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# **Governance Preferences of Subnational Administrative Elites in the European Union**

## **An Empirical Analysis**

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**ABSTRACT** The paper explores the preferences of subnational administrative elites on crucial issues of European and subnational governance. Individual preferences of top subnational officials from five European countries are collected, patterns identified and interpreted. In general subnational administrative elites are EU-friendly and supportive in regard to the process of European integration. With respect to issues of subnational governance our respondents want the institutional nexus of regions with the EU to be modestly strengthened. However, the subnational interest in closer cooperation with the EU in specific policy areas remains surprisingly weak.

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## 1. Introduction

Regions and subnational authorities come regularly into focus when political scientists attempt to pin down changes in European political systems.<sup>2</sup> Scholars identified a long-standing trend of regionalization and decentralization contributing to current processes of western European state transformation (Keating 1998, 2008). It has also been empirically shown that, in particular in the European Union, political authority has constantly moved downward to subnational levels over the last five decades (Marks/Hooghe/Schakel 2008). In addition, the vanishing ability of the national governments to comprehensively control subnational authorities' involvement in European policy making has also be taken as evidence to support claims about the emergence of a multilevel governance system (Hooghe/Marks 2001). Such research endeavors constitute the background for a lively academic debate about the reality and the relevance of changing patterns of subnational governance in the European Union (Marks 1992; Hooghe 1995; Bauer/Börzel 2010).<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the proclaimed significance of subnational actors and subnational politics goes far beyond purely academic interest. Several studies have pointed out that subnational authorities play a crucial role in the implementation of EU legislation (Maher 1996; Mols/Haslam 2008; Borghetto/Franchino 2009). According to estimates 70 to 80 percent of EU decisions or programs have to be implemented by subnational authorities (Christiansen/Lintner 2005). Despite their apparent theoretical significance and practical relevance we do however know little about regional elites, who they actually are and how they perceive the role of their political authorities in the emerging European multilevel system.

With the intention to help closing this gap, this article focuses regional administrative elites, i.e. top officials in the subnational public service. These individuals are the vital link between subnational politics and administration. On the basis of the permanency of the position they occupy and their technical and administrative expertise subnational top officials can be conceived of as a crucial group that influences today's political practice as well as future political choices of the subnational authorities for which they work.

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<sup>2</sup> We use the termini region and subnational authority interchangeably and conceive it as political units directly located below the national level with an elected assembly.

<sup>3</sup> Above all the differential quality of interactions between supranational and subnational actors (in which some see the harbinger of the nation state's decline, others merely secondary effects in an intergovernmental play) has elicited most interest. For more details on the controversy about the role of the third level in EU policy-making in the scholarly debate see Marks 1992, 1993; Hooghe 1995; Marks/Nielsen/Ray/Salk 1996; Kohler-Koch 1998; Jeffery 2000; Pollack 1995; Bache 1999.

This article thus puts the subnational administrative elites from distinct EU member states and regions and their images of European governance centre stage. First, it aims at investigating subnational top bureaucrats' preferences on crucial questions of governance in the EU multi-level system. In this context we focus on issues of European governance, i.e. the institutional architecture of the EU and the preferred market model for the EU; and we study subnational top-officials' preferences with regard to quality and modes of subnational-supranational political exchange. Second, we explore how far "contended issues" of European or subnational governance are connected with distinct institutional backgrounds of subnational top managers.

The article is based on data from a comparative survey among subnational administrative elites in five European countries. It proceeds as follows. Section 2 develops the framework of analysis by putting the research question in its theoretical context and providing an overview over the data set. Sections 3 to 6 include the empirical analysis. Section 3 contains socio-demographic information about the individuals in our sample; section 4 presents results about subnational opinions in view of EU membership. At the heart of our empirical analysis stand sections 5 and 6, where the subnational preferences about the political order of the EU and about their respective political authorities' role therein are respectively analyzed. The article ends with a conclusion and outlook.

## **2. Framework of Analysis**

The dispositions, beliefs and values of administrative elites constitute a classical research field of political science and comparative public administration research (Aberbach/Putnam/Rockman 1981; Derlien/Mayntz 1988; Page/Wright 1999; Derlien 2003; Aberbach/Rockman 2006; Goetz 2006; Schwanke/Ebinger 2006). Administrative elites prepare, design and implement policies and political decisions. Administrative elite preferences are thus seen as important estimates for future political choices (Le Pape/Smith 1999; Jeffery 2000; Roller/Sloat 2002; Mols/Haslam 2008). One notes also that the current debate about the transformation of government into governance—especially under the auspices of European integration—stresses technocratic expertise as a crucial resource of effective policy-making, which can be taken as additional encouragement to revisit the attitudes of administrative elites.

The relevance of subnational administrative elites' preferences depends upon how one conceives the role of preferences in policy-making. Obviously "deterministic" arguments cannot be made about how a certain attitude of an individual will lead to a precise political choice of the institution this individual works for, or for an exact political outcome. The causal chain is usually too long and it is difficult to control for all the other potentially influential variables. Nevertheless institutionalists argue that "members of an institution observe and are the guardians of its constitutive principles and standards" and that their behavior is based on a "logic of appropriateness and a sense of obligations and rights derived from an identity, role, or membership in a political community and the ethos and practices of its institutions" (Olsen 2009: 9). Thus, there is a link (especially between the top layers) of members of a bureaucracy and the political authority to which use the bureaucracy has been created. The individual has certainly liberty in his actions, but he is also coined by and thus embodies the way his or her organization interprets the outside reality (Egeberg 2004).

The interest of this article is first and foremost empirical. However, our work stands in a long tradition of research on elite attitudes and thus, once one agrees that subnational top officials occupying roles at the hub where subnational politics and expertise meet, it is of some relevance to find out what the political preferences and opinions of such an influential group are (Le Pape/Smith 1999; Börzel 2005; Kooiman 2003). Subnational top officials have crucial practical powers either up (preparing decision taking, provision of ideas) or down the line (implementation, supervision). With view to their key role in virtually all stages of the subnational policy process systematic knowledge about subnational top officials' preferences in regard to crucial issues of European and subnational governance can constitute in our view important elements of explanations for particular policy outcomes and also be used for estimating future political choices at the subnational political level. Knowledge about subnational top officials' political preferences can thus serve as an indicator with respect to how these individuals routinely act; and constitute thus potential predictors how they are going to make use of their discretion. That makes political preferences of subnational elites in our view a valuable object of empirical analysis.

The selection of our interviewees—high ranking officials in subnational administrations—has been carried out in three stages. Our aim was to ensure that interviewees from states with different institutional structures at the subnational level, i.e. from decentralized as well as from federal states are represented in the sample. Furthermore, we wanted to take advantage

of being able to interview subnational elites in countries with varying time of experience with the reality of European integration. We thus decided to interview members of the subnational administrative elites in Germany, Spain, France, Poland and Hungary.

Second, the selection of subnational units was guided by the consideration to include interviewees with distinct regional backgrounds. In order to increase the variance of regional backgrounds of our interviewees, three factors have been of major importance: the socio-economical status of their respective regions, its cultural as well as its party-political distinctiveness in regard to the centre (the nation state). Hence, we ensured that socio-economically poor and rich regions, regions with or without a special cultural or national self-understanding and regions where the governing parties were the same or different to the party-political constellation that governed the centre are represented in the sample (Marks/Nielsen/Ray/Salk 1996; Keating 2008).

Third, the individual interviewees were selected due to their position in the subnational administration. In order to be included in our sample individuals had to hold management positions—usually as a head of unit. Moreover, our heads of unit should have policy responsibilities—as opposed to only having horizontal administrative or juridical responsibilities (cf. Bauer 2008a). That means only policy-making administrators are included in the sample. Due to the varying size and diverging responsibilities of regions represented in our sample the numbers of interviewees per region differs between 1 and 13. Altogether our sample includes 347 individuals in 60 regions (see table 1). We developed a standardized questionnaire which comprised roughly 100 questions. The data were collected by telephone interviews conducted by native speakers in the second half of 2007.

**Table 1: Sample Structure**

| Country        | Regions included in sample       | Interviews per region | Interviews per country | Response Rate |
|----------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|---------------|
| Germany        | 13 Länder (of 16)                | 4-9                   | 78                     | 47%           |
| Poland         | 12 Voivodships (of 16)           | 2-9                   | 70                     | 45%           |
| Hungary        | 19 Megyek (of 19)                | 2-7                   | 84                     | 41%           |
| France         | 10 Régions (of 26)               | 1-13                  | 66                     | 45%           |
| Spain          | 6 Autonomous Communities (of 17) | 5-11                  | 49                     | 53%           |
| <i>n = 347</i> |                                  |                       |                        |               |

In the following we present the preferences of subnational top civil servants on crucial aspects of European and subnational governance. We start with a socio-demographic overview of the

individuals at the center of this inquiry and their general attitudes towards national and regional membership in the European Union. The primary interest of this article is to figure out how subnational top bureaucrats with distinct institutional backgrounds conceive crucial issues of European and subnational governance.<sup>4</sup>

### **3. Subnational Top Civil Servants: Socio-demographic Patterns**

Who are the people who prepare, design and implement governmental decisions within the subnational administration? Where do they come from, what are their reasons for joining the subnational civil service and what is their professional background?<sup>5</sup>

The subnational administrative elite in the countries under consideration is predominantly male and middle-aged: Nearly 40 percent of the interviewees are between 46 and 55 years old. About 30 percent are over 55 years old. As in many other top positions in the public and private sector the share of women is significantly lower than the share of men. Only about one third of the persons represented in the sample are women.

Apart from two exceptions all interviewees have a university degree. Their disciplinary background is, however, quite heterogeneous. Within the German Länder administrations we observed a predominance people trained in law and public administration; though the fraction of lawyers and public administration specialist in the German Länder administrations is somewhat lower than in the federal administration (Schwanke/Ebinger 2006; Luhmann/Mayntz 1973). Also within the Spanish and French subnational administrative elite we find a relative predominance of people trained in law or public policy. However, people with other educational backgrounds, e.g. economics, natural sciences or social sciences and humanities are nearly equally represented. Among the Polish and Hungarian subnational top bureaucrats economists constitute even the biggest group.

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<sup>4</sup> Our data reveal that in regard to the questions addressed in this article national preference trends are clearly and robustly identifiable. This encourages us to focus on the presentation and comparison of the results of the national subsamples.

<sup>5</sup> For more detailed information on the socio-demographic background of the subnational administrative elites represented in this sample, see Pitschel 2010.

**Table 2: Educational background**

|                | <b>Law and public administration</b> | <b>Economics</b> | <b>Natural science</b> | <b>Social sciences and humanities</b> | <b>Engineering and technics</b> | <b>Agronomy</b> | <b>Other</b> |
|----------------|--------------------------------------|------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| <b>Germany</b> | 37.7                                 | 14.3             | 15.6                   | 18.2                                  | 13.0                            | 1.3             | -            |
| <b>Poland</b>  | 17.4                                 | 30.4             | 27.5                   | 7.3                                   | 13.0                            | 1.5             | 2.9          |
| <b>Hungary</b> | 29.5                                 | 41.0             | 1.3                    | 12.8                                  | 9.0                             | -               | 6.4          |
| <b>France</b>  | 26.6                                 | 18.8             | 18.8                   | 18.8                                  | 10.9                            | 4.7             | 1.6          |
| <b>Spain</b>   | 24.5                                 | 16.3             | 16.3                   | 22.5                                  | 10.2                            | 10.2            | -            |
| <b>Total</b>   | 24.9                                 | 27.6             | 15.4                   | 15.4                                  | 11.3                            | 3.0             | 2.4          |

Source: own data.

On average our interviewees have served in subnational administration over twelve years. This figure indicates that top officials have to collect intra-organizational experience before they are granted with managerial positions. This is especially true in Germany. Around 95 percent of the German interviewees have served at least six years within the Länder administration. Our data indicate that within regional public administrations in Germany the seniority is still very important. In other countries, the number of respondents who have entered the subnational public administration no more than six years ago is significantly higher, i.e. seniority appears there somewhat less of an issue.

**Table 3: Working experience within the regional administration**

|   | <b>Germany</b> | <b>Poland</b> | <b>Hungary</b> | <b>France</b> | <b>Spain</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|---|----------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|
| <b>Up to 5 years</b>  | 5.1            | 37.6          | 27.4           | 50.8          | 30.6         | 29.3         |
| <b>6-15 years</b>   | 42.3           | 56.6          | 41.6           | 36.9          | 32.7         | 35.4         |
| <b>More than 15 years</b>   | 52.6           | 5.8           | 31.0           | 12.3          | 35.7         | 35.3         |
| <b>Average time being on current position (years)</b>                         | 5.8            | 2.8           | 6.0            | 2.6           | 3.8          | 4.4          |
| <b>Percentage of respondents being less than one year on current position</b> | 7.8            | 45.7          | 22.6           | 4.8           | 10.2         | 19.0         |

As regards “time at the job” the trends are similar. German respondents took over their current position on average 5,8 years ago. The proportion of administrators which are less than one year on their current position is highest in Poland and Hungary. Usually, public administration analysts interpret personnel stability (over time) and professional homogeneity as factors fostering the potential for administrative independence in view to political leadership (Mayntz 1978).

The career paths of our top managers testify to a high mobility and flexibility within the subnational administrative elite. Our data reveal that 85 percent of all interviewees have gathered working experience outside the subnational administration. Furthermore, about 13 percent of our respondents have not started their career in the public administration but in the private sector. Comparing the work experience of subnational administrators in the five countries the Spanish interviewees demonstrate the highest fraction of individuals with experience in the private sector closely followed by the French.<sup>6</sup> Around 14 percent of the German and eleven percent of the Polish regional civil servants have gained experience outside the public administration. In Hungary, however, the segregation between public and private sector appears still most pronounced.

**Table 4: Working experience outside the subnational administration and outside public sector (in percent)**

|  | Germany | Poland | Hungary | France | Spain | Total |
|--|---------|--------|---------|--------|-------|-------|
| <b>Experience outside the subnational administration</b> | 72.7    | 97.0   | 88.9    | 96.8   | 64.6  | 84.8  |
| <b>Experience outside the public sector</b>              | 14.3    | 10.6   | 2.6     | 21.3   | 22.6  | 12.7  |

Finally, we asked about the motivation of subnational officials to join the regional civil service. Based on a typology developed by Luhmann und Mayntz (1973: 53ff.) we classify sources of motivation into three categories, namely intrinsic, moral-political and extrinsic.<sup>7</sup> Within our sample extrinsic motivation appears indeed dominant. Only among German administrators moral-political reasons to join the service appear to be prominent. In addition, German and French subnational civil servants also score high with respect to levels of intrinsic motivation. If one differentiates between various extrinsic motivations, good salary and career perspective score on average lower than job security. Moreover, our data suggests that none of our interviewees joined the subnational civil service because of excellent prospects for remuneration. In Spain and the Eastern European countries officials tend to indicate extrinsic reasons as source of their motivation to join the subnational service. By contrast, in Germany and France intrinsic reasons score high; and in Germany and (to a lesser

<sup>6</sup> Within the French system it is easy for bureaucrats to switch between the private and public sector. This system is labelled as “pantouflage” (Rouban 1999).

<sup>7</sup> Intrinsic motivation concerns aspects of the actual work content. In contrast, if someone is motivated by the desire to contribute to the common good of the society, he follows a moral-political motivation. Furthermore, extrinsic motivation has its sources in issues that are not related to the work content but concerns any “outside incentives” (e.g. salary).

extend) in Spain, i.e. in the federal or quasi-federal state systems, we find strong commitment towards developing the own region what we interpret as a moral-political motivation.

**Table 5: Motives to join the subnational Administration**

| Motive  | Germany | Poland | Hungary | France | Spain | Total |
|---|---------|--------|---------|--------|-------|-------|
| <i>Intrinsic motivation</i>                   |         |        |         |        |       |       |
| Interesting working area                      | 23.1    | 8.6    | 13.3    | 20.0   | 10.4  | 15.4  |
| <i>Moral-political motivation</i>             |         |        |         |        |       |       |
| Contribution to the development of the region | 32.1    | 5.7    | 0       | 1.5    | 18.8  | 11.3  |
| <i>Extrinsic motivation</i>                   |         |        |         |        |       |       |
| Secure job                                    | 2.6     | 1.4    | 4.8     | 0      | 41.7  | 7.9   |
| Good salary                                   | 0       | 0      | 0       | 0      | 0     | -     |
| Good career prospects                         | 6.4     | 11.4   | 18.1    | 15.4   | 4.2   | 11.6  |
| I was offered this job                        | 5.1     | 7.1    | 38.6    | 15.4   | 8.3   | 16.0  |

*Note:* Multiple answers were possible. Reported are the percentages of interviewees naming the respective motivation source.

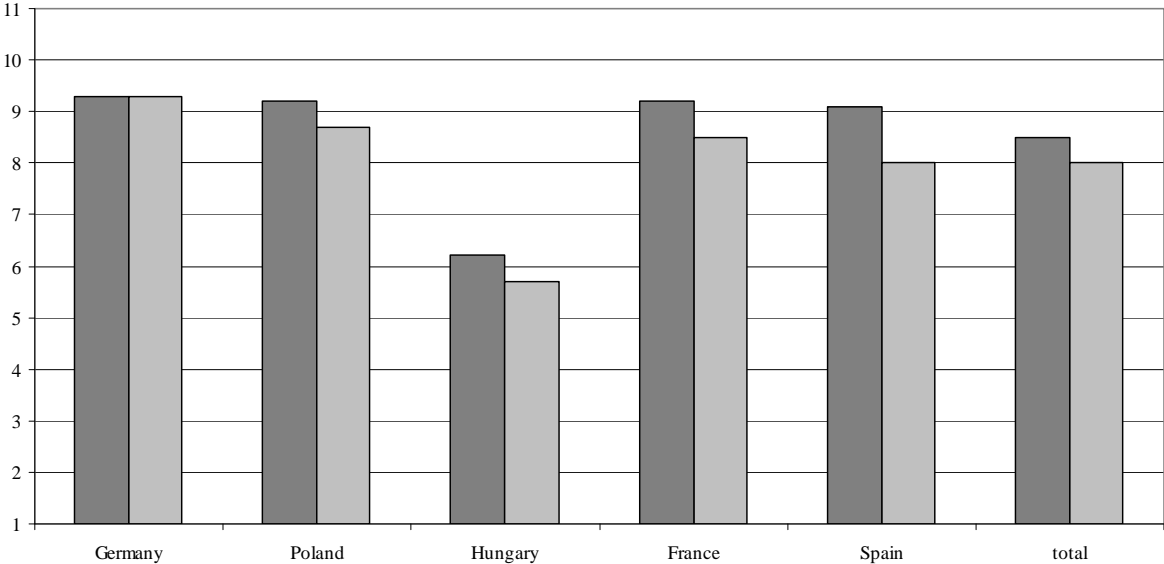
The view to the education and work experience of subnational officials and their motivation for joining the subnational civil service reveal quite differential patterns, distinguishing subnational civil servants from one country to another. Focussing the similarities of our sample, the typical subnational top manager is trained in law, though economists and other social scientists are on the rise; he (as there are relatively few women) is in his 50s, has some level of seniority and thus intimate knowledge of the institution he is working for; he knows the public service as such better than the private sector. He is motivated by intrinsic, moral-political as well as extrinsic reasons varying by country of origin. Especially in quasi-federal and federal countries moral-political motivation is strong.

#### **4. Subnational Assessment of EU Membership**

How do the subnational elites assess the benefit of EU membership? How do they assess the strength of the EU's impact in their own particular policy field? Generally speaking, EU

impact in the policy field is perceived to be strong. 40 percent of our interviewees see medium, and 57 percent even see very strong EU impact in their policy fields. This suggests that the subnational elites are well aware of the EU’s importance and the consequences of European decisions upon subnational affairs. Apart from being conceived as strong, the impact of the EU is also in general positively assessed. The following tables show the results of the questions whether “your nation state” and “your region” has benefited from EU membership, the higher the score the more positive the assessments.<sup>8</sup> The results presented in table 1 indicate that on balance national and regional membership are assessed quite positively by nearly all subnational top bureaucrats regardless of their national background. But there are differences. First, the benefits for their own region are generally seen *less* positive than for the nation state. Second, the Hungarian subnational elite appear more skeptical than subnational elites elsewhere. Third, only in Germany the assessment of national and regional benefit is evenly positive. By implication, 4/5 of the subnational elite in our survey sees more national than regional advantages in EU membership; thus subnational officials probably would agree that there is room for improvement in respect to what the EU has to offer to subnational actors.

**Table 6: Assessment of the benefit from EU membership for the nation state and the region**



*Note:* Dark gray corresponds to the nation state’s benefit; light gray reflects the subnational authority’s benefit.

<sup>8</sup> Obviously, the low values on Hungary show that Hungarian respondents evaluate the benefit less positive than the majority in all other countries. Nevertheless, the Hungarian mean value lies in the medium range of the scale.

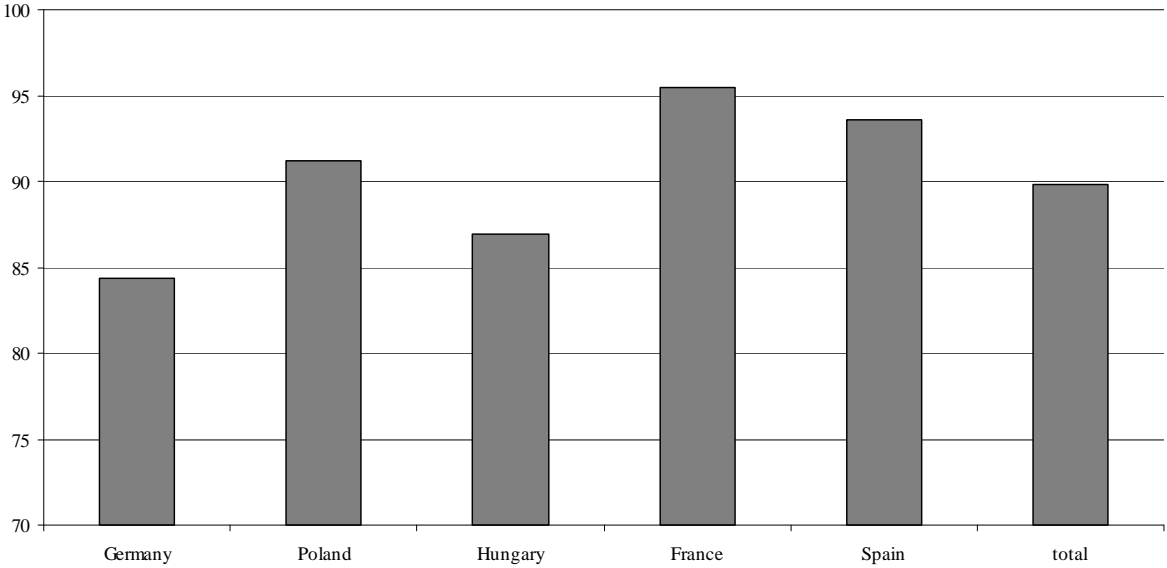
## **5. Subnational Top Bureaucrats' Preferences on European Governance**

The preferences of subnational administrative elites in regard to European governance are conceived along two dimensions that are thought to capture the specific features of policy making in the EU multi-level system. In a first step we refer to the general institutional architecture of the European Union and the cleavage between supranationalism and intergovernmentalism as principles to design the European polity. In this context we asked where political authority in the EU should be primarily located and whether the member states or the supranational institutions shall occupy the driver's seat. Second, we focus on subnational elite preferences in regard to the economic principles that should constitute the basis for the EU and whether our interviewees display a predilection for market liberalism or state interventionism (see Hooghe 2001). What is the preferred model for how the European Union should organize the economy?

### ***Institutional Architecture of the EU***

With respect to the allocation of authority in the European policy a simple question is: what is the preferred decision-making principle in the Council of Ministers, i.e. whether the interviewees are in favor of majority voting or unanimity. The overwhelming majority (90 percent) of interviewees state that they prefer the majority principle instead of unanimity (see table 7). Only ten percent of all interviewees are in favor of unanimity as the general decision-making rule. These data indicate that the vast majority of the subnational civil servants favor a supranational over an intergovernmental architecture of the EU.

**Table 7: Decision-making rule in the Council of Ministers**



*Note:* Reported are the percentages of respondents by country favoring majority voting as decision-making rule in the Council of Ministers.

In general our interviewees appear to be in favor of strong supranational institutions. With a battery of questions we tap into the supranationalist-intergovernmentalist divide; for example, we asked questions like “should the Commission become the government of Europe”, “should the European Parliament have equal rights to the Council”, “should the European Court of Justice settle disputes between member states”. The subnational administrative elites are either neutral or even embrace supranationalism as the ordering principle of EU governance. Especially the Spanish interviewees favor a strong Commission. It fits that subnational administrators do not support that the Commission should strictly follow the instructions of the member states which would turn the Commission into a kind of an intergovernmental body. Only the Polish subsample indicates some reservation about very strong supranational institutions. This political attitude is reflected likewise in the lower mean value in regard to the statement that the European Parliament should have the same rights as the Council of Ministers during the legislative process. Nevertheless, by and large our subnational elites are quite strong supporters of a supranational European Union.

**Table 8: Supranationalism versus intergovernmentalism**

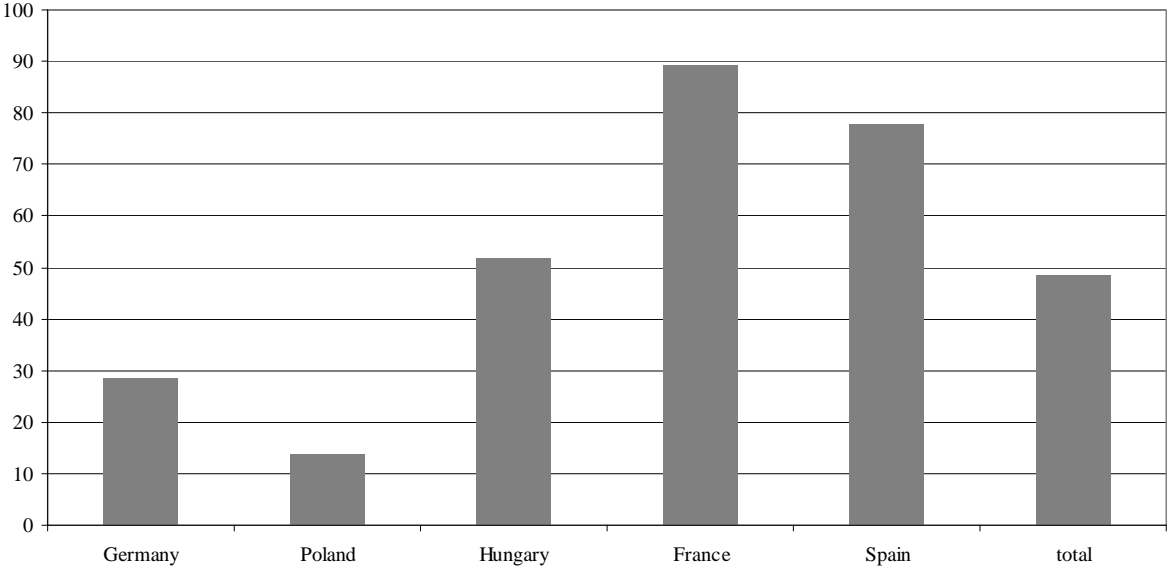
|  | Germany | Poland | Hungary | France | Spain | total |
|--|---------|--------|---------|--------|-------|-------|
| European Commission as government  | 7.0     | 6.3    | 7.9     | 6.5    | 8.3   | 7.2   |
| Mandatory instructions for the European Commission                               | 4.7     | 6.9    | 4.0     | 4.8    | 4.9   | 5.0   |
| European Parliament having equal rights as the Council                           | 8.5     | 6.5    | 7.0     | 7.3    | 8.9   | 7.6   |
| Final judgement by the ECJ concerning struggles between member states and the EU | 7.7     | 8.9    | 9.5     | 8.0    | 9.1   | 8.6   |

*Note:* Reported are the means by country. The scale of the possible answers ranges from 1 (strong disagreement) to 11 (strong agreement).

### ***Role of the EU in Economic Issues***

Concerning the second crucial aspect of European governance—i.e. the role of the EU in economic and social issues—we first addressed the interviewees’ “philosophical stance on economic issues”. We followed the common distinction between a market liberal versus a regulated capitalism stance (see table 9). A market liberal view means that the state should hardly intervene in the economy and it should be the responsibility of the citizens to take care for their social security. In contrast, regulated capitalism is characterised by a strong role of the state in the economy, i.e. cross subsidizing public sector activities and guaranteeing comprehensive social security schemes. Our data reveal that our sample is split in two nearly equal parts. 48 percent of the respondents favor regulated capitalism as the state model for the EU, whereas the other half prefers a market liberal model. But there are remarkable differences if one compares the national means: Subnational elites in France and Spain are the enthusiastic supporters of state regulated capitalism as guiding model for the EU, while the majority of German and Polish interviewees favor a market liberal orientation of the EU.

**Table 9: State regulated capitalism**



*Note:* Reported are the percentages of respondents by country favoring state regulated capitalism as model for the EU.

One would now expect the market liberals in our sample to be critical of an active EU role with respect to intervening in the European economy. However, ensuring similar living conditions in European regions as a task for EU finds broad agreement among *all* interviewees. French and Spanish respondents, who prefer state regulated capitalism as model for the EU, are naturally also in favor of a high intervening capacity on the supranational level. However, there is a certain discrepancy in Polish civil servants' answers. Although they subscribe to a market-liberal ideal for the European Union, they at the same time support intervention measures to lift regional development.

**Table 10: Intervening capacity of the EU**

|                                | Germany | Poland | Hungary | France | Spain | total |
|--------------------------------|---------|--------|---------|--------|-------|-------|
| Intervening capacity of the EU | 6.9     | 9.6    | 8.6     | 8.5    | 8.7   | 8.4   |

*Note:* Reported are the means by country. The scale of the possible answers ranges from 1 (EU should not possess any intervening capacities in market and societal affairs) to 11 (EU should possess strong intervening capacity in market and societal affairs).

In sum, the subnational top bureaucrats in our sample lean clearly toward supranationalism. A clear majority of interviewees is in favor of majority voting in the Council of Ministers and expresses a rather positive opinion about the strengthening of supranational institutions. Data on the preferred role of the EU with respect to managing the economy, however, disclosed

certain differences. First, our sample is nearly equally split between supporters of regulated capitalism and supporters of market liberal capitalism. Second, the preference for the market model varies along national lines. Whereas the French and Spanish respondents clearly favor regulated capitalism, top-bureaucrats in Poland and Germany rather support the market liberal model. Third, these cross-country differences disappear when more concrete measures come into focus; at least that is our interpretation of the fact that Polish free marketers turn into pragmatics if EU intervention may bring additional resources to boost regional development.

## **6. Subnational-Supranational Governance ... Seen from Below**

The second part of the survey deals with subnational elites' preferences on key issues of subnational-supranational political exchange. In this context we tap the following questions: Do subnational officials believe that their governments can have an impact in influencing EU decisions? How would they like to organize crucial elements of what can be understood as the subnational-supranational institutional nexus? And, most importantly, in which areas of public policy-making do they see a benefit in cooperation with the supranational level? Prospects to influence EU decisions, assessment of the emerging basis for institutionalized political exchange between the subnational and the supranational arena and perspectives for cooperation with the European level across a broad range of policy fields are in our conceptualization the three most important dimensions of subnational-supranational governance.

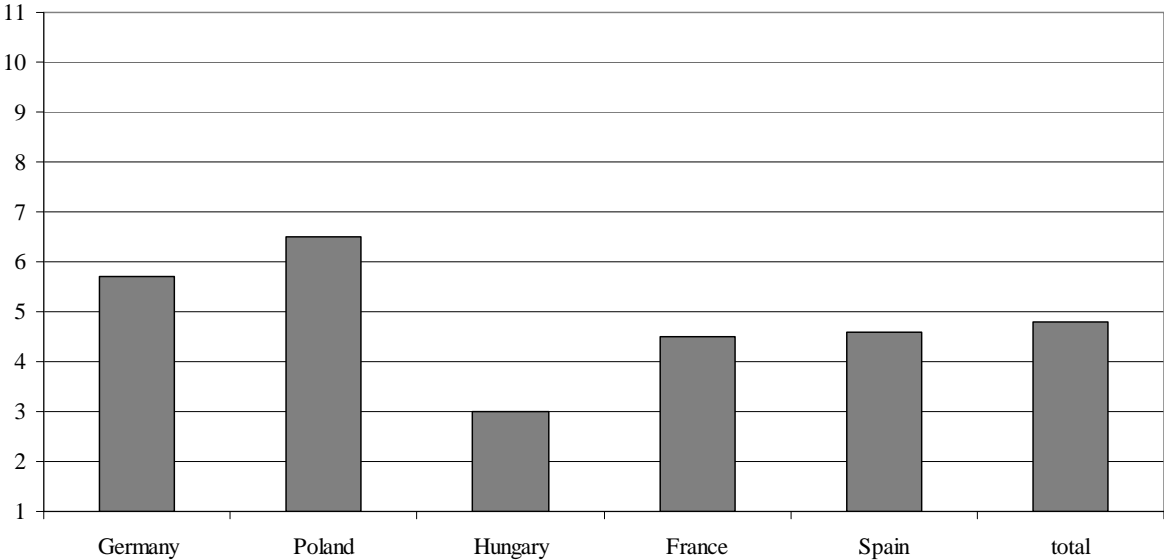
### ***Prospects to Influence EU Decisions***

A crucial question for the organization of subnational-supranational relations is whether one believes that subnational political engagement has an impact on supranational decision making. For this purpose, we asked how subnational top officials assess the overall success of their region in influencing decisions at the EU level. In a nutshell, our respondents are not exaggeratedly enthusiastic in the assessment of their ability to influence supranational decision making. The mean of all respondents lies in the medium range of the scale indicating a neutral position of top bureaucrats. The Hungarian interviewees respond somewhat more negative than the others. In general Hungarians respondents perceive only a low capacity to influence decisions on the European level. This seems to be in line with the above findings that Hungarian respondents assess the national and regional benefit from EU membership

more cautiously than the others. By contrast, the majority of French and Spanish interviewees tend to estimate their region’s ability to exert influence on EU decisions low, even though they see the EU membership as such quite beneficiary for their country and their region.

The subnational elites of Germany and especially Poland are most sanguine assessing their influence at European level. But even they remain in a relatively modest “medium range” in the assessment of their potential. All in all, the reassurance of the Polish subnational elite is as surprising as is the relative modesty of Spanish and first and foremost German regional top officials—given that the latter are able to operate in a supposedly favorable constitutional context of a federal or semi-federal system. One can speculate whether the relative positive Polish expectation to be able to influence is owed to lack of experience as “EU newcomers”, and the German modesty a function of disappointed hopes throughout many years of practicing the subnational-supranational nexus. At any rate, the point is that we see everywhere a solid, positive expectation in view of subnational ability to influence EU decision making. This expectation might be more modest in some countries than in others; but everywhere subnational elites appear to belief in the fundamental importance of subnational-supranational political interaction.

**Table 11: Assessment of regional success in influencing decisions on the EU level**



*Note:* Reported are the means by country. The scale of the possible answers ranges from 1 (not at all successful) to 11 (absolutely successful).

***Institutional Intensification of Subnational-Supranational Interaction***

Having established that subnational elites see some room for improvement in influencing EU decisions, the question becomes how they assess elements of institutional set-up of this subnational-supranational exchange. In consequence, we examined our interviewees' attitudes concerning crucial elements of the institutional nexus between subnational authorities and the European Union: the participation of regional parliaments in the early warning system, the possibility to delegate regional ministers as national representatives into the Council of Ministers, the option to bring before the European Court of Justice suspected cases of breaches of the subsidiarity principle and the usefulness of the Committee of the Regions as the formal representation of subnational interests in the political system of the European Union. These elements (and whether and how to change them) have been part of the discussion about the strengthening of the regional dimension of the European Union in recent years (Bauer 2006).

Being asked whether they support the inclusion of subnational parliaments in the "early warning system", i.e. ability to signal to the European Commission that there is suspicion that a proposal of her violates the subsidiarity principle, subnational top officials display strong sympathy. Only German bureaucrats appear less supportive than bureaucrats elsewhere—not surprising if one considers that the German federalism has a strong bias in favor of the executive multilevel cooperation (which structurally passes over the regional parliaments).

Already the Maastricht treaty established the possibility that regional ministers can take part in the Council of Ministers as the representatives of the respective member state (Hooghe 1995). Use of this is made in cases when the Council of Ministers negotiates policies the regions are responsible for.<sup>9</sup> How do subnational elites assess this institutional linkage with the European arena? Surprisingly we receive somewhat lower mean values of support for this device than for the option to file subsidiarity complaints in the early warning procedure. The reason for such reservations might be that subnational representatives in the Council of Ministers negotiate on the basis of a "national" position which (usually) already represents a compromise between central and subnational governments; therefore regional delegates cannot promote unconditionally the position of their individual subnational authority. Furthermore, the pattern is similar with respect complain to the ECJ if one suspects a breach in the principle of subsidiarity. Generally speaking, there is support for such an option.

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<sup>9</sup> In the subnational mobilization literature this constitutes one of several channels of representation (Hooghe 1995; Hooghe/Marks 1996)

Spanish, French and Hungarian respondents are very much in favour, the German subnational elite much less so.

**Table 12: Strengthening of the institutional nexus**

|   | Germany | Poland | Hungary | France | Spain | total |
|---|---------|--------|---------|--------|-------|-------|
| Integration of regional parliaments in national early warning system              | 7.9     | 8.7    | 9.0     | 8.8    | 8.6   | 8.6   |
| Possibility to delegate a subnational representative in the Council of Ministers  | 6.9     | 8.2    | 8.1     | 8.3    | 8.4   | 7.9   |
| Right to file an action at the ECJ if the principle of subsidiarity is endangered | 5.3     | 7.4    | 8.1     | 8.5    | 8.9   | 7.5   |

*Note:* Reported are the means by country. The scale of the possible answers ranges from 1 (strong rejection) to 11 (strong support).

Finally, we asked about the desired future for the Committee of the Regions which by many accounts constitutes the single most important institutionalized channel of interest representation between the subnational and the European arenas (Hooghe 1995; Hooghe/Marks 1996). We gave four options: “abolish the CoR”, “keep in its current form”, “strengthening the role of the institution in the policy-making process” and, finally, “make it a true “third chamber”. The majority of our interviewees favored the third option and wants to give more rights to the CoR. In addition, about one fifth of the interviewees responded that the CoR should be endowed with equal competences as the Council of Ministers or the EP. However, the deviant opinion of German subnational administrators becomes obvious again; about one third of them just want to maintain the status quo as far as the CoR is concerned.

**Table 13: Future Role of the Committee of Regions**

|   | Germany | Poland | Hungary | France | Spain | total |
|---|---------|--------|---------|--------|-------|-------|
| Abolishment   | 13.3    | 1.5    | 4.0     | 8.2    | 4.2   | 6.4   |
| Keeping the status quo                                  | 34.7    | 16.4   | 14.7    | 13.1   | 6.3   | 18.1  |
| More rights in the stage of law formulation             | 41.3    | 61.2   | 61.3    | 54.1   | 75.0  | 57.4  |
| Equal third chamber besides EP and Council of Ministers | 10.7    | 20.9   | 20.0    | 24.6   | 14.6  | 18.1  |

*Note:* Reported are percentages of respondents by country.

In sum, the data reveal a general preference of subnational administrators for the status quo in regard to the institutionalised interaction between subnational authorities and the EU. This is especially true for the future role of the CoR. Furthermore, except for some reservation of German subnational elite, we find strong cross-national support for a deeper integration of regions into the EU multi-level system.

### *Cooperation with the EU in specific Policy Areas*

A crucial issue in the context of subnational engagement in multi-level governance is the participation of the subnational level across policy areas.<sup>10</sup> We thus asked subnational top-bureaucrats to decide whether or not regional authorities should be involved in policy-making across a range of twelve specific policies.<sup>11</sup> In general, the interviewees only have modest desires for subnational policy participation: on average they only want subnational competences in about four policy areas.

However, national differences become evident comparing the national mean values. Whereas Hungarian respondents are satisfied with few competences (1.6) the Spanish demand extensive competences in about eight of twelve policies. Furthermore, Polish (4.8), French (4.3) and German (3.4) subnational elites desire only modest co-determination rights across policy areas in the EU multilevel system.

Besides these findings we scrutinize the preference patterns in more detail by distinguishing low and high politics. Policies of the latter category fall primarily in the sovereignty of the nation state. In contrast, the former category comprises tourism, culture & school system, business development and structural policy, health & consumer protection, environmental protection, research & technology, agriculture and social policy. Here, subnational participation in decision-taking is de facto already often the case. Distinguished in that way, subnational administrators, if they seek more policy involvement, they do this in the category of “low politics”. In policies like tourism as well as culture and school system we find broad support for competences allocation to subnational authorities. Furthermore, regional competences in the fields of health & consumer protection, environmental protection and research & technology enjoy medium level of support. With regard to high politics considerably few subnational administrators favour the involvement of regional authorities.

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<sup>10</sup> Being aware of the fact that multi-level governance is a complex concept which comprises both the aspect of policy competences and of varying modes of coordination and interaction (Benz 2007; Benz/Zimmer 2008; Tömmel 2008) we focus on the former.

<sup>11</sup> The twelve policies are social policy, asylum & immigration, foreign & defense policy, health & consumer protection, frontier police & frontier protection, culture & school system, agriculture, tourism, environmental protection, monetary policy, business development & structural policy and research & technology. Note that we are not able to differentiate between administrative and legislative competences.

**Table 14: Regional policy competences**

|                      | <b>Policy</b>                            | <b>Percentage of respondents preferring subnational participation</b> |
|----------------------|--|---|
| <i>Low politics</i>  | Tourism                                  | 71.4  |
|                      | culture & school system                  | 67.4  |
|                      | business development & structural policy | 49.3  |
|                      | health & consumer protection             | 42.7  |
|                      | environmental protection                 | 42.6  |
|                      | research & technology                    | 39.9  |
|                      | Agriculture                              | 29.1  |
|                      | social policy                            | 22.1  |
| <i>High politics</i> | asylum & immigration                     | 18.9  |
|                      | foreign & defence policy                 | 15.3  |
|                      | monetary policy                          | 12.1  |
|                      | frontier police & frontier protection    | 2.1   |
|                      | <i>All policies</i>                      | <i>34.4</i>   |
|                      | <i>Low politics average</i>              | <i>45.6</i>   |
|                      | <i>High politics average</i>             | <i>12.1</i>   |

In respect to our focus on the nexus of subnational and European governmental level we were interested under which conditions subnational top-bureaucrats want the regions to engage in an intensive exchange with the European level. We therefore looked for those policies in which subnational top-bureaucrats wanted the regions and, at the same time, the EU to hold competences. Wanting to share responsibility between subnational and supranational levels can be taken as evidence that in these areas the “multi-levelness” of the governance structure is—in the eyes of the subnational elites—to be strengthened. Thus the question is in which policy areas subnational bureaucrats want the EU *and* their subnational authority to hold competences.

On average respondents chose only one out of twelve selected policies in which they want the regions and the EU to share competences. With 2.4 (and 2.2) policies French and Spanish top bureaucrats are slightly more in favour of an institutionalised policy nexus between the subnational and supranational levels than German and Polish interviewees (1.1 and 0.9 policies). Hungarian top bureaucrats displayed no preference for shared competences between regions and the EU at all.

Our results, however, disclosed interesting aspects in regard to the policy-specific structure of these preference patterns. We identified four policies in which we find broad support for a

stronger nexus of regions and the EU in policy-making: research & technology, business development & structural policy as well as tourism and environmental protection (see table 15). Furthermore, in comparison to the general participation of subnational authorities in these three policies (see table 14) the preferences for a supranational-subnational nexus are strong. Around the half of respondents favoring subnational competences in these policies want the EU as a partner. Yet, the results in table 15 also indicate that preferences for EU and regional cooperation in policy making vary cross-nationally. Around one third of the German and Polish and half of the French respondents regard shared responsibilities most useful in business development & structural policy. Spanish respondents, however, prioritize subnational-supranational cooperation in research & technology, tourism and environmental protection.

**Table 15: Preferences for European and subnational cooperation in different policies**

|                      | <b>Policy</b>                            | <b>Total</b> | <b>Germany</b> | <b>Poland</b> | <b>Hungary</b> | <b>France</b> | <b>Spain</b> |
|----------------------|--|--------------|----------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|--------------|
| <b>Low politics</b>  | tourism                                  | 12.3         | 7.1            | 0             | 0              | 18.5          | 48.0         |
|                      | culture & school system                  | 8.9          | 4.0            | 4.7           | 0              | 35.4          | 2.0          |
|                      | business development & structural policy | 22.8         | 29.7           | 28.8          | 0              | 50.8          | 6.0          |
|                      | health & consumer protection             | 8.9          | 12.9           | 6.2           | 2.6            | 19.7          | 2.0          |
|                      | environmental protection                 | 23.3         | 19.7           | 18.5          | 1.2            | 46.2          | 42.0         |
|                      | research & technology                    | 25.3         | 20.0           | 17.7          | 0              | 36.9          | 69.4         |
|                      | agriculture                              | 14.5         | 12.3           | 12.3          | 0              | 19.7          | 38.8         |
| social policy        | 3.6                                      | 4.0          | 1.6            | 0             | 9.4            | 4.1           |              |
| <b>High politics</b> | asylum & immigration                     | 2.4          | 1.3            | 1.6           | 0              | 4.8           | 6.0          |
|                      | foreign & defence policy                 | 0.3          | 1.3            | 0             | 0              | 0             | 0            |
|                      | monetary policy                          | 4.1          | 1.3            | 0             | 0              | 0             | 26.5         |
|                      | frontier police & frontier protection    | 0.6          | 1.3            | 0             | 0              | 0             | 2.0          |

*Note:* Reported are percentages of respondents per country favouring participation of the European and subnational level in the respective policies.

In sum, subnational top-bureaucrats favor the intensification of subnational-supranational political exchange—to some degree. Moreover, far from wanting to expand policy involvement in all areas, they carefully select in which policies they want to see more subnational competences allocated. Areas where the subnational elite favor competences are mainly policies of “low politics” character. However, we find high variation between specific policies. In tourism & culture and school system our respondents favor regional participation most. Furthermore the cross-country variation suggests that the actual competence allocation within the nation state influences the preference patterns for regional policy participation within the multi-level governance system. Obviously the subnational top-bureaucrats’ desire

for a supranational-subnational policy nexus are very modest. Nevertheless in some policy areas a relative high proportion of respondents favoring regional participation prefer a constellation which contributes to a stronger exchange between the supranational and subnational governmental level.

## **7. Conclusion: The defensive Nature of the supranational-subnational Nexus**

This article put governance preferences of European regional administrative elites with respect to subnational-supranational political exchange centre stage. Subnational top-bureaucrats are recognized as crucial subnational group that coins today's political practice as well as future political choices of the subnational authorities for which they work. To our knowledge that is the first time that comparative survey data on subnational administrative elites in five different countries on issues of European Governance has been collected. Our data reveals a number of common features, but also many differences among governance preferences of subnational elites in France, Germany, Hungary, Poland and Spain.

An elite sociological perspective revealed that the "typical" subnational top-bureaucrat is male, in his 50s and looks back to many years of experience in his institution. However, professional education backgrounds are heterogeneous; in Germany there is high probability that the top-bureaucrat is a lawyer, in Hungary and Poland it is more likely that he is a trained economist and in France and Spain greater varieties of educational backgrounds exist. The motivation for joining the subnational administration in case of Spain, Hungary and Poland rest with the privileges of the office, in Germany and France intrinsic motivational reasons score high; and in the federal or quasi-federal state systems Spain and Germany, we find strong commitment towards developing the own region. The assessment of the benefit of EU membership is everywhere higher for the own nation state than for the own region. It should also be acknowledged that in our data, although this may be an implication of the relative low numbers of interviewees in certain regions, we find that "national" patterns prevail, i.e. subnational top-bureaucrats are likely to answer questions in a similar way as their national compatriots. Differences in answer patterns between regions from different states are usually higher than from regions within a certain state.

With respect to what we call European governance, we found that subnational elites from all countries are decidedly "supranationalist" in their preferences; they want majority voting in

the Council, they want strong supranational institutions and a Commission that is able to act independently from the member states' governments. This consensus about the institutional order of the EU does not stretch unrestrictedly to the EU's intervention capacity into the European economy. Here the southern European (France, Spain) are more enthusiastic, others, foremost, the Polish subnational elite, are rather sceptical—although the Polish lose this scepticism if the issue is whether the EU should intervene with European resources into fostering economic development in Poland's regions.

The most interesting findings lie however in the area of subnational preferences how to design subnational-supranational governance relationships. We distinguish in this context roughly between an institutional and a policy nexus. The subnational elites—with the exception of Germany where reservations are palpable—are clearly in favour of strengthening the institutional channels for political exchange with the European Union (access to Court of Justice to defend subsidiarity, integration of regional parliaments in early warning mechanism, strengthening of CoR, etc.). They are, however, much less keen on working with the supranational level jointly in policy-making.

Our results here have to be interpreted carefully. Little interest in participating in policy-making across specific areas together with the EU is clearly a function of the—in general terms—modest desire of subnational elites to “expand” their competences into new policy areas. On the basis of our data we conclude that subnational administrative elites have a very realistic understanding where subnational policy priorities lie—namely in areas like tourism, culture & school system, business development and structural policy, health & consumer protection, environmental protection, research & technology, agriculture and social policy. These are precisely the areas where subnational authorities do already enjoy most of their actual competences. Analyzing subnational preferences to cooperate in policy-making within these “low politics” areas, we find that the most likely candidates for an intensification of the subnational-supranational nexus are the areas of research & technology, business development & structural policy as well as tourism and environmental protection. However, in terms of policy re-allocation in the EU multilevel system, subnational top-bureaucrats actually are very conservative and appear to have the desire to stick to the status quo.

In other words, *subnational elites conceive their cooperation patterns with the European level on the basis of what they know from their nation state's vertical allocation of policy*

*competences*. The obvious question then is, why would subnational elites show more enthusiasm for intensifying the institutional nexus which constitutes but channels to potentially connect to EU decision-making and remain so reserved in view of indicating where they see substantial needs for cooperation across governmental levels in specific policy areas? We tentatively conclude that subnational elite preferences in this respect indicate that there is little hope (or fear) of transformative governance dynamic fuelled by the expansive agendas of subnational levels; subnational elites' yardstick for competence allocation appears to be the reality of their respective national systems and not a vision of an emerging European multilevel system, in which their level could expand its authority.

It fits this picture that instead of extending the policy nexus subnational elites appear more eager to upgrade the institutional nexus. After all, the institutional nexus is rather a defensive tool, good to get alerted and, if possible, inhibit threatening EU decisions; but at the same time, it does not oblige to anything in terms of positive subnational action. Intensifying the policy nexus and engaging into the challenges of multilevel policy-making would require more pro-active behaviour (and probably a broader resource base than most of the subnational authorities in our sample have at their disposal). Our data thus suggests that subnational elites think that there are limits to what their subnational authorities should do and where they should engage in intensifying the subnational-supranational nexus in multilevel policy-making. Such kind of self-restriction is of great interest—not only to those expecting huge transformative repercussions of multilevel policy-making also at the subnational level. Why subnational elites are so reserved to intensifying subnational-supranational policy cooperation remains however a question for future research in this area.

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