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# *With or without you: Mobilization strategies of Portuguese regional authorities in the European Union*

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## ABSTRACT

A sizable body of literature has investigated the activity of regional authorities in attempting to circumvent central governments in the European Union (EU). Located at the intersection between research on multi-level governance and Europeanization, and building on the conceptual division between 'financial' and 'regulatory' mobilization, the aim of this article is to identify the domestic mediating factors which condition the channels and rationales underpinning Portuguese regional strategies in the EU. This article shows that structures, agency and contextual factors are the most relevant mediating factors explaining the decision of the Autonomous Regions of Azores and Madeira to combine intra- and extra-state strategies geared towards 'regulatory' purposes, whereas the five deconcentrated Regional Coordination and Development Commissions (CCDRs) in mainland Portugal have confined themselves to an extra-state strategy tailored to 'financial' purposes. We conclude that despite the presence of national bypassing in both cases, the regions have not challenged Portuguese state authority.

**KEYWORDS** Regional mobilization; Portugal; multi-level governance; European Union

## Introduction

Portugal has traditionally been considered a centralized unitary state (Loughlin and Peters 1997, 41–63; Loughlin 2000, 24–32), with regional authorities largely neglected by scholars in terms of their relationships with Europe. Curiously enough, after the country's accession to the then-European Community (EC) in 1986, a widespread assumption in academic and political circles was that mainland Portugal would be more capable of playing a comprehensive role in the European integration process if it decentralized its administrative structures in favour of the regions (Gallagher 1999, 135). Nevertheless, territorial reforms in mainland Portugal did not move in that direction (Magone 2004,

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2014, 2017). Although the competences of the five Portuguese non-elected decentralized regional structures, also known as Regional Coordination and Development Commissions (CCDRs), have been bolstered in response to the intense flow of structural funds over the last 40 years – that is, over the five Cohesion Programming Periods (three Community Support Frameworks, the National Strategic Reference Framework and Portugal 2020) – Portugal is generally portrayed as a ‘dual’ country with respect to regional responsiveness to territorial mobilization in the EU. Indeed, whereas the elected self-governments in the Autonomous Regions of Azores and Madeira have managed to engage proactively in the many available channels of influence (Greenwood 2011a) in a mutually beneficial combination of intra- and extra-state strategies, in mainland Portugal, the five CCDRs have been limited to a constrained extra-state strategy with restricted payoffs, thus remaining largely on the margins of the multi-level system of governance.

In sum, as a general picture, we suggest that the Portuguese regional authorities have been able to follow (to radically varying degrees) a more general European trend whereby regions have considered the European venue for bypassing the nation-state (Marks 1992, 217; Keating and Loughlin 1997; Keating 1998; Keating, Hooghe, and Tatham 2015). This pattern of interaction linking subnational actors to the EU is best captured by the concept of multi-level governance (MLG) defined by Marks (1993, 392), according to which subnational authorities operate within a broader political system in which they can develop and pursue projects independent of the national capital. However, with respect to the Portuguese case, although such bypassing is present in both the Autonomous Regions and in the CCDRs, it remains unclear as to which intra-state factors have justified the choice of the ‘channels’ of influence used (intra- and/or extra-state) and the ‘rationales’ underpinning those strategies (influence-seeking and/or information-/fund-seeking). Moreover, it is not entirely clear when regional interests differ from or conflict with those of the Portuguese central state. Therefore, against the backdrop of a wider literature on territorial mobilization in the EU, this article seeks to explore the under-researched topic of the impact of Europe on Portuguese regional mobilization.

In utilizing a mixed theoretical approach which reconciles the contributions of the literatures on MLG and Europeanization, the purpose of this article is three-fold. First, it will evaluate Portuguese regional responsiveness to the European polity in attempts to bypass the central government as the main gatekeeper. Second, it will identify the domestic mediating factors that are responsible for nuanced strategies of territorial mobilization in the EU. Third, it will assess whether the Portuguese regional authorities have been able to weaken the gatekeeping position of the Portuguese state. The remainder of this article is organized as follows: in the first section, we will justify the choice of our theoretical framework and methods. We will then place

Portuguese territorial organization into historical context. In the third section, we will present the empirical data for the two cases under scrutiny. In the fourth section, we will discuss and contrast our major findings by means of a comparative analysis. Finally, we will draw conclusions based on the data and analysis.

### **Framing regional mobilization in the European Union: Reconciling multi-level governance and Europeanization approaches**

In his work in the early 2000s, Jeffery (2000) posed a key question regarding the analytical tools that should be used to understand and assess the mechanism and impact of subnational mobilization on state authority. Over time, the concept of multi-level governance (MLG) pioneered by Marks (1993) has emerged as an insightful approach due to its ability to pinpoint the presence of non-state actors in this engaging and evolving European multi-level system. This analytical innovation has been supported by the growth of formal and informal European institutional channels with a regional outlook, such as the Committee of the Regions (CoR), and by the establishment of regional offices (Marks, Haesly, and Mbaye 2002; Tatham 2008; Rowe 2011) which have reinforced the notion of ‘Europe of the Regions’ (Loughlin 1996a) or ‘with the Regions’ (Hooghe 1995, 177; Hooghe 1996; Hooghe and Marks 1996). However, although the MLG approach has contributed to the disentanglement of the burgeoning complexity of European politics, it has remained a contested concept (Hooghe and Marks 2001, 2003) or theory (Piattoni 2010) because of its multiple definitions and the difficulty in its operationalization (Bache and Flinders 2004, 4; George 2004, 116). Despite these drawbacks, a serious body of literature based on MLG has provided additional clarity regarding the territorial dynamics in the EU. Some scholars have identified the channels of influence that regional authorities can use (Mazey and Richardson 2001; Tatham 2008, 2010; Greenwood 2011a; Keating, Hooghe, and Tatham 2015); others have focused on the objectives pursued (Rowe 2011; Callanan and Tatham 2014). These substantial contributions notwithstanding, researchers have yet to establish a more comprehensive dialogue with the MLG vision of the EU that would lay the foundations of an encompassing theoretical framework offering a more nuanced understanding of the apparent contradiction between the gradual appropriation of the central state’s monopoly in the EU policy-making process and the enduring persistence of national governments as ‘the most important pieces of the European puzzle’ (Hooghe and Marks 2001, 3). In other words, a broader conception of MLG must be developed in order to include these arguably more significant intra-state factors which can support, catalyze and explain distinctive patterns of subnational mobilization

in Europe. In this regard, Charlie Jeffery has assumed a critical voice, proposing in a first rough theoretical attempt a number of intra-state variables which, taken together, may explain the extent to which regions are more likely to 'muscle in' to establish a role alongside central state institutions as authoritative interlocutors between Member States and EU institutions (Jeffery 2000, 12–17).

These variables include four major factors: constitutional issues, intergovernmental relations (IGR), entrepreneurship and legitimacy. First, according to Jeffery, regional authorities endowed with extensive internal competences have the strongest interest in mobilizing in Europe and are more likely to exert influence than their more weakly endowed counterparts. Second, settings featuring formal structures of central-regional intergovernmental relations are more likely to provide effective channels for policy influence (namely, through the nation-state) than situations in which such formal structures are absent or are purely informal. A third argument emphasizes the importance of 'policy resources', also described as 'capacity-building' by Hooghe and Marks (2001), which consists of the ability of regional authorities to adapt to the European policy environment. This argument stresses aspects of 'political leadership' on the part of those responsible for directing EU policy in the region, such as personal authority, interests and the personal commitment of *notables* in European institutions and in coalition-building strategies. 'Capacity-building' also encompasses the overall organizational capacity – that is, the pool of human and financial resources that can be assigned to regional engagement in the EU. These aspects have been further developed by Rob De Rooij (2002), Donas and Beyer (2013) and Oikonomou (2016), who stress the importance of the size and resources of subnational authorities in tentative efforts to mobilize. The fourth and final argument underlines the importance of 'perceived legitimacy'. According to Jeffery, the credibility of regional claims for a participation in European decision-making processes will be greater and less easy to ignore or deflect if these claims are perceived as being democratically (i.e. if regional authorities are elected bodies), politically (i.e. if regional authorities have the constitutional powers to decide) or culturally rooted (i.e. if they represent firmly established civil societies and/or cultural identities). In a similar vein, although not with the primary intent of explaining the impact of the EU on territorial dynamics, the literature on Europeanization has further explored the role of mediating factors in Europeanization processes. In this respect, Risse and his colleagues (Risse, Cowles, and Caporaso 2001, 9–12; Börzel and Risse 2003, 63–69) have reasserted the importance of 'structural factors' (i.e. the presence of formal or informal domestic mediating networks) and have added 'agency' as a second category of mediating factors to emphasize the function of political leadership. Finally, according to Graziano (2003), changing contextual factors which include economic and societal challenges at

particular moments in time – such as contexts of economic crisis or prosperity – should also be considered as plausible alternative explanations for differential degrees of Europeanization.

Based on widely varying contributions located at the intersection between the literatures on MLG and Europeanization, the purpose of this article is to map the patterns of Portuguese regional mobilization in the EU in the light of three sets of domestic mediating factors: structure, agency and contextual factors. For the sake of clarity, and keeping in mind the theoretical framework presented by Antunes and Loughlin in this issue, structural factors will encompass the level of authority of the regions, the quality of IGR and legitimacy issues, agency factors will consider the aforementioned elements of capacity-building and contextual factors will assess the impact of the economic crisis on regional engagement.

### **Conceptualizing mobilization strategies in the European Union: 'Channels' of influence and 'types' of regional mobilization**

The role of intra-state factors in regional mobilization cannot be understood without a previous clarification of the 'channels' of influence and 'types' of mobilization. Mapping the various channels of interest mediation exhibited by the European polity will provide a clearer picture of the channels utilized by the regions in question, and framing the types of mobilization will reveal the rationales underpinning their engagement in Europe. In terms of the channels of interest mediation that regional authorities can use, at its most basic level, the 'national route' (also referred to as the intra-state channel) is the most obvious (Greenwood 2011a, 25). This channel consists of the region's indirect representation in the European Union through the use of national structures – that is, the country's National Permanent Representation to the European Union (REPER) – to engage in EU decision-making. A very different choice is the 'Brussels route' (also referred to as extra-state channels), which involves direct representation in the European institutions, whether through formal and informal channels organized at the EU level. The Brussels route comprises at least three access points that are used regularly by the regions. First, the EU legislative procedure emphasizes the roles of the European Commission (EC), the European Parliament (EP) and the Committee of the Regions (CoR) (Loughlin 1996b, 1997). Although the impact of the CoR has been somewhat muted by its advisory role, the European Commission and the European Parliament are directly involved in the co-decision legislative EU procedure, especially following the Treaty of Lisbon. Second, inter-regional associations (Bomberg and Peterson 1998; Loughlin 2005) such as the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR, established in 1973) and the Assembly of European Regions (AER, established in 1986) have become crucial actors in increasing the competition for 'ear time' (Bomberg

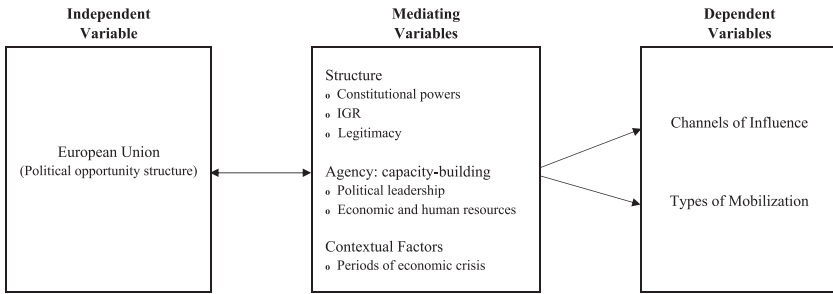
and Peterson 1998, 229). In the particular case of the island regions of Azores and Madeira, we will also address the role of the Conference of the Presidents of the Outermost Regions (CPOR, formalized in 1995). Finally, we will consider the phenomenon of regional offices, as they are traditionally perceived as an important arena for regional bypassing (Marks et al. 1996, 171; Nielsen and Salk 1998; Marks, Haesly, and Mbaye 2002; Tatham 2008, 2010, 2016, 2017; Rowe 2011).

Furthermore, building on the distinction between 'regulatory' and 'financial' mobilization proposed by Callanan and Tatham (2014, 191–192), we will clarify the objectives of the strategies under analysis. The former method of mobilization is a proactive, dynamic process whereby regional authorities seek to influence EU policy and legislative outcomes; the latter refers to a more reactive process in which regional authorities focus on tracking information on upcoming legislation with a view to preparing for future challenges related to implementation and/or access to EU funding. Generally speaking, regulatory mobilization tends towards a collective action, whereas financial mobilization tends towards an individual one. Although regulatory and financial mobilization are not mutually exclusive, as both can be present as rationales underpinning EU activities, we will comply with this conceptual definition because it overlaps with the strong-weak regional divide. 'Strong regions' (i.e. those endowed with legislative powers) tend to place primary emphasis on regulatory mobilization; in contrast, 'weak regions' (i.e. those endowed with administrative powers) generally stress financial mobilization (Callanan and Tatham 2014, 190).

To summarize, in this article, the multiple channels of regional interest mediation exhibited in the European political opportunity structure (Marks and McAdam 1996) will be considered the independent variable (cause), whereas the channels effectively used as well as the rationales underpinning the types of mobilization displayed will be considered the dependent variables (outcomes). Finally, because we are interested in assessing *how* intra-state factors condition the strategy (channels and type of mobilization) employed by regional authorities, domestic intra-state factors will be presented as mediating variables. In other words, the domestic mediating factors will hold the key for explaining the relationship that can be established between the European polity and the various strategies employed by Portuguese regional authorities in the European arena (see the theoretical framework in Figure 1 below).

## Methods and data

Because we are dealing with data that is not available in the literature, we have opted for a mixed approach involving 10 questionnaires (including both open-ended and closed-ended questions) and 10 in-depth interviews.



**Figure 1.** Theoretical framework.

Both of these techniques were applied in interactions with officials from the two Autonomous Regions of Azores and Madeira and from the five CCDRs. The same procedure was followed with the Head of Office of the recently established Portuguese regional office in Brussels shared between the two Autonomous Regions. These techniques were implemented between April and June 2018 with the aim of identifying the channels and rationales underpinning Portuguese regional strategies in the EU. As a complementary element to the analysis, one civil servant working at REPER was interviewed to enable an understanding of their role in regional interest mediation in Brussels. Finally, the former president of the government of Madeira, Alberto João Jardim, also contributed to this research by providing insights in his capacity as the founder of the Assembly of European Regions.

### Portugal: A small unitary state in context

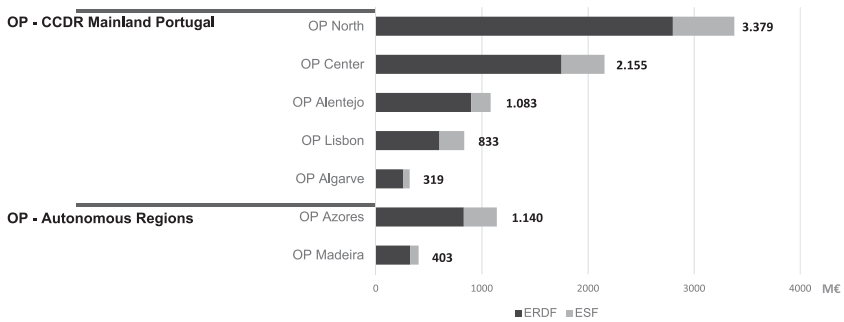
Portugal, founded in 1143, is a small country with 10.3 million inhabitants (Pordata 2017) and a territory of 92.212 km<sup>2</sup> including the two Atlantic archipelagos of Azores and Madeira. It has always been highly centralized, and the centrality of Lisbon throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been a dominant feature of Portuguese politics. The authoritarian regimes of Antonio Salazar (1926–1968) and Marcelo Caetano (1968–1974) were major factors leading to even more extensive centralization. A regional tier of government never existed before the Carnation Revolution of 25 April 1974, and the local levels of municipalities (*municípios*) and towns (*freguesias*) was strongly controlled by the capital. After the Carnation Revolution, Portugal moved towards the establishment of a liberal democratic order in which the democratization and reform of local government became a central priority. Over time, 308 municipalities were created, taking into account some historical legacies. Since 1976, local elections have resulted in the selection of a large number of officials representing the 308 municipalities and parishes



(for more detail, see Oliveira 1996a, 1996b). Despite this decentralization of human resources, funding has been rather less forthcoming.

The constitution of 1976 provided for the establishment of directly elected administrative regions in mainland Portugal (Constitution of Portugal, Title VII, arts. 255–262), as well as two Autonomous Regions in the island archipelagos of Azores and Madeira. Thus, according to Loughlin's typology (1997), Portugal, as a whole, could be described as a regionalized unitary state, but in practice, mainland Portugal is a centralized unitary state. The two island regions were granted regional political autonomy in 1980 (Constitution of Portugal, Title VII, arts. 225–234), first Azores and then Madeira, but in mainland Portugal, the regions have remained 'paper regions' (Greenwood 2011a, 179). The administrative regions have never been set up, due to considerable differences between the political parties regarding exactly how this should be implemented. In other words, the five CCDRs (North, Centre, Lisbon and the Tagus Valley, Alentejo and Algarve) have to date remained unelected bodies, meaning that they have effectively served as extended arms of the central government, despite officially being granted autonomy and flexibility in the planning and implementation of public policies. These regional structures were formalized in 1979, before Portugal entered the then-EC, and their competences were reinforced in 1986 as a consequence of Portugal's accession. Specifically, the CCDRs are tasked with the management of the five European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIFs) that fall within the remit of the Cohesion Policy (CP). They are also in charge of the European Territorial Cooperation (ETC), which oversees the management of INTERREG programmes. Under the most recent programming period 2014–2020 (Europe 2020), these funds have been managed through five regional Operational Programmes (OPs). Such funds are negotiated by the European Commission and the Portuguese government without the input of the CCDRs. Moreover, implementation is carried out under the supervision of the Portuguese government through the Cohesion and Development Agency that was established in 2013 for this purpose (Portuguese Council of Ministers, Law n°140/2013). The same rule applies to the Autonomous Regions of Azores and Madeira, irrespective of the scope of their political and international competences.

Managing competences of two funds - the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF) - have been attributed to these regional authorities, in compliance with the strategic guidelines of their regional OP. As we can see from Figure 2 above, in mainland Portugal, the CCDR North is the net receiver of these two funds, and in the island regions, Azores receives almost three times more than Madeira. Additionally, under the current Cohesion Policy programming (2014–2020), the CCDRs of Centre, North and Alentejo and the Autonomous Region of Azores are considered to be less developed regions (GDP per capita under 75% of the EU average), with the CCDR Algarve classified as a region in transition (GDP per



**Figure 2.** Operational programmes of CCDRs and autonomous regions for 2014–2020 (in M €). Source: website of Portugal 2020 at [www.portugal2020.pt](http://www.portugal2020.pt) accessed in June 2018.

capita between 75% and 90% of the EU average). Conversely, the CCDR Lisbon and Tagus Valley and the Autonomous Region of Madeira are seen as the most developed Portuguese regions (GDP per capita equal to or above 90% of the EU average).<sup>1</sup>

Since 1979, the national constitution has been reviewed seven times. The autonomous statutes of the two island regions of Madeira and Azores were approved in 1980 (Constitution of Portugal, Title VII, art. 225–234), but the regionalization of mainland Portugal was put on hold as part of a ‘political compromise’ for the future. Regionalization is traditionally supported by the left-wing parties – the Socialists (*Partido Socialista*-PS), the Communists (*Partido Comunista Português*-PCP) and, since 1999, the Left Block (*Bloco da Esquerda*-BE) – but opposed by the right and centre parties, namely the Liberal Social Democrats (*Partido Social Democrata*-PSD) and the Conservative Democratic Social Centre–People’s Party (*Centro Democrático Social*-CDS). In 1998, the Socialist government under Antonio Guterres tried to put regionalization back on the agenda. A referendum was organized on 8 November of that year, but it turned out to be a major defeat for regionalization supporters, as two-thirds of voters rejected it. Additionally, the turnout threshold of 50% was not reached, and therefore the referendum was non-binding (on the debate, see Barreto 1998). Since this setback, legislators have found it difficult to return to the issue. More recently, in 2016, the Socialist government under Prime Minister António Costa (in government since 2015) sparked off a new discussion on decentralization/regionalization (Portuguese Government 2015, 87–88). The then-Minister for Internal Affairs, Eduardo Cabrita, proposed the decentralization of national policy competences in favour of CCDRs as well as the democratization of the CCDRs through an indirect election of their presidents (Portuguese Government 2017, 40). However, by mid-2017, the proposals had become encumbered by disputes between the political parties (Público 2017), leaving matters unchanged at the time of writing.

## **Mobilization strategies of the Autonomous Regions of Azores and Madeira in the European Union: *With and without you***

The strategy employed by the Autonomous Regions of Azores and Madeira in the EU encompasses all the channels of influence that the European polity has to offer. This strategy relies on a mutually reinforcing combination of intra- and extra-state strategies which seeks to influence a wide range of European policies that fall within the regions' remits. Legitimate actors and resourceful regional authorities endowed with strong constitutional positions and proactive political leadership in trans-regional European associations – namely in the AER, the CPMR and the CPOR – help to explain how this strategy has been carried out *with* and *without* the state. Recently, in April 2017, the two regions decided to join forces in order to establish the first Portuguese regional office. In this section, we will scrutinize the many details of a strategy focused on identifying and exploiting all the channels of influence that can bring these regions closer to 'political power'.

### **Intra-state strategy: 'Strong regions' with privileged access to the national route**

The first and most important variable in understanding why both of these regions have privileged the national route in Europe concerns their constitutional status and how it is embedded in formal structures within Portuguese foreign affairs in Brussels. Indeed, in both cases, the regional competences are quite extensive, ranging from political to financial powers and including international representation at the European Union level (see art. 227 of the Constitution). Both regions have the right to contribute to the definition of the position of the Portuguese state in the European Union with regard to issues that affect regional interests (see art. 36, line j, Law 130/99 of 21 August on the Political Status of Madeira and art. 35, line b, Law 2/2009 of 12 January on the Political Status of Azores). On the basis of their special autonomous status within the Portuguese constitution, each Autonomous Region benefits from the services of a civil servant appointed to REPER. These civil servants are tasked with protecting regional interests in sensitive policy areas such as regional policy, Cohesion Policy, maritime policy, transport and mobility (Interviews 2018b, 2018c). Moreover, the Autonomous Regions can send representatives to the meetings of the Interministerial Committee of European Affairs (*Comissão Interministerial de Assuntos Europeus-DGAE*) at the General Directorate of European Affairs (*Direcção Geral de Assuntos Europeus-DGAE*). This is the liaison body of REPER in Brussels which coordinates the positions of the Portuguese government in forthcoming Council of Ministers meetings (for more detail on these structures, see Magone 2000, 153–154, 2001, 178–182, 2018, 67–71). Ultimately, regional positions

are discussed with the national government in order to ensure their consideration in a more general national position to be presented to the Council of Ministers. In sum, the relationship with the national government is very open, and the dialogue is constant (Interview 2017b). Even with respect to the Cohesion Policy, these regions are approached by the Portuguese government before negotiations take place with the European Commission (Interviews 2018b, 2018c). According to both regions, the national route is definitely one of the most effective channels of influence in the European Union (Interviews 2018b, 2018c).

### **Extra-state strategy: Formal and informal channels, the best of two worlds**

#### ***Cor, EC and EP: 'Strong regions' with legitimate input in the EU policy-making process***

In addition to their ample access to the national route, the Brussels route options of these regions are also diverse and complementary. As legitimate actors endowed with a considerable scope of constitutional powers and a democratic mandate, the Autonomous Regions of Azores and Madeira are represented in the CoR and in the EP. Specifically, their representation in the CoR is undertaken by the most powerful notables of the two regions, the presidents of each regional government (Vasco Cordeiro (PS) for Azores and Miguel Albuquerque (PSD) for Madeira). Despite its nominally consultative role, the CoR is commonly perceived as a key actor that influences the policy-making process at an early stage (Interviews 2018b, 2018c). The CoR serves as an information provider on topics that might be of regional interest, which in turn allows regional governments to intervene in the policy-making process before it reaches the EP or the CM. Whereas the CoR provides opportunities for regional networking and the sharing of best practices, a presence in the EP opens the door to the policy-making process. Additionally, both regional governments contact the EC (and different DGs) on a regular basis, often for information-gathering concerning certain aspects of a policy initiative before they exert influence on the matter. Of these three EU institutions, the EC is by far their main 'institutional target' when it comes to influence (Interviews 2018b, 2018c).

#### ***CPMR, CPOR and AER: 'Strong regions' with a proactive profile***

Irrespective of their privileged access to REPER and direct contact with the EU institutions, both of these regional governments have always been invested in European regional network associations, namely the AER, the CPMR and the CPOR. Numbering among the founders of the AER in the early 1980s –

with a decisive contribution by the former president of Madeira, Alberto João Jardim – both governments have cooperated with the organization since 1986 (Valente 2017; Jardim 2018). Today, this cooperation is still active, although it is much less intense due to the current political weakness of the organization and to human resource constraints (Interviews 2018b, 2018c). At present, the bulk of the cooperation takes place within the Eurodyssey programme, an exchange programme run by the AER that allows young job-seekers to benefit from traineeship placement abroad. Thus, the relationship focuses on fund-seeking purposes. The regions have also served as leaders in the CPMR since 1979–1980, even before Portugal joined the then-EC, and former President Jardim of Madeira additionally contributed to the establishment of the CPOR in 1995 (Valente 2017; Jardim 2018). Each of these channels has its own idiosyncrasies, with varying policy insights, but both provide a permanent European observatory for EU legislation coupled with the benefits of intense regional networking. As a strong indicator of the political salience of the CPMR, the current President of the Government of Azores, Vasco Cordeiro (PS), has been the President of the CPMR since 2014 (second mandate). Both regions also belong to the Islands Commission (IC) and contribute actively to the lobbying work of the organization. Indeed, a proactive leadership is supported by a strong constitutional position and a democratic legitimacy which enable them to provide their own inputs and positions regarding a wide range of policies ranging from the most traditional (such as Cohesion Policy and transport) to new policy areas (such as energy, climate change and maritime policy). Their primary intent is to approach the EU institutions, specifically the EC and the EP, in order to influence policy decisions that fall within their remit.

In contrast, the CPOR is an *ad hoc* political forum consisting of nine regions that have strived to achieve proper recognition and differential treatment as Europe's outermost regions (ORs). This formal recognition was achieved in 1999, and since 2009 these regions have benefited from specific measures in key EU policies including agriculture, Cohesion Policy and competition. The Conference of the Presidents meets once a year in the region that holds the presidency, and officials from the EC are generally invited. Recently, the forum has gained new visibility due to the potential that these regions hold for the EU in meeting the 'blue growth' challenge (Interviews 2018b, 2018c). In this regard, the October 2017 meeting was a 'turning point' in the CPOR's history, as French President Emmanuel Macron, President of the EP Jean-Claude Juncker and Regional Policy Commissioner Corina Cretu were all in attendance.

### **Regional office: Latecomers, same game**

In April 2017, the governments of the two Autonomous Regions quite unexpectedly decided to set up a joint regional office in Brussels (Azores

Government 2017). This decision, relatively tardy in comparison to regional counterparts that established offices in the mid-1980s or early 1990s (Tatham 2008; Rowe 2011; Greenwood 2011a, 2011b), was delayed by three major factors (Interviews 2017a, 2018b, 2018c). First, neither government ever felt the need to act autonomously (that is, apart from the state), as they are institutionally embedded in domestic intergovernmental networks which provide privileged access to policy decisions made in the Council of Ministers over a wide range of policies (Callanan and Tatham 2014; Tatham 2017). Second, long-lasting and profitable engagement in other inter-regional coalition networks such as the CPMR and the CPOR somewhat undermined the added-value of a regional office. Third, there is the cost of the office itself. Thus, the primary intent of the ultimate establishment of a regional office was not 'political' but rather 'functional'. More specifically, it was based on the need to bring regional civil societies and stakeholders closer to the EU decision-making process. The activities performed by this office, enshrined in resolution n.º 45/2017 (Azores Government 2017), consist of the following (listed in descending order): first, attempts to enhance the profile of the regional governments in Europe. The purpose here is to ensure that they are noticed by the EU institutions, namely the EC, as well as by regional partners (especially constitutional regions) with a view to future lobbying activities. Second, the office acts as a platform facilitator between regional stakeholders on the one hand and the EP, the EC and the EU's various agencies on the other. Third, it acts as an information-gatherer for the regional governments and regional stakeholders. In the first case, this information-gathering is aimed at influence-seeking, in the sense that it provides follow-ups on upcoming EU legislation that might be of regional interest (Interview 2018a); in the second case, it focuses more on fund-seeking information, which is disseminated through a weekly bulletin. Overall, this office acts on a broad spectrum of civil society interests without neglecting public interests (Greenwood 2011b).

For the time being, the office's staff is relatively limited. It relies on the services of two interns and one 'delegate' who was recruited as a 'European expert' on the Brussels scene due to his previous experience as a MEP's assistant. Moreover, it should be noted that the existence of this regional office has been acknowledged by the Portuguese government since its inception. It is perceived by both parties as a useful and complementary tool to serve national and regional interests in Brussels (Interviews 2017a, 2017b, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c). The office works in close contact with REPER and in strict coordination with the regional civil servants working there. According to the Head of Office (Interview 2018a), a physical presence in Brussels has provided opportunities for more informal contacts; over time, this will allow the regions more detailed follow-ups in advance of decisions taken by the Council of Ministers.

## **Mobilization strategies of mainland CCDRs in the European Union: *Without you***

In stark contrast to the many options available to the Autonomous Regions of Azores and Madeira, the five CCDRs in mainland Portugal focus exclusively on obtaining information on new developments related to regional Cohesion Policy. This is largely due to their limited constitutional competences, which are primarily related to implementation tasks; these regions are therefore confined to a very limited 'extra-state strategy'. As a result, the CCDRs do engage in Europe, but they do so *without* interacting with the central government. Their liaison with REPER is almost non-existent owing to the strong mediation ensured by the national government through the Cohesion and Development Agency. Beyond this obvious exclusion from the national route, extra-state options are also exiguous due to legitimacy issues as well as constraints on human resources and finances imposed by the recent economic crisis. Effectively, because the CCDRs are not elected political bodies, they are not represented in the CoR (Ruivo, Francisco, and Gomes 2011, 83–84), nor are they directly represented in the EP. Generally speaking, their contact with the EC is restricted to technical follow-ups on regional OPs. Some CCDRs do engage directly with the EC, mainly for informational purposes and very limited regulatory purposes, but this practice is still relatively new. Overall, although 'national bypassing' is present, it is exclusively framed by a modest engagement in the CPMR. In this section, we will further explore in detail the CCDRs' current activities in this organization. Additionally, we will reveal the reasons why the CCDRs have never considered the possibility of establishing a regional office in Brussels.

### ***CPMR and AER: 'Weak regions' with a reactive profile***

The five CCDRs became members of the CPMR and the AER in the mid-1980s. This intense period of European discovery coincided with the accession of Portugal to the then-EC in 1986. Simultaneously, at the domestic level, the CCDRs were newly established institutional structures, and political expectations regarding the future of these regional entities were running high. Specifically, all five CCDRs entered the CPMR between 1982 and 1989 and the AER in 1986, numbering among the founding members of the association. Nowadays, the CPMR is still portrayed as a very useful channel of interest mediation – for both financial and regulatory purposes – and only the CCDR Algarve has withdrawn from it (in 2012) due to financial and human resource limitations that were exacerbated by the economic downturn of 2008 (Interview 2018g). The remaining four CCDRs are still active members of the CPMR and also belong to the Atlantic Arc Commission (AAC). Some of them are more active than others, in the

sense that they attend more meetings. However, they all receive high-level technical reports and policy briefs covering a wide range of European issues that may affect regional interests, such as Cohesion Policy, maritime policy, energy and climate change, culture and tourism, transport and mobility issues. CPMR members are expected to provide feedback during meetings that are organized on a regular basis by the AAC sub-commission and in working groups in order to reach a collective position to be presented to the EC and/or the EP.

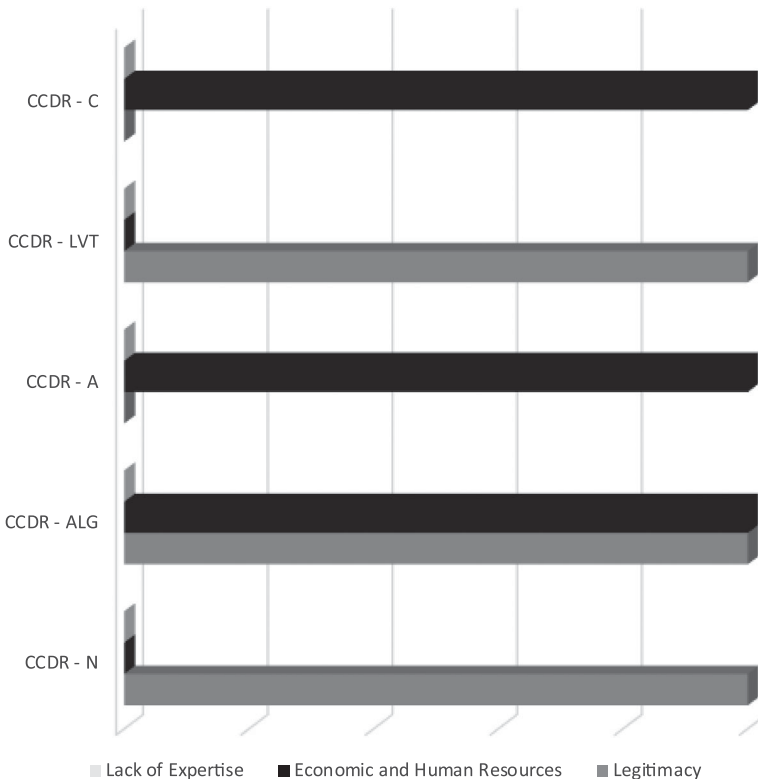
Despite its enormous potential for lobbying (Interviews 2018d, 2018e, 2018f, 2018g, 2018h), all of the CCDRs emphasized the limited budget devoted to this institutional relationship within their likewise constrained scope of competences. Keeping these limitations in mind, their participation is geared towards four main activities: first, legislative information-gathering that will allow them to prepare for future challenges related to their implementation tasks; second, networking activities with other regions and the sharing of best practices; third, opportunities to influence policies that impinge upon their interests; and fourth, participation in collectively funded projects. Generally speaking, the 'influence' exerted through this channel takes place predominantly within the Cohesion Policy Working Group (CORE Working Group), which was created in 2011 to anticipate the Cohesion legislative package negotiations of 2014–2020. The CPMR will likewise have an important role to play regarding the negotiation of the next Cohesion package for 2021–2027. Overall, in the eyes of the CCDRs, the CPMR is an under-utilized institutional tool for lobbying, as the CCDRs lack the obvious legitimacy to engage more proactively at the 'political level' in policy fields that fall under national responsibility. Despite these criticisms, the CCDRs agree that this channel provides access to unique information, intelligence and in-house expertise; it also offers a collective lobbying service (but not an individual one) and networking opportunities that cannot be disregarded.

More recently, the CCDR Centre has decided to go directly to the EC instead of going through the CPMR. In a positive sign, it has already been invited to present its position on the next programming period for 2021–2027. The CCDR North has likewise reinforced its presence by taking advantage of the European Commission awards that it has earned over the years to make itself known to potential partners in inter-regional cooperation programmes. Influence has not yet been secured, but it is believed that this goal will be achieved in the near future (Interview 2018d). Finally, with regard to participation in the AER, none of the CCDRs are currently active members, as they are not elected bodies. Moreover, the AER's high membership fees and the low salience of this channel have also contributed to this outcome.



### **Regional offices: A world apart**

For similar reasons, the CCDRs do not maintain their own representative offices in Brussels. As noted by Greenwood (2011a, 186), this makes Portugal one of the few countries in the EU to lack territorial representation offices. Even regional authorities in Central and Eastern countries – such as Poland, with 18 regional representatives, and the Czech Republic, with 12 – have moved more rapidly than the Portuguese CCDRs (Moore 2008; Tatham 2014). Although it is not possible to determine what is being lost by *not* being based permanently in Brussels, absence from Brussels represents, above all, a missed opportunity to reinforce regional bargaining power in decisions made in the EU. This intelligence gap also relates primarily to policy developments highly relevant to the region’s key actors (employers, manufacturers, social and environmental actors, etc.) and to funding streams of key significance for regional players (Rowe 2011, 89). In other words, when compared to their European regional counterparts, the CCDRs are deprived of the possibility to provide tailored advice to actors in the



**Figure 3.** Why CCDRs do not have regional offices in Brussels? Source: Questionnaires answered by CCDR officials (2018).

domestic arena or to establish direct contacts with other regions in order to derive benefits (Keating, Hooghe, and Tatham 2015). The Portuguese presence is constrained by two major shortcomings: first, limited human and financial resources, and second, a legitimacy gap (political and democratic). However, rationales vary across the CCDRs (see Figure 3 below). Whereas the least developed regions such as CCDR Alentejo and CCDR Centre cite the first argument, the most developed ones (that is, CCDR Lisbon Tagus Valley and CCDR Algarve) emphasize the second. The CCDR North simply points to the legitimacy argument as an inescapable matter of fact. However, this region would definitely open its own regional representation if it had the legitimacy to do so. Here, it is not a question of money, but merely a matter of ‘political will’ (Interview 2018d). Despite these differences, all of the CCDRs feel that they possess the expertise to intervene in Brussels. For the time being, they all feel absent from ‘Brussels’ environment’, leaving the enormous potential for lobbying, networking and fund-raising activities out of their reach.

### **Discussion of findings: A comparative analysis**

In view of the theoretical puzzle posed at the beginning of this article, we are now able to provide concrete answers concerning the role of intra-state factors in the devising of nuanced strategies on the part of Portuguese regional authorities in relation to the EU. Based on the widely varying contributions in the literatures on MLG and Europeanization, we can argue that differences in constitutional powers immediately draw a dividing line between the rationales underpinning the strategies followed by the Autonomous Regions of Azores and Madeira on the one hand and the five mainland CCDRs on the other. Indeed, whereas the Autonomous Regions are empowered and legitimized to pursue regulatory ends – that is, to exert influence over all policy fields falling within their remits (i.e. Cohesion Policy and beyond) – the five CCDRs are much more attuned towards the search for information that will facilitate the identification of funding opportunities and coalition partners in EU-funded projects. The CCDRs act exclusively within the realm of their competences (i.e. implementation tasks of the Cohesion Policy), even though they could extract more benefits for their regions across a wider range of policies if they were granted such responsibility. Therefore, while it is undeniable that the regional tier in mainland Portugal has gained some degree of power with the intense influx of European funds since the 1980s, it is also true that they are still operating under a capacity gap, as they lack proper recognition (political and financial) on the part of the national government. These limitations are also reflected in the choice of the channels used at the European level. Whereas the Autonomous Regions of Azores and Madeira exert influence

across all channels of influence (both intra- and extra-state channels), the five CCDRs are confined to a reactive presence at one extra-state channel, specifically at the CPMR.

Ultimately, these options are in a way 'imposed' by the strong versus weak positioning within the Portuguese constitution and by high versus low capacity-building. In other words, whereas the Autonomous Regions of Azores and Madeira are respected for their strong position and are, as such, deeply entrenched in domestic intergovernmental networks, which provide them with a privileged access to the Council of Ministers through the national route, the five CCDRs are overshadowed by a strong national mediation that is secured by the Cohesion and Development Agency. In addition, the five CCDRs operate with a legitimacy gap – both political and democratic – which prevents them from engaging more directly with the European institutions, namely with the CoR, the EP and the EC. Once more, this situation contrasts with that of the Autonomous Regions of Azores and Madeira, which are perceived as legitimate actors and engage readily with all EU institutions. As elected entities, they are represented in the CoR, and they have established a consistent and fruitful dialogue with the EP (especially through their regional representatives). They openly and effectively engage with the EC over a wide range of policy issues. These multiple engagements in formal European structures take place alongside a highly dynamic participation in transnational

**Table 1.** Comparative analysis of Portuguese regional strategies.

Regional authorities	Mediating domestic factors		Channels of mediation	Types of mobilization
	Categories	Effect		
Autonomous Regions of Azores and Madeira	<i>Structure</i>		Intra- and extra-state channels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Predominantly regulatory and to a small degree financial</li> <li>• Proactive</li> </ul>
	Constitutional powers	E		
	IGR	E		
	Legitimacy	E		
	<i>Agency: capacity-building</i>			
	Strong political leadership	E		
	Well-staffed and well-financed	E		
5 CCDRs Mainland Portugal	<i>Contextual factors</i>		Extra-state channels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Predominantly financial and to a small degree regulatory</li> <li>• Reactive</li> </ul>
	Economic crisis	NI		
	<i>Structure</i>			
	Constitutional powers	C		
	IGR	C		
	Legitimacy	C		
	<i>Agency: capacity-building</i>			
Weak political leadership	C			
Poorly staffed and poorly financed	C			
<i>Contextual factors</i>				
Economic crisis	C			

Legend: E = enhancing effect; C = constraining effect; NI = no impact.

European networks, namely the CPMR and the CPOR. Moreover, in April 2017, they decided to join forces to establish the first Portuguese regional office in Brussels. This comparatively tardy decision reflects a desire for strong and proactive leadership in Europe, as well as recognition of the need for a collective approach to new European challenges. This situation contrasts, once more, with that of the five CCDRs, which are still absent from the Brussels environment due to legitimacy issues and limited resources (human and financial) that, in some cases, have worsened with the economic downturn of 2008. To summarize, both categories of Regional Authorities have not only followed different paths and ends, but they have also achieved different outcomes of domestic change. That is, drawing on Europeanization literature (Börzel and Risse 2003; Radaelli 2003), domestic change has been close to 'inertia' in the five CCDRs, whereas it has reached 'accommodation' in the Autonomous Regions of Azores and Madeira. Table 1 offers an overview of the comparison (see above).

### Concluding remarks

As a general conclusion, we confirm that both categories of actors have been responsive to the European political opportunity structure, although they have followed different paths and ends on their European venue (i.e. regulatory versus financial). Both categories of actors have engaged in the dynamics of MLG, but differences in structural, agency and contextual intra-state factors have determined their nuanced approaches and outcomes. The Autonomous Regions are active and influential policy actors, acting side-by-side with the national government. In these cases, the EU polity has offered many channels of influence that have been fully explored. Conversely, the CCDRs are still fighting against the many limitations imposed by the Portuguese territorial organization, although they have responded to the European stimulus. However, neither group has sought to override national authority; all the regions act within the limits set out by the Portuguese constitution. Therefore, if we seek to assess the overall impact of the EU on the Portuguese state, it would be wiser to claim that the EU does not strengthen nor weaken but 'transform the state' by fostering the emergence of cooperative relationships between the state and regional authorities in European policy-making. In this way, we can now understand why national governments have remained 'the most important pieces of the European puzzle' (Hooghe and Marks 2001, 3), while regional authorities have gained some leeway for autonomous action.

### Note

1. For a historical review of the Cohesion Policy in Portugal, see Pires 2017; Magone 2004: Chapter 4; and Magone 2014, 199–203.

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