

*Center-Periphery Alignments and Political Contention*  
*In Late-Modern Europe*

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On February 27th, 1997, the President of the ailing French Renault firm announced the imminent closure of the company's plant in Vilvorde, Belgium. Closing Vilvorde was but a prelude to politically more risky cuts, for Renault's largest shareholder is the French state and an election was coming up in that country. But the mainly Flemish and heavily-unionized Vilvorde workforce would not go quietly. They occupied the plant and began a series of public protests that would make Vilvorde synonymous with a new term in the European political lexicon – “the Eurostrike.” Vilvorde brought together Belgian, French and Spanish workers, officials of France, Belgium and the European Community and the courts of both countries in a multiple structure of alignment and contention that was dramatized by the EU, the French and the Belgian Press and culminated in a mass demonstration before the EU headquarters.

Many aspects of the strike were interesting, but for our purposes it will serve to illustrate this chapter's three central messages: First, that the Europeanization of Europe is not occurring only at the summit -- where most of the research has been centered -- but also at the grassroots of European society; second, that social actors at that level are looking upward and learning to utilize Europe's variable political geometry and – though they lack the resources of the rich and powerful Brussels lobbies – developing a repertoire of contention to put forward their claims; third, and most central to our discussion, European contention is crossing Europe's center-periphery axes in a variety of conflicts and alignments. My thesis is that if polity building is occurring in Europe today, it must be seen not only at the summit but in the relations of contention and alignment at the intersection of elite and mass, local, national and supranational actors and institutions.

Four axes of conflict and alignment can be seen in the Vilvorde affair:

First, in the run-up to the labor conflict, we see the effects of *elite consolidation*, as European governments, led by the Commission and cheered on by the German government, worked out a plan for European Works Commissions (Martin and Ross 2001: 68-9, Turner 1996). These institutions, roughly based on German co-determination practices, called for multinational European firms to organize transnational works councils among their workers. These institutions were still in their infancy when Renault decided to close Vilvorde and the firm no doubt thought they could ignore them with impunity. It was the company's indifference to the requirement that it must inform and consult its workers through its EWC that fed the workers' campaign and led the media and European officials to enter the fray.<sup>1</sup>

Second, we see in the conflict *a supranational/local alignment*, one which aligned the workers – however briefly – with supranational actors. In the Vilvorde case, both Commission members and European Parliament members expressed outrage at the plant closure, its unexpected announcement and the failure of the firm to consult its workers.<sup>2</sup> Not only the Commission, but also the European Parliament – peppered with E-mail petitions from constituents and unions -- expressed shock and outrage at this "Anglo-Saxon" restructuring. Echoing the concerns of unionists from Belgium, France, and Spain, the assembly urged the EU to penalize Renault for its failure to consult and inform its workers, as EU regulations require, accusing the auto maker – and indirectly the French government – of "arrogance and disdain for the most fundamental rules of social consultation" (*Reuters*, March 12, 1997; *Le Monde*, March 13, 1997: 14).

Third, we also see a *local-national alignment*, as the Vilvorde workers benefited from their government's support and even from the King, who, in measured terms, expressed his concern. Prime Minister Dehaene, as luck would have it, represented Vilvorde in the Belgian

Parliament and could not fail to express his government's outrage. More surprising was the ability of the workers to gain support from both the French and Belgian courts, which ruled that Renault had ignored its obligations under the EWC regulations to inform and consult its workers of the plant closing. Local-national alignments were not sufficient to reverse the decision but they helped to legitimate and politicize the workers' cause.

Fourth, the Vilvorde workers became part of a *transnational alignment*, as French, Spanish and even British workers demonstrated alongside them against the plant closure. Coordinated by the European Federation of Metalworkers – which has its headquarters in Brussels -- the unions organized “guerilla actions” bringing small numbers of Belgian workers across the border to France, and bringing French workers to Belgium for a mass demonstration. When the firm refused to compromise, the Vilvorde workers responded with a surprise “commando action” across the border at the Renault plant in Douai. As they marched through the factory, about 600 French workers joined them, and production ground to a halt (*Le Monde*, March 15, 1997, p. 19). Not only French workers but French politicians supported the Belgian workers. On television, CFDT general secretary Nicole Notat chided the company for failing to consult the workers. In Parliament, deputies of both the majority and the opposition were up in arms about Renault's decision (*Le Monde*, March 9-10, 1997: 5), and created an information mission to keep track of Renault and its workers (*Le Monde*, March 13, 1997: 14). Given the politically charged atmosphere and the threat that the Vilvorde case would invest French electoral politics, Prime Minister Juppé appeared on French television to announce that 800,000 francs per worker would be disbursed for “reconversion and accompaniment” (*Le Monde*, March 26: 18).

The Renault crisis ended as it had to – with the plant's closure and the distribution of generous severance packages to the workers. But before it ended, it had angered officials of the EU, forced European Commission and parliamentary figures to take positions critical of

a member state, united unionists of three nations against “American”-style capitalism, identified a catalytic future role for an institution – the European Works Council – that had been created as a tame instrument for transnational communication (Martin and Ross 1999), and involved the courts in both countries. However measured and temporary, Europeanization could be seen occurring below the states and summits of the European system.

### **I. Multilevel Conflict and Political Alignments**

Vilvorde was not a typical incident of industrial relations – for one thing, the fact that it occurred in a suburb of the capital of Europe won it an unusual amount of EU and press coverage. But if the closure of one plant belonging to one firm operating in one other country could produce so tangled a skein of center/periphery and transnational conflicts and alignments, then we need to look beyond the summit of the European project to understand the impacts of Europeanization. To do so we will need to study not only broad structural trends and interstate relations, but also the *relational mechanisms* developing among ordinary Europeans, their national governments, supranational elites, and their counterparts in other countries around issues that are defined as European. That will be the main goal of this chapter.

I have called for a “relational” approach, but I need to make clear what I mean by it with respect to European contention.<sup>3</sup> By a relational approach I mean attention to the mechanisms that regularly bring actors into interaction with one another and bring about change. Later in this chapter I will examine such mechanisms as:

- *Brokerage*: the linkage of two or more social sites by a unit that mediates their relations with each other and/or with yet another site (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001: 142)

We saw such brokerage at work in the Vilvorde case in the role of the Renault European Works Council and the European Metalworker's Federation; we will see it again in European structural policy.

- *Object Shift*: alteration in relations between claimants and objects of claims (ibid. p. 144)

We saw object shift at work as French and Belgian politicians joined the Vilvorde workers in the and as the press constructed the issue from one of industrial relations to one of European contention (Lagneau and Lefebure 2001)

- *Scale Shift*: a change in the number and level of coordinating contentious actions leading to broader contention involving a wider range of actors and bridging their claims and identities (Mcadam, Tarrow, Tilly 2001: ch. 10).

We saw scale shift in the Vilvorde conflict as French and Spanish unionists and French opposition politicians took the conflict into the courts to the European level.

Attention to relational mechanisms such as these are in their infancy in the study of European integration. Until recently, scholars polarized around two main approaches, both of them heavily structural and institutional, and neither one paying particular attention to the mechanisms that link social actors to the European project: -- intergovernmentalism and neo-functionalism:

- *Neo-functionalism*: deriving from Ernst Haas's celebrated work in the 1950s, the approach focusses on the structural trend towards supranationalism rippling outward from market opening to elite actors (Haas 1958). Haas' approach was implicitly interactive, but it did not specify the kinds of relations that would develop among social actors, nor did it adequately predict how states and non-elites would react to these activities outside the nation-state.

- *Intergovernmentalism*, which insists on the centrality of the major treaty-making activities of European states, provides no more specified a guide to the relational mechanisms developing among Europeans around the European project (Moravcsik 1998). Consider the conflicts we saw in Vilvorde: They brought private and public actors into relations of conflict and alignment, crossed national borders, and leapfrogged over the national states that are at the center of the intergovernmental model. In the sequence we saw above -- creation of the EWCs by the commission and the member-states, Renault's closure of a plant in a neighboring country, the workers' formation of a transnational alliance against the firm and the array of national and supranational actors at their side -- a multilevel interaction was at work.

But what *kind* of interaction, and with what long-term perspectives? Neither of these two general covering law theories told us this. Two newer approaches provide a better purchase on some of these interactions than either of the two classical models:

*Exit Without Separation*: Drawing on Stein Rokkan's theory of territorial cleavages and Hirschman's trilogy of exit, voice and loyalty, our colleague Stefano Bartolini has produced a model of territorial "exit" that might help us to find an answer (This volume, chapter 2; also see Bartolini 1999). To summarize his argument schematically: in times past European territorial actors could find recourse for their claims only by permanent exit (eg., peripheral nationalism) or by integrating them horizontally with others in mass political parties that centered on the national state. Polity-building was in large part a process through which center-periphery cleavages were absorbed and transformed into functional ones through mass political parties that took the national state as their targets.

In contrast with the historical development of national territorial/functional systems, continues Bartolini, the uniqueness of the European project is, first, that national states are

losing their capacity to respond to sub-national claims and, second, that sub-national actors who fail to find satisfaction at the national level have recourse to forms of “exit” less dramatic than separation – without permanently “exiting”, they can extend their activities to other parts of the Union. This serves at one and the same time as a safety valve for subnational tensions and as a weakening of the powers of the national state and party systems (this volume; [ms. pp. 6. Ff.].

The marriage of Rokkan’s structuralism with Hirschman’s individualism is a unique contribution to our understanding of the dynamic of European center-periphery relations. But we may usefully interrogate Bartolini’s model in three respects:

- First, do European states really lack the resources to brake or oppose the “exit” of constituent sub-national actors?
- Second, what are the political mechanisms through which such exit occurs and how is it mediated by state and supra-state actors?
- Third, what can we learn about territorial relations from areas of European policy making that bring local, national and supranational actors together in conflictual relations?

*Multilevel Governance:* A team of American and Belgian researchers propose an answer to these questions with their model of “multilevel governance.”<sup>4</sup> In a series of wide-ranging books and articles, Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks and their collaborators provide us with a picture of multilevel interaction. Hooghe and Marks put their emphasis on “governance”, joining a number of American and European scholars who see late modern Europe in terms of the problem of who is governing whom across a range of policy sectors. Their work has the virtue of transcending the search for general covering laws in favor of a more down-to-earth focus on what happens in the day-to-day negotiation among public and private actors in the European Union. But their accounts have several major lacunae:

- first, they do not propose a theory of intra-European alignments, offering instead a finer-grained description of day-to-day European policy making than either intergovernmentalists or supranationalists (Roederer 2000: 25);
- second, they build their findings largely on one area of policy – cohesion --a policy area that was deliberately created to empower non-state actors (Fairbrass and Jordan 2000:2), though recently they have applied it to other areas of policy (Hooghe and Marks 2002:);
- third, they “tend to iron social and political conflicts out of European policy-making” (Roederer 2000:26), making it difficult to explain the kind of multilevel conflict and attempts at cooperation we have seen in the Vilvorde crisis.

Let me be clear: I have no quarrel with either Bartolini’s observation that the EU offers opportunities for exit without separation or with Hooghe’s and Marks’ observation that multiple channels and elite interactions characterize contemporary Europe. But both approaches stop short of pointing to the kinds of mechanisms and processes through which these interactions operate. Since many of these interactions revolve around the traditional territorial institutions of government, states need to be centrally involved in any such equation; since nonstate actors more than occasionally take part in such decisional interactions, they cannot be excluded either; and since both states and private actors interact in various ways with supranational authorities, we need to develop models of multilevel governance which specify *recurring processes among constellations of private and public actors in the everyday conflicts of European integration..*

The rest of this chapter will constitute an effort to identify such processes through attention to the axes of alignment and contention we find in a number of cases of EU policy conflict involving social actors, states and the European Commission. I begin with a historical analogy which I then use to specify some processes of alignment and that be observed in many

multilevel interactions in the European Union today. I then trace in more detail one set of mechanisms that we observe in the area of European center-periphery relations.

## II. Composite States in Early Modern Europe

“At the beginning of the early modern period,” writes historian Wayne te Brake, “most Europeans lived within composite states that had been variously cobbled together repertoire of techniques” (1998:14). Some territories, like England or Wales or the mosaic of *pays d'élection* and *pays d'état* in France, were made up of continuous territories; others, like the checkerboard of territorial units in the Hapsburg Empire, were physically dispersed and boasted strong local rulers making competing claims on loyalties and resources – like Catalonia and Portugal (pp. 14-15). Still others lived in city-states or Cathedral cities. For centuries, most people lived under the sway of local elites, bishops, merchant aristocrats, dukes and rival princes. Te Brake writes

Since the dynastic ‘prince’ promised to respect the political customs and guaranteed the chartered privileges of these constituent political units, ordinary political subjects within composite states acted in the context of overlapping, intersecting, and changing political spaces defined by often competitive claimants to sovereign authority over them.” (p.14).

European state-building was not simply a process of insistent nationalizing pressure from above and futile resistance from local rulers and ordinary people from below. Out of this triangular structure of relations among nationalizing princes, local rulers and ordinary people, a variety of alignments and conflict structures developed among actors whose strategies and successes varied with the context and the strength of the pressure from their opponents:

- *Nationalizing princes* could either try to coopt local rulers or form coalitions with merchants, bankers or the ordinary people living under their direct rule to subvert their power.

- Under pressure from these nationalizing princes, *local rulers* could attempt to fight them off or join them. If they chose to fight, one strategy was to oppose the creation of large, national states through coalitions with the merchants, religious groups and even ordinary people living in their territories.
- Although they lacked the power and discretion of their betters, these *ordinary people* – many of them, of course, economically powerful --oppressed by either local rulers or nationalizing claimants, did not always “resist” superior power. As opportunistic as their betters, they sometimes made common cause with local rulers against intrusive nationalizers and sometimes reached out to the latter against the former. On occasion, but more rarely, they made common cause with people like themselves from other territorial jurisdictions in cross-territorial social movements. “It was often in the interstices and on the margins of these composite early modern state formations that ordinary people enjoyed their greatest political opportunities”, concludes te Brake (p. 15).

These alternative alignments growing out of different patterns of opposition suggest three forms of center-periphery alignment to te Brake:

- *Local consolidation*: alliance structures between local rulers and ordinary people, which produced either sovereign city-states, as in Italy, or confederated provinces, as in the low countries and Switzerland;
- *Elite consolidation*: alliances between nationalizing claimants and local rulers, creating layered sovereignties, as in Catalonia or the Empire, and
- *Territorial consolidation*: the erosion of the power of local rulers leading to unitary states, as in Britain or France.

Possibly because the period he studied offered less evidence of it than the centuries before or since, te Brake ignores a fourth form of alignment:

- *Cross-territorial political alliances*: leagues of cities or religious denominations who united periodically against either nationalizing princes or local rulers.

For a longer period than is often realized, political contention in Europe was fought out not only between or within territories but also among a triad of players with unequal resources whose playing field was both intra-and extra-territorial. In Figure 1, I present an expanded version of te Brake's three forms of historical alignment with the addition of the fourth alignment of "cross-territorial political alliances".

*Figure 1 about here*

I do not rehearse te Brake's argument here because I think twenty-first century Europe is subsiding into a pre-Wesphalian jumble of territorial jurisdictions; nor do I think that Europe is segmented into four watertight patterns of alignment and conflict. But as we saw in the Vilvorde case, te Brake's model has strong analogies with what is happening in Europe today, in processes in which ordinary citizens and their representatives interact regularly with both sovereignty-holding "local" rulers (eg., national governments), with [supra]nationalizing claimants (eg., European authorities), and with one another. As we did in the Vilvorde case, I see all four patterns of political alignment and conflict co-existing in the current phase of European integration.

### **III. Beyond Exit and Governance:**

#### **Alignment and Conflict in Late Modern Europe**

Early modern Europe possessed an overlapping checkerboard of political jurisdictions that is analogous to the variable geometry of today's Europe. This produces what te Brake calls

“multiple and overlapping structures of opportunity” (p. 14). Social movement scholars would say that while ordinary people possess weaker internal resources than the elite actors whose interests are supported by the Union’s market logic, they can sometimes avail themselves of an opportunity structure in they can make their claims and exploit conflicts among the elite actors they face – as did the Vilvorde workers with whose story we opened this chapter.

Moreover, “ordinary people” are better organized today than they were in early modern Europe and even than they were a few short decades ago. With modern means of communication, a loosening and hybridization of the organizational forms of private associations, public interest groups and social have more access to a broader range of channels of influence than at any time in the past. With the aid of transnational instruments of communication and organization (like the EWCs we saw in the Vilvorde story), ordinary Europeans – among them, farmers, workers, women’s groups, immigrants, and consumer and environmental advocates – can combine in transnational collective action (Imig and Tarrow, eds. 2001). And finally, these Europeans are learning to profit from “dual networks” with national governments and supranational authorities (Ansell, Parsons and Darden 1997).

How do these aggregate trends play out in Europe’s emerging policy? In the mix between supranational, intergovernmental and governmental decision-making and regulation, the map of European politics today offers the potential for coalition-building, political exchange, and the construction of mechanisms of reconciliation among social actors across states, sectors, and levels of decision making. These can take horizontal as well as vertical form. Although leagues of cities are unlikely to appear on the scene today, regional governments, political parties and even social movements are reaching across territories to increase their leverage against both national states and supranational authorities. Figure Two proposes a

typology of political contention in contemporary Europe parallel to the patterns of alignment and conflict derived from te Brake's work in Figure One.

*Figure Two about here*

**A. *Elite Consolidation and its Victims***

In early-modern Europe, local rulers frequently aligned themselves with nationalizing princes to suppress efforts for autonomy of their restive subjects. Sub-national actors in today's Europe worry less about such elite alliances suppressing their liberties; but in the late 1990s the implementation of the Maastricht Treaty caused ripples of protest on the part of social actors against their own governments and European institutions.

From the signature of the Maastricht treaty onward, it was clear that the historic beneficiaries of the European welfare systems were in for a shock. Farmers, pensioners, workers in state-run or state-subsidized industries: all those who benefited from what are loosely termed "transfers" would have their payments from the state shaved in order to meet the stabilization requirements for their countries' entry into the European Monetary System. Some states rejected the social costs that would be involved in such massive budget cutting; others could not meet the criteria in time; but for most, the Maastricht criteria provided a spur – and for some, an opportunity – to put their national accounts in order.

*Resistance, Italian Style.* For example, as is well known, Italy was clearly in need of budgetary discipline. Since the early 1970s expansion of its welfare system, it had accumulated a massive public debt, which it met only through increasingly expensive public borrowing, leading to cycles of inflation and devaluation. Even in the midst of the political turmoil around the "tangentopoli" scandals, Ciampi and Amato – both, it should be noted, representing the center-

left – were able to use the Maastricht stabilization criteria to introduce cuts in the nation’s current spending. By the late 1990s, current spending was being covered by revenues and only accumulated debt from the previous decades still left the budget in the red.

The Italian budget-cutting exercise was fought out politically on domestic ground. But in a pattern reminiscent of the Brake’s pattern of “elite consolidation” – but at a higher level -- an objective alliance between Europe’s supranational institutions and Italy’s national government was struck at the cost of subnational “ordinary people.” Plenty of these protested – especially the pensioners who stood to lose the most, but also workers in nationalized industries, farmers and milk producers, and even shopkeepers supporting Berlusconi’s rightwing effort to turn Italy towards a liberal market economy. But in the end, a center-left government with support from internationally-oriented business and neutrality from the reluctant trade unions, used the European Union as a lever to pry budget-cutting reductions out of many domestic actors.

Italy was not alone. Without going into each of the national cases, the Reuters European news data collected in my study with Doug Imig of European contention shows a sharp upturn in protests by various social actors as the deadline for meeting the Maastricht criteria approached (Imig and Tarrow 2001: ch. 2). Farmers, manufacturing workers, miners, pensioners, and public welfare clients marched, demonstrated, blocked the entrances to offices and banks, and lobbied their governments to soften the blow. Figure Three summarizes the trend line of the protests in 12 nations of the EU that we found through a quantitative analysis of the Reuters data between 1984 and 1997. Subnational actors were protesting on native ground directly against their national governments but indirectly against European institutions aligned with them.

*Figure Three about here*

## ***B. National-Local Alignments***

Like Early Modern Europe, Europe today also shows a variety of cross-cutting alignments and cleavages. Many of these bring the equivalents of te Brake's "local" (that is, national) rulers together with ordinary people in periodic alignment against others or the European Union. We saw this in the support that Belgian politicians offered the Vilvorde workers. Such alignments do not lead to local revolts against "nationalizing princes," as in te Brake's model, but to concerted lobbying efforts and coordination of policy between subnational and national elites facing European rules and officials. The result is not territorial exit but brokerage between subnational and supranational actors by national states (Ansell, Parsons and Darden 1997).

*Fishing for State Support:* The conflict over fishing rights in the Bay of Biscay in 1995 was a good illustration of how contentious politics masks objective alliances between subnational actors and their national governments. In 1995, Spanish tuna fishermen, using old equipment that was no match for the modern trawlers used by their British and French competitors, sequestered a French tuna boat for allegedly using nets that exceeded the statutory EU limit of two km. For god measure, they blocked a French ferry in the port of Hendaye. The French navy replied in kind as militants of Greenpeace entered the fray on the high seas to protest the threat to both tuna and dolphins caused by the big trawlers' industrial fishing practices. Britain, accused of snaring dolphins with their 2-km nets, insisted that their nets were equipped with holes to let the intelligent dolphins escape, while the apparently stupider tuna allowed themselves to be caught (Tarrow 1999).

This story would be no more than a folkloric intrusion on the ordinary political-economic business of three historical neighbors were it not for the outcome negotiated in Brussels. Embarrassed by the daring of their fishermen and pilloried in the national press, the Spanish government was forced to demand better regulation of tuna catches from Brussels and

succeeded in having EU inspectors placed on the bigger French and British trawlers to assure that they were not taking more than their fair share of the catch. What began as a conflict between social actors from different European member-states ended up as a national-subnational alignment vis a vis supranational elites.

### ***C. Supranational–Local Alignments***

Te Brake's category of "territorial consolidation" was meant to show how national claimants, overriding or defeating local rulers, sometimes aligned with ordinary people to create centralized administrative structures and, eventually, integrated national states. Advocates of the "Europe of the Regions" advocated just such a project: a gradual scaling-down of the power of national states with the hope that subnational actors – aided and abetted by Brussels – would affirm their own territorial rights within a supranational polity. At the extreme, advocates of the Europe of the Regions called for separatism of regional governments with what they hoped would be the tacit or active support of the European Union.

European officials would not go nearly so far. European cohesion policy, as amended in 1988, was designed to establish permanent patterns of cooperation between subnational governments, interest groups and the Commission (Hooghe, ed. 1996) – but it did not flirt with regional exit. Although the role of national governments in deciding on the allocation of funds was increased in the 1990s, structural policy is one of the few areas where the EU, under a unique system of "partnerships," intervenes directly in the implementation of Community funding and has developed privileged relations with subnational actors (Ansell, Parsons and Darden 1997). This gives EU administrators leverage against national governments by encouraging some kinds of regional projects over others, stimulating the organization of *forces vives* in the regions they work with, and occasionally overcoming national resistance.

The capacity of regional authorities to evade the control of their national governments and align themselves with supranational officials is broadly illustrated in the literature on the EU's regional policies. As Ansell, et.al summarize it;

Politically, Commission officials do little to disguise their attempts to cultivate potential allies in subnational government... Regional actors, in turn, may be willing to lend this political support for several reasons. From the Commission they too obtain useful information...regions may profit from the support the Commission lends to regional priorities which diverge from national priorities in regional development (1997:59).

Here is a stunning example

*New Laender in an Old Economy:* The inclusion of the new east German laender – poor enough to warrant major major EU structural support -- into Germany's federal government brought Bonn a particular dilemma. Germany's federal system and the country's European vocation afford great access for its laender governments to European institutions, but Bonn wished to set the parameters for East German development. Soon after the re-unification of Germany, the Commission set up direct ties with the needy and inexperienced eastern regions, responding to their aggressive campaign for "Objective One" status and a substantial injection of EU funding. "In effect," concludes Jeffrey Anderson, "unification created a new territorial constituency in Germany, one that had the opportunity, the desire, and the means to avail itself of Commission resources" (1996:164).

West German leaders were anxious to get all the help they could to transform the East's crumbling infrastructure, but were uneasy about the potential interference of EU administrators in this politically-delicate task. In the end, the government acceded to the new laenders' wishes for direct access to the Commission, and EU funds were employed for projects that Bonn might not have supported with its own funds. A supranational-regional alliance leapfrogged

over the national state, providing a form of mediated brokerage for regional elites that transferred resources and avoided any hint of “exit.”

#### ***D. Transnational Alliance-Building***

Our fourth mechanisms of alignment examines transnational alliance-building, along the lines of my addition to te Brake’s three-fold typology of early modern European contention. But unlike Bartolini, I see few signs of “exit” in these alliances, but, rather, “routine” contention: lateral cooperation among actors with similar claims against their own governments and Europe’s institutions. Although such cooperation has developed slowly in most sectors (Imig and Tarrow 2001: ch. 2), in sectors of activity with strong international links – such as air and water pollution, food safety issues, and immigration – we are beginning to see evidence of transnational collective action similar in many ways to the Vilvorde case.

*Seeding Europe with Conflict:* My example comes from the work of Vera Kettner, who studied the formation of a European coalition against the importation of genetically-modified seeds from the United States (Kettner 2001). Anti-genetic food protests are a sector of activity that lends itself easily to transnational contention. The market for GMO’s is international; member states have a stake in protecting or promoting domestic producers, farmers and consumers; and at least four Directorates of the European Commission – External Affairs, Agriculture, the Environment, and Scientific Research – have an obvious interest or competence. As U.S. GMO seeds began to enter Europe in the mid-1990s, this provided a setting that encouraged both transnational and national consumers’ and environmental groups to come together in a powerful international coalition that attacked subnational, national and supranational targets.

Before the first half of 1996, anti-genetic food protests were mostly confined to sporadic local campaigns against experimental fields of genetically-modified crops. Yet in

November 1996, when the first crop of genetically-modified corn and soybeans was to arrive in Europe, many Europeans protested in fear of another food safety scandal like the BSE crisis in Britain. Kettner writes:

Activists fervently pressured the European Union to avoid this seemingly unnecessary danger or at least to uphold the freedom of choice for consumers by imposing labeling requirements. Concurrently, consumer campaigns were launched to pressure food producers and retailers into making promises not to produce or sell products that contained genetically-modified material (2001: 207).

Although European legislators were moving closer to the position of the consumer and environmental NGOs by the late 1990s, the European legislative process moved slowly and both Brussels and member-states were torn between the goals of calming environmental and consumer groups, supporting Europe's budding GMO industry, and keeping relations with the U.S. on an even keel. As policy shifted back and forth from Brussels to national governments, the campaign moved back and forth between transnational anti-EU and national protests. This situation provided Kettner with the unusual opportunity to compare protest behavior against governments at both the national and the European levels within the same campaign and time period.

Table One, taken from Kettner's study, shows the percentage distribution of anti-GMO protests targeting the subnational, the national, the European, or the international level (e.g. protests at international conferences or UN meetings), as well as 3 categories of indirect targeting. Supranational contention – rather than being an “exit” apart – is a form of action among others chosen by national and transnational activists working in coalition.

*Table One about here*

Are national environmental and consumer groups “exiting” their national territories to target the European Union? This would lend support to Bartolini’s theory of territorial exit. While there is some evidence of coordinated European protests against the European Union on the part of coalitions of consumers and ecologists, what we find from Kettner’s evidence is a much more differentiated picture, with national groups protesting against their own governments and transnational social movement organizations focussing on European institutions. Table Two, also from Kettner’s study, demonstrates this division of protest-labor. It dovetails with other scholars’ findings that when “civil society” groups organize at the European level, they use techniques of jawboning and lobbying that have little relation to the more contentious forms of protest that their homologues employ in national politics.

*Table Two about here*

#### **IV. Mechanisms of Conflict and Alignment**

A variety of deep and structural conflicts of interest divide Europeans, and the lowered borders between their states facilitates forms of territorial exit that challenge both the political parties that organize around national politics and the national states that used to monopolize authority. But while the migration of regulatory authority to Brussels put national governments’ authority at risk, territorial exit is only one of the processes in play; others – like the four that we have sketched above -- bring states, supranational authorities and citizen groups into different and shifting alignments.

Some of these alignments – like supranational/local alignments – leapfrog over the national state. Others – like transnational alliances – bring social actors together across Europe’s increasingly permeable borders. But others – like national/supranational alignments and

national/local ones – place national governments at the center of shifting networks of actors and institutions, providing them with leverage that they can use, respectively, to pressure European decision makers and produce resources for restive subnational groups. Rather than wringing our hands over – or applauding – the supposed decline of national sovereignty we would do better to focus on structure of these conflicts and alignments and on the mechanisms and processes that link European states, social actors and institutions to one another in the everyday conflicts of polity construction and management.

### ***A. Sectorialization of Territorial Claims***

To illustrate, in the area of European Union structural policy, a process that I call ‘sectorialization’ (Balme and Bonnet 1996) results from a combination of mechanisms: “mobilization” and “claim formation” start the process, “brokerage” brings it into the European arena, and “object shift” and “claim shift” turn what might have turned into efforts for territorial exit into claims for sectoral benefits.

- *Mobilization and claim formation* occur in domestic politics no differently than they would when the focus is national governments (Imig and Tarrow 2001: ch. 2), as regional elites mobilize support on behalf of constituents around claims that involve local interests and identities. Regional nationalism is not natural: claims that are not inherently territorial may be framed in territorial terms or may be framed in terms of satisfying the interests of specific local actors – the famous *forces vives* of French regional policy, from which EU structural policy was largely derived (Balme and Bonnet 1996).
- *Rotating Brokerage*: We saw in the “tuna war” how national states can act as brokers between supranational authorities and their own domestic groups. But the brokerage role in the European Union is not limited to national states. For many issues, conflict is regulated through an interlarded system of policy networks in which brokerage can shift from one

player to another. Again, looking at structural policy, Ansell and his collaborators pinpoint a number of exchange networks among subnational, national and supranational officials. At first, they observe, national governments were the sole linchpin between subnational governments and Brussels. Now, however, “supranational and subnational actors also have dual access to aspects of their policy-making environment” (1997:353). During some stages of structural policy allocation, national governments align with their subnational authorities to extract the maximum of resources from the Commission; during other phases, however, the axes of brokerage shifts and subnational actors find interlocutors among Commission officials against their national officials.

- *Object and claim shift:* Territorially-framed claims are not natural or inevitable just because the actors come from delimited subnational territories. As Europe’s history of nationalism shows, the territorialization of conflict depends on the cumulation of sectoral policy differences into indivisible and mutually-exclusive territorial clusters and on the mobilization of ideologies of difference among nationalizing elites (McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly 2001: ch. 8). When we turn to EU structural policy – through which the Commission allocates resources to subnational territories -- regions are framed by the commission as a policy sector, not as a set of territories with distinct identities and needs. Once levels of need are statistically established, structural funds are allocated for sectoral purposes and in partnership with sectoral groups who will use the funds (Balme and Bonnet 1996).

The shift of regional mobilization and potentially territorial claims to sectoral objects and claims through the brokerage of EU officials and national governments buffers the territorialization of regional cleavages that might produce territorial “exit” and renders them divisible into budget items that can be negotiated over, compromised, and traded off for gains or losses in other areas of policy. What might have developed as a transgressive process

fomenting territorial exit develops instead as a process of bargaining, alignment and contained contention.

The process of sectorialization is beneficial for all the actors involved: “Through functional arguments for the need for transnational co-ordination of regional policies,” the Commission has steadily expanded its own discretion. At the same time – and also largely through similar functional arguments – the Commission has successfully pushed for a subnational role in European regional policy” (Ansell et al 1997: 51, 52). National states have had to give ground in this relationship, but on the other hand they gain resources for less-developed regions from the Commission and political credit for doing so. Sectorialization of territorial policy transfers resources from the supranational to the subnational level without encouraging the territorial exit that nationalists fear and that advocates of the Europe of the Regions cheer.

## **V. Protest and the Democratic Deficit**

The reflections above suggest no single trend is emerging towards the construction of a transnational polity. Bartolini worries that the growth of supranational authority and the territorial exit that it encourages leaves the classical instrument of representative politics – the national mass party – with a much reduced role. I share that concern and do not believe that existing European party groupings are an adequate substitute for them. But if our sketch of European alignments has shown anything, it is that there is more than one mechanism for ordinary people to participate in European politics and gain representation for their claims. With respect to some issues, ordinary people unite with their national governments to face their counterparts in other countries and the European Union; for others, they find support from the Union against their own governments; for still others they combine across borders; while for others they protest domestically against EU policies (Imig and Tarrow 2001: ch. 2).

Elite consolidation at the cost of Europe's "ordinary people" is one part of the equation; the other is the emerging capacity of Europe's social and political actors to align vertically and horizontally in Europe's composite polity.

As ordinary people and the organizations that represent them increasingly target Europe with their claims, the question of democratic representation shifts from a purely national arena to a supranational and transnational one as well. Will Europe's institutions begin to fill the representative gap that some believe have given rise to a more contentious European politics? Or will they reinforce and diversify the institutional channels that Europeans have available to provide incentives to act collectively? A broader look at Europeans' forms of representation and participation as they cross boundaries and levels of authority may now be in order.

Ordinary people seeking representation for their interests at the European level have traditionally had both informal and formal, direct and indirect pathways open to them:

***Figure Four about here***

- *indirect formal representation* through member-states meeting in intergovernmental forums in which state interests, European collective goals, and interstate coalitions constrain the capacity of domestic social actors to gain representation for their claims;
- *indirect informal representation* through Euro-lobbies in which the big and the powerful possess natural advantages over the small and dispersed interests of ordinary people;
- *direct formal representation* through elections to the [extremely weak] European Parliament;
- *direct informal participation* through Euro-protest against national governments and – more rarely -- against European institutions.

The indirect nature and the biases of the first two forms of access and the weaknesses and imperfections of the latter two have led to two kinds of proposals to fill the democratic deficit: the desire to broaden the web of Euro-lobbies to so-called “civil society groups” and the urge for a stronger European Parliament. How are these trends likely to affect the magnitude and direction of contentious politics? Will European civil society lobbies representing the interests of ordinary people and greater power for a directly elected Parliament still the voices of protest that we have heard and overcome the tendency to territorial exit that concerns Bartolini?

With respect to European-level civil society groups, recent research suggests that such groups are often little more than coopted agencies of the Commission which have great difficulty creating and maintaining representative links with their claimed constituencies in the member-states. Without such ties it would be surprising if such groups gained much political clout either in Brussels or with respect to national governments. They prosper in Brussels largely because it is in the interest of the Commission that they do so, for they provide EU officials with both information for policymaking and legitimation for the European project.

This takes us to the argument that increasing the power of the European Parliament will lower the incentives for ordinary people to employ the forms of contentious politics that we have examined here. The argument has a certain superficial logic: why go to the trouble of protesting against European policies if MEPs in a more effective European Parliament will be available to carry your claims to Strasbourg? But it should be recalled that, historically, the strengthening of parliamentary government did *not* lead to a decline of contentious politics -- on the contrary, as Charles Tilly has shown in Britain’s contentious history, it led to a greater focus of contention on central governmental institutions (1995). Instead of a substitute for

protest, a strengthened European Parliament may provide more channels for European contention and greater incentives for taking protests to a higher (in this case *supranational*) level. We already see hints of coordinated action between protesters in the streets and MEPs in the European Parliament.

Democracy, if it evolves at the European level, will not result from the predominance of any single channel of representation but from the capacity of social movements, public interest groups and other non-state actors to forge workable alignments with national governmental actors, supranational institutions and each other in Europe's increasingly composite polity.

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*Table One:*  
*Frequency of Events Targeting Different Levels of Government*  
*In the Campaign Against Genetic Modification*

<i>TARGET</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
<b>Direct targets</b>	<b>102.4</b>	<b>N=129</b>
Subnational government	3.1	4
National government	48.1	62
US government	2.3	3
EU	47.3	61
International	1.6	2
<b>Indirect targets</b>	<b>105.6</b>	<b>N=18</b>
National govt., indirectly EU	77.8	14
National, indirectly international	16.7	3
EU, indirectly International	11.1	2

*Note:* Figures add to over 100% because of multiple targets for some events.

*Source:* Vera Kettner, “The European Conflict over Genetically Engineered Crops, 1955-1997 (2001: 2 18).”

*Table Two*

*Level of Government Targeted by National and Transnational Actors*

*In the Campaign Against Genetic Modification*

	National target	National (indirect supranational) Target	Supranational target	US	Total
National actors	81.8% (45)	10.9% (6)	14.5% (8)	0% (0)	(55)
Transnational actors	23.9% (21)	12.5% (11)	64.8% (57)	3.4% (3)	(88)

*Source:* Vera Kettner, "The European Conflict over Genetically Engineered Crops, 1955-1997 (2001: 217).

*Figure Four*  
*Forms of Europeanized Participation*  
*And Representation*

	<i>Formal</i>	<i>Informal</i>
<i>Direct</i>	European Parliament	Euro- Protest
<i>Indirect</i>	Member- States	Euro- Lobbies

## *Notes*

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- 1 On the media support, see Eric Lagneau and Pierre Lefebure, pp. 189-206 in Imig and Tarrow 2001.
- 2 This was heightened when it emerged that the French government knew of the plan months in advance and that Renault was hoping to use EU structural funds to expand its plant in Valladolid, Spain, just as it was closing Vilvorde. Competition Commissioner Karel Van Miert quickly announced that he would soon propose ways to stop companies from "aid shopping" from the EU (*Reuters*, March 7, 1997). Nearly \$8 million would have come from the European Regional Development Fund, in effect, helping Renault to move jobs from one member state to another, according to a spokeswoman for Regional Policy Commissioner Monika Wulf-Mathies.
- 3 The approach put forward here derives from joint work with Doug McAdam and Charles Tilly in our *Dynamics of Contention* (2001).
- 4 Among their many contributions, the following stand out: Hooghe, ed. 1996; Marks, Hooghe and Blank 1996, and Hooghe and Marks 2002.