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Does EU regional policy increase parties' support for European integration?

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ABSTRACT

How does EU funding to European regions affect sub-national parties' support for European integration? This paper aims at analysing whether the EU regional development policy contributes to setting up support for EU institutions and European integration and thus strengthens the whole 'European idea' among political parties. To answer this research question, the article analyses election manifestos of parties acting on the regional level in Germany, the Netherlands, Spain and the UK for two EU programming periods: 2007–2013 and 2014–2020. The results show that sub-national parties are more supportive of European integration if regions receive more EU funding and if the parties represent regions that are dependent on EU funding.

KEYWORDS European integration; sub-national parties; EU funding; party positions; multi-level politics

The general principle of the political system of the European Union is the idea of European unification and the process of further European integration (Loveless and Rohrschneider 2011). Yet in recent years the sovereign debt and economic crisis in Europe, the 'Euro crisis' (Schimmelfennig 2014), has led to a stark decline in citizens' political trust and in public support for the EU (van Erkel and van der Meer 2016). This decline in EU support has been accompanied by an activation of national identity (Serricchio *et al.* 2013) which stands in contrast to positive attitudes towards European integration (Carey 2002). National identifications have been particularly challenged where crisis countries had to face a loss of national sovereignty when adopting austerity measures imposed by European and international actors. The public discourses in national media

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that accompanied these processes have politicised the issue of European integration (Hutter *et al.* 2016; Kriesi and Grande 2015) and have been captured by populist parties and other nationalist actors that searched for scapegoats among international political actors. Even in countries that have not been strongly affected by the Euro crisis, many citizens became upset with European politics because their countries needed to bail out those member states that were no longer able to service their public debts. Rather than directing their dissatisfaction towards the regime authorities of the EU, citizens in these creditor countries often became reluctant towards further European integration itself, as it would tie their destinies even more closely to those countries that were in severe economic crisis (Ringleova 2015).

One of the key strategies of the EU to foster European integration is its regional policy, the EU Cohesion policy (CP), which accounts for approximately one-third of the EU's budget (George and Bache 2001: 303).¹ This funding is the EU's core element to reduce regional disparities, support job creation, enhance the economic well-being of European regions and – most importantly – ‘as an expression of solidarity, Cohesion policy buttresses European integration’ (Bachtler *et al.* 2013: 12). European integration issues and CP are both part of the European multi-level governance structure (Hooghe and Marks 2001) where European, national, regional and local actors work together with the aim of implementing EU directives and EU funding schemes, among others (Dąbrowski *et al.* 2014; Mendez and Bachtler 2016). It is precisely in this respect that political parties play an important role in the process of European integration by linking EU policies to citizens. Analysing parties' positions on European integration is thus of utmost importance for the understanding of parties' mediating role between EU policies and citizens' perceptions of the EU. Existing research, however, almost exclusively focuses on *national* party positions on European integration (see e.g. Arnold *et al.* 2012; Hooghe *et al.* 2004; Williams and Spoon 2015), whereas the positions of *sub-national* parties (SNPs), which can deviate from those of the national party organisations (e.g. Alonso *et al.* 2013, 2015; Bäck *et al.* 2013), towards further European integration are still unknown.

In this contribution, we develop a set of hypotheses regarding the impact of EU regional policy on SNPs' positions by referring to theories on party competition, multi-level governance and European integration. The hypotheses are tested on the basis of a new dataset covering SNPs' European policy positions, their left-right position, the partisan composition of regional governments and the level of EU funding for the funding periods 2007–2013 and 2014–2020 at the sub-state level in Germany, the Netherlands, Spain and in the United Kingdom. Empirically, the findings show that the level of allocation of EU funding per capita is decisive for SNPs' positions on European issues, particularly if regions heavily depend on EU regional transfer money. These results extend previous findings of the positive effect of regional transfers on

SNPs' orientations towards European integration (Masseti 2009; Massetti and Schakel 2016) by, first, focusing on the two most recent programming periods 2007–2013 and 2014–2020 and thus for time periods when European integration became a salient policy issue for citizens and representatives of political parties (e.g. Hutter *et al.* 2016). Secondly, we take into account that the EU's regional policy is more than just the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), but additionally comprises the European Social Fund (ESF), the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), the European Maritime & Fisheries Fund (EMFF) and the Cohesion Fund (CF). Thirdly, we deviate from existing research by focusing on the *allocation* instead of the *spending* of CP money because the amount of money distributed to a region can increase the parties' financial scope of action and is – for the research question addressed here – more decisive than actual spending figures.

To derive these findings, we begin with a review of the literature in the following section. The third section presents the hypotheses that guide the analysis. Before presenting the results in the fifth section, section four provides a detailed overview of the case selection, the data and variables, and the applied statistical technique. The final section concludes by discussing the results, the limitations of the study, and implications for further research.

EU regional policy and its perceptions by citizens and parties

The regional policy of the EU has undergone important changes in the last two decades by, for instance, establishing common provisions for five EU regional funds as 'European Structural and Investment Funds' (ESIF). ESIF comprises the ERDF, the ESF, the EAFRD, the EMFF and the CF. ESIF money is allocated to all regions in EU member states, although to a varying degree, but these financial resources have to be complemented by national expenditures. Many European regions, such as most of the Greek regions (Huliaras and Petropoulos 2016: 1345), almost exclusively depend on EU regional transfers in order to finance infrastructure projects, among others.

Even though regional elections can still be considered as 'second-order' elections (Reif and Schmitt 1980), parties campaigning on the sub-national level have incentives to politicise European integration and EU regional policy issues. The Maastricht Treaty in 1993 strengthened the role of the regions on the European level by establishing the 'committee of the regions' which consists of local and regional representatives and influences the decision-making process of EU institutions. More importantly, the provisions laid out in the Lisbon Treaty increased the 'demands for parliamentary participation' by sub-national parliaments (Abels 2015: 201), since more and more authority has been decentralised to sub-national levels of government (Marks 1993: 401; Schakel and Jeffery 2013: 328–9). Furthermore, the legal requirement to co-finance regional development programmes within the ESIF scope (Auel and Große Hüttmann

2015: 352) incentivises regional political actors to address regional policy issues (see e.g. Graziano 2010).

Since sub-national governments and administrative levels are part of the formulation and implementation of EU regional policy (Bachtler and McMaster 2008: 406; Dotti 2013: 599; Leonardi 2005: 1), regional political actors are directly involved in the respective bargaining processes. In particular they have a large leverage in decision-making regarding the usage of EU funding if *regional* programmes are required for the allocation of ESIF money. This is because they are responsible for deciding which funding objectives will be pursued after national governments and the EU Commission have established the total budget for each funding scheme (Dettmer and Sauer 2016; Mendez and Bachtler 2016). The allocation of EU funds *within* a country is additionally influenced by regional actors by means of bargaining processes between the regions and the national government in the structural programming phase (Dettmer and Sauer 2016: 7; Kemmerling and Bodenstern 2006: 378). It is particularly regional government parties that allocate EU money in the regions through their Operational Programmes (OPs), thus giving them the additional possibility to adopt measures which could not have been financed otherwise (see González-Alegre 2017).

Osterloh (2011) demonstrates that regional transfers increase citizens' support for the EU if they directly benefit from EU funds (see also Dellmuth and Chalmers 2017), although citizens' awareness of benefiting from regional transfers is dependent on both their educational level and their information use. This point is crucial for the success of CP because 'the visibility of cohesion policy plays a valuable role in fostering support for EU regional policy and, indeed, the EU generally' (Begg 2008: 297). Indeed, citizens are more aware of CP if they are living in regions receiving a large amount of EU regional transfers (Dellmuth and Chalmers 2017).

Furthermore, the potential effect of EU regional policy on citizens' view of the EU is also dependent on parties' positions on European fiscal redistribution: if national parties are already in favour of European fiscal redistribution, then citizens in these countries 'are not more likely to link EU transfers to their support for European integration' (Chalmers and Dellmuth 2015: 387). Different positions of SNPs regarding European redistributive policies thus should be salient for voters. Furthermore, SNPs competing for votes in regional elections assume that voters in the respective regions will reward them if they manage to attract as much EU regional transfer money as possible to the region (Dellmuth 2011: 1021) because voters believe that this money is advantageous for them (Dellmuth and Stoffel 2012: 417).

Even though SNPs' party programmes may not comprise many EU issues because their impact on politics and policy will be more on the national than on the EU level (Ladrech 2015: 86), SNPs have incentives to talk about and position themselves on European issues and EU Cohesion policy. This is because 'the

funds distributed to the regions via Cohesion policy represent the most substantive and tangible manifestation of the EU policy for the regions' (Massetti and Schakel 2016: 217). It therefore comes as no surprise that SNPs are more and more publicly stating their policy preferences on EU policy issues in order to affect EU policy-making (van Hecke *et al.* 2016), e.g. by establishing representations in Brussels to communicate directly with the EU Commission (Marks 1993: 402; see also Tatham 2008: 497).

Theoretical considerations and hypotheses

SNPs have some leeway in positioning themselves apart from the policy positions adopted by their national parties (Müller 2009; see also Müller and Bernauer 2017). We argue that this might also be the case for SNPs' positioning on European integration and EU Cohesion policy, depending on whether the region where SNPs are campaigning is benefiting from EU regional policy more than other regions in the country. Several West German states and their elected representatives, for instance, were in favour of a fundamental reform of CP at the beginning of the 2000s, whereas the East German states – benefiting from EU regional transfers much more than other regions – were against this proposal. These differences between regions have also been pronounced in Belgium, Denmark, Spain and Sweden (Bachtler *et al.* 2013: 165–185).

Assuming that parties also in the regional sphere try to maximise their vote share in upcoming elections in order to win control over key political offices, parties should integrate the positive impressions citizens might have of the effects of European regional funding. Parties from regions that benefit a lot from EU regional policy should therefore be more positive on European integration than parties from regions benefiting less. Massetti and Schakel (2016) were among the first who linked the amount of EU regional funding to regional parties' positions towards European integration, showing that regionalist parties indeed adopt more positive positions towards European integration if they compete in a region that receives a higher amount of ERDF funding compared to the national average. Furthermore, Eurosceptic positions of regionalist parties are less pronounced in regions that receive more ERDF funding per capita than the national average. Because the focus of Massetti and Schakel's (2016) study is on regionalist parties only, we do not know much about changes in the policy profile of parties from other ideological families. We expect that SNPs are more in favour of European integration and its instruments, like CP, if the region they are campaigning in financially benefits from EU regional policy. Put differently, SNPs should adopt more negative stances towards European integration if they compete for votes in regions which benefit from EU regional policy to a smaller extent. Therefore, our first hypothesis reads as follows:

H1: The more/less a region benefits from EU regional policy, the more/less are the parties in this region in favour of European integration policies.

Regional political actors also face economic and monetary constraints in their day-to-day policy-making. Many European regions almost exclusively rely on EU regional transfer money in order to finance infrastructure projects, among others (see e.g. Huliaras and Petropoulos 2016). Yet allocating EU funding through their OPs provides SNPs with an additional opportunity to adopt measures which could not have been financed otherwise. Even if sub-national (government) parties would have financed some measures regardless of the amount of allocated EU regional transfers – for example the repair of a bridge by using national or regional financial resources – additional money from the EU extends the scope of action for political actors. Furthermore, more allocated funds set incentives for SNPs to send positive signals back to the decision-makers in the EU (Dellmuth 2011; Tosun 2014), e.g. by formulating positive positions on European integration in their policy documents because the regional party leadership might fear spending cuts by EU decision-makers in future funding schemes if the regional parties do not emphasise positive effects of EU regional policy. Therefore, we expect that SNPs' positions towards European integration may also be driven by instrumental considerations: if a region depends more on EU regional transfer money to meet its expenses, SNPs in that region will adopt more pro-European positions.

H2: The more/less a region financially depends on EU regional transfer money, the more/less are the parties in this region in favour of European integration.

Additionally, we hypothesise that changes in ESIF funding over time should also matter for party positions. If a region received less EU regional transfer money than in the previous programming period, SNPs competing in this region might take more negative stances on CP in general and European integration in particular. This is because they have an incentive to blame the EU and national governments for regional transfer reductions, thus strategically making use of the complex nature of multi-level political systems (see Däubler *et al.* 2017).² Parties could use this issue and their position on it in their election campaigns to attract voters who are likely to have realised that EU funding for the region has decreased.

H3: If regions receive a smaller/bigger amount of EU regional transfers than in the previous programming period, then parties from this region are less/more in favour of European integration.

Research design, data and methods

We test these expectations by analysing SNPs' positions on European integration and EU Cohesion policy in four countries, comprising 47 regions and 113 different parties. The selected countries are Germany (16 *Länder*), the Netherlands (12 *provincies*), Spain (17 *Comunidades Autónomas*) and the UK (Scotland and Wales). The time period covered ranges from 2007 to 2016. It therefore

comprises the two EU programming periods 2007–2013 and 2014–2020 as well as at least two elections in each region.

The countries and regions under investigation demonstrate significant variation in several aspects. First, regional authorities need to have a say in the implementation of CP. This is only the case in EU member states with a three-level multi-layered political system, thus significantly decreasing the number of potential countries. Secondly, we chose countries where the degree of regional autonomy varies considerably, both cross-nationally and within a country, ranging from a combined self- and shared-rule score of 11.5 (Wales) to 21 (German regions; see Hooghe *et al.* 2010). Thirdly, and to assess the potential effects of EU regional transfer money on SNPs' party positions on European integration, we selected countries with a high variation in ESIF money allocated to the regions, both across and within countries (see Figure 1). Fourthly, and based on Eurobarometer data, the selected regions show a large variation with respect to citizens' views on and their attachment to the EU, ranging from positive images and attachments (Netherlands) over neutral-attached regions (Germany and Spain) to negative images and attachments (United Kingdom; see Dąbrowski *et al.* 2017). Fifthly, on the national level, we deal with three countries being net contributors to the EU's budget (Germany, the Netherlands and the UK) and one net beneficiary (Spain).

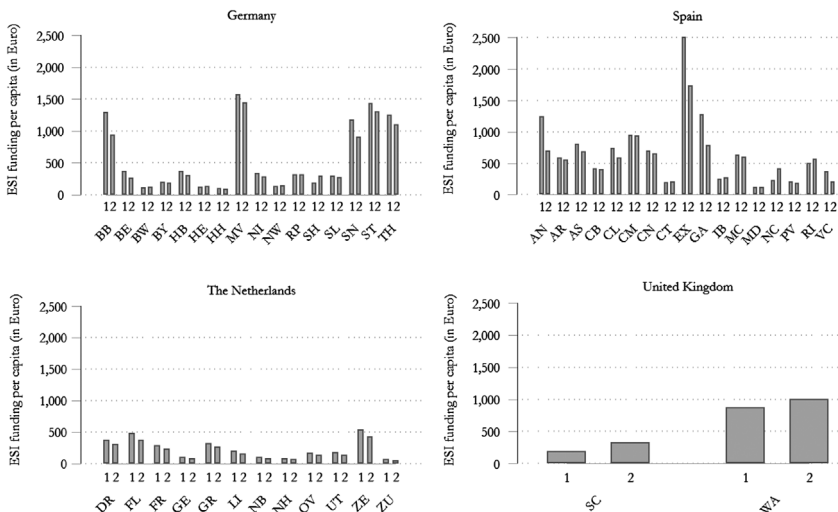


Figure 1. ESI funding per capita in the programming periods 2007–2013 and 2014–2020 by countries and regions. *Note:* Bars show the European Structural and Investment (ESI) transfer money per capita allocated to the regions in the programming periods 2007–2013 (value '1') and 2014–2020 (value '2'). A list of region names can be found in Table A2 in the online appendix.

Dependent variables

The dependent variables are SNPs' positions on European integration and also on EU Cohesion policy, which we use as a robustness check (see below). Party policy positions are often measured by using either expert surveys or content analyses of parties' election manifestos. Yet no expert survey exists covering positions on European integration and EU Cohesion policy among all relevant parties acting on the regional level. We use SNPs' election manifestos as a source for deriving their positions on European integration and CP (Marks *et al.* 2007; Ray 2007). Comparing these positions cross-nationally and over time renders it virtually impossible to code election manifestos by hand and by assigning (quasi-)sentences to different categories (Alonso *et al.* 2015; see also Scantamburlo *et al.* 2017). Since SNPs do not talk about European issues in a specific 'EU section', but throughout their entire manifesto, automated coding of EU-relevant paragraphs is not a feasible approach. Even though European issues are not at the core of SNPs' election campaigns because their impact on politics and policy might be more on the national than on the EU level, particularly Eurosceptic and nationalist parties devote a lot of space to European issues (Ladrech 2015: 86–7). Furthermore, recent research for a smaller set of the regions under study here shows that there is great variation in SNPs' issue emphasis of European issues in regional election manifestos, where SNPs sometimes devote up to 50% of their manifestos to European and EU Cohesion policy issues (Gross 2017).³

We are applying fully computerised automated text analysis and here the 'Wordscores' method to derive SNPs' positions on European integration and CP from election manifestos (Laver *et al.* 2003).⁴ Following the suggestions by Hjorth *et al.* (2015), the application of 'Wordscores' is recommended for two reasons. First, *ex ante* position estimates of *national* party positions on European integration and CP are available from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) (Bakker *et al.* 2015) and thus can serve as 'reference scores', while parties' national election manifestos are used as 'reference texts'. Experts were asked to evaluate the overall orientation of the party leadership towards European integration as well as its position on EU Cohesion policy on a seven-point scale ranging from 'strongly opposed' (1) to 'strongly in favour' (7). In addition, the availability of expert judgements on *both* dimensions allows us to descriptively assess whether SNPs differ in their policy views between European integration and CP.

To cover the time period in this study as broadly as possible, CHES data in 2006, 2010 and 2014 is used as 'reference scores' and assigned to the respective election manifestos of the parties for the national elections closest to the CHES surveys. In the case of Germany, we refer to the 2005, 2009 and 2013 federal election manifestos.⁵ For Scotland and Wales, we rely on the programmatic documents written before the general elections in 2007, 2011 and 2015 in the

UK. The Spanish data use parties' national election manifestos in 2004, 2011 and 2015 as 'reference texts'. In the case of the Netherlands, the 'reference texts' are the general election manifestos in 2006, 2010 and 2012.⁶

This leaves us with the degree of regional parties' support for European integration and CP. The higher the scores a party receives on the respective dimensions, the more the party is in favour of European integration and CP. Since we are interested in the change of support for European integration and CP to test hypothesis 3, we additionally calculate the distance between a party's position at time point t and its position at time point $t-1$. Positive scores indicate that a regional party became more supportive on European integration and CP, whereas negative scores indicate a move towards less favourable positions on EU issues by the respective party between two elections.

Independent variables

The variable *Regional EU funding per capita* provides information on the overall sum of ESIF allocations to regions per capita for the programming periods 2007–2013 and 2014–2020.⁷ The higher the funds allocated by the EU to the respective regions are, the more supportive should regional parties be to European integration policies.⁸ We focus on the allocation of ESIF money to the regions and not on the actual spending by the regions for two reasons. First, the total amount of allocated money to a region should be decisive for SNPs' addressing of European integration and CP issues in their policy documents because of the signalling function towards decision-makers at the EU level. Actual spending of EU funding might be influenced by further factors like administrative capacity of the regional governments (e.g. Tosun 2014). Secondly, focusing on allocations allows us to include the recent EU programming period 2014–2020, whereas spending figures are not confined to the actual EU funding periods since – according to the N+2 rule – regions can spend money allocated for the last year of the programming period up to two years after the official end of the funding period.

We need information on a region's *Dependency on EU funding* to test hypothesis 2. Since there is no comparable data on regional governments' total expenditures or revenues, we use the aggregate gross national product (GNP) at current market prices provided by Eurostat as proxy for a region's economic situation. The indicator for how dependent a region is on EU regional transfer money is calculated by dividing regional EU funding per capita in 2007 and 2014 by the regional GNP per capita in 2007 and 2014, respectively. Higher values indicate a greater dependency of a region on EU funding. Since a region's GNP per capita (in comparison to the EU average) is a decisive factor for financial allocations within the CP framework, *Regional EU funding per capita* and *Dependency on EU funding* are strongly correlated (Pearson's $r = 0.83$). Hence, H2 is another way of testing the expected relationship described in H1.

Finally, we calculate the difference between the EU funding in 2007–2013 and in 2014–2020 (Δ *Regional EU funding per capita*) for testing the third hypothesis.⁹ Negative values indicate that regions faced cutbacks of EU funding compared to the period before.

Controls

We control for several variables that play an important role in the literature on SNPs' positioning in multi-level systems. First, it is regional government parties that allocate EU money in the regions through their OPs, thus giving them the additional possibility to adopt measures which could not have been financed otherwise. Hence, parties that are part of the regional government should be aware of the potential electoral benefits EU regional funding can have. We use a dummy variable (*regional government party*), indicating if a party campaigned as a government party (value 1) or if the party drafted its election manifesto as an opposition party (value 0). This information is partly based on data presented in Bäck *et al.* (2013) and has been extended by searching the websites of regional parliaments and governments for more recent information on regional governments' partisan composition.

Secondly, this relationship might be even stronger if parties are not only part of the regional, but also of the national government. Bouvet and Dall'erba (2010) show that national governments spend more EU money in regions governed by parties that also form the national government, in particular if the national government needs to secure votes in these regions. Dotti (2016) demonstrates that regions get more financial EU support and have more flexibility regarding the implementation of CP measures if they are politically aligned with the national government. Based on these previous findings, we include an interaction term between a party's participation in the regional and the national government.

Thirdly, European integration has been put forward by parties from the ideological centre and by moderate parties from the centre-left and centre-right (Hooghe and Marks 2009: 21), whereas radical left parties and parties from the far right are much more Eurosceptic and opposed to European integration than parties from other party families (Aichholzer *et al.* 2014; Marks *et al.* 2002). We expect this pattern of an inverted U-shaped relationship to be also reflected on the regional level and we control for it by using SNPs' positions on a general left-right dimension (see also Massetti and Schakel 2016). We measured SNPs' general left-right positions by again applying 'Wordscores' and by using information on parties' general left-right positions according to the CHES data. *L-R extremity* is calculated as the absolute distance between a party's general left-right position and the centre of the 11-point left-right scale.

Regarding the evaluation of the third hypothesis, we also control for SNPs' policy positions at the previous election (*EU integration*_{*t-1*} and *EU Cohesion policy*_{*t-1*}, respectively). Finally, we take potential effects of the sovereign debt

and economic crisis in Europe into account since the Euro crisis has provoked political reactions by EU citizens resulting in a stark decline in political trust and democracy (see e.g. van Erkel and van der Meer 2016). We created a dummy variable indicating if a regional election has taken place before (0) or after (1) the outbreak of the *Euro crisis* in October 2009 (Featherstone 2011).

Results

The estimated policy positions of sub-national parties on European integration and CP show a high face validity because SNPs are ordered in a way that one would expect relying on case-based knowledge. For instance, the parties in Germany with government experience on the national level – CDU/CSU, FDP, Greens and SPD – are on average far more in favour of European integration and CP than ‘The Left’ and the ‘Alternative for Germany’ (AfD) which are known to have more sceptical views on the EU and the Euro. This finding also holds for Dutch, Scottish, Spanish and Welsh parties (see Table A1 in the online appendix). Furthermore, SNPs’ positions differ between European integration and CP. These policy differences are, however, most of the time more pronounced on the issue of European integration than on regional policy. Additionally, there are not only differences between *parties*, but also between *regions* (see Table A2 in the online appendix). On average, SNPs’ positions on EU integration differ more than on CP throughout the regions, particularly in Germany and the Netherlands, whereas virtually all Spanish parties are highly in favour of CP. This adds to previous findings showing that sub-national party branches have some leeway in positioning themselves on, for instance, economic and societal issues (Müller 2009). Note, however, that SNPs’ positions on European integration and CP are highly correlated (Pearson’s $r = 0.82$). We therefore restrict the analysis to SNPs’ positions on European integration and use the estimated positions on CP as an additional check on the robustness of the results.

The dataset consists of sub-national party positions on European integration in a given regional election within a country. As a result, the dataset is two-fold clustered. First, the overall majority of parties are sub-national branches of national parties; thus the observations are clustered into national parties. Secondly, the observations are clustered into regions within four different countries. We account for this clustering by estimating linear-mixed effects models with national parties on the upper level and sub-national parties on the lower level. Since party-fixed effects for national parties already control for unobserved factors on the national level, we do not include country-fixed effects. In addition, four countries would be too few groups to be included as level-2 variables (see Stegmueller 2013).

We evaluate the first and second hypotheses in Models 1 and 2 (Table 1). The third hypothesis is evaluated separately in Model 3 (Table 2) because the dependent variable is now the positional *shift* of sub-national parties (and not

Table 1. Determinants of sub-national party positions on European integration.

	Model 1	Model 2
<i>Hypothesis 1:</i>		
Regional EU funding per capita (natural log)	0.07* (0.03)	
<i>Hypothesis 2:</i>		
Dependency on EU funding		2.21* (1.12)
<i>Control variables</i>		
Regional government party (RGP)	0.34*** (0.08)	0.34*** (0.08)
National government party (NGP)	0.21 (0.10)	0.22* (0.10)
RGP * NGP	-0.27* (0.12)	-0.27* (0.12)
L-R extremity	-0.32*** (0.03)	-0.33*** (0.03)
Euro crisis	0.22*** (0.05)	0.22*** (0.05)
Party fixed effects	Included	Included
Constant	4.51*** (0.21)	4.88*** (0.14)
N (sub-national parties)	592	592
ICC	0.83	0.83

Note: Dependent variable is SNPs' positions on European integration. Multilevel mixed-effects linear regressions with restricted-maximum-likelihood-estimation. Significance level:

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 2. Determinants of sub-national party policy shifts on European integration.

	Model 3
<i>Hypothesis 3:</i>	
Δ Regional EU funding per capita	-0.19 (0.26)
<i>Control variables</i>	
Regional government party (RGP)	0.04 (0.11)
National government party (NGP)	0.34 (0.27)
RGP * NGP	-0.14 (0.19)
L-R extremity	-0.13** (0.04)
EU integration _{t-1}	-0.43*** (0.04)
Party fixed effects	Included
Constant	2.36*** (0.26)
N (policy shifts of sub-national parties)	237
ICC	0.47

Note: Dependent variable is SNPs' positional shifts on European integration. Multilevel mixed-effects linear regressions with restricted-maximum-likelihood-estimation. Significance level:

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

the *positions* itself). We restrict the analyses to the first elections in a region throughout an EU programming period because the expected effect of EU regional transfer money allocation or allocation changes in EU funding, respectively, should play a greater role in the first election campaign following the beginning of a EU funding period than in the second or third one.

The results are consistent with two out of three hypotheses. First, the amount of allocated EU funding per capita does play a decisive role for SNPs' positions on European integration. The more regional transfers per capita a region receives, the more pro-European positions sub-national parties adopt in their manifestos (see Model 1 in Table 1). This provides support for H1. Moreover, SNPs adopt supportive positions on further steps on European integration because of a region's dependency on EU funding. The more dependent a region is on ESIF money, the more positive positions SNPs adopt on European integration. This is indicated by the positive and statistically significant effect in Model 2 (see Table 1) and thus lends support to H2. We interpret this finding as an instrumental approach by sub-state political actors: if they are reliant on EU regional transfers – for instance, to finance local and regional infrastructure projects – they adopt more positive positions on EU integration than regional actors that are less dependent on EU funding. These results demonstrate that EU regional policy does have a positive impact on SNPs' positions towards further European integration and thus extends previous research showing that this is the case for parties exclusively competing on the regional level (Masseti and Schakel 2016).¹⁰

The regression results presented in Table 2 highlight that changes in the EU regional funding per capita between 2007 and 2014 do not have a statistically significant effect on SNPs' position shifts on EU integration. We therefore have to reject H3. This might be explained by the fact that a vast majority of regions under study had to face severe cutbacks in EU funding per capita in the current programming period 2014–2020, whereas only a few regions financially benefited more compared to the previous funding period (see Figure 1). In other words, the distributional balance between regions was not altered sufficiently – because most regions saw financial cuts – to result in major policy shifts. Given that the level of EU regional transfers is largely dependent on a region's gross domestic product per capita (compared to the EU average), receiving less ESIF money compared to the previous programming period is also an indication of a region's economic development. SNPs representing prosperous regions might not shift their positions on European integration much because they still acknowledge the beneficial role previous CP transfers have played for the region's economic development.

The control variables show the expected effects. For instance, we see that SNPs are more in favour of EU integration if they are part of either the regional or the national government. Opposition parties at both the national and regional level are significantly more sceptical on further steps to European

integration. This highlights the importance of multi-level characteristics not only for understanding government formation on the regional level (Bäck et al. 2013), but also for the analysis of regional party positions. Furthermore, SNPs from the radical right and the extreme left are more against European integration than other parties. This corroborates the findings for parties at the national and regional level (Arnold et al. 2012; Hooghe et al. 2004; Massetti and Schakel 2016).

Conclusion

Regions play a crucial role in the formulation and implementation of EU Cohesion policy, one of the most important EU policies to foster economic growth as well as citizens' views on European integration in a positive way. Sub-national governments and parties are an essential part of this approach. Whereas there exists an exhaustive strand of literature on the impact of CP on the economic development of regions (for an overview, see Crescenzi and Giua 2017), the aim of this contribution was to answer the question whether EU regional policy has a positive impact on SNPs' positions on EU integration.

We found that regional parties are more supportive of European integration the more funding a region receives from the EU and the more a region depends on EU funding. Put differently, SNPs adopt more negative stances towards European integration if they run for elections in regions that benefit from EU regional policy to a smaller extent than other regions. This indicates that parties in the regional sphere do consider the money that the region they represent receives from Brussels, which could have implications for how parties – as key actors that link political institutions and decision-making with citizens and their interests in representative democracies – frame European integration and communicate goals of European integration to citizens. The latter is even more important if we stress a second result of the analysis presented in this paper: regional parties do not become more sceptical on European integration once their region receives less funding. It seems that there is no 'signalling game' which could have important implications for the level of trust and satisfaction with EU institutions among citizens living in the respective region. Further studies, ideally ones that include regional surveys among citizens and cover more EU member states, need to be conducted to shed more light on these possible connections. Initial descriptive results, however, indicate that citizens do *not* identify themselves more with the EU if they are living in a region that benefited more from EU Cohesion policy in the programming period 2007–2013 than citizens in other regions (Dąbrowski et al. 2017).

It is necessary to reflect on these findings critically as the estimations of SNPs' policy positions feature some shortcomings which need to be taken into account in future studies. Even though regional political actors address European issues in various sections of their manifestos, using the entire manifesto comes with

a price because the estimations are additionally based on information in paragraphs that are not directly related to European issues. It might be worthwhile for future large-scale research projects to extract the paragraphs specifically related to European issues via manual coding to reduce the 'noise' in the data stemming from policy areas one is not interested in (Slapin and Proksch 2008). This would additionally allow researchers to analyse via topic modelling (Grimmer 2010) which specific EU-related issues regional political actors focus on in their manifestos.

This contribution provided a first analysis on the impact of prominent explanatory factors in the literature on party positioning towards European integration. In contrast to existing studies, the focus was not on the national, but on the regional level, and included not only regionalist parties, but parties from all ideological families. However, more data is needed to confirm the results presented here, and different theoretical perspectives should be adopted to shed more light on European integration policy preferences of regional partisan actors. For instance, we only focused on SNPs' positions in four Western European countries (Germany, Spain, the Netherlands and the UK). Future studies are needed to analyse if the results presented here also hold in those Central-Eastern European countries where the regional level plays also an important role with regard to the formulation and implementation of EU regional policies, e.g. in Poland.

Additionally, within the scope of CP, regional governments can be conceived as 'agents' of both EU and national 'principals' (Bachtler and Ferry 2015). Yet it is still unclear if and how SNPs in regional governments use their leverage to benefit from this situation and if they express this leverage in the process of political decision-making in the European multi-level system. As discussed above, the funding decisions of the EU are not entirely independent of the influence of regional parties. By increasing their lobby activities in Brussels, regional political actors directly communicate with the EU Commission (Marks 1993: 202; Tatham 2008: 497) and they potentially try to get a greater impact on the first stage of the negotiation process regarding EU Cohesion policy, which is officially only a bargaining process between the EU Commission and the member states. Hence, a more fine-grained research design - e.g. by performing surveys or interviews with regional decision-makers - is needed to disentangle the impact of regional political actors on the allocation of ESIF money and the structure of funding schemes. Adopting such a research design might complement quantitative studies and would help to get a deeper understanding of decision-making processes in EU Cohesion policy.

Notes

1. We use the terms 'regional policy' and 'Cohesion policy' interchangeably as abbreviations for EU cohesion, regional and urban policies.

2. This blame attribution is also used by voters (Léon *et al.* 2017).
3. Nevertheless, since very short election manifestos probably do not include a great number of European issues, we restrict our analysis to manifestos that contain at least 1000 words to get more reliable estimations (see Klemmensen *et al.* 2007; Klingelhöfer and Müller 2015).
4. We combined data from the *Political Documents Archive* (Benoit *et al.* 2009) and the *Regional Manifestos Project* (Alonso *et al.* 2013) and expanded these data with manifestos from recent elections.
5. The Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU) and the Christian Social Union in Bavaria (CSU) adopt a joint election manifesto for federal elections. We use the average of the CDU's and CSU's CHES position scores as 'reference scores'.
6. Regional parties sometimes drafted a joint platform. In this case, we refer to the manifesto of the respective largest party. If parties drafted more than one election manifesto, we refer to the more comprehensive one.
7. Data come from the European Commission and the respective regional OPs available online via the InfoRegio website. For the programming period 2007–2013, we used data on EAFRD's and EMFF's precursor funds, i.e. the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF), the Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance (FIFG) and the European Fisheries Fund (EFF). None of the selected countries has been entitled to CF funding. Some transfer money from specific funds is allocated to more than one region. We partitioned the transfer money equally to the respective regions, with the exception of the two German city-states Berlin and Bremen where we attributed EAFRD money to Brandenburg and Lower Saxony, respectively. EMFF money is allocated to countries per se, not to individual regions. Due to a lack of more fine-grained data, we divided EMFF transfer money by the number of regions in each country.
8. We take the logarithm of this variable to get a more normalised distributed variable (see also Massetti and Schakel 2016).
9. We divide this variable by the factor 1000 in order to get a 'visible' coefficient in the regression analysis.
10. However, the respective coefficient in the second regression model with the parties' positions on CP as the dependent variable is statistically significant only at the 10% level (see Table A3 in the online appendix).

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