Regional Sub-State Diplomacy from a Comparative Perspective: Quebec, Scotland, Bavaria, Catalonia, Wallonia and Flanders

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Summary
Regions are nowadays generating an increasing amount of diplomatic activity, both in quantitative and qualitative terms. This article studies the emergence of regional sub-state entities as diplomatic actors, and an in-depth comparative study is made of the external relations of Quebec, Scotland, Bavaria, Catalonia, Wallonia and Flanders. The following dimensions are studied: (1) the definition of foreign policy; (2) the diplomatic instruments that are utilized; (3) the organizational structure and operation of foreign affairs; and (4) the character of the representations abroad. Based upon a comparative study of the empirical data, the article argues that boundaries between diplomacy (as generated by states) and sub-state diplomacy are visibly watering down.

Keywords
sub-state diplomacy, foreign policy, paradiplomacy, diplomatic representation, federalism

Introduction
Today it has become somewhat of a platitude to say that national states are no longer the only actors on the international scene, let alone that they no longer maintain a monopoly on conducting foreign policy and developing diplomatic activities. The web of actors generating diplomatic activities is widening yet still becoming more condensed, while at the same time ‘new’ societal and international-political trends generate changes in the frameworks of diplomacy.

At the sub-state level, it is clear that sub-state actors — especially regions with legislative powers — are in relative terms becoming more relevant and are generating an increasing amount of diplomatic activity, both in quantitative and qualitative terms. In the 1980s, a growing number of non-central governments tried to attract foreign direct investment through their own initiatives or to use culture and identity as a lever to place themselves on the international map. Such
initiatives were often of an ad hoc nature, and there was often only a minor integration of all of the external activities that were generated. In the 1990s, different sub-state entities of certain (European) countries were given constitutional and/or institutional leeway to develop external activities. Hence they could develop a judicially grounded set of instruments for their own (parallel as well as complementary) diplomatic activities. These instruments were supplemented by the gradual development of a separate foreign policy apparatus (administration or a policy body), which started to coordinate horizontally the external activities of the different administrations in certain regions. Although every region with legislative powers follows a dynamic of its own, one can today detect some steps towards a ‘verticalization’ of the organizational structure of the administration or department of external/foreign affairs, a strategic reorientation of the geopolitical and functional priorities, and attempts to integrate the external instruments of a sub-state foreign policy into a well-performing whole.

Diplomacy is changing rapidly, both in nature and in content. This article studies the emergence of regional sub-state entities as diplomatic actors. An in-depth comparative study 1 was made of the external activities of Quebec, Scotland, Bavaria, Catalonia, Flanders and Wallonia. These cases were selected because they are often cited in the literature as the ‘most advanced’ examples of sub-state diplomacy, although authors may disagree on what this entails exactly within diverse domains. 2 The following dimensions are explored: (1) the definition of foreign policy; (2) diplomatic instruments that are utilized; (3) the organizational structure and operation of foreign affairs; and (4) the character of representations abroad. It will be argued that the boundaries between diplomacy (as generated by states) and sub-state diplomacy are visibly watering down.

Studying the external activities of regions with legislative powers is not an easy undertaking. As Duchacek already wrote in 1990, the ‘interventions’ of non-central governments in international relations (originally labelled as paradiplomacy) differ in form, intensity and frequency. 3 Likewise, different theoretical schools of thought exist on how to appreciate the external activities of regional sub-state entities. Neo-realists will see it as a phenomenon that questions the monopoly of central governments in diplomacy. Regionalists focus on the parallel external activities that are generated. Federalists see sub-state diplomatic activity as part of a complementary, multi-level governance setting. In fact, every school of thought might be right at the same time, for sometimes sub-state diplomacy acts

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1) This in-depth study was conducted at the Flemish Centre for International Policy in Antwerp, Belgium, between 2007 and 2008. The researchers were Manuel Duran and Dr David Criekemans.
2) Other factors that influenced the case sample in this study were: geographical diversity of the cases; similarities in economic make-up (such as the comparable relative openness of their economies); and having a distinct cultural identity, etc.