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Celtic nationalism and supranationalism: comparing Scottish and Northern Ireland responses to Europe'

Celtic nationalism and supranationalism: comparing Scottish and Northern Ireland party responses to Europe[1]

Eve Hepburn and Peter McLoughlin

Introduction

Whilst there has been a notable upsurge in scholarly work comparing the activities and goals of stateless nationalist and regionalist parties (SNRPs) across states, there have been very few analyses that compare such parties *within* states. This is by no means a criticism of the rich body of comparative studies focusing on SNRPs across Italy, Belgium, Spain, the UK, Germany, Canada, France and elsewhere, which have led to theory-building in this area (De Winter and Türsan 1998; De Winter and Gómez-Reino 2002; De Winter et al 2006; Elias 2008; Hepburn 2009). Rather, it is an observation that within-state analysis often offers a rich, and more tightly controlled, setting for comparative research. The devolved United Kingdom offers one such setting. Stateless nationalist and regionalist parties have emerged in all three of the devolved territories – Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – and have assumed power at the regional level, either in a minority or coalition government. Yet, there have been remarkably few studies comparing the UK's territorial movements (for two exceptions see Mitchell and Cavanagh 2001; Lynch and Elias 2009). In particular, Northern Ireland parties are rarely, if ever, compared to those in Great Britain. The reason for this, according to some accounts, is that Northern Ireland represents a 'deviant' case that is 'abnormal' or

different from UK politics elsewhere (Mitchell 2004; Evans and Tonge 2005). Because of the religious or ethnonational cleavage in Northern Ireland that has resulted in violent inter-ethnic conflict, political scientists prefer to compare the nationalist movement there with those in similar 'conflict regions' such as the Basque Country and Palestine rather than with the more peaceful nationalist movements in Great Britain (Keating 2001; Smooha 2001; Bourne 2003; Alonso 2004).

This article seeks to address this gap in comparative research on Northern Ireland and British parties by comparing two 'Celtic' nationalist parties: the Scottish National Party (SNP) and Northern Ireland's Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP). Specifically, the article explores how the SNP and the SDLP have sought to use Europe to advance their nationalist projects in the context of a devolving UK state. European integration has become an important aspect of territorial politics in the stateless nations and regions of the European Union (EU). This is because supranational integration and an EU-wide commitment to subsidiarity has led to the rescaling of political authority and functional systems, creating new spaces for substate territorial actors to operate. In response, SNRPs are able to redefine their goals of autonomy and alter their strategies for obtaining these as a result of the opportunities presented by Europe.

This article examines the diverse ways in which two SNRPs – the SNP and SDLP – have responded to processes of deepening integration. Despite the very different historical and socio-political contexts from which each party has emerged, it is shown that the SNP and SDLP have both emerged as pro-European, social-democratic nationalist parties that sought to use Europe in similar ways to advance their projects, and in particular, as a framework for constitutional reform. For the SNP, this means breaking

from the UK to enter Europe as a small nation, whilst for the SDLP, it implies breaking

from the UK to bring about the gradual reunification of the island of Ireland. This article

will use a thick comparative case-study analysis, supplemented by interviews with party

members, analysis of government documents, party manifestos and newspapers, to

illustrate the different paths that the SNP and SDLP have taken to arrive at a post-

nationalist interpretation of European integration.

The article is organised in four parts. It begins by exploring the changing

relationship between European integration and stateless nationalism since the

introduction of direct elections to the European Parliament in 1979. In particular, it

explores three principal ways in which Europe has provided certain opportunity

structures for substate parties. Following this, the discussion turns to the distinct nature of

'Celtic' nationalism in Scotland and Northern Ireland. The third, substantive section

explores how the SNP and SDLP have sought to use European integration to legitimise

their projects for constitutional reform. The final section compares the strategies of the

SNP and SDLP, in particular highlighting a recent divergence in party responses to an

increasingly Eurosceptical electorate.

SNRPs and European Integration

It has been widely argued that the transformation of state and European structures has

created new political and economic spaces in which substate actors may operate (Lynch

1996; Keating and McGarry 2001). European institutions, networks and lobbying

organisations have provided an 'opportunity structure' for substate actors, and European

integration has opened up new possibilities to pursue territorial interests that were once

'closed' by the expansion of the nation-state (Keating 2004; Bartolini 2005). As a result of these changes, parties of all ideological creeds, but SNRPs in particular, have become enthused about the possibilities of a regionalised Europe (Elias 2008; Hepburn 2010).

European integration has affected substate territorial debates in three main ways. Firstly, European directives and policies impinge directly on devolved competences, thereby creating a number of challenges for regional actors to protect territorial interests from EU encroachment (Hepburn 2010). For instance, the creation of a Single Market opened up regions to greater economic competition and forced substate regional territories to adapt their industries. In order to make their concerns known, regional actors have challenged the monopoly of national governments by demanding the creation of the Committee of the Regions (CoR), and establishing regional offices in Brussels to lobby EU institutions (Tatham 2008). Thus, European integration has encouraged 'bottom-up' regionalism, whereby substate actors have demanded a greater say in European affairs, although this is by no means uniform across territories.

Second, changes in the political structure of state and European institutions have widened the scope for territorial demands. SNRPs are now searching for new forms of autonomy in Europe that are less clear-cut than independent statehood. While territorial political strategies were once focused exclusively on state structures, regional actors now lobby at transnational levels to advance their goals, and European umbrella organisations have been formed to represent regional party interests in European institutions (Lynch 1996). The European level constitutes a new focus of demands, which have included a 'Europe of the Regions', a 'Europe of the Peoples', a 'Europe of the Small States', and a

'Federal Europe' (Hepburn 2010). As such, statehood has begun to lose its functional and normative attraction to SNRPs.

Third, European integration has encouraged SNRPs to adopt more civic and inclusive criteria for territorial membership (De Winter and Türsan 1998; Keating 2004). It has become important for SNRPs to develop this new political voice to be perceived as credible and play the European ideological game. These parties are likely to advocate principles and themes common to those of the EU – such as support for free trade and diversity – and a pro-European ideology. However, if a party's demands are not met in Europe, and its rhetoric subsequently becomes more Euro-sceptical, this may indicate that support for European integration is merely tactical, and that there is no long-term attitudinal commitment to European integration.

The main hypothesis of this article is that SNRPs have redefined their goals of autonomy and altered their strategies for obtaining these as a result of the opportunities presented by European integration. These opportunities include access to European institutions such as the CoR and the European Parliament; involvement in European political parties and lobbying organisations; and special rights, funding and minority protections under European law. More specifically, in the case of the devolving UK, we hypothesise that the processes of European integration have caused SNRPs to moderate their demands and advance a postnationalist strategy in an integrating Europe.

Celtic Nationalism

Whilst Scotland and Northern Ireland are only separated by 20 miles of water, there is a dearth of studies comparing political processes in the two territories.[2] This is due to the

tendency to treat Northern Ireland as a 'deviant case' in the UK, because of the region's

history of inter-communal violence resulting from ethnonational divisions. As a result,

scholars have been more likely to compare Northern Ireland with other conflict regions

such as the Basque Country, Palestine and Corsica (Smooha 2001; Bourne 2003; Alonso

2004). Yet a more obvious comparator for the Northern Ireland nationalist movement is

other instances of 'Celtic nationalism'[3] in the UK state. In particular, Scotland is a

valuable comparator owing to the strong historical, educational and social links between

the two territories, their shared experience of devolution in the UK context, and the

burgeoning government and policy linkages between the two territories since devolution

in 1998-9 (Walker 2010; Keating et al 2009). A comparison of the SNP and SDLP allows

us to explore how political actors that operate within highly different political contexts

have responded to similar opportunities resulting from spatial restructuring.

Scottish and Northern Ireland politics vary considerably with regard to the

structure and format of the party system; the main cleavages determining party

competition; party support bases and societal representation; and the profile and demands

of the nationalist movement. To begin with, Scotland sees statewide parties (Labour,

Conservatives, Liberal Democrats) competing in elections alongside regional parties

(Scottish National Party, Scottish Greens, Scottish Socialists). However, since the state's

formation in 1920, the main British parties (Labour and Conservative) have largely

declined to organise or contest elections in Northern Ireland.[4] Secondly, the primary

cleavage in party competition differs in each regional context. In Northern Ireland, the

religious and constitutional cleavages are dominant, whilst in Scotland it is the left-right

and constitutional cleavages. Relating to this, while parties in Scotland have sought to

become catch-all parties, the main Northern Ireland parties (with the exception of the Alliance Party) cater for one of the two religious/ethnonational communities – Protestant/British unionist and Catholic/Irish nationalist.[5]

In addition, the profiles of the two nationalist movements are highly different. To begin with the Scottish case, the Scottish National Party's origins may be traced to a number of organisations at the turn of the twentieth century advocating autonomy. In 1934, the most successful of these groups, the left-wing National Party of Scotland, amalgamated with the right-wing Scottish Party, resulting in the establishment of the SNP. The SNP won its first by-election in Motherwell in 1945, but for the next twenty years it was more a 'resilient little sect' than a political movement, gaining less than 10% of the vote (Harvie 1998). However, the SNP slowly rose from peripheral obscurity to obtaining a third of the popular vote in a breakthrough election in 1974, to becoming official opposition in the new Scottish Parliament in 1999, to becoming the party of government in 2007. While the SNP, for the first decades of its existence, sought to contain all shades of political opinion as a 'non-ideological' party (Lynch 2009), under the leadership of Alex Salmond from 1990, the party articulated a social-democratic nationalism and sought to open the doors of Scottish citizenship and nationhood to *all* residents of Scotland regardless of race or religion (Hepburn 2009b). This inclusiveness enabled the SNP to rise above various social cleavages (Hamilton 1999: 30). The SNP has therefore overwhelmingly portrayed itself as a civic nationalist party without any cultural or religious allegiance, and has rejected violence as a means of securing its goals.

The Northern Ireland case is more complex. Firstly, here nationalists do not seek an independent or even autonomous polity, but rather wish to unite with another state

which they feel best represents their interests and national identity, the Republic of

Ireland. Thus, Northern Ireland nationalism is made different by the historical fact it was

preceded by a movement which has already succeeded in establishing an independent

state for the greater part of its perceived 'homeland'. And like its all-Ireland predecessor,

Northern Ireland nationalism has been more forceful than Scottish nationalism – most

obviously in its cyclical resort to violent methods. However, this reflects the very

different experiences of Scotland and Ireland under the Union; while Scotland's

integration to the UK state was broadly successful (Mitchell 2003), the 1801 Act of

Union between Britain and Ireland never created a stable constitutional order. Indeed,

the failure to give full political rights to Irish Catholics from the outset of this Union

meant that there remained a colonial dimension to the relationship between the two

islands. In short, Irish Catholics continued to see the link with Britain as one which

privileged the Protestant settler population. Accordingly, from as early as the 1830s, Irish

Catholics were mobilised by a succession of nationalist campaigns – mainly

constitutional, but sometimes violent – in an effort to achieve some form of self-

government for Ireland.

However, Protestant opposition to Irish independence, concentrated in the North-

East of Ireland, led to the partition of the island in 1920-1. Whilst the greater part of

Ireland gained autonomy, the portion which became 'Northern Ireland' remained under

British rule, and the local control of the region's pro-Union Protestant majority. This

situation also led to significant discrimination against the smaller Catholic and nationalist

population which was included in the boundaries of the Northern Ireland state. They felt

powerless to challenge this discrimination until the 1960s, when changing economic and

political conditions led to the emergence of a civil-rights campaign seeking equality in Northern Ireland. The state's violent reaction to this campaign split the Catholic community in two. Radical elements chose to respond in kind, seeking to complete the task begun in the early 1920s, when guerrilla warfare had achieved partial independence for Ireland. This led to the rebirth of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), and its political counterpart, Sinn Féin. However, moderate nationalists chose to continue the reformist path of the civil rights movement, believing that that this was only way to win Protestant support and thus achieve Irish reunification by peaceful means. Such ideas led to formation of the SDLP in 1970.

As a result, unlike the Scottish nationalist movement, Northern Ireland nationalists were divided between reformists and those who, until very recently, advocated violence. Thus, unlike the SNP, the SDLP has faced a credible rival for the nationalist vote,[6] with Sinn Féin contesting elections in Northern Ireland from the early 1980s. Since then, Sinn Féin has moved closer to the SDLP, eventually accepting its peaceful and reformist strategy as means towards Irish reunification, and thus endorsing the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) of 1998 as a step towards this end (Bean 2002). However, in doing so, Sinn Féin effectively stole the SDLP's clothes, and many of its supporters, thus becoming the leading nationalist party in the aftermath of the GFA. Nonetheless, there remain differences between the SDLP and Sinn Féin, especially regarding Europe. Indeed, Sinn Féin has traditionally presented European integration as a threat to Irish sovereignty, and though it has adopted a more pragmatic approach in recent years, the party remains 'more critical than engaged' with Europe (Maillot 2009: 559) – as is evidenced by its opposition to the Lisbon Treaty. By contrast, the SDLP has always

held a strongly pro-European outlook, thus explaining why the article focuses on this party rather than the now more dominant Sinn Féin. For the SDLP's position is more comparable with that of the SNP: both parties have attempted to use Europe as an arena in which to advance their national goals – the unification of Ireland for the SDLP, and the independence of Scotland for the SNP.

The SNP: incremental independence in Europe

The Scottish National Party adopted a policy of Independence in Europe in 1988. The party argued that independence would allow Scotland to take full control of its policy agenda, whilst the European context would provide economic and potentially security safeguards (SNP 1992). The party seeks Scottish self-determination within a European confederation, i.e. an association of member states which pool sovereignty in certain areas but do not surrender total control to an authoritative body. This would allow Scotland equal influence over EU decision-making as other small member states. Importantly, Europe was also seen to 'allay some of the fears that people used to have about the whole concept of Scottish independence' and reassure voters of 'going it alone' (interview with Nicola Sturgeon, 6 January 2004).

However, the SNP has not always been an enthusiastic supporter of the European project. The SNP opposed European integration during the early 1980s, as it was viewed as a Tory free-market project that would undermine Scottish values. The SNP, like other parties in Scotland, was hostile about the supranational project, which was viewed as another distant, bureaucratic and elitist structure on a par with London (SNP 1974). It feared that Scotland's interests would be sidelined if the EC operated on an

intergovernmental basis – with the UK Government taking important decisions over

regional affairs (Lynch 1996). Furthermore, the SNP feared the exacerbation of economic

inequalities (SNP 1976). In particular, there were fears that the region's fisheries,

agriculture and traditional industries would be threatened by the Common Market (SNP

1979). As such, the SNP sought to fight the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and

European fisheries policies in order to protect traditional ways of life and local

economies.

These positions all changed the following decade when reforms to the European

structural funds and Jacques Delors' vision of a social Europe won the support of the

Left. With a new emphasis on the social and political dimensions of European integration

from the late 1980s, the EC became more attractive to the SNP, which began to view the

EU as an alternative framework for security and trading opportunities that could replace

the 'external' structure of the UK state. The SNP's new left-leaning leader, Alex

Salmond, also began to look favourably on Europe as providing an arena in which to

continue the social-democratic project that Thatcher's Conservative government had tried

to end. Furthermore, the party's elected MEP – Winnie Ewing – strengthened the

European dimension to SNP ideology through her activities in Strasbourg. As such, the

SNP made the decision in the 1980s to join the European Free Alliance (EFA) – an

umbrella grouping of (pro-European) SNRPs in the European Parliament.

Yet, despite aiming for a confederal Europe with power concentrated at the

member-state level in the Council of Ministers, the SNP was also active in debates about

the regionalisation of Europe (interview, Neil MacCormick, 28 October 2003). The SNP

favoured of the creation of a Committee of the Regions (CoR), an issue which split the

party when SNP leaders made a secret 'deal' with the Conservative government to win more seats on the Committee for Scotland (*The Scotsman*, 9 April 1993). The SNP was supported the establishment of Scotland House, the creation of a Minister for European and External Affairs, and the development of stronger links between the Parliament and other sub-national governments. The SNP even briefly toyed with the idea of supporting a 'Europe of the Regions' when the concept gained popularity amongst SNRP circles in 1994. However, following considerable opposition, the SNP almost immediately shelved its interest in a 'Europe of the Regions' in 1994 and re-emphasised its commitment to independence-in-Europe (SNP 1994).

The party's vacillation between independence and greater regionalisation is indicative of a fault line that has run through the party since the merger between the pro-home rule Scottish Party with the pro-independence National Party in Scotland (Hepburn 2009c). 'Gradualists' see sovereign statehood arriving in stages, and have sought to use devolution as a 'stepping stone' to the end goal of independence. 'Fundamentalists', however, perceive independence as a zero-sum gain, and were highly critical of the decision to support the yes-yes option in the devolution referendum in 1997, arguing that devolution would undermine the momentum for independence.

The party's constitutional goal is not the only issue that has been contested by SNP members. The party has also been divided over Europe, as we saw in the 1970s, and these tensions have recently come to the fore again. This was evident when former SNP leader John Swinney decided to oppose the draft European Constitution in 2004, despite year-long support of the document (*The Scotsman*, 22 April 2004). The SNP criticised the draft for failing to recognise the self-determination of stateless nations and for its weak

conceptualisation of subsidiarity. Most importantly, the SNP argued that the awarding of exclusive EU competence over marine resources (i.e. fisheries) was unacceptable (*SNP Press Release*, 12 June 2003). Since the failure of the draft Constitution and its re-formulation through the Lisbon Treaty, the SNP continued its outright opposition to the Common Fisheries Policy, calling for a decentralisation of fisheries powers to the EU's fishing nations (*SNP Press Release*, 21 April 2009). The SNP also called for a UK-wide referendum on Lisbon and declared its opposition to the Treaty. The party's critical attitude towards integration was reflected in its 2009 European election manifesto, where it repeatedly highlighted the need to defend Scottish interests and ensure that the Scottish Government's work 'is not undermined by EU policy' (SNP 2009: 16).

The SNP's increasingly Euro-critical attitude raises the question of how 'Europeanized' the SNP really is, and whether commitment to Europe is really simply a tactical issue. To justify the SNP's growing scepticism, Swinney maintained that in the early stages of integration, the SNP were naïve of the workings of Europe, and would accept any policy unquestioningly: now, one 'shouldn't always say yes to everything in Europe. There are some lines that we won't cross' (interview, February 2005). One 'line' is the adoption of the European currency by an independent Scotland. Although the SNP has had a long-standing commitment to the 'euro' (interview with Rosanna Cunningham, 14 January 2004), party members made the surprising decision to keep the British pound and put the 'euro' to a referendum at their annual conference in 2009 (*The Times*, 16 October 2009). Thus, although the party overcame traditional divisions to unite behind its 'independence-in-Europe' policy in the late 1980s (Mitchell 1990), since then Europe had provided grounds for further tensions within the party.

The SDLP: incremental unification with Ireland

From the time of its first published proposals, the *Towards a New Ireland* document of 1972, the SDLP suggested that the European project held lessons for Northern Ireland:

> Old and bitter enemies are settling their differences and are working together in a new and wider context of a United Europe. We in this Island cannot remain in the seventeenth century. We cannot participate in this vision while at the same time continuing our outdated quarrel (SDLP 1972: 2).

However, *Towards a New Ireland* also made clear the SDLP's opinion that this 'outdated quarrel' would only be ended if Ireland, like Europe, became one (ibid.). Towards this end, the paper consciously drew upon the European model by proposing political institutions which would actively encourage co-operation between the North and South of Ireland, harmonise structures and services in the two polities, and thus create the basis for their reunification (ibid).

   This neo-functionalism, and the SDLP's generally pro-European outlook, became even more pronounced after John Hume was elected to Strasbourg in June 1979, and then became party leader only a few months later. Even before this, Hume had always been the party's primary ideologue and strategist (Murray 1998: 87). and it was he who had written the pro-European arguments into SDLP's early policy documents (McLoughlin

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2009: 604-5). As such, he was eager to continue this line after becoming both party leader and an MEP.

At Strasbourg, Hume appealed to the European Commission to help address the severe economic problems which affected both communities in Northern Ireland, and which were exacerbated by ongoing political conflict and subsequent lack of investment in the region. Accordingly, in these efforts, Hume was able to win the support of Northern Ireland's two unionist MEPs. By presenting a united front in articulating the region's desperate economic situation, the three politicians were able to maximise the financial aid which Northern Ireland received from the EC. But whilst they were happy to work with Hume in the pursuing their common economic interests, unionists remained wary of the SDLP's leader's political agenda, believing that his party's pro-European arguments were solely designed to undermine British sovereignty over Northern Ireland, and eventually deliver the region into a united Ireland (McCall 1999: 83, 106, 170; Mitchell and Cavanagh 2001: 259).

However, from late 1980s, SDLP's political strategy became less clearly associated with the objective of Irish reunification – at least in the sense of creating a traditional unitary state. Inspired by the radical changes then taking place in Europe, Hume and his party began to talk more generally about how evolving notions of political sovereignty might create a context favourable to political compromise in Northern Ireland (Hume 1993: 229-30). Accordingly, Hume in particular appeared to embrace something of the 'post-nationalist' discourse that emerged in the early 1990s:

> [T]he democratic nation-state is no longer a sufficient political entity to allow people to have
>
> adequate control over the economic and technological forces that affect people's opportunities
>
> and circumstances. ... [T]he nation-state is not the last word in polity creation (Hume 1993: 227,
>
> 229).

In the same vein, like the SNP for a period, the SDLP began to associate itself with the idea of a Europe of Regions (SDLP 1992: 12). However, again like the SNP, the SDLP was ambiguous on this subject, and failed to clearly define where exactly Northern Ireland would fit within such a scheme. Accordingly, critics felt that the SDLP was simply advocating the greater regionalisation of Europe as a means to weaken the Union with Britain, and strengthen co-operative links with the Republic of Ireland (McCall 1999: 101, 106).

Towards the end of the 1990s, the concept of a Europe of Regions became less prevalent in the SDLP's arguments and policy documents. This appeared to reflect a realisation that the emergence of a more regional dimension to European governance in the early 1990s had been a limited development. Institutions such as the CoR had not evolved in the way that its supporters had hoped for, and decision-making in the EU was still dominated by national governments. Put simply, it became apparent that a Europe of the Regions was not forthcoming. At the same time, the SDLP saw that the British and Irish governments were not prepared for a truly radical reconceptualisation of power relations in constructing a new political settlement for Northern Ireland. Thus, whilst the GFA did create a new devolved, power-sharing government for the region, and novel structures to facilitate co-operation between the two parts of Ireland, it did not incorporate the more ambitiously Europeanist proposals that the SDLP had been offering

in the early 1990s, which at one stage included a mechanism through which the EU Commission would have direct role in the governance of Northern Ireland (McLoughlin 2009: 610).

However, the failure of the British and Irish governments to allow a more European dimension to the GFA, or of the EU to create a more radical context for the settlement, did not cause the SDLP to abandon its pro-integrationist perspective. Indeed, though talk of a Europe of Regions became less common, the party maintained a European flavour to its political proposals. Indeed, even after Hume stepped down as party leader in 2001, his successor, Mark Durkan, continued to stress the importance of the EU for Northern Ireland, and to support both enlargement and further integration (SDLP 2004; 2009). Despite this, Hume's departure as SDLP leader was followed by the loss of the European seat which he had held for a quarter of a century. This, and the election to Strasbourg of Sinn Féin – a party which was far more critical of the EU – raised questions about nationalist voters' attitudes to Europe – long considered to be more favourable than those of the unionist community.

Nonetheless, the SDLP continued to articulate a strongly pro-integrationist line in the 2009 European election, most notably supporting the Lisbon Treaty – this despite the political capital which Sinn Féin had already made from its role in the successful campaign against the Treaty in the Irish Republic. Indeed, this allowed Sinn Féin to enhance its image as the stauncher defender of Irish nationalist interests in both parts of the island, and may have helped it to retain its European seat at the expense of the SDLP.

Celtic post-nationalism? Comparing responses to Europe

Despite the considerable differences in their historical backgrounds, there are remarkable similarities between the SNP and the SDLP, the type of nationalism which they articulate, and the way that each party has sought to advance its political agenda in a European context. Indeed, both parties have a social-democratic character, and correspondingly have employed a liberal and progressive nationalist discourse. Even the SDLP, though it cannot hope to win many Protestant votes, tries to promote an inclusive brand of Irish nationalism. This, like the civic nationalism of the SNP, has allowed each party to adopt positions compatible with the ideals of the European project, itself a reaction to more exclusivist and destructive forms of nationalism.

Returning to our first hypothesis presented at the beginning of the article, it is clear that SNRPs in both Scotland and Northern Ireland have altered their autonomy goals in response to developments in Europe. As demonstrated in the case studies, both the SNP and the SDLP have perceived Europe as aiding their end constitutional goals, by viewing Europe as an external support framework that could replace that of the UK state. For the SNP, this end goal involved Scotland becoming independent within a larger supranational framework, whilst for the SDLP this meant creating a context and political dynamic towards Irish reunification. Europe was a central facet in the attainment of both these goals. For the SNP, Europe lessened the risks of independence by providing an external economic framework (through access to the Common Market), a possible source of funding (through the Cohesion Policy), potential security safeguards (which would enable Scotland to stay out of NATO), and an institutional system in which small states have a disproportionate voice (Hepburn 2009c). For the SDLP, European integration increased both the logic of Irish unification and the momentum towards that end. By

bringing down economic barriers between the North and South of Ireland, and helping to equalise living standards in both jurisdictions, the party suggested that European membership removed the essential rationale for the Irish border. In time, the SDLP hoped that this would lead unionists to rethink their relationship with the nationalist majority on the island and eventually negotiate some form of all-Ireland constitution (Hume 1993: 228, 231-2; McLoughlin 2009)

Similarly, as we hypothesised earlier, European integration encouraged both the SNP and SDLP to change their strategies for advancing their political projects. Nationalists in both territories sought to utilise a range of opportunity structures presented by European integration to highlight their autonomy demands and advance their territorial interests. For example, both the SNP and SDLP perceived the EU as an important source of funding to aid socioeconomic development, whilst simultaneously protecting key industries in their respective territories. In Scotland, European structural funds have been a significant source of economic development. Winnie Ewing MEP won considerable acclaim through her efforts to gain 'Objective 1' structural funding for her Highlands and Islands constituency in 1994-99. And during the period 2000-6, Scotland received over £1.1 billion of structural funds to boost economic growth and improve productivity, which was lauded by the SNP.[7] However, the SNP has also adopted a more critical view on other economic aspects of EU membership. In particular, it has strongly criticised the EU's agriculture, fisheries and energy policies for failing to take account of Scotland's economic needs. Yet this did not detract from the SNP's overall endorsement of the economic benefits of Europe for Scottish independence, whereby membership of the Single Market would remove the threat of economic dislocation. Similarly, the

SDLP's European elections literature often reminded voters of its role in helping

Northern Ireland to acquire Objective 1 status, and the billions in extra funding which

this brought to the region (SDLP 2004; 2009: 16). In doing so, the party also emphasised

the benefits of a regional approach to funding, suggesting that this helped to offset the

tendency of the British government to overlook the particular interests of Northern

Ireland in a European context (SDLP 1994: 4-5). More recently, with Northern Ireland

having lost Objective 1 status, the party has stressed its determination to help shape a

wholly new regional policy for the post-Lisbon EU, and one which will aid Northern

Ireland's now more developed economy (SDLP 2009: 16).

Furthermore, both parties used Europe to enhance their political legitimacy and

reputation both at home and abroad, by seeking visibility in European institutions such as

the European Parliament, and becoming actively involved in the activities of

'Europarties'. The SNP became an active member of the European Free Alliance (EFA)

of SNRPs in 1983. EFA is a relatively loose organisation that allowed members to opt out

of some policies, which is important for the SNP as it aims for independent statehood

rather than greater regional autonomy unlike most other members (Lynch 1996: 143).

EFA enabled the SNP to develop closer links with SNRPs from across Europe, and was

useful as a mode of 'mutually supportive instrumentalism' (interview, Neil MacCormick,

28 October 2003). Meanwhile, the SDLP joined the Party of European Socialists (EPS),

and routinely stressed the advantages of alignment with one of the largest and most

influential groupings in the Strasbourg assembly. In particular, the party stressed the

many economic benefits which Hume, as an influential front-bench member of the EPS,

was able to secure for Northern Ireland (SDLP 1984: 1-2, 5-7; 1994: 1; 2004).

Unsurprisingly, since losing its European seat, the SDLP has argued that its re-election to Strasbourg would allow it to recombine with the EPS in order to give Northern Ireland 'real influence at the very heart of Europe' (SDLP 2009: 3)

The rhetoric of the SNP and SDLP also changed as a result of their activities in Europe. This was most evident in cases where SNP and SDLP MEPs imported a stronger European dimension to the party's ideology and discourse through their activities in Brussels and Strasbourg. For example, Hume consciously used his position as an MEP to 'internationalise' the Northern Ireland problem (McLoughlin 2010: 106ff). In doing so, he argued that the Northern Ireland conflict was, at its root, a dispute over sovereignty between Britain and Ireland, thus a problem with many precedents in European history, and so a problem which should be resolved by the same means by which a stable peace was achieved in post-war Europe: 'Sovereignty and independence, the issues at the heart of wars in Europe and the issues at the heart of the British-Irish quarrel, have changed their meaning. The basic needs of all countries have led to shared sovereignty and interdependence as we move inevitably to the United States of Europe' (Hume 1993: 229). Meanwhile, the SNP MEP Winnie Ewing was able to win over more Eurocritical colleagues in her party, while simultaneously highlighting the self-determination demands of Scotland through her reputation as 'Madame Ecosse' in the European Parliament (Lynch 1996).. As such, both parties were to an extent Europeanised through their involvement in the European Parliament, which enabled them to bypass the UK state delegation and gain a direct political voice in Europe.

Finally, another striking similarity is that both parties initially sought to advance the cause of a 'Europe of the Regions', but ultimately had difficulties reconciling this

discourse of a regionalised Europe with their core goals. This is because neither party wished to categorise their territory as merely a 'region' and therefore had difficulties in explaining how Scotland and Northern Ireland should fit into such a framework. Furthermore, neither party was able to maintain a belief in a radical regionalisation of Europe. This is because of the relatively weak powers of the CoR, which have recently been strengthened, but only to a limited extent, by the 2009 Lisbon Treaty. The continued dominance of the Council of Ministers in terms of EU decision-making means that support for a genuinely regionalised Europe would now appear somewhat naïve.

Clearly, European integration has altered the goals and strategies of the SNP and SDLP. But do these cases also verify the second hypothesis we set out, which holds that European integration has caused SNRPs to moderate their demands and advance a postnationalist strategy? Here the evidence is less conclusive, primarily because the positions of the parties have diverged in recent years. Indeed, whilst the SNP and SDLP had remarkably similar platforms on Europe during the late 1980s and early 1990s – when both endorsed efforts to strengthen the role and resources of the regions of Europe –,sections of the SNP have since become more suspicious about the integrationist project.

With the rise of popular disenchantment with the project of European integration across the United Kingdom, 'Europeanism' has become an electoral disadvantage for political parties. The SNP has responded to public opinion by becoming more critical of certain aspects of Europe and even threatened to vote against the draft European Constitution. This indicates that the SNP's moves towards a more 'moderate' position may have been thwarted by its growing caution towards Europe. While the period of the early 1990s saw the SNP's position on autonomy in Europe softening – whereby it

expressed support for the CoR, the possibilities of a devolved Scotland in Europe, and developing relations with Catalonia, Bavaria and other legislative regions – since the early 2000s the SNP has strengthened its position on 'independence, nothing less' and has sought to more clearly position itself as a small-state in the waiting. So, while the party's independence-in-Europe policy, and the various compromises it has pledged to make to gain EU membership (such as handing over control over defence, foreign affairs and possibly monetary policy), provides some indication of a more 'postnational' understanding of sovereignty (Hepburn 2009c), disillusionment with the possibilities presented by European integration from the late 1990s has led the SNP to take a harder line on Europe, which is somewhat reminiscent of the party's antipathy towards Europe in the 1970s.

By contrast, the SDLP has refrained from courting the more Eurosceptical attitude now apparent in both parts of Ireland, even when Sinn Féin has made gains from this. Indeed, despite losing out to Sinn Féin in the last two European elections, the SDLP had continued to defend its pro-Europeanism (SDLP 2005; 2009). In doing so, the party has demonstrated a deeper commitment to the project of supranational integration than the SNP, and for this reason, Mitchell and Cavanagh (2001: 262) suggest that the SDLP is perhaps more deserving of a 'post-nationalist' appellation.

It could be argued, therefore, that the SNP's Europeanism is more instrumental than that of the SDLP, whose support for Europe both predated and outlives this period of electoral disenchantment with Europe. This is not to say that the SDLP viewed Europe in a completely altruistic light. Indeed, in the 1980s and 1990s, when Northern Ireland received great economic benefits from Europe, the SDLP found electoral advantage in

criticising the Sinn Féin's, and indeed unionists', Euroscepticism. Yet the SDLP's instrumental use of Europe was different to that of the SNP's: it was accompanied by a more ideologically-rooted affiliation with the integrationist project, as well as a practical realisation of its tactical uses. In the party's own words: 'Our support for the European Union is both principled and pragmatic' (SDLP 2005, 2).

The case analysis suggests three explanations for this recent divergence in Celtic nationalist positioning on Europe. First, these differences were shaped by the parties' varying degrees of party unity on the issue of Europe, with the SDLP broadly united on the issue, and the SNP often more more divided. Party (dis)unity relates to a second factor which helps to explain differences between the two parties – the influence of particular leaders. For example, Hume, as a founding member of the SDLP, deputy leader for nine years, and then leader for a further 22, had an enormous impact on party policy. This allowed him to imbue the SDLP with his own strongly pro-European ideals. Meanwhile, in the SNP, while Alex Salmond sought to import a much more positive attitude to Europe into the party with the adoption of 'independence-in-Europe' in 1988, his Europhilia was far more practical, less vocal and less central to the SNP's self-understanding as a party compared to Hume's passionate support for Europe. As a result, the SNP leadership's historical ambivalence on European integration has allowed for greater debate within the party on European matters, and thus a much more pragmatic attitude towards the integrationist project. Finally, regional party competition had an important influence on party positioning on Europe. Since the early 1980s, the SDLP has faced an electoral rival, Sinn Féin, which has adopted a more nationalist, Eurosceptic position. This provided further grounds on which the SDLP might distinguish itself,

particularly in the 1980s and 1990s, when Hume could argue the economic benefits which his role as an MEP had brought to Northern Ireland. By contrast, the SNP has faced no significant (anti-European) nationalist competitor.

Conclusion

This article has explored how SNRPs in the 'Celtic periphery' of Scotland and Northern Ireland have responded to deepening European integration. Whilst there is an extensive literature on the separate activities and strategies of the SDLP and SNP, the two parties have rarely been compared. Given the striking similarities in European approaches of the two parties, this is an oversight. Despite the different historical and political contexts from which these parties emerged, they have both sought to use Europe in similar ways. Each has adopted comparable strategies in terms of their desire to obtain more structural funding; their coalition-building with like-minded parties at the European level; their use of the European Parliament to put Scottish/Northern Ireland interests on the map; and their desire to protect the local fishing and farming communities in Scotland and Northern Ireland. The two parties were at their most similar in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when both the SNP and SDLP were flirting with the idea of a regionalised Europe, but maintaining a certain ambiguity about their ultimate political objectives. Importantly, each party sought to use European integration to hasten their constitutional objectives of renegotiating relations with the UK state and engaging in new European alliances. As we have seen, during the period leading up to devolution in the 1990s, both the SNP and SDLP perceived Europe as a sphere in which they could advance their autonomy, and

both parties sought to strengthen their voice at the European level, either through direct channels, or by obtaining more representation in UK delegations to Europe.

However, there have also been differences in each party's response to Europe, especially since the late 1990s. Whilst the SDLP continues to be very pro-European – which has proven an electoral disadvantage in today's political climate – the SNP has become more critical of certain aspects of the integrationist project – thus chiming with the public mood. This recent variation in Scottish and Northern Ireland nationalist responses to European integration may be explained by the extent of party unity on Europe, the influence of party leaders, and the challenges presented by nationalist or Euro-sceptical competitors. As such, the recent Celtic nationalist divisions on European integration demonstrate that, even for parties that have developed highly similar approaches towards European integration, one cannot speak of an 'homogenous' effect of Europe on SNRPs. Instead European integration has a differential impact – on different places and at different times – even for parties within the same state.

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[2] The few publications comparing Scottish and Northern Ireland politics in the last decade include Brown et al (2002), Mitchell and Cavanagh (2001) and Walker (2010).

[3] The 'Celtic fringe' refers to those areas of the UK (and elsewhere, e.g. France) where a Celtic language is spoken or a Celtic culture exists, including Scotland, Ireland, Wales (and to a lesser extent, Cornwall and Man) (Pittock 1999). In particular, 'Celtic' nation is commonly used to describe Scotland, Ireland and

Wales as having a Celtic heritage in contrast to the Anglo-Saxon culture of (much of) England. Yet as well as implying difference, this concept is also strongly interwoven into the history of Britishness, whereby 'the "Celtic fringe" is felt to be part and heart of Britain in a proprietorial and intensively emotive way' (Pittock 1999: 4). We use the term 'Celtic nationalism' in a descriptive and geographical manner, to describe the territories of Scotland, Ireland and Wales that each have a Celtic heritage. We follow in the footsteps of other political scientists (e.g. Edwards et. al. 1968; Sharpe 1985; Weight 2002; Morgan 2006) who have employed this term to describe nationalist mobilisation in Scotland, Wales and Ireland. We believe the term 'Celtic nationalism' is appropriate to describe regional nationalisms in the UK which accept a common 'Celtic' affiliation, and are often defined by their opposition to the more Anglo-Saxon identity of the British/English centre of the UK state. For instance, nationalists in Scotland often refer to their 'Celtic cousins' in Northern Ireland (SNP 2008), and nationalist parties in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have also endorsed a 'Celtic nationalist alliance' to win more influence at Westminster (Guardian, 31 March 2010). Importantly, we do not employ a normative understanding of the term 'Celtic', for instance, by endowing it with certain ethnic characterisations that rely on 'nostalgic projections of primitivism' (Pittock 1999).

[4] In recent elections, the historic link between the Ulster Unionist Party and the British Conservative Party has been restored as the two fielded joint-candidates in Northern Ireland. However, there remain divisions amongst the Unionists regarding the sense of this strategy.

[5] The SDLP was founded by activists from both sides of the religious divide. However, the party's commitment to Irish reunification ensured that it won the vast majority of its votes from the Catholic community and the small number of Protestants who consider themselves Irish nationalists.

[6] Although seeking independence, the Scottish Socialist and Green parties do not categorise themselves as nationalist parties as independence is not their primary demand.

[7] For more information, see http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Business-Industry/support/17404 (accessed 23 May 2010).