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Is there regional level of governance in the European Union?

By

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For my son, the best present in my life.

Abstract

The process of regionalism has been present in the European Union in parallel with the integration process. Simultaneously, it has been considered as an important factor influencing the integration process as well as having back influence from integration. The research assesses the interconnection and interdependence between the two processes. The paper provides examples of different types of regions, both created by the regions themselves as a bottom-up process as well as initiated from the top by the European Union, and it also shows how the multi-level decision-making works in the system of the European Union.

The research findings indicate the emerging importance of regional participation in the EU decision-making system and show how in the course of years this interaction between the three levels in the EU, the supranational, national and regional developed with close consideration of institutionalizing of the regional level participation through the establishment of the special body, the Committee of the Regions, to represent the regional interests on the EU arena. This also shows whether positive or negative role the regions played in the process of integration. And based on the assessment of the role of the regions in the integration process, the final answer flows out on defining whether there is a regional level of governance in the EU or in contrary there is only regional participation.

Introduction:

The European Union is considered to be a true success story out of all the attempts of integration processes in the world. Initially, everything started from the unification of six countries of Germany, France, Italy and the Benelux group which once decided to get into a closer cooperation in collective management of their coal and steel industries for common goals of post WWII recovery, economic development and most important the securing of a long-term stability in Europe as a defense from the destructive consequences of the world wars. Having this number grown up to 27 member states, as well as existing for the 6th decade already, the European Union has shown itself as a great achievement and proved its uniqueness for it was able not only to develop towards one goal of economic integration, but it also advanced and highly progressed in creating and supporting an ongoing process of political, legal and economic integration.

The spreading integration has created various differences and inequalities between the regions. Indisputably, regions turned out to be the engines of growth and as the other side of the coin there emerged the depressed regions. This happened thanks to the rapid spread of the globalization process which was capturing Europe on line with the rest of the world. Hence the later unable to catch up with the growth regions could lead to the deceleration of the integration. Therefore the main focus of the paper is to find out the role of the regions in the integration process, if their simultaneous emergence played a positive role making the integration go on a level higher or in contrary they brought to disintegration. The regions were recognized as another level of important actors to contribute to the integration process not only in terms of economic growth, but they also participated politically in EU decision-making as well as added to the growth of EU's legitimacy among the European citizens. Regions taking part on the EU level through the close cooperation with the supranational institutions, not necessarily via the nation states as it used to be before, gained much influence in EU policy-making process and that way

they made the EU closer to the EU people. Hence, regions were also useful in the good implementation of the subsidiarity principle bringing the EU issues to the lowest regional level. In order to have a successful integration, all levels should be involved as well as all actors cooperate with each other, therefore regions are also a significant element of the holistic approach to EU's goal of becoming an "ever closer Union".

Moreover, these two processes of integration and regionalism in the EU are viewed as the two movements in different directions from one center in the face of the nation state. The integration takes the matters to the EU supranational level, whereas the regionalism raises the issues of the regions. When one goes up and the other down, it can be logically concluded that such a creative structure of the EU aims to involve all the actors from the three levels in the EU decision-making process, thus creating a multi-level governance system. This multi-level policy-making can also be seen as a triangular interaction between the three levels, where when working together the representatives of these tiers can directly reach each other and at the same time all can see what is happening in the 'triangle'. Such a system has numerous advantages for it makes the EU with its member states and its regions closer and more open to each other, allowing each to have their say. However, it is controversial to what extent it is beneficial to each level. The EU and the regions gain in terms of directly reaching each other even sometimes bypassing the nation state, which they could not do previously. Regions gained more influence and voice on EU level as well as EU got one step closer to its people and this gives credit on the good implementation of the subsidiarity principle. As for the nation states, they are no longer in the absolute control of the regional actions, but on the other hand with the emergence of the regional level actors, they were eased in the way that regions now became active and moved on their own for the growth and development.

Furthermore, in order to examine whether positive or negative role the regions played in the process of European integration, the different types of regions are presented in the paper and

on example of the regions as administrative units in the composition of the member states, the Euroregions and the EU macro-regions, it will become possible to understand the impact of regions to the EU integration process. Another essential aspects such as the EU regional policy as well as the main body to represent the regional interests on the EU level, the Committee of the Regions, are thoroughly discussed in the paper for their establishment and launching was an important step in the EU integration process to move forward towards the EU of the three levels all working together for one common goal. EU in its members has seen that collective work is better and far-reaching rather than individual approach; therefore it is interesting to find out through this research whether regions also became an integral part of the Union and if altogether the EU and its regions became a 'win-win' situation. As an overall conclusion, after the review of the multi-level governance in the EU as well as the different types of the regions directly and indirectly influencing the EU integration process, it will become possible to answer whether there is a uniform regional level of governance within the EU or not.

Methodology

The main findings of the research were made through the detailed studies of various literature sources. Frequent references were made to the anthology of Michael Keating on "Regions and Regionalism in Europe", a fine gathering of outstanding works by scholars and experts in the field of regionalism and regionalization in Europe. The articles provided in the anthology gave a close review of the evolution of the processes of regionalism and regionalization of Europe; case studies were provided on the examples of regions as the administrative units of the EU member states, showing their divergence based on their political, cultural and economic conditions. The reasons for such difference between the regions were that the notion of the region itself is very controversial, where numerous ways could be used to describe and explain the regions. The book gave fine examples on how the EU showed its

interest in regions historically, as well as what pushed the regions to unite in order to eventually be able to form a level that could also have its voice heard on the supranational level.

Based on the wide source of information provided in the books of Michael Keating and Gleb Yarovoy, comparisons became possible to be made. According to the visions in the study book by Gleb Yarovoy, the different types of regions are provided as examples of advantageous outcome from the integration process. Yarovoy was able to provide a comprehensible view of the interaction and interdependence between the regionalism and integration while equalizing the integration process to the sum of regionalization and globalization processes. In his book on the political system of the EU, Simon Hix gives a clear picture of the development of the multi-level governance and it's functioning in the framework of EU decision-making system, where he also provides the example of it on the case of the EU Cohesion Policy discussions. The information on the establishment and work of the Committee of the Regions was acquired from the website of the institution as well as described in detail in numerous books sources and scholarly articles, one of which is the work of Gallastegui on the interaction of the Committee of the Regions and the EU Commission and institutionalization of the relationships between the supranational and regional levels.

Moreover, overall information on the cases of Euroregions and Macro-regions was obtained from the websites of the particular regions, as well as numerous print and web sources served as a reference for information extraction. The close overview of the EU Regional Policy as well as the techniques of Para-Diplomacy and Regional Lobbying was made thanks to the information from the books of Keating, Jones, Yarovoy, Ohmae, Bach, Marks, et al. The methodology was based on the detailed review of the found literature and comparisons of the contradicting arguments provided from the authors to whose works references were made. The case studies of Euroregions and Macro-regions were used to give a strong back up to the theoretical analysis of multi-level governance of the EU made in the paper. As well as show the

success stories of both top-down and bottom-up processes of regionalism, Euroregions and Macro-regions respectively.

Research Focus:

The research focus of this paper is to find out whether there was an independent regional level of governance formed in the EU decision-making process or not based on the close review of the role of regions in the process of the European Integration; seeing how the movements of integration and regionalism have crossing points that define their impact on each other. The research question is: “Do the regions play a positive or a negative role in the EU integration process?” In the process of EU Integration, a different level of participants has been active for years, the regions in the European Union, which always feed the ground for hot discussions of regionalism and regions in the EU integration. It is of a big importance to be careful in an attempt to understand the difficult processes firstly, and later the interaction between the two, as well as view their parallel, and find out how these movements influenced each other. The two processes of European integration and regionalism have simultaneously developed in the post-war era and both had political and economic reasons. According to the discussions of Keating on the “Europeanism and Regionalism”, these two processes can also be viewed as the “twin challenges” to the nation state in Europe. They rose almost at the same time, and both had political and economic dimensions, as well as they contradict in the way they are directed, where the European integration goes up to the supranational level bringing matters to the EU level versus regionalism concerned about the issues of the subnational level, the level of the regions. “Yet there are also elements of consistency and mutual reinforcement in the two movements” (Keating 1), and later in the course of the research the complicated relationships between the two movements are shortly reviewed in order to understand the importance of the interconnection and interdependence between them.

Defining whether regions have a positive or a negative role in the process of integration will be possible once the effect of regionalism on EU integration will be analyzed. The research aims to show whether regionalism mostly contributes to the EU integration or in contrary it is disintegrating and creating a risk for the breakdown. According to the ideas provided by Yarovoy in his book on regionalism and cross-border cooperation in Europe, the integration process of the EU can be determined as a process of mutual adaptation, broadening of the economic, political and cultural cooperation, as a result of which two or more countries unite. Moreover, Yarovoy pays a special attention to the process of globalization, which is known as a movement which increases the rapid development of the interdependence and influence among various actors in international relations in the economic and political spheres. As a result of the comparison of these mentioned above processes, he concludes that globalization has a direct positive impact on integration, when they bring unity to Europe as a region itself thus contributing to the "Europeanization". In contrary, in this research the interaction between integration and regionalism is to be observed. The economic and social disparities in Europe, as well as on the regional level, have been seen as the greatest threat to integration process over the course of almost 50 years history of the Community. However, when looking closer on the EU integration, it can be noted that the process of regionalization could be considered as one of the essential parts of the EU integration. The arguments of providing the definition for regions and showing their varieties, then explaining the three rationales of regionalism (political, economic and social) backed up by the examples of the case studies of different kinds regions, regions as administrative units of the EU member states, Euroregions, and EU macro-regions will make the picture of the interconnection between the two important processes more comprehensible, hence allow to answer the research question.

In the course of the work it is necessary to show how decisions are made in the EU, in order to show how the creative mechanism of multilevel decision-making in the EU operates. To

answer the question of whether there is regional level of governance in the EU or not, it is important to understand the triangular interaction between the legislative body of the EU, the Council, the executive actors in the Commission, and the private interests of the regional authorities in working out policies concerning the regions. Or in other words, it would sound as the participation of the supranational EU level, the member-state national level and the subnational level of regions taking decisions together. And in the process of so doing, such close overview of multilevel decision- making will make it clear whether there is a specific division of tasks according to the levels or actually such does not exist.

1.1 Goals of the EU integration.

In order to understand the interconnection between the processes of the EU integration and regionalism in Europe, it is important to review the goals of the EU integration process, and see how it leads the EU to be a success when properly managing the process of regionalization by turning its disadvantages into the advantages. One of the most successful integration processes in modern world, the European Union had several specific goals for integration initially before its gradual becoming a union, comprised of a group of 27 member states as of today. It was vital for Europe to take measures in such a critical moment after the WWII period and the middle of the Cold War between two competing superpowers of those days, the USA and the USSR. Europe was in a serious danger for it was the center of the events happening in the world, when it was actually split into two with the divided state of Germany into West and East, or as it could be said as a crack right in the middle of the world. Europe was greatly devastated with the two world wars, Germany was obliged to pay reparations; there was a great need for Europe to recover economically, politically and socially. The economies of the European countries suffered greatly, there was no stability on the whole continent politically and these also flew into poor social conditions. Therefore, the European integration had many reasons behind for it was important for European states to get together and take collective actions to rebuild

peace and prosperity on their land: “European unity provided a framework for containing Germany and insurance against a new war...the dream was of a United States of Europe, a political and an economic union to take its place beside the superpowers.” (Keating 1)

Furthermore, economically the European countries had to unite in order to correspond to the scalable industrial development taking place during those years; “free-trade theory predicted that the removal of tariff barriers would increase allocative efficiency, while the creation of a large home market would allow European firms to compete with their American and Japanese rivals.”, quite a reasonable factor for the post-war European states. Also it is important to note that according to the functionalist theory of European integration, there were the spillovers from one area to another which were also adding to the integration of other areas.

Moreover, the integration undermined the common internal and external policy for the EU, as well as the unification of the national economies and culturally building one European identity. Having the EU being not a federal state because its member states are independent countries, as well as also not being an intergovernmental organization because the nation states delegate only some of their sovereignty to the European Union, the members of the EU gained great collective strength and influence in comparison with what they could achieve using individual approaches. As for the European Union, it can be said that in the process of EU integration, a political and economic union was created, and now this is not the end goal because the EU integration showed itself as a constantly continuing process of involving many different actors, implementing a number of various tasks, setting up new goals and strategies, never stopping and always moving.

Got acquainted with the initial goals of the integration, it is now important to consider the goals of today's EU as well. “To create an ever closer union” is what is heard frequently nowadays when discussing about the European Union. The creation of a federal union by ensuring highest levels of cooperation between the members would make them interdependent

and their work as well as other areas intertwined thus making the Union strong and unbreakable. Probably, this will also lead to further deeper developments in the EU, where the integration process will easily flow into different smaller and larger fields by making the already complex system of EU even more complicated; this will mean that on the other hand a greater load of work will be required for the EU in order to become more comprehensible to its citizens. Indisputably, the EU is a success, but much is still to be done. The Union needs one European voice externally to the world, as well as inside itself; the notion of common European identity needs to be better welcomed by the European citizens, and of course there is much to be done on the big issue of the 'democratic deficit' in the EU. Following the principle of subsidiarity, the EU decisions should be taken on the lowest level possible in order to maximally be comprehensible to its people, and therefore serious work is still needed to be fulfilled in terms of reviewing the responsibilities in the framework of the EU's institutional structure, where the European Parliament, the most democratic body in the EU will be granted more powers, for instance. Another concern would be EU's consideration of economic disparities between its different member-states and regions and strategies on eliminating such problems in order not to have the negative elements of regionalism such as the rise of 'unsatisfied' regions, which could flow into the issue of disintegration as an example. It is necessary for the EU to work on all of these and many other minor and major issues in order to create such a 'win-win' situation where being inside the team would be beneficial to all players rather than being out of the board. Therefore, once the EU achieves this goal, it can potentially become a strong world superpower, not only economically as it is now, but also politically has its own say on the world arena. According to one of the famous sayings of today, for now the EU is considered as an "economic giant" , however politically as a dwarf.

Lastly, understanding the goals of the EU integration builds a clear image of what is the goal of EU and how the proper management of the regionalism process, by involving the lowest

level of the regions in the EU life in all possible areas in the framework of ongoing integration can help the achievement of a union with strong legitimacy of its supranational institutions and high levels of recognition of one common European identity for the citizens of the European Union. This will increase the positive image and comprehensibility of the EU in the eyes of the people of the Union, thus giving a push and further motivation for the building of an “ever-closer union”.

2.1 Differences between regions

In order to start discussion about the regions, it is essential to try to explain what is meant under the notion of a region in the paper, based on the explanation of the regional concept in the EU. According to Keating, in an attempt to understand the concept of regionalism or a region, many different forms of regions and regional action will be found. As for now, there is no one clear and exact definition of a region for it has many various meanings. However the following definition could serve as the one most commonly agreed upon:

“The term refers to the notion of space; the notion of space itself can have several meanings: territorial space; political space and the space of social interaction; economic space; functional space. A region is the result of the meeting of various concepts of space. It is also an institutional system, either in the form of a regional government or as a group of institutions operating on a territory.” (Keating)

Such a definition gives an idea of what a region could be and what forms it actually takes. When discussing about the regions and their role in the given paper, specific regions are considered. These would be the regions in the face of the administrative units of the EU, such as the districts of which the member states are comprised, the Bundeslander of Germany as an example; the Euroregions, a special form of organized cross-border regions, the projects under which the peripheral borderland areas of the member states get together in the implementation of different EU funded developmental projects; and the EU macro regions, the recent program under which a group of states unite based on their common features or challenges. Based on such

examples, it can be again said that the regions in the EU are different. This would be in terms of their territorial context, actions and goals. Lastly, such a review of the EU regions will make it possible to see how the provided different types of regions add up to the EU integration as well as how far their interests go when aiming to have their voice heard on the EU level. To sum up, such an approach of reviewing different regional activity and participation of different types of regions in the EU life will make it clear whether it is proper to conclude about the existence of one uniform regional level of governance.

2.2 Economic rationale: economic integration. Euroregions

Europe is the part of the world, which has experienced numerous wars and genocides. Especially, during the WWII the relations between the states also greatly stagnated. Cooperational works on the border areas between the nation states of Europe could serve as a great tool to enhance good neighborly relations between these countries. Common projects and activities between the borderland areas of the member states could be helpful in making states closer and more 'open' to each other in terms of willingness for collaboration and mutual support as well as improve the consequences of hard times in history. This was the leverage for the launching of the growth of popularity of the "border regions having their own political self-governments" forming the unions of borderland areas, the Euroregions.

"Euroregions are transborder areas in frames of which there is guided cooperation between units representing regions of two or more countries (self government territory units). Each of them is appointed and functions under the internal law of a particular country. The aim of euroregions is development of economics cooperation development, infrastructure extension, environmental protection as well as tourism and culture / educational activity." (Lewandowski)

With the happening changes in Eastern and Central Europe, in 1990s, there were also opportunities for cooperation emerging. This was because of many factors, the most important of which were the growing independence of local and regional actors, as well as possibilities for the regions of the neighboring states. One of such success stories is the case of a Euroregion

Niemen, a borderland union between the countries of Poland, Lithuania, Belarussia and even Russia. The area serves as a good example of Euroregions being the engines for economic integration by fostering economic development and growth of the peripheral regions in order to catch up with the other regions which greatly benefited from the EU integration process. Being an underdeveloped depressed region, the Euroregion Niemen became a successful region which grew economically and socially.

It was during the 3rd Baltic Economic Forum in Poland on 11 February 1995 when the project of the Euroregion Niemen establishment was discussed. The border regions of Poland, Lithuania, Belarus and Russian Kaliningrad Oblast participated in the forum. Later on in 1996 these regional representatives gathered again to discuss the organization and projects of the Euroregion. Niemen was founded on July 6th 1997 “on the power of a multilateral understanding concluded by representatives of: Suwalskie Voivodeship (Poland), Alytus and Mariampol regions (Lithuania) and Grodzieńskie Voivodeship (Belarussia).” These areas were united based on their common cultural, historical and geographical features and now aimed to establish strong social, political and economic contacts for the purposes of mutual development. The main purposes of its establishment were the promotion of the borderland cooperation in numerous spheres such as “economy and infrastructure, spatial planning, education, public health, culture, sport, tourism, environment protection etc.” Moreover, to go deeper on the activities of the Niemen members and their development the special association from Poland was formed. The "Euroregion Niemen" Association dates back to 27th October 1997.

““Its members are the local self-governments of podlaskie and warmińsko-mazurskie voivodships that belong to the Niemen Euroregion. The Association currently comprises 51 members, including: 42 gmina’s self-governments, 7 powiat’s self-governments, the self-government of podlaskie voivodship and 1 non-governmental organisation. The activities of the Association are aimed at social and economic development of the Polish members to the Euroregion Niemen. Those activities include supporting the progress under laws of nature, improvement of local inhabitants’ living conditions, growth of permitted by law frontier as well as cross-border cooperation with the neighbouring

countries' regions and promoting Polish activity in the European Union. The financial resources of the Association are mainly membership fees and funds allocated to manage the aid programmes implemented by the Association. It also acquires external funds for the realisation of its own projects..." (Euroregion Niemen)

The main goal of the Association is to support different forms of cross-border cooperations and "reduce negative stereotypes and prejudices, and foster business relations." As one of its activities the Association carries out programs for cross-border projects which are supported by the EU funds. Moreover, the Association managed "the aid funds to finance 368 projects for the total amount exceeding 15.5 million EUR." Besides, the administration of these funds, the Association also implements its own projects on development of education and skills training, as well as other economic and social projects; observes the activities of the Polish membership participation in the Niemen Euroregion Council.

Furthermore, the the number of Euroregions increased in the EU. The Assembly of European Regions (AER) adopted Statutes, a special declaration where the concept of Euroregion was given a definition. Also it became highly important to systematize the activities of Euroregions, for they proved their importance in the deepening of the economic integration and had their role unavoidable in further cooperational activities between the regions of the EU member states. According to AER, there were almost 300 different regions existent with a population of almost 400 million people residing in them. And as a matter of fact, "regions were recognised as an essential and indispensable element for developing European integration." According to the agreement, the main factors determining the successful development of euroregions include:

"partnership of all countries forming a Euroregion, equal rights and equal evaluation; elaboration of a common strategy for the frontier area; good neighbourhood and understanding between the border communities; voluntary participation in the Euroregion and its activities; obligatory consensus; taking into consideration the partner's interests, informing about changes; principle of rotation while implementing activities, organising meetings and conferences; support for local initiatives by state and international institutions, in implementing cross-border co-operation." (Euroregion Niemen)

Another document on “transfrontier co-operation between territorial communities or authorities” became the European Outline Convention (Madrid Convention) of 1980. The countries which signed the Convention have to support co-operation by also allowing the states to “limit the communities and the local governments, spheres and forms of their activities, as well as to appoint representatives controlling these authorities.” The agreements on cross-border cooperation between the representatives of state and regional authorities were added to the Convention, which are also used in the formation of Euroregions respectively.

Lastly, the Euroregions show that they can bring significant success to the EU by bringing the depressed peripheral regions of the EU in line with the growth regions, allowing the EU integration to become a pleasant process where all the actors are in a “win-win” situation.

2.3 Social rationale: common identity. EU macro-regions

In addition, to the different types of regions in the EU, there is also another kind of newly emerging regions, the macro-regions. They are important representatives of the This concept was introduced when the Baltic States united with the common initiative of developing a new transnational developmental strategy for the region of Baltic countries. These national governments together with the Europe Baltic Intergroup, a special representation of these countries in the European Parliament proposed their initiative to the European Council and the Commission. It was the time of the Swedish Presidency in the Council when in 2009 the strategy was adopted.

“The Baltic Sea Strategy is the EU's pilot project for so-called macro-regions comprising several states featuring a common geographical characteristic. As with the states bordering the Baltic Sea, the EU could soon see a strategy for the Danube region, one for the Alps and another for the Carpathian Mountains.” (Baltic Sea Macro-Regional Strategy)

The main purposes of the Baltic Sea Strategy are to take cleaning up measures for the polluted waters, and to establish connections for the transport and energy networks for the bordering countries. The countries involved into the strategy are Sweden, Finland, Poland, Germany, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia and Denmark. As for now the macro-regions do not have any EU funding, but in contrary use their own funds to implement their projects. When proposing the Baltic Sea Strategy, the countries took the whole responsibility of legislative, institutional and financial burden on themselves, not the EU, and most likely that is why nobody from the member states opposed it and the strategy was adopted.

Moreover, macro-regions are considered as the representation of a new governance level, where the issues are between the national and supranational level. Also, the regional, national and Community levels interact in such a transnational arena. In a macro-region's setting, all the participating parties being in a "win-win" situation leads to social integration based on the development of a common identity:

“Every institutional level takes part in a positive-sum game: the local and national levels are protagonists in the establishment of a space and in the achievement of a goal linked to regional development that crosses the frontiers, making it possible to deal with common problems with a beneficial impact for all participating parties, contributing to strengthen the unity of Europe.” (Baltic Sea Macro-Regional Strategy)

The macro-regional strategies have been also considered as a field of interaction between multiple levels as well as various actors, which makes such participation mutually beneficial for all involved. According to the European Commission's definition of macro-regions, they are recognized as the regions consisting of parts of many countries which are integrated based on common features or challenges, either economic or cultural or geographic. Therefore, the functions of the macro-regions are also determined closely to such a definition. Macro-regions aim to take a collective action towards common problems that concern many states simultaneously. For instance, in case of environmental problems, team of countries should take measures together in order to have the highest efficiency possible because a single country

cannot achieve efficient results. And the Baltic Sea countries case is the most suitable example to show how the Baltic States united in collective approach to solve the problem of the sea highly polluted from the discharges of the surrounding territories. In order to handle the problem, geographically a certain area was marked as a macro-region out of those countries which are directly related to the problem and will have its negative consequences first. European Commission also sees such a macro-regional approach as the “added value”, where all can win from being within the collective problem resolution approach, hence having a number of actors involved and contributing, which consequently makes them closer based on a common goal of eliminating a common problem: “cross-border issues are handled collectively in order to yield greater efficiency than compared to efforts undertaken individually and in a fragmented manner.” As for the Baltic Sea, with its environmental situation, geographical position and influence as well as its historical significance, all add up to the united Baltic Sea region.

The creation of the Baltic Sea macro-region as well as the introduction of the strategy for its development serves as a great example of social rationale of EU integration process, where a group of countries united into a level of transnational cooperation to take preventive actions towards their common challenges. Also these countries have other reasons to make them get closer such as their common geographical position, cultural heritage and economic matters. Consequently, flowing out of these aspects, it can be considered that when acting so, the countries within the macro-region also help the integration process for they firstly unite among themselves, and secondly make up the level in between the EU and the nation states. As for today, the EU Commission has supported the creation of another macro-region, the Danube macro-region. And it seems that the idea of macro-regions itself shows how could lead to a further creation of a number of other such regions across the Europe, and working together can become an experience-based tool in further collective management of common cross-border issues with higher results rather than individual approaches with low effects.

“Italy, together with Slovenia and Greece, has launched a proposal to establish a new macro-region in the Adriatic-Ionian basin involving Western Balkan countries which are candidates and potential candidates for accession in the EU. Other regions and local authorities (LAs) are proposing the elaboration of strategies for macro-regions in the North Sea and Atlantic. The Mediterranean basin represents another space where diverse stakeholders feel the necessity to improve the trans-national governance for achieving more impact on development.” (Baltic Sea Macro-Regional Strategy)

In some cases there will be very specific and visible opportunities or problems that cannot be satisfactorily addressed by regions or countries acting alone, or even by jointly working on a sectoral basis. That’s why the environmental challenges, require action not only from environmental actors but from the wide society. Indisputably, there will appear the ‘non-motivated’ actors, whose contribution will also be necessary to the solution. Therefore in order to have all involved it is necessary “to frame the environmental actions in a wider context that will also bring social or economic benefits.” (Baltic State Macro-Regional Strategy)

“In other cases there may be no obvious primary issue, or issues, to stimulate the creation of a macro-regional strategy but a group of regions may nonetheless be convinced that by preparing a joint, integrated strategy the regions will be better equipped to compete in the global marketplace while maintaining social and environmental standards. In particular, the new and innovative integrated way of working across a wide number of sectors may offer significant opportunities for specialization, cooperation and greater efficiencies” (Baltic Sea Macro-Regional Strategy)

Lastly, the macro-regions are a unique tool that could be used by the EU to develop the common European Identity based on the case of countries joining each other in collective management of the common challenges.

3.1 EU decision-making on a multi level

The review of the decision-making system of the EU is necessary to show how the regions of the EU are involved into this process and to what extent their role is important in the EU’s decision-making system. When talking about the decision-making system, it is of a great significance to understand that it is quite a complex system. The EU’s decision-making system has evolved over half a century. And as for today it has been known as a multi-level decision-

making system which involves three levels of actors, which form a so-called 'decision-making triangle' comprised of the supranational EU level, national level of the member-states and the subnational representation of the regions. It is important to note that with the evolution of such a multi-level mechanism of taking decisions, member-states which previously used to have an important role in EU policy-making system, are no-longer the only actors in decision-making as for today. Nowadays, the authority is shared among a number of actors, representatives of all three above mentioned levels. The development of the Cohesion Policy could be used as a suitable example to explain the process of reallocation of authority with a specific attention on how the devolution of authority resulted in shifting into two ways: up to the supranational level and down to the subnational one.

It was the time period of the Single European Act adoption when the multi-level governance approach was mentioned firstly. In her work Gallastegui discusses the inter-institutional relations between the Commission and the Committee of the Regions as an example of multi-level participation in decision-making, where she describes the initial steps towards the multi-level governance. Everything took a gradual push, when the European Commission won support from the national governments for the reform of the European Regional Policy in 1988 with the aim of the establishment of the single market. In the Commission's proposal, it was said that the supranational actors, the member states and the regional actors should administer the regional funds altogether as a group. According to Marks, multi-level governance is defined as a "system of continuous negotiation among nested governments at several territorial tiers...that has pulled some previous centralized functions of a state up to the supranational level and some down to local level". As for Bache and Flinders, the term "multi-level" means the interdependence between governments and non-governmental actors on different levels. Moreover, such statement is supported by Marks in saying that "the departure point of multi-level governance approach is the existence of overlapping competencies among multiple levels

of governments and the interaction of political actors across these levels.” Indeed, in the interaction the multiple actors are not given concrete responsibilities assigned to them only, but are presented as essential parts of one holistic decision-making mechanism.

Furthermore, according to Bache the main argument of multi-level decision-making is that ‘collective decision-making and the independent role of supranational institutions are eroding the sovereignty of national governments in Europe’. And according to Marks, Hooghe and Blankas as the result of such power erosion, the governments of the member-states are challenged with the difficulty of controlling the activity of their internal actors in the international arena. Such would also be supportive in the case of lobbying the regional interests to the EU level, establishing offices of regional representation in Brussels, or in other words bypassing the nation state by the regions, and their close cooperation with the European Commission.

So in further attempt to understand the mechanism of the multi-level decision-making in the EU, it is significant to also clearly see how the three levels interact. The multi-level governance does not neglect the importance of state, however the decision making competencies are now shared among the various representatives of different levels and not monopolized by the states only. So as a result, it can be concluded that the EU level in the face of the supranational actors have independent influence from the national governments on the regions in policy making. And it is not necessarily that “the subnational arenas are nested within the national policy arena; consequently, subnational actors participate in national and supranational arenas.” (Marks, Hooghe and Blank) Accordingly, it comes out that the nation state is just one out of the other actors in the decision making process. And from here a special attention should be paid to the fact that the state is still an important and quite powerful actor in the process of decision-making, however it is no more the “one in the middle” between the supranational EU level and the subnational regional one for now it became possible for the regions to avoid that

previously ‘unavoidable middle level’. Hence, the subnational bodies, such as regions in our case are also significantly influenced by the decisions of the Community level and therefore integrated in order to participate on EU level decision making. For instance, by using the subnational lobbying offices in Brussels as a mighty tool. Moreover, when looking at this triangular model of decision-making structure, it can even be observed that sometimes the regional actors are staged on the same level of importance as the central governments. Hence, as an interesting fact it can be assumed that in some situations the national governments can no longer stand as the borderline between the supranational and sub national levels.

On the contrary, Bache recognizes that multi-level governance was well used by Marks in the process of description of the EU policy-making, however as a matter of fact the strength of the national governments is widely present for they are still quite influential in various stages of decision-making, thus they could be considered as the “gatekeepers”, which is not allowing the development of the multi-level governance further on. So it becomes controversial whether it is more of multi-level governance or participation on a multi-level. Therefore, it is important to note that the levels on two sides of the national level, the supranational and the subnational are not significantly influential in the outcomes of decision-making. But on the other hand, Hooghe states that regions and local authorities increasingly participate in European policy-making, and “this participation often escapes the control of the traditional gatekeeper, the national state executive” (Hooghe). And the Cohesion Policy serves as an example of such interaction between the three levels, where their roles cannot even be clearly differentiated in the policy networks.

Until this moment there have been discussions and arguments on the multi-level decision-making in the EU with regards of the extent to which the representatives of each level get involved in the process of decision-making, and how the interaction happens. It was questionable whether multi-level decision making has decreased the “gate keeping” advantage of the central governments or in contrary had little influence on the change of their power in decision-making

arena. Thus the best conclusion for this part would be that multi-level participation is present in the EU decision-making process, and the representatives of the three levels comprise a decision-making triangle with all the actors being able to equally access each other, thus making it unclear where the borderline is drawn between the competencies of each for the interaction is now made possible to articulate back and forth in different directions, or in other words creating no separate governance levels, but one multi-level triangle.

The Cohesion policy is the policy that deals with the equal redistribution of resources between the regions with the aim of decreasing the disparities. Under the EU Treaty one of the main goals of the EU is to promote 'economic and social cohesion', which means that the EU helps to reduce the disparities between different regions and other social units in the union. And as for today, the EU has transferred a large proportion of its budget to the less-developed regions. However, it still remains controversial whether such an approach was effective in terms of reaching the policy goal of actual reduction of social and economic disparities. With the reform of structural funds in 1988 four principles of Additionality, Partnership, Programming and Concentration were introduced in order to manage the policy. As it was mentioned before, the Cohesion policy is made through a triangular interaction between the Council, EU Commission and the regional actors, the representatives of private interests. The amount of resources available through the structural funds and also which member states will gain the most as well as which regions can apply for support is decided in the Council, thus by the member state governments. In the procedure of applying for funding, the member states submit proposals to the Commission in form of regional development plans, after which the proposals as well as their number is negotiated between the member state governments, the Commission and the regional authorities respectively. Monitoring committees comprised of member state governments, the Commission and regions supervise the implementation of programs. Moreover, it is necessary to note that the national governments are not in absolute control of the cohesion

policy because their autonomy has been limited by the four principles established by the Commission. As an example of such, under the “additionality” principle some nation states were obliged to alter their accounting practices in the management of distribution of the regional funds; under the “partnership” principle Commission was enabled to bypass the national governments and have direct negotiation access to the subnational component, the regions. Representatives of the subnational level in accordance with the partnership principle were able to directly influence the cohesion policies. According to Hix, a confirmation for this would be the above mentioned techniques of lobbying and Para-diplomacy in Brussels by directly establishing contacts with the Regional Policy Directorate-General of Commission, where the senior officials from the regions receiving substantial funding from the structural funds are seated. An example of one of such regions is the Basque region of Spain. The special institution, the Committee of Regions was established under the Maastricht Treaty with the aim of consulting the regions in making and implementing the regional policies. The other important reason for the creation of this institution was the institutionalizing of the transnational contacts between the subnational level representatives.

The regions in the European Union vary greatly and their influence as well as access to the EU policy making greatly differs among each other. For instance, regions with strong identity such as of Spain or UK, or the federal states of Germany or Belgium have more influence in Brussels. As for today, the regions are still active players in the decision-making process of the EU together with the Commission and the member states, as well as simultaneously by so doing they tend to avoid the way of going through the nation states in the process of participation in the EU level of policy-making. Having regions to participate in the EU system of decision-making was a big step of the EU to the further deepening of the integration process, thus the EU also showed that to reach the highest levels of cooperation all actors should be involved. Having regional level participating in the life of EU also makes the

complicated system of EU more open and more comprehensible to ordinary citizens hence providing a fine implementation of the subsidiarity principle. And finally, this all allows the negative outcomes of regionalism in the form of “manifesting” underdeveloped regions to turn into the pleasant advantages of the regionalism process helping the development of the EU integration.

3.2 Committee of Regions in the EU decision-making process

This subchapter aims to show the evolution of formalizing the regional level participation in the EU multi-level decision-making system by the creation of the special institution to represent the regional interests, the Committee of the Regions. It also shows the interaction of the CoR with other EU institutions and regional actors, as well as gives a brief overview of the issues within it. The Committee of Regions is the voice of the local and regional governments in the EU. In other words it is an institution that represents the regional and local authorities at the supranational EU level. In 1994 it was set up under the Treaty on European Union and now has 344 members. As for its functions “the CoR has to be consulted before EU decisions are taken on matters such as the regional policy, the environment, culture, education and transport”, or the issues which directly or indirectly concern the subnational level of regions. As for the members, it consists of the local and regional authorities, who are nominated to the CoR by the member state governments, later on approved and appointed by the Council. There is also a president for the CoR.

Furthermore, the role of the CoR is in issuing special reports to the proposals by the Commission, which means sending the concerns and views of the regions on the EU legislation. When decisions are being made the Council together with the Commission consults the CoR on all the issues related to regions. For instance, such important policies as the employment policy, education, telecommunications, health, transport, culture and many others are matters of such kind. On the other side, CoR works out its opinions and shares them with the EP, Council and

Commission. “Each year the Committee of the Regions holds five plenary sessions, during which its general policy is defined and opinions are adopted”.

The Committee of the Regions was also famous for bringing significant changes to the Union’s becoming for it introduced a new “level” into the EU decision-making, where now the subnational units, the regions of the EU had gained their say. It could also be said that under the TEU, some other innovations were brought into the Union such as the establishment of the CoR, the subsidiarity principle, both of which greatly increased the participation of the regional representatives and also accentuated the emergence of the other, regional level in the EU policy-making. As a result making the Union closer to the European citizens.

Hence, the creation of such an institution as the CoR in the EU would mean the formalization of ‘another level’ in the EU, the level of the regions to make it possible for the subnational units to participate in the EU without always dealing with and through the nation states. The regions became more independent. So, it is important to understand that some reasons actually lied behind the establishment of the CoR, where European Commission had also contributed. The Commission needed advice and legitimization through the way of establishment of a consultative body. From the other side, even the Council, the institution which represents the national interests, saw the creation of the CoR as the great tool to increase the transparency in the EU decision-making, thus contribute to the solution of the problem of the ‘democratic deficit’. Moreover, with the establishment of the CoR the regions were now formally able to use the channels to the EU level decision-making. In the course of the paper, the functions of the CoR as well as its role are to be discussed. And now it is important to further figure out to what extent of development the CoR as an institution has its say in the EU decision-making.

It is argued by many scholars that actually Commission was significantly interested in the creation of the CoR for it used different ways for regions to participate in the EU decision-

making process. As for nowadays the relationship between these two institutions is tie and their 'cooperation' is seen as mutually beneficial. As for the CoR it gets a certain level of influence, whereas the Commission gets a certainly increased legitimacy through the support of the CoR. As an example by Gallastegui, when there is a proposal from the Commission that neither the Council in face of the member states nor the European Parliament support, the Commission can have the CoR on its side and argue that the matters in the proposals are related to the subnational units.

As for the Commission, it does not only give feedbacks to the reports from the CoR, or has the Commissioners participate in the plenary sessions, but it is still considered as the main supporter of the CoR in the EU policy-making system. Also the Commission and the CoR always encourage the dialogue with the regional authorities in order to have the subsidiarity principle working.

The interesting fact in the development of the close cooperation between the CoR and the Commission, according to the findings made by Gallastegui was that they both went beyond their responsibilities under the TEU and did not limit themselves only by its provisions. They agreed to assist each other not only in matters related to the subnational units, but also in many others. Such would include the informing of the European public on EU policies for example, or issues touching the economic and social cohesion.

Lastly, the most important in the framework of the cooperation agreement of the year of 2007, specific roles of the CoR were defined. Firstly, the CoR is considered as a 'body in the middle' for the regions, therefore it serves as a bridge between the supranational and the subnational levels. Also it is important not to forget that actual presence and functioning of the CoR serves as bringing the EU decisions to the lowest level of the regions, thus a good implementation of the subsidiarity principle. As well as if the competencies of CoR were

increased, it could also be significantly helpful in some other EU policies such as cross-border cooperation promotion for instance. And so far, this has been the close cooperation between the two institutions only, but sometimes even being together they can be left on the other side opposite from Council, voice of the member states for the area of actions of the CoR is still under limitation and needs further deeper development.

To sum up, the establishment of the CoR was a great step forward by the EU and its members states and regions as a holistic system aiming towards common goals. Indisputably, the CoR was aimed to play one of the most essential roles, however the fact is that as of today the institution is left marginalized in the EU policy-making process, thus showing the regions as significantly less influential in many other policy areas not related to regional issues. The major causes of the issues in the CoR itself could be the following: the constitution of the CoR itself is not in a good order, it needs to be properly structured because as for now it has different levels of actors playing in it: the national representatives, some majors of peripheral cities and towns, those who were for creation of the CoR as well as those who initially opposed the idea of its creation. Therefore, having such a different-sided composition of the CoR makes its status be lower and thus not allow the consensus decisions be made. And it is comprehensible because when facing such a “conflict” inside, will not allow the CoR have a common point for diverse interests. Moreover, according to Yarovoy, the inter-institutional relations between the CoR and others except the European Commission are imbalanced and having only Commission on its side is not enough to gain much influential say for CoR. Furthermore, the CoR does not possess a right to influence its own budget and its role is more of a consultation but not decision-taking. The bag of such problems inside CoR itself stay as a burden pulling it behind and not allowing to progress. Lastly, the optimistic view is that the role and functions of CoR can grow if the role of the regions in the EU is enhanced and empowered, which will flow into the rapid development of

further regionalization processes, thus it will increase the governance status of the EU and most likely give more powers to the CoR.

4.1 Regional Interests in the heart of multilevel governance

When talking about the policy-making process in the EU it is necessary to say that regions, the subnational level, have also established an important role. According to the Brussels European Liaison Office, the number of regions and localities with offices was totaled to 192 in 2004.

“These include the offices of the state governments of the German, Belgian and Austrian federal systems; regional councils and other official organs of the decentralized unitary states of Italy, France and Spain; local government bodies of the unitary states of UK, Ireland, Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden, Greece, Portugal and Finland; and various intermediary associations of local authorities, communities, municipalities, towns, cities, regions and subnational units.”

The representation of such subnational units started in the 1970s, with further major mobilization in 1980s when there were reforms of the EU regional policies made. The reform of the structural funds led to the involvement of the regional interests in the initiation, adoption and implementation of regional policy, which actually was aimed to be reached by the Commission. And this would have the regional interests to make the most of the opportunity to bypass the national governments, “many of which were opposing political hues or were cutting back on national regional spending” (Hix). In other words this means that the interaction between the supranational and subnational levels became possible even without the middle level involvement of the nation states. It became more comfortable for the regions to get involved in the EU policy-making by avoiding the limitations/barriers in form of different procedures of approval or review of regional matters by the nation states. As a consequence, this innovation of regions being able

to straightly reach the EU level in policy making without necessarily going through the national level, could be also viewed as the straight line of multilevel hierarchy transformed into a more comfortable system of triangular interaction in policy-making. However, when concluding so, it is interesting to see for whom it is more comfortable, for nation states or the regions. As a definite answer to this question would be that if carefully reviewed and understood, the situation could be seen as beneficial for all the levels.

Firstly, the supranational level is represented by a number of different institutions, most influential of which are the Council and the Commission, where first serves as a voice of the member states and second aims to promote the common interests respectively. As long as Commission is the one which “consciously sought” the involvement of regions in regional policy-making process, there is an interest to work with the regions directly, as well as this is also more preferable for the regions who want to have their voice heard on the EU level. Lastly, it is also good for the nation states because such an approach of regional independent actions would allow the governments to integrate their peripheral territories and also have the regions as a useful tool in strengthening national unity. All this could be achieved due to the growth of depressed regions, relief of the advanced regions from congestion, and the additional output to the national economy; the overall burden from the regions on nation states will be significantly reduced once the regions are on their own in taking measures on their further development and growth. But, it is also important to note that on the other side of the coin, such bypassing of the middle national level of governance might lead to the loss of control over their regions for the nation states. To sum up on the part of triangular interaction between the three levels of governance, one can also see how complex and creative the EU system is. In such a decision-making process, the EU is able to see what is happening on regional level without being limited by the national level, and simultaneously interact with both of them.

Moreover, to see the ‘partnership’ between the regions and the Commission it is good to see it on the example of how the procedure works. “The regional bodies were invited to submit funding applications directly to the Commission, and funds were forwarded directly to the regional authorities rather than passing through central government treasuries.” Also, the regional bodies had to report to the Commission officials as well. In order to formalize the involvement of regions in EU policy-making was later on institutionalized by the creation of the Committee of the Regions by Maastricht Treaty, the new institution aimed to bring the EU closer to the public.

Furthermore, lobbying the regional interests on the level of EU is done by the regions not only because of the presence of EU competencies in the area of regional policy, as well as funding and promotion of the regional representation, but also because regions have their own competencies versus national governments. And this is supported by the fact that those subnational governments with the broadest range of policy competencies, such as German and Belgian States, have offices in Brussels. Moreover, these subnational bodies were able to force their national governments to include them into the German and Belgian delegations to the Council when the agenda contains the subnational competencies. However, according to the Brussels European Liaison Office, the number of regional interest groups in Brussels from such states as the UK and France, the two most centralized states in Europe is much bigger than those of Germany, Spain or Italy. And an explanation for that could be that the regions from centralized states were limited by too much dependence and control from their states, and or have the burden of “waiting” for the depressed regions in their state as well as assisting them in order the whole state to have equal growth of its regions as a requirement from the state.

As a result, the consequence was the system of the multilevel governance, where policies are made through the interaction between all three levels: regional, national and European authorities. The regional level of governance present in the operation of the structural funds,

evolved from the research of the EU regional policy. “However as regional interests have been incorporated into other EU policies, and as the EU policy deliberation and implementation has involved a growing number of participants at the regional and local levels, the multilevel governance conception has gradually evolved into a general model of EU decision-making.” (Hooghe and Marks, 1996). Lastly, Brussels is not only the capital of the European Union, but it is also a place of wide place of political lobbying.

5.1 Goals of the European Regional Policy

With the empowered regions, as well as the parallelly developing processes of integration and regionalism, it became impossible to have the regional problems be housed under the roof of different policy areas. The regional activity as well as the increasing participation of the subnational level in EU decision-making called for a special policy instrument specifically dedicated to the regions to serve them as a tool for access into the EU. The integration process had different impacts on the regions. Some gained, whereas some in the peripheral areas were left behind and under-represented. This could lead to different consequences, to name a few: rise of unsatisfied regions, lack of support for the EU integration based on the decreased trust to the EU institutions as well as anti-integration manifests of right-wing regions. In order to avoid such problems, to assist the depressed regions to catch up with the growth leaders, as well as increase the legitimacy of the whole EU and the idea of an ‘ever closer Union’ as a result of the Europe-wide integration process, the EU regional policy was introduced and gradually developed. First it had the national governments level to lead and manipulate the policy, when later it involved all three levels of EU supranational, national and the regional subnational into the management of the policy instrument. The EU regional policy now can also be another example of how the three tiers in the EU interact as in the multi-level decision-making process. In both, the representatives of the three levels share the responsibilities over the policy

implementation as well as EU decision-making. This again stands as a real fact of EU's creative approach towards an unbreakable union with the highest level of cooperation between its members.

“The European Union's regional policy seeks to reduce structural disparities between EU regions, foster balanced development throughout the EU and promote real equal opportunities for all. Based on the concepts of solidarity and economic and social cohesion, it achieves this in practical terms by means of a variety of financing operations, principally through the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund. For the period 2007-2013, the European Union's regional policy is the EU's second largest budget item, with an allocation of €348 billion. The objective of economic and social cohesion was introduced in 1986 with the adoption of the Single European Act. The policy was finally incorporated into the EC Treaty itself (Articles 158 to 162) with the Maastricht Treaty (1992).”

Before the adoption of the regional policy, there was no single place where the regional issue were considered, they were spread in a number of different policy areas. The regional problems were firstly recognized in the Common Agricultural Policy, the European Social Fund, the European Investment Bank and other policies such as the policy areas such as the transport and the state aid policies. “In 1971, limits were placed on allowable national regional aid, with higher limits for the poorer parts of the Community, though no region was absolutely excluded.” (Keating)

Initially, the regional policy was almost under the absolute control of the member states where they were setting the priorities as well as distributed the funds, and they also were independent of the supranational and subnational levels. At that time the policy was not of a high political significance as well as the amounts of funds were not so large. Moreover, having the power to determine the eligible regions, the member states did not provide a guarantee that the funds were properly distributed, so that the most in need of those funds were getting them. “Governments needed to produce projects to receive the funding, but they simply sent in grants and infrastructure spending which were already planned and, in many cases, completed.”

(Keating) and if so, then what would be the reason for having such a policy instrument, if there was no goal-orientation as well as zero effectiveness.

One of the reasons why the EU regional policy gained wide support for adoption because the policy serves multiple objectives and it does not focus only on a delimited problem, but it serves multiple interests on all the levels, the supranational, national and subnational respectively. This is also not a policy that was pursued by one actor only, but many in the face of the EU, the member states and the regions themselves locking up the control triangle. Moreover, with the development of the policy even more actors were brought into the process of the management of the competing interests considered in the policy. And together with this the potential support base for the policy increased, however at the same time the conflict over the control of the policy also increased. The nation states were no longer in the sole control of it with the attendance of the EU and the regions also in the policy management. With the course of time however, the policy became weightier in terms of funds added and this also attracted all the three level representatives to compete for the control of this policy tool.

As for today, the Commission has to put proposals for the Council of Ministers to take the decisions. This again shows more influential position of the Commission and the regions in terms of defining the problems and setting them on the EU agenda, as well as it also engaged the regional representatives and local authorities into a dialogue, thus making it a real European policy. Previously the Commission dealt only with the rejection or accepting of the projects. Moreover, the Commission also became the initiator of the cohesion problem in the Union and thus proposed also for the cohesion policy. According to the further developments in the policy and the introduction of the cohesion policy as well, the principles of partnership, subsidiarity and additionality were introduced, which meant that the regions were even more empowered. Under the “Partnership” , the three levels are meant to work together on the administration and implementation of different operations. Subsidiarity principle would make all these actions be

done on the lowest possible level. And “Additionality” required that the aid provided by the Community should be additional to the support from the national and regional governments, but not serve as their replacement.

Lastly, the EU regional policy is an important element of the triangular interaction between the different governance levels of the EU. It is an important instrument which considers the regional interests and shows how the Union cares for its regions, the other important actors in the integration process.

Conclusion:

To sum up, from the main findings of the research it can be said that the EU is a unique form of a successful integration process. It is a complicated mechanism with multi-level decision-making system being the core of its functioning and the spreading of its policies to the all levels of the system. Furthermore, it was found throughout the research that the regionalism process having both negative and positive sides was in line with the EU integration process from its beginning. The two processes were seen as the “twin challenges” to the nation state, where one pulled towards the EU supranational level, whereas the other down to the regional level. Thanks to the understanding of such an issue by the EU itself, made it possible to create the Committee of the Regions to represent the regional interests in the EU as well as the EU Regional Policy served as the main driving force supporting the importance of the role of regions in the EU integration process. Thanks to these instruments, the regions gained more power and say on the EU arena as well as they gained some extent of independence of interaction directly with the EU level bypassing the unavoidable previously nation states level. The cases of the Euroregions as the example of the top-down regionalism as well as the example of macro-regions as the bottom-up initiatives showed the importance of the regions and their positive to the EU integration role to the whole EU. Hence, the research question was answered positively by proving that even though the regionalism has sometimes negative sides in form of right-wing regionalism

emergencies, it is still more positive for it great helps the further deepening and development of the EU integration process.

Lastly, it is impossible to take a decision regarding policies related to the regions without the participation of all three levels simultaneously. And this will give the answer that decisions are not made according to one specific supranational, national or regional level, but always involving all three levels at the same time only. Putting them all in one group level rather than separating by one, shows that one cannot be recognized without the other, as a consequence there is also no regional level of governance in the EU. Such a conclusion can also be supported by the definition of regionalism given by Keating, where it is said that “Regionalism is a complex phenomenon which cannot be reduced to the notion of a ‘level’ in the new territorial hierarchy”. Therefore, regions are present in the EU integration process, they help it as well as they participate in the EU life overall. As for the decision-making, the formal regions in face of administrative units of the member states or the regions with their own governments formed can have a say on supranational decision-making in the EU. Thus there is various multi-level participation in the EU, however this can not be counted as the presence of a regional governance in the EU separate from the multi-level governance system. The regional level in decision-making comes only together with the supranational and national levels’ triangle, but never independently.

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