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BEYOND THE ECONOMIC AGENDA: TOWARDS A NORMATIVE DIMENSION OF PARADIPLOMACY¹

Magdalena Kania*

ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of paradiplomacy, broadly referring to external activities of sub-state governments and embracing to a lesser or greater extent the elements defining foreign policy, gains an interest of experts from various academic disciplines. Yet, over the recent years, with some exceptions, the academic literature has been more preoccupied with investigation of economic dimensions of paradiplomacy when compared with investigation of normative-oriented issues. The objective of this article is to analyse the potential of the sub-national actors paradiplomatic activities in the field of development assistance. The article adopts an exploratory research design and is based theoretically on the studies on paradiplomacy. It looks at the particular examples of sub-state governments from the EU countries. The results show that despite little attention concerning the problem, the local governments go through the process of an ongoing institutionalization of their activities in development assistance as they have launched their own development aid programmes, manage local budgets for development aid, and established administrative bodies in charge of conducting development aid programmes. Due to such institutionalization of development assistance policy, sub-state governments are capable of establishing and developing bilateral and multilateral relations with third parties, both state and non-state actors, confirming that they are politically and economically adequately resourced.

Key words: Paradiplomacy, Development assistance policy, Sub-state government, Decentralized cooperation in development

Introduction

The phenomenon of paradiplomacy, broadly referring to external activities and policies of sub-state governments and embracing to a lesser or greater extent the elements defining foreign policy, emerged in recent years within

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certain academic disciplines. Paradiplomacy evokes traditional diplomacy practices carried out by the official representatives of central governments, especially in terms of directions (external activity) and motives (realization of economic, political, cultural interests). However, studies on sub-state governments' international engagement remain biased. The economic motives behind paradiplomatic activities dominate the field of examination, and with some exceptions², they serve as an explanation of paradiplomacy. Nevertheless, in recent years there is a tangible shift in approach to paradiplomacy, in a consequence of which the normative dimension becomes more relevant. It results in global support for a more participatory approach in certain public policy domains (i.e. development aid policy and human rights protection). As a consequence, it led to the incorporation of normative issues into the sub-state governments' external agendas. The aim of this article is to examine the potential of sub-national actors from the EU countries as rising donors in global development aid policy. The argument behind the article is that in recent years, sub-state governments intensified their activity in normative-oriented external policies, by structuring and institutionalizing development assistance policy at the sub-state level, therefore they extended significantly the conventional dimensions of paradiplomacy. In this context, development aid policy reflects a normative dimension of external policies, since it derives from the normative stance, that highly advanced states have a moral responsibility to assist developing and underdeveloped countries. Although they have gathered limited attention, the local governments from the member states of the EU have developed bilateral relations with foreign actors, opened representation offices in developing countries and launched their own *ad hoc* and permanent development aid programmes. They manage local budgets for development assistance and have established administrative bodies with the responsibility to manage development policies. In light of scarce literature, the article aims to analyse the role of sub-state governments in the EU as emerging actors in global development assistance.

It must be acknowledged that despite the enthusiasm towards sub-state governments' international activities expressed by researchers working on

² These exception are related to the specific sub-categories of paradiplomacy, as for instance protodiplomacy, which is defined as "initiatives and activities of a non-central government abroad that graft a more or less separatist message on to its economic, social, and cultural links with foreign nations" (Duchacek, 1986, p. 240). However, as pointed out by Noe Cornago (Cornago, 2010, p. 32), in practice paradiplomacy only sporadically turns into protodiplomacy.

paradiplomacy, the bigger picture remains ambiguous at best. In fact, the international actorness of sub-state governments is rather limited in scope and is expected to maintain its secondary status, as pointed by **Matthew Mingus** (2006, p. 581) who notes that “states [sub-state governments – MK] should be able to speak their minds but must ultimately keep in line with existing federal policies in the international arena”. Now, the question emerges of what are the reasons behind sub-state governments’ political willingness to provide their own political and economic resources to operate within the global system of development assistance. The article has been divided into the following parts. The first section locates the analysis within the concept of paradiplomacy, tracing the general motives behind the involvement of sub-state governments in international relations. The section highlights the economic, political and cultural motives behind paradiplomacy. In the second part, the paper moves towards an exploration of current trends of the sub-state governments’ presence as global donors in development aid system, while it harks back to the well-established question of the political actorness, the ability to perform as a full-fledged political actor³. The issue of politicization of a normative realm gains a new salience. To this end, the article reveals that in light of lack of the international recognition of sub-state governments as full-fledged stakeholders in international affairs, the economic ties are not sufficient to affirm their global position. This part has been limited to three cases: Catalonia, Flanders, and Scotland.

1 The Essence of Paradiplomacy: Economic-Political-Cultural Triangle

The phenomenon of sub-state governments’ external activities labelled in academic literature as paradiplomacy remains a relatively marginal domain of interests for IR and Political Science experts. The micro-perspective of foreign policy extended to the concept of paradiplomacy gets as many opponents as proponents in a theoretical perspective. The first ambiguity of paradiplomacy is reflected in the signification of the term. In 1961, Rohan Butler in the article entitled “Paradiplomacy” described the meaning of thereof as “the highest level

³ The question of who is capable to be an actor in international relations remains the center of attention of IR theories. For instance, the realist tradition is built upon a narrow definition of political actorness, indicating state-centric perspective according to which sovereign states are principal actors in world politics (Gilpin, 2001, p. 17). Contrary, the liberal tradition adopts a multi-centric perception of social reality, resulting in diffusion of equal decentralized actors (Rosenau, 1988).

of personal and parallel diplomacy, complementing or competing with the regular foreign policy of the concerned minister” conducted by other-than-formal diplomatic officers (Butler, 1961, p.12). However, despite a fetching façade, Butler’s neologism has been “doomed from the beginning”, since he gave a new name to a phenomenon, which has been previously known in the literature as secret diplomacy (Kutznetsov, 2015, p. 26). Nevertheless, Butler’s understanding of paradiplomacy has been evoked in some further research (i.e. Hamilton, Langhore, 2011, p. 151-152, 182). Yet, due to the fact that Butler’s neologism has not indicated the specific level of political actorness, his definition is distinctive when compared with today’s interpretations of the term. The first studies on what is currently defined as paradiplomacy (external activities of sub-state governments) were published in the 1970s, although researchers did not adopt the exact term of paradiplomacy. In many cases, the early studies suffered from the fact that due to the dominance of case-study methodology, their academic outputs revealed serious weakness and limitations (Kuznetsov, pp. 34-35). The newly emerged vitality of studies on paradiplomacy was introduced by Ivo Duchacek (Duchacek, 1984; Duchacek, 2001), who rooted the term in the academic discourse. However, despite more than three decades of research, the analytical definition of paradiplomacy remains vague and falls into academic trends in IR described by Inaki Aguirre as endowing “certain buzz-words with a mysterious success in specialized literature” (Aguirre, 2013, p. 185). Aforementioned tendency does not imply that paradiplomacy remains a purely theoretical and academic concept or an abstractive phenomenon. Contrary, it has been conceptualized due to the previous observations of political practice going beyond state-centric frames of analysis. The definition provided by Ivo Duchacek, who was rather sceptical of the concept of “paradiplomacy” at the beginning⁴, depicted paradiplomacy as the “[activity of] constituent governments of larger national policies to assert an international competence of own, primarily in matters touching upon their respective jurisdiction” (Duchacek, 1984, p. 5). This interpretation consists of three crucial elements – (1) *constituent units* of state as providers, (2) activity oriented *beyond* national borders and (3) realization of own *local interests* – and as such prevailed in literature as a definition of paradiplomacy (see more: Keating, 2013;

⁴ In his article from 1984, Ivo Duchacek used the name of „paradiplomacy” only in the abstract, aiming to describe a broad concept consisting of trans-border regional regimes and global micro-diplomacy.

Aldecao, 2013; Cornago, 2013). Etymologically, paradiplomacy is an abbreviation of the “parallel diplomacy”, in a sense that it denotes diplomatic activities provided in parallel to traditional state diplomacy (Duran, 2015, p. 23). However, as “more functionally specific and targeted, often opportunistic and experimental” (Keatings, 2013, p. 11), paradiplomacy implies rather “a second-order set of activities, a pale imitation of *real* diplomacy” (Hocking, 2013, p. 21).

To structure the complex analysis of external policies of sub-state governments, it is necessary to make certain general remarks at this point. Regarding a broad scope of the meaning of paradiplomacy, the analysis shall be split into three analytical dimensions. First, the organizational dimension highlights political institutions and legal structure of sub-state governments as driving factors influencing their international performance. Second, the conceptual dimension embraces areas of academic expertise within the framework of which paradiplomacy has been examined. To this end, Alexander Kuznetsov (Kuznetsov, 2015) distinguished 11 dimensions of paradiplomacy – constitutional, federalist, nationalism, IR dimension, border studies, globalisation, security/geopolitical, global economy, environmental, diplomacy and separatism angles. Third, the motivational dimension embraces the motives behind sub-state governments’ international performance. Following part will focus strictly on the latter one. For that reason, three basic sets of “traditional” motivations for sub-state governments’ international participation were distinguished, as it has been indicated in academic literature: economic dimension, political and cultural dimension (Blatter et al., 2008; Keating 2013).

Sub-state governments have developed strictly economic-oriented external activities in parallel with their political agendas. It has been reflected in setting up of trade offices abroad (California⁵), broadening trade relations through regular business meetings and business trips encouraging export and foreign direct investments (Florida⁶, Quebec⁷), and in the establishment of promotional

⁵ As indicated by Robert Kaiser, California launched three offices responsible for trade and investment activities in Shanghai and in Argentina, becoming in a period of the 2000-2005 present in all of its top-ten export market. It follows the logic that the sub-state governments are more prone to invest their resources abroad if their economies are more integrated into international markets (Kaiser, 2005, p. 98).

⁶ The State Governor of Florida, Rick Scott, undertook 13 abroad trade missions (incl. Brazil, Chile, Japan, France, Canada), including the most recent to Argentina, which took place in April 2017. However, his predecessor, Governor Jeb Bush took approximately 16 trade missions during his leadership (Fineout, 2017).

⁷ For instance, Investissement Quebec or Invest in Quebec.

agencies seeking new foreign investors⁸. Due to the tangible profits of economic-oriented activity, promotion of local economic development remains one of the most dominant motives influencing international relations carried out by sub-state governments as revealed in several case-study research (Casson, Dardanelli, 2012; Keating, 2013; Milani, Ribeiro, 2011; Njanje, 2014). The consequence of liberalization of the global economy, which rumbled on across the 1980s and beyond, was the opening of global markets to political actors other than states. Due to the neoliberal structural reforms at the domestic level, sub-state governments have begun playing an increasing role in economic processes. For that reason, the rise of sub-state governments' international practice could be explained as a "pragmatic response (...) to the opportunities and challenges of rapid globalisation and economic interdependence" (Ngaje, 2016, p. 150). However, the opening of the world economy to other than state actors is a double-edged sword. From one side, sub-state governments undertook their external activities to boost local export and to benefit from bilateral economic and trade cooperation. From the other side, the environment became more rivalry since more than ever actors have been involved (Haggard, Kaufman, 1992). However, the rational calculations, highlighting more gains from potential economic ties rather than the harm of potential political losses resulted in a situation in which sub-state governments became highly dependent on international trade (Paquin, Lachapelle, 2005). The rise of sub-state actors as in international economy is reflected in numbers. There are nearly 200 sovereign nations, and close to 300 sub-state governments (federated states), not to mention the level of municipalities and cities as rising global actors (Mingus, 2006, p. 581). Moreover, while considering 25 leading nations in the world rank (GNP), only 10 could have been inserted as states in the early 1990s (Fry, 1993, p. 122-139).

The political ambition arising over sub-state activity on the international scene is reflected in various aspects. Through the extension of paradiplomatic activities, sub-state governments validate their contested international actorness. While in many cases sub-state governments achieved noticeable political successes, the functional effectiveness plays a role of specific justification and legitimization of their international activity. Therefore, the symbolical ability to present itself as a responsible actor, capable of conducting independent external activities, is a political success. Paradiplomacy serves

⁸ For instance, Catalonia - Consorcio de Promoción Comercial de Cataluña, COPCA

therefore as a soft-power tool, aiming to “promote and improve the image of a country in minds of the foreign public” (Scoproni, 2016, p. 235-236). In that context, building a regional brand is not so far from the national branding. As a combination of clear and simple symbols, characteristic features and attributes, it provides an image easily understandable by the greater audience (Scoproni, 2016, p. 237). Positive image built globally, accompanied by economic competitiveness attracts a various audience: tourists, business and industry, residents and highly skilled workers. On the flipside, the self-perception of sub-state governments as global actors obliges them to a greater engagement in global political initiatives. One of the most tangible practices in that context is the engagement in global advocacy for human rights (Government of Flanders, 2016; Scottish Human Right Commission, 2013). In fact, human rights are incorporated into the local strategies or adopted within special plans or frameworks devoted to the human rights-based approach to development assistance (i.e. Government of Brandenburg 2012; Government of Flanders 2011; Scottish Government, 2016; Senate of Bremen, 2015).

The third dimension of the motivational sphere is the promotion of a distinct culture. As such, it rarely walks alone, and in political practice serves as a supplement for economic and political agenda. There is a shift in sub-states’ cultural paradiplomacy, which took place in recent years. Primarily emerged as an “a nationally determined, locally relayed, welfare-oriented” policy, it became a “supra-nationally facilitated, locally determined, wide-ranging supply-side intervention” (Jessop, 1997). It must be acknowledged, however, that in some cases cultural diplomacy plays a significant role in going abroad. This is the case of the city of Barcelona and the region of Catalonia. With the transformation of Barcelona towards a service economy in the 1980s, the city began to attract potential foreign actors through the channels of cultural paradiplomacy, which was implemented “in a context of social legitimacy, a strategy for economic and social development” (Zamorano, Morato, 2015, p. 568). In political practice, the cultural diplomacy carried out by the city of Barcelona supported its image as a stateless nation, since it was focused on a national identity, which served to boost Barcelona’s political activity and as an instrumentalization in the sense that it became an “instrument for the construction of a New State” (Zamorano, Morato, 2015, p. 569-570).

2 Towards a normative agenda in external policies

Rapid changes in the international environment fostered by the processes of globalisation, which had altered the structure of the development aid system, led to greater inclusion of sub-state actors as global aid donors. In many cases, the multiplicity of actors within the state expressing international ambitions is at first glance considered as a challenge to the activity of central governments. However, bilateral relations between the central and sub-state governments cannot be regarded in zero-sum terms, in which the dominance of one part undermines the other part (Frankowski, 2014, p. 57). Contrary, international activity of sub-state governments can internationally strengthen the national identity of central governments and provides a fertile ground for the creation of “a multi-layered policy milieu which ties together governmental and non-governmental actors in mutual dependencies” (Hocking, 2013, p. 20). Following the logic of decentralization in development cooperation, a good number of sub-state governments from highly developed countries have challenged the role of states, represented by central governments, and international organizations as the exclusive players in development aid policy. In political reality, for sub-state newcomers, development aid policy served as a backdoor-entry to international politics. Debates over paradiplomacy paradoxically rarely pay heed to normative matters in sub-state governments’ international agenda. In academic literature, the “matters of functional relevance” reflected mainly in economic dimension dominate the field of sub-state governments’ international practice (Cornago 2010). What is missing is the ongoing institutionalization of development assistance policy of sub-state governments.

The institutionalization of development assistance policy at the local level is structured upon certain pillars: (1) *legal basis* – laws and agreements regulating sub-state governments’ international engagement; (2) *actors* – administrative bodies at the local level in charge of conduction of development assistance policy; (3) *resources* – distinguished budget lines for development assistance programmes; (4) *strategies* – specific programmes of development assistance for specifically selected countries of priorities; (5) *concepts* – the extension of the scope of development cooperation.

The decentralization of development assistance is based on the legal acts, which provide sub-state governments with specific competencies in that field. The Spanish law on development cooperation of 1998 (Ley 23/1998) established a framework for the local and regional governments to participate in

decentralized cooperation in Spain. Consequently, the amount of assistance extended by them significantly increased (OECD, 2005, p. 17). Soon after, Catalonia along with other autonomous communities signed an agreement with the Spanish Governments in order to carry out its policy. The Catalan development assistance is put into practice under the terms expressed by Catalonia's Development Cooperation Act 26/2001 of 31 December 2001 (Presidencia de La Generalitat, 2001). The law lays down the general principles and objectives of Catalan development assistance, providing a basis for following Masters Plans, the main strategic plans of Catalan development assistance, which define the directions, available resources, as well as geographic and sectoral priorities. To entry into force, Master Plans have to be approved by the local Parliament. Moreover, the specific directorate in charge of development assistance policy is obliged to publish annual plans for development assistance. The current Master Plan for 2015-2018 (Generalitat de Catalunya 2015) is the fourth published, following the former of 2011-2014, 2007-2010, and 2003-2007. Similarly, in the case of Belgian sub-state governments, the general competence to conduct independent development policy has been agreed at the national level, and then the competencies have been transferred to the regions. The Belgian Constitution provides Flanders and Wallonia with the competence to engage globally in issues related to their domestic jurisdiction. In the course of 2000-2001, during the fifth state reform in Belgium, the chambers of Parliament adopted the Lambermont Accord (The Parliament of Flanders, 2006) consisting of a considerable increase in federal transfers to communities. The aforementioned agreement derived from the pressure for greater decentralization, which began with several reforms in the 1970s and beyond (Blöchliger, Vammalle, 2012). Among other provisions, the accord transferred certain powers to the regions and communities in the field of development cooperation (Delwit, Hellings, 2001). The current recognition of decentralized cooperation in the Belgian legal framework is provided by the Law on Cooperation in Development of 2013, however, the Flemish Government adopted its own Decree on Development cooperation in 2007 (Government of Flanders, 2007), updated in 20018 (The Parliament of Flanders, 2018). In the case of Scotland, development assistance remains a reserved power under the terms of the Scotland Act (Scotland Act 1998). There is no statutory requirement for the Scottish Government to get involved, however, the local government may assist in international development activity as indicated in the Scotland Act. Therefore, the engagement of the Scottish government is fully voluntary.

The second dimension of institutionalization of development assistance policy at the sub-state level is the establishment of administrative bodies as distinguished actors to manage and carry out development aid policy. In the case of Catalonia, there are two distinguished bodies. The Directorate-General within the framework of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is responsible for general policy-making, and the executive agency – Catalan Agency for Development Cooperation (ACCD). The latter is responsible for the management of development assistance, operating as a main implementing body under the control of the government. The two-fold structure creates a typical agent-principal relation. In 2004-2005, during the reorganization of a government, the Flanders International Cooperation Agency (FICA) has been established as an “executive arm of Flemish administration for development cooperation”, yet after the financial crisis, it has been absorbed fully by the Flemish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (OECD, 2018). Currently, the government of Flanders provides its development assistance within the Department of Foreign Affairs; however, it is not responsible for implementation. In order to remain in compliance with international standards of the aid/development effectiveness, the Flemish government leaves the implementation to the other stakeholders, mainly located in the developing countries. Within the structures of the Scottish government, a minister of international development and Europe is appointed to support the Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs in development assistance activity.

The third dimension of institutionalization is the management of budget lines for development assistance. Catalonia's annual plan of cooperation for development in 2017 increased the budget line with €30.2 million, which compared with 2016 presents a 65.5% increase. The current Master Plan for 2015-2018 (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2015) expects a “sustained percentage increase” in development cooperation budget of the Catalan government, setting the objective of 0.4% percentage of current income by 2018, in a manner that an increase should occur each year. The Scottish Government allocated around £9 million for the annual budget for four countries of priority; however, spending on Malawi consumes nearly half of the overall budget. The main source of the Flemish government's funding for development cooperation is the development cooperation budget. Expenditures under development cooperation policy embrace both cooperation development budget and the Flemish Climate Fund. In 2016, €24.95 million has been spent, which records the lowest spending rates since 2010. However, the overall ODA spending in

Flemish case increased in 2016, due to an increase in the other ODA category, resources for activities and projects that “have a positive impact on developing countries” (Government of Flanders, 2017).

The fourth dimension of institutionalization relates to the specific programmes undertaken by sub-state governments that established bilateral relations with countries of recipients that have been awarded status of countries of priority. The Catalan Master Plan for 2015-2018 established 11 priority countries/societies, referring to the geographical concentration. Therefore, Catalonia provides its development assistance to Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador, Bolivia, Colombia, Equator, Morocco, Western Sahara, Senegal, Mozambique, and Palestine. However, in order to limit the streams of engagement, the assistance is provided for particular sectors in particular countries, as for instance gender in Morocco, and healthcare in Mozambique. Under the current International Framework, the Scottish Government is active in four countries of priority – Malawi, Rwanda, Zambia, and Pakistan. However, in case of emergency, the government provides humanitarian assistance to other countries, as it used to be as a response to the crisis in Syria, the Philippines, Gaza, West Africa, and Yemen. The Flemish Government signed memorandums of understanding with South Africa, Malawi, and Mozambique to whom it provides development assistance based on Country Strategy Papers. The cooperation between the Flemish government and those countries traces back to support provided by the Flemish authorities to the post-Apartheid provinces of South Africa – Limpopo, KwaZulu Natal and the Free State (OECD, 2018, p. 96).

The last dimension reflects the extension in the scope of development cooperation between the sub-state governments and recipient countries. It embraces an increasing number of sectors, within which the assistance is distributed and funds are allocated. Yet, it must be noted that the increase is not recorded at the level of particular actors. Although being engaged in various aspects of assistance generally – political, economic, and social aspects – the number of sectors of engagement is limited to a few at the level of particular governments. For instance, Catalonia adopts a broad notion of development assistance, which shall not be limited to economic assistance, but which aims at providing local societies with certain political and social rights. While the overall idea behind the provision of development assistance is based on human rights approach, the Government of Catalonia operates within the health sector, education, economic sector, protection of human rights, and empowerment of

the position of women, environmental issues, and peacebuilding activities. The Scottish Government invests and allocates its funds in areas such as education, health, sustainable economic development, civic governance and society, food security as well as energy and climate change. Flanders adjusts the sectors of cooperation to each country to whom the assistance is provided. The extension of sectors is tangible in the context of Flemish and South African cooperation. In 2001, a year the Flemish Government and South Africa signed a Memorandum of Understanding the scope of assistance was relatively modest, limited nearly to fighting against poverty and promotion of democratization. The first Country Strategy Paper (CSP) for 2005-2008 indicated food security and agriculture, small enterprise development and HIV/AIDS prevention as the sectors of involvement. The following Country Strategy Paper 2012-2016 focused both on the economic dimension of assistance (job creation, small business development, agriculture, food security) and other cross-cutting themes (gender equality, children's rights, HIV/AIDS prevention, sustainable development, good governance, climate change) (Government of Flanders, 2011).

Conclusion

Although the economic dimension of paradiplomacy dominates the field of studies on the external activity of sub-state governments, the increasing interdependence of the world politics leads to greater inclusiveness of a rising number of public policies in which sub-state governments are involved. Development assistance policy in decentralized modality, despite relatively low records, when compared with volumes of aid delivered by states, is in fact of a paramount significance for symbolic reasons. It is not surprising then, that when the unquestionable and politically uncontroversial domains are at stake, the incentives to get on board are widespread. Development assistance policy may boost the positive image of the sub-state government abroad. Due to the institutionalization of development assistance, sub-state governments are capable of establishing and developing bilateral and multilateral relations with third parties, both state and non-state actors, confirming that they are politically and economically adequately resourced. They, therefore, directly contribute to the global efforts aiming at facing the most pressuring societal challenges. For this reason, the capacity to intervene in the field of development assistance may put sub-state governments in one line with traditional donors, as states and international organizations. It presents "an ambition to take a more independent

place in the world and a belief that in doing so better aid will result” (Gibson, 2016, p. 6). Political costs of engagement are incomparably lower when compared with political gains. Thus, sub-state governments are not gathering attention when it comes to the critique of the ineffectiveness of development assistance, as they remain hidden in the shadow of greater players, as state actors and international organizations. For sub-state governments, it is a win-win game.

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