CEuS Working Paper 2002/8

Regional Parliaments and Good Governance in the EU

I. Project Description (30.04.2001)

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University of Bremen, Jean Monnet Centre for European Studies

European Integration Project,

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Regional Parliaments and Good Governance in the EU

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Regional parliaments and good governance in Europe: New Communication Technologies for Enhancing Social Representation and European Public Spheres

Ulrike Liebert, Bremen, 30. April 2001

I. Project Description

Summary of the project proposal:

1.   In all EU-member states, Europeanization – understood as the emergence of structures and processes of decision-making at the supranational level of the European Union – is transforming the functions of elected assemblies at the national, and, in some (semi-) federal or regionalised member states, also of regional parliaments. EU-policy-making challenges national and regional parliaments in their classical tasks: to legitimate authoritative decisions, to control the executive; to organize social representation and participation and to enhance public debate on decision-making. But while the perception of a democratic deficit of supranational policy-making has focused attention on national legislatures, regional parliaments have received scarce attention, so far. However, in the context of the Post-Nizza-Process, where the issue of the delimitation of competencies between the European, the national and the regional level is on the agenda, a project to study and experiment the new role of regional parliaments appears timely for developing the framework of "new governance" in the European Union further.

2.   This project starts with the assumption that the transformation that regional parliaments undergo in response to Europeanization varies, with four different patterns to be distinguished (cf. Greenpaper, November 2000, p. 2-3):

   I.   Parliaments being marginalized and disempowered, in a laissez-faire regime, with power resources being monopolised, to the detriment of poor and unorganised groups, e.g. women, children, minorities;

II.   Parliaments making regional governance structures accountable, including executive agencies as well as private and public organisations;

III.   Parliaments as mediating agents among a plurality of diverse agents, within a multilevel and transregional public space;

IV.   Parliaments as key-players in a multi-agent network of governance.

3.   The hypothesis guiding the comparative study is that different patterns of transformation depend on whether regional parliaments are capable of coping with the new information and communication challenges of in the framework of the emerging system of "new governance" in the European Union (see preparatory work of "White Book on Governance"). We argue that Parliaments may adjust to EC-governance without being necessarily marginalized, if they use new information and communication technologies to build transregional networks, to ensure executive accountability, and to enhance the Europeanization of public spheres, including the social representation of underrepresented groups in European governance at the regional level.

4.   The proposed research project will evaluate institutional innovations in German regional parliaments geared towards improving social representation, transregional networking, and new technologies for information and communication. Among the 15 Länder, four will be selected for in-depth analysis, according to the level of their economic resources, on one hand, and to their degree of socially balanced (gender) representation in their elected regional parliaments, on the other hand. Three of these regions belong to West Germany (Bremen; Baden-Württemberg, Bayern); one belongs to East Germany (Thüringen). The in-depth analysis is based on a mix of methods, including the study of primary documents (parliamentary debates; activities; social composition; reforms of standing orders); interviews of members of regional parliaments engaged in European politics; and "focus groups" discussing the question of past and future transformations of regional parliaments. Furthermore, the research on German regions makes part of an international cooperative research network that includes research projects on three more memberstates: a federal state: Belgium (Prof. Alison Woodward, Brussels), a semi-federal state: Spain (Prof. Francesc Morata, Barcelona); a regionalized state; Italy; and a state in the process of devolution: Great Britain.

5. The project pursues three aims:

I. to produce a report on past and future transformations of the functions of regional parliaments in response to European governance, with a focus on the use of new communication technologies;

II. to develop a model and conduct a pilot project in the case of the Bremen regional parliament, testing the use of new communication technologies (including Multimedia) for enhancing transregional/international communication, and the representation and participation of citizens and regional groups in public debates on European issues;

III. to present and discuss the report and the documented pilot study among the members of research teams from Spain, Belgium and Great Britain in a joint conference (September 2002).

Ziele des Projektes:

(1) die europapolitischen Funktionen regionaler Parlamente in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland vergleichend zu evaluieren, insbesondere hinsichtlich der Repräsentation sozialer Gruppen, der politischen Kontrolle der Exekutive, und der Partizipation von Bürgerinnen und Bürgern an öffentlichen Debatten zu europapolitischen Themen (Entscheidungs- und Implementationsprozesse); dabei soll eine Bestandsaufnahme dessen verbunden werden, inwieweit neue Kommunikationstechnologien eingesetzt werden.

(2) Es soll ein Modell entwickelt werden, wie regionale Parlamente durch Nutzung der neuen Informations- und Kommunikationstechnologien ihre soziale Repräsentativität, transregionale und supranationale Vernetzung und europapolitische Öffentlichkeitsfunktion stärken können, als Beitrag, die aktive Beteiligung der Bürgerinnen und Bürger am europäischen Integrationsprozess zu fördern und zu erleichtern.

(3) Es soll dieses Modell in einem Pilotprojekt des Bremer Landesparlamentes mit Beteiligung anderer deutscher und ausländischer regionaler Parlamente erprobt und auf einer internationalen wissenschaftlichen Konferenz daraufhin ausgewertet werden, inwieweit es als institutionelles Reformmodell zur regionalen Stärkung „guten Regierens" in der Europäischen Union geeignet ist.

Kurzbeschreibung der Projektabwicklung:

Die 18-monatige Laufzeit des Projektes (April 2001 - September 2002) umfasst 5 Phasen:

I. Vorarbeiten (April-September 2001): (a) Literaturrecherchen und vergleichende Analysen zur Europäisierung regionaler Parlamente; (b) Planung und Aufbau einer informations- und kommunikationstechnologischen Infrastruktur am "Jean Monnet Centre for European Studies", bzw. dem Fachbereich Sozialwissenschaften der Universität Bremen (Projektantrag T.I.M.E), etc.

II. Evaluationsbericht (Oktober 2001 - Juni 2002): Die Doktorandin erstellt einen Bericht, welcher die europapolitischen Funktionen der deutschen regionalen Parlamente unter dem Gesichtspunkt ihrer sozialen Repräsentativität und ihrer politischen Öffentlichkeitsfunktionen evaluiert. Dieser Evaluationsbericht enthält einen quantitativen Teil, in dem Indikatoren für die „Europäisierung" der 16 deutschen Landtage zugrundegelegt werden. Im qualitativ-vergleichenden Teil werden vier Regionalparlamente (Bremen, Baden-Württemberg, Bayern, Thüringen) hinsichtlich (a) ihrer sozialen Repräsentativität, u.a. hinsichtlich der geschlechtsspezifischen Differenzierung; sowie (b) ihrer Leistungen in der Herstellung europapolitischer regionaler Öffentlichkeiten vertieft untersucht. Die Datenerhebung erfolgt mittels Interviews, teilnehmender Beobachtung, sowie mit Fokusgruppen.

III. Modellkonzeption „Nutzung neuer Kommunikationstechnologien durch regionale Parlamente" (Oktober 2001-Juni 2002): Der Doktorand wird zunächst mit Hilfe eines Fragebogens und mit Interviews eine Bestandsaufnahme der Verwendung neuer Kommunikations-Technologien in den deutschen Landtagen vornehmen. Sodann wird eine Modellkonzeption entwickelt, wie regionale Parlamente durch den Einsatz der neuen Informations- und Kommunikationstechnologien, insbesondere digitalen Multimedia-Ressourcen, ihre Öffentlichkeitsfunktionen gegenüber der Zivilgesellschaft besser wahrnehmen, und zum andern ihre transregionalen Vernetzungen und Kommunikationsbeziehungen fortentwickeln können.

IV. Pilotprojekt (Juli 2002): Diese Modellkonzeption soll in einem Pilotprojekt in der Bremer Bürgerschaft unter Beteiligung von regionalen Parlamenten aus der Bundesrepublik, sowie Belgiens, Spaniens, und des Vereinigten Königreiches erprobt werden. Es bestehen bereits Kooperationsbeziehungen zu regionalen Parlamentsforschern in diesen drei Mitgliedsstaaten (Prof. Dr. Alison Woodward; Prof. Dr. Francesc Morata). Dieses Pilotprojekt wird im Internet und in Form von DVD dokumentiert.

V. Auswertung (September 2002): Der Evaluations-Bericht sowie die Dokumentation des Pilotprojektes werden im September 2002 auf einer internationalen Konferenz einer Gruppe von Experten für regionale Parlamente vorgestellt und auf ihre internationale Verallgemeinbarkeit und Übertragbarkeit der Befunde hin ausgewertet.

Kurzbeschreibung der Maßnahme:

Vergleichende Evaluationsstudie, Modellkonzeption und Pilotprojekt zur Nutzung neuer Technologien/Multimedia durch regionale Parlamente zur Entwicklung ihrer europapolitischen Öffentlichkeitsfunktion und sozialen Repräsentativität, als Beitrag zu „gutem Regieren" in Europa,

I. Erstellen einer Evaluationsstudie „Die europapolitischen Funktionen regionaler Parlamente der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: regionale Öffentlichkeiten; BürgerInnen-Partizipation und -Repräsentation" (ca. 80 Seiten); Verfasserin: Henrike Müller;

II. Erstellen einer Modellkonzeption: „Zur Nutzung Neuer Technologien in regionalen Parlamenten im Regierungsprozessen der EU" (ca. 40 Seiten); Verfasser: Daniel Allnoch;

III. Pilotprojekt: „Transregionale Vernetzung und europapolitische Öffentlichkeit durch die Nutzung neuer Kommunikations-Technologien in regionalen

Parlamenten"; Durchführung: Daniel Allnoch und Henrike Müller; Ort: Bundesland Bremen, in Kooperation mit anderen Regionalparlamenten;

IV. Dokumentation des Modellversuchs über das Internet und Video-Aufzeichnungen; Verfasser: Daniel Allnoch;

V. Konferenz „Die Rolle regionaler Parlamente im Regierungsprozess in Europa: die Bundesrepublik, Belgien, Spanien und das Vereinigte Königreich im Vergleich; Jean Monnet Centre der Universität Bremen; Dauer: drei Tage im September 2002; Organisatorin: Henrike Müller; Teilnehmer/innen: Prof. Dr. Alison Woodward mit Mitarbeitern (zu den belgischen, schottischen, walisischen Regionalparlamenten); Prof. Dr. Francesc Morata mit Mitarbeitern (zu den spanischen Regionalparlamenten); weitere Experten zu italienischen und österreichischen Regionalparlamenten (N.N.).

II. Activity Report

I. Aims

Which are the institutional prerequisites for regional parliaments to resolve the regional democratic deficit and enhance good governance in the European multilevel polity? Financial support was requested for exploring this question from four different angles: (1) evaluating the impacts of Europeanisation on parliaments in self-governing or constitutional regions in Germany in a comparative framework, especially with respect to legislative decision-making, control of the executive, and citizen participation in public debates on EU-related topics; (2) exploring the role of new information and communication technologies and whether a model can be developed of how regional parliaments can make use of these new technologies to enhance participation of civil society, improve transregional and supranational information exchanges, and develop communication with local and regional publics; (3) testing this model in a pilot project envolving the Bremen regional parliament (Bremische Bürgerschaft) and a non-German regional parliament, and (4) presenting and discussing the results at an international conference with experts from and on regional parliaments in Spain, the UK, Belgium and Italy to find out whether this model can be generalised beyond the German cases.

II. Summary of Project Development

During the 18 months duration of the project (May 2001 - October 2002) the following activities were realised:

(1) Preparatory research (May- September 2001): (a) Overview on comparative literature on the Europeanisation of regional parliaments; development of a conceptual framework and methods of investigation (Liebert; Donnelly); (b) building of an infrastructure of information- and communication technology at the "Jean Monnet Centre for European Studies", School of Social Sciences, University of Bremen (supported by the Bremen regional government program T.I.M.E; Sifft, Packham).

(2)   Evaluation Report (October 2001 - June 2002): Writing a report (Müller, Mauren, Donnelly, Sifft) to evaluate the euro-political functions of the German regional parliaments, including comparative quantitative data on all 16 parliaments, and a qualitative analysis (on the four parliaments of Bremen, Baden-Württemberg, Bayern, Sachsen-Anhalt), covering (a) their social representativeness, and, in particular, their gender composition; (b) their legislative activities, as well as (c) their internet-based information and communication resources and functions. A part of the data was collected on site by means of structured interviews with parliamentary staff and elected members.

(3)   International Workshop (March 1-2, 2002, Bremen University) to discuss preliminary results on the German parliaments with experts on the Spanish (Catalan, Basque), Belgian, and Scottish cases, with the aim to elaborate a common framework for case studies conducive towards a comparative analysis and evaluation (March 2002).

(4)   Report on the "New information and communication technology resources and their use by German regional parliaments" (march-september 2002), based on telephone interviews with public employees and civil servants in the German Landtage.

(5)   Pilot project (September 2002): Video-Conference between representatives of the Bremen "Bürgerschaft" (regional parliament) and of the Scottish parliament on current issues of EU-politics and policies (Convention on the Future of Europe; the role of regions in EU-policy making; regional educational programs to build European consciousness; regional structural development programs). This Pilot Project was video-taped and is documented in the Internet.

(6)   International conference (September 28-30, 2002, Bofill Foundation, Barcelona): Presentation and discussion of case studies and comparative evaluations with and by experts on regional parliaments in five EU-member states (Germany, Spain, Belgium, Italy, Scotland), Bremen participants: Liebert,

Allnoch, Röper, Müller. The program included a visit to the Catalan parliament, presentation and discussion of our project results with Catalan representatives and public servants.

III. Results

(1) Report "Regional Parliaments and Good Governance in the EU-Multilevel Polity: the German Federal Republic" (100 pages, including attachments, in German and – in a short version – in English), by Henrike Müller, with Norbert Mauren;

(2) Pilot Project Documentation: "The Use of New Technologies in Transregional Parliamentary Communication"; by Henrike Müller, Kathrin Packham and Daniel Allnoch (Video; Website);

(3) Collection of Conference Papers "Regional Parliaments and Good Governance in the EU-Multilevel Polity: Belgium, Germany, Italy, Spain, and the UK"; by Ulrike Liebert, Francesc Morata, Juan Antonio Romero, Alison Woodward, Miguel Angel Lozano, Erich Röper, Henrike Müller, Eberhart Bort, Massimo Morisi. To be published by the Jean Monnet Centre of the University of Bremen (in English, in preparation).

IV. Findings: "Regional parliaments and democratic governance in the EU"

(1) "The regional democratic deficit". With respect to the restructuring of regional powers, the processes of Europeanization – understood as the emergence of structures and processes of decision-making at the supranational level of the European Union – had varying impacts. In some cases, Europeanisation was conducive to constraining the competencies of "constitutional" regions in a growing range of areas formerly under their competence, such as in Germany. In other member states with more recent devolution processes under way, regions have been able to take advantage of multilevel policy making to expand their competencies vis-

à-vis central government, such as in Scotland or Italy. In these contexts, regions have tried to secure their participation in domestic decision-making on European policy issues with variable successes. But even in more successful cases – such as in Germany where the Länder were able to expand their formal and political position by constitutionally binding the federal government to their consent in the Bundesrat on all issues falling under Länder competence – this was conducive to the weakening of regional parliaments. Confronted with the outcomes of EU-policy-making processes in which they were neither consulted nor granted opportunities for participation, regional legislators were constrained in exercising their classical responsibilities: to legitimate authoritative decisions, to control the executive; to organize social representation and participation and to enhance public debate on decision-making. While the perception of a democratic deficit of European integration has focused attention on national parliaments (Maurer/Wessels 2001), regional democratic deficits have received scarce attention, so far. The debate on the future of Europe and the drafting of a European constitution offers novel opportunities for discussing institutional innovations that might benefit – or further weaken – regional democracy.

(2)   "Best practices in comparative analysis": The comparative research starts from the assumption that European governance will constrain regional democracy to the degree to which EU-decision-making affects regional interests and policy-competencies, without compensating regionally elected representatives and civil society organizations with sufficient information and competencies to meaningfully participate in and exercise control on the multiple sites where European governance is located. In the Post-Nice-Process, these imbalances are addressed in contrasting ways: while some regional representatives in and outside the European Convention advocated a catalogue of competencies with clear-cut delimitations between those exercised at the European, the national and the regional levels, others focus the issue of how the instruments of European governance can be simplified and participatory governance developed in ways to empower regional and local representatives in the European Union. Comparative research on current practices and deficits is needed, to map out "best practices" and to define the most promising among these reform devices. The empirical research aimed at evaluating institutional practices and innovations by studying all 16 German Landtage. Four were selected for in-depth

analysis, according to the level of their economic resources, on one hand, and to their degree of socially balanced (gender) representation in their elected regional parliaments, on the other hand. Three of these regions belong to West Germany (Bremen; Baden-Württemberg, Bayern); one belongs to East Germany (Sachsen-Anhalt). The methods used include the analysis of primary documents (parliamentary debates; activities; social composition; reforms of standing orders); evaluation of parliamentary new technological resources and Website features and functions; interviews with regional representatives and responsibles for EU policy. The research on the German Länder matched with an international cooperative research network that was established in Spring 2001, covering regions from four more memberstates: a federal state: Belgium (Prof. Alison Woodward, Bruxelles), a semi-federal state: Spain (Prof. Francesc Morata, Barcelona); a regionalized state; Italy; and a state in the process of devolution: Great Britain. Thus the project spans 5 member states and 20 regions.

(3) Comparative research findings on interregional variation: According to our common research design, we distinguished between (a) formal and practical resources and capabilities of regional legislators enabling them to represent interests and participate in or to control EU-governance, including new information and communication technologies; and (b) their actual patterns of interest representation, participation and control related to EU-policies. In this respect, a cross-national and cross-regional comparison demonstrates that regional parliamentary patterns of engaging with EU-governance vary strongly:

    a.   Parliaments without formal or practical resources, may or may not engage with EU policy-making, with varying impacts especially for socially excluded or non-organized regional constituencies, such as women, minorities, unemployed, etc. – this applies to some regions in Spain;

    b.   Parliaments with significant resources at their disposal, that nevertheless do not engage in holding regional governments accountable or in representing regional constituency interests or preferences in EU-decision-making at the national or supranational level – this applies to most of the German regions;

    c.   Parliaments with important resources and innovative practices, successfully managing to engage with European policy making, in direct horizontal

transregional as well as vertical interaction with EU-institutions – a model case for this pattern is Scotland.

(4) Explanations: How can these variations in the "regional democratic deficit" and in "best practices" to resolve it be explained? What are the prerequisites for regional representatives to make their regional assembly a key player and at the same time a mediating arena for a plurality of diverse agents, and a part of a multi-sited and transregional network of public spaces? Three sets of variables has been explored more in-depth in our project:

a. New information and communication technologies: by a comparative assessment of the 16 German Länder, our initial hypothesis was empirically further developed – we argue now that different patterns of engagement depend not on whether but on how regional parliaments make use of the new information and communication technologies;

b. Institutional innovations and instruments of European governance, such as those covered in the debate on the White Book on Governance in the European Union": On the basis of our empirical findings and comparative analyses of 20 regions in EU-member states we argue that in order not to be marginalized, regional parliaments need to adjust to the more traditional as well as to the new forms and instruments of EC-governance (such as: regulation by directives; action programs; open method of coordination; gender mainstreaming; social dialogue; corporate governance etc.) in different ways:

i. building structures for representing regional interests in Brussels, vis-à-vis EU-institutions;

ii. engaging in transregional networks between regional assemblies, not necessarily between speakers, but also between sectoral committees, to exchange information on best practices, aggregating interests etc.

iii. training regional representatives and capacity building in the regions on issues and forms of European governance with relevance to regional interests.

(5) In two further project proposals were written by myself and my colleague Erich Röper that draw on the findings of this project:

a. Development by myself of a project proposal for the 6th EU-Research Framework: Expression of Interest „Adapting Regional Government to New Forms of Multilevel Governance" (June 1st, 2002), based on the network established by the present project, to further deepen and broaden the research undertaken here.

b. Project proposal submitted by Prof. Erich Röper to the EU Committee of the Regions (October 31, 2002), with the aim to use the RegParl-Network revise the volume „Regional and local democracy in the European Union" (Brussels, 1999).

V. Overall Impact

The impact of the activity for which a financial contribution from the European Commission was obtained, include:

In 5 Member States, 20 regions were studied;

– International RegParl-Network was built up, including about 20 scholars and experts on regional parliaments in the EU,

– appr. 50 regional parliamentarians from 20 regions, including Bremen, Bavaria, Sachsen-Anhalt, Baden-Württemberg, Catalonia, Scotland, were interviewed, five of them participating in the Video-Conference Bremen-Scotland;

– wide dissemination of project reports (in German) among experts and representatives; publication in German journal "Zeitschrift für Parlamentsforschung" (in preparation);

– information disseminated by Website of Jean Monnet Centre for European Studies, University of Bremen (www.monnet-centre.uni-bremen.de).

Appendix:

–   Press-information on Parliamentary Video-Conference Bremen-Scotland, September 10, 2002

–   Conference program Barcelona „Regional Parliaments and European Governance", Sep 28-30; Jaume Bofill Foundation/Catalan Parliament and Bremen Jean Monnet Centre for European Studies.