A niche or an expanding universe for etnoregionalist parties in Europe?
Party demands in contemporary European politics

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Today the presence of etnoregionalist parties is widespread in Western Europe. The politicization of territorial identities and claims of self-government represent the specialization of etnoregionalist parties, yet some evidence suggests that this is a changing scenario. Recent debates concern whether minority nationalists in Europe can be analyzed as niche parties or they can be treated as mainstream parties, and whether demands of territorial autonomy can be accommodated or still represent a challenge for European states. This paper addresses these concerns by focusing on the impact of territorial restructuring in Europe in opening up the political space for etnoregionalist politics. Territorial restructuring in Europe offers a new political and institutional framework in three distinctive ways: allowing the redefinition of category space and territorial identifications, shaping conflict by territorializing political issues, and introducing a multilevel polity that provides a variable geometry to differentiate party objectives and strategies. The paper examines the diversification of party strategies and the renewed sources of divergence within the etnoregionalist party family with three cases of the last and third wave of mobilization: BNG, LN, VB.

Introduction

The idea that etnoregionalism could be analyzed as some kind of niche in European politics was widely accepted in early studies on etnoregionalist parties. As small parties with agendas focusing on the claims of territorial minorities, academic writing assumed the high specialization of party agendas and party voters (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Urwin 1983). Conceptually niche parties –minority nationalist, green and radical right parties-- exhibit three main characteristics: absence of traditional politics, novelty of issues, and politicisation of a restricted set of issues in electoral competition (Meguid 2005: 347-348).[1] Unlike traditional parties, etnoregionalist restricted their claims and demands to encapsulated ethnic and national minorities which were territorially bounded. Etnoregionalist parties were characterised by the subordination of all other issues to 'this territorial claim of cultural distinctiveness' (Urwin 1983:226). Thus, political competition was confined to a very limited political space.

Although appealing, the concept of niche party has been also challenged as a tool to characterize the politics of etnoregionalist parties in Europe. Tronconi considers that 'all too often in academic literature the classic interpretation of ethnoregionalist parties occupying a niche position, and simply defending the identity boundaries that separate and ethnic minority from the dominant group in the state has been reproduced without even being questioned' (Tronconi 2006:24). Criticisms point to the empirical fact that, beyond their niche, some of these parties behave as mainstream parties, or as 'intrinsically catch-all parties' in the politicisation of issues and competitive dynamics (De Winter 1998:223). This is not a novel feature of etnoregionalist parties. The today extinct Flemish VU, evolved from the early 1970s onwards, 'from a single 'issue' pressure party into a multiple issue party with a full governmental program inspired by integral federalist principles' (De Winter 2006:21).[2] At stake is a rejection of etnoregionalist parties as 'single-issue' representatives of territorial minorities in European states and a request to revise their position in political space in light of different strategies.[3]

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[1] Although Meguid's empirical analysis only dealt with green and radical right parties, the empirical analysis was extended to etnoregionalist parties in other works (Jensen and Spoon 2008).

[2] Scholars introduce other distinctions, their increasing potential as challenge and protest parties, or contrast their potential as 'challenging' or 'mobilizing' parties (Newman 1997; Tronconi 2006).

[3] According to Tronconi (2006), 'the image that these parties are bound exclusively to their function as representatives of a peripheral ethnic minority is utterly inadequate… A closer look their recent evolution and programs will show that ethnoregionalist parties are much more dynamic, and ready on some occasion, to review their collocation in the political space, as well as objectives and short and long-term strategies (Tronconi 2006: 2).

The position of etnoregionalist parties in European politics is an elusive one. On the one hand, there is evidence on restrictions on etnoregionalist politics. The re-politicization of identity in Europe in the last two decades supports the idea of party specialization and niche politics (Messina 1992; Müller-Rommel 1998). Research on individual voting behaviour in comparative perspective also supports, to some extent, the argument about specialized voters (Pérez-Nievas and Bonet 2006). On the other hand, three waves of political mobilization of etnoregionalist parties show that they behave as mainstream or catch-all parties incorporating all kind of demands into their programs covering other issues (De Winter, Gómez-Reino and Lynch 2006). Simply casting etnoregionalist parties as either niche or mainstream misses important features to understand the strategic behaviour of these parties. The heterogeneity of the party family, an intrinsic characteristic of etnoregionalist parties, casts some doubts on the possibility of fixing static competitive positions.

The specificity of the party family relies upon its linkages and claims over the territory, its core business (Türsan 1998). Thus, the central question that this debate brings to the fore is to what extent the identity politics of these parties retains a restricted character or becomes increasingly 'malleable and sticky'.[4] These two aspects of the politics of etnoregionalist politics in Europe are usually conflated. First, political entrepreneurship targets the expansion of political space in relation with categories of belonging and identity, and subjective political identification with the territory. On the one hand, etnoregionalist parties are appearing, even in unfamiliar contexts or territories were cultural or linguistic demands were marginal or even absent in the past (Gomez-Reino 2002). On the other hand, identity politics is also changing in Europe. The characterization of etnoregionalist parties as political entrepreneurs of exclusive identities--circumscribed to cultural and mainly linguistic issues is no longer appropriate. Thus, etnoregionalist parties are specialized on territorial identities and interests but the categorical space in which they insert their demands is malleable. Second, the expansion of the political space for the etnoregionalist party family in Europe addresses the diversification of issues politicised by etnoregionalist parties. By multidimensional politics, reference is made to the relevant dimensions for competition of these parties: one related to category space (identity), others related to left-right wing (socioeconomic issues), new politics and European integration. The range of party

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[4] Here I distinguish between 'malleability', which relates to adaptability of territorial identifications and claims, and 'stickiness', which refers to the adherence (glue-like) of all type of issues to their politics.

options includes traditional and conservative politics, protest and new politics, extremes and centres, opposition and governing parties. Thus, the core business of etnoregionalist parties is sticky and tied to very different ideologies, issues and programs.

This is the starting point to focus on the diversification of party strategies within the etnoregionalist party family. The paper argues that whether these parties can be treated as niche or mainstream parties depends on context and political opportunity structures. Many etnoregionalist parties, in fact, struggle between niche and mainstream dynamics to cater to broader publics. Moreover, it argues that territorial restructuring with decentralization and Europeanization have redefined the terms of competition in three ways (category space, issues and arenas) offering an even more heterogeneous scenario to pursue different party strategies. Multilevel politics, offers interconnected arenas of competition--three major ones: regional, state and European--and the territorialization of electoral politics and party strategies.

By providing an analysis of the renewed sources of divergence and territorial conflict in party politics, the paper aims to move away from deterministic accounts on the linear evolution of the party family in Europe towards moderation and adaptation to territorial restructuring—such as the new regionalism proposed by Michael Keating--Continuity and change in nationalist party politics are examined through comparative processes of change in party claims. The selection of three cases of the third wave of political mobilization illustrates the dynamics of change in party strategies and shifting party positions (in Spain--the Galician BNG--, in Belgium--the Flemish VB--and in Italy, LN) and the different strategic importance assigned to competing in different levels. Multilevel politics facilitate or preclude the possibility of forming political alliances with other political etnoregionalist and members of other traditional or new party families.

Next section starts with the politics of etnoregionalist parties and the specification of the heterogeneity of the party family as an intrinsic and historical characteristic. The following section examines the impact of large scale territorial restructuring (decentralization and Europeanization) on reshaping center-periphery dynamics in European politics. The three main effects of territorial restructuring on the expansion of the political space for etnoregionalist politics are examined. Then the paper turns to the three cases of the third wave of etnoregionalist mobilization examined here to explore the expansion of the political space for etnoregionalism in contemporary European politics.

Theoretical framework: Characterizing the etnoregionalist party family

A variety of labels (etnoregionalist, regionalist, ethnic, minority nationalists) illustrates the uneasiness to produce a common category to define these parties (Türsan 1998).[5] Heterogeneity was an intrinsic characteristic of the party family since its origins (De Winter and Türsan 1998, De Winter, Gomez-Reino and Lynch 2006). Despite their differences, the etnoregionalist party family has as its 'core business' claims of self-government based on territorial identities and interests. As Seiler put it, 'singularity and the expression of difference are the constant features of peripheral parties' (Seiler 1980:374). Most scholars treat them as a party family and include etnoregionalists in the list of standard party families in European politics (Von Beyme (1985; Hix and Lord 1997: Marks, Wilson and Ray 2002).

Unlike most European party families, etnoregionalist parties are old and new. Different waves of political mobilisation and different generations of parties have appeared over time (Rokkan and Urwin 1982; Müller-Rommel 1998). The first wave of political mobilization represents the emergence of the old centre-periphery cleavage in the formative period of European party systems as early as the late XIX century (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). In the 1970s the traditional cleavages of class and religion were challenged by the second wave of etnoregionalist parties across European polities (Esman 1977; Rokkan and Urwin 1982). The old-center periphery conflit re-emerged during the second wave followed a long period of de-mobilization of etnoregionalist politics after the Second World War with only one anomaly: the conflict involving the German Speaking population of the South Tyrol in Italy (Esman 1977). However, the third wave of political mobilization does not simply represent the re-emergence of the old-center cleavage but a larger process of cultural change in European politics (Muller-Römmel 1998). As table 1 shows, since the 1970s the party family is clearly expanding in number of parties.

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[5] Lipset and Rokkan used the term 'parties of territorial defence' to refer indistinctively to federalists, autonomists, nationalists, etc. (Lipset y Rokkan 1967, 41). Seiler in his first study on party families (1980) talks about parties of 'defence of the peripheries', and later uses autonomist parties (1982). Some scholars use double-categories such as: 'nationalists and regionalists', 'ethnic and regional' (Pallarès, Montero y Llera, 1997; Von Beyme, 1986), or the composed label of etnoregionalist parties (Newman (1994,1997; De Winter y Türsan 1998). The literature on European integration commonly refers to regionalist parties (Hix y Lord, 1997; Marks, Wilson y Ray, 2002). As a more generic label, autonomist parties has been recently proposed (De Winter, Gómez-Reino y Lynch 2006).

Table 1. Generations of etnoregionalist parties in Europe

	S XIX-1945 WAVE I				1945-		WAVE II 1960-70		WAVE III 1980-	
					1945-1960					
Parties	Lliga Reg.	1901	ERC	1931	SVP	1945	RW	1968	BNG	1982
	PNV	1895	PG	1931	U.Valdotaine	1945	FDF	1964	U. Valenciana	1982
									EA	1986
	SfP	1906	PSd'A	1921	Volksunie	1954	UDB	1964	Ch. Aragonesista	1986
	Frontpartij	1919	P. Cymru	1925			Vlaams Blok	1978	Coalición Canaria	1993
			SNP	1934			P.Andalucista	1976	Partit Occitan	1987
			VNV	1933			H.Batasuna	1978	Veneti d'Europa	2001
							Sin Feinn	1970	Lega Nord	1989
							SDLP	1970	Ligue Savoissienne	1994
							MRS	1971	Unitat Catalana	1986
									UPA	1988
							UPC	1979		
							FNP	1962		
							CDC	1974		
							PAR?	1978		
							UP	1979		

The waves of etnoregionalist mobilization are characterized by increasing mobilization—movements and sectors—that led to party emergence and consolidation of party organizations. The waves also were translated in discontinuity in the small and minor party organizations. Very few political parties have survived since their emergence, in particular those born before 1945. Well-known exceptions include the Basque PNV or the Catalana ERC. In the second and third waves of etnoregionalist mobilization, old center-periphery cleavages led to new party formation, such as the rise of VB in Flanders in 1978, or the BNG in Galicia in 1982. Moreover, the last two waves of etnoregionalist mobilization involved new party formation in regions or territories without historical legacies of etnoregional mobilization and cultural distinctiveness in three European states: Spain (Aragon, Canarias, Andalucía), Italy (Lombady, Veneto, Piedmont) and France (Savoy).

These different waves of political mobilization shape both the emergence and the success of etnoregionalist parties. Both the second and third waves of etnoregionalist political mobilization targeted the political space of traditional parties (De Winter 1998; Muller-Rommel 1998). The second and third waves of mobilization represent the electoral expansion of the etnoregionalist party family in comparative perspective in Spain, Italy, and United Kingdom--and to a lesser extent in France. Spain

contributes to the etnoregionalist party family with the largest number of etnoregionalist parties and electoral successes and governing parties in Europe (Lago 2004). Overall the political space for the etnoregionalist party family is growing taking into account the electoral results for the entire family and disregarding individual cases since there are instances of party failure or disappearance in recent dates (De Winter, Gomez-Reino and Lynch 2006).

The comparative study of etnoregionalist parties commonly starts with the challenges involved in explaining their historical singularities and the way nationalist and regionalist parties politicize territorial identities. Since early studies on etnoregionalist parties comparative analysis showed the different histories and processes that accounted for very different patterns of territorial mobilisation and alternative trajectories (Linz 1973, Díez Medrano 1999; Conversi 1997).[6] The classic definition of the center-periphery cleavage relies on the existence of two opposing and exclusive territorial identifications: the dominant culture and the peripheral culture of ethnic and national minorities (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Urwin 1983). An exclusive identity is still a requirement in more recent theoretical frameworks (Türsan 1998). The dichotomy inclusive/exclusive addresses the classical differences between civic versus ethnic identities. The well-known distinction by Hobsbawn defines two types of nationalism, one civic, mostly territorial and based on political boundaries, and another ethnic, based on cultural and linguistic distinctiveness (Hobsbawm 1991).[7] This categorical distinction is also used to define the identity politics of etnoregionalist parties (Martínez Herrera 2002; Miley 2007; Perez-Nievas and Bonet 2006).

Moreover, rather than ethnic minorities being represented by homogeneous political actors, research uncovered quite early and later developed fragmented movements—'divided nations'--and alternative political projects within nationalist movements and parties. Thus, different internal competitive contexts in the territories explained the success or failure of different nationalist party options within each case.[8] Variation in the types of nationalist strategies in each scenario goes back to a very early stage but it has been sustained over time (Díez Medrano 1999). In contemporary

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[6] The contrast between the strategies of Basque and Catalan nationalist movements, or the differences between Flemish parties VU and VB has been extensively analyzed (Díez Medrano 1999; De Winter 1998).

[7] Anthony Smith has argued against this typology on analytical, normative and empirical grounds. They relate to the difficulties in defining two pure types, since political reality is usually fuzzy (Smith 1998).

[8] In the case of Basque nationalism, the success of radical options in contrast to the case of Catalonia, a success for moderate nationalism (Díez Medrano 1999).

research on etnoregionalist parties, the number of etnoregionalist parties defines the competitive internal context to define moderation and radicalization of claims, and party successes and failures (Van Houten 2007; Perez Nievas and Bonet 2006).

Not surprisingly, different histories and trajectories account for the intrinsic heterogeneity of the etnoregionalsit party family on several accounts. The claims of self-government of etnoregionalist parties are heterogeneous and include a range of options from independence to decentralization. Party claims have been recently classified and compared in a systematic way (De Winter and Türsan 1998, De Winter, Gomez-Reino and Lynch 2006; Tronconi 2004; Van Houten 2007). The most frequent claims of etnoregionalist parties in contemporary European politics are independence, autonomy and federalism (De Winter, Gomez-Reino and Lynch 2006).[9] De Winter (1998) states the impossibility of locating claims of self-government on fixed permanent positions over time, while others point to a fundamental continuity in party claims, although single parties such as the Flemish VU or the Lega Nord, significantly shifted its position (Tronconi 2004).

The demands for some kind of self-government constitute 'the defining characteristic' of etnoregionalist parties, but 'their electoral success and expanding constituencies forces them to address a wide range of policy issues' (De Winter 1998:208). Derek Urwin early claimed that etnoregionalist parties had no *Weltanschauung*; they only demand recognition of minorities (Urwin 1983:227). Since Urwin wrote this piece, empirical analysis has shown that etnoregionalist parties do have a *Weltanschauung*, although research clearly shows they do not have the same one. Multidimensionality refers to the salience of other dimensions (rather than identity) to explain party strategies and party electoral success (Riba 2000; Bonet y Pérez-Nievas 2006). Multidimensionality shapes the styles of competition and strategies of etnoregionalist parties because the etnoregionalist party family is the most mimetic party family with regard to both traditional and new politics. The salience of the traditional left-right wing dimension to explain etnoregionalist politics appears in many studies on the party family (Newman 1997; De Winter 1998, De Winter, Gómez-Reino and Lynch 2006 and Tronconi 2005). Unlike any other party family in Europe, ethnoregionalist parties are located along the entire dimension, spreading along the ideological continuum from the extreme left to the extreme right (Ware 2004;

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[9] The result of a comparative analysis of 17 cases showed that seven were classified as independentists (three refer to self-government without explicit reference to independence), four were federalist, two as autonomists, and one as protectionist (De Winter, Gomez-Reino and Lynch 2006: 251).

Guibernau 1996; De Winter 1998; Tronconi 2004). This puzzling characteristic appeared quite early in the history of etnoregionalist parties, but it has been reproduced over time. [10] Despite some emphasis on the importance of 'the dark side of nationalism' to explain etnoregionalist politics, recent studies show that centre-left is the most frequent position within the etnoregionalist party family (De Winter, Gomez-Reino and Lynch 2006). [11]

While the importance of a bidimensional space in the politics of etnoregionalist has received substantial attention, additional dimensions of competition are also identified. The third salient dimension of competition corresponds to post-materialist or new politics issues. Some etnoregionalist parties have developed a clear profile on new politics (De Winter 1998:208; Van Atta 2003). Yet it is the fourth dimension corresponding to the so-called silent counterrevolution which has received most attention (Ignazi 1992; De Winter 1998). The centrality of anti-migrant discourses and programs in the rise of the radical right wing in European polities is the central issues, although fiscal demands and issues of law and order are also included. The significance of this issue dimension has been largely demonstrated in the successes of parties such as the Lega Nord and Vlaams Blok (Kitschelt 1996; Mudde 2000). [12]

The last relevant dimension of competition for the etnoregionalist party family is European integration. In contrast to ideological differentiation on the previous dimensions, the position on European integration offers a more homogeneous picture of etnoregionalist politics. Since the first comparative study on Europeanization and party families, ethoregionalists are treated as a pro-European party family (Hix y Lord 1997). Several studies confirm the pro-European attitudes of the party family (De Winter and Gómez-Reino 2002; Marks and Wilson 2000; Marks, Wilson and Ray 2002). The reason for their support lies in the opportunities afforded to undermine state authority (Marks, Wilson and Ray 2002). However, some etnoregionalist parties clearly opposed

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[10] Left-right politics has become crucial for the etnoregionalist party family, not only because etnoregionalism offers a wide range of options along this dimension, but also because etnoregionalist parties are divided along the left-right dimension. Some well-known examples are provided by competing parties in Flanders (VU and VB until recently) or Catalonia (CiU, ERC).

[11] According to Guibernau: 'nationalism does not determine what politics its adherents should support. It is insufficient to know where one wants to go, one needs also to find out and decide how to get there. Thus, we can find nationalist parties following conservative, Marxist, social-democrat or liberal strategies (Guibernau 1996:62-63).

[12] However, it is by no means restricted to extreme right-wing politics, since the issue of migration has a long lasting history in the politics of some etnoregionalist parties (De Winter 1998).

European integration on political and economic grounds. A subset of etnoregionalist parties has asserted their distance with European integration and can be categorized as Euroskeptics (Gomez-Reino, Llamazares and Ramiro 2008). While symbolically etnoregionalists claim to be Europeans in terms of identities and values —including parties such as VB and LN--, some etnoregionalist political parties—both left and right--reject the specific policies and path of economic integration.

The heterogeneous nature of the etnoregionalist party family has led some scholars to question their nature as a single party family. Mair and Mudde suggest to disaggregate and to distribute the parties among the traditional party families (Mair and Mudde 1998:222). However, all party politics is firmly anchored in the specificity of territorial claims. Etnoregionalist parties are, almost, like all parties and they are almost, like all party families. Political parties strategize about dimensions of party competition and take positions on issues in interaction with the strategies of mainstream parties (Meguid 2005). All political parties are specialized in 'an ideological division of work' in which they incorporate certain issues in their political programs and eventually 'fish' in other issues (Klingeman et al. 1994:16). Etnoregionalist parties seem to fish a lot more than the rest on other issue dimensions. Moreover, territorial claims are moving center stage with territorial restructuring in Europe, further reproducing the intrinsic heterogeneity of etnoregionalist politics and expanding political space.

The effects of territorial restructuring in Europe: opening up political space

Lipset and Rokkan posited that large scale processes in state and nation formation left behind encapsulated cultural peripheries in European states (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). Both territorial cultural and economic development were constrained by the relationship of the region with the central state (Gourevitch 1979; Rokkan and Urwin 1983). This type of center-periphery dynamics in Europe have changed from the 1970s onwards with two large scale processes, decentralization and Europeanization. They account for territorial restructuring in the form of a new political, economic and institutional framework. These processes affect not only political authority in the form of new political institutions (governments, parliaments, elections at the regional and European levels), but also individual and collective attitudes and identifications towards the territory. Territorial restructuring offers a new political space for territorial claims in

Europe opening up to political conflict three distinctive questions: the politicization of categorical space (identity politics at stake), the territorialization of political issues, and the emergence of new arenas of competition to advance party agendas.

Both processes of political and institutional reform are large, dynamic, open-ended, and asymmetric--as the decentralization of the Spanish, Belgian, and British cases or the institutional design of the new EU clearly illustrate. On the one hand, political decentralization in Europe was developed in many states from the 1970s onwards.[13] Already in the post war period territorial autonomy was granted within some European states, but in the 1970s a wider process took off and led to the transformation of unitary states in Belgium first, and then Spain, in quasi federal or federal states.[14] More limited in scope in the early 1980s the French state structure was also regionalized, and more recently political devolution took place in the U.K. (Swenden 2006). The way states have recognized the political autonomy of national minorities or political decentralization varies. Special constitutional provisions shape a map of European states with symmetric but also asymmetric states structures. On the other hand, Europeanization is a dynamic process that targets state sovereignty: the very meaning of sovereignty is transformed by deepening and enlarging the new political unit (Hooghe and Marks 2001; Keating 2007). The European Union is today considered a new political system in which the power of the state is integrated within a larger multilevel political structure (Hix 2005). Moreover, other theories define the EU as a process of multilevel governance in which regions and regional actors are incorporated into a new political structure that clearly undermines from above and below state authority (Hooghe and Marks 2001). Arguably the relative importance of decentralization vis-à-vis Europeanization varies in different European countries but they both have an impact on shaping a new relationship between territory and authority.

All political parties need to adapt institutionally, organizationally and strategically to territorial restructuring. However, for the etnoregionalist party family both processes strike at the core of the very definition of its raison d'être, the center-periphery cleavage. First, territorial restructuring allegedly changes the relationship

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[13] In this paper the label political decentralization is used in a broad sense, to refer to the institutional reforms that change the form of the unitary state, ranging from administrative decentralization to substantial state reform towards federal structures.

[14] Ethnic minorities in Europe were recognised dating back to 1945 when special provisions for the German ethnic community of the Alto Adige were introduced in the Paris Treaty and later in the Italian constitution with the creation of a special region to grant the cultural and linguistic rights of the population. The conflict was both internationalized and domestically handled (a striking difference with most conflicts in Western Europe).

between identity, territory or space, and political authority (Keating 2007). Both territorial identifications and claims of self-government can be redefined to accommodate or contest a new political system. In this setting political entrepreneurs can expand or contract category space (Laitin 2008).[15] Second, the new division and sharing of competences defines new space for political conflict and new specialized territorial issues to compete--such as the regional welfare state and regional social policy. Third, territorial restructuring provides a multilevel political framework which includes the emergence of regional politics as a distinctive arena for political competition and coordination (and encourages office-seeking behaviour). The redefinition of center-periphery dynamics has not modified the centrality of state authority and policies to explain the conflict and grievances advanced by etnoregionalist parties (Marks, Wilson and Ray 2002). However, a more complex political framework with new political opportunities and constraints to define territorial claims is emerging (Elias and Tronconi forthcoming).

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[15] Laitin states: '… the politics of identity involves three major processes. People invest in attributes for purposes of qualifying for membership in another category in the process of assimilation; political entrepreneurs expand or contract category space () to induce new coalitions; and ethnic entrepreneurs work to increase the salience of a dimension to expand their authority (Laitin 2007: 37).

Two distinctive views on the transformation of identity politics in Europe point towards alternative scenarios with inclusionary and exclusionary features. On the one hand, some studies argue that political decentralization consolidates pre-existing territorial identities, but also has new effects on subjective political identification (Maddens; Martínez Herrera 2002).[16] Likewise the literature on the new regionalism asserts that territorial identity politics is becoming inclusive into a European multilevel political system (Keating 2007). The interaction effect of these two processes (regionalization, Europeanization) would produce the politicization of multiple, complex, layered identities, in contrast to exclusive ethnic ones (Moreno 2003). On the other hand, both decentralization and Europeanization are allegedly responsible for the politicization of exclusive identities and exclusionary categories. A clear-cut distinction would maintain a separation between types and forms of nationalism and regionalism in Europe (Keating 2007, Mudde 2007: 28). Regionalism would be related to movements that demand greater control over the affaires of the regional territory by the people residing in that territory and nationalism would represent exclusionary categories (Keating and Loughlin 1997:5; Mudde 2007:28). [17]

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[16] Using the example of Catalonia, the Basque country and Galicia, Martínez Herrera shows the decreasing importance of exclusive identification with the state vis-à-vis the strengthening of dual territorial identities and exclusive regional ones (Martinez Herrera 2002).

[17] Another categorical distinction defines regionalism and nationalism as separate types in the Spanish context. Regionalist parties are the new political parties emerging in autonomous communities without a tradition of territorial claims. Nationalist parties is only used for etnoregionalist parties of the 'historical nationalities', that is Catalonia, the Basque country and Galicia (Lago 2004).

Territorial restructuring offers the possibility of redefining category space. Political entrepreneurs have incentives to advance new categories or reformulate old ones. Territorial restructuring in Europe is blurring some categorical distinctions. First, nationalism and regionalism can be treated separately, but nationalism and regionalism tend to overlap on 'national claims'. The incentives for political entrepreneurs to turn the region space into a 'nation' space build upon the principle of congruence embedded in nationalism (Gellner 1983; Lijphart 1977). Given the symbolic power of nationalism and the legitimacy that derives from a national identity, party strategies often display claims of nationhood regardless of histories, legacies or any other factor.[18] Regardless of origin or historical legacies, today most of etnoregionalist parties in Europe define themselves as nationalist (Gomez-Reino 2008). Second, research has uncovered the difficulties in introducing clear-cut distinctions, and even a reversal of types—from inclusive to exclusive ones (Miley 2007). The redefinition of territorial identification widens the range of styles of political mobilization on party identity politics: from the emptiness of cultural distinctiveness in national claims to the new (re)politicization of cultural differences.

Political decentralization and Europeanization also define a new framework for party claims of self-government. On the one hand, decentralization processes have undermined the hegemony of unitary states and state sovereignty, granting autonomy, shared competences and constitutional recognition. This transformation alters the terms for old demands of recognition and state reform and bring about new ones. On the one hand, decentralization totally or partially fulfils the demands for self-government of etnoregionalist parties. Some of the old demands of self-government have been accommodated since party goals were partially achieved. This is the argument advanced by De Winter to explain the disappearance of the Volksunie in Flanders (De Winter 2006). On the other hand, decentralization refuels new demands of self-government on the basis of new institutional grievances (1999). This scenario would be represented by the Italian or the Spanish states, where the recognition of institutional differences among regions induced new demands of special recognition and self-government. In turn the process of European integration offers the opportunity to insert their claims in a wider European unit (De Winter and Gomez-Reino 2002).

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[18] This is why, just to give an example, parties such as the Partido Andalucista, defines itself as a nationalist party despite the clearly territorial based of its politics, the absence of a tradition of claims of cultural distinctiveness and the lack of a social base to claim an Andalucian nationalism.

A second transformation relates to the on-going territorialization of political issues brought about by political decentralization and Europeanization in European states. Territorial restructuring involves a process of division or sharing of competences that vary across European states. Political decentralization in European states varies in scope and timing. The regional governments in these systems can have a full range (Belgium), substantial competences (such as the Spanish autonomous communities, with competences over education and heath, among other social policies), or a limited sharing (Italy or France) (Swenden 2006). Europeanization further reinforces the sharing of competences among different levels (Marks and Hooghe 2001). The territorialization of political issues affects a wide range of public politics but in particular, the so-called regional 'welfare state' and social policy have moved centre stage. There is a relationship between substate nationalism and welfare state (Béland and Lecours 2005:677). Identity formation in territorial mobilisation involves a social policy dimension. Here nationalist battles are also struggles to control social policy areas. The key to link both areas is that nationalism and the welfare state are framed in reference to the idea of solidarity (Béland and Lecours 2005:679). [19] In short, nationalist movements will promote their identity politics--the congruence between cultural and national boundaries--with social citizenship (Béland and Lecours 2005:680). This linkage between territorial identity and social policy is a central aspect of the contemporary politics of etnoregionalist parties, both left and right wing.

The third transformation brought about by territorial restructuring is a new multilevel political framework to advance territorial identity and interests. A multilayered polity with at least three-tiered levels (regional, state and European) is in place to advance party agendas. These new political arenas at the regional and European level offer qualitatively different arrangements, in particular, at the regional level. [20] In comparative politics, the emergence of the region/territory/subnational space as a 'unit of analysis' is relatively old (Linz and De Miguel 1966; Rokkan and Urwin 1982), but the processes of political decentralization and Europeanization have really turned regions into administrative and political units. Multilevel politics changes the scenario to develop party strategies. First, a multilevel politics implies the territorialization of

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[19] As they put it: 'National solidarity is a political and ideological construct that owes much to nationalism as a political force and, in contemporary liberal democracies, to the welfare state (Béland and Lécours 2005:680).

[20] Many countries in Europe exhibit these multiple arenas yet in between the 'legislative' regions and some of the administratively defined NUTS there are a variety of institutional arrangements, although I do not develop their implications here.

electoral politics since parties need to compete in each different level; the territory becomes relevant for (all) parties (Hopkin 2003; Hough and Jeffery 2006). Second, competitive dynamics can change at different levels such as the abundant research on differential voting highlights, showing that voters do vote differently according to the type of election (Riba 2000; Pérez-Nievas and Bonet 2006). Third, multilevel politics implies the possibility of developing differentiated strategies for each level according to their relative importance for party objectives. In sum, this is a complex scenario in which there is also interaction and interdependence among the different levels of the political system, and both competition and coordination are crucial to explain party strategies and the expansion of political space (Lago and Montero 2007).

Although etnoregionalist parties might act politically outside their territorial boundaries, they are distinctively rooted in the regional space and claim to articulate territorial identities and interests within the region and the larger multilevel political system.[21] De Winter (1998) argued in the past that in order to understand party behaviour and success, etnoregionalist parties should be analyzed at the regional level, success measured as a proportion of their target electorate, and size measured in terms of the regional level as well (De Winter 1998: 211).[22]

The emergence of regional arenas within a multilevel political system offers the opportunity to achieve government (at the regional level).

The strategies of etnoregionalist parties to expand their political space adapt to these three transformations, categorical space, territorialization of issues and multilevel arenas in different ways. Etnoregionalist parties can strategize expanding categorical space (inclusive dual identities, exclusive identifications) or emptying or refilling the cultural content of territorial identifications. Etnoregionalist parties can expand their political space territorializing traditional and new issues to cater to broader publics. Finally, etnoregionalist parties can strategize whether to pursue restricted or wider issues to compete at the regional, state, and European levels. Finally, party strategies can give relevance to all (regional, state and European), two (regional and state, state

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[21] However, this can be a controversial issue. Although symbolically the territory is very important for these parties, its translation into a dominant regional level is not so straightforward De Winter argues, for example, that the most important level for etnoregionalist should be the state level, since their main policy objective is the reorganisation of the state structure and their demands of self-government and the national level is the competent one to decide over these matters (De Winter 1998:212).

[22] Despite this crucial methodological remark, we can still find empirical studies using the national level as the relevant one (Brancati 2008).

and European, regional and European) or only one arena of competition and coordination.

Competition and coordination of the etnoregionalist 'supply' becomes central to explain successes and failures of etnoregionalist parties at the different levels. On the one hand, they compete with other etnoregionalist parties for votes, such as in the cases of Flanders, Catalonia or the Basque country. Political decentralization has consolidated the emergence of three distinctive territorial party systems in Europe (Basque, Catalan and Northern Ireland), up to five different regional party systems in Spain, and distinctive regional party systems in Belgium (Newman 1997; Lago 2002: 136). These territorialized party systems exhibit distinctive competitive dynamics. Political decentralization has modified the structure of incentives and competitive dynamics so state-wide parties are effectively regionalized and adapt to the new scenario by advancing regional identities. Examples include Catalonia, the Basque country or Galicia, where state-wide parties have adapted to territorialization.

At the state level, etnoregionalist parties strategize by focusing on claims of self-government and do prefer tribune strategies, exerting pressure on policies from opposition or conditional, external, support (Seiler 1982; De Winter 1998). Only in Belgium and Italy etnoregionalist parties have entered governments at the national level (De Winter 1998). While the European level mirrors to some extent the restriction of issues at the state level etnoregionalist parties coordinate with other etnoregionalist to compete in European elections and achieve representation, party behaviour also shows that they can strategically act on double membership. The divide of etnoregionalist parties in European politics lies in restricted specialized demands, and claims and traditional and new politics is clear-cut. Not only the radical right, but other traditional etnoregionalist parties 'opt out' from their niche for participation in the standard party groups. Christian democrats and liberals--parties or coalitions such as SVP or CiU have never integrated in the European Free Alliance and distribute themselves in traditional parliamentary groups.

Reframing centre-periphery dynamics; three adaptative strategies

The third and last wave of enotregionalist mobilization from the 1990s further expanded the political space for etnoregionalist parties. Despite arguments that the third wave of etnoregionalist mobilization largely corresponds to the success of the populist new right

wing and the incorporation of anti-migrant issues in party agendas, the expansion of political space was not limited to these issues (Newman 1997). Etnoregionalist parties showed the 'malleability and stickiness' of their politics following different adaptative strategies. The strategic behaviour of three parties is described here: the Bloque Nacionalista Galego (BNG), the Vlaams Belang (VB) and Lega Nord (LN). The three cases are part of the same party family given the centrality of the claims of self-government (De Winter, Gómez-Reino and Lynch 2006) although two of the cases have been analyzed mostly as examples of the populist right wing family (VB and LN), and the other as an example of the etnoregionalist party family (BNG). However, both LN and VB can be treated as examples of double membership in different party families (De Winter, Gomez-Reino and Buelens 2006; Mudde 2007). The selection of the cases analyzed here is not meant to illustrate 'types' of etnoregionalism in European politics. Despite their similarities in some key aspects, the VB and LN are different with regard to relevant aspects of mobilisation and party strategies.

The three cases share in common a trajectory from political marginality to electoral success. Their formation is clearly inserted in the recent process of territorial restructuring in Europe and built their politics upon current asymmetries in state institutional designs. Party demands have territorialized political issues and demands to expand their political space. Ultimately, they have started to slowly differentiate party strategies at different levels. In short, they show the malleability and stickiness of their politics in defining category, space, shaping issues and party agendas and adapting their strategies to different levels. However, they differ in the extent to which political space led to niche or mainstream dynamics at different levels. The three cases show different alternatives between re-politicizing identity boundaries, and combinations of traditional and novel issues. They also depart in the extent to which they could articulate differentiated strategies at the regional, state and European levels. Their strategies do not develop in isolation and the competitive contexts are crucial to understand the extent to which party politics enter into niche or mainstream dynamics (Newman 1997; Meguid 2005).

BNG: Old demands in new bottles

The old centre-periphery cleavage was weakly translated in Galicia in the first and second waves of etnoregional mobilization in Europe (Linz 1973; Díaz López 1983).

The Galician nationalist political movement lagged behind the other historical nationalities of the Spanish state: Catalonia and the Basque country in political successes and representation (Beramendi and Nuñez Seixas 1996; Máiz 1994). Despite the objective potential—language and cultural distinctiveness--and the early presence of political organizations, Galician nationalism was a marginal movement until the late 1980s. The Spanish state suffered from the 1970s a double transition: from authoritarianism to democracy, and from unitary to quasi-federal with the creation of the state of Autonomies (Aja 1999; Stepan 2001; Moreno 2001). This type of federalism was introduced to solve the question of the historical nationalities of the Spanish state (Catalonia, the Basque country and Galicia) is asymmetric in some respects, treating territorial autonomy according to their distinctiveness. The second cycle of institutional reform in the Spanish was recently initiated to rewrite the early statues of Autonomy of the *comunidades autónomas*. The victory of the Socialist party in the 2004 Spanish general elections opened a new political opportunity structure to reform the existing statues of autonomy approved after the transition to democracy. For the old historical nationalities the relationship with the central government and at the institutional definition of the 'nations' are at stake. Polemics accompanied the approval of the new Catalan statute in 2006, and the claims of associate membership launched by the lendakari Ibarretxe in the Basque country and his proposal to run a referendum on it. This is the political context to insert the claims and demands of Galician etnoregionalist parties.

The BNG is a clear-cut case of a party moving from marginality to political success in twenty five years of existence. The radicalization and fragmentation of Galician parties after the transition to democracy exclude them from political representation and the institutional processes of the first cycle of reform. Galician nationalists mostly observed how other etnoregionalist parties participated in the process of definition of the state of autonomies and in the writing of the very statue of autonomy. The BNG was created as a party-front in 1982 after a series of unsuccessful attempts from the part of different Galician nationalist groupings to consolidate a nationalist party platform. The starting point, however, was as radical as many of the Galician movements that predated it. The BNG took an anti-system stand refusing to recognise both the Spanish constitution and the Galician *Estatuto de Autonomía* approved in 1981. The legitimacy of the new territorial framework was not formally accepted until 1985 (Beramendi and Nuñez Seixas 1996). In the first formulation of the

BNG Political Principles in 1982, Galicia is defined as a nation with the right to self-determination. Electoral success was gradually achieved from 1989 onwards and political success signalled when the BNG became a governing party in 2005 with the formation of a bipartisan government with the Galician Socialist party. Today the BNG is an left-wing autonomist party that demands territorial autonomy within the constitutional framework of the Spanish state.

The BNG's evolution is one of ideological moderation achieved over a period of two decades in which external and internal factors both play a crucial role (Lago 2002; Gomez-Reino 2006). In comparative perspective (both Spanish and European) the profile of the BNG in its claims of self-government and the defence of territorial autonomy can be classified as 'moderate'. The quest for independence was always marginal within Galician nationalism, unlike the Basque Country and Catalonia. At present the BNG demands the reform of the Statue of Autonomy, which was formally included in the governmental pact between the PSdG and the BNG in 2005. The agreement sought to recognize the 'national character' of Galicia. The BNG officially presented its proposal of Statue of Autonomy for Galicia in December 2005.[23] The proposal and approval of a new Statute of Autonomy in Catalonia on June 18th, 2006 largely influenced the BNG's draft. While the centrality of claims of self-government for party politics cannot be neglected, the policy position regarding autonomy issues became flexible and compromising. For Quintana the formula to insert the new Statue within the Spanish Constitutional framework redefines the Galician nation to accommodate it to the Constitutional framework. [24] Most importantly, the BNG leader remarked throughout the process that none of the suggestions were fix and non-negotiable. Despite his compromising disposition, the negotiations among the three parties, BNG, PSdG and PP, were blocked by January 2007, *sine die*. [25] The structure of Galician public opinion and also of BNG voters—is quite different from voters for Catalan and Basque nationalist parties. Subjective political identification in Galicia is

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[23] The proposal received many criticisms for a variety of reasons, starting with its first article that reads:
The Galician nation constitutes a political community (….) and it is integrated as an autonomous community within the Spanish state.

[24] Using the example of the new Statue of Autonomy of Catalonia, the BNG 'national' is redefined in the Preamble of its proposal: 'Tradition, sentiment and the Parliament define Galicia as a nation, and then include article 2 of the Spanish Constitution that recognised Galicia as a historical nationality'.

[25] The responsibility for the failure to reach an agreement on the reform of the Statue of Autonomy was ultimately on the Galician PP that blocked the negotiations in January 2007. The BNG could allege that despite its efforts to moderate its policy position on autonomist issues, the process failed for the PP stand.

characterized by the presence and strength of dual identities (Spanish and Galician) vis-à-vis the weakness of exclusive identifications (Martínez Herrera 2002; Pérez Nievas y Bonet 2006). Moderate autonomist solutions are preferred by both the population at large and by BNG voters (Lago and Lago 2006).

The ideology of the BNG is defined by its pursuit of territorial autonomy but also by its social agenda and clear location as a left-wing political party. The ideological evolution of the party-front also changed the nature of the BNG, from an extreme left organization in the early 1980s, to an increasingly moderate left party. The original 1982 BNG program included anti-monopoly policies to defend popular interests and the principle of national self-organisation (trade unions, parties) against political colonialism. In the 1990s the incorporation of other nationalist parties increased the variety of ideological influences within the BNG and moderated its left ideology. [26] The BNG emphasis on social policies highlights the utmost importance of social policies in party objectives. The BNG seeks equal and fair policies within the Spanish state (infrastructure investments), and in Galicia, employment and social services for the elderly, the poor, education, etc. Thus, in order to analyse party goals and competitive behaviour, the two dimensions (nationalist and left-right ideology) define the expansion of the policy space of etnoregionalism. The choices made by the BNG adapting its ideological and programmatic stand had consequences for electoral and policy success. This is clearly the party position and party strategies at the regional level.[27]

At the regional level, the expansion of political space was facilitated by the coordination of almost all Galician nationalist parties under the banner of the BNG, a process initiated in the 1980s and completed a decade later (Lago 2004).

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[26] Except for the PNG-PG (centre-right) all the parties and *colectivos* belong to the family of left-wing parties. The UPG, the founding member of the BNG, was a Communist party. The PSG was a Socialist party, and after 1973 radicalised its political discourse as a Marxist organization (Beramendi y Nuñez Seixas 1996).

[27] The extent to which party politics offer differentiated strategies at the regional level can be illustrated with an example from the last BNG manifesto for the 2005 regional elections. The introductory paragraph of the manifesto lists the objectives of the party for the Galician nation. It reads: 'The nationalist ideal for the next four years is directed to increase substantially the welfare of the people of the country, to have decent and stable employment for the young, to have free universal assistance for old people, to improve the health services in public hospitals, to offer free and quality education, to avoid workers' layoffs, to offer women of our country equal opportunity, to enjoy and protect a natural environment beyond comparison to pass to future generations, and to maintain alive our language and our collective identity in face of globalization and cultural uniformity' (BNG. 2005 Manifesto Autonomous elections). Thus, the very last item on the list, language and collective identity, represents the core of etnoregionalist politics.

Table 2. Results of Galician nationalist parties in regional elections (1981-2005) [28]

	1981		*1985*		*1989*		*1993*		*1997*		*2001*		*2005*	
	%v	s	%v	s	%v	s	%v	s	%v	s	%v	s	*%v*	*s*
CG	-		12.9	11	3.6	2	0.4	0	-		--		-	
BNPG	6.3	3												
BNG	-	-	4.1	1	8.0	5	18.6	13	24.8	18	22.6	17	18.8	13
EG	3.4	1	5.7	3	3.8	2	-		-		-		-	
PG	3.3	0	4.2	1	1.4	0	-				-		-	

Source: Xunta de Galicia

At the regional level BNG's strategies since it achieved the coordination of all Galician nationalist parties in the early 1990s, pursued ideological moderation and multiplication of issues in party programs. This is the scenario described by Newman as 'dual consensuals' (etnoregionalist parties articulating moderate autonomist solution and socioeconomic consensus at the regional level), the etnoregionalist parties easy to accommodate and therefore whose political space is less stable (Newman 1997: 36). Despite political accommodation risks the irrelevancy of party agendas and electoral decline, the territorial agenda is very much open (Rudolph and Thompson 1985; Levi and Hechter 1985; Newman 1997). The electoral results of the BNG at the regional level from 2001 show a stalemate but not substantial decline. BNG's issue ownership of territorial autonomy needs to be inserted within the context of the regionalization of state-wide parties, whose programs incorporate territorial autonomy and Galician identity and interests. State-wide parties have accentuated their regionalization, in particular the PP (a functional equivalent of a regional party in Galicia), but also the Socialist party since the late 1990s (Gomez-Reino 2007).

The BNG privileged the regional level in party strategies but since the late 1990s sought to differentiate the state and European levels. At the state level claims of self-government and restricted territorial issues still apply since the BNG party presents itself as the natural defender of Galician claims of self-government and interests in a multilevel polity. The BNG aims to become decisive to advance the claims of self-government with the central government, extract resources for Galicia in the form of investments and infrastructure, and more competences for the autonomous community.

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[28] The table also includes the results of Coalición Galega (CG), a Conservative platform launched in 1983, the merging of different forces after the dissolution of the statewide UCD. Some scholars considered CG a regionalist, rather than a nationalist conservative party (Beramendi and Núñez Seixas 1996:274).

The BNG used its representatives in the Spanish parliament to perform an expressive role, to denounce the negative influence of the Spanish state in Galicia, to protest against the economic situation of a structural backward region, and to defend Galician interests vis-à-vis the central government. Moreover, since the BNG achieved political representation at the state level (1996), it has sought coordination with other nationalist parties, therefore its interest in promoting the *Galeusca* alliance.[29] On July 16th 1998 the BNG signed, together with the PNV and CiU, the *Declaración de Barcelona,* a common political agenda to transform the Spanish state in a multinational, multicultural and multilingual state. The Declaration was a major step for the BNG at the state level to influence the Spanish political agenda together with the more relevant PNV and the CiU, and to coordinate its electoral, political and institutional strategies with these parties at the state level.

With regard to the European level, the evolution of BNG strategies over more than two decades shows its shifting importance. The BNG is a clear example of a hard Euroskeptic turning into a soft one (Gomez-Reino, Llamazares y Ramiro 2008). The BNG became the defender of Galicia territorial interests denouncing the process of European integration and its impact on Galician rural interests and fisheries. The case of the BNG is representative of the difficulties they face in order to gain representation at the European level. Competition and coordination of party strategies at the European level played a minor role in the politics of the BNG up until the late 1990s. More clearly at the European level, electoral coordination (first in coalitions with left nationalists and later with center-right nationalists) prioritized the claims of self-government. In the 2004 European elections Galeusca was translated into an electoral coalition that did not bring representation to the BNG for a handful of votes.

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[29] *Galeusca* is an alliance of nationalist parties in the 'historical nationalities' of the Spanish state, first introduced in 1923 (Beramendi y Nuñez Seixas 1996). The alliance symbolised the solidarity of nationalist parties against the Spanish state.

VB: A well-defined niche

The evolution of the the Flemish movement was discontinuous between the first and second waves of etnoregional mobilization in Belgium and marked by events during World War II (De Winter 1998). A single party Volksunie (The Christelijke Vlaamse Volksunie since 1954) articulated the claims of Flemish self-government in the post war period. The Volksunie insert its demands of Flemish self-government in Belgian federalism. From the late 1970s until 1993 the Belgian state was transformed from unitary and regional, to later a new federal form as Belgian elites proceeded with piecemeal accords (Hooghe 1993). The federalization of the Belgian state introduced an asymmetric institutional design: the constitutional recognition of both cultural communities and regions. The Voksunie's program privileged complexity in the politicisation of territorial identities in Belgium and supported consensual solutions to transform the state (on the linguistic and political status of Brussels, the redefinition of regional spaces for new solutions). However, the claims were divided between those that actively participated in the transformation of the state into its present federal form (the majority) as part of a multiparty coalition, and those who rejected the accommodation of demands, in particular the Brussels solution with the creation of a separate region.

This process of political decentralization led to the fragmentation of Flemish nationalism in two separate party organizations. The participation of VU in a Belgian multiparty coalition led to the formation of minor organizations, specially the well-known Vlaams Blok (today Vlaams Belang) in 1978, as a faction of the VU left the party (De Winter, Boelens and Gomez-Reino 2006). Thus, the VB was born out of hardliners who rejected the Belgian decentralization processes and claimed instead Flemish independence from the Belgian state. The reforms of the Belgian state structure evolved in opposing and polarizing demands of self-government. On the one hand, the Volksunie had adopted Belgian federalism to insert its demands of self-government. On the other hand, Vlaams Blok (later Vlaams Belang) demanded Flemish independence. Since the late 1970s the regional and linguistic divide in Flanders was represented by two parties, Vlaams Belang (the extreme nationalist pole), the VU (in its last phase advancing and competing with a multicultural proposal), although the VB was a marginal force until the late 1980s. The increasing expanding political space for VB was marked in recent years by the disappearance of the VU in 2001, and the rather minor impact of its successor parties N-VA and SPIRIT (which compete in electoral coalitions

with traditional Christian Democrat and Socialist parties). The VB rejects both state and European institutional frameworks. This is the only political party in Flanders that rejects European integration and claims the creation of a separate Flemish state inserted in a confederal Europe. From its birth, VB has demanded Flemish independence from the Belgian state. The party claims to represent the legacy of a century of Flemish nationalism reshaping the cultural and linguistic boundaries broken by the adoption of the Belgian federal structure. VB clearly represents the residual and exclusionary nationalism identified in academic literature (Keating 2007; Mudde 2007).

The early years of the VB were characterized by 'old fashioned politics and political marginality' (De Winter, Boulens and Gomez-Reino 2006:51). At its starting point, the Vlaams Blok is not an extreme-right wing party, but rather as a conservative separatist party with a marginal presence in political institutions. The party's electoral success only took off from 1989 when the emphasis shifted from traditional Flemish nationalism to anti-migrant policies. Migration is truly a 'new issue' for the VB since neither the Grondbeginselen of VB, nor the following programs include immigration. The label xenophobic defines the party since party programs reject the presence of migrants as cultural aliens.[30] Islamophobia is a central piece of VB xenophobic discourse. Anti-migrant policies offer migrants the false dilemma between cultural assimilation and repatriation. It has popularized slogans such as Eigen volk eerst, or Baas in Eigen Land, expressing that all policies—housing, work, education, health care--- should be devised and implemented giving priority to Flemish people. Several 'dark Sundays' in a sequence since the first one in 1991, mark VB increasing political space and the successful electoral trajectory of allegedly the most successful extreme right wing party in Europe. In terms of voting behaviour a wealth of evidence shows its electoral success largely as a result of the strategies the party adopted to mobilize against migrants in Belgium (ISPO 1991, 1995, 1999).

Despite their electoral success—first and second party in Flanders in terms of votes in the last 2004 regional elections and 2006 local elections—they are completed excluded from government. Up to date the *cordon sanitaire* in Belgian politics, an agreement of all parties, prevents the VB from entering government at any level. The city of Antwerp is one of the strongholds of the VB but they could not succeed in their objective getting the mayoral seat in 2006. The cordon sanitaire in Belgian politics has

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[30] The main positions of VB regarding immigration are included in its 70 points-program in 1992. It is largely inspired by Le Pen's program, including measures to immigration and limit the rights of illegal and legal migrants.

trapped VB expansion. Party elites are aware of the dilemma they face since success with a restricted set of issues limits their capacity to cater to broader publics (De Winter, Gomez-Reino and Boelens 2006).

The reform of the Belgian state effectively regionalized party systems with the formation of two quasi-autonomous regional party systems: a Flemish and a francophone one (De Winter, Swyngedouw and Dumont 2006). The Flemish party system has some specific features in the dimensions of competition. In Flanders, both Volksunie and Vlaams Blok represented the etnoregionalist cleavage. According to De Winter et al, a universalist-particularist divide (also present to a lesser extent in Wallonia) opposes the extreme right VB to all other parties—although some mainstream parties are already 'sensitive' to the issues advanced by the VB (de Winter, Swyngedouw and Dumont 2006:944).

The relative novelty of regional elections in Belgium (the first regional elections took place in 1995) has prevented the emergence of clearly differentiated policy spaces (De Winter 2006). Until 2003 federal and regional elections were held on the same date and scholars found little differentiation on party programs and voting behaviour in the Belgian case (De Winter, Swyngedouw and Dumont 2006; Perez Nievas and Bonet 2006). [31] Paradoxically, the asymmetric institutional design and the fragmentation of the Belgian political and party systems produced symmetric multilevel coalitions at the regional and federal levels despite the different weight of party families in each party system. However, from the new and separate timing of regional elections in Belgium (2003) there are changes in the political dynamics inherited from the past and signs of differentiation (De Winter, Swyngedouw and Dumont 2006). In the past VB strategies were not significantly differentiated at different levels. In the 2004 regional elections, the differences between electoral results for federal (2003) elections were pronounced for some parties, the VB received 24.1% of the vote in the regional elections, while it only obtained 18.8% in the federal elections of the previous years, opening up a new scenario (see De Winter, Gomez-Reino and Boelens 2006:52). At the regional level the VB seeks office and struggles to become a governing party. The strategic dilemma for the VB is that in order to do that it needs to unpack its niche—both for votes and

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[31] Part of the argument is that parties do not differentiate because voters are not aware of the division of competencies between levels and formulate programs adaptable to all levels, including here the fact that European campaigns usually run on domestic matters (Ackaert et all 2006; De Winter, Swyngedouw and Dumont 2006).

coalition potential. So far the symmetries of the Belgian political scene outlined above allow isolating the VB at all levels.

The VB party strategies largely ignored competition and coordination at the European level. In sharp contrast to both etnoregionalist and extreme right wing parties, the VB denounces the processes of European economic and political integration yet it largely ignores competing in European elections and advancing issues in the European parliament. Consistently and coherently with their political stand, the VB representatives in the EU parliament belong to the non-attached group.

LN: between niche and mainstream dynamics

The old etnoregionalist parties in Italy were confined to the special regions including the minorities in border regions and the islands. The structural divide between north and south in Italy had nothing to do with regional cultural distinctiveness and was never translated politically (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Gomez-Reino 2002). Territorial restructuring in the Italian state was undertaken in two very different periods and for two types of regions, special and ordinary. The asymmetries of the state structure were designed to grant special status to bordering minorities and the islands and to grant autonomy to 'ordinary' regions created in the 1970s after an agreement of Italian parties. These asymmetries of the institutional design provided the impetus for mobilizing on new grievances. The new etnoregionalist parties that emerged in the northern ordinary regions (Piedmont, Veneto, Lombardy) from the late 1970s also claimed specialty and their recognition as minorities with special status in Italy.

The formation of the Lega Nord goes back to 1989 and the party was officially launched in 1991. An agreement between several etnoregionalist parties in the northern ordinary regions coordinated their political and electoral strategies (Gómez-Reino 2002). Political entrepreneurship under the leadership of the Lombard organization involved the expansion of category space to the full. Instead of territorial autonomy and special status for the ordinary regions, the new party claimed the self-government of the 'north' of Italy. The symbolic construction of the territory and the territorial political identity went through different phases until the creation of the so-called Padania. Within a decade etnoregionalist shifted from marginal organizations into a spectacular success. In the early 1990s Lega Nord spectacularly grew among the crisis that ended with the Italian party system in the early 1990s.

LN's claims of self-government significantly changed in the 1990s and passed from autonomy to federalism, to secession to independence and back to federalism. Lega Nord has compromised with the request of federalism yet it retains the name Lega Nord *per l'indipendenza della Padania*. Academic writing has emphasized the cultural emptiness of party claims and analyzed instead LN's similarities with other right-wing populist parties on anti-migrant policies. However, the question of which dimension of competition was more relevant to explain the expansion of Lega Nord is not straight forward. On the one hand, some studies emphasize the new issues politicized in Lega Nord party agenda as radical right wing, most remarkably, anti-migrant issues (Biorcio 1996). On the other hand, the territorial dimension of competition was also vindicated (Diamanti 1994, 1996).

Lega Nord's shifting emphasis on issues reveals a complex scenario to articulate party strategies. The initial success was shaped by the crisis of traditional cleavages in the Italian party system. Sequential reforms of the Italian electoral systems—state and regional--have introduced a complex system with mix effects and signals for party strategies (Bartolini et al. 2004). LN party strategies had evaluated over time their incidence for party politics to become part of the right-wing coalition, both to compete in elections and to form government at the state level. The early electoral success of the Lega Nord was accompanied by the collapse of the traditional Italian party system. LN sought with the further expansion of categorical space and claims of self-government along federal lines to articulate a new political space in Italian politics. The demise of governmental parties between 1992 and 1994 led to an opening up of the political space in which LN was located into a difficult position. Party strategies had originally expanded political space by accommodating territorial issues. Lega Nord became an 'old' party in the new Italian party system polarized along the left-right wing continuum. Moreover, its issue ownership of territorial autonomy was challenged by the responses of mainstream parties (both right and left) to claims of self-government. Since the 1990s Italian political parties and governments have incorporated 'federalism' in their programs and objectives (Ieraci 2006). Party strategies attempted to renew the salience of territorial issues. The LN had strong incentives for exit and blackmailing-- this is why demanded independence from the Italian state, and abruptly left the first Berlusconi government in 1994.

The strategic importance of the state level for Lega Nord's is rather exceptional in comparative perspective. Electoral and governing right-wing coalitions at the state

level incorporate discontinuously Lega Nord from 1994 onwards. Earlier dilemmas today are resolved in favour of becoming part of the right-wing electoral alliances and coalition in government since 2008. Moreover, Lega Nord seemed to secure a political space for its specialized agenda on territorial autonomy. Paradoxically, at the regional level party strategies were and are always subordinated to political dynamics at the state level and right-wing electoral and governing coalitions. The lack of congruence between party claims (federalism and independence of the Padania) with the regional institutional design and electoral rules has largely de-activated the potential for distinctive strategies for party politics at the regional level.

In contrast to the lack of differentiation of party strategies at the regional and state levels, Lega Nord's politics at the European level have played a significant and autonomous role in different periods. In 1989 European elections were the arena to coordinate the different etnoregionalist parties into a single platform, later called Lega Nord. Moreover Lega Nord inserted itself as part of the etnoregionalist group and their defined its claims and demands in the European parliament. The experience was short-lived—abruptly terminated with the formation of the first Berlusconi government in 1994--yet it showed a very different location for party niche politics. The location of Lega Nord representatives in different groups in the European parliament (from etnoregionalist, to different traditional groups as well as new formations) over time shows the ambiguities of the shifting 'niche' it aimed to occupy in the European parliament. Although clearly Euroskeptical, Lega Nord has attempted to do a lot more about, and in European politics than the Flemish VB (Gomez-Reino and Llamazares 2006).

Concluding remarks

The history of the etnoregionalist party family in European politics reveals the heterogeneity of party ideologies and the policy dimensions in which they compete. The historical restriction of policy space of etnoregionalist parties is questioned as party strategies widened the range of issues and demands. There are two contrasting views on the ideologies of etnoregionalist parties, one conceiving them as creative actors advancing new political ideas, the other considering the parties as followers of larger ideological trends (Newman 1997:56). Yet the expansion of political space for etnoregionalism offers a mix picture. While it relies heavily on anchoring party politics

in territorial claims, it nevertheless shows that specific bundles or packages of issues are increasingly relevant to explain political successes. The comparative advantage of etnoregionalist parties seem to lie in the differentiation of their product, which allows them to compete with other traditional and new political parties.

Territorial restructuring in Europe shapes a new scenario for territorial mobilization and party competition. Some scholars argue that the impact of these two processes of territorial restructuring--decentralization and Europeanization—have linear effects on etnoregionalist political mobilization. The literature on new regionalisms posits they are accommodating demands at three levels. First, they create an inclusive and integrative identity politics. As the author states: 'the new regionalist paradigm embraces functional change, institution-building and new ways of conceptualising territorial politics (Keating 1998, 2007). Keating argues that Europe is open to nationalist and regionalist movements that have emphasized inclusive nationalism (Keating 2007:25) and a general process of adaptation to Europe. Only the extreme right would illustrate a type of residual ethnic and racist nationalism in Europe. Second, it eliminates maximalist demands of self-government (secession and independence) since Europe allows the possibility of advancing territorial autonomy without the claim of a separate state. Third, it integrates regional interests within the institutional framework. The new regionalism assumes that territorial restructuring couples the functional and the cultural dimensions. Thus, we are likely to expect convergence and accommodation in the politics of etnoregionalists.

However, arguably territorial restructuring is renewing the sources of divergence of etnoregionalist parties in Europe. First, empirically demands of self-government have not significantly changed despite cases as the Lega Nord, despite the processes of decentralization and Europeanization. Moreover, independentist parties are not all necessarily 'extreme', as the SNP case shows. There are arguments to explain why independence is still an attractive alternative since parties can evaluate the cost of independence in Europe as attainable. Second, it seems that the emerging map of identity politics shows styles of mobilization of inclusive and exclusive identities, but also mixed styles or types. Adaptation to Europe, which has largely taken place, is also a difficult process for many etnoregionalist parties (Taggart and Szerbiack 2008). Rejection has to do with not only with the insertion of claims of government, but also with the ideologies embedded in the deepening of European economic and political integration. Third, a new institutional political framework is in place but it does not

necessarily imply that territorial conflict of interests disappears. A functional transformation is taking place, yet it does not necessarily involve a linear process of cultural change or a particular style of consensual politics. Territorial restructuring simply introduces a framework to understand changes in the claims and demands of etnoregionalist parties.

Etnoregionalist parties can strategize not only about dimensions of competition, but also about levels of competition. While territorial restructuring and multilevel politics does not always lead to the strengthening of the regional arena in party strategies, it nevertheless helps to explain party strategies at different levels. It seems that etnoregionalist parties can behave as mainstream parties at the regional level of representation while retaining restrictions and niches at other levels. Contemporary research emphasizes the need to focus on the nature of party competition in the region and the number of etnoregionalist parties to explain either the moderation or radicalization of demands of territorial autonomy, the niche or mainstream character of etnoregionalist politics and successes or failures (Perez Nievas and Bonet 2006; Van Houten 2007; Lago and Montero 2007). Examining both competition and coordination at different levels offers a route towards explaining restrictions and expansions in the political space in the politics of etnoregionalist parties.

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