role in coordinating territories beyond local governments, and, again depending on the context, may have a better opportunity to engage in strategic thinking, involving bringing the relevant actors together and mediate. The ability of, and experience in, engaging in transnational discussions strengthens the role of regions in strategic development.

References


Pekka Kettunen defended his doctoral thesis in 1994 at the University of Turku. This thesis analysed various theories of implementation research, and tested the bottom-up/approach empirically. Since then, Dr. Kettunen has worked also at the Abo Akademi University, Tampere University and Jyväskylä University and published over one hundred scientific publications in the areas of policy analysis, evaluation, local government research, comparative analysis, and democracy. Mr Kettunen has recently co-authored articles in Local Government Studies, Regional and Federal Studies, and Evidence & Policy. He has also co-edited two special issues of journals: in 2012, Scandinavian Journal of Public Administration, on evaluation, and in 2013, Halduskultuur (Administrative Culture) on decentralisation and governance. Dr. Kettunen has given presentations in several Japanese Universities and made longer visits to several European Universities in the U.K., Denmark, Estonia, Croatia and Slovenia. Dr. Kettunen has also conducted evaluation for Icelandic, Estonian and Slovenian Research Agencies. His current research interests include the issue of effectiveness of public interventions as well as the methods applied in analyzing impacts.
Go-Governance is headed by Dr Melanie Sully, editor, writer and consultant, who was for many years professor of political science at the Diplomatic Academy, Vienna. Formerly Voice of America radio correspondent, Dr Sully acts as a consultant on good governance projects for the Cultural Department of the Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs, Austria. Further she has worked as a consultant for the OSCE (ODIHR Warsaw) on projects such as parliamentary standards, comparative legislatures, as well as women’s political participation. In this capacity she has presented expert papers in parliament, Belgrade, Serbia on legislative standards, public consultations and parliamentary ethics, November 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014 and in parliament, Tirana, Albania, July 2012; presentations on parliaments and ethics and legislative standards for parliamentarians in Tbilisi, Georgia July 2013 and for the Council of Europe, GRECO 2014. Guest lectures at the universities in the town and region. Selection was made by application and a Summer School was organised at Batumi University on the Black Sea coast for young people from the region engaged in civil society and governance work fostering more security in the region. Selection was made by application and a group including youth from Georgia, Turkey, Armenia, Russia, Ukraine and others came together for intensive study carried out by international experts. The project resulted in a publication produced by the students themselves and the seminars and field work enabled the young people to get to know better their neighbours. From this it became apparent that there was often a lack or insufficient knowledge of neighbouring countries in the region, a situation which can and has made a great contribution especially under the leadership of Dr Hande Özsan Bozatli from Turkey whose own biography is so closely associated with cities such as Odessa and Batumi.

Summer School Batumi

Following a good governance conference in the Georgian capital and with the support of the Austrian Foreign Ministry, the City of Vienna and German Marshall Fund and local partners, a Summer School was organised at Batumi University on the Black Sea coast for young people from the region engaged in civil society and governance work fostering more security in the region. Selection was made by application and a group including young from Georgia, Turkey, Armenia, Russia, Ukraine and others came together for intensive study carried out by international experts. The project resulted in a publication produced by the students themselves and the seminars and field work enabled the young people to get to know better their neighbours. From this it became apparent that there was often a lack or insufficient knowledge of neighbouring countries in the region, a situation which can easily promote prejudice and conflict. Many of the young people had visited countries in the EU or even the US but often had not seen much of their own region because of difficulties in travel or visa restrictions. From the experience many friendships were formed which continued via social media subsequently. Lectures were also given by Austrian experts highlighting the country’s own difficult history and path to democracy and stability.
The Institute for Go-Governance decided after a conference series on good governance that very often examples were given again and again of bad governance, not too difficult to cite in the region. However, good governance work carried out in difficult circumstances was often overlooked. Small projects carried out by enterprising individuals with little official support can however build that necessary link in the chain to strengthen democratic governance. Thus with the help of the City of Vienna, the Austrian Foreign Ministry, the Austrian Industrialists and the Assembly of European Regions an awards scheme was launched to find dedicated people pursuing such projects. Social media was used to disseminate information about the award as well as the network and the AER newsletter, and applications were received mostly from Moldova, Ukraine and Armenia. Successful candidates were invited from western Ukraine, from Chisinau and from Yerevan to come to Vienna with expenses paid to undergo intensive training with experts from the Austrian Foreign Ministry, the City of Vienna, the UN and the OSCE. The projects of the awardees involved improving relations between Armenia and Turkey, free media in Armenia, a student initiative in Western Ukraine to provide legal assistance and a regional scheme in Moldova. Certificates were awarded by officials from the Austrian Foreign Ministry and details can be downloaded from the Institute for Go-Governance homepage www.go-governance.com. The Institute would like to organise more schemes such as this as well as Summer Schools in the future but financial support is limited and increasingly difficult to come by.

The Work of the AER

AER sees the importance of the Black Sea region stretching well beyond the littoral states to Eastern Europe, the Balkans, Caucasus and the Caspian area. The Batumi Declaration was made following the second AER Black Sea summit in Georgia in April 2011. It made reference to the geo-strategic role of the region, the common ecological problems that transcend borders affecting all countries and neighbours and however the importance of peace and stability. For this AER has strongly promoted and supported projects aiming to develop a dialogue between those active in the region engaged in work promoting these aims such as local and regional authorities and also civil society which is an important component. In accordance with AER philosophy, “local and regional levels form the bedrock of fruitful dialogue which strives to cope with many challenges facing the Black Sea region.”

In 2013 the fourth AER summit took place in Rize Turkey and drew up a final resolution. This recognised the vital ongoing role of the European Union in working for sustainable democracies and peace in the region. AER encouraged, however, a stronger partnership in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy but considered progress modest. Above all it called for funding to match the ambitious aims of the EU and expressed concern that lack of agreement on budgetary rules could hold back progress. However, the resolution noted on a positive note that some attempt had been made to streamline the programming process for greater simplicity. One of the key concepts developed by AER was multi-level governance to increase stability and long term security. For this to work effectively more fiscal autonomy was vital for the regions. AER restated its commitment to decentralisation and support for dialogue throughout the Black Sea region.

In 2014 representatives of AER gathered in Bucharest at the invitation of the National Union of Romanian Counties. The meeting pushed for the EU to work on a real strategy for the Black Sea region. Not only should synergy develop in the Danube cooperation programme but at the same time an effort should be made to maintain contacts with the Russian Federation in increasingly difficult circumstances. AER welcomed the signature of Association Agreements between the EU, Ukraine, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova and welcomed the move which should promote cooperation across the borders between Member States of the EU and others including Russia. In turn AER called on Russia to sign financing agreements which could contribute to greater stability in the region as a whole. The priorities for AER are and have been education, social inclusion, people to people contacts and youth programmes as a foundation for the future. In the Bucharest declaration reference was made to regional and local good governance without which it is difficult to run programmes efficiently. The Academic and Training Centre offers a platform for regional administrations and experts to improve efficiency and work in this respect. In Bucharest AER supported the idea of a Youth Black Sea Centre as an advocate of strong regions for the future. Much more work has to be done not only securing more financial support but also in acting as a network for those working in the region to come together and pool resources.

Conclusion and Outlook

In 2015, in the framework of the 30th anniversary AER moved to its Brussels office to a new home in the House of European Regions, an appropriate centre for networking and promoting the values and ideals on the spot. Now AER is better placed to champion the interests of regions in the Black Sea region. Looking back on the many dramatic developments in the Black Sea region in recent times it can be said that progress has been made but often at the expense of new hatred where before there was calm and strife where before there was mutual understanding. The lesson to be learnt is the promotion of people to people contact, in the regions and local communities, which provide from the bottom up the potential for enduring solutions.

Much more has to be done in the Black Sea region to combat the lack of trust, and fear which hinders the implementation of necessary reforms. There is still work to be done on democratic sustainability deficit and progress; the legacy of the Soviet era is still cited as holding back governance having entrenched a culture of passivity: “Shaped by a strong central state ideology subnational authorities in the Black Sea area do not have the political support they have had by tradition and political culture in Western Europe. Although all of the states around the Black Sea have sub-national authorities, they lack independence, political power and fiscal autonomy”. AER accumulated a wealth of experience in the region stretching back to the fall of the Soviet Union and has shared the ups and downs, the setbacks and progress of its regions.

One of the greatest challenges is to muster financial support for even the most modest projects. To date, the Institute for Go-Governance can be grateful for the enthusiasm of members of the AER, the Austrian Foreign Ministry and the City of Vienna and support kindly made available to realise the implementation.
Regionalisation: why?

by Anne Azam-Pradeilles

Anne Azam-Pradeilles, French ENA graduate, international expert with an extensive experience in international cooperation, EU matters and Institutional Building, notably in the fields of public administration reform, governance, regional policy and capacity strengthening, in particular with the EU Twinning instrument, has graduated of the ENS of Cachan and Paris Sorbonne. She started her career as senior lecturer and researcher fellow in English at Paris V-René Descartes University. Since 1994, she has specialised in EU enlargement: in Poland and several other candidate countries, Slovakia, Lithuania, Latvia, Romania, Bulgaria, then Kosovo, Croatia and Serbia, then in European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) countries, East Ukraine, Moldova, and South, Morocco and Egypt and more widely Africa, Asia and South America. In 2000, she became adviser to the DATAR (Delegate for Spatial Planning and Regional Action) for public services and public administration reform. Capitalising on this experience, she became the Pre-Accession Twinning adviser for Regional policy in Latvia, Ministry of Finance. She then became the Pre-Accession adviser to the Ministry of Administration and Interior of Romania, 2004–2005, for financial and fiscal decentralisation and later adviser for administrative capacity building to the Director General of Civil Service and the President of the National Academy of Public Administration of Ukraine. From 2008 to July 2012, she was director of international cooperation for administrative and territorial governance in the French Ministry of Interior. From July to December 2014 she has been the team leader for the elaboration of the action plan of the National Policy of Modernisation of the State in Niger. Since November 2014 she has been working on decentralisation in the context of “advanced regionalisation” for the Ministry of Civil Service and Administrative Reform of Morocco. In 2013–2014 she has been resident Twinning adviser in Moldova for Regional Policy with the Ministry of Regional Development and Construction.

" The multisecular effort that has long been necessary for our country to achieve and maintain its unity in spite of the divergences between the provinces that were successively added to it, is no longer compulsory today. On the contrary, it is the regional activities that appear as the springs of its economic power of tomorrow."

Charles de Gaulle, March 24th 1968

"France has needed a strong and centralised power to make itself, it needs today a decentralised power not to break away."

François Mitterrand, July 15th 1981

In our “global village” in which the former superpowers of the Cold War have faded away into more balanced driving forces and in which demographically strong countries have emerged as powerful economic and political powers, regionalisation has become one of the most effective institutional instruments: an essential component of the democratic process and a major asset for sustainable economic, social and territorial development. Regions, which must be distinguished from states, are at the heart of economic, social and territorial cohesion. There can be regions in both unitary and federal states. Considered sometimes as a step towards federalisation, they may be perceived as a danger in certain contexts. "Regionalisation" refers to the process of dividing a state into smaller units and transferring to them a number of powers – either from central state administration to regional and local state administrations (deconcentration) or to self-governments (decentralisation).

In the European Union (EU) “regions” have so many different names, sizes and numbers of inhabitants that in the seventies EUROSTAT established statistical standards and norms: the Nomenclature d’Unités Statistiques Territoriales or NUTS. The Commission Regulation (EC) No 1059/2003 gave NUTS a legal status in July 2003. NUTS 1 refers to the state level, NUTS 2 to the region level, NUTS 3 to the 3rd tier, like the 39 Government Regions (Regierungsbezirke) in Germany or the 101 départements in France and NUTS 4 and 5 refer to lower levels of self-governments or Local Administrative Units (LAU).

The EU is composed of rather big countries, like Germany, France, Italy, Spain or Poland, and small countries like Estonia and Latvia or very small ones like Luxembourg, Malta or Cyprus. Regional policy targeting the NUTS 2 level, it was decided, notably for the allocation of EU structural funds, to consider the smaller countries as NUTS 1/2 Member States. Some countries, federal or semi-federal or composed of a “Union” of “Nations” are divided into several NUTS 1 Units. The United Kingdom (UK) has devolved a lot of powers to the members of its “United Kingdom” and Scotland, for example, is one of 12 NUTS 1 areas in the UK and is divided into 4 NUTS 2 areas.

During the eighties the implementation of Regional Policy with its financial instruments was an incentive to the creation of institutional regional units. But, for different reasons, some countries only created these NUTS 2 territories as programming regions, not as self-governments, like Portugal and, later, Bulgaria and Romania – whose territorial reforms are delayed in both cases by historical and political issues related to the still important presence of minorities, Turkish and Hungarian respectively. The late appearance of regions as fully-fledged institutional entities when territorial units existed in a way or another in more or less all the member states deserves to be carefully analysed. In 1985 the European Charter of Local Self-Government was elaborated by the Council of Europe. But the late ratification of the Charter by some countries, France for instance, who only did so in 2006, underlines the sensitive dimension of the transfer of some powers from the central state to regional entities.

Seen from opposite perspectives regionalisation can be considered by some as a strong democratic asset enabling sustainable economic and social development and by others as a weakening of the country or even a threat to the unity of the state. Regionalisation and federalisation have been debated intensely in Europe in the past months with the Scottish referendum and the Cataluna vote – both nations’ leaders proposing to go the full length of the process towards independence and the creation of new countries. The end of the communist block in Central Europe and the Balkans has shown several such examples with Czechoslovakia dividing into...
two, now both EU Member States, Yugoslavia exploding into several of its past components, then the Federation of Serbia and Montenegro also separating and Kosovo seceding from Serbia. All these countries are meant to enter the EU soon and their former links will be assets. But Kosovo, for instance, is not yet recognised by all EU member states as some consider it may prove a “bad” example when there are still unresolved or not yet totally appeased minority problems in their own countries.

France study case
With a “regional” history of more than two thousand years, the case of France may provide an interesting example. After the fall of the Roman Empire, the “French regions” again became somewhat autonomous under the influence of local lords after conflicting tribes. The first king who really started the process of institution building was Hugues CAPET, elected king in 987. As prince of the Île-de-France “region” he was the most powerful prince, and as elected by the other “regional” princes he was legitimate and his hereditary dynasty lasted for 8 centuries until the revolution at the end of the 18th century. Its centralised power was vested in the hands of the king, the feudal lords, heads of the other regions. At the beginning of the 17th century, Louis XIII decided to put an end to the feudal system. The uprising, “La Fronde” (1648–53), of first the Parliament then the highest regional lords, during the infancy of Louis XIV mark the last attempts to counterbalance the absolute power of the king. At his major reform, Louis XIV declared “l’État” and insisted on having all his regional lords at court – with no political power. His governance was based on a strong institutional organisation with professional ministers – the provinces being administered by powerful fermiers généraux, in charge of levying taxes for the royal treasury. The Constitutions of the revolutionaries and ministers upon the royal administrative framework – except for regions that represented the aristocratic power of a privileged elite that the new politicians wanted to see abolished. When in 1806, Napoleon passed a law on centralisation as the mode of administrative governance and created the prefects, representing State, Government and all ministers, he did so not at regional level but at departmental level (NUTS 3). Progressively, notably with Napoleon III, the missions devolved to the prefectoral corps extended to economic development policies. But it was only a century later, after the 2nd World War, that the first planning regions were created in 1955 and region prefects established in 1964 – just after DATAR, the Delegation for Spatial Planning and Regional Policy, created in 1963. In 1969 President de GAULLE failed in his referendum establishing regions as self-governments. Regions were only created in 1982 in the law on decentralisation2 and it is only in 2003 that the revised Constitution explicitly included the regions in article 721. To render these regions more competitive in a global context, France has just passed a law3 to reduce on January 1st 2016 their number from 22 to 13 in metropolitan France with a bigger size, more inhabitants and more competencies.

Morocco study case
Morocco is also a very interesting case. After signing a protectorate treaty in 1912 with France and obtaining its independence in 1956, the country chose to capitalise on its administrative past. The history of Moroccan regions started in the forties. After the war, smaller units, “provinces”, were preferred. But again, in the sixties, 7 regions were created to address the challenges of a non-decentralised governance. In the Concorde of 1992 and 1996 regions are local governments under the rule of the deconcentrated services of the appointed governors. The regional charter promulgated by the dahir (law) of April 2nd 1997 regulates this first decentralisation and divides the country into 16 regions, including the two Sahara “provinces of the South”. In January 2010 King Mohammed VI set up a consultative Commission for Regionalisation, which produced its report a year later4. In 2011 the King reacted rapidly to the “Arab Spring”. The Constitution, revised in July 2011, states that “The territorial organisation of the Realm is decentralised, based on an advanced regionalisation”. Title IX on “Regions and Territorial Collectivities”, articles 135 to 146, delves into the delimitation and missionisation on the royal administrative framework – except for regions that represented the aristocratic power of a privileged elite that the new politicians wanted to see abolished. In 1806, Napoleon passed a law on centralisation as the mode of administrative governance and created the prefects, representing State, Government and all ministers, he did so not at regional level but at departmental level (NUTS 3). Progressively, notably with Napoleon III, the missions devolved to the prefectoral corps extended to economic development policies. But it was only a century later, after the 2nd World War, that the first planning regions were created in 1955 and region prefects established in 1964 – just after DATAR, the Delegation for Spatial Planning and Regional Policy, created in 1963. In 1969 President de GAULLE failed in his referendum establishing regions as self-governments. Regions were only created in 1982 in the law on decentralisation and it is only in 2003 that the revised Constitution explicitly included the regions in article 721. To render these regions more competitive in a global context, France has just passed a law to reduce on January 1st 2016 their number from 22 to 13 in metropolitan France with a bigger size, more inhabitants and more competencies.

Egyp study case
The case of Egypt also brings an interesting perspective. Egypt as a nation state goes back to the tenth millennium before Christ and has experienced some of the earliest forms of central government. The new Constitution of 20145 has 247 articles with the executive authorities in Chapter V, the President (art. 139–162), the Government (art. 163–174) and the Local Administration (art.175–183). Article 175 on Administrative Units provides: “The state is divided into local administrative units that have legal personality. They include governors, cities and villages”. The governors are administered by a governor under the presidency while the local administrative units represented the traditional regions, not yet decentralised. Governors are either “urban” or a mix of “urban” and “rural”. They may comprise just one city, as Cairo or Alexandria. To address the political and geostrategic challenges of the Sinai, a large desert sparsely populated by Bedouins, bordering on Gaza, Israel, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, two large regions have been created, North Sinai and South Sinai, with a certain degree of specificity taken into account in the Constitution. The same is true for Nubians in the Upper Egypt governorates and for some other minorities like the Berbers. Their inclusion in Egypt’s political map aims at preserving its territorial unity, avoiding internal disputes or even movements calling for secession – the more so as Sinai is the frequent target of terrorists who want to establish a caliphate on the model of ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

After Morocco and Egypt, belonging to the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in the South, two countries of ENP East deserve to be analysed, Moldova and Ukraine.

Moldova and Ukraine study case
Both are former Soviet Socialist Republics colonised by Russia at some stage of their respective histories and again independent since 1991 at the fall of the Soviet Union. Moldova for a time kept its NUTS 3 Romanian judet and has now recently created three development regions, an autonomous territory, Gagauzia, and with one a special status, Transnistria. Ukraine has kept its Soviet NUTS 2 oblasts with an appointed governor. Both countries have been developing the last few years a National Strategy for Regional Development, supported by Technical Assistance from the EU and even a Twinning project with the Ministry of Regional Development and Construction for Moldova in 2012–2014. And both are facing the same problem, secessionist territories, Transnistria for Moldova and Donbass for Ukraine. The cease-fire of July 1992 in Transnistria has led to a frozen conflict and the Russian tanks are still there. The Minsk cease-fire Agreement of February 12th 2015 seems to be leading to the same result: Crimea is still occupied and the tanks are still in parts of Luhansh and Donetsk oblasts. Unrecognised by any United Nations member state, Transnistria is designated by the Republic of Moldova as the “Transnistria autonomous territorial unit with special legal status”6. On March 17th 2015, the Ukrainian Parliament has voted a special legal status for its territory in the eastern Region of Ukraine. The Russian backed separatists have already re-fused. In November 2003, Russian president Putin had proposed a memorandum on the creation of an asymmetric federal Moldovan state, which did not materialise. The same concept was proposed to Ukraine, who considered that independent territorial units would not be access liable to secession – the more so as Crimea had been annexed. Following this inclusion of Crimea to the Russian Federation, in March 2014 the head of the Transnistrian parliament asked to join the Russian Federation. No answer was given. Last but not least, the linguistic dimension is to be stressed in both cases. The Moldovan state is 40% populated by ethnic Romanians, the Ukrainians are 60% of the population, and the nationality of the remaining 20% is not known. It both enables to keep a country together and gives the possibility to linguistic minorities to have their own national parliament. It is also an instrument of countability from its leaders. It is also an instrument of democracy and we, hope, of peace.
From a Europe of the Regions
to Nation State Regions?

by Maura Adshead

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For the last three hundred years or so, the nation state has been regarded as the most appropriate unit of political rule. Secured in international treaties and law, dating back as far as the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, there is a presumption that nation states have the right to political independence and autonomy.

The combination of nation and state, however, is not always a happy coincidence. States are independent political units, over which recognized governments have judicial, administrative and territorial powers to rule. In this respect, states are practical units of government: nations are often less so. The idea of a nation usually embodies a blend of cultural, linguistic, ethnic or religious particulars shared by a group of people for whom this distinctive combination provides a binding sense of identity. For some this identity is naturally claimed: for others it is deliberately created.

Thus, for example, some see the nation as a largely cultural phenomenon, organically created by the distinctive and shared history, language, lifestyles and attitudes of its people. It is this view that lends itself to the idea – put about by German philosophers in the 18th century – of the Volksgeist, a nation’s collective sense of itself that is often revealed in the songs, myths, stories and legends of its people. For others, nations are groups of people bound together primarily through shared citizenship and civic obligation, regardless of their cultural, religious or linguistic loyalties. It is this view that underpinned the French revolution, creating the idea of French citizens with inalienable rights and liberties bound together by the radical creation of the French nation state.

The problem then, is that whereas states are objectively identifiable political units, with governments that represent them, nations are more likely to be subjectively defined by their members – a projection of a perceived political community that does not always coincide with the practical politics of the state. For all Europeans, history illustrates that the difference between nations and states is much more than just simple semantics.

Delicately positioned between the nation and the state, European regions typically accommodate the diverse political, social and cultural identities of distinct groups of people whilst fending off short of strident bids for statehood. Whilst the 19th century nation states spawned regions as obstacles to the construction of a national identity, 20th century states regarded regions as a means to strengthen fragile European democracies in the aftermath of the Second World War. Post war peace, the establishment of stable frontiers, and the easing of relations between European states, provided a context in which European regions were a politically secure means to represent religious, linguistic and cultural differences within states.

In Germany, the strong role given over to regions in the newly created federal state was designed to avoid the excesses of centralisation that had occurred under National Socialism. In some states, such as Belgium or Italy, it is argued that regionalism helped compensate for the weakness of the central state. And in other cases, such as Spain, regional autonomy was the price paid for peaceful democratic transition.

The advance of European integration provided further political impetus for regional recognition. EU acknowledgement of European regions offered the promise of increased EU legitimacy by establishing the means to connect a supranational level of government to a more locally relevant regional level. Moreover, as the demands on European welfare states continued to increase, bespoke regional responses presented a more effective investment to cash-strapped central government. Practically speaking, European regions provided a peaceful means to promote European democracy.

Spain study case

Nevertheless, in some places regional movements remained in contention with the central state. The Basque separatist movement is perhaps the most obvious example, with claims to a Basque nation that comprises the autonomous communities of the Basque Country and Navarre in Spain, and the French Basque Country in France. In an awkward historical paradox, however, greater autonomy was ceded to the Basque region in Spain in return for their alliance with Franco. The surrender, in 1937, of Basque troops to the Italian allies of Franco in Santander (Santona) is still recalled by many leftists in Spain as the ‘Treason of Santona’. In a further ironic twist, the reemergence of violent Basque separatism in the 1960s, focused around ETA’s Marxist claims for an independent Socialist Basque country, led both to unprecedented levels of autonomy for the region in the newly democratic Spain and a series of Christian Democrat-led governments in Basque Autonomous Community. Although the separatist and nationalist organisation ‘Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA), meaning ‘Basque homeland and Freedom’ announced a definitive cessation of violence in October 2011, still the patchwork of political preferences within the Basque region have worked against plans for independence.

The same cannot be said for Catalonia. In addition to a strong attachment to their own language, the wide scale suppression of all things Catalan by the Franco regime helped to develop a broader and more politically inclusive independent identity. In addition to banning the use of Catalan in government-run institutions, Franco’s regime banned any kind of public political activities in Catalan, including even the publication of books or simply the discussion of ideas in Catalan. The extraction from German-occupied France, of the exiled pro-Republic of Spain President of Catalonia, Lluis...
Company, his subsequent torture and execution for ‘military rebellion’ in 1940 seeded a tension between Catalonia and the Spanish state which has never since been fully resolved.

After Franco’s death in 1975, Catalonia voted for the adoption of a democratic Spanish Constitution in 1978 giving Catalonia a degree of political and cultural autonomy. Today, it is the most economically dynamic region of Spain and its capital and largest city, Barcelona, is a major international, cultural centre and tourist destination. Where political extremism divided the Basques, however, Catalan nationalism has enjoyed a consistent political consensus. In 2005, the Catalan government proposed a new statute on autonomy, designating Catalan as the preferred language and al-
locating increased judicial and fiscal competences to the region. For many Catalans, the statute offered a final chance to find political accommodation in the Spanish state. Supported by a large majority of Cat-
alans and approved by both the Spanish and Catalan parliaments, it was, however, struck down by a land-mark ruling from the Spanish constitutional court in 2010. The decision triggered a wave of public outrage, mass street demonstrations and a further impetus to-wards regional autonomy.

Belgium study case
In other places the long-standing claims for regional autonomy have grown hand in hand with the central state. Since its creation in 1830, the Kingdom of Bel-
gium has been divided into two main linguistic groups: the northern Dutch speaking Flemish (or Flanders); and the southern French speaking Wallonos. The existence of the French speaking capital in the middle of the Dutch-speaking region, plus a significant minority of German speakers along the German border, makes any neat partition between the two groups feasible. Still it is argued that the Flemish speaking Dutch and French speaking Wallonos have been drifting further apart since the 1970s. A series of state reforms be-
tween 1970 and 1993 enabled the evolution of a more effective federal structure, but still since the 2007 gen-
eral election, forming a national government has be-come increasingly fraught. In 2010–11, the country had to wait 589 days before a government was formed. The situation was equally difficult following the election of 2014. In consequence, even the French Wallonion hold on the lucrative capital region of Brussels, which has kept the Flemish in the union thus far, is perhaps no longer enough to hold the two regions together. The problem, however, for two more or less equal regions in Belgium is that there can be no further devolution short of independent statehood. This was not the case in the UK, where the long-standing asymmetry in re-
negional powers meant that there was plenty of scope for a further devolution to UK regions.

UK study case
When the leader of the Labour party, Tony Blair came to power in Britain in 1997, he pursued a constitution-al revolution which, he promised, would be ‘the biggest programme of change to democracy ever proposed’. Amongst his proposals were a Scottish Parliament with legislative and tax varying powers, a National As-
sembly for Wales and the promise of English region-al assemblies, where they were supported in regional referendums. Again, with the changes, the people talked in Northern Ireland that were concluded with the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, also devolved significant powers to the newly created Northern Irish Assembly. Legislative devolution was accompanied by executive devolution to the Scottish Government (formerly Ex-
cutive), Welsh Assembly Government and Northern Ireland Executive. Each government is accountable to its own parliament or Assembly. In both devolved parts of the UK are still represented in the UK Parliament at Westminster. Scotland has 59 West-
minster MPs, Wales 40 and Northern Ireland 18. This settlement, which was designed to finally settle re-gional claims for autonomy, was only partially suc-
cessful. Although regarded as a positive reinforcement of regional identities in Wales and Northern Ireland, it seemed only to encourage further separatist claims in Scotland, whilst contributing to a more generalised feeling of disengagement with government amongst many English. There are many factors responsible for the rise of the UK Independence Party (UKIP), but – notwithstanding the name – it is clearly a party that appeals to separatist sentiments of native national feel-
ings. Their part in the May 2015 general election cam-
paign helped make that election the most volatile ever in British history. For the first time ever, there were five English parties polling more than 5% of the vote: Con-
servative, Labour, Liberal Democrat, UKIP and Green; raising the possibility that the Scottish National Party might be the third largest party in Westminster! It is in this volatile political atmosphere that a yes vote in the recent Scottish independence referendum would certainly have meant the opening of Pandora’s box for European politics as a whole. Although breaking a 307 year union with England and Wales would have been dramatic enough for the politics of the United Kingdom, these were not the only political impacts to consider. A queue of other independently minded Eu-
ropean regions were equally keen to see what new po-
litical opportunities and precedents Scottish secession might set. In the months leading up to the Scottish vote, online polls produced majorities for independ-
ence in the South Tyrol and Veneto regions of Italy, as well as Catalonia in Spain. And so it was that the Scottish campaign for independence became as much a concern for the rest of Europe as it was for the UK. Indirectly joining the campaign in February 2015, the European Commission President, Jose Manuel Barroso, argued that it “would be extremely difficult, if not im-
possible” for an independent Scotland to join the EU, because the formation of a new member from a mem-
der state would need the approval from all other ex-
sting EU states. And that was likely not forthcoming.

And policies in all this ?
But in all of the recent talk of regional secession, sepa-ratism and statehood, have we mistaken long-standing regional issues for the cause of contemporary political tumult? if in fact regions provide ready-made po-
litical channels through which to voice other political concerns? A closer look at the politics of Catalonia and Scotland would seem to support this view. For Catalonia, on the question of cultural, linguistic and even economic independence: none of these need to be ‘claimed’, for they already exist. Catalans are Cat-
alans. They know that Catalonia is a part of Spain, but in the everyday reality this is only a technicality. It is in this context that moves for an independent Catalo-
nia first appeared as but another manifestation of this strong regional identity. As disappointment with the Spanish government increased, however, the idea of a Catalanian alternative seemed less fanciful. On a trip to Spain during Easter this year I spoke to one Cata-
lan woman about her support for a secessionist refer-
dendum and gained something of an insight into the mixed feelings about independence shared by many Catalans. Originally, against independence, she would now be tempted to vote for it, “because the Spanish government is so awful”. This is a feeling shared by many more in Spain, not just in Catalonia. The meteoric rise of Podemos, a leftist insurgent party founded in early 2014 provides testimony to many. Podem-
os calls for sweeping reforms to the Spanish political system, including a 35 hour week, a state-funded basic income for all citizens, public control over ‘strategic’ parts of the economy and parliamentary control over the policies of the European Central Bank. With popu-
sar support fluctuating consistently around and above 25%, Podemos now outflanks the ruling conservative party and its socialist opposition. Led by Pablo Iglesias, a relatively young 36 year old lecturer of politics, Po-
demos reflects a populist move against traditional po-
litical croneyism and a long string of recent corruption scandals in Spain. Certainly much of the surge in support for Scottish independence drew from the same kinds of popular discontent. Scottish antipathy towards conservative led UK governments, that threaten more left-oriented education and health values in Scotland, has provid-
ed a natural well-spring of support for independence from anti-austerity voters disaffected by Westminster policies. A review of the pro-independence campaign reveals that it was as much about retaining those pos-
tive things created by the union and now in threat, as it was about creating an entirely new political plan. Support for the National Health Service against threats of privatisation and a positive and proactive role in Europe were key issues in the Scottish independence campaign. And there are good reasons to think that the campaign went some way to achieving these ambi-
tions: it raised the possibility of a split, and therefore revenue raising powers in the post referendum political settlement, making the Scottish parliament the third most devolved parliament in the world, after those of the Canadian provinces and Swiss cantons. But per-
haps not everything is about regional power. Polls from the most recent UK general election showed that many Scottish Labour voters opted to support the SNP, see-
ing it as a potential power-broker in a post-election coalition in the Westminster parliament and a means thereby to support the policies they want in Scotland via the UK parliament, as well as their own.

If we are to learn anything from a review of European regionalism, it is that we cannot expect the outcome of the Scottish referendum to quell the desire for greater regional autonomy, but that as much of the responsi-
bility for this political impetus comes from states as it does from regions.
The rise of regionalism in Europe

by Nico Groenendijk

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Regionalism in Europe has been on the rise since the mid-1980s. Prior to that European integration was driven by and mainly concerned nation states; regional and local authorities were not really in the picture. This has changed considerably over the last 30 years, for a number of reasons. First, both the European Union (EU) and the Council of Europe (CoE) have enlarged considerably, especially after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which had also an impact on the nature of their policies. In the case of the EU, the southern and northern enlargements in the 1980s and 1990s, but especially the eastern enlargements in 2004 and 2007, have led to an expansion of the EU Cohesion Policy in which regions play a crucial part. Secondly, supranational institutions such as the European Union and the Council of Europe have deliberately developed close cooperation with regional and local actors, and with their associations, to some extent “by-passing the nation state”. Thirdly, the kind of problems European cooperation addresses, and thereby the nature of European integration, has changed a lot over the last 30 years. With the “completion” of the Single European Market (SEM) and the establishment of the Economic Monetary Union (EMU), the need for European cooperation has spilled-over to a large variety of policy areas in which all kinds of interdependencies between Member States occur. These increased internal interdependencies (within a large and increasingly heterogeneous group of nation states) are complemented by huge changes in the external environment, such as increased economic competition on the global level and numerous armed conflicts at Europe’s doorstep.

In this article, a historical overview is given of the rise of regionalism, first for the CoE, then for the EU, with a focus on the institutional role of regions and on their lobbying activities. This development is then placed within the wider context of the dynamics of the European integration process. The article concludes with a future outlook on the role of regions in Europe.

Regions and the Council of Europe: a historical overview

The Council of Europe, founded in 1949, was the first to incorporate representation by sub-national authorities into its institutional fabric, by means of the establishment of the Conference of Local Authorities of Europe (CEPL) in 1957, which was succeeded by the Conference of Local and Regional Authorities in 1975 (CEPLR). The CEPLR brought together representatives from regional authorities and local authorities and it became a more permanent institution (a Standing Conference) in 1979. In 1985 it adopted the European Charter of Local Self-Government, to which all (currently 47) CoE Member States are parties. The Charter commits the Member States to guarantee political, financial and administrative independence of sub-national authorities, to be laid down in (constitutional) legislation.

In the mid-1980s a more comprehensive role of the CEPLR (i.e. as an autonomous CoE “senate” made up of regional representatives) was debated but did not materialise. Regions reacted to this by establishing – in 1985 – the Council of Regions of Europe (CRE) which in 1987 became the Assembly of European Regions (AER). AER successfully fought for a true representation of regions in the CoE; eventually, in 1994, the status of the CEPLR was upgraded to that of the present Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the CoE. This Congress consists of two chambers, one of which is the Chamber of Regions, with 318 members. The Congress adopts recommendations and opinions which are presented to the CoE Committee of Ministers and/or Parliamentary Assembly. In 2010-2011 the Congress reformed its own structures and activities in order to make its work more effective and relevant to European citizens. Its general role in CoE decision-making is consultative. In terms of local democracy and the guarding of the Charter it has an important monitoring role (by means of regular inspections of Member States and observations of elections). Increasingly, and as result of prioritisation of its activities, the Congress is involved in cooperation programmes and projects, and in networking activities.

As regions have a direct channel of influence in the CoE, they are less involved in lobbying the CoE. Lobbying generally is less well-developed in the CoE context, compared to the EU, and is done mostly by NGOs in the field of human rights and democracy.

Regions and the EU: a historical overview

The involvement of regions in the decision-making processes of the EU started later than in the CoE case, but it has evolved rapidly. The Maastricht Treaty, which entered into force in 1993, gave regional authorities from federal Member States the right of representation in the Council of Ministers. It also established the Committee of the Regions (CoR), which started in 1994. As with the upgrading of the CoE CEPLR to a true Congress, AER was crucial to the establishment of this EU assembly of regional and local representatives. The Maastricht Treaty furthermore put forward the subsidiarity principle (which also is part of the CoE European Charter) as a fundamental principle for delineating competencies within the EU. The Lisbon Treaty, which entered into force in December 2009, has further strengthened the institutional role of regions in the EU, by giving more substance to the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. By means of the Early Warning System (EWS) national parliaments have a right to scrutinise EU legislation at an early stage, and can invite regional parliaments to give their opinion on subsidiarity compliance. This involvement of regional parliaments can be supported and coordinated by the CoR.

The CoR itself, although still in an advisory capacity, is now involved in the entire legislative process and must be consulted by the European Commission, the Council of Ministers and European Parliament. The CoR has also been given the right to take action before the Court of Justice in case of infringement of the subsidiarity principle. Its mandate has been changed from four to five years, in order to bring it into line with that of European Parliament. The CoR currently has 350 members (and the same number of alternate members), who are locally and regionally elected politicians.

This institutional development links in with what is often called increased “regional mobilisation” within the EU. As far as influencing EU policies is concerned, regions have two main channels. First, they can contribute to the Member State’s position by providing the regional perspective on EU policy proposals. In some countries, formal (and sometimes rather elaborate) consultation procedures (on new) EU legislation exist in which regional authorities and their associations participate. Secondly, they can act directly as interest groups and lobby the EU institutions. Often both the indirect (intra-state) and direct (extra-state) channels are used. If there is no formal role for regional authorities direct lobbying is the only option. From the mid-1980s onwards we can witness a huge growth in regional representations in Brussels, run by cities, municipalities, regions and their associations. It is estimated that more than 250 of such liaison offices are now present in Brussels, with an average budget of 350,000. They vary in size, from one staff member to...
over 30, with 6 on average, meaning that Brussels now hosts more than 1,500 sub-national lobbyists. Liaison offices are however just one form of regional representation. Increasingly, regions often in addition to individual representation by means of liaison offices get engaged in more hybrid forms of mobilisation, by establishing joint offices with some regions of the same country, by participating in national associations which include all regions of their country, or by involvement in transnational associations or networks, sometimes beyond EU borders. In 30 years’ time a dense network of regional representation has been built in Brussels.

The logic of regionalism

The increasing institutional involvement of regions in both the CoE and the EU and especially the huge steps over the last 30 years in regional mobilisation at the European level follow from the logic of European integration. As mentioned before, the widening of European integration by means of enlargement has had a direct effect on the contents of CoE and EU policies, especially on EU Cohesion Policy. In further developing these policies, the institutions of the CoE and the EU have found natural allies in regional and local authorities. European integration is favourable to regions, as being part of the EU provides regions with various advantages (being part of the SEM, access to funding, access to networks, possibility to learn from peers and best practices). Regions increasingly do not need nation states to perform successfully. While EU legislation and Cohesion Policy have a huge impact on and provide great opportunities to regional authorities, at the same time the EU increasingly needs regions to successfully implement its policies. The SEM and EMU consist of policies that are shaped by nation states and require implementation mainly on the nation state level. The Lisbon Agenda and its successor, the Europe 2020 Strategy, which focuses on smart, inclusive and sustainable growth, however, add a direct effect on the contents of CoE and EU policies, and that the same is true for the functioning of the CoR. The negative explanation is that the institutions involved (national parliaments, CoR) still struggle with adapting their procedures and activities in such a way that they can deliver in their capacity as watchdog of the subsidiarity principle.

Another possible line of reasoning is that in the current context of governance, in which public actors from all levels cooperate with private actors in order to coproduce and implement policies, the subsidiarity principle is difficult to apply, as such coproduction is at odds with strict delineation of tasks between levels of government. In practice proportionality (i.e. in what way should the EU be involved?) is more often an issue than subsidiarity as such. Regional authorities and EU institutions may have common policy objectives, but policy implementation may bring about excessive administrative burdens on the regional and local level. A proportionality check on new EU legislation (for instance as part of the regular Impact Assessments) may be worth considering.

Another challenge that regions face is their role in the European neighbourhood. The widening of external border regions in the EU. With EU membership often not being feasible for neighbouring countries, the EU needs to facilitate new cooperation schemes for EU/non-EU cross-border cooperation, if possible by intensified cooperation between the EU and the CoE. In that respect, the EU’s macro-regional strategies are important, not only for closer economic or environmental cooperation but also to prevent conflicts and mitigate security risks in the wider European neighbourhood.

Finally, the flexibility and variety of regions, which is a great advantage, poses a challenge in terms of political representation. Representation, both in intra-state formal procedures, and in the CoR and in the CoE Congress, follows the administrative set-up of Member States. For example, in the case of the Netherlands, such representation is done exclusively from the municipal and provincial level. However, de facto there are regions that are in between these levels, or in between the provincial and nation-state level. In extra-state lobbying this kind of stratification and nestedness of regions can easily be met. For example, the region of Twente (in the eastern part of the Netherlands) has a liaison office in Brussels. The region is part of various European regional networks and is also engaged in cross-border cooperation with regional and local authorities in Nordrhein Westfalia, Germany. It is part of the province of Overijssel, which cooperates in a regional Brussels office with another eastern province (Gelderland). This cooperation is embedded in the larger scheme of the House of the Dutch Provinces in Brussels. While such hybridity of cooperation schemes matches the variety in functional scales of regions, this variety should also by some means be reflected in the way political representation is arranged in the EU and in the CoE. AER, which is currently discussing opening up its membership to reflect such variety, can well be used as a laboratory to find new ways of representation of regions in Europe.
IBSA Institut Biochimique SA, a privately owned pharmaceutical company based in Lugano, Switzerland, (www.ibsa-international.com) has recently promoted the "1st International Press Award for scientific information on hyaluronic acid".

Aim of the award was to highlight the company’s expertise and leadership in the field of hyaluronic acid and to propel both the specialised and non-specialised European press towards a correct scientific information, destined to the general public/readers, on the themes linked to this molecule, very often simplified, but with a wide range of therapeutic potentialities.

In fact hyaluronic acid is commonly regarded only as the molecule for the beauty, but it is currently used in many branches of medicine (i.e. rheumatology/orthopaedics, urology, respiratory), as reported in the scientific literature.

The award was launched at the end of 2013 and it came to a conclusion last November 26th, 2014, when the official awarding ceremony took place in Milan.

Members of the jury that selected the best press communications were Prof. Luciano Onder, a well-known scientific journalist, Prof. Alberto Passi, Professor of Biochemistry at University of Insubria, Varese (Italy) and member of the International Society for Hyaluronan Sciences (ISHAS) and, last but not the least, the President of the Press Club of Brussels, Dr. Maria Laura Franciosi.

The selected articles/services were the following:

- "Acido ialuronico" by Maria Rita Montebelli (La Repubblica)
- “Dolore alla mandibola: un aiuto dall’acido ialuronico” by Luisa Romagnoni (www.donnainsalute.it)
- “Acido hialurónico, la sustancia mágica” by Pilar Manzanares Olavezar (Salud Revista.es)
- “L’acido ialuronico e le sue applicazioni” by Marco Strambi (Clip Salute – 7 Gold)

This event has evidenced how important is a correct journalistic information, especially on topics potentially complicated as those related to medicine/science; this becomes even more important in a globalized world where there is still the need for a more structured and effective European network of communication to provide a better circulation of information.

This "1st International Press Award for scientific information on hyaluronic acid" has for sure contributed to an improvement of appropriate journalistic information, giving to the molecule of hyaluronic acid the deserved attention for its therapeutic use in all the different medical areas where it is currently used.

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**Gelderland**

The Netherlands

Gelderland is the Green Lane in the Rhine-Delta metropolis of Europe forming a natural link between the Dutch Randstad and the German Ruhrgebied. Surprisingly versatile Gelderland is a popular location for the (international) business community where people enjoy living, working and taking their recreation.

It is no coincidence that the Guelder rose has for centuries thrived in the Gelderland river delta of the Rhine, with a name for themselves worldwide and number over 18,800 students. The capital of Gelderland is also the home base of The Gelderland Orchestra (HGO), Introdans ballet company and theatre group Toneelgroep Oostpool, not to forget the Gelredome stadium theatre where the Vitesse professional football club plays its matches.

Science and creativity

In Gelderland modern science, creativity and innovation go hand in hand with history, recreation and nature. The universities of Nijmegen and Wageningen rank among the best in Europe, just like the ArtEZ Institute of Arts in Arnhem, where innovative fashion designers such as Viktor & Rolf, Iris van Herpen and Pauline van Dongen were trained. Van Herpen experiments with 3D-printer technology and Van Dongen combines energy and environmental technology in her clothing, such as a dress with flexible solar cells that can charge a mobile telephone. The Kröller-Müller Museum in De Hoge Veluwe National Park has a special art collection with Van Gogh paintings and a sculpture garden, Burgers’ Zoo in Arnhem and the Dolphinarium in Harderwijk are international public attractions, just like events such as the mediaeval Brothers of Limburg Festival and the world music festival Music Meeting in Nijmegen.

Modern science and knowledge help feed the 9 billion people that will live on earth in 2035, says Louise Fresco, chair of the Management Board of Wageningen University & Research (WUR). Wageningen UR leads the way internationally as far as healthy food and living are concerned. Over 8,000 students from over a hundred countries study there. The Chinese dairy giant Yili, the Japanese Kikkoman (soy sauces) and the Dutch FrieslandCampina have set up their R&D labs on the Wageningen Campus. The Radboud University of Nijmegen and the Medical Centre are also making a name for themselves worldwide and number over 18,800 students.

**Fruit garden**

On the Veluwe with its woods and heaths the timber trade traditionally flourished, in Achterhoek with its beautiful scenic landscape iron ore was found and processed, along the rivers in De Betuwe and the Land of Maas and Waal stood many brickworks and many cherry, plum, apple and pear orchards which still form the ‘fruit garden’ of the Netherlands.

To reinforce social cohesion in rural areas, such as Achterhoek, since 2004 Gelderland has followed the example of Denmark in promoting the development of Kulturhus cultural centre. Together with housing associations, care institutions and social life a Kulturhus combines functions in the area of (health)care, education, child care and business services in over 25 villages and districts.

With Het Dorp (The Village), in 1962 Gelderland was the first in the world to set up a residential area especially for the disabled in Arnhem. In 2015 Het Dorp is again leading the way with a residential area for people with disabilities. The care institution Siza supports people with a physical and/or mental disability in leading the most independent life possible in Het Dorp and throughout Gelderland, with a total of over 3,500 clients.

**Trade**

The Hanseatic League set up in North Germany in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries ensured prosperity with its lively trade, as it did in the Gelderland Hanseatic towns such as Zutphen, Elburg, Hattem, Doesburg and Tiel. Gelderland has from historical times always been open to cooperation with other regions. The Assembly of European Regions (AER) offers many opportunities to get to know one another. Gelderland now and in the future also aims for cooperation with European regions. The province of Gelderland nowadays promotes the cooperation of knowledge institutes and the business community in particular in the top economic sectors of Food, Health, Energy and Environmental Technology (EET) and Manufacturing. The Gelderland region is home to a number of ‘hidden pearls’ in the form of innovative companies, for example chip manufacturer NXP Semiconductors and young knowledge companies such as Ojah (soya-based meat substitute) and Solynta (growing potatoes from true seeds).

With the Room for the River programme Gelderland has for decades combined water management, spatial planning and nature development in an innovative way. The knowledge it has acquired here is also an attractive export product. When constructing subsidiary channels along the Waal in Nijmegen for more water storage, space was also created for recreational facilities, such as a river beach and housing construction. In the Ooijpolder near Nijmegen, Meinerswijk along the Rhine at Arnhem and along the Waal at Tiel wild nature reserves were created. Recreational users can follow ‘foraging’ routes there and koniks, semi-wild Polish horses, roam freely there and their grazing behaviour is important in ‘nature conservation’.

**east. All are only an hour away by high speed train or car.**
The TeleCare North project is a cross-sectoral cooperation between North Denmark Region, the 11 municipalities, the general practitioners, Aalborg University and the Danish Lung Association. The purpose is to develop and test telemedical home monitoring of COPD patients (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease) in North Denmark. Telemedicine here refers to out-of-hospital care and treatment between the patient and healthcare professionals with the use of communication and information technology.

The aim is to offer the TeleCare North solution to all COPD patients in North Denmark Region, who would benefit from it. The service is available irrespective of which municipality, hospital or general practitioner, the patient is affiliated to.

The patients are given telemedical equipment in their homes which consists of a tablet, oxygen flowmeter, sphygmograph, sphygmomanometer as well as some scales. The equipment is wireless and can be used everywhere. It is agreed individually with each patient how often measurements need to be taken and these are monitored by health professionals. The aim is to give patients peace of mind and a higher quality of life, where they can better be in charge of their own illness.

The initial results show that the patients are pleased with the equipment, which they find easy to use. They experienced that they are better able to react to symptoms earlier on and they feel better equipped when they are in dialogue with the healthcare system. The healthcare professionals are pleased by the increased cooperation and the possibility to make individual adaptations for each patient. TeleCare North makes it possible for them, in cooperation with the patients, to be proactive and react at an earlier stage to signs of deterioration. TeleCare North runs 3½ years in 2012-2015 and it has a budget of 6.6 million euros. It is financed by North Denmark Region, the 11 municipalities and with external support from among others the European Social Fund. More than 1200 patients between the ages of 31-94 years participate in the project. Three Ph.D. students from Aalborg University follow the project and their research will be published after the end of the project. The project is the largest of its kind in Europe and has, not least due to the research activities relating to the project, attracted much international interest.

The technological platform is called Open Tele and it is developed as Open Source with free access to code and documentation. The project is part of the Danish Telemedicine Action Plan. It is the ambition that the experiences gained from TeleCare North can lead to the definition of common national models and strategies for how telemedical solutions should be organised and implemented both technical and cross-organisational.
AER has been engaged in promoting a healthier, fairer and inclusive Europe. The definition has gradually become more and more comprehensive, from 'E-health solutions' to 'building an inclusive society', as well as performance and health promoting innovations.

What is the secret of making the elderly maintain a satisfactory life quality? How to ensure their participation in society just as active as others? As one of the oldest member regions from Sweden, the Dalarna County Council shares a common interest with AER on the issue regarding healthy and independent ageing.

Situated in middle Sweden, operating within a geographic area just about the size of Belgium, Dalarna is known by its history, culture, tourism and entrepreneurial spirit. It offers a high quality of life and a wide range of sports, musical and cultural activities which makes it easy for people to enjoy living here. The Dalarna County Council is a self-governing regional authority elected by its inhabitants and it is responsible for publicly financed healthcare, medical care and some regional activities.

As one of the departments in the Dalarna County Council, the Assistive Technology Centre (ACT) of Dalarna provides services and functional facilities which help disabled patients regain equal access to society. The ACT of Dalarna has run several projects mainly to enhance information and accessibility to assistive technology, services and solutions. The ACT of Dalarna has a close collaboration with other municipalities and counties, clients, stakeholders, research and development institutions, and other organisations. The overall goal is to enable elderly people to remain independent as long as possible and to remain involved in the society as much as possible through personalized adapted assistive technology and solutions.

The Assistive Technology Centre of Dalarna shares good experiences and engage regions for political actions at European level. More significantly, the ACT of Dalarna has a great knowledge on giving information in innovations of personalised assistive technology and solutions for elderly people. For example, new ways for information and accessibility to assistive technology and solutions; innovation projects – low- and high-tech assistive devices and from innovation to implementation – the path from new product/solution to the user.

Demographic change is by far one of the most significant challenges facing Europe and ultimately the whole world in the next 30–40 years. For policy-makers there are many developments which are not possible to control or influence, however, foreseeable changes, such as demographic changes, allow the opportunity for preparation. With help of innovative ideas and solutions, the Dalarna County can turn demographic ageing in Europe into opportunities.

Welcome to Dalarna, Sweden! Together we can explore on an independent and healthy Europe based on innovative solutions.
Värmland is a region in the west of Sweden, situated by the shores of the largest lake in the EU, Vänern, with Karlstad as the capital city. The region has 275,000 inhabitants and covers 17,600 square kilometres, of which most parts stay green all year round thanks to its story-telling traditions, with many distinct positions without hazardous chemicals and keeping the organisation's environmental impact to a minimum.

Facilitating patients' contact with health care services
A new registration and payment system means that patients rarely have to wait in line. Using self-service kiosks at the main entrance of the hospitals, patients can register themselves prior to an appointment with the help of user-friendly touch screens. The fee is invoiced in arrears so no cash has to be handled by the reception, saving time which can then be used to help patients. The system, ABBA (in Swedish short for Registering Visit, Paying Fee), has been awarded the Swedish Götapriset (Göta Prize) and has also been nominated for a public sector innovation award issued by the UN.

The County Council of Värmland is also working on a broad implementation of eHealth Services which will enable patients to, for example, book an appointment or read their medical record online. It will also be possible to make use of online self-care services like CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy).

Patient focus and active environmental efforts.
Värmland has a mining and industry tradition that goes back centuries. Modern-day business in the region keeps building on these traditions, but has also developed within new areas. The region is characterised by successful collaborations between companies, authorities, educational institutions and organisations that join together in clusters, for example Paper Province with actors within the forestry and paper industry, Steel & Engineering within the metal and engineering industry, and ICT (Compare) within the IT and telecom industry.

Sweden is the land of compromise and over the past three centuries, serious social conflicts have been rare. This has created a close to unique combination of strong authorities and a population with great trust in the social institutions. The level of trust has for a long time been measured by the University of Gothenburg, showing that public health care is the public institution that the Swedish population trust the most. The main responsibility for health care is held at a regional level by the county councils and they are therefore an important part of the regional operations. A sparsely populated region like Värmland, with an older population than the rest of Sweden and Europe on average, has a different set of challenges compared to many other places. Despite this, the County Council of Värmland manages to offer people world-class health care standards in many areas. The County Council is a forerunner in terms of patient focus, care environments without hazardous chemicals and keeping the organisation's environmental impact to a minimum.

Ambulance helicopter
Värmland, which covers 17,600 square kilometres, has three emergency hospitals. This means that large parts of the region are far away from a hospital. That is the reason why the County Council of Värmland has initiated an ambulance helicopter service, which took off in 2014 and now involves several regions. By acquiring ambulance helicopters in its own cross-border organisation – Svensk luftambulans (the Swedish Air Ambulance) – with doctors, nurses and pilots, lives have been saved within a short period of time thanks to quick emergency care and air transport to hospitals. Collaboration in cross-border air ambulance transport is also in place with Norway.

Development laboratory for care services
Experio Lab is the County Council services' development laboratory, focusing on the design of care services. The main idea is to involve staff, patients and relatives in order to develop care services together. Experio Lab has received a lot of national and international attention for its innovative methods and has been nominated for the Guldfänken (Golden Link) prize, which awards innovative ideas with patient focus within the health care sector.

Energy efficiency
More efficient energy consumption is one of the most important efforts to cut the environmental impact since all energy production affects the environment in one way or another. The County Council of Värmland already has the lowest energy consumption in terms of heating and operations out of all the county councils in Sweden. It is the result of conscious efforts to adapt ventilation, heating and cooling systems, putting in new windows and additional insulation in already existing buildings. A new energy centre at the hospital in Karlstad and environmentally friendly energy systems in connection with new constructions have also brought improvements.

Cutting environmental impact
In addition to efforts to make energy consumption more efficient, the County Council of Värmland has chosen to only buy electricity from renewable energy sources. This means a great cut in the County Council's environmen-tal impact. Besides energy consumption, nitrous oxide (laughing gas), which is used as anaesthesic during childbirth for example, is one of the major sources of environmental pollution coming from the health care sector. In order to limit this, a cleaning plant for nitrous oxide has been installed at the largest hospital in the region. Put together, these efforts have contributed to a 7% cut in the Council's environmental impact from 2007 to 2013.

Care environments without hazardous chemicals
When it comes to the procurement of construction projects, the County Council of Värmland has had routines in place for a long time that require the construction companies to clearly declare the content of their building materials, and to avoid substances which might pose a risk. Through these requirements, the County Council is informed about where different substances can be found, which is important should new information reveal previously unknown risks with various substances.
Welcome to Madeira
You do not have to travel a long way to find the ideal holiday destination. There are endless reasons for visiting Madeira! In addition to its stunning scenery and luxuriant mountains, this archipelago also offers a mild climate all year round, a warm welcome, peace, safety and security are among its charms.
To really get to know Madeira, climb to the top of a mountain and enjoy fantastic, breathtaking views or close encounter with nature. Feel the energy flowing from the cosmopolitan ambience of Funchal’s streets and buy some souvenirs, like the famous Madeira embroidery, wine or wickerwork. Take a tour around the island, stop on the way to admire the landscape or to enjoy traditional gastronomic delicacies. For more energetic visitors there is scuba-diving, surfing, windsurfing or jet-skiing. Romantics may prefer a wonderful sailboat trip along the coast to enjoy the sunset.

Sports
Climb up to the clouds among mountains and levadas and enjoy the pure, rarefied air or discover treasures as you explore the depths of the Atlantic. Whatever your choice is, you will feel nature all around you! The mild climate of Madeira and Porto Santo Islands is ideal for all kinds of sports, leisure and outdoor activities, at any time of the year.
Many options are available, including water, land and aerial sports; ranging from relaxing activities to traditional and extreme sports. Sea lovers will benefit from the warm sea currents, with temperatures ranging between 19° and 24°C, ideal for snorkelling, diving, sailing, surfing, windsurfing and sport fishing, all year round. You will also be able to catch the best waves in Europe, at the Jardim do Mar, Fajã da Areia (São Vicente) and Porto da Cruz beaches. A quiet boat trip is also a must. Sailing along the coast, you will be able to watch dolphins, whales and monk seals that grace Madeira seas with their presence.

Gastronomy
In Madeira Islands, you will find typical regional dishes made with the highest quality ingredients. There is also plenty of international cuisine to choose from. Thanks to its close contact with the sea, most restaurants in Madeira offer excellent seafood and fresh fish dishes. Limpets, octopus, shrimp, tuna steaks and scabbard-fish fillets are just some of the local delicacies. You must try traditional regional dishes like tuna steak and fried maize the delicious grilled kebab on a laurel skewered accompanied with sweet potatoes bread «bolo do caco». Other traditional foods are home-made couscous, home-baked sweet potato bread and marinated pork tenderloin.

Entertainment
In addition to the natural attractions and year-round spring weather, there is always plenty to do in the Madeira Islands.

Throughout the year, there are cultural, entertainment and sports events all over the island and they not only attract the local population but also make holidays unforgettable. Madeira has an annual festival calendar, of which the most famous events are Carnival, the Flower Festival, the Atlantic Festival, the Wine Festival, Columbus Festival, the Madeira Nature Festival and the New Year Celebrations, recognized by the Guinness World Records in 2006 as the greatest fireworks display in the world.

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To really get to know Madeira, climb to the top of a mountain and enjoy fantastic, breathtaking views or follow the trails and paths in the Laurissilva Forest along more than 1,400 km of levadas, in a unique encounter with the island’s soul.
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It is not everyday that you can moor right beside the stone fortifications of a 3,500 year-old town. Nor is it everyday that you can be present as an entire region comes alive with the optimism of change. But in Budva you can. Arrive here and see for yourself how Dukley is redefining what Montenegro means, with its vision of a New Mediterranean.

Dear friends,

This publication will be an ideal way to showcase how Budva, the home to some 30000 people, benefits daily from its membership with the Assembly of European Regions (AER). Our local economy is predominantly based on tourism. We have been part of the AER family for a year and it proved to be a truly unique opportunity to introduce Europe to our wonderful Budva. Our municipality proudly contributes as much as 50% to the entire tourism turnover and a substantial part of our GDP is also generated between the ancient walls of Budva.

With most of our tourists coming from Russia and the Ukraine, we were severely affected by both the global economic crisis and the situation in the Ukraine. On a positive side, Montenegro is steadily on course towards NATO and EU membership. This is giving us an unprecedented opportunity to promote Budva as an extraordinary investment destination, rich in culture and opportunity alike.

On behalf of the entire community, please accept my warmest congratulations on the occasion of the AER 30th anniversary. We are looking forward contributing to AER’s impeccable track record of advocating interests of local communities in Europe.

Ljubomir Filipović
Vice-Mayor of Budva
Andora, Gibraltar, Monaco, Isle of Man… exclusive locations that I knew from before such as:

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“Welcome to Brčko District of BiH, make yourself at home” says the tall, sharp looking Mayor of Brčko District of BiH as he shook my hand and cordially shares his name with me “Anto Domic”. In his mid forties, the youngest elected Mayor of Brčko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina so far, dr. Anto Domic modestly shares other details that will in course of this interview allow me to recognize that there other specifics that make him differ from all previous mayors of the only District of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Listening carefully to this eloquent man who spoke about his city-District with great enthusiasm but seriousness made me discover a number of similarities between Brčko District of BiH and other peculiar and exclusive locations that I knew from before such as: Andora, Gibraltar, Monaco, Isle of Man...

BRČKO DISTRICT
Bosnia and Herzegovina

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BRČKO DISTRICT
Bosnia and Herzegovina

No more a city, long lives the District

To offer you a clear picture, Brčko once a very industrialized city and now the District of Bosnia and Herzegovina with its’ nearly 100,000 inhabitants is a specific political and administrative unit established by the Arbitration Award in March 2000. Yes, you read it well, Brčko’s status was so profound that it was the most significant issue which could not be negotiated during the Dayton peace talks. Instead, the parties referred the issue to a tribunal that ultimately comprised international and domestic legal experts. The specific status and powers of Brčko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina were determined by the ‘Final Award’ issued by the Arbitration Tribunal in 1999.

On the basis of such an advantageous legal status, Brčko District creates its own independent legal and economic regulations within Bosnia and Herzegovina. The organization of its power differs from the other communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina since the District, as it is often referred to, has independent legislative, executive, judicial and multiethnic authorities.

Take part in "Brčko 2020" development plans

The District was among the first places in Bosnia and Herzegovina that started with strategic planning of its development. In that way it demonstrated a high level of public consensus, political culture, professionalism and responsible public influence.

On the basis of the analyzed situation and established development potentials the following long-term vision of development “Brčko 2020” was defined: "The development of the Brčko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a multifunctional city integrated in the national, European and global economy which provides a favorable environment for living and running business. Important segment that surely contributes to the success of the aim is the fact that Sava River flows through the District in the length of 44 km. This is an important link between Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia and the Danube countries in area of the Black Sea too. The Rhine–Main Danube Canal links the District with the Central and Northern Europe. The special advantage of the District is the inland Port of Brčko, which has had the status of an international port since September 2006.

Preparations were made for Brčko (that is located just next to the Zagreb–Belgrade highway) to play a key role in the Corridor Vc integrated transport project (Y section of the corridor that connects Tuzla via Brčko to Orasje) that will connect northern and southern European markets through Bosnia and Herzegovina. Member of the first government (back in 2000) and current (since recently end of 2014) member of Government, Head of Urbanism Department Mr. Ismet Dedeic aims to recreate the conditions for the investors that have once made possible for the largest BiH investment to take place in Brčko District of BiH (establishment of the largest open air market in the region “Arizona”) through introducing positive regulations for investors in industrial zones with simple interest of BiH District – creating jobs. The successful post-war recovery of Brčko District has been the direct result of the hard work, determination and confidence of the people of Brčko and their elected representatives – and the District has shown what can be achieved in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Neighbors to become (EU) family

Mayor dr. Domic is in charge of European integration process of Brčko District of BiH. Along with the two entities (Bosnia and Herzegovina is composed of two entities Federation BiH and Republika Srpska and Brčko is condominium of the two entities) Brčko has a seat in the decision making panel when it comes to EU funds, accession process and regional cooperation. Not only does it take part in the process but it gradually becomes the most efficient stakeholder. Only last years, Brčko was a host of the two regional conferences with guests from all over Europe. On August last year, AER’s president dr. Hande OZSAN BOZATLTI and AER’s Vice-President Jean-Claude GAYSSOT along with members of Executive Board invested efforts to and presented AER activities of interest to the region. On October 2014, a regional conference was held in Brčko where dr.Franz Schausberger, CoR rapporteur for the opinion on the enlargement report 2013/2014 of the Commission stated “Contrary to the rest of the country, Brčko District is a step ahead in implementing EU policies.”. An investor friendly government oriented toward creating new and fostering proven values, on improvement of its’ infrastructure with aim to facilitate the needs of citizens and the businesses, best subsidies in the region, economy dedicated and oriented towards sustainable growth and a regional leader when it comes to relations with EU neighbors (Brčko shares the river Sava with EU /Croatia) – all these features explain why Brčko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina is one of the most attractive destinations to invest in the South East part of Europe. Its strategic location will surely contribute in the favor of investors who want to expand their business all over Europe. At the end of our conversation, I asked the Mayor dr.Domic, if he has anything to add for the potential investors; the reply was prompt and clear: “Yes. Welcome to Brčko District of BiH, make yourselves at home…”
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Baku 2015 European Games

On 12 June, the curtain will raise on the European Games in Azerbaijan’s capital Baku.

The city is the venue for the first-ever European Games, an exciting and innovative multi-sport event for the continent that will run until June 28. Unusually, there is also a particularly influential Belgian connection as the event was the brainchild of Gent-born Jacques Rogge, who served as the eighth president of the International Olympic Committee from 2001 to 2013. It was Rogge who came up with the idea for such an event, in part, because he wanted to give non-Olympic sports a chance to shine at international level.

The Games are billed as arguably the biggest sporting event of this year. Great Britain, for example, will send its largest overseas contingent since the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Belgium itself will send a 117-strong delegation. And with the Rio Olympics looming on the horizon, the event could have a say in how well Team Belgium and others do in Brazil.

First a bit of history: the Games were devised by the European Olympic Committee and launched at their General Assembly in Rome in December 2012 and Baku was named as the first host city. The event will be regulated by the EOC. The concept is a continental multi-sport event along the lines of an Olympic or Commonwealth Games. Asia has already been holding its equivalent games every four years since 1951. That was the same year in which the Pan-American Games came into being as well.

In total, 50 European countries will take around 6,000 athletes to compete in Azerbaijan where there will be 20 sports on show, encompassing 30 disciplines.

Of those sports, 16 are Olympic events, while the other four – karate, basketball 3x3, beach soccer and sambo - are new sports to this format.

In judo, the European Games will double as the European Championships – which had been set to take place in Glasgow in April until the event was postponed over a sponsorship dispute.

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There will be 253 medal events in total and opportunities in 12 sports to qualify for next year’s Olympics in Rio.

Some of those sports offer direct qualification – such as triathlon, shooting and table tennis – and others provide ranking points, including wrestling, archery and taekwondo.

The other 15 sports are: aquatics, archery, athletics, badminton, volleyball, boxing, canoe, cycling, fencing, gymnastics, shooting, table tennis, taekwondo, triathlon and wrestling.

One of the organisations championing the event is the European Azerbaijan Society (TEAS), a relatively new, pan-European organisation dedicated to raising awareness of Azerbaijan.

Marc Verwilghen is a former Belgian government minister who, in a long and distinguished political career, held up three different government ministries, including foreign trade.

He is now Director of TEAS Belgium and, speaking of the European Games, says, «This is a wonderful opportunity to showcase Azerbaijan to the whole world and I am sure it will not disappoint.»

He told this magazine that Azerbaijan is a «bridge» between Asia and Europe and that the event will further allow the country to «orientate» itself towards the EU.

«It is a vibrant country, the start of the Silk Road, and has made great advances in recent years. An international event like this can only help raise awareness of what is happening in the country and help it make further progress in its development.»

Azerbaijan, on the shores of the Caspian Sea, is bordered by Russia to the north, Georgia and Armenia to the west, and Iran to the south.

It is a country that has become rich since breaking away from the Soviet Union in 1992 thanks to its resources of oil and natural gas.

The local organising committee has spent billions of euros on the Games infrastructure, including a new 68,000-capacity athletics stadium, which Verwilghen has visited and describes as «spectacular», and international-standard aquatics, gymnastics, BMX and shooting venues.

Baku is also one of those selected, with Brussels, to host the 2020 European football championships.

To launch the event, a flame, as is the tradition of course with the Olympics, has travelled the length and breadth of the country, spreading the spirit of the Games.

The torch is a symbol of Azerbaijan’s culture. The Baku 2015 Torch and Lamp was designed by Sebastian Bergne. They are engineered and crafted using materials and techniques inspired by traditional Azerbaijan metalwork.

The torch measures 660 mm high, and its body features a pomegranate tree, echoing the Baku 2015 brand. The copper head that protects the flame is also in the form of a pomegranate – its 50 pips representing the number of nations participating in the Games.

TEAS itself was launched in 2008 with the aim of fostering closer economic, political and cultural links between that country and the nations of Europe.

As well as promoting the positive aspects of Azerbaijan, Verwilghen says TEAS also seeks to highlight the plight of the 875,000 refugees and Internally Displaced Persons within the country. These people are unable to return to
Azerbaijan's tourism potential is increasing as does the cultural events and operating as a networking centre. TEAS raises awareness of Azerbaijan's rich and vibrant culture to a worldwide audience by organising Culture – TEAS has three main facets to its operations: Business – TEAS supports its membership of European and Azerbaijani businesses. It provides a platform for organisations to establish links and strengthen their existing business relationships via a programme of networking opportunities across the regions. With the country being a key player in Azerbaijan, and to develop relationships with key stakeholders in the European Commission, the European Council of Ministers, and the European Parliament – as well as with civil society. It is worth noting that Azerbaijan has established strong relations with the European Union, ties which are being constantly enhanced, and the opening of negotiations on Association Agreements will accelerate this process. Public Affairs – TEAS works to increase awareness about Azerbaijan amongst key opinion formers, key decision-makers and other political, academic and civil society stakeholders. The foundation also includes TEAS Belgium which was established with a mission to raise awareness about Azerbaijan, and to develop relationships with key stakeholders in the European Commission, the European Council of Ministers, and the European Parliament – as well as with civil society. It is worth noting that Azerbaijan has established strong relations with the European Union, ties which are being constantly enhanced, and the opening of negotiations on Association Agreements will accelerate this process.

TEAS Belgium and the organisation generally aims to raise Azerbaijan's profile in cultural, economic and political terms. Azerbaijan looks to the west for support and guidance, and Verwilghen, lawyer by training, believes that the EU can play a vital role in delivering stability and security to the whole South Caucasus region. Expectations for the upcoming European Games are high, with Azad Rahimov, Azerbaijan's Minister of Youth and Sports and Chief Executive Officer of Baku 2015, saying: «The European Games mark a historic moment for European sport, and for Azerbaijan it will be a milestone in the country's progress as an independent, forward-looking member of the European family. This extraordinary journey will showcase the best of Azerbaijan – taking in historical, natural, sporting and cultural highlights in the 60 regions.»

His comments are echoed by Chris Kendall, a representative of the European External Action Service, who has said it is going to be a «fine experience for Azerbaijan to be the first host country for the first European Games.» Azerbaijan, as a country with an indescribable landscape, may also surprise many of those Europeans who attend the Games. That is the opinion of the editor in chief of the oldest German newspaper, Thuringer Allgemeine. «The event is very important for the future of Azerbaijan, for the formation of the image of such a small country as Azerbaijan, particularly in Europe,» said Paul-Joseph Rau. «In addition, the important point is that Azerbaijan is at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, but mostly your country is closer to Europe. In overall, holding such large-scale sports like the European Games in the country has a positive impact on the economy, the development of tourism.»

Such activities are important for all countries, and all the more for Azerbaijan, because of all the three South Caucasian countries, Azerbaijan, despite the conflict with Armenia, is the most progressive one, he said. The Games will, of course, grab global attention but it is also worth mentioning that there will also be travelling photographic exhibition alongside the sporting endeavours of some of the best athletes in Europe. The «Azerbaijan Sport in Focus» was launched by TEAS and is a collection of photos by some of the finest sporting photographers in the world. It will be exhibited at various venues, including the European Parliament in Brussels. It comprises over 300 photos from more than 50 photographers from 10 countries and, among other things, aims to showcase the universality and values of sport. This, believes Verwilghen, is one of the key messages he thinks will emerge from the Games themselves. Verwilghen, an MP in Belgium for 21 years who took up his current post in December 2014, says, «Sport is an important part of the development of any country and I believe this event and the superb way it has been organised will show that Azerbaijan deserves its place on the world stage.»

It is not for nothing, he says, that Azerbaijan is fast becoming the «Eurasian Tiger.» So, in that time honoured phrase, let the Games commence...
While the jury may be out on whether Kazakhstan is more in Asia, saying it's more a part of Asia than Europe. Kazakhstan is the closest country of Central Asia for the EU and the bloc has progressively become Kazakhstan's first trade partner, with about a 49% share in its total external trade (in 2011). EU trade with Kazakhstan is increasing rapidly, as is Kazakhstan's trade with the rest of the world. In 2011, EU exports to Kazakhstan were worth 6 billion euros while the imports from Kazakhstan amounted to 22.7 billion euros.

EU imports from Kazakhstan continue to be dominated by energy products while the main EU exports are machinery, vehicles and chemicals. The EU has also become an important partner in Kazakhstan's economic development and remains the largest investor in the country. This blossoming relationship was underlined as recently as January this year when Almaty and Brussels signed a new, enhanced partnership agreement for stronger political and economic relations.

The new agreement replaces the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement that has been in force since 1999, and is a significant step to increase the flow of trade, services and investment between Kazakhstan and the European countries. Kazakhstan, it is worth noting, is the first country in Central Asia to commit to an enhanced partnership agreement with Brussels while the country's importance as an oil and gas supplier to the EU is also growing.

Undoubtedly, when it comes to rapid development Kazakhstan has become a role model of sorts in Asia for other neighbouring "stans" but you have to also remind yourself that, as outlined, part of the country lies geographically within eastern Europe.

While it may find itself from time to time being pulled one way, then the other, what cannot be disputed is that Kazakhstan, the world's ninth-biggest country, is the most economically advanced of the 'stans', this thanks to its abundant reserves of oil and most other valuable minerals. This means generally better standards of accommodation, restaurants and transport than elsewhere in Central Asia. The biggest city, Almaty, is almost reminiscent of Europe with its leafy avenues, chic cafes, glossy shopping centres and hedonistic nightlife. The capital Astana on the windswept northern steppe, has been transformed into a 21st-century showpiece with a profusion of bold futurisitic architecture.

Since independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, the Kazakhstan government has allowed foreign investment to flow into the country. The development of significant oil and gas reserves, particularly in the north and west, have subsequently brought a large amount of wealth to the country, though the money is said by some to fall into the hands of just a few people. Nevertheless, Kazakhstan is now labelled a middle-income country, and is already classified with a high human development index. Corruption in Kazakhstan is, according to some, more ubiquitous than China but it is not as wide-spread compared to other countries in the region.

Modern Kazakhstan is a neo-patrimonial state said to be characterized by considerable nepotism and dominance over political and economic affairs by President Nursultan Nazarbayev who, on 26 April, enjoyed a crushing election victory, winning 97.7 per cent of the vote. If truth be known, the result, giving 74-year-old Nazarbayev a fifth consecutive five-year term, had never really been in doubt. The president has promised economic and social stability in the oil-rich Central Asian state.

Elections had been due in 2016, but Nazarbayev announced they would be held a year early in what some see as a move intended to halt speculation about any possible successor. Nazarbayev has been president of Kazakhstan since before it became independent in 1991 following the break-up of the former Soviet Union.

Even so, independent monitors called the vote in April undemocratic and criticized the government for limiting competition. Observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe said the government prevented some parties and candidates from contesting the election. It is not the only criticism that has been made of the country with "Human Rights Watch" saying that Kazakhstan's human rights record has seriously deteriorated following violent clashes in December 2011 between police and demonstrators.

The right to freedom of assembly is strictly controlled and a re-strictive law on religious freedoms remains in force. There have been allegations of attacks on independent journalists with the authorities accused of shutting down key independent media outlets. HRW also says legislation regulating workers' rights is vague. Despite such concerns, the country continues to go from strength to strength, not least economically, and a forthcoming exhibition under the motto "Energy of the Future" seeks to further showcase this vibrant country and, at the same time, highlight global concerns about finding alternative energy sources.

Apart from a booming economy, Kazakhstan is rich in natural resources including coal, oil, natural gas and uranium and has significant renewable potential from wind, solar, hydro and biomass. In spite of this, though, the country is currently dependent upon fossil fuels for power generation. Coal-fired plants account for 75% of total power generation leading to concerns over greenhouse gas emissions and impacts on human health and the environment.

Recent economic growth in Kazakhstan has driven increased demand for energy services making the construction of additional generating capacity increasing necessary for enabling sustained growth.

Despite significant wind, solar, hydro and biomass potential, these resources have, to date, not been sustainably captured and deployed in Kazakhstan due a range of technical, institutional, social and economic barriers.

As host of "Energy of the Future" in 2017, it is something the country hopes to put right in the coming years. The decision about Energy of the Future 2017 was made back in November 2012, when the 156 member nations of the International Exhibitions Bureau (BIE) met in Paris and decided by an overwhelming majority vote of 103 countries that the event would be held in Astana.

EXPO 2017's Future Energy theme will promote efforts to find sustainable energy solutions to meet growing global demand. Kazakhstan's choice of the topic reflects a recognition by the country's leaders and policymakers that even its vast resources of natural energy resources are ultimately finite and that eventually the country, and the rest of the world, will have to make the transition to alternative energy sources and greener economies.

EXPO 2017 will last three months, from 10 June to 10 September and include representatives from approximately 100 countries. It is expected to draw three to five million visitors, which would make it the largest international gathering of its kind Central Asia has seen.

If ever a single event encapsulated the rapidly growing vissibility of a nation it is this one. While some concerns still persist Kazakhstan is clearly an Asian Tiger that is going places.

KAZAKHSTAN: historic crossroad with Europe

By Martin Banks

Kazakhstan is a large country and occupies a lot of land. It has also been a crossroad for Europe and Asia for centuries. However, where does Kazakhstan lie in: Europe? Asia? Or is it in a specialized area like Eurasia or Central Asia? The answer, as with much when it comes to Kazakhstan, is not as easy as you think. While most people will agree that Kazakhstan is a part of Asia, it actually does have a stake as being a part of Europe because a portion of the country falls on the "European" side of the Ural Mountains. That portion on the European side is about 10% of Kazakhstan. That constitute Kazakhstan as a part of Europe. While some would agree and say Kazakhstan is a part of Europe, others would say it doesn't count since 90% of the country is in Asia, saying it's more a part of Asia than Europe. While the jury may be out on whether Kazakhstan is more European than Asian what is clear is that this massive ter-
EXPO-2017 for Kazakhstan is a national project, the greatest opportunity for the country to investigate new sources of power and green technologies. This involves billions of dollars being invested not only to prepare for the EXPO but also, in turn, to ensure that the exhibition site is turned to good use in the future. Nearly all the 160 BIE member countries voted for Kazakhstan to host this exhibition, which is why we have a responsibility to them and to the rest of the world to make this a huge success. The President of Kazakhstan has set up some challenging objectives; we need to turn EXPO-2017 into the transit centre of the third industrial revolution, which includes the rise of an alternative economy and the creation of new, high-tech materials, sources of renewable power and a skilled workforce.

Construction on the exhibition grounds will follow the principles of a green economy, using smart-power supply networks and buildings with renewable power sources. This unique and highly advanced building project will spur on the technological development of the country. Not only will the capital get a new district with modern buildings and infrastructure, but also new premises for implementing innovative ideas after the exhibition. What is important is that new technologies and innovations will become a part of the life of the republic.

We guarantee to provide appropriate accommodation and working conditions for the participants of the exhibition. We will take all measures necessary to provide visa support, issuing visas for the representatives of the participating countries and ensuring that guarantees relating to customs and local taxation are in place. Eighty-six years ago, a Convention on International Exhibitions was signed in Paris that, in turn, established the Bureau of International Exhibitions (BIE) and put down the rules outlining the number of exhibitions, their order and characteristics. The plenipotentiary representative of the country is required to observe these rules.

I will be visiting a great number of countries whose representatives are expected to participate in the exhibition. In this sense, 2015 will be a crucial year for negotiating and signing participation agreements. We are also holding meetings to discuss technical and other issues. In regards to the entry regime, we have piloted a visa-free regime for 10 countries: the USA, the Netherlands, Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Malaysia, the UAE, the Republic of Korea and Japan. For one year, the residents of these countries will be able to enter Kazakhstan without a visa for up to 15 days. We are now considering extending the duration of the stay. As we implement this project we will discover any disadvantages and administrative barriers, assess how well prepared the country’s tourism industry is for the influx of visitors and how we can put in place all the simple but necessary services that our visitors will require. We will expand the countries included in the visa-free regime and we have already identified countries with which we are planning to sign mutual agreements on visas. At the same time, we are working on improving our system of border and migration control.

Two bus stations and a railway station are under construction in Astana; work on a new terminal for our international airport will begin soon. We plan to build 70 more hotels. Exhibition pavilions and new housing spread out over 173 hectares will be constructed over the next three years, so the face of the city will be completely different by 2017. The Safe City programme is also in full swing. Taking into account the experience of other countries, we are considering how to use the pavilions of EXPO-2017 as cultural spaces, housing and related buildings as effectively as possible once the exhibition is over. We hope that after 2017 the exhibition area with its unique and innovative buildings will become a new centre for Astana. Most of these buildings will use green energy, including wind and solar. Part of the complex will become an additional campus for Nazarbayev University, where its students and scientists will be able to develop new technologies.
for the media industry, adding, "in fact, what is happening to newspapers is..."
New Year’s Reception organised by the EU Representation Office for Belgium and the Information Office of the EU Parliament in Belgium.

The EACD Meets the EU: A new institutional set-up – communication challenges and opportunities

On January 29th, the EACD organized a panel discussion with key institutional spokespersons: Preben Aamann, Spokesperson, European Council; Jaume Duch, Spokesperson, European Parliament; Matteo Maggiore, Director of Communications, European Investment Bank; Margaritis Schinas, Spokesperson, European Commission.

“Roles and Responsibilities of the Media in the Age of (Dis)information.”

On Wednesday 17 March, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs Doug Frantz discussed journalistic challenges and opportunities in an evolving media environment, particularly when confronted with disinformation and propaganda campaigns.

Liége accueillera du 20 au 23 juillet 2015, le Forum Mondial de la Langue Française sur le thème « La francophonie créative »

Depuis 2012, la francophonie internationale compte un nouveau rendez-vous : le Forum mondial de la langue française. La présentation de cette 2e édition qui se tiendra à Liége du 20 au 23 juillet 2015, s’est déroulée ce jeudi 19 mars 2015 au Press Club Brussels Europe en présence de Mr. Rudy Demotte (photo), Ministre-Président de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles.

“Confiscation of Criminal and Illegal Assets : European Perspectives in Combat Against Serious Crime”.

On Tuesday 24 March 2015, the national chapters of Bulgaria, Italy and Romania of Transparency International organized a conference on “Confiscation of Criminal and Illegal Assets : European Perspectives in Combat Against Serious Crime” in the presence of the Vice President of the European Commission for Budget and Human Resources, Ms. Kristalina Georgieva.

“Brexit” by the author Denis MacShane.

On Wednesday 25 March 2015, the Britain’s former Europe Minister Denis MacShane moderated a debate on his book’s theme. Will Britain leave the EU?

Europolitics celebrated the publication of its 5,000 issue.

Founded in 1972, Europolitics, the leading independent source of European news celebrated the publication of its 5,000th issue at The Press Club Brussels Europe on Monday 20 April 2015.

Reception in honour of H.E. Mr. Bruno Rodriguez Parrilla, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Cuba

On Wednesday 22 April 2015, more than 120 Ambassadors and Eu officials attended the Cuban Embassy reception in honour of H.E. Mr. Bruno Rodriguez Parrilla, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Cuba.
By Bruno Mariani

It is a small charming square in the municipality of Etterbeek close to the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council. Unlike Place du Luxembourg next to the European Parliament, Place Jourdan is visited not only by an international public who work in the European institutions but also by the Belgian locals. It is surrounded by terraces where you can taste the most famous Belgian beers and eat in restaurants with a great variety of cuisines (Italian, Greek, Indian, Tunisian, Belgian, Bio, etc.).

A prestigious hotel, Sofitel, accommodates visitors to the capital. There is a wide variety of shops and services including a pharmacy and a hair salon. On weekdays, the square is a car park but on Sundays it becomes a large market. These numerous terraces invade the sidewalks and provide a very friendly atmosphere especially during sunny days. However, the most important feature of this square is La Friterie Antoine, a true representation of “belgitude” in all its splendour whose reputation goes far beyond the borders of Belgium.


What is so special about these famous Belgian fries?

Well, they only use Bintje potatoes cut into thick rectangular shapes and double fried in beef fat. They are served in a triple layer paper cone and decorated with a choice of sauces (mayonnaise, American, Andalusian or Samurai, etc.).

But beware that the queue is always long! You can also order a “fricandelle”, a traditional Belgian sausage.

What it is made out of still remains a mystery but it is very tasty!

These gastronomic Mikado golden chopsticks do not lack aesthetics! You can move to a terrace with a beer and enjoy your fries there. In the beginning, your fingers will be covered in sauce, but by the end it will be your whole hand as you attempt to get the fries from the bottom of the cone. This experience definitely lacks table manners but it is so enjoyable!

Bruges has devoted a whole museum to Belgian Fries. It is a MUST!
No matter where in the world diplomats are relocating from or to, Gosselin Mobility can handle it. We know that government-sponsored relocations involve a range of requirements not encountered in other types of moves, so we have our own specialist diplomatic moving service which caters for the specific needs of diplomats, officials and the military (and their families).

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An Italian ship, the “Leopoldo”, arrived at Pointe-à-Pitre in Guadeloupe in the French Antilles. It came from Meta di Sorrento. The ship’s captain, the 30 year old Leopoldo Petrelluzzi, was the older brother of my great grandfather, Giuseppe Petrelluzzi, both of them captains on the vessels of their father Ferdinando who was a shipowner in Meta di Sorrento. It was 14 February 1896, St. Valentine’s Day.

When the ship reached the “Butterfly” Island (that is how the inhabitants affectionately call their island for its butter-flower shape), Captain Leopoldo Petrelluzzi did not expect that he would stay there for the rest of his life.

Just like Cristofero Colombo, who “discovered” Guadeloupe four hundred years earlier on his second trip to the East Indies, Captain Petrelluzzi from Meta di Sorrento was fascinated by its beauty. Pristine beaches as far as the eye can see, sea of shades of blue and emerald green, lush tropical vegetation and an abun-dance of water sources, as in the mountains of the Sorrento Peninsula, and even the Soufrière volcano, shaped vaguely like his beloved Mount Vesuvius. However, it was an encounter with a young lady, Laurence Collin de La Roncière, who lived with her family on one of the islands, in the harbour of the port of Pointe-à-Pitre, that persuaded the Captain to stay. He took his “Leopold” back to Italy but soon after he returned to Guadeloupe as a passenger to marry “his” Laurence. In 1898 he bought an island next to his beloved’s one, which according to the current nautical charts still bears the name of Petrelluzzi. Alexis Léger (aka Saint John Perse), a famous French poet and Nobel Literature Prize winner in 1960, was born on this little island, also called “the island of leaves”.

It was where Leopoldo Petrelluzzi’s Caribbean adventure began, as many of his descendants remember (there were about 300), many of them still living in Guadeloupe.

Background

After the unification of Italy many maritime cities were built to meet the transport demands of the shipbuilding industry in the south of Italy. This had been initiated by the Bour-bons, by Charles III in particular, and continued after the unification of Italy in order to strengthen the economy especially in the Sorrento Peninsula, where the shipyards of Castelmare di Stabia, Vice Equense, Meta and Piano di Sorrento achieved phenomenal economic development by producing tools, sails ropes and other marine equipment... and ships of course! Tens of thousands of sailors were recruited for Italian ships to sail the world, many of whom came out of the naval schools established in Sorrento, and whose fame is still a source of pride for the local population. In 1866, the shipyards of Alimuni in Meta di Sorrento had eight dry docks where hundreds of workers were employed. The Castelmare di Stabia shipyard kept building brigs and schooners which then departed for the northern European routes, the Baltic Sea, the Americas and the Caribbean, and even as far away as China and Australia providing other countries with Italian products of all kinds. The Mediterranean crews, due to the high demand for transport of food-stuffs and raw materials for industrial areas and thanks to being family run, were able to provide their services at competitive prices and with substantial profits. Ships built in the Gulf of Naples were so successful that they were given a higher merit category in 1867 in Bureau Veritas, the naval registry published in Paris. Shipyards in Procida, Alimuni, Piano di Sorrento, Castelmare di Stabia and Equa (Vico Equense), in the course of twenty years had built hundreds of large ships (between 300 and 500 tonnes), many of which were managed by families on the Sorrento Coast. The story that I am telling you comes from one of those families...

Messages were exchanged and the story that I had heard in my childhood as if it was an exotic legend became a true story that allowed me to put faces on people with known names, to rediscover in their faces some family traits and link the place where I was born near Sorrento with an island that attracted Leopoldo from Meta di Sorrento when he arrived in the New World. It was an unusual family reunion of Italian pride in the maritime traditions of this country when ships were leaving the Sorrento Peninsula and crossing the oceans of the world and when “Made in Italy” was much more than a commercial label. It was also an unforgettable discovery of this part of France embedded in the Caribbean with its crown of small islands around, Les Saintes and Marie Galante especially with their cai, old customs, traditional rum and white and incredibly peaceful beaches. It was amazing to me to see how many of the descendants of Leopoldo keep alive the image of the land where he came from, Meta di Sorrento, where the brig began its adventure. The image of Meta di Sorrento, that only few of them have visited, remains a magical place linked to a glorious past that no one will ever succeed in erasing. They are all proud of their origin even though for many of them Meta is just a postcard picture. They are proud of the maritime tradition of their country, the image of expertise in navigation and appreciate the Neapolitan expertise that Meta was able to spread throughout the world. They are also proud to live in a place like Guadeloupe and to contribute to this wonder ful island their labour and experience. In old photographs the “Leopold” can be seen moored at Pointe-à-Pitre with dockers busily loading the cargo including sugar cane sacks, packages of spices used at the time for healing and cooking and barrels of rum used by expert Neapolitan cake makers to enrich the famous “baba” pastries.
of Leopoldo, I have no one to talk to about you, my children hardly know you.” She asks her Italian sister-in-law “Do not forget me. Love me as I love you.”

The story that I recounted is made out of links that oceans cannot break. Contacts can be established between successive generations if memory does not go. Emigration builds bridges, recreates links, transmits the traditions and customs for future generations despite the distance.

Not Only a Tourist Heaven

Currently, Guadeloupe is a tourist destination for its great beauty, suitable for all tastes: sea, mountains, spas, water sports, uncontaminated nature and luxury hotels (such as La Creole Beach Hotel at Le Goset where I stayed). One can enjoy diving among the coral forests, stroking tortoises, sailing, or jet-skiing, windsurfing and kite-surfing. And last but not least a varied cuisine that has absorbed the best of European cuisines, especially the French one, and has a wide range of local produce, fruits and vegetables, fresh fish and tasty meat.

Tourism, with transport and maritime trade, is one of the main activities of the island, or rather of the islands that surround Guadeloupe, islands each of which has its own characteristics. For example, Marie-Galante, the island of a hundred mills, where time seems to have stopped and where the flavour of rum seems to hover over the whole territory where sugar cane is grown.

The revival of tourism in the French West Indies – and the wider Caribbean with the two French overseas departments of Guadeloupe and Martinique – has stimulated the opening of new initiatives such as design and fashion.

On the occasion of a fashion show at the headquarters of the local television station in Pointe-à-Pitre that I attended on the 4th July, I understood its importance. Madras fabrics, printed cotton with typical traditional Indian motifs inspired by the Scottish tartans, were used by designer Lo-rela Nadege Dessommes to compose fantastic dresses and scarves but also simpler two piece dresses in bright colours that delighted the eyes. It was an explosion of colour and imagination based on tradition but projected into a future of new exchanges, new markets, new proposals. The Indian immigration to Guadeloupe, mixed with local traditions, has created new styles which merged with pre-existing ones with the addition of Italian style and French know-how.

This demonstrates that the history of emigration has become a history of integration, whereby the descendants of the captain of the brig of Meta di Sorrento became an integral part of a very different but at the same time very similar society they left in 1896. They have been there for almost one hundred and twenty years.

Guadeloupe between the Two World Wars

Sugar also played a part in the revival of Guadeloupe – a French colony at the beginning of last century. When the First World War turned French farmland used for sugar beet production into battlefields, the cane from Guadeloupe and Martinique enabled France to get the sugar it needed and simultaneously revive the economy of the French overseas territories at least until the beginning of the Second World War when the French Caribbean also suffered losses. Now these two islands are a part of the French administration, part of the European Union and their currency is the euro. Their production of bananas, tasty “European bananas”, is being spread in Europe.

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The revival of tourism in the French West Indies – and the wider Caribbean with the two French overseas departments of Guadeloupe and Martinique – has stimulated the opening of new initiatives such as design and fashion.

On the occasion of a fashion show at the headquarters of the local television station in Pointe-à-Pitre that I attended on the 4th July, I understood its importance. Madras fabrics, printed cotton with typical traditional Indian motifs inspired by the Scottish tartans, were used by designer Lo-rela Nadege Dessommes to compose fantastic dresses and scarves but also simpler two piece dresses in bright colours that delighted the eyes. It was an explosion of colour and imagination based on tradition but projected into a future of new exchanges, new markets, new proposals. The Indian immigration to Guadeloupe, mixed with local traditions, has created new styles which merged with pre-existing ones with the addition of Italian style and French know-how.

This demonstrates that the history of emigration has become a history of integration, whereby the descendants of the captain of the brig of Meta di Sorrento became an integral part of a very different but at the same time very similar society they left in 1896. They have been there for almost one hundred and twenty years.

Alain Hutchinson explains his new role as the Brussels Commissioner for Europe and International Organisations

The Brussels Region has a new face with a new role: Alain Hutchinson, the “Commissioner for Europe and International Organisations”. The Government of the Brussels Region has recently decided to strengthen its role as an international capital and has asked the former member of the European Parliament (and also a former secretary of state and member of the Brussels Region for the French Community) to fill the new post.

“Do you consider yourself Mr. Europe or Mr. Brussels in Europe?” He laughs and explains that he is not Mr. Europe since “the mission that the Brussels regional government asked me to fulfill implies not only contacts with the European institutions but also with other international institutions which have their headquarters in the Brussels Capital Region, NATO for example, and a series of UN agencies, plus several embassies and diplomatic missions”. Several countries have up to three diplomatic representations in Brussels, those representing their countries to the Kingdom of Belgium, those to the EU and several to NATO.

“My mission – he explains – consists also in being available to all associations, federations, NGOs present in Brussels which have contacts with the European institutions and to the international organisations in Brussels. So you can see that I am not Mr. Europe, but a person entrusted by the Brussels regional government with organising a real “politique de siege” as we say in Brussels, a host region policy”.

This is a responsibility, he explains, that up to now was the prerogative of the Belgian Federal State, the so-called “host nation policy”, as it is the prerogative of national governments in other countries. “But after six different reforms of the state in Belgium the regions have acquired much wider competences within the Belgian system and that specific competence is now in the hands of the Brussels-Capital region”. He explains that 80-85% of the requests from the international organisations to the Belgian authorities fall within these competences, with the regions seeing a considerable increase in their powers. “My role, therefore – he adds – is to help international organisations to better function. I am a kind of go-between: my mission – he explains - consists also in being available to all associations, federations, NGOs present in Brussels which have contacts with the European institutions and to the international organisations in Brussels on the one side and the international institutions in Brussels on the other”. The role of the new Commissioner consists in ensuring that the development of the Brussels-Capital Region and the needs of its inhabitants go hand in hand especially when dealing with urban development, mobility, the quality of public spaces, security etc.
Talking of public spaces, what can he say about the state of Rond Point Schuman, the roundabout in the heart of the European quarter?

"Indeed – he replies – this is one of the issues we have to deal with, together with the European institutions. In this area there are also some EU representative offices such as the UK one for example. We have to deal with the residents, I am not the one who can decide, there are also the municipal authorities who decide in the Schuman area also the region has its say. Since my arrival in this post, we have been trying to do as much as possible to improve this area where for some time important big public works are being carried out. However it is difficult to accept the state in which this area is being kept. The minister in charge of public works in the Region Pascal Smet has very quickly started to meet the people living in this area and those living here can appreciate the amenities and a place that tourists, the people working with, together with the European institutions. In this area of Rond Point Schuman, the roundabout in the heart of the Brussels Park Leopold. We are working on it."

So how could one describe the role of the "commissioner for Europe"? A political or a lobbying one? "I would say essentially political, a role linked to Europe and to the international framework. Remember that I also deal with NATO which is in Brussels. My role is to present to the international authorities the projects that we want to realise."

Is there a project that you cherish most, I finally ask. "It is – he answers – an initiative of the European Parliament to present the history of Europe (animation, cultural activities etc.). It is scheduled to open in 2016. It will be housed in a building within the Park Leopold. We are working on it."

Another subject of interest for a "commissioner for Europe" is how he can help fill the gap between Europe and Brussels residents. "The older people who used to live in this area – Hutchinson replies – have a negative attitude towards Europe since they experienced the period when houses were compulsorily acquired only then to be then razed to the ground. This has left a very negative attitude towards Europe.”

In this healing process, he says, several Belgian agencies will collaborate with him. And he mentions Visit Brussels, the agency in charge of tourism within the region of which he has been a president. "For my part – he says – I will try to convince the politicians of the importance of the European institutions, and explain to everybody the services that the authorities offer to all. We certainly do not consider as "invasors" the foreigners who have arrived here to work". Basically, he says, "we want to work in the interest of all the people living in Brussels, also keeping in mind that European and international institutions contribute to the wealth of Brussels for 10% of its GDP and represent 16% of the Brussels workforce. Europe expects from us quick responses and warrants for security for example. And we have to guarantee the rights of the people living here: this is not a European bunker, which closes at 6 pm when people leave their offices". And explains that he wants to bring life back to this area with the creation of the Maison de l’Europe (The House of Europe) and the Parliamentarium which has already been visited by thousands of people.

The House of Europe? What is this? “It is – he answers – an initiative of the European Parliament to present the history of Europe (animation, cultural activities etc.). It is scheduled to open in 2016. It will be housed in a building within the Park Leopold. We are working on it.”

DOES THE MORE INTERMITTENT USE OF RENEWABLE ENERGY SIGNIFY MORE UNCERTAINTY? WILL EU COUNTRIES BE ABLE TO DEAL WITH THIS ON THEIR OWN?

Renewable energy, and especially its intermittent nature, does indeed create new challenges for the electrical system. Networks, and in particular electricity distribution networks, are central to the resolution of these issues, not only through their strengthening and modernisation, but also due to the emergence of smart grids. This implies a European approach, both in order to compensate for the intermittent nature of renewable energy on a continental level, and to share costs and encourage innovation.

WHAT IS YOUR REACTION TO THE ADVANCED ELECTRICITY STORAGE PROJECTS SUCH AS TESLA’S POWERWALL? WILL THE REGIONS NOT BENEFIT MORE FROM A BETTER ELECTRICITY STORAGE SYSTEM THAN AN IMPROVED NETWORK SYSTEM?

Storage is one of the four priority areas in network R&D. The feedback which Tesla is receiving is shedding light on expectations in this field. However, storage should not be seen as being in opposition to networks, but rather as a complement to them, offering a complete range of services and lower prices to consumers.

HOW MANY BILLIONS OF EUROS OF INVESTMENTS WILL NEED TO BE SPENT ON ELECTRICAL NETWORKS UNTIL 2020 AND WHY?

Between now and 2020, the sums to be invested are 150 billion for electricity transport and over 200 billion for its distribution. These considerable amounts correspond to this need to develop interconnections, to adapt the networks to renewable energy sources and new uses such as electric cars, and also to renovate ageing structures.

WHY HAVE YOU ASKED FOR A EUROPEAN ENERGY DATA PLATFORM IN YOUR REPORT? WHAT COULD BE THE AIM OF SUCH A PLATFORM?

The issue of data and its access is key in order for users to be able to fully manage their consumption. It is also essential for the development of smart grids. But this also leads to questions regarding cybersecurity and the protection of privacy. Fully relying on these issues with certainty and coherence requires an important European framework.
The Diplomatic Platform of the Press Club Europe Brussels is an exciting new initiative offering a limited series of exclusive programming for the growing number of diplomatic, governmental and regional representation members of the Club. These activities are a complement to the thirty-plus public programs the Club offers each month. The Platform offers two to three thematic and networking opportunities a month for diplomatic members. The Platform was officially launched on March 9, 2015, by Mr. Alain Hutchinson, Brussels Commissioner for Europe and International Organizations, in the presence of some 80 members and specially invited guests, including Mr. Laurent Brihay, Executive Director of the Club.

Thematic programs thus far have included a briefing on the status of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) by Robert Gordon, Senior Advisor for Europe, Sorini, Samet & Associates, on February 19, 2015, and a briefing on the current situation in Ukraine by Ambassador Kostiantyn Yelisieiev, Ambassador of the Mission of the Ukraine to the European Union, on April 14, 2015. The Head of the Diplomatic Platform is former U.S. diplomat Viktor Sidabras. Of Lithuanian origin, Mr Sidabras is a dual national committed to European integration. He has served in Belgium, (West) Germany, Liberia, Norway, Lithuania, Sweden, Russia and again Belgium, besides numerous postings in the U.S. He last served as the U.S. Spokesperson to the European Union, 2010-2013.
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