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Domestic structure and sub-national foreign policy: an explanatory framework

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to examine the effects of domestic structure forces on “sub-national” foreign policy (SFP); an analytical concept provides a suitable operational framework for research on international activities of sub-national entities or regions.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper is carried out on the basis of a theoretical framework proposed by the author. First, the dependent variable is defined. Then, domestic structure is broken down into four variables, including legal grounds, the level of autonomy, the type of intergovernmental relations and institutionalization. A comparative method is used to examine the validity of the theoretical framework.

Findings – The paper finds out that domestic structural forces influence level and form of SFP with some regularity. The influence of these forces on SFP can be explained, as they recur and have such consistent effects that they create patterns and regularities in SFP. Such regularities can be detected through systematic analysis.

Originality/value – The topic of SFP is relatively controversial because of academic debate over international agency of substate actors. However, it is a worthwhile subject of research, as it has the potential to revolutionize research in foreign policy analysis. Moreover, the phenomenon of SFP is in need of theorizing and comparison as the literature on SFP is still in its infancy.

Keywords Intergovernmental relations, Institutionalization, Domestic structure, Legal grounds, Level of regional autonomy, Sub-national entities, Sub-national foreign policy

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The link between domestic structure and foreign policy has been studied by several scholars. In 1969, Kissinger advised that the USA should examine the interplay of domestic forces in the Socialist bloc to better understand the Soviet actions. He argued that domestic structure is crucial to the understanding a state's foreign policy, as it determines allocation of resources, interpretation of other countries' actions and the goals of a countries' foreign policy. Kissinger particularly focused on the nature of the administrative structure and the leadership as essential factors to the shaping of a state's relationships with other nations.

Nevertheless, the perspective on the relation between the domestic structure and foreign policy started to emerge with [Rosenau \(1976\)](#) who emphasized that foreign policy is



fundamentally influenced by clusters of orientation held by the elite, a set of commitments and forms of history we can detect from historical analysis.

Since then, many scholars of international relations, and students of comparative politics, argued the case for the importance of domestic politics. They maintain that domestic structure is typically an important part of the explanation for states' foreign policies and seek to understand its influence more precisely. They accepted the view that foreign policy of a country is to a large extent determined by its domestic structure, which seems to account for general features of foreign policies, the degree of stability as well as the level of activity and commitment. Domestic structure also seems to determine key factors to the implementation of foreign policy (Fearon, 1998; Risse-Kappen, 1991).

Globalization and the rise of transnational regimes, especially regional trading areas, have eroded the distinction between domestic and foreign affairs and further advanced the framework analyzing the impact of domestic structure on foreign policy (Keating, 1999).

Purpose

Benefiting from the literature on the relationship between domestic structure and foreign policy, this paper attempts to explain the interplay between domestic structure forces and the formulation of "sub-national" foreign policy (SFP), sometimes called the foreign policy of non-central governments/regions¹. In doing so, the paper is structured into three main sections. First, the proposed theoretical framework is explained. Second, the dependent variable SFP is defined. Then, the third section offers an examination of the impact of domestic structure on SFP using four variables, including legal grounds, the level of autonomy, the nature of intergovernmental relations and institutionalization.

In this paper, the term SFP is used as an analytical concept, which provides a suitable operational framework for research on international activities of sub-national entities (SNEs) or regions. SFP can be defined as the involvement of SNEs or regions in international relations "through the establishment of permanent or *ad hoc* contacts with foreign public or private entities" (Cornago, 1999, 40).

Value

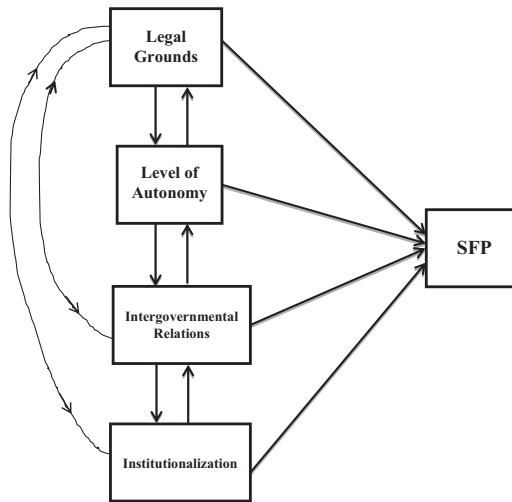
This topic is relatively controversial, not only because of academic debate over international agency of substate actors, but also because it revolutionizes research in foreign policy analysis (FPA) by including 'SFP to the subfield.

However, this topic is a worthwhile subject of research for a number of reasons. First of all, the literature on SFP is still in its infancy, and the phenomenon is in need of theorizing and comparison. In addition, the study of the impact of domestic structure on 'SFP' provides the student of IR with a good opportunity to revisit the external-internal linkage debate and to resurrect the notion of "intermestic" politics. Having said this, this study focuses on interactions between the local and international levels, a highly neglected globalization issue. More important, while this study hopes to contribute to the existing literature on the effects of domestic structural context on "SFP", it also seeks to broaden the scope of FPA by including "SFP" to that subfield of the study of international relations.

Methodology

The study will be carried out on the basis of a theoretical framework proposed by the author to explain the impact of domestic structure on SFP (Figure 1). The proposed framework includes the following variables and their indicators:

Figure 1.
Domestic structure
and SFP



Legal grounds

- constitutional and statutory competences regarding foreign affairs;
- national and regional laws and regulations regarding foreign affairs; and
- level of legal permission of treaty-making with foreign actors granted to regional authorities.

A thorough analysis of the statutory and constitutional competences attributed to regions in foreign affairs, as well as the pertinent laws and regulations, will be at the heart of this study. Special attention will be given to the level of treaty-making powers some regions enjoy, for this is a good indicator for the degree of actorness a region has in the international arena. Let us now turn to the second variable, broken down into the following indicators:

The level of regional autonomy

- decision-making at regional level;
- election and appointment at regional level; and
- regional fiscal autonomy.

This variable seek to assess the degree of regional autonomy, which might “enable” substate governments to exert a measure of influence over the central government’s foreign policymaking and to enjoy substantive influence more directly in the international arena. Before analyzing the indicators of regional autonomy, I will shed some light on the possible effects of decentralization, devolution and federalism on SFP.

The third variable is intergovernmental relations. Here are its indicators:

The type of intergovernmental relations

- cooperative-coordinated pattern;
- conflictual pattern; and
- mechanisms of region-state consultations on foreign affairs.

This variable seeks to establish whether the type of relations (cooperative or conflictual) between the central and regional governments affects the prospects of success for the international activities of regions. It also seeks to explore whether there are mechanisms for collaboration between state and region on foreign affairs and whether they are deemed effective.

The final variable draws attention to the institutionalization of the region's foreign policy.

Institutionalization

- strategies/policies to guide regional foreign affairs;
- regional department of foreign affairs and other regional organizations working in related external activities; and
- permanent abroad offices.

The aim here is to examine whether institutionalization is a key variable in explaining SFP. In addition, by analyzing the way SFP is carried out, it might be possible to infer certain motives from it. Thus, the first indicator demands an investigation of the regions' designed strategies and policies to guide their actions abroad. The second indicator will examine the overall organization of the region's external apparatus. How has it evolved over time, and how has it been affected by legal framework? Third, many regions entertain permanent political, economic and cultural offices abroad. Their number, geographic location and opening dates might give indication as to the guiding motive of SFP at a certain moment in time.

Hypotheses

This framework makes the following hypotheses:

- H1.* The constitutional and legal framework could have a distinct bearing on region's capacity to pursue its interests internationally.
- H2.* SFP is reflecting the degree of autonomy given to sub-national governments.
- H3.* The type of intergovernmental relations affects the prospects of success for the international activities of regions.
- H4.* Regions that show a high degree of involvement in international relations have a high level of institutionalization.

Research methods

It is necessary to use a comparative method to have a better comprehension of the effects of domestic structure on SFP and further examining the validity of the theoretical framework. The necessary information to tackle the research question will be drawn from a careful study of national constitutions and regional statutes of several cases, the relevant legal documents (laws, decrees, and executive orders) concerning regional foreign affairs, official central and regional government policy documents and websites, official statements, relevant news articles and secondary literature.

Sub-national foreign policy

The practice of foreign affairs by sub-national entities or regions has been coined in a multitude of different ways[2]. SFP refers to direct international activities by sub-national actors. These activities can either be in concert with and complementary to, parallel to, or in conflict with parent state diplomacy (Duchacek, 1990; Kincaid, 1990; Crikemans, 2010). The patterns of the relation between SFP and national foreign policy has to be examined and evaluated on a policy by policy basis (Mccallion, 2011). SFP can be understood as “a broadening of the universe of international affairs, in which states are no longer the sole actors” (Keating, 1999: 9).

In fact, sub-national governments engage in foreign affairs with the aim of representing themselves to other actors and in pursuing their own specific (economic, cultural and political) international interests, which could be, and might be independent of, even antagonistic to, the national interest as that may be constructed by central governments. In addition, SFP seeks to secure international recognition for a SNE rather than a country (El-Dessouki, 2008).

The external activity of SNEs has “the constitutive elements of a foreign policy, in that it has objectives, strategies, tactics, institutions, a decision-making process, instruments, and a ‘foreign policy’ output” (Soldatos, 1990, 29). More important, the manifestations of the external activity of SNEs are often similar to the foreign policy of nation-states. Regions conduct official missions/visits abroad, engage in negotiations, sign and implement agreements with other international actors, and participate in worldwide forums and conferences. Other forms of sub-national external activity include interregional cooperation and diaspora politics (Duchacek, 1990; El-Dessouki, 2008).

Domestic structure and sub-national foreign policy: an explanatory framework

To understand the external activities of regional governments, one has to have a greater understanding of not only the domestic frameworks regions are working within, but also their ability to act within these frameworks. Domestic structure plays an important role in shaping and explaining SFP as it provides opportunities for action while imposing constraints. In essence, SFP does represent further evidence of the breakdown of the distinction between domestic and international affairs (Keating, 1999). Put differently, a clear understanding of the motivations for specific modes of SNE international activity needs to relate domestic to international forces and the interactions between the two (Hocking, 1999).

This paper proposes a framework to explain the impact of domestic structure on SFP, as it is demonstrated in Figure (1).

Legal grounds

Legal grounds refer to constitutional and statutory competences attributed to a SNE in foreign affairs, as well as the pertinent laws and regulations. Legal grounds also include the level of legal permission of treaty-making with foreign actors granted to regional authorities.

A region’s constitutional status is potentially a key variable as to whether it enjoyed sufficient influence over international affairs (Wright, 2005). In addition, the constitutional and legal framework is an important factor, to a certain degree, in determining whether the regions are prepared for maneuvering in the international arena and adapting to new challenges (Hooghe, 1995). The greater the scope of a region’s policy competence in its national arena, the more likely a region is to engage in international relations. Put

differently, the foreign competencies of sub-national governments are generally a spillover of their internal competence, i.e. local governments carry out their competencies both within and outside their boundaries. SPF partially represents the projection abroad of the domestic competencies of sub-national governments (Tavares, 2016).

The level of treaty-making powers a region enjoys is a good indicator for the degree of actorness it has in the international arena (de Vicuna, 2015).

Typically, constitutions are not conducive to regions operating in the international arena; they tend to make international affairs the reserved domain of the central state. For example, The Iraqi Constitution stresses that foreign affairs, including “formulating foreign policy and diplomatic representation and negotiating, signing, and ratifying international treaties and agreements,” are exclusive to the federal government (IRQ. Const., 2005, art. 155, § 1). Other matters related to foreign affairs and identified by the constitution as ‘exclusively federal’ comprise defense, fiscal, economic and monetary policy, home affairs, border crossings, maritime and land ports, civil aviation and water sources from outside Iraq (IRQ. Const., 2005).

Some constitutional frameworks are particularly strict in this respect and, as a consequence, make external activity of SNEs quite difficult. Mexico’s constitution, for example, explicitly forbids regions to sign agreements with foreign powers (Lecours, 2002a, 2002b).

At the other end of the spectrum are the (rare) constitutions and laws that explicitly give regional governments power over some aspects of international affairs. These legal frameworks remove a crucial obstacle for regions to access the international sphere and, as a result make SFP more likely (Lecours, 2002a, 2002b). Belgium adopts the principle that regions can exert its competences in its domestic affairs as well as in its foreign relations (Crikemans, 2006). A constitutional amendment in Italy has explicitly permitted regions to open offices in Brussels (Tavares, 2016). The Sino-Portuguese Joint Declaration on the question of Macao, signed in 1987, allows the latter to maintain and develop economic and cultural relations and in this context conclude agreements with other international actors (Henders, 2001). Successive laws in France allow local authorities to engage with international actors, including international organizations (Tavares, 2016).

If one looks at the treaty-making power, one will find that most countries will offer no or only scarce opportunities to SNEs (Keating, 1999; Lecours, 2002b, 2002a). However, regions and communities in Belgium are authorized to sign international treaties with foreign governments under international law on the areas where they enjoy internal competence (Tavares, 2016). The Swiss cantons may conclude treaties with sub-national governments of third countries in those areas for which they are internally competent provided they don’t contradict with the Swiss law or that of other cantons and the Confederation has to be fully informed in advance. The Austrian Länder can also conclude treaties with sub-national governments or even with the countries that border Austria. However, an explicit mandate has to be given by the Austrian head of state to the head of the Austrian sub-national entity (Crikemans, 2006). The Argentinian constitution allows the provinces to sign “partial” (nonpolitical) treaties with foreign partners when it is not incompatible with national foreign policy (Tavares, 2016). Similarly, the United Arab Emirates’ constitution allows the member Emirates of the Union to conclude limited agreements of a local and administrative nature with the neighboring states or regions (Obaid, 2004).

But the power of sub-national governments to enter into formal partnerships and sign agreements with international partners does not exhaust itself in the adoption of international treaties. In fact, the menu of options is fairly large, and regions often exercise their right to engage in a variety of agreements such as cooperation agreement (also called

memorandum of agreement), international loan agreement, protocol of intent (also called letter of intent or memorandum of understanding), exchange of letters or notes, and political declaration or statement (Tavares, 2016).

When constitutional texts present no clear instructions on how to proceed, some regions have adopted local legislation to overcome any legal vacuum. In 2006, Catalonia adopted a Statute that allows it to engage in international relations (de Vicuna, 2015). Macau's Basic Law of 1999, which replicated virtually word-for-word its Hong Kong counterpart, states that "Macau may on its own maintain and develop economic and cultural relations and in this context conclude agreements with states, regions and relevant international organizations, although foreign and defense affairs remain the responsibility of" the Chinese government (Henders, 2001). In 2009, a draft Kurdistan constitution was ratified by the regional parliament. Although a planned referendum on the draft was deferred because of a number of disagreements between Baghdad and Erbil, the draft constitution is officially in use within the region. The draft measure says the central government must obtain consent from the KRG before signing any treaties related to the northern Kurdish governorates (Devigne, 2011).

Moreover, some regions have special status with regard to their autonomy and their capacity to conduct international relations. Russian republics of Bashkortostan and Tatarstan are just examples (Tavares, 2016).

In some cases, constitutional and legal frameworks (as in Russia and Canada) leave certain ambiguities with regard to international roles of the sub-national units. That indeterminacy allows regional leaders to claim a right to be involved in foreign affairs (Makarychev, 1999). In other cases, such as the US Constitution, the international competencies of sub-national governments are more implicit than explicit. That means the states possess implicit international competencies in fields not occupied by the federal government under its constitutional authority (Kincaid, 1999).

Although a region's constitutional and legal status is so important with regard to its capacity to pursue foreign policy, this is by no means clear-cut. For one thing, regional governments could create climates in their jurisdictions that encourage or discourage a wide range of internationally relevant activity (Kincaid, 1999). Dubai, which is categorized among the most internationally active regions in the world, represents a good example of a SNE that managed to create a favorable context for its involvement in international relations (Bruns, 2017).

Regions can also engage in extra-constitutional foreign activities; bypassing constitutional strictures concerning international involvement of the regions. Quebec represents a classic case in this regard. The Belgian regions and the German Länder secured their right to act internationally over time. Then the basic laws had to be amended accordingly (Gress and Lehne, 1999). Chinese provinces represent another example. Although China's constitution makes no reference to the capacity of the provinces on foreign affairs, political practice in China indicates that the local governments do engage in international relations on their areas of domain. Over the years, some Chinese provinces entered the group of the most proactive actors in SFP (Tavares, 2016).

Therefore, the actual practice of foreign affairs by countries displays more variety than do formal constitutional structures. In other words, sometimes the constitutional/legal rules and the reality contradict each other. In the absence of a wholly constitutional or legal arrangement, which clearly defined competencies between the various tiers of government, there was more reliance on pragmatic and *ad hoc* devices. For example, the Autonomous Communities of Spain, especially the Basque country and Catalonia, play considerable international and European roles. They directly participate in the Council of the EU.

Ironically, the Spanish constitution does not grant the Autonomous Communities any international or even European role (Sharafutdinova, 2003).

The level of autonomy

The level of autonomy available to a given region can be perceived as a continuum, on which we have decentralization, devolution and federalism. Moreover, the level of sub-national autonomy could be operationalized into several measurable indicators such as decision-making, appointment, the extent to which sub-national officials are elected, and the share of sub-national governments in public budget.

Decentralization refers to the territorial redistribution of administrative functions, and it may lead to the delegation of political power to sub-national entities. Nevertheless, under a decentralized system of government, executive power still resides at the center, and decentralized units of government have little if any autonomy. They merely possess sufficient power to administer the application of government regulations. Whilst devolution refers to the delegation of some authority (being executive, legislative or administrative) from the center to local government without the relinquishment of sovereignty, federalism means regions sharing sovereignty with the state (Wright, 1998; Wright, 2005).

Treisman (2002) developed several measurable indicators to determine the level of autonomy of a sub-national unit. The first indicator is the extent to which sub-national actors have the right to make political decisions. The second indicator of regional autonomy concerns the extent to which executive appointments are made by actors at sub-national level, rather than from above. The more appointments are made “from above”; the lower is regional appointment autonomy. The third indicator refers to the extent to which sub-national officials, being executives or legislators, are elected. The fourth indicator (fiscal autonomy) refers to the share of sub-national governments in total tax revenues or public expenditures, or public budget. Fiscal autonomy concerns the way tax revenues and public expenditures are distributed among the different tiers of government. This particular indicator is so important because financial resources underlie political and administrative autonomy. Whatever the constitutional or legal provisions, these are of little account if the regional or local authority does not have the resources to give them expression. The fifth indicator refers to the share of sub-national governments in total government administration employees. The greater the share of administrative personnel employed at sub-national level tiers, the greater is personnel decentralization.

It is of great importance to study the level of autonomy as a key variable in explaining SPF. The external activities of SNEs naturally presuppose that they possess a considerable degree of autonomy, which might enable them to exert a measure of influence over the central government’s foreign policymaking and to enjoy substantive influence more directly in the international arena (Wright, 2005). That is why external activities are observable and significant primarily in the case of territorial components of federal or devolved or decentralized systems (Duchacek, 1986).

The Chinese experience showed that decentralization and internationalization of the China’s provinces were correlated. Since the reform and opening-up policy in the late 1970s, the forces of decentralization and internationalization proved to be twin. The twin forces of decentralization and internationalization empowered the provinces, especially the coastal ones, and transformed them into international actors (Zhimin, 2005). The UK’s experience showed that the Scottish external activities got a fillip since the 1999 devolution (El-Dessouki, 2008a).

There is most certainly a connection between federalism and SFP. However, the theoretical perspective linking federalism and SFP would generate an incomplete, even

inadequate understanding of the phenomenon of SFP. Put differently, the idea that the former can essentially explain the latter is questionable. For one thing, federal units may conduct external activities, but not all regions of a same state develop international personalities. Second, in many unitary states, SNEs engage in external activities or have an international role that equals and sometimes surpasses that of the central government. Examples include Spanish, Portuguese and French regions. Iraqi Kurdistan before 2005 is another example. Other examples are drawn from the experiences of China, Hungary and The Netherlands. Municipalities in The Netherlands are more active involved in international relations than Flemish counterparts, even though Flanders is located in a federal system. Even a number of provincial governments in China and Cuba have engaged in external activities (Kuznetsov, 2015). Therefore, the bottom line is whether domestic structure provides a region with some opportunities, basically in terms of the level of autonomy, to conduct foreign policy.

On the other hand, international relations, potentially, could act as drivers for further autonomy (Wright, 2005). In a sense, foreign policy at the local level is generally not an end in itself but a means to strengthen local competences and local programs (such as on healthcare, education, or public safety) by having an arm outside. According to Keating (1999), SFP becomes a mean for a region to assert its autonomy, not only against intranational obstacles but also international threats to autonomy posed by free trade, globalization and supranational rule-making. SFP is therefore Janus-faced, facing inward and outward at the same time (Tavares, 2016; Bruns, 2017).

In other words, some regions play a “foreign card” to exert pressure upon the center to acquire more autonomy and privilege (Sergounin, 2001). SFP is also used by regions like Quebec and Iraqi Kurdistan as an instrument of stateless nation-building, without requiring difficult constitutional changes (Aldecoa, 1999).

Intergovernmental relations

A third key variable for the prospects of success for the international activities of a SNE is the nature of intergovernmental relations. There is wide agreement among scholars that a cooperative relationship gives a region access to diplomatic network that nation-states maintain between themselves while a confrontational one threatens this access. In other words, authority for sub-national international activity is partially rested on intergovernmental comity (Kincaid, 1999). To increase effectiveness, Catalan representatives abroad have sought cooperation with Spanish diplomacy rather than confrontation (Aldecoa, 1999). Dubai’s engagement in international affairs rests on understanding and collaboration with the national government in Abu Dhabi (Bruns, 2017).

Put differently, when regions wished to have an external action, the outcome could be more successful if there was close collaboration between the various tiers of government. Goodwill, therefore, potentially counted for much. However, as the Spanish experience shows, it would seem that goodwill and constitutional mechanisms are somewhat akin to the “chicken and the egg.” Which comes first? Although goodwill is to be much prized, arguably, it alone falls short of more formal mechanisms, such as those which currently exist in Belgium and Germany. They enabled regional governments in those countries, eventually, to exercise a degree of control over how their state governments formulated their position in relation to European affairs. Clearly, goodwill on the part of Germany helped ensure that the Länder did indeed secure certain entitlements regarding European matters. The same could be said of the Belgian SNEs, save that this also applied to international relations, more generally. This somewhat contrasts with the more pragmatic set-up in the UK, where goodwill is much valued (Wright, 2005).

On the other hand, regions develop external relations to enhance the type of intergovernmental relations with the center (El-Dessouki, 2008).

One crucial motive behind cooperative intergovernmental relationship is the perspective held by some central governments that regional external action may be positive and welcoming (Mccallion, 2011). Countries all over the world have established different legal and institutional mechanisms to acknowledge a more active role by regions in their foreign policy designs and diplomatic machineries (Cornago, 2010). The support of the South Korean government toward local governance and foreign activities has been of vital importance to generate a consensus in the country over the importance of sub-national powers. In Japan and China, SPF is often supported by the national government as it may provide a bypass to controversial issues and official implication that usually attached to national government actions abroad and delivers potential economic benefit (Tavares, 2016).

In addition, there are reasons of efficiency for establishing channels for consultation with regional governments, when national decisions could require the collaboration of substate authorities in implementation, or when a regional input can make for better policy. This applies in the negotiation of agreements, foreign representation, the international responsibility of the state, and the management of foreign affairs. At a time when international negotiations increasingly deal with matters that affect sub-national self-government, this explains the emergence of various innovations in intergovernmental relations. These are usually intended to link the regional governments in some way to the foreign policy process. Sometimes national governments are looking for backing or at least wish to neutralize opposition before decisions are taken that affect the regions. Concessions and reciprocal forms of compensation are widely used here. It is often important for states to achieve a domestic agreement before entering international negotiations since, without it, states may lack credibility before third parties (Aldecoa, 1999).

An important indicator of cooperative intergovernmental relations is establishing effective structures and processes for communication between central governments and regions on issues relating to SPF. These may take the form of constitutional or *ad hoc* arrangements, procedural agreements, regular meetings and institutional linkage mechanisms between levels of government.

Various constitutional systems provide for participation of the SNEs in the formation of national foreign policy, because of their competence in certain functions. This participation can be as little as an obligation for the central government to provide timely information to the sub-national authority on the course of the negotiations, or simply to consult regional governments at appropriate moments on the position to adopt. Sometimes, however, they also require formal approval by the regions or even the recognition of a treaty-making capacity for the sub-national authority itself (Aldecoa, 1999). In other countries, a range of *ad hoc* arrangements was established to ensure that sub-national officials have access to the central governments' documents on foreign affairs and were also able to discuss foreign policy issues with central government ministers on an informal basis (Wright, 2005).

Procedural agreements have developed in Germany, Belgium and Spain between the central governments and regions regarding EU affairs (Hocking, 1999). In Mexico, the federal and the state governments hold regular meetings to enhance cooperation and cohesion concerning foreign policy issues (Tavares, 2016).

With regard to institutional "linkage mechanisms," some countries have developed new institutions within their central government to facilitate sub-national representation in certain aspects of foreign policy making and also to promote intergovernmental cooperation. For example, the US Department of State has an intergovernmental affairs office that endeavors to channel state and local government concerns to appropriate officials and to

respond to sub-national needs for information, advice and technical support (Kincaid, 1999). In Brazil, the Ministry of External Relations opened representation offices in eight states that collaborate with local governments on foreign affairs. Moreover, Brazil has in place a program, run by the Presidency and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to identify and finance international cooperation projects that will be implemented by Brazilian SNEs with other developing countries (Tavares, 2016). On the other hand, some sub-national governments have established coordinating bodies with the central Ministry of Foreign Affairs to facilitate information sharing and consultation on international relations and related issues, including the signing and implementation of international agreements (Aldecoa, 1999). For instance, Iraqi Kurdistan established a permanent ministerial-level representation office in Baghdad to coordinate actions between the regional and central governments, and address budgetary and other issues (El-Dessouki, 2013).

It is also common to have sub-national representatives abroad within their respective countries' consulates or embassies. Quebec's offices in Mumbai, Beijing and Shanghai are located at the Canadian Consulate General or Embassy (Tavares, 2016). The Iraqi constitution allows the regions to establish representation offices related to their areas of jurisdiction within the Iraqi embassies, to pursue 'international' cultural, social, and developmental affairs (El-Dessouki, 2010).

Some countries provide training courses for sub-national officials on international relations. For instance, the Local Government Officials Development Institute, a government organization affiliated with the Ministry of Public Administration and Security of South Korea, conducts international training programs and promotes international collaborative programs (Tavares, 2016).

Though there is wide agreement among scholars and practitioners that cooperative intergovernmental relations gives a boost to SFP, conflict with the central government does sometimes account for much of regional external action (El-Dessouki, 2008). According to de Vicuña (2015), SFP implies a rather conflicting perspective on the regional activity of regions vis-a-vis states, as it implies the emergence of new power centers next to states.

While regions may certainly challenge their parent state internationally, such as Québec, Catalonia and Iraqi Kurdistan's assertive diplomacy in their quest for independence, SFP is taken to be the reflection, not the cause of domestic conflicts. It has been theoretically established that while SFP does not cause domestic conflict, it can transport that conflict to the international arena (Kuznetsov, 2015). Tatham (2013) explains conflicting SFP as a reflection of conflictive intergovernmental relations at home.

However, some regions use their foreign policy to internationalize the domestic conflict. Recent developments in Scotland, Iraqi Kurdistan and Catalonia that led to holding independence referenda provide strong evidence of conflicting SFP. The domestic conflict between those regions and their parent states has spilled over into the international arena, and that has become apparent when these regions have internationalized their bid for independence. In fact, external activism of Scotland, Kurdistan and Catalonia in addition to Quebec, is perceived as a challenge by their parent states. Therefore, in some cases, foreign affairs have become an additional source of conflict between the central and the regional governments.

Institutionalization

This variable refers to the institutionalization of the SFP. For the purpose of this study, it includes (a) designing strategies/policies to guide regional foreign affairs, (b) possessing regional department/ministry of foreign affairs and other regional organizations working in related external activities and (c) setting up regional permanent abroad offices. The *de facto*

institutionalization of the SFP does not have to coincide with the corresponding *de jure* framework (Kuznetsov, 2015).

It has been theoretically established that institutionalization is a key variable in explaining SFP. After all, it shows the region's organizational commitment to foreign affairs. From theory to practice, regions that show a high degree of involvement in international relations have a high level of institutionalization.

A growing number of SNEs around the world have designed strategies and policies to guide their actions in the international arena. Examples of these SNEs include Iraqi Kurdistan, Quebec, Scotland, Tatarstan and Catalonia. These strategies and policies put forward a region's conception of the international relations, identify more clearly its priorities on the international scale and sells out the objectives sub-national leaders have decided to pursue in a given relationship or situation (Vengroff and Rich, 2004; Crikemans, 2010; El-Dessouki, 2012).

Quebec and Iraqi Kurdistan possess a system for their foreign relations completely comparable to minor powers, perhaps even more so. Both regions have an actual "diplomatic service", complete with its own minister, a corps of officials specializing in international affairs, and a network of foreign representatives.

Quebec's Ministry of International Relations (MRI) was created in 1985 and structured in the same model as the federal Department of Foreign Affairs. The MRI leads Quebec's international initiatives, coordinate the actions of departments and agencies in this regard, and negotiate and enforce international agreements. The Ministry is responsible for developing Quebec's relations with foreign governments and international organizations. It ensures the presence of Québec representatives within Canadian delegations involved in the deliberations of international intergovernmental organizations. The MRI grants foreign diplomats and international organizations located on its territory the privileges and immunities that fall under its jurisdiction. In addition to its trade missions, the MRI conducts its own foreign aid program, and organizes its own international trade conferences (Crikemans, 2010).

The MRI manages a network of about 29 offices (delegations, bureaus, trade offices and areas of representation in multilateral affairs) in some 20 countries in the Americas, Europe, and Asia. Among them, there are 7 general delegations in New York, Paris, London, Brussels, Tokyo, Mexico and Munich. More offices are to be open, especially in Latin America, Europe and India. A few of these offices are actually housed in Canadian embassies, high commissions, and consulates, but most are situated in separate facilities. Quebec has the most extensive international network of any sub-national government and larger than the foreign presence of several nation-states (Crikemans, 2010).

Established in 2006, the Department of Foreign Relations (DFR) of Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) is a *de facto* ministry. Its head has a ministerial rank and, for all intents and purposes, is the foreign minister of the region (El-Dessouki, 2012). The DFR is responsible for developing Kurdistan's relations with other international actors and for maintaining contacts with Kurdish diaspora. The department ensures that the region's message reaches the outside world and that Kurdistan participates in international events and activities. The DFR is required to coordinate its work with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Baghdad (KRG, 2009). But such coordination is rare.

The DFR manages a network of representation offices abroad and facilitates the missions of foreign representatives and international organizations within the region. Kurdistan maintains 14 representation offices across Asia, Europe, North America and Australia. These offices are physically separate from Iraqi embassies, and many of them function as embassies of sorts for the region. These diplomatic missions have functions that

sometimes extend beyond the borders of the host country and cover other countries. Many of these offices act as embassies of sorts, and the KR's representatives abroad consider themselves to be 'diplomatic envoys' (El-Dessouki, 2013).

Since 2007, Scotland has a dedicated minister with the sole responsibility of handling external affairs as well as the resources for carrying out the role. The post's name has changed over time and now called "Minister for International Development and Europe." Scotland's foreign relations have been further institutionalized through the establishment and practice of several organizations, specialized agencies and associations, including Scottish Development International, the Scottish International Forum, the GlobalScot network, and the Global Friends of Scotland network (El-Dessouki, 2008a).

Scotland is represented abroad by several offices, organizations and networks. Permanent abroad offices are located in the European Union in Brussels, WA DC, Canada, China, and Estonia. Most of these offices are based in the British Embassies in host countries. Scotland's foreign relations were further institutionalized through the establishment and practice of several organizations, specialized agencies and associations, including Scotland Europa, established in Brussels in 1992, the Scottish Development International, which has about 60 offices in 20 countries around the world, and the Scotland House in Belgium, which brings together the Scottish Executive's EU Office, Scotland Europa and many other organizations working on international issues (Wright, 2005).

Catalonia created, in 2013, a Secretariat (ministry) of Foreign Affairs and of the European Union, and placed it directly under the Department of the Presidency. Over the years, Catalonia has spread a wide net of offices all over the world, be it a political representation, an office of economic promotion or a cultural center. Catalonia possesses five political delegations in Brussels, London, Paris, Berlin, and Washington D.C. Two more delegations are set to open in Vienna and Rome later this year (de Vicuna, 2015).

Findings

The main finding of this study is that the domestic structural context is important in shaping and explaining the level and form of SFP. That is consistent with Lecours' (2002) conclusion that domestic opportunity structures may enable or constrain the international activity of regions.

The research findings indicate that all independent variables in the proposed framework, including legal grounds, the level of autonomy, the type of intergovernmental relations, and institutionalization, influence SFP with some regularity. Figure 1 displays the possible mutual influence of the variables on each other. For example, "legal grounds" determines the level of autonomy a region enjoys, which plays an important role in conditioning the level of institutionalization of SFP. In addition, there is a positive relationship between cooperative inter governmentalism and the increasing trend toward decentralization within political system.

The influence of the abovementioned independent variables on SFP can be explained. They recur and have such consistent effects that they create patterns and regularities in SFP. Such regularities can be detected through systematic analysis.

For one thing, the legal framework of a region could have a distinct bearing on the likelihood of its international agency or actorness. However, sub-national actions in the international arena are governed more by political practice, among others, than by enforcement of constitutional and statutory rules. Moreover, regions can engage in extra-constitutional foreign activities by passing constitutional structures concerning international involvement of the regions.

Second, a considerable degree of autonomy allows regions to establish and consolidate their own foreign relations, both in coordination and independent of the central government. A high level of autonomy may also enable regions to exert a measure of influence over the central government's foreign policymaking. On the other hand, SFP becomes a mean for a region to assert its autonomy.

Third, if there was close collaboration between the various tiers of government, regions' external action would be more successful. To enhance their chances of engaging in international relations, regions seek cooperation with the central government rather than confrontation. The existence of linkage mechanisms between the central and sub-national governments on foreign affairs enhance the latter's chances of engaging in foreign affairs. In fact, the existence of linkage mechanisms is evidence for positive attitude of the central government toward SFP (cf. [de Vicunõa, 2015](#)). In some cases, however, conflict with the central government does account for much of the region's foreign activity. SFP is taken to be the reflection, not the cause of domestic conflicts. On the other hand, regions develop external relations to enhance the type of intergovernmental relations with the center.

Fourth, institutionalization is a key variable in explaining SFP as it shows the region's organizational commitment to foreign affairs.

Conclusion

This paper attempts to explain the impact of domestic structure on SFP. In doing so, domestic structure was broken down into four variables, including legal grounds, the level of autonomy, the pattern of intergovernmental relations, and institutionalization. Together, they can be utilized to measure the power of a region. We expect that more powerful regions will be more likely to try to influence, not just respond to, international phenomena. In their study on regional offices in the European Union, [Marks et al. \(2002\)](#) find out that regional offices representing more powerful regions will be more oriented towards gaining influence than those representing less powerful regions.

Therefore, this paper proposes a causal model, in which the degree of regional power, emanating from domestic-structure-four variables, determines the likelihood of regions becoming international actors, the possible level of their foreign activism, and the shape of their external agenda.

Notes

1. The term "region" is used to refer to the intermediate level of government, including cantons, provinces, states, landers. In other words, "region" refers to the tier of government between the local level and the national level, irrespective of whether the state is a federal one, or a unitary one.
2. Besides this term, there are several other ways to coin the same phenomenon such as "paradiplomacy," "substate diplomacy," "subnational foreign affairs," "substate diplomacy," "multilayered diplomacy," "constituent diplomacy," "decentralized international cooperation," "local government external action," "local diplomacy," "local foreign policy," "regional diplomacy," "plurinational diplomacy," "pos- diplomacy," "microdiplomacy," or one may speak of "foreign policy localization".

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