

Sub-State Nationalism and European Integration: Constructing Identity in the Multi-Level Political Space of Europe

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1. Introduction

The European Union has been transformed into a multi-level political system by processes of European integration and globalisation on the one hand, and by pressures for decentralisation on the other. Thus, 'European integration and regionalism have posed twin challenges to the nation state in Western Europe' (Keating 1995: 1). While the central governments of the member states remain important actors within this new framework, their autonomy and the capacity to control policy-making and outcome has been reduced considerably. This is the consequence of two complementary processes: On the one hand, certain competencies have been shifted upwards to the supranational EU level.¹ On the other hand, nationalist and regionalist pressures for decentralisation and devolution in several member states have transferred some powers of the central state downwards to the sub-state political levels (Hooghe and Marks 2001).

The emerging European polity offers new opportunity structures² for strong political units below the level of the state, to enhance their autonomy and self-governing capacities in internal and external affairs.³ At the same time any involvement in Europe means being affected by the constraining aspects of EU institutions, regulations and increased economic competition within the single market (Dyson and Goetz 2003).

Sub-state nationalist parties, as actors within this political system, are influenced by these changes and must react to them. They have to make up their minds where they stand in relationship to the EU and European integration: do they view EU-membership as an obstacle on their way to self-government, or do they understand it as 'an external support system for minority nationalism' (Lynch 1996) and thus develop a more favourable position?

Historically, nationalism in the 19th and 20th Century strove for the establishment of independent and sovereign nation-states (Hobsbawm 1990). Consequently, one would expect nationalist parties to be critical of the high level and broad range of co-operation at the supra-state level, especially on those issues which used to be mainly the domain of state action. While there is evidence that the nationalists of the 'new right' are in fact hostile to the infringement of state sovereignty caused by European integration (Kitschelt 1997), most of the sub-state nationalist parties within the member states tend to be more positive about the European Union (Lynch 1996; De Winter and Cachafeiro 2002).

Moreover, as European integration has altered certain competences and powers of states in the EU, many nationalists have revised their concepts of national independence and sovereignty. Most of them see the future of their nations firmly placed within the EU, either as an independent state or as an autonomous political unit (Keating 2004).

In this article it will be analysed how sub-state nationalist parties construct national identities in the multi-level political space of the European Union. It is argued that there is an interdependent relationship between the process of European integration and the construction of these collective identities: While the process of European integration has an impact on key dimensions of national

identity, the way national identity is shaped determines the party's attitude towards European integration and its vision of Europe.

This article is structured as follows: In the next section I will outline the analytical framework of the comparative analysis of the identity constructions of three sub-state nationalist parties: the Lega Nord, Plaid Cymru and the Scottish National Party.⁴ The central dimensions of sub-state nationalist identities, which provide the raw materials to construct *boundary markers* (party history and ideology, the concept of the nation, centre-periphery relationships and party positions on Europe) are presented. In the following section I will take a closer look at the empirical evidence of how the 'imagined community' (Anderson 1991) is shaped in each case of and how these constructions are related to the process of European integration.

2. Constructing sub-state national identity

National identities, which refer to a cluster of norms, rules, values and societal roles, are, like all other types of social identities, not fixed or given, but discursively constructed in processes of social interaction (Jenkins 1996). For the individual they provide answers to the question 'who am I?' and 'where do I belong?'; thus, they supply a sense of uniqueness and a sense of belonging to a group. Consequently, these mental constructs always incorporate an individual and a collective dimension. Moreover, they function as an interpretative framework which structures perceptions, helps to 'make sense' of highly complex social realities, and suggests guidelines for action. In order to provide such an anchor of certainty, identities rely on a framework of generalisations, prejudices and simplifications in which society's complexity appears to be transparent and understandable. Despite their constructed nature fundamental changes in national identities are quite rare; they appear to be considerably stable and prove to be very adaptable to changing political circumstances (Wodak et al. 1998).

Shaping identities is inextricably linked to processes of inclusion and exclusion; it is a 'dialectical process of internal and external definition' which takes place across the boundary between 'us' and 'them' (Jenkins 1997).⁵ Thus, the construction and maintenance of boundaries and the therefore necessary boundary markers are of crucial importance for the formation of collective identities (Barth 1969). These boundary markers, which are constructed in specific discourses, confer a feeling of belonging to the members of the 'in-group' and also signal the difference from and to the 'out-group'.

For sub-state nationalist parties a collective identity is a central means and resource to mobilise support (voting and protest), and thus to maintain and enhance the strength and power of their movements.⁶ The Scottish, Welsh and Padanian identities are constructed in opposition to the majority – English and Italian – 'nation-state' identities. Thus they challenge, more or less successfully, the conceptual hegemony of the centre nations over national identity, by offering an alternative nationalist construct (Sutherland 2005).

In the case of sub-state nationalist parties the main boundary markers, which are strategically used in their discourses, are formed out of five categories: The first dimension is the *historical development* of the party and its *ideological position*. Specific historic experiences are central for the construction of collective identities as they provide 'evidence' of the group's uniqueness. The ideological position also provides a means to stress its difference from other groups. Both areas can provide raw materials for the construction of boundary markers.

The second dimension is the '*ethno-history*' and inextricably linked to it the culture of the nation. The '*ethno-history*', which tells the narrative of the nation, provides the nationalists with a virtually inexhaustible repertoire of national symbols, values, institutions and traditions (Smith 1991: 126-128). It offers a selective, incomplete and often inaccurate picture of the history of a community as it does not incorporate historical fact but 'present-day *constructions* of the past', which are shaped according to present political need (Eriksen 1993: 73, emphasis in the original). The national culture, which is assumed to be 'naturally' derived from its ethno-history is seen as some sort of 'essence' or a 'character' of the nation and thus supplies the imagined community with a primordial aura (Cohen 1985: 99). Both, the ethno-history and national culture are used by sub-state nationalists to stress their national difference from the central nation.

The third dimension of the construction of sub-state national identity is the *concept of the nation*. Smith (1991) distinguishes between two ideal types of nations, the civic and the ethnic one. The first concept is the *Western civic model* of the nation. According to Smith this incorporates four

key elements: 'Historic territory, legal-political community, legal-political equality of members, and common civic culture and ideology' (Smith 1991: 11). Opposed to this is the *Eastern ethnic model* of the nation. Here the defining elements are: 'Genealogy and presumed descent ties, popular mobilization, vernacular languages, customs and traditions' (Smith 1991: 12). While the civic nation is a political concept which builds on the ideals of the French revolution and ideas of citizenship, the ethnic nation is based on ancestry and common culture. According to the ethnic conception, the nation is held together by 'the subjective belief in common descent' (Weber 1976: 203); which means that the group members subconsciously believe in the existence of fictitious primordial ties between them (Connor 1994; Geertz 1963). In reality, as Smith notes, every nation is both civic and ethnic,⁷ and both concepts are discussed and contested in the discourses of nationalist parties. The nationalists' decision to construct the nation either more in ethnic or in civic terms has important implications for the way boundary markers are constructed.⁸

Fourthly, the diverse *centre-periphery relationships* between the regions and central government are important for the construction of sub-state national identity. This is the case because the centre and its institutions symbolise 'the other' which is assumed to differ fundamentally in cultural, economic and political terms from 'us' - the sub-state nation. Moreover, ideas of economic exploitation or neglect and political domination of the peripheries by the centre are often voiced in sub-state nationalists' discourses. Consequently, empirical findings and theoretical models of scientific research which support the idea of difference and unequal partnership between centre and periphery, like Hechter's (1975) model of 'internal colonialism' or Rokkan and Urwin's (1983 and 1982) multidimensional centre-periphery relationships can be seen to be warmly welcomed by nationalists.

A final issue which influences the identity constructions of the parties is the process of European integration. Like other actors in the multi-level political space of the EU, sub-state nationalist parties have had to come to terms with Europe, and consequently the European dimension plays a strong role in party discourses. Moreover, many nationalist parties have 'played the European card as a resource' in domestic politics (John 2000: 884). Taking a specific attitude towards the European Union has strategically been used to stress their difference from other political parties and also from their respective central nations. Thus, the contentious European issue has been developed into a boundary marker.

In the following section I want to show which boundary markers are constructed out of these categories and how these are strategically used by the parties in order to shape national identity. The comparative analysis is mainly focused on official party documents⁹ and on party literature.

3. Case studies: Scottish National Party, Plaid Cymru and the Lega Nord

3.1. Party history and ideology

Scottish National Party

The Scottish National Party was formally established in 1934. For the first forty years of its history the SNP has been a very small party, of marginal political importance.¹⁰ This changed in the 1970s when 'the party was to become a serious player in British politics capable of driving the issue of self-government' (Lynch 2002: 2). Today the SNP is 'on a rising trend' (Newell 1998: 105).

Throughout the history of the SNP, there have been two lines of tension within the party (Lynch 2002). There is a conflict between 'fundamentalists' and 'gradualists'. This is mainly a conflict of strategy, on how to achieve independence. There is also a conflict about the ideological position of the party. While 'traditionalists' argue, that the SNP should be concerned with independence and remain a non-ideological party, 'socialists' claim that the SNP should take a clear left-of-centre stance. After several ideological debates in the 1970s and 1980s, this second conflict was settled in favour of the socialists and the SNP was turned into social democratic party (Lynch 2002: 13). In terms of strategy, the party has decided to adopt a gradualist approach to independence. Both conflicts, especially the one between gradualists and fundamentalists are likely to re-emerge in the future.

The SNP likes to stress its 'grass roots' organisational character, claiming the local branches to be 'the fundamental building block of the party', which 'have the largest say in determining

the policy and direction of the party' (www.snp.org). While the SNP sees itself as a part of the wider Scottish nationalist movement, its 'movement' character has declined in importance since the 1960s, and by the 1990s it was 'largely historical' (Lynch 2002: 8).

The party's 'left of centre' position is reflected in many of its policies (www.snp.org). Consequently, Social issues are high on the SNP agenda. It is committed to a 'national anti-poverty strategy' and to 'equal opportunities regardless of race, gender, age, sexuality, disability or social background' (SNP: 2001a).¹¹ Moreover, green issues are stressed by the SNP,¹² and there is an element of pacifism within the party line.¹³

Plaid Cymru

Plaid Cymru was formally established in 1925. Initially it was mainly a pressure group, campaigning for the defence and promotion of the Welsh language and culture. Since the 1960s, Plaid has developed a broader political programme, campaigning for bilingualism and self-government for Wales. The main line of tension within Plaid remains the one between a cultural-linguistic and political nationalism (Mitchell 1998). As a mature nationalist party, Plaid is today 'a progressive, forward-looking force in Welsh politics' (Christiansen 1998: 129).

Plaid has always understood itself as a pressure group within the wider nationalist movement in Wales and also as a political party (Mitchell 1998: 109). Hence, Plaid co-operates with campaigners for nuclear disarmament, environmental groups, and Welsh language organisations. Thus, more like the SNP, Plaid kept its double character of party and movement.

Ideologically, Plaid is positioned more to the left of centre than the SNP. The party favours a 'decentralised socialism', based on 'the principle of redistribution' (Plaid Cymru: 2001). Plaid have chosen to base their construction of national identity on an incorruptible stance of environmentalism, pacifism and a 'green and peace loving Wales', which is further along the road of these principles than either the SNP or the Lega.

Lega Nord

The Lega Nord (Northern League) was officially founded in 1990, as a merger of the predominant Lega Lombarda, the Lega Veneta, and other regional leagues in the North of Italy. To define the type of party the Lega Nord represents is complicated. As Cento Bull and Gilbert (2001) have shown, the party can be interpreted and categorised in diverse ways: As a 'protest party', a 'populist party', a 'sub-cultural party' or a right-wing 'ethno-regionalist party'. Tambini argues that attempts to pin down the party to one of these types is fruitless, because 'the League was in fact unstable, constantly redefining identity, interests and goals. There is no single League that wants or does or thinks (...) the League, like most contemporary movements, is certainly not driven by reference to a single unquestionable text, utopia, ideology or article of faith' (Tambini 2001: 6). Despite the frequent changes in strategy, membership and goals, there is some continuity concerning the party structures and ideology.

Much of the propaganda of the Lega is 'based on what the League is against, rather than what it is for' (Tambini 2001: 2). It is the underlying populism, law and order and anti-immigration policy combined with a neo-liberal economic position that places it amongst the parties of the 'New Radical Right' in Western Europe (Kitschelt 1997). Such a categorisation is still incomplete, because it does not consider the nationalist ideology of the Lega. Just like the SNP and Plaid, the Lega Nord is a sub-state nationalist party, but unlike them it is firmly positioned on the right of the ideological spectrum.

For the Lega it is important to stress its double character of party and movement. While in Scotland and Wales there is a broader nationalist movement, in Northern Italy, *Padanian* issues are monopolised by the Lega and their associated organisations. Consequently, there are several 'Padanian' social institutions – amongst others a trade union, a women's and a youth association, and several sport associations – which are directly connected with the Lega Nord.

Officially the Lega Nord has a federal and a decentralised structure, which corresponds to the 13 'national sections' which 'Padania' is separated into. While the grass roots character is stressed by the party line, in practice there has always been a 'problem of internal democracy' within the party (Tambini 2001: 94). The Lega is clearly organised in an authoritarian way, with Umberto Bossi, its charismatic leader, being in a very powerful position. Helped by 'a combination of in-

formal control, personal trust, and the use of the media' (Tambini 2001: 93) Bossi can define the central policies and decide whether functionaries are promoted, degraded or as has happened in several cases, expelled. While in the Welsh and Scottish counterparts the party leaders were important and had some authority, they have never been able to exercise as much power as Bossi does. Surprisingly, the members do not even seem to be critical of this authoritarian leadership. Ordinary members seem to be convinced that Bossi knows what is best for the party and that he will take the right action. Consequently, the figure of the leader of the North who will liberate its people from the shackles of Rome is a central element of the Lega's identity construction.

3.2. *Ethno-history and culture*

Scottish National Party

The situation in Scotland appears to be very favourable for a strong nationalist party. There is first of all a clearly defined and non-contested geographical territory. Second, there are strong, distinctly Scottish 'national' institutions, mainly; the Church of Scotland; a separate legal system; an independent educational system; and very importantly, since 1999, the Scottish Parliament. Many Scots are aware of their long distinctive 'ethno-history', which separates them from the English. The combination of these and other factors helped in the construction process of a Scottish national identity which is shared by the majority of the population. 'The SNP, therefore, has not had to 'manufacture' a sense of identity or distinctiveness in its quest for self-government, it has just had to politicise such identity and mobilise it into electoral support for the SNP come election time' (Lynch 2002: 3f.). But, as Lynch shows, this has not been easy for the party. While in general Scottish nationalism is based on culture, history and tradition, the SNP does not heavily play on these issues in its programme, policies or public debates (Kellas 1989: 129).¹⁴ On the contrary, the party presents itself as a modern and modernising force in Scottish politics, being driven on by the wish to achieve Scottish self-government and to improve the Scottish economy.¹⁵ Hence, it is mainly the distinctly Scottish political and social institutions as well as socio-economic factors ("*It's Scotland's oil!*")¹⁶ that are used as boundary markers by the party. The core symbol of the SNP's national identity is the political concept of independence; other factors, like culture and language are inextricably linked and subordinated to the idea of independent statehood. Hence, if Scottish ethno-history is mentioned in political discourse by the party, it is used to stress Scotland's tradition of independent statehood.

Plaid Cymru

According to Christiansen (1995) there are three core elements of the Welsh national identity in the 20th Century: coal-mining, nonconformity and the Welsh language. While there are other factors which constitute Welshness, like the Welsh Dragon, rugby, and one could also name football, these are mainly important as cultural markers and have not been politically mobilised. The core symbols of Plaid's nationalism are the Welsh language and culture. Accordingly, the language issue is of high priority in their party programmes, speeches and policy proposals. Since the 1960s the political issue of self-government became a second major concern of the party. Consequently the Welsh language and Welsh self-government became Plaid's most important boundary markers in the process of national identity construction. Moreover, territory and especially the Welsh rural areas are stressed as an important symbol of the Welsh nation.

Lega Nord

While Scotland and Wales can both be considered 'historic nationalities' (Keating 1998), this is not the case with Padania, which is a recent invention of the 1990s. Consequently, there is no broader nationalist movement in Northern Italy and Padanian nationalism is monopolised by the Lega Nord and its affiliated associations. Only a minority of Northern Italians share a common identity as Padanians. Nevertheless, for many of the supporters of the Lega Nord, Padania is their 'imagined community'.¹⁷

While the SNP's nationalism is at its core political, and Plaid's cultural, that of the Lega is basically socio-economic. The Lega portrays the rich northern part of Italy as a homogeneous socio-eco-

conomic space which has developed a 'culture' of its own.¹⁸ This socio-economic culture provides the raw materials for the symbols and boundary markers of Padanian national identity: the Lega Nord 'explicitly adopted and promoted the cultural values of small-scale industry, emphasizing its exclusionary aspects, its local communitarianism and its anxieties and prejudices' (Cento Bull and Gilbert 2001: 97). The Padanian nation is *internally defined* as a community of honest, hard working modern, European self-made entrepreneurs, shaped by the Northern civic tradition. Accordingly, the Southern Italians are *categorized* as cheating, lazy, traditionally backward, African *terroni*.¹⁹ As an ethnic entrepreneur, the Lega has been able to build its version of welfare chauvinism on pre-existing stereotypes and prejudices in the North about Southern Italians. The Lega's central historical myth is the medieval Lombard League, which helps to legitimise the party's struggle for freedom and federalism, by setting it within an 'historic tradition'. Another element of the Padanian 'ethno-history' is to stress its 'Celtic inheritance' (Tambini 2001: 111), as well as constructing the Padanian identity through attempts to establish Northern dialects as languages, form Padanian sport associations and have an annual 'Miss Padania' election.

3.3. Conceptions of the nation

Scottish National Party

Nairn (2000: 99) claims that Scottish nationalism has 'nothing to do with ethnicity' and there are indeed very few examples of ethnic nationalism in Scotland.²⁰ The SNP clearly has a civic vision of the Scottish nation, and 'has never made any specific "ethnic" appeals to gain support' (Lynch 2002: 4). The civic concept of the nation corresponds to the SNP's open and inclusive approach to Scottish citizenship: 'The automatic right of citizenship will be open to all those living in Scotland, all those born in Scotland and all those with a parent born in Scotland. All others are free to apply' (SNP: 2001a). The adoption of a multicultural or post-national Scottish citizenship goes together with the establishment of groups like 'New Scots for independence' and 'Asians for Independence'.²¹ But still, as the process of identity construction needs 'the other' to distance itself from, sentiments of 'anti-Englishness' remain important to Scottish nationalism. The SNP does not directly express sentiments against 'the English', but against Thatcherite Conservatism, and against the central government in London - which are both ultimately English. Thus, anti-Englishness, which is contrary to civic nationalism, plays its part in the construction of national identity by the SNP.

Plaid Cymru

The party's declared aim is 'to build a national community based on equal citizenship, respect for different traditions and cultures and the equal worth of all individuals, whatever their race, nationality, gender, colour, creed, sexuality, age, ability or social background' (www.plaidcymru.org). Hence, Plaid's vision of the 'Welsh national community' and its adoption of a multi-cultural and post-national Welsh citizenship correspond to the civic model of the nation (Christiansen 1998: 129). However, the aim to establish a 'bilingual Welsh society' (Williams 2002) does not fit easily with the idea of multicultural citizenship.²² Plaid's concept of citizenship is culturally bi-ased, because immigrants must be willing to learn and ultimately be able to speak Welsh, if they want to be part of the 'national community'. This ethnic element stands in drastic contrast to the otherwise liberal, civic and inclusive construction of national identity by Plaid Cymru. Moreover, just like in the case of the SNP, 'anti-Englishness' - mostly in the shape of anti-Conservatism, and anti-central government - does have an impact on the process of identity construction of Plaid Cymru.

Lega Nord

While the Scottish National Party and Plaid Cymru construct their communities according to ideas of civic nationalism, Lega Nord's vision of the nation and its definition of citizenship is ethnic in character: The real *Padano* must be born and bred on its territory. Consequently, the constitution of the Lega Nord defines the thirteen 'nations' which constitute Padania as 'ethnic communities' (Lega Nord: 2002a). Inherent in this ethnic vision of the Padanian nation is racism

towards immigrants from non-EU countries - currently especially towards Muslims – and from the South of Italy. Moreover, the mafia, communists, multi-national companies and anti-globalists are portrayed by the Lega as 'the others'. In the case of the Lega Nord's construction of sub-state national identity, 'identity and interest go hand in hand' (Tambini 2001: 109). Thus primordial elements of ethnic nationalism are combined with the idea of the fight for freedom and the factor of the wallet (Tambini 2001: 123).

3.4. Centre-periphery relationships and constitutional preferences

Scottish National Party

The Act of Union in 1707, which was more or less voluntarily signed by the Scottish Nobility, marked the end of Scottish Parliament and made Scotland a part of the United Kingdom. Thus, Scotland has been part of the Union for 200 years; however, according to the SNP this has just been a transitory period in the long history of Scotland. As the Union is deemed no longer convincing for Scotland they want to terminate this contract.

When the SNP was formed in 1934, it contained 'radicals' and 'moderates'. While the moderates wanted to achieve some form of Home Rule as self-government for Scotland, the radicals called for independent statehood. Before the end of World War II the radicals within the party had won the conflict, and nationalist self-determination and independence became the core aim of the SNP (Finlay, 1994: 253). Since then, the party has always been very straightforward about their constitutional preference. Consequently, the SNP is not satisfied with devolution, and the Scottish Parliament is seen as a step in the process towards independence. The SNP's shift towards its independence in Europe policy will be analysed below.

Plaid Cymru

Wales has never in its history been a unified and independent state: 'Since the Act of Union in 1536 Wales had been progressively incorporated politically, economically and culturally into Southern Britain' (Jones 1997: 57). In the eyes of Plaid Cymru the conflict ridden relationship between Central government in London and Wales remains one between centre and periphery. Unlike the SNP, independent statehood was never high on the agenda of Welsh nationalists. It rather opted for more moderate versions of self-government (Keating 2001: 22). Saunders Lewis, one of the founding members and first President of Plaid Cymru, made a clear distinction between 'independence' and 'freedom', arguing that it was possible for the Welsh nation to have the latter without having an independent Welsh state: 'There is a certain amount of political separation, a very minimal amount, essential for creating this unity of our nation. Some form of Welsh parliament is necessary. But I never would have thought that the concept implied complete political separation' (Saunders, quoted in: Fishlock 1972: 159).

Ever since, Plaid's central aim has been to achieve self-government for Wales. But, especially since the 1980s the party has remained ambiguous about what self-government implies for the status of Wales. While traditional nationalist terms of 'state', 'sovereignty' and 'independence' have been deliberately avoided by the party, one can find instead descriptions like 'full national status for Wales within the European Union', 'full membership of the United Nations', 'small European nation' and 'own national government' in Plaid Cymru's programmes, speeches, manifestos and statements. Officially the party rejected the idea of independent statehood as it was considered to be outdated within the European context. Thus, Christiansen (1998) classified Plaid as a 'post-nationalist party'.

Recently, a shift in Plaid's attitude towards independence can be witnessed. It was the establishment of the Welsh Assembly in 1999 which seems to have spurred Plaid's 'traditional nationalist' aspirations. Even before the inauguration of the new Assembly the party called for the extension of its powers, according to the model of the Scottish parliament. The Welsh nationalists are obviously not satisfied with the current state of devolution, and view the establishment of the Assembly consequently 'as the beginning of a process of taking increasing responsibility for our own fate' (Plaid Cymru 2001: 3). The radicalisation of Plaid's constitutional position became evident in September 2003, when the delegates decided at a party conference that Plaid Cymru's long term aim was to secure independence for Wales within the European Union (BBC

News 2003). This position is also voiced in the party's manifesto for the European Parliament elections 2004, which calls for 'an independent Wales playing a progressive and radical role in the EU' (Plaid Cymru 2004). Thus, by now, the language of independence seems to be firmly established within party discourse. One can think of at least two reasons for this radicalisation. On the one hand it was a strategic move of the party to stress its distinctiveness as the only party defending exclusively Welsh interests. With the Welsh Assembly in place and virtually all political parties supporting devolution, to embrace the notion of independence became a necessary step to maintain its identity as a different force in Welsh politics. And on the other hand the call for independence clarified the party's position on the constitutional question. Thus, it was a way to remove the longstanding ambiguity surrounding its concept of self-government.

Lega Nord

In the case of the Lega Nord the relationship between centre and periphery has changed several times. This is most of all due to the fact that the Lega has actually been in government. This situation has at times blurred the conflict between centre and periphery. But central government and the central state are repeatedly portrayed as 'the other': The state is anti-North, and 'the embodiment of the inefficiency, criminality and backwardness of the South' (Tambini 2001: 101). Consequently, the anti-state attitude, which is inextricably linked to the dislike of the traditional parties, is a central boundary marker in the Lega Nord's construction of sub-state national identity. The Italian state is defined as 'a modern artefact' which was imposed on Padania and its constituent nations. In this colonial relationship, Rome has exploited the resources and economies of the Northern regions and endangered the survival of its endogenous cultures by imposing cultural assimilation and uniformity (Gómez-Reino Cachafeiro 2002: 66).

The position of the Lega on the constitutional question is extremely ambivalent and has changed several times in its short history as a political party. In its first political programme the then Lega Lombarda declared as its basic aim 'to transform the Italian state into a confederation of autonomous regions' (Lega Lombarda 1982). Only one year later, the party declared in its 'definite programme' to overcome the central state and to build up a 'modern federal state', which respects all its constituent peoples (Lega Lombarda 1983). By 1993 the Lega Nord had established the idea of Italy as a union of three republics. One in the North (Padania), one centre region and one in the south of Italy. In 1996 this position changed again and Bossi and his followers symbolically founded Padania as an independent and sovereign state. By 2001 the Lega moved back to a federalist position, calling for the federalisation of the Italian state. Entering the centre-right election coalition Casa delle Libertà, Umberto Bossi became Minister for Institutional Reforms and Devolution. With the consent of the coalition he is now able to transform Italy in a federal state according to Lega's ideas. But in its constitution Lega remains committed to establish Padania as an 'independent and sovereign federal republic' (Lega Nord 2002a). Thus, the Lega Nord is likely to leave government – as it did in 1995 – and shift on to a separatist stance again, if it is not satisfied with the process of devolution.

3.5. Attitudes towards European integration and visions of Europe

Scottish National Party

Until the middle of the 1980s, 'Europe has been of secondary importance' for the SNP (Mitchell 1998). While there was some support for European unity in the 1950s, the party turned against the EEC in the 1960s and 1970s. As a consequence of the anti-EEC mood within the party, and as it was assumed in Scotland as a whole, the party campaigned for a 'No' vote in the British referendum on continued EEC membership in 1975. The referendum result was a defeat for the nationalists, as 58 per cent of Scots voted in favour of continued membership (Mitchell 1998). The SNP position towards Europe changed gradually in the 1980s in the direction of a more favourable view of Europe (Ichijo 2004). This slow and uneasy process was helped by the adoption of a more positive view of European integration by key SNP officials and the nationalist supporters (Dardanelli 2002). By adopting the *Independence in Europe* policy, the SNP added a European dimension to Scottish national identity and placed Scotland's future firmly into the EU framework (Scottish National Party 1992). Now the European Union was no longer seen

as a threat, but as a window of opportunity for their claims of independence (Mitchell 1998). Consequently, in 1988, the SNP officially adopted the policy of *Independence in Europe*, which inextricably linked the party's core aim of independence with the EU. There are several advantages connected to this new idea (Dardanelli 2002): First of all, it would reduce the political costs of secession. An independent Scottish state within the EU would avoid the problem of being isolated from the international community. Secondly, such a solution would guarantee access to EU markets. This would fundamentally reduce the economic costs of secession. And finally, as the EU's institutional framework favours small states, Scotland would be over represented in the central institutions. A precondition for the Europeanisation of the SNP's independence policy was that the EU was seen in more positive terms by Scottish nationalist voters.²³ Consequently, the SNP could utilise the European dimension to strengthen the demand for self-government, and argued that being an independent part of the European Union would be a better alternative than to remain within the British state. The existence of the EU made the SNP's arguments more credible and independence a more realistic option.

For the SNP taking a positive stance on Europe also proved to be beneficial in terms of domestic politics: a positive view of Europe is used as a symbolic means to distance itself from other British parties, which tend to be more Eurosceptic. According to John (2000: 884) the SNP, and this is also true for Plaid Cymru, 'played the European card as a resource.' Consequently, the SNP's positive approach towards the EU and European integration is now another boundary marker in the process of national identity construction.

The SNP supports the idea of a '*confederal union of sovereign states*, not a centralised super-state' (SNP: 2001b, my emphasis). It is in favour of pooling sovereignty and enhanced co-operation in several policy areas including trade, environmental and social issues and in defence and foreign affairs. Moreover, the SNP welcomes EU enlargement and favours the introduction of the Euro. At the same time the EU should have no authority to decide on the issues of taxation, public spending, natural resources and constitutional affairs. These should be left to the sovereignty of the member states only. Hence, the SNP is critical of 'excessive Euro-enthusiasm, and creeping integrationism' (SNP 2001b). It favours a confederal constitution of the EU based on the principle of subsidiarity and decentralisation, which puts clear limits to what can be done on the EU level. Thus, the SNP sees the EU still mainly as an intergovernmental confederation of states, with some supranational components (Mitchell 1998: 128). This view reflects the classical assumptions of an intergovernmental and neo-realist analysis of the European Union, where nation states pool their sovereignty, but remain firmly in control of the processes and retain sovereignty in the fields they wish to. The SNP favours such a vision of the EU because it can be reconciled with its idea of independent statehood: 'The SNP's view of Europe is pragmatic and Europe is merely a means of achieving independence' (Ichijo 2004:50).

Plaid Cymru

As in the case of the SNP, the European Union and European integration were not high on the agenda of Plaid until the end of the 1980s (Mitchell 1998). Even though the first party leader, Saunders Lewis, wrote in 1927: 'Wales does not exist except as a part of Europe' (quoted in: Jones 1990: 41), the party's support for enhanced co-operation in Europe remained very vague and diffuse. While until the late 1950s many party members did share a positive attitude towards Europe and understood Wales to be part of European civilisation, it remained nevertheless a second order issue for the party for many years. The position of the party and the importance of the European issue changed dramatically in the 1960s and 1970s, when several developments reversed the diffuse support into opposition to Welsh membership of the EEC. Plaid established a research group to analyse particular issues of the membership of the UK in the EEC and the effects on Wales (Plaid Cymru 1975). Most of the published papers came to the conclusion that Wales would not profit from membership, and that many policies of the EEC were not compatible with the ideas of Plaid.²⁴ Moreover, the absence of Welsh representation in negotiations for EEC membership was criticised. Consequently, Plaid Cymru campaigned for a 'No' vote in the referendum on continued membership in the EEC in 1975. However, the Welsh experience ultimately mirrored that of the Scots to an extremely high degree, and they too found that 'the party was out of step with its electorate' (Mitchell 1998: 115). The disastrous referendum result forced the party to rethink its European policy. In the late 1980s Plaid developed a pro-European

policy, and envisioned the EU as a *Europe of the Nations and Regions*. From then on, Plaid saw and continues to see its future as a firmly integrated part of the European Union (Plaid Cymru 1989; 1999; 2004).

Also Plaid, like the SNP, uses Europe as a symbolic means to distance itself from other more Eurosceptic British parties. As Keating (2001) has shown, the more positive view of Europe in Wales and in Scotland is also a consequence of historiography: For the Welsh and Scots it has been easier to come to terms with the EU as their historiography often portrayed their nations as being part of European history. So they understand themselves as a part of the European family of nations – which is not the case with England, who usually saw 'Europe' confined to the continent.

Plaid's vision of the EU – at least until 1999²⁵ – is a *Europe of the Nations and Regions*, which is based on the principle of subsidiarity and decentralisation (Plaid Cymru 1999). In this model, 'nations and historic regions' replace states as the basic political units. Plaid is in favour of granting the European Parliament legislative powers, and turning it into the first chamber of a bicameral parliament. The second chamber should be formed out of the Committee of the Regions. Consequently, European law-making should be transferred from the Council of Ministers to this bicameral system (Plaid Cymru 1999). Plaid's vision of Europe goes beyond traditional nationalist ideas, and allows for self-government without achieving independent statehood. This 'post-national' vision is compatible with the evolving multi-level political space of the EU. The problem about Plaid's conceptual ideas of a future EU is that they are utopian. Like in the case of the Lega Nord – which is discussed below – Plaid favours a 'virtual Europe' which seemingly runs counter to recent developments.

Lega Nord

Unlike their British counterparts the Lega has always defined itself as a European party, and the European Union has always been an important issue on its agenda (Gohr 2001: 125). Already by 1983, in the first 'definite programme' of the Lega Lombarda, the party declared their support for a construction of Europe, based on autonomy, federalism, and the respect and solidarity for all the people (Lega Lombarda: 1983). The European dimension is crucial to the Lega Nord's construction of sub-state national identity and is used as a boundary marker: While Northern Italy is defined as 'European', the centre and the south are portrayed as 'foreign' Mediterranean or African cultures (Gómez-Reino Cachafeiro 2002: 67).

The Lega Nord's vision of Europe is one of a *Confederation of the Peoples* – similar to the idea of a 'Europe of the Regions' – which wants to establish regions and confederal 'communities' as the basic units of the EU. Each of these entities should maintain a maximum level of autonomy, and decide on most issues independently, except for currency, foreign policy and defence (Gohr 2001: 129). According to Bossi, the Lega's Europe is a Europe 'of the small people, and of small enterprises, of protected minorities, and of cultural freedom for the cities and regional states' (Bossi, cited in: Gohr 2001: 127). The Lega rejects outright a 'European superstate, destroyer of the differences, which is advancing thanks to the work of the European left' (Lega Nord: 2002b). At first glance, the Lega Nord's vision of the EU seems to be similar to Plaid Cymru, and hence, compatible with the model of multi-level governance (Cento Bull and Gilbert 2001: 145). But one should be careful with this assumption, as it is questionable whether the exclusive ethnically defined citizenship of the Lega, its rejection of multiculturalism and its racism are compatible with this model. If it is, then Plaid's multi-level governance system is qualitatively different from the one of the Lega Nord. Currently being part of the Italian government, the Lega has distanced itself from separatist ideas and opts for a federal solution; its vision of Europe is changing. While the party remains opposed to a 'centralised European state' – 'the Soviet Union of the Occident' – it supports the idea of a 'Europe of the Peoples', and is at the same time in favour of a Europe as a 'Union of States'.

Recently it has been argued that the Lega Nord has performed a 'U-turn from Europe', shifting from strong support to hostility towards the EU (Chari et. al. 2004; Giordano 2004). According to this position the Lega has always been – at least until the mid-1990s – unquestionably pro-Europe. As Diamanti (1993) has shown this has not exactly been the case. While the party is placing the North of Italy firmly into a European context, and has shown a general, mostly symbolic support for Europe, the Lega and Bossi always used to be very critical of the concrete structures and policies of the European Union. According to Diamanti, the Lega thus supported

a 'virtual Europe', which was based primarily on regions and peoples and not on states. The 'real Europe', on the contrary, was considered to be too big, too bureaucratic, too centralist, and too tightly integrated. Thus, it is questionable whether the Lega has ever really been Europhilic and one can speak of a 'U-Turn from Europe'. It appears to be more appropriate to categorise the party as instrumental Europeans; thus it is pro EU as long as it serves its strategic interests within the Italian political system.

Like their British counterparts, the Lega has played 'the European card' in domestic politics. Until recently, it has used its positive attitude towards the EU to distance itself from the 'African' south of Italy. Currently, it has strategically adopted a more Eurosceptic position in order to oppose the majority of the Europhilic political elite in Italy. Thus, Europe plays a strong part in the Lega's construction of Padanian identity.

4. Conclusion

The comparative analysis of the Lega Nord, the Scottish National Party and Plaid Cymru has shown that the way sub-state nationalist parties construct their collective identities is influenced by the process of European integration. First of all, the changing nature of borders and sovereignty in the EU and the interpretation of these changes by sub-state nationalist parties have an impact on their constitutional preferences: all three parties want to achieve their aim of self-government within the framework of the European Union; either as an independent state (SNP) or as an autonomous region in a federal system (Lega Nord, Plaid Cymru). Second, the parties take advantage of European integration by playing the 'European card' within their domestic political contexts. Since the 1980s Plaid Cymru and the SNP have taken a distinctively positive approach to Europe and developed their pro-EU attitudes into boundary markers for their collective identities. Thus, Scottish and Welsh nationalists politicise the European issue in their struggle to oppose and challenge the hegemonic British/English nation-state identity. While its British counterparts remain pro EU, the Lega Nord has changed its position recently, but still uses the European issue as a boundary marker. Originally, the Lega Nord used its positive attitude towards the EU symbolically, in order to stress the 'European-ness' of Padania vis-à-vis the 'African-ness' of the south of Italy. The recent shift towards an EU-critical position can be mainly explained by domestic political concerns, its ethnic nationalism and its right-wing ideological position. Opposing the European Union enables the party to distance itself from the Europhilic Italian political elite and thus to strengthen its own identity as a 'different' force in Italian politics. It should be stressed though, that the Lega was much less successful in challenging the hegemonic Italian 'nation-state' identity than were its British counterparts – especially the SNP.

While their national identities are influenced by, and adapted to, the European context, the parties try at the same time to develop a vision of Europe which fits their constructions of national identity. The SNP thus favours an intergovernmental European Union of sovereign states, with some supranational elements. This vision is fundamentally shaped by the party's historical core aim of independence, adapted to the European framework. Plaid Cymru, at least until recently, developed a fundamentally different vision for Europe. Its members would like to see the EU to develop into a highly decentralised multi-level political system, which overcomes the traditional ideas of 'nation-states' and sovereignty. This is mainly due to the party's longstanding dislike of centralised states and the idea of independence. Like Plaid, the Lega Nord would prefer a federally structured European Union. However, due to the ethnic nationalism of the latter and its xenophobic attitudes, the Lega paints a different Europe: that of Europe as a fortress based on homogeneous 'ethnic' communities and inspired by Christian values, which defends itself against external immigration.

Thus, while European integration does basically have a similar impact on all three parties, their reactions vary considerably. The differences in attitudes towards the EU can be explained on the one hand by the respective domestic political context and the consequent strategic choices of the parties. On the other hand their attitudes are also dependent on the key dimensions of national identity: their ideological positions, their concept of the nation, their constitutional preferences and the ethno-history of their nations. All these factors shape the visions of Europe propagated by the parties which in return influence their particular constructions of the 'imagined community'. Thus, as it has been argued in this article, the two processes, European integration and the construction of sub-state national identities, are interdependent and mutually influencing each other.

Notes

¹ Schmitter (1996: 124) and Hooghe and Marks (2001: 187-89) have shown that virtually all areas of policy-making exhibit some form of EU involvement.

² Those regions with the necessary resources, institutions, policy-making capacities and capable leadership can profit from the transformed political framework (Keating 1999). The main opportunity structures open to regions in the EU are:

- interpretation of the 'principle of subsidiarity' as the strengthening of the role of regions (Downs 2002);
- participation in the process of EU regional policy-making (structural funds) (John 2000);
- participation of regional representatives in the Council of Ministers (Hooghe and Marks 2001);
- establishment of the Committee of the Regions (John 2000);
- establishment of regional offices in Brussels (gather information, networking, lobbying) (Marks et.al. 2002);
- formation and management of transregional networks (Keating 1999).

³ Being able to establish more or less autonomous forms of external relations with other regions and with EU institutions is of special interest for sub-state nationalists as it allows them to circumvent central government and enhances their international recognition and legitimacy (Keating 1999). Thus this 'paradiplomacy' might help them to pave their way to national independence (Aldecoa and Keating 1999).

⁴ The case studies share several characteristics: First of all, they are all sub-state nationalist parties in non-federal states which want to achieve self-government for their regions. Second, they all construct a national identity in opposition to the central state and are self-defined in national terms. A third common characteristic is that the parties use constitutional, non-violent means of action in their struggle against the centre. At the same time there are clear differences between them: While Plaid Cymru (founded in 1925) and the SNP (1934) have existed for a considerable period of time, the Lega Nord (1990) is of very recent origin. There are also ideological differences between the parties: While Plaid appears to be the most left-wing party of the three, the SNP is a centre-left party and the Lega is clearly right-wing. Moreover, the basis of their respective nationalism differs: Plaid Cymru is very much concerned about language and culture, the SNP's focuses mainly on politics and institutions, and the Lega Nord's nationalism relies heavily on socio-economic factors.

⁵ In this article I will focus on the 'internal' self-definition of the parties.

⁶ There is an interdependent relationship between mobilisation and national identity: while national identity can be a crucial resource for political mobilisation, mobilisation in turn enhances the awareness of this identity and helps to construct it. Hence, the two phenomena reinforce each other (Hensiek 1999: 76-84).

⁷ 'In fact every nationalism contains civic and ethnic elements in varying degrees and different forms' (Smith: 1991: 13).

⁸ While the emotional attachment of the ethnic nation is stronger, it is at the same time more exclusive than its civic counterpart. Foreigners might be able to join the civic nation, if they are willing to accept and live according to the predominant rules, norms, and traditions. If the nation is mainly constructed on ethnic, hence, primordial terms, it becomes very difficult - if not impossible - for outsiders, like minorities or migrants, to join.

⁹ These documents are largely formulated by elites within the party, and thus do not necessarily reflect the attitudes and positions of ordinary party members.

¹⁰ 'For much of its history, the party was extremely small in terms of membership and organisation, with few leading public figures, little money and a chronic inability to fight elections' (Lynch 2002: 1-2).

¹¹ The ideological move to the left was principally boosted by the policies of Thatcherism which were extremely unpopular in Scotland (Finlay 1997). Consequently, the party moved to the left and anti-Conservatism became an important element in the SNP's construction of national identity. Since the creation of 'New Labour' in 1995, the party confirmed their social democratic stance, and positioned itself ideologically left of New Labour, also to attract former 'Old Labour' voters (Lynch 2002: 14).

¹² The SNP wants to 'ensure that Scotland becomes a world leader in securing a sustainable

environment and quality of life for all'. Thus, it wants to support the use of renewable energy sources and calls for a closing of nuclear power stations. The fact that the Scottish nationalists at the same time want to cut taxation on fuel seems at odds with its environmental outlook (SNP: 2001c).

¹³ The SNP calls for nuclear disarmament and was heavily opposed to the war against Iraq.

¹⁴ One can find references to the 'Gaelic and Scots heritage' in SNP's party programmes: 'The SNP continues to campaign for secure status for Gaelic as one of the key measures that will assist in supporting and reviving the language' (SNP: 2001a). But cultural issues remain of low priority to party policy and are inextricably linked and subordinated to the theme of independence.

¹⁵ 'This (the SNP, M.H.) is not a party of intellectuals, poets, writers or the like, primarily concerned about culture or language in the same way as other nationalist movements. A belief in the efficacy of Scottish self-government and a desire for the economic improvement of Scotland have been the twin drives motivating people to join the SNP rather than cultural issues' (Lynch 2002: 4).

¹⁶ The SNP claimed that the oil which was found in the North Sea was the property of Scotland and the Scottish people and not of the British state.

¹⁷ The Lega Nord constructs Padania as a supranation, which is composed of the 13 'national sections' (Italian Northern regions). Thus being a Padanian citizen allows for – at least – double nationality: One can have a Padanian and at the same time a Lombard national identity.

¹⁸ This is of course far from the truth, as there are distinct economic differences within the North, and there are a multitude of local cultures (campanilismo) with very diverse dialects, and the opposition of the 'white' (Christian) and 'red' (socialist) political subcultures.

¹⁹ For an extensive list of the internal definitions and external categorizations, see Tambini (2001: 123).

²⁰ Fringe groups like 'Settler Watch' and 'Scottish Watch' remained small, without broad support and short-lived (Zuelow 1998). The SNP clearly distanced itself from these groups, by officially opposing them and expelling party members which were supporting them.

²¹ These groups are composed by French, German, Pakistani and also English members, which support the idea of an independent Scotland.

²² One can witness a clear radicalisation of Plaid's language policy. Their Manifesto of 1999 (Plaid Cymru 1999) called only for 'the revitalisation of the Welsh language' and not for the establishment of a bilingual Wales.

²³ Dardanelli (2002) shows, that in 1979 SNP voters were the least supportive of the EU of all Scottish voters. This has changed dramatically in 1997. Now the SNP electorate was the most supportive.

²⁴ For example, the Common Agricultural Policy was seen as a 'threat to Welsh interests and the notion of the EEC as an American satellite was put forward' (Mitchell 1998: 112).

²⁵ It can be expected that Plaid's vision of the EU has changed since 1999, as the party now aims for 'independence within the European Union' (Plaid Cymru 2004). Unfortunately, in Plaid's manifesto for the EP elections in 2004 no clear picture of how the EU should look like is outlined.

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