

Understanding attitudes towards EU rules and regulations in Multi-Level Governance contexts: A social identity perspective

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ABSTRACT

Recent research into compliance with European Union (EU) regulation focuses on how alternative modes of EU governance lead to different ‘behaviour rationalities’ amongst civil-servants in ‘national’ bureaucracies (e.g. Knill and Lenschow, 2005). Such accounts conceive of ‘Europeanization’ as a top-down process involving socialisation and institutional adaptation. The central argument of this article is that the willingness of street-level bureaucrats to comply with EU regulations is explained by the dynamics between relevant domestic subgroup identities. On the basis of a social identity approach (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), it is hypothesised that (a) negative perceptions of the relationship between one’s region and nation-state lead to a tendency to defy the national stance on EU policy-implementation, and (b) that this overrides party-political considerations. Findings provide considerable support for the first hypothesis and partial support for the second and confirm that attitudes of regional civil-servants towards EU regulation are mediated by identity processes.

KEY WORDS: European Union, Multilevel Governance, Centre-Periphery Relations, EU Regulation, Compliance, Social Identity Theory.

INTRODUCTION: ATTITUDES TOWARDS EU REGULATION

Research into compliance with EU regulation has tended to focus on whether and in what way national bureaucracies respond to rules and regulations that have emerged at the EU level and that are being passed down to national bureaucracies. It was these types of issues that initially gave rise to the debate about ‘Europeanization’ (Anderson, 2002; Börzel, 1999; Olsen, 2002; Radaelli, 2000; Wallace, 2000). More recently, Knill and Lenschow (2005) have suggested that the way in which national bureaucracies in member-states respond to pressures from above depends on the mode of governance adopted in the policy field in question. They suggest that actors in national bureaucracies are more willing to work towards institutional adaptation when faced with ‘voluntary’ modes of governance, such as the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) which centres on the notions of mutual learning and information exchange in transnational networks, than when faced with more ‘coercive’ modes of governance, as is the case with EU Directives (Knill and Lenschow, 2005).

The argument put forward by Knill and Lenschow is that such ‘soft’ modes of governance enhance the perceived legitimacy of EU regulations and hence the willingness to comply, because of their greater ‘leeway for interpretation and adjustment to domestic conditions’ (Knill and Lenschow, 2005, p.589). This is why, in their view, institutional adaptation and policy convergence across EU member-states can, paradoxically, be expected to be greater in ‘soft’ modes of governance than under ‘hard’ law that is characterised by coercion from the top-down. In this article, it is argued that in order to be able to explain more specific variations in compliance with EU regulation, one needs to go beyond the

study of how certain modes of governance lead to certain types of ‘behavioural rationalities’ in ‘national bureaucracies’, and examine the extent and way in which domestic politics influence the willingness of street-level bureaucrats to comply with EU regulation from the bottom-up.

The idea that domestic politics matter to attitudes towards the EU is of course not new. For example, this can be seen from the debate in the 1980s and 1990s about New Regionalism (Keating and Jones, 1998) and Multi-Level Governance (MLG, Marks et al. 1996). From that perspective it is rather surprising to see that scholars like Knill and Lenschow continue to conceive of member-states and national bureaucracies in a monolithic rather than in a pluralist way. This is arguably all the more surprising if we accept the view that (a) local and regional bureaucrats play a crucial role in enforcing EU regulations (Maher, 1996), and that (b) ‘greater leeway for interpretation and adjustment to domestic circumstances’ cannot only potentially improve collaboration between different actors in the policy-network, but also increase the scope for domestic disputes and contestation. This is why it is important to move beyond a monolithic conception of member-states and adopt a pluralist perspective from which one can study the dynamics that occur between social identities defined at different levels of inclusiveness.

Rather than to conceive the response of ‘national bureaucracies’ to different modes of EU governance as a two-level game, it is necessary to take into account the multi-layered nature of national bureaucracies and the social identity dynamics that occur in these networks. This, it is argued here, is an essential prerequisite if one is to acquire a better

understanding of the perceived legitimacy of EU regulations and, hence, of the willingness of street-level bureaucrats to comply with and implement EU regulations. Moreover, such an understanding is essential in furthering our understanding of a number of broader EU compliance questions. For example, which factors determine whether compliance with EU rules are ‘procedural’ or ‘substantive’ (Jacobsen and Weiss, 1998)? To what extent should non-compliance with EU regulations be attributed to rational institutionalism, management, legalisation, or legitimacy (Zürn and Joerges, 2005)? Are managerial modes of EU governance more effective than coercive modes in ensuring compliance with EU law (Axelrod and Keohane, 1986; Chayes and Chayes, 1995; Haas, 1998; Tallberg, 2002)?

Although the qualitative findings reported here have implications for our understanding of *actual* compliance with EU rules under alternative modes of governance, the aim is to make a theory-based contribution to debate about the factors that determine the *propensity* or *willingness* of street-level bureaucrats to comply, as well as to the wider empirical literature on Multi-Level Governance and multiple identities in the EU. The findings presented in this article chime well with the view that Europeanization research should consider the interactions between domestic politics and EU explicitly (Radaelli and Pasquier, 2006).

The core argument of the present research is that social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) enables EU scholars to study the interactions between multiple identities at different levels of EU governance and their impact on attitudes towards EU regulation in

a systematic and theoretically informed way. Specifically, it is predicted that social identity dynamics between salient domestic sub-group identities influence the willingness of regional/local politicians to comply with EU regulations. To illustrate this point, two hypotheses will be tested, predicting (a) that negative evaluations of the relationship between one's region or locality vis-à-vis the national government leads to a tendency amongst regional policy-makers to oppose the (perceived) national stance on EU regulation and (b) that this can override party-political considerations.

In order to appreciate the contribution this research makes to the wider empirical debate about attitudes towards European integration and multiple identities in the EU, it is useful to give a brief overview of this literature. This will be done in the next section. This will be followed by an overview of qualitative findings that test the plausibility of the hypotheses. These findings contain excerpts from interviews conducted with politicians in peripheral regions in the UK and the Netherlands. These findings provide considerable support for the first hypothesis and partial support for the second hypothesis. In the last section the theoretical implications of these results are re-considered in the light of debate about attitudes towards EU regulation, followed by suggestions for future research.

EU MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE AND IDENTITY

Even though one does not necessarily need to move beyond monolithic/state-centric conception of national bureaucracies in each and every context, there is a clear need for more pluralist understanding of attitudes towards EU regulation when examining local and regional politics in peripheral regions. If one were to examine bureaucrats and their

attitudes towards EU regulation solely from a state-centric perspective, one would overlook the fact that these bureaucrats views do not merely involve comparative identity dynamics between ‘us’ in the member-state and ‘them’ in Brussels, but also between ‘us’ here in the region and ‘them’ in the centre or in central government.

As can be seen from the (New) Regionalism literature, there is a long-standing interest in centre-periphery relations in nation-states. As early as 1975, scholars studied how the process of nation-state formation resulted in the submergence of ancient regional/sub-state identities. Some authors questioned the legitimacy of nation-state building, pointing out that this process had in many cases gone hand-in-hand with what Michael Hechter termed ‘internal colonialism’ (Hechter, 1975). Others, such as Stein Rokkan and Derek Urwin, studied the way in which cultural and socio-economic ‘domestic cleavages’, posed a challenge to effective public administration of nation-states (Rokkan and Urwin, 1982).

It was these early writings that later gave rise to the New Regionalism debate (Keating and Jones, 1985) and this literature, in turn, contributed to the emergence of the Multi-Level Governance (MLG) literature (Marks, 1992; Marks et al., 1996). These theoretical developments contributed to the consolidation of the idea that policy-making in the EC/EU is best conceived as occurring in a complex environment, characterised by ‘the existence of overlapping competencies among multiple levels of governments and the interaction of political actors across those levels’ (Marks et al., 1996, p.41). As one would expect, the emergence of this literature led to renewed interest in empirical

research into territorial identities in the EC/EU. However, there has been relatively little empirical research into the interrelationships between multiple identities at different levels of the EU governance system.

MULTIPLE IDENTITIES IN THE EU: WHAT DO WE KNOW?

The question of how multiple levels of (territorial) identification interrelate is not new and has surfaced at different points in the history of EU Studies. This question was raised amongst others in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when ‘New Regionalism’ scholars became interested in regional mobilisation in the EU. In particular, it brought to the fore the question of whether the emergence of institutional links between the regions and the EU could lead to increased allegiance to the European Community (EC) at the expense of allegiance to the nation-state (Keating, 1991; Keating and Jones, 1985). This question gave rise to attempts to investigate these relationships empirically, using Eurobarometer survey data on levels of identification with the region, nation-state and EU amongst the public at large (Hooghe and Marks, 2001). However, even though this research provided some important insights, these studies also revealed that in order to unravel these interrelationships ‘one needs to dig deeper [and address] questions that lead us beyond Eurobarometer trends’ (Hooghe and Marks, 2001, p. 58).

One may wonder why Hooghe and Marks’ attempt did not give rise to further research to investigate patterns of interrelationships between levels of regional, national and European identity empirically. Two factors are likely to have prevented this. First, MLG scholars interested in empirical research into multiple identity were –and still are – facing

the problem of the absence of adequate theories and methods to conceptualise and study these interrelationships in a systematic and structured way. Second, the emergence of a 'normative turn' in EU studies (Bellamy and Castiglione, 2003; Chrysochoou, 2001) encouraged many MLG scholars interested in identity to abandon empirical research into multiple identities in the EU. Instead, they engaged in the emergent normative debate about the feasibility and desirability of alternative conceptions of EU citizenship and identity (e.g. Delanty, 1997; Laffan, 1996; Meehan, 1993).

It would be wrong to conclude from these developments that there has been no empirical research into European identity during the years of the normative debate. On the contrary, there have been two strands of such research. On the one hand, EU scholars have studied to what extent and under which circumstances national and EU elite officials identify as 'European' rather than as nationals of a member-state (Beyers and Dierickx, 1997; Egeberg, 1999; Hooghe, 1999). The unit of analysis in this literature is the individual civil-servant and his/her attitudes towards the EU. On the other hand, EU scholars have used multivariate statistical analysis to analyse Eurobarometer trends, in an attempt to single out the variable(s) that best predict identification with the EU amongst the public at large. In this debate the unit of analysis is public opinion. The variables under investigation in this ongoing debate are, amongst others, 'cognitive mobilisation' (Inglehart, 1970), cost-benefit evaluations (Gabel, 1998), perceived threat to the national identity (McLaren, 2002) and evaluations of the domestic politics (Anderson, 1998; Franklin et al., 1994; Ray, 2003). Whereas research into multiple identities amongst EU elites arguably investigates the interrelationship between multiple, or rather two, levels of

identification, research into opinion polls and public support for EU integration is not geared towards enhancing our understanding of these interrelationships. Moreover, not only is there an absence of empirical research into the interrelationships between identification with multiple levels of EU governance, there is a general lack of research into EU identity at the meso-level. That is, not much is known of the views of officials in local, regional and other institutions mid-range institutions, even though it is these bureaucrats who play a crucial part in enforcing EU rules and regulations and in shaping general EU attitudes in their local/regional constituencies. The research reported in this article demonstrates the importance of studying attitudes towards EU regulation at this meso-level.

To summarise, there have been very few attempts to investigate the interrelationships between multiple levels of territorial identity in the EU, and those attempts that have been made have resulted in very few new insights. Arguably, one of the few novel insights is that individuals in the EU hold multiple territorial identities and that these can be mutually inclusive. More recent empirical research into Eurobarometer trends suggests that for most Europeans the predominant outlook on territorial identity is ‘Country first but Europe too’ (Citrin and Cides, 2004, p.170). However, these observations hardly enhance our understanding of how these identities interact and how these identity dynamics influence the perceived legitimacy of EU regulation and, hence, the propensity to comply with them. Most EU scholars will probably agree *that* social identities matter to research into attitudes towards EU regulation. However, so far very little progress has been made in EU studies in demonstrating *how* multiple identities interact and *in what*

way they matter to these attitudes. Thomas Risse acknowledges this, suggesting that social identity principles should be used to unravel these types of multiple identity questions (Risse, 2004).

NATIONAL COMPLIANCE BUT REGIONAL DEFIANCE?

At first glance, the choice for a social psychological approach in research into attitudes towards EU regulation may seem rather unusual. Indeed, EU scholars interested in empirical research into norms and identity have traditionally tended to adopt a social constructivist perspective. Sociological constructivists have accepted the view that ‘social reality exists beyond the theorist’s view’, (Christiansen et al., 1999; 535), and that it is therefore possible to study the role of norms and identities in political contexts empirically (Checkel, 2001; Christiansen et al., 1999). However, this strand of research into attitudes towards EU regulation has been hampered by a lack of adequate theories that can be used to put forward testable hypotheses. It is in this respect that the use of a social identity approach –encompassing social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) and self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987) – offers a clear advantage. Moreover, rather than being competing theoretical perspectives, the two approaches can be seen as compatible and even complementary, since they share the ontological premise that social identities are socially constructed and that their meaning is therefore context-dependent. What is different is the social identity approach not only accepts the premise *that* the meaning and function of collective identities are socially constructed (Turner et al., 1994). It also offers social scientists a number of core tenets that can be used to predict

which social identity processes can be expected in specific socio-structural contexts and *how* these processes will inform social and political behaviour (e.g. see Haslam, 2001).

It would be impossible to give a comprehensive overview of social identity principles here. However, it is important to underscore the core tenet of social identity theory, that social identities are primarily driven by people's desire to belong to groups that increase the positive distinctiveness from other groups. This enhances group-derived self-esteem vis-à-vis other groups, and such group-based belonging can, under certain circumstances, override cost-benefit evaluations. That this has real consequences in behavioural terms has been demonstrated time and again, both in laboratory experiments (Tajfel et al., 1971), as well as in research in real life organizational contexts (e.g. Haslam, 2001). Moreover, the social identity approach offers researchers an integrative approach for explaining how this desire to belong to distinct social groups leads to certain behavioural strategies in specific socio-structural contexts.

HYPOTHESES AND RESEARCH DESIGN

The hypotheses put forward in this article are based on the core principles of social identity (Tajfel, 1979) and self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987), the cognitive spin-off of social identity theory. The first principle, which is central to both theories, is that people desire to belong to groups that enhance their self-esteem vis-à-vis other groups (Tajfel, 1979). The second and third principle, which are more central to self-categorization theory, are that the perceived socio-structural context determines at what level of inclusiveness individuals identify (Turner et al., 1987) and that the willingness to

embrace a superordinate identity is mediated by the evaluations of the relationships between meaningful sub-group identities at different levels of inclusiveness, which has been referred to as ‘comparative identity’ (e.g. Huici et al., 1997)

Based on these principles, it is hypothesised that (a) regional politicians, when asked about their views about EU rules and regulations, will display a tendency to defy the central government’s stance on implementing EU regulation, and (b) that this tendency may override party-political considerations. As mentioned earlier, these hypotheses are clearly geared towards identifying the *willingness* to comply, rather than towards explaining *actual* compliance. However, if one accepts that ‘substantive’ actual compliance with EU regulations requires positive attitudes towards EU regulation and towards EU integration more generally, then the findings are clearly relevant to research into actual compliance.

In order to demonstrate the existence of defiance amongst regional politicians against the traditional national EU stance, it is necessary to probe this hypothesis in nation-state contexts with different EU traditions. It was therefore decided to select one context in which central government has traditionally been perceived as aligned with the EU (the Netherlands), and one where this relationship is regarded as more problematic (the United Kingdom). This tendency to criticise or oppose the traditional national (nation-state) EU stance was expected to lead to positive attitudes towards EU regulation amongst regional bureaucrats in member-states with an EU-sceptic tradition, and to more sceptical attitudes amongst their counterparts in member-states with a pro-EU tradition. It

was further expected that this effect can be witnessed amongst officials of different party political persuasions, regardless of whether the party with which the person was affiliated forms the incumbent government. Support for this second hypothesis would provide additional evidence for the view that attitudes towards the EU are mediated by social identity processes, rather than primarily shaped by affiliation to a political party. The decision to conduct this research in peripheral regions was inspired by the view that the hypothesised processes are likely to be more pronounced in peripheral regions, where a sense of cultural and/or socio-economic distinctiveness from the nation-state can be found.

The hypotheses were tested with help of semi-structured face-to-face interviews with 40 regional elected civil-servants in two Dutch regions (Friesland and Limburg) and two UK regions (Wales and Cornwall). Field research for this study was conducted in 2003, well before the Dutch referendum on the EU Constitution, at a time in which public opinion and elite level attitudes in the Netherlands were commonly regarded as predominantly pro-EU. The interviews with 10 participants in each region were conducted amongst male and female regional officials from different political parties, who had been elected into the County Council of Cornwall, the National Assembly of Wales, and the Provincial Estates of Friesland and Limburg.

As a corollary of the first hypothesis, participants in the EU-sceptic UK context were expected to express positive attitudes towards EU regulation and EU integration more generally. However, in addition to finding this effect, it is essential to demonstrate that

these positive EU attitudes can be attributed to a desire to emphasise the distinctiveness of one's regional identity and ability to express an independent regional EU perspective, rather than to positive cost-benefit evaluations of the regional-European relationship. The responses were therefore analysed in such a way that it was possible to identify whether the participant's attitudes towards EU regulation were informed by utilitarian, ideological/political or indeed by comparative identity evaluations, involving evaluation of the perceived relationship between one's region, the nation-state and the EU.

THE FINDINGS

Study one: 'Regional defiance' in UK regions

The data obtained from interviews in the two UK regions revealed that, generally, most participants expressed pro-EU attitudes. As can be seen from Table 1, 14 out of the 20 participants (70%) expressed unambiguous pro-EU attitudes, while 4 participants expressed EU-sceptic attitudes (20%) and only 2 participants expressed ambivalent attitudes towards the EU (10%).

[Insert Table 1 here]

The high frequency of pro-EU attitudes encountered in these two regions in a EU-sceptic member-state, and amongst members of various political parties, is arguably an interesting finding in its own right. It suggests that 'domestic cleavages' need to be taken into account in research into EU attitudes. However, these findings do not provide any insight into (a) the mechanisms that underlie these pro-EU attitudes and (b) whether these

general attitudes inform the more specific attitudes of these civil-servants towards EU regulation. In order to ascertain whether these more general positive EU attitudes can be attributed to comparative social identity processes it was necessary to identify the extent to which these attitudes were motivated by a desire to emphasise the distinctiveness of one's regional (or national in the case of the Welsh) identity and the national (nation-state) identity.

Analysis of the themes used to describe the relationships between the region, nation-state and EU, revealed that 16 of the 20 participants (80%) discussed the relationship between the region and the EU in political or ideological terms, while 2 other participants evaluated this in utilitarian terms (10%) and two participants did not have very strong opinions. These moderate attitudes were categorised as 'permissive' or 'unconvinced'. Of the 16 participants who discussed the relationship between their region and the EU in political/ideological terms, only 3 participants expressed EU-sceptic attitudes. All 3 expressed views that reflected a belief in a Europe of sovereign nation-states. However, the positive EU attitudes expressed by the other 13 participants reflected the belief that the EU represents a vehicle for structural domestic change. This was particularly clear from the finding that 8 of these participants expressed support for the idea of a *Europe of the Regions*, although only 2 participants explicitly referred to this term.

These findings suggest that EU attitudes encountered amongst these elected regional officials were motivated, not merely by direct technocratic evaluations of specific EU rules and regulations or EU policy-making more generally, but by their views of the

relationships between their region, central government in ‘Westminster’ and the EU. However, in order to demonstrate that the high frequency of pro-EU attitudes in UK regions can be attributed to the desire to emphasise the distinctiveness of one’s regional identity and perspective, it is necessary to analyse the way in which these officials described their identification (or disidentification) with the region, nation-state and EU and the way in which they perceived the relationships between these social categories.

It was clear from the onset that the desire to emphasise one’s regional identity distinctiveness as well as the predicted regional defiance of the national government’s EU stance could manifest itself in a covert way. For example, it was expected that this could be witnessed in the form of more or less rational evaluations of the relationships between the region, nation-state and EU, thereby not referring to regional culture, norms or identity. However, it was also expected that this could be witnessed in a more overt way, through the explicit portrayal of ‘Britishness’ (or ‘Englishness’) and ‘Europeanness’ as incompatible, whilst portraying one’s regional/sub-national identity as naturally compatible with EU integration and ‘Europeanness’. This kind of more direct evidence of EU attitudes being mediated by comparative identity dynamics was encountered in 5 interviews in UK regions. The most common way in which the effect was witnessed was amongst participants who emphasised their region’s long-standing links with ‘Europe’, and its problematic relationship within the UK. This can be seen from the following excerpts.

“I have always felt European” [...] “We [Cornish] have ties with Galicia in Spain, the word Galicia means ‘Celtic’, with Brittany, Wales, [and] Scotland.”

“Whoever negotiates on behalf of Britain [in the EU] is always doing this with the purse behind their back.” (CW01-Male-Independent)

“I can trace back my Cornishness to my ancestors. That is what gives me pride, a pride in what my ancestors achieved, several of which went all around the world.”

“I see my family’s future in Europe, Cornwall in Europe, yes, but all I see when I look at the other side of the Tamar is anti-Europeanness.” (CW07-Male-Independent)

“If I go to Ireland, [...], when they ask where you come from, and you say from Cornwall, they’ll say what can I get you to drink?” [...] “The UK has always been in isolation, so you have a series of peoples on an island, compressed with one who is dominant.” [...] “I have always felt a sense of belonging to the EU.” (CW10-Male-Liberal-Democrat)

“We are one hundred percent European” [...] “We did have a [Welsh] Parliament until 1405, and we did have ambassadors to the French and Scottish courts and we have always seen ourselves as the European family of peoples.” [...]

“The British vision is Euro-sceptic, because Britain is [defined by] about 58 million inhabitants of England, and they’re defined by their Euro-scepticism.” (WA01-Male-Plaid-Cymru)

“You’ve got to remember that going back into history [...] there was a lot of contact between Wales and the area that is France now. [...] You had all this coming and going [...] between Brittany and Ireland and Wales.” [...] “[This EU-Sceptic stance] is entrenched in the national British identity, I suspect it’s because of all the wars they fought, but I think people are very, you know, most people don’t really see themselves as being part of the EU” (WA02-Female- Plaid-Cymru)

The message conveyed by these five officials is unambiguous in that these explicitly refer to both the incompatibility between Britishness/Englishness and Europeanness and the compatibility between regional and European identity. As can be seen from the following excerpts, the same message can of course also be conveyed implicitly by merely referring to the compatibility of the regional and EU identity, or only to the incompatibility between the national and EU identity. Such implicit comments were encountered in eight other interviews in UK regions:

“I have always felt a sense of belonging to the EU” [...] “We are one of the Celtic nations” [...] “Historically Cornwall has had strong links with mainland Europe.” (CW03-Female-Liberal-Democrat)

“I have always felt a sense of belonging to the EU” [...] “We have always been a Duchy, and even a separate Kingdom, for a couple of hundreds of years [...] that stretched across the Channel.” (CW04-Male-Conservative)

“You’re Cornish effectively, you cross the Channel to Brittany, and they are like the Cornish, Bretons first and French second.” (CW05-Male-Liberal-Democrat)

“It’s being a Celt that means something to me. If I go to Ireland, Wales, Portugal or Spain, if I say I am a Celt, it opens doorways.” (CW-06-Male-Liberal-Democrat)

“Cornwall has a very distinct culture, you just have to look at the history of the place, [The Cornish] were great travellers, [...] they went to Brittany, to Northern Spain, they were sailing to all sorts of places.” (CW09-Female-Independent)

“The difficulty with Britain in the EU is that we should have gone in straight away, [...] and as such the Europeans view us as totally being an Island. [...] We’re always behind.” (WA04-Female-Liberal-Democrat)

“[British Euro-sceptic attitudes] reflect an island mentality [which] has been largely associated with England [...] I mean the continental connections between the Celtic parts have always appeared to be stronger, and really just attitudes as well.” (WA05-Male-Liberal-Democrat)

“Wales definitely has a distinct national culture, very much so. Not only the language, but also the history of our nation, our Celtic nation.” (WA08-Male-Plaid-Cymru)

One could argue that it is not surprising to find evidence of perceived regional-European identity compatibility and perceived nation-state - EU incompatibility amongst members of regionalist/nationalist parties such as the Welsh Nationalist Party (Plaid Cymru), as this could be regarded as merely reflecting these participant's political views. However, as can be seen from the above excerpts, this effect was witnessed in interviews with female and male officials of different political persuasions and expressed in a very similar way. This suggests that such views cannot merely be attributed to political persuasion or affiliation and that social identity processes play their part in shaping EU attitudes.

The above findings suggest that a considerable proportion of civil-servants in these UK regions feel compelled to defy the more general traditional national stance on EU integration. It would seem reasonable to expect that this has a bearing on the attitudes of these officials to specific EU rules and regulations. However, it remains unclear from the findings in the UK whether this more general positive 'predisposition' vis-à-vis the EU leads to more positive attitudes towards EU regulation more specifically and to greater propensity to comply. As will become apparent below, the interviews conducted in Dutch regions provide much clearer evidence that more general EU attitudes do have a bearing on attitudes towards EU regulation.

Study two: ‘Regional defiance’ in Dutch regions

The reason for conducting field research in Dutch regions was to verify whether the first hypothesis, which predicts a tendency amongst regional officials to oppose the traditional national stance on EU regulation, could also be witnessed in a member-state with a pro-EU traditional stance. Unlike their counterparts in UK regions, the Dutch participants did not display a tendency to oppose the traditional EU approach traditionally adopted by The Hague. Instead, only 6 of the 20 officials expressed EU-sceptic views (30%) and 10 of the 20 participants expressed pro-EU attitudes (50%), while 4 participants expressed ambivalent EU views (20%).

[Insert Table 2 here]

At first glance, the findings in Dutch regions do seem to provide little support for the first hypothesis. However, closer inspection of the views expressed by the Dutch civil-servants revealed that 7 of the 20 participants (4 in Limburg and 3 in Friesland) explicitly criticised the traditional Dutch central government’s reputation of swift implementation of EU regulations. As can be seen from the following excerpts, these views often went hand-in-hand with a desire to question the genuineness of the pro-EU Dutch tradition and good implementation record, whereby the central government in the Hague was often accused of ‘being more Catholic than the pope’, or portrayed as aspiring to be ‘the EU’s teacher’s pet’ (In Dutch: *Brave Hendrik*, or *Het Braafste jongetje van de Klas*).

“[In principle] I do agree with collaboration in the EU, [because] isolationism is not an option for the Netherlands, but this enthusiasm should not make us blind for its shortcomings.” (FR01-Male-Frisian-Nationalist-Party)

“The Netherlands has the tendency to walk in front, to accept EU proposals without reservation, while other member-states negotiate all sorts of clauses.” (FR05-Female-Liberal-Democrat)

“The Netherlands has always wanted to walk ahead, in terms of EU regulation, to be the teacher’s pet as its often called” (FR08-Male-Christian-Reformed-Party)

“The Netherlands want to be seen as one of the pioneers of EU integration, but I doubt whether this corresponds with reality.” [...] “The Netherlands is a pro-EU country in some respects, but it is often slow with implementation.” [...] “It’s part of what I described earlier, this image [the Hague wants to uphold] of having things under control, always wanting to be the teacher’s pet.” (FR10-Female-Frisian-Nationalist-Party)

“The Netherlands have always been the EU’s teacher’s pet, always too keen to press ahead, and now they discover that they haven’t achieved much.” (LI03-Male-Socialist-Party)

“I think the Netherlands’ pro-EU image abroad can be questioned” [...] Take for example the delay in transposing EU law into national law.” (LI04-Male-Christian-Democrat)

“It’s a shame the Netherlands believe they should be the EU’s teacher’s pet.”
(LI06-Female-Liberal-Democrat)

“The Netherlands have the tendency to want to go ahead, [...] “In principle this is positive, but at times it leads to over-confidence.” (LI07-Female-Green-Left)

The above examples suggest that the opposition to the national stance on EU regulations and policy-making more generally is inspired by a desire to emphasise the distinctiveness of one’s regional identity. This is evidenced by the fact that these participants distinguished between ‘us’ in the region and ‘them’ in the Hague in their evaluations of the central government’s approach. More importantly, these findings suggest that the above-described identity dynamics do not lead to opposition to the general national stance on EU integration, but that they do have a bearing on the individual’s attitudes towards EU regulation.

The conclusion that opposition against the national government’s stance in Dutch regions was inspired by a desire to emphasise the distinctiveness of one’s regional identity is given further support by evidence that this opposition often went hand-in-hand with the

tendency to portray the regional identity as either more genuine European or as shrewder than the Dutch national identity. This can be seen from the following extracts:

“I feel much more at ease with the Scandinavian stance on Europe, where people are rather sceptical about the idea that you can create Europe artificially.” (FR-10-Female-FNP)

“Limburg has a distinct regional identity, which has its origins in central Europe”
(LI04-Male-Christian-Democrat)

“Limburgers have a natural tendency to think across borders.” (LI02-Male-Labour)

“Politics in Limburg should be based on what belongs together culturally.” (LI05-Male-New-Limburg-Party)

“As Limburgers we have a lot in common with Belgians, [...], than with people in the Randstad.” (LI08-Female-Labour)

“We’re only an hour from Brussels or Antwerp, and we have a tradition of looking across the national borders.” (LI09-Male-Christian-Democrat)

“Culturally Limburg has a lot more in common with the surrounding regions in Belgium and Germany.” (LI10-Male-Christian-Democrat)

Analysis of the responses of all 40 participants revealed that, in both the UK and the Netherlands, the tendency to oppose the national stance on EU regulation was witnessed amongst participants from a wide variety of parties and amongst participants from opposition parties as well as from parties that formed the incumbent government at the time of the interview. This suggests once more that such views cannot merely be attributed to political persuasion or affiliation and that social identity processes play an important part, and at times apparently an overriding role, in shaping attitudes towards EU regulation. However, in order to obtain more robust evidence for this second hypothesis, it is imperative to (a) study these effects in a larger sample group, and (b) on the basis of an analytical framework based on official party manifestos and positions on European integration. The findings reported above can therefore best be seen as providing preliminary support for the second hypothesis.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings provide considerable support for the hypothesis that comparative identity processes structure the attitudes of regional civil servants in peripheral regions towards EU regulation. They provide partial evidence for the hypothesis that these processes can override party-political consideration. However, the extent to which this is the case should be explored in more depth in follow-up research involving a random sample of civil servants or politicians. As for debate about attitudes towards EU regulations and

towards European integration more generally, three lessons can be drawn. First, the results of this research suggest that it is necessary to move beyond a state-centrist conception of ‘national bureaucracies’ and to take into account the multi-layered nature of these bureaucracies. Second, this research shows that attitudes towards EU regulation are not merely the product of rational cost-benefit evaluations, but mediated by comparative identity processes. Finally, this study illustrates the way in which social identity principles can be used to appraise the impact of these processes on attitudes towards EU regulation in a systematic and theoretically informed way.

The findings of this study provide insights into the extent and way in which comparative identity processes mediate the *willingness* of local/regional civil-servants to comply with EU regulations. However, positive attitudes can of course not be regarded as sufficient to ensure *actual* compliant behaviour, as this would be to look other important variables. From that perspective, it is fair to say that this study speaks only indirectly to Knill and Lenschow’s research (Knill and Lenschow’s 2005). However, the results of this research are relevant to the debate about *actual* compliance if we accept the view that in voluntary modes of (EU) governance, ‘substantive’ compliance requires positive attitudes towards EU regulations. From that perspective, it is also interesting to consider briefly how the findings speak to the wider debate about actual compliance.

First, this study provides additional evidence for Börzel’s view that it can be misleading to classify EU member-states as ‘leaders’ or ‘laggards’, on the basis of their formal implementation track-records (Börzel, 2001). This would ignore the fact that the

member-state's formal implementation reputation can itself be a matter of domestic contestation. This insight can be used to shed a rather different light on Maher's institutionalist view that 'the effectiveness of implementation [of EU regulation] is weakened through the emphasis on the State-Community axis at the expense of sub-national agencies, which are in practice responsible for day-to-day enforcement of the rules' (Maher, 1996: 578). However, the results of this study are of more immediate relevance to Mastebroek's assertion that 'empirical research into EU compliance has been disappointing' and provide further evidence for her view that 'domestic politics need to enter the equation more explicitly' (Mastebroek, 2005, p.1103).

To summarise, it should be clear from the above that it is important to take domestic politics into account, and that social identity (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) and self-categorization principles (Turner et al., 1994) enable researchers to generate testable hypotheses, predicting the impact of comparative social identity processes on attitudes towards EU regulation in specific socio-structural contexts. This suggests that there is considerable scope for cross-fertilization between research into compliance with EU regulations and social identity research into the perceived legitimacy of regulatory authorities (e.g. Tyler, 2001; Wenzel and Jobling, 2005). This study provides some interesting insights into the way in which such processes are 'played out' in specific regions in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. However, the aim of this study is not to make general claims about EU attitudes in the specific regions under investigation on the basis of the data presented here. Rather, this research seeks to make a tangible contribution to the emergence of an inter-disciplinary research agenda by demonstrating

the usefulness of deploying social identity principles in research into the causal mechanisms that determine attitudes towards EU regulation and EU integration more generally.

Finally, it is interesting to consider the above conclusions in the light the debate about Europeanization. As Radaelli and Pasquier point out, research into Europeanization has tended to have a top-down focus on adaptational pressures and social learning, and neglected the extent to which ‘Europe’ has become a new *référentiel* for domestic politics (Radaelli and Pasquier, 2006). This project suggests that in order to do justice to the complexities, Europeanization is best conceptualised in an interactive way, as domestic ‘encounters with Europe’ (Radaelli and Pasquier, 2006).

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Table 1 General EU attitudes amongst regional politicians in UK regions

EU attitudes in U.K. regions						
Wales						
Gender	Political Party	Strong EU-Sceptic	EU sceptic	Neutral/Ambivalent	Pro-EU	Strong Pro-EU
Male	Plaid Cymru					√
Female	Plaid Cymru				√	
Female	Labour				√	
Female	Lib.Dem.				√	
Male	Lib.Dem.				√	
Male	Conservative	√				
Male	Conservative				√	
Male	Plaid Cymru					√
Female	Labour		√			
Male	Labour					√
Cornwall						
Gender	Political Party	Strong EU-Sceptic	EU sceptic	Neutral/Ambivalent	Pro-EU	Strong Pro-EU
Male	Independent					√
Female	Labour	√				
Female	Lib.Dem.					√
Male	Conservative			√		
Male	Lib.Dem.				√	
Male	Lib.Dem.					√
Male	Independent					√
Male	Lib.Dem.			√		
Female	Lib.Dem..	√				
Male	Lib.Dem.					√
Aggregate		3	3	2	6	8

Source: Qualitative data obtained from fieldwork, conducted in spring 2003, and coded on the basis of thematic content analysis (Giorgi, 1986).

Table 2

General EU attitudes amongst regional politicians in Dutch regions

EU attitudes in Dutch regions						
Friesland						
Gender	Political Party	Strong EU-Sceptic	EU sceptic	Neutral/Ambivalent	Pro-EU	Strong Pro-EU
Male	Fr. Nationalist (FNP)				√	
Male	Chr. Dem. (CDA)				√	
Male	Chr. Dem. (CDA)			√		
Female	Green Left (GL)				√	
Female	Liberal (VVD)	√				
Male	Chr. Dem. (CDA)		√			
Male	Chr. Dem. (CDA)				√	
Male	Chr. Union (CSGP)		√			
Female	Labour (PvdA)		√			
Female	Fr. Nationalist (FNP)					√
Limburg						
Gender	Political Party	Strong EU-Sceptic	EU sceptic	Neutral/Ambivalent	Pro-EU	Strong Pro-EU
Male	Liberal (VVD)				√	
Male	Labour (PvdA)			√		
Male	Socialists (SP)	√				
Male	Chr. Dem. (CDA)				√	
Male	New Limburg (PNL)					√
Female	Liberal (VVD)	√				
Female	Green Left (GL)			√		
Female	Labour (PvdA)			√		
Male	Chr. Dem. (CDA)				√	
Male	Chr. Dem. (CDA)				√	
Aggregate		3	3	4	8	2

Source: *Qualitative data obtained from fieldwork, conducted in autumn 2003 and coded on the basis of thematic content analysis (Giorgi, 1986).*