

Call for papers

Research Seminar: Local and Regional Authorities as new diplomatic actors since the 1980's

European Parliamentary Association – Strasbourg

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Costs regarding transportation and accommodation will be taken care of by the organisation.

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Active contestation of Reagan's Foreign Policy by several US Federal States and major cities; French decentralization laws authorizing local and regional authorities for the first time to engage in "external relations", opening up for them a small window to international action (1982); permanent representations at the European Commission in Brussels set up by the *Länder* Saar and Hamburg and by the city of Birmingham (1985); self-affirmative use of the diplomacy weapon by Quebec and Scotland... If announcing signs had appeared in the two previous decades, the 1980s shed a bright light on a major change that was happening on the international scene. As pioneer research revealed on both sides of the Atlantic (see the fundamental works by Ivo Duclacek, Panayotis Soldatos, Michael Keating or Rudolf Hrbek), at the very heart of public policy, diplomacy thus appeared less and less as the exclusive sphere of action of the central state.

Sometimes perceived as an occasion for a reaffirmation of diplomatic state power privileges, the new composition of the international system after the fall of the Berlin Wall did not put an end to this dynamic development, which was even accelerated in Europe at the beginning of the 1990s by a resurgence of theories of regionalism and by the introduction of the principle of subsidiarity in Article 3B of the Maastricht Treaty. The Committee of the Regions was created within the European Union in 1994 when, at the same time, local and regional actors with strong identity claims, such as Catalonia or Flanders, placed their bet on an international affirmation via a multi-level-governance approach, based on the articulation between micro and macro and on the development of a diplomatic network all over the world. In the US, in 1996-1997, the Supreme Court seemed to settle -at least from a legal point of view- the fight over the constitutional foundations of the nation, when it invalidated a Massachusetts Law that excluded from public contracts all firms who were trading with the authoritarian regime of Burma: the judgment declared unconstitutional any action that could "compromise the very capacity of the American President to speak for the nation with one voice in dealing with other governments". This legal reaffirmation of the federal power's authority on the diplomatic scene did in reality however not put an end to the attempts by infra-national actors to play their own cards.

The last fifteen years witnessed a multiplication of decentralized and/or cross-border cooperation and networks of local actors, whilst the deepening of decentralization policies increased the scope of action for local and regional authorities on the international scene, including in countries of centralizing tradition. Such a development can be observed in certain states in the former Eastern bloc, but also in Italy or in France, where a pioneer and experimental role was given to the so-called *territoires d'outre mer* (the local and regional authorities in French territories overseas) being authorized by a law of December 13th 2000 to directly dialogue with their neighbouring states. The law proposal of July 22nd 2015 will spur off, if implemented, a small cultural revolution in the Jacobin French State: highly symbolic, it goes as far as to foresee the possibility to extend diplomatic immunity provided by the 1961 Vienna Convention to certain civil servants from local and regional authorities.

Scientific research in Political Sciences and in History of International Relations has accompanied these changes since the last fifty years. The research seminar, which is openly interdisciplinary, aims at first questioning the different approach angles which have been employed, by focusing mainly on an attempt to clarify terminology: Do the concepts of territorial or infra-national diplomacy, of para- or proto-diplomacy or of local and regional diplomacy in fact englobe stackable layers of reality? How do they help to apprehend the development which has been taken place during the last five decades?

The challenges resulting from these changes in terms of a historical redefinition of diplomatic activity also need to be analysed. Referring to James Rosenau's grid of understanding, diplomacy by local and regional authorities appears both as "sovereignty bound" because it benefits from a democratic legitimacy usually based on ballots, and "sovereignty free" as it seems to be freed of any constraints linked to the implementation and the service of official state diplomacy. Can it claim to be a transnational diplomacy close to the citizen -like the *Eurocities* network which presents itself as echoing the voice of 130 million metropolitan Europeans- despite the fact that it remains closely dependent on the state model in which it is enshrined? The scope of action left for diplomacy of local and regional authorities remains indeed, at least apparently, inversely proportional to the degree of centralization of the states. How do these authorities manage to negotiate at the same time with their counterparts on the other side of the border and with the central state who determines *in fine* the limits of their action? Which type of authorities have been able to enlarge their scope of action during the course of time, and in which context? Do the contemporary crises -migration crisis, international terrorism- lead to increase or, on the contrary, diminish their scope of action?

The dependence of local and regional authorities on the good willingness of the central state leads in fact on the diplomatic scene to relations between actors of largely unequal positions, as these have not been able to negotiate in their internal framework the same type of powers – the example of the difficult cooperation between strong German *Länder* with weak French *Régions* is well known. This disequilibrium is accentuated by a legal uncertainty which still characterizes the action of these actors who are unrecognized, or at least not well recognized (nor well protected) by international law and diplomatic conventions. What are the consequences of this unstable situation? Will it be modified at a time when, like the Spanish *Generalidades* or the German *Länder* represented within the COREPER in the European Union, or like Wallonia, Quebec and New-Brunswick holding a seat autonomously, at the side of Belgium and Canada, in the International Organisation of Francophonie, more and more infra-national actors obtain a participatory right in international organisations? The use of the diplomatic tool in a strategy of affirming one's identity -or autonomy- also deserves to be questioned: is it a top-down emancipation openly led against the central state or an active implementation of a multi-level diplomacy playing on the complementarity between several scales of action? Has this emancipation been encouraged by international institutions searching for recognition such as the European Community/EU? Aside from specific cases of regionalist claims, does the affirmation of diplomacy by local and regional authorities take place necessarily against the diplomatic state monopoly, following a conflictual logic?

Analysing how these issues at stake evolved since the last five decades leads us to question globally the role and the place of local and regional authorities in an international system of diversified actors and to rethink, by taking into account infra-national actors, the historical functions of diplomacy: representation, negotiation and information.

Paper proposals open to pluridisciplinarity (history, law, political sciences, geography...), in French or English should present a title, an abstract (3000 signs maximum) and a short biographical note of the author and are to be sent before 30 November 2016 to Birte Wassenberg (birtewassenberg@gmail.com) and Marion Aballéa (maballea@unistra.fr), who will hand them over to a scientific committee for evaluation.