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Adapting to Europe? Regional MPs' Involvement in EU Affairs in Germany

ELLEN SCHNEIDER*, BERTHOLD RITTBERGER** & ARNDT WONKA†

*Statistical Office Baden-Württemberg, Stuttgart, and Mannheim Centre for European Social Research, Germany, **Department of Political Science, University of Munich, Munich, Germany, †Bremen International Graduate School of Social Sciences, University of Bremen, Bremen, Germany

ABSTRACT The Lisbon Treaty has led to an expansion of the rights of parliaments in scrutinizing EU decision making, including—for the first time—also regional parliaments. Yet, theoretically informed empirical work on how regional legislatures adapt to the increasing relevance of the EU for subnational jurisdictions remains scarce. Drawing on data from an original survey of 251 MPs, conducted in seven German Länder in 2011, we explore regional MPs' involvement in EU affairs. We find strong variation among MPs' level of EU involvement. Exploring different sets of explanations, we show that individual-level factors—the perceived salience of the EU and MPs' perceived influence in EU matters—hold the highest explanatory power.

KEY WORDS: Germany, regional parliaments, Europeanization, EU decision making

Introduction

The impact of the European Union (EU) on national institutions, policies and political processes, as well as the adaptation of actors and institutions to the process of European integration, continue to be themes attracting much scholarly attention. In this context, research on how the EU impacts subnational jurisdictions is also flourishing. In federal polities, such as Germany, the states (Länder) possess considerable prerogatives when it comes to policy-making and implementation. Yet, as competencies are increasingly transferred to the EU level, the German Länder face various challenges. For instance, Länder governments see themselves increasingly compelled to protect their own institutional interests and prerogatives, as policy areas, which used to be under the exclusive jurisdiction of the Länder, are increasingly subjected to EU influence (Eppler, 2006: 18). Similarly, German states lost legislative influence via the Bundesrat, the second chamber of the federal legislature, in co-deciding formerly federal legislation, which has successively been transferred to Brussels (Jeffery, 1996: 58). Even though the Länder have experienced a gradual erosion of their policy-making prerogatives,

Correspondence Address: Berthold Rittberger, Department of Political Science, University of Munich, Germany. Email: berthold.rittberger@gsi.uni-muenchen.de

they are—at the same time—considered quite influential players in EU policy-making: The Länder, for example, possess constitutionally guaranteed information and scrutiny rights (Jeffery, 1996: 56; Bauer and Börzel, 2010: 258) and the Lisbon Treaty has empowered subnational parliaments in the context of the new subsidiarity control mechanism (Abels and Eppler, 2011: 17). Moreover, EU policies with a direct impact on Länder competencies, such as the EU's structural and cohesion policies, provide regional political actors with strong incentives to exercise influence in order to receive more regional funding.

All of the above reasons suggest that regional political actors should not be considered passive recipients of political decisions taken at the EU level. Given the EU's mounting impact on domestic policy-making, we would expect that political actors in the Länder make increasing use of the various instruments at their disposal to actively shape and get involved in EU policy-making. However, the knowledge we possess about the degree to which different subnational actors, most notably Länder executives and legislatures, employ their means to influence or scrutinize EU policy-making tends to be one-sided. While we possess substantial knowledge on the subnational mobilization of the Länder executives in EU matters, scholarly attention on regional parliamentary involvement in EU affairs is rather scant. First, increased scholarly attention for the *de jure* involvement of German state parliaments in EU policy-making (e.g. Abels, 2011) is not matched by a simultaneous evaluation of their *de facto* participation (for exceptions, see Johné, 2000; Bauer, 2005; Hummrich, 2009). Second, besides well-known problems of information overload and time constraints faced by politicians, we possess little systematic knowledge about why members of Länder parliaments (MPs) get involved in EU politics at all and why some are more involved in EU affairs than others. Moreover, existing causal explanations for regional mobilization often lack micro-foundations and do not move beyond highlighting macro-level factors (for a critical overview, see Sturm and Bauer, 2010: 21).

In this contribution, we address these gaps in the literature by exploring how individual MPs from regional parliaments respond to the increasing political relevance of the EU level for the Länder. We do so by analysing the involvement of Länder MPs in EU affairs, which we define as those political activities geared towards obtaining information and wielding influence in EU policy-making. In the remainder of this contribution, we employ the terms involvement and activities interchangeably. To capture MPs' activities, we conducted a written survey with all MPs in seven German state legislatures (Landtage) in 2011. The responses received provide us with a unique dataset on MPs' involvement in EU affairs (the details of the survey and the rationale for the selection of seven Länder will be discussed in the third section). Besides presenting descriptive evidence on MPs' involvement, we are also interested in explaining the variation in individual MPs' EU-related activities. In order to account for differences in activity, we present an analytical framework comprising explanatory factors at different levels of analysis (individual-level, organizational-level and context-level factors).

Why our focus on Germany and its Länder legislatures? Given their high level of regional authority (see Hooghe et al., 2008: 263), German Länder constitute a most promising environment to witness EU-related activities of regional MPs. In a research

area where we possess hitherto very little information and knowledge on the scope and intensity of EU-related activities of regional MPs, it is—in our view—reasonable to study MPs in a political setting that is conducive to engagement with the EU. Studying subnational units in one country also has a decisive advantage, since variables, which are not of interest for this study, can be held constant.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. The ensuing section sketches our analytical framework. We introduce our conceptualization of EU-relevant activities before we present hypotheses to explain MPs' activities to get involved in EU affairs. The third section presents the research design, including data collection and operationalization of the dependent variable and explanatory variables. We present the empirical analyses and results in the penultimate section and the final section discusses the results and concludes.

The Involvement of Regional Parliaments in EU Politics: An Analytical Framework

Existing research commonly highlights the formal competencies of parliaments to scrutinize their governments' EU policies. Scrutiny is not all there is when studying the involvement of regional parliaments in EU affairs, since MPs may also seek to impact the policy-making process more directly, through formal and informal channels. In this paper we thus follow Auel's (2006: 250 – 251) advice to include the "more informal means of parliamentary influence" in analyses of parliaments' role in EU policy-making.

The EU Involvement of Regional MPs

In this study, we opt for a broad conceptualization of MPs' involvement in EU affairs. First, we assume that MPs have two strategies at their disposal to advance their interests: they can exchange information and co-ordinate common positions with actors to influence policy outcomes (Auel and Benz, 2005; Wonka and Rittberger, 2009; Kropp et al., 2011: 232). Drawing on the literature on lobbying, we hold that information comprises not only knowledge about facts, "[i]t may include advice on the best political strategy to be used, knowledge about others' strategy, as well as a range of, sometimes confidential, technical and scientific findings" (Beyers, 2004: 224). Our perspective to highlight information exchange-activities of MPs is important because "[i]nformation is the ultimate basis for participating in public policy-making" (Maurer and Wessels, 2001: 439). Without information no effective scrutiny of the executive can be exercised (Sprungk, 2007: 140) and no policy positions can be formulated independently (Hummrich, 2009: 163 – 164). Consequently, exchanging information with other actors is crucial to influence EU policies (Beyers, 2004: 224). Besides information exchanges, MPs can also co-ordinate their positions with like-minded actors to influence the policy process more directly (Kropp et al., 2011: 232).

Regional MPs are confronted with a multitude of interaction possibilities, which are not restricted to regional or other domestic actors, but encompass transnational as well as the supranational arenas, public as well as private actors. Moreover, besides legislative and executive actors (which may or may not be from the same

party), we also take into account administrative or ministerial officials and representatives of interest groups (see Tatham, 2008). When we refer to the ‘extent of activity’ of MPs we refer to (a) the number of interaction partners with whom they exchange information and co-ordinate common positions as well as (b) the frequency of these respective interactions. However, while taking into account a diverse set of actors, we do consider political parties to be of particular importance for regional MPs’ EU-related activities. Political parties bring together individuals with similar political preferences and ideological outlooks. In addition, political parties provide an organizational infrastructure that facilitates the co-operation among its members. We expect this transaction cost-reducing function of political parties (Müller, 2000) to play a significant role for Länder MPs’ EU-related activities. Consequently, we expect them to rely heavily on intra-party channels for their EU-related interactions.

Explaining the EU Involvement of Regional MPs

How can the EU involvement of regional MPs be explained? The literature tends to focus on the lack of activity and EU involvement: While some scholars emphasize the information overload and lack of administrative resources for MPs to effectively deal with EU proposals (Johne, 2000: 328 – 329, 356; Heggie, 2003: 118; Hummrich, 2009: 169), in his analysis of the Hessian state legislature, Bauer (2005) argues that the (voluntary) non-exhaustion of participation opportunities can be explained by party political considerations of the governing majority (Bauer, 2005: 646). The more general literature on subnational mobilization, which also includes activities of regional governments in EU affairs, highlights macro-level factors, such as a state’s financial resources, institutional competences or its regional political culture (Sturm and Bauer, 2010: 21, 23 – 24). We thus agree with Bauer and Pitschel’s (2007) concern that the existing literature often seems to simply add another macro-level variable if a previously employed one fails to explain subnational mobilization and (in)activity. Echoing this criticism we propose an analytical framework, which includes not only organizational (meso) and contextual (macro) factors, but also zooms in on actors’ preferences and incentives (Bauer and Pitschel, 2007: 76 – 79) to account for MPs’ EU-related activities. We thus follow the suggestion that “instead of invoking grand theories (that do not reflect the realities of regional politics in the EU), more attention needs to be paid to middle-range mechanisms and scope conditions of regional participation in EU politics” (Bauer and Börzel, 2010: 260). In this respect, we present explanatory factors operating at different levels of analysis. At the micro- or individual level, factors that pertain to regional MPs’ general attitudes towards the EU or Europeanization are included in the analysis. At the meso-level, we focus on MPs’ organizational environment, such as an MP’s membership in a majority or minority parliamentary group or in a parliamentary committee. Relevant macro-level or contextual factors that we include in the analysis focus on particular attributes of the respective Land, such as its financial endowment. In the next sub-sections, we elaborate on these three different sets of explanations and present empirically testable hypotheses.

The micro-level: individual perceptions and attitudes. In a broad sense saliency can be “understood as the strength of one’s interest” (Tatham, 2012: 436). Saliency of an

issue thus focuses actors' attention and compels them to get involved if the saliency of an issue is perceived sufficiently strong. We assume that the subjectively perceived saliency of EU affairs has a strong impact on the extent of MPs' activities in pursuing their EU-related interests, which is in line with Tatham's (2012) findings on mobilization efforts of regional representations in Brussels. It is often argued that the saliency of EU policies is quite low for the ordinary MP, for whom time is a scarce resource and it simply does not pay off—electorally and as regards policy influence—to invest scarce time in EU-related issues (O'Brennan and Raunio, 2007: 278; Sousa, 2008: 441). In these accounts, saliency is treated as a constant. We argue, however, that MPs may well attribute different levels of saliency to EU affairs: The subjective importance individual MPs attach to EU affairs for the success of their own political work is based on individual beliefs and calculations of costs and benefits. The saliency of EU politics perceived by regional MPs might thus vary with the extent to which an MP's area of legislative specialization is affected by EU policies and/or by the extent to which firms in an MP's constituency are active in the EU's internal market.

Hypothesis 1: The higher a regional MP perceives the saliency of European affairs for her own work, the more active she is in EU politics.

The perceived influence on legislative proposals at the EU level is another variable that can be expected to affect the extent to which MPs become involved in EU affairs. The discussions on the Lisbon Treaty and the respective decisions by the German Constitutional Court in 2009 have not only raised awareness of the EU's impact on domestic legislative prerogatives, but the possibilities of MPs to react to EU proposals has also been expanded, at least formally. However, irrespective of formal instruments to influence EU affairs, parliamentarians' individual perceptions on influence also matter. MPs who consider their influence to affect EU politics to be high will, according to our expectations, also be more involved in EU affairs than MPs who consider their own influence to be limited or futile. This group may still be aware of the EU's impact, but they see no sense or benefit in investing their scarce time and resources in EU affairs.

Hypothesis 2: The higher a regional MP perceives her influence to be in EU politics, the more active she is in EU politics.

Attitudes of MPs towards the EU can also affect the extent of their activities in EU policy-making. In this regard, Euro-scepticism—defined as negative attitude towards European integration—is frequently employed as an explanatory variable for parliamentary activities (Raunio and Wiberg, 2000; Raunio, 2005; Raunio and Wright,

2006; Sprungk, 2007; Ahlback Oberg and Jungar, 2009; Karlas, 2011). While it could be argued that politicians opposed to European integration should be particularly active in EU politics, we argue that Euro-sceptic politicians rather opt for publicly visible 'outside'-strategies, employing the media or public rallies as outlets for their views. These strategies are targeted at the public at large and EU-sceptical parties utilize them to reap electoral benefits by distinguishing themselves from the generally pro-integrationist centre parties (Kriesi et al., 2007, 2012). The informal, non-public

EU activities, which we explore here, are less politically attractive for Euro-sceptic Länder MPs, since their non-public quality does not allow them to be utilized for the mobilization of EU-sceptic voters.

Hypothesis 3: The more Euro-sceptic an MP's attitude is, the less active she is in EU politics.

The meso-level: MPs' organizational environment. Turning from individual-level attributes and attitudes to the meso-level and MPs' organizational and working environment, we first focus on respective MPs' occupation with specific policy areas, which is reflected in MPs' committee membership. The impact of the EU on domestic policies differs by policy area. Whereas environmental and agricultural legislation mostly originates from the EU level, policy areas pertaining to internal affairs are considerably less Europeanized (Bengtson, 2007: 52; König and Mäder, 2008: 449; Töller, 2008: 9). Similar findings exist also for the regional level: "environmental affairs are highly Europeanized and are characterized by relatively high levels of regional mobilization—similar to agriculture, fisheries, regional, or transport policy" (Tatham, 2012: 439). These differences should also have an effect on the activities of MPs: MPs spending considerable time working in highly Europeanized fields should be more likely to get involved in EU affairs, e.g. by seeking information on bills originating at the EU level. In this respect, MPs' committee memberships are particularly relevant: MPs who are members in highly Europeanized committees tend to deal with EU issues more frequently. Moreover, they are more likely to find a working environment and resources, which facilitate EU involvement.

Hypothesis 4: The more Europeanized a regional MPs' working environment, the more active she is in EU politics.

Turning to the second meso-level factor, many scholars flag the importance of the interaction between executive and legislative actors in general and the relationship between majority and minority parliamentary groups in particular. It is argued in the literature that MPs from governing parties rely on their government to obtain information on EU policies (Auel, 2006: 263; Kropp, 2010: 138), while opposition MPs who lack direct political access to the executive have been shown to rely on MPs from other member states (Auel, 2006: 263), or on the exploitation of formal information rights of their colleagues in the European Parliament (Proksch and Slapin, 2010). Given our broad conceptualization of MPs' activities, we do not have any specific expectation on the effect of an MP's government or opposition status on the scope of their EU-related activities. In our analysis we do, however, control for this factor.

The macro-level: Länder-specific characteristics. Moreover, particular characteristics of the Länder—such as their economic strength and size—potentially impact MPs' EU related activities as these factors affect MPs' opportunity structures and their incentives to become active (Sodeur and Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik, 2005: 16). German Länder, for instance, differ in the access points they offer to their

representatives. Here, compositional variables, such as population size, the economic situation and European experience, may affect individual MPs' EU-related activity. Thus, MPs from the more resourceful Länder should be more active. Yet, it could also be argued that economically weaker states—as recipients of the EU's structural aid programmes—should display higher levels of involvement. As their goal is to obtain funding and influence EU-level funding decisions, MPs from these states should possess high incentives to become involved in EU policy-making. On the basis of these arguments, we do not have any specific expectations on the direction of regional-level effects on MPs' EU involvement and we therefore include Länder variables as controls in our analysis.

Research Design

In order to assess the EU-related involvement of individual MPs from the different Länder, as well as MPs' individual attitudes and characteristics, we collected data on the subjective evaluations of regional MPs from seven Länder. The seven Länder—Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, Bremen, Hesse, Lower-Saxony, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, and Saxony—were selected following a diverse case selection strategy: They provide us with a wide range of variation of potentially relevant Länder characteristics and difference, such as population size, economic situation, geographical position, distinctiveness of regional political culture, and governmental coalition—to guarantee representativeness (Gerring, 2007: 97 – 99). MPs' subjective evaluations were collected through a standardized questionnaire, both online and written. The field phase started in March 2011 and ended in October 2011. 251 out of 881 regional parliamentarians participated in the survey, which amounts to a response rate of 28.5%. Even though the response rate is rather low, it is comparable to those of other recent surveys of political elites addressing similar topics: In their survey of inter-parliamentary co-ordination of MEPs, Miklin and Crum (2011) attain a response rate of 10.7% (84 participating MEPs); Tatham (2010) obtains a response rate of 28% in his survey of heads of sub-state offices in Brussels. To assess the representativeness of the responses, we looked closely at participation rates across state, parliamentary groups, gender, as well as membership in a European affairs committee (EAC). The participation of MPs across states is only slightly skewed,¹ but because of the very low number of parliamentarians and participants in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania (12 respondents among a total of 71 MPs), outcomes for this group of respondents is not representative for the state as a whole. With respect to participation across parliamentary party groups, members of party groups from the left of centre ('DIE LINKE': +1.6 percentage point difference between sample and population, Greens: +2.6, SPD: +3.8) are slightly overrepresented, whereas parliamentary groups from the right of centre (CDU: -4.5, FDP: -2.8, CSU: -0.5) are slightly under-represented. While no bias results from the distribution of gender, members of EACs are somewhat overrepresented: 17.9% of respondents (45 MPs) are in an EAC, whereas only 114 of the 881 MPs (12.9%) are full members in such a committee. While one could argue that the overrepresentation of EAC members could lead to an overestimation of MPs' EU-related activities, we do not consider this to be a serious problem, given the fact that almost 90% of our respondents have a further affiliation with at least another committee. Moreover, the variables that exercise a significant effect on our respondents'

EU-related activities vary considerably in our sample. Together with an overall moderate level of EU-related activities, this indicates that our sample is not restricted to a small and unrepresentative group of EU enthusiasts and activists.

Operationalization of the dependent variable. MPs' involvement in EU affairs (activity) is operationalized by asking MPs questions about the contacts they entertain with different actors at different territorial levels and in different arenas and whether these contacts are geared towards exchanging information or coordinating common positions and political strategies. With respect to their information activities, MPs were asked how often they exchange or gather information on planned or initiated decisions at the EU level with (1) parliamentarians and party members, (2) members of the executive, (3) administrative and ministerial officials, and (4) interest groups and associations. For each of these four groups of actors a detailed list with possible interaction partners was set up (see the Appendix for the list of actors). A distinction was made not only between actors at different territorial levels but also with respect to their party affiliation. MPs were then asked how often they contact the same set of officials and political actors in order to influence policies that are planned or have been initiated at the EU level. Respondents could assess the frequency of these contacts on a five-point scale, ranging from 'never', 'seldom', 'occasionally', 'often' to 'always'. To assess the extent of MPs' EU-related activities, we constructed an additive index, which aggregates MPs contacts across different groups of actors.² Figure 1 displays how we the process of aggregation was carried out.

Since the aim of our research was to capture all relevant contacts that German Länder MPs entertain with other actors, we are confronted with 92 items at the lowest level of aggregation. These items are grouped in eight indicators, four of which capture information exchange strategies while the other four capture

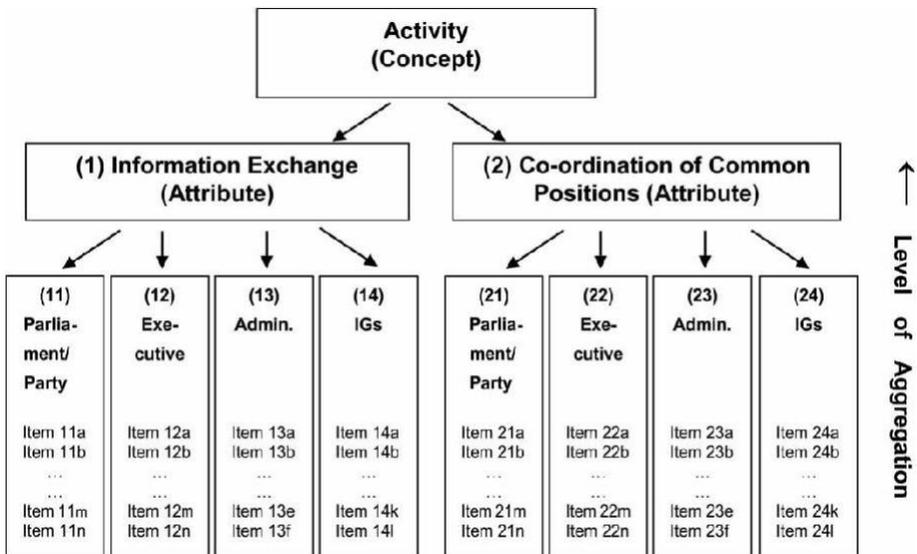


Figure 1. Construction of the index on MPs' EU-related activities.

coordination strategies.³ For each item, respondents could indicate the extent of their activity on an ordinal scale: if they indicated to 'never' contact any of the suggested actors, we assigned a value of zero. Following this logic, 'seldom' is assigned a value of 1, 'occasionally' a value of 2, 'often' a value of 3, and 'always', 4.⁴ The frequencies are then summed up for each respondent. If a contact is marked 'not applicable' by a respondent (for example an information exchange with a state minister of one's own party), this respondent is considered to have 'never' had the opportunity to contact this actor. This incidence is taken into account by standardizing the score, which is obtained at every level of aggregation by the total amount of possible contacts to a 'zero-one'-interval.⁵ This form of standardization allows us not only to account for non-applicable or missing items, but also facilitates the interpretation of the indicators at the different levels of aggregation, because conclusions on the extent to which MPs exploit their individual potential of activities can now be drawn.

The other indicators were constructed in a similar fashion. On the next higher level of aggregation, two further indicators were constructed. Indicator 1 (information contacts) covers all kinds of information exchange strategies and was created from the four information exchange indicators (11 – 14), which all receive the same weight. Similarly, indicator 2 (co-ordination of common positions) captures co-ordination strategies and is created from the four standardized co-ordination indicators (21 – 24).⁶ The minimum value for both indicators is zero and the maximum value one. Finally, one single indicator of an MP's overall activity is obtained by summing up the standardized indicators 1 and 2, weighing them equally.⁷

Operationalization of the independent and control variables. The perceived saliency of the EU for individual MPs is operationalized by asking MPs how important the EU is for the success of their own work (11-point scale ranging from 0 to 10). To assess MPs' perceived personal influence on EU policy-making, respondents were directly asked how they evaluate their influence on legislative initiatives and proposals at the EU level ('no influence', 'small influence', 'medium influence', 'big influence', or 'very big influence'). As is common in the literature, Euro-scepticism is operationalized by asking respondents if 'European integration has already gone too far' or should 'be further advanced' (again employing a 11-point scale).

The variables capturing MPs' organizational environment are operationalized as follows: for MPs' membership in differently 'Europeanized' committees we created dummy variables, where non-membership in a specific committee (e.g. environmental affairs) is coded as 0 and membership as 1. Of special interest is, of course, membership in an EAC. Regarding government and opposition status, a further dummy variable was constructed, where parliamentarians from minority parliamentary groups are coded 0 and those from majority parliamentary groups, 1. Data for both indicators were collected for each respondent via the webpages of the state legislatures, hand-books, and with the help of Landtag administrations. Finally, turning to the macro-level, the MPs' affiliation to each of the seven Länder is operationalized by dummy variables, with Lower-Saxony as a reference category. Moreover we include the duration of each MP's tenure in state legislature as well as gender as control variables. Although the data structure is hierarchical, multi-level regression analyses are not a reasonable strategy with the data at hand: conditions for multi-level modelling, such as a random selection of individuals and groups, a

sufficient number of groups at the contextual level and, finally, enough variance at the group level,⁸ are violated. Consequently, we will conduct simple linear regression analyses.

Analysis: How Active are German Regional MPs in EU Politics?

Extent of Regional MPs’ Activity in EU Politics

We start out by providing descriptive information on the extent of regional MPs’ EU-related activities (see Figure 2). Seven of the ten most frequently contacted actor groups have been contacted for informational purposes. Furthermore, contacts are channelled mainly through an MP’s own party, which confirms our expectation on the transaction cost-reducing role of political parties. Contacts with MPs from other political parties do not even make it into the ranking of the fifteen most frequent contacts. Staff from state ministries constitute the most relevant non-partisan contact source and, overall, the seventh most important interlocutor for regional MPs in EU affairs. Actors from MPs’ immediate working environment are those contacted most often: 52.6% of the respondents have frequent contact with MPs from their own party to exchange information on EU-related policies, two out of five respondents furthermore contact them frequently to co-ordinate common positions. The parliamentary

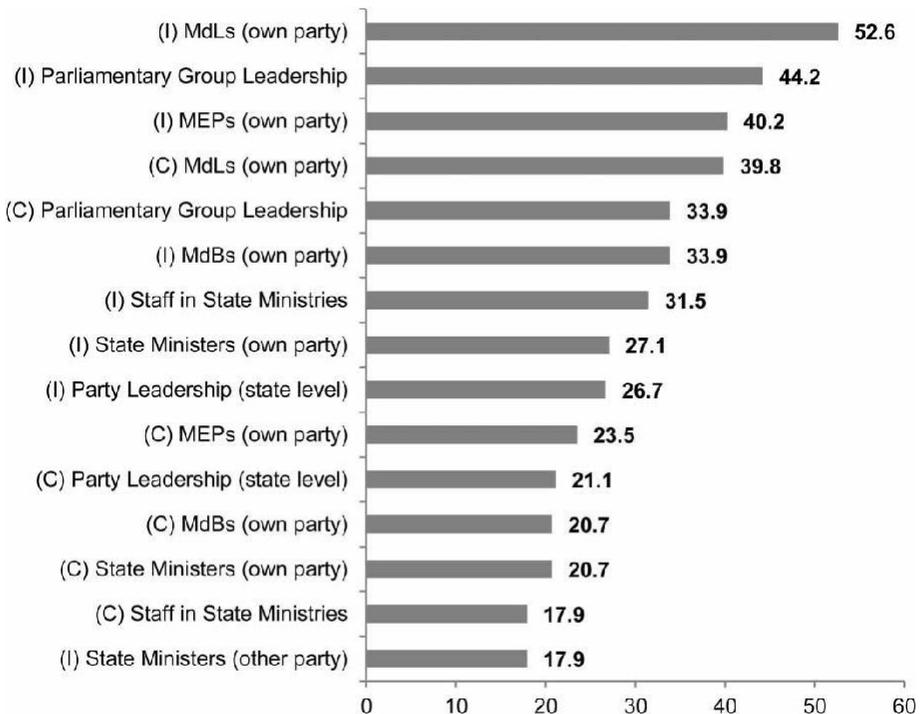


Figure 2. Rank-order of the 15 most frequent contacts (‘often’/‘always’ in %). (I), Information contact; (C), Co-ordination contact; MdL, regional MP at the state (Land) level; MdB, MP at the federal level (Bundestag); MEP, Member of the European Parliament.

group leadership and MEPs of the own party are also important potential political allies and sources of information. The latter finding suggests that the national level does not seem to dominate MPs' activities: MPs contact members of the European Parliament more frequently than members of the Bundestag and the regional ministers of their own party. This finding underwrites the assumptions made by proponents of multi-level governance, as well as paradiplomacy approaches (Marks et al., 1996: 346 – 347; Tatham, 2008: 511), that regional politicians bypass domestic actors and institutions to directly contact supranational actors to obtain information and influence policy.

Following the logic of our index construction, we can present a single score to assess MPs' overall extent of EU-related activities. The average extent of activity is rather low, with a mean aggregated score of 0.20 (bearing in mind that German state legislatures are considered a most promising environment to find parliamentary

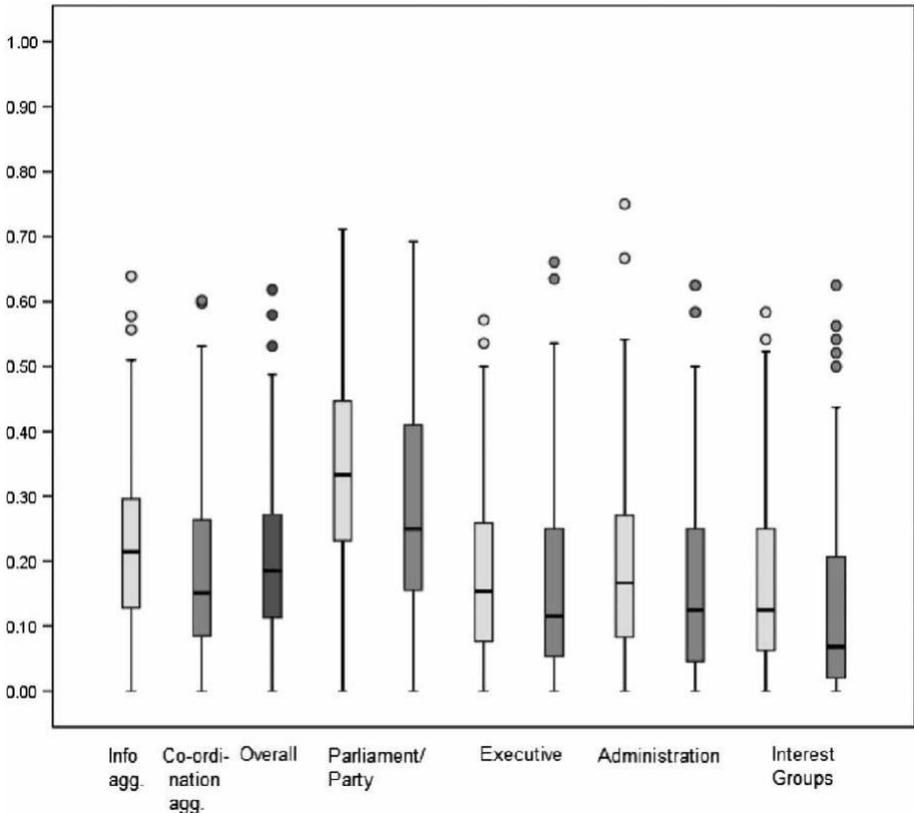


Figure 3. Scope of regional MPs' EU activities by type of activity and actor groups contacted. Information contacts are in light grey, co-ordination contacts in medium grey, and overall contacts in dark grey. The black band in the boxes represents the median score for this category (50th percentile). The bottom and top of the boxes represent the 25th and 75th percentile respectively. The whiskers show the range of answers from the minimum to the maximum value (without outliers). Outliers which lie more than 1.5 box lengths outside are marked with a dot.

engagement in EU affairs!), yet the frequency of contacts varies considerably across the different functional groups. As displayed in Figure 3, the mean score is slightly higher for information activities (standardized score of 0.22) compared to co-ordination activities (0.18).⁹ This is hardly surprising because co-ordination activities are more sophisticated and resource-intensive than pure information strategies. Regarding activities with different actor groups, MPs and party members are the groups most frequently contacted (a score of 0.35 for information exchanges and 0.28 for co-ordination activities). Moreover, standard deviations are rather high and maximum (as well as minimum) scores clearly differ from mean activity scores showing that MPs differ considerably in their EU-related behaviour. We now turn to our analysis to explain this variation.

Explaining Regional MPs' Involvement in EU Politics

Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics for the individual-level variables, which we employ in the regression analyses. The average perceived saliency of the EU for all respondents is 5.7, which indicates that MPs generally perceive EU issues as rather important for the success of their own political work (standard deviation: 2.6). Furthermore, at least 30% of our respondents consider EU issues to be highly salient for themselves (values range from 8 to 10). However, another third of our respondents attribute rather low saliency to EU issues (values ranging from 0 to 4). Regional MPs' perceived influence on EU proposals, which was measured on a five-point scale, is quite low (with a mean value of 1.69 and a standard deviation of 0.64). An overwhelming majority of nearly 90% of the respondents perceives themselves as having predominantly no influence (100 respondents or 39.8% perceive no influence, 122 respondents or 48.6% perceive only little influence). Not a single parliamentarian gives the impression to have very strong or at least strong influence; only 24 respondents

(9.6%) perceive medium influence. With a mean value of 2.74 (standard deviation: 2.71), MPs are not overly Euro-sceptic and hence adopt a rather positive stance towards European integration. Only a small minority of 26 respondents (10.4%) tends towards the position that European integration has already gone too far (values ranging from 6 to 10).

Table 2 provides an overview of linear regression coefficients for four different models. In the first three models, individual, organizational and contextual factors are tested block-wise. Model 4 is a full model, which includes all factors for which hypotheses were derived as well as the control variables. In the first model, which covers all individual-level variables, perceived saliency as well as an MP's own

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of individual-level variables used in ordinary least-squares (OLS) regression

	Mean	Standard deviation	n
Perceived saliency	5.70	2.60	246
Influence on EU proposals	1.69	0.64	246
Euro-scepticism	2.74	2.71	204

Table 2. Linear regression (OLS) analysis: effects of individual, organizational and contextual factors on MPs' extent of activity

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Constant	0.000 (0.027)	0.169*** (0.014)	0.183*** (0.026)	0.039 (0.054)
Individual factors				
Saliency	0.017*** (0.003)			0.016*** (0.003)
Personal influence on EU proposals	0.061*** (0.013)			0.053*** (0.014)
Euro-scepticism	-0.001 (0.003)			-0.001 (0.003)
Organizational factors				
EAC		0.082*** (0.022)		0.022 (0.020)
Majority Parliamentary Group		0.029 (0.018)		0.024 (0.017)
Contextual factors (Reference: Lower Saxony)				
Baden-Wu"rttemberg			0.040 (0.033)	0.019 (0.028)
Bavaria			0.008 (0.033)	-0.008 (0.027)
Bremen			0.000 (0.037)	-0.018 (0.031)
Hesse			0.021 (0.036)	0.015 (0.029)
Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania			0.091* (0.046)	0.040 (0.038)
Saxony			0.007 (0.035)	-0.014 (0.029)
Additional control factors				
Regional political experience (Reference: 16 years or more)				
0 - 5 years				-0.044* (0.022)
6 - 10 years				-0.019 (0.026)
11 - 15 years				-0.043 (0.029)
Gender (Reference: female MPs)				-0.004 (0.018)
Adjusted R ²	0.335	0.090	0.002	0.345
F-test	28.877***	9.196***	1.051	6.824***
n	167	167	167	167

EAC, European Affairs or Trans-regional Committee. ***p,0.001; **p,0.01; *p,0.05. Due to missing answers for some indicators, the n is restricted to 167 so that the models are comparable.

influence on EU legislative initiatives and proposals attains statistical significance: a one-unit increase in saliency increases the extent of activity by nearly two percentage points. With respect to the perceived influence an MP exerts on EU proposals, a change

from a lower category (e.g. ‘no influence at all’) to the next higher category (e.g. ‘small influence’) changes the extent of activity score by 6 percentage points. However, it has to be borne in mind that only three of the five possible categories were used by the respondents, so that this result applies only to the three lowest activity-categories. Turning to Euro-scepticism, the coefficient points in the expected direction but is not statistically significant.¹⁰ The explained variance of this model is rather high, with an adjusted R^2 of nearly 34%, which suggests that individual-level factors possess high explanatory power for MPs’ involvement in EU affairs.

Model 2 reveals that both hypothesized organizational factors have the expected positive influence on the extent of activity. However, only membership in an EAC exerts significant influence and increases the extent of activity by slightly more than eight percentage points. Further analyses (which are not displayed here) reveal that membership in a highly Europeanized committee, such as environmental affairs, is not associated with a significantly higher extent of activity. The adjusted R^2 of this model is below 10%, which means that organizational factors explain much less of the variance than individual factors. The linear regression including all Länder dummies (Model 3) suggests that macro-level factors do not seem to be appropriate for explaining variation in MPs’ EU-related activities: only membership in the group of MPs from Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania affects the extent of activity in comparison to the reference category (Lower Saxony).¹¹ However, this result has to be treated cautiously because of the few respondents from this state in our sample. Nevertheless, respondents from populous and economically strong Länder, such as Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria and Hesse, are not significantly more active than their colleagues from other states (and neither are MPs from states that obtain significant levels of EU funding more active in EU affairs). Consequently, no variance can be explained with this model: the adjusted R^2 is zero and the F-test is not significant.

In the full model (4) only individual-level factors—perceived saliency and MPs’ perceived influence on EU—remain statistically significant. All other coefficients remain or turn insignificant. Additional analyses reveal that the influence of membership in an EAC is mediated by MPs’ perceived saliency and the perceived own influence on European proposals. This meso-level factor turns insignificant in the full model (4). Moreover, MPs who are members of an EAC hold more positive attitudes towards the EU, which suggests that this variable has, at least, an indirect effect on the extent of MPs’ activity. When individual and organizational-level variables are included in the model, the impact of the Länder context disappears fully. With respect to control factors, gender does not possess any influence, but the duration of an MP’s tenure matters: MPs in their first legislative term are significantly less active than those who are at least in their fourth period. Since our conceptualization of activity puts a premium on informal channels of communication, this finding is not surprising, since MPs need to invest not only resources but also time to build up contacts. The adjusted R^2 of the full model is only slightly higher than for model 1 (which contains only individual-level factors).

Finally, we also checked for other potentially relevant control variables. However, neither the level of education, nor ideology, nor party affiliation, nor personal, constituency-related (operationalized by the amount of local European Regional Development Fund means from 2007 until 2010) as well as state-related advantages offered by the EU or other Länder level variables, such as the distinctiveness of the regional political culture, the financial status or the European experience, display

statistical significance. These results do not change decisively if robust standard errors—clustered for states and political parties—are estimated.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this contribution we highlight the importance of individual-level factors to account for the differential scope of EU-related activities of regional MPs in Germany. Our findings complement the existing literature, which has hitherto focused predominantly on meso- or macro-level factors to explain subnational mobilization in EU politics. Our analyses dismiss contextual factors, such as a region's geographical location, its relative economic prosperity and specific regional cultures, and strongly qualify the explanatory relevance of MPs' working environment, i.e. whether an MP is a member of an EU committee and/or a governing or opposition party. While the latter has no significant effect in all our analyses, the effect of being a member of an EAC disappears when controlling for individual-level factors. The perceived saliency of the EU and an MP's perceived influence on EU politics drive the extent to which regional MPs become involved in EU affairs.

One could argue, however, that causality runs the other way, i.e. that the scope of MPs' EU-related activities determines the saliency MPs attribute to EU politics and their own influence in EU policy-making. Given the data at hand, we cannot establish a definitive empirical claim about the causal direction that we propose here. If, however, causality runs from MPs' activities to subjectively attributed saliency and perceived influence, the question arises why MPs become active in EU policy-making in the first place. In the bivariate analyses our individual-level factors correlate with organizational variables (membership in an EAC; governing/opposition party status), which provides us with an indication that MPs' perceptions are, at least to some extent, affected by factors that are independent of MPs' EU activities.¹² While being active in EU affairs can, of course, reinforce the saliency MPs attribute to the EU and their perceived personal influence in EU affairs, we are confident that our causal interpretation is meaningful. In order to obtain more robust claims about the direction of causality, and hence about possible learning and socialization effects, we require more and better data, such as panel data.

Our findings are also of broader relevance for the literature on the role of regional parliaments and regional MPs in EU policy-making. Compared to other EU member states, Länder legislatures possess relatively strong formal powers, which empower regional MPs and should induce them to become (more) active in EU policy-making. Consequently, we would expect to find less EU-related activities from parliamentarians in regional legislatures of other EU member states with, perhaps, the exception of Belgium and Spain, where regional assemblies do possess considerable policy-making powers. While our findings suggest that a non negligible proportion of MPs exploit the multitude of institutional opportunities provided by the EU's multi-level system to engage in EU policy-making, it has to be borne in mind that the overall level of Länder MPs' EU-related activities is rather modest. Our

findings hence also suggest that regional power in EU policy-making still rests first and foremost with regional executives.

Our empirical analysis also shows that political parties are of fundamental importance for MPs' EU-related activities. MPs use the programmatic and organizational ties provided by their party to obtain information and co-ordinate common positions and political action with their partisan colleagues from their parliamentary group but also with members of their party group in the Bundestag and in the European Parliament (see [Figure 2](#)). This finding highlights the important role played by political parties in the EU's multi-level polity. Political parties do not only enable MPs to co-ordinate the behaviour of their members in parliament, in the EU's multi-level polity an MP's political party affiliation reduces her costs of obtaining information and coordinating political action. Regional parliamentarians can and do utilize their partisan links to representatives in other institutions at the federal and supranational level to acquire the information to scrutinize executive actors and to influence the content of EU policies. By highlighting partisan links, we also underline the informal nature of these ties.

Yet, our findings beg further questions: Why do some regional MPs perceive the EU to be more important or relevant for their own work than others? What factors help to account for these differences? Recent work on the career paths and legislative activity of MEPs highlights that this is a promising avenue for future research (Meserve et al., 2010). Research exploring the career paths of regional MPs, their political ambitions, but also their professional backgrounds and qualifications will have a lot to offer to better grasp individual MPs' attribution of saliency and influence in EU affairs. Moreover, qualitative case studies investigating the mobilization of regional parliamentarians and executives in different regions and countries should be employed to identify the institutional, political and, eventually, personal motives that cause regional MPs to engage in EU politics.

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Notes

¹Differences in participation range between +3.9 percentage points difference between the sample distribution and the population in the case of Baden-Württemberg and – 3.3 percentage points difference in the case of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania.

- ²Inevitably, some respondents did not answer all items or quit the survey at an early stage. We decided to include all responses, which contained not more than 25% missing values for all items at the lowest level of aggregation (our eight indicators). We checked the robustness of our index construction by dropping all cases with missing values on any item. This did not affect the results.
- ³The number of items, which are summed up for the indicators at this lowest level of aggregation, differs between 14 in the case of contacts with members of parliament and parties as well as members of the executive, 12 in the case of contacts with interest groups and associations, and 6 in the case of contacts with administrative and ministerial officials.
- ⁴This procedure is reasonable because the differences between these ordinal scale points can be justified as being equal. Respondents generally prefer answering scales with categories compared to numbers. In an experimental study, Rohrmann (1978: 239) found that the wordings 'never', 'seldom', 'occasionally', 'often', and 'always' best reflect a 5-point frequency scale.
- ⁵The following example clarifies this standardization procedure: there may be two parliamentarians who both receive an additive score of 20 for indicator 11 (information exchange with members of parliament or parties). However, one of them marked 'does not apply' at item 11g ('national-level MPs of my party'). Consequently, their standardized value differs: whereas one respondent receives a score of 0.36 (a score of 20 divided by the highest possible amount of contacts, 56), the other receives a higher score of 0.38 (20/52) because her total number of possible contacts is lower.
- ⁶Results do only slightly change if the four indicators do not receive the same weight but are weighted according to their number of items.
- ⁷To check for the reliability of the aggregated index, we calculated Cronbach's Alpha, which accounts for the correlations between all items. For each aggregation step, the coefficient exceeded 0.81, which points to a high degree of internal consistency of the (analytically defined) activity dimensions.
- ⁸The intra-class correlation reveals that less than 0.1% of the total variance can be explained by state characteristics. Furthermore, the null hypothesis that no differences exist cannot be rejected.
- ⁹However, the aggregated indices for information exchanges and the co-ordination of positions are highly correlated (Pearson's $r = 0.9$).
- ¹⁰Correlation analyses show that Euro-scepticism is moderately correlated with the extent of activity. However, although the correlation coefficient shows the expected sign and is significant, the result does not hold in regression analyses including other individual factors.
- ¹¹In addition to this finding, only the differences in the extent of activity between Mecklenburg Western-Pomerania and Lower Saxony ($|t| = 2.01$, $p = 0.05$), Hesse ($|t| = 1.92$, $p = 0.06$), Bavaria ($|t| = 2.29$, $p = 0.03$) as well as Bremen ($|t| = 1.86$, $p = 0.07$) are at least slightly significant.
- ¹²While it could be claimed that some of these relationships are driven by self-selection—members of an EAC tend to be those attributing more importance to the EU—we contend that the self-selection effect is unlikely to bias our results since less than 20% of the respondents in the sample of our multivariate analyses are members of an EAC.

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Appendix: Regional MPs' Interaction Scheme for Information Exchanges and Co-ordination of Common Positions in EU Politics (Questionnaire)

Actor group	Items
Members of Parliament and parties	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Leadership of my party at the state level 2. Parliamentary group leadership of my party 3. MPs of my party in my state 4. MPs of other parties in my state 5. MPs of my party in other states 6. MPs of other parties in other states 7. MPs of my party (federal level) 8. MPs of other parties (federal level) 9. MPs of my party family in parliaments of other EU member states 10. MPs of other party families in parliaments of other EU member states 11. MEPs of my national party 12. MEPs of my party family 13. MEPs of other party families
Members of the Executive	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 14. Officials in the Committee of the Regions 1. State ministers of my party in my state 2. State ministers of other parties in my state 3. State ministers of my party in other states 4. State ministers of other parties in other states 5. Federal ministers of my party 6. Federal ministers of other parties 7. Ministers of my party family in other EU member states 8. Ministers of other party families in other EU member states 9. German European Commissioner and members of his personal cabinet 10. German staff in personal cabinets of other European Commissioners 11. European Commissioners from other EU member states 12. Commissioners from my party family and members of their personal cabinets 13. Commissioners from other party families and members of their personal cabinets 14. Observer of the Länder
Administrative and ministerial officials	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Staff members in state ministries 2. Staff members in federal ministries 3. Staff members in the Bundesrat administration 4. Staff members in ministries of other EU member states 5. Staff members in the Directorate Generals of the European Commission 6. Staff members in the Council's Committee of Permanent Representatives

(Table continued)

Table Continued

Actor group	Items
Interest groups and associations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Unions in Germany 2. Unions in other EU member states 3. Unions at the EU level 4. Employers' associations in Germany 5. Employers' associations in other EU member states 6. Employers' associations at the EU level 7. Business associations in Germany 8. Business associations in other EU member states 9. Business associations at the EU level 10. Non-governmental organizations in Germany 11. Non-governmental organizations in other EU member states 12. Non-governmental organizations at the EU level