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## **Dissent on the periphery? Island Nationalisms and European integration**

Eve Hepburn and Anwen Elias

### **ABSTRACT**

Many scholars have identified stateless nationalist and regionalist parties (SNRPs) as ardent supporters of Europe. This support has been explained as a result of positive developments in supranational integration that convinced these actors that Europe could facilitate the achievement of their territorial demands. Other work, however, leads to an expectation that SNRPs that mobilise within island regions that are geographically distant from the European centre of power (Brussels) will adopt more Eurosceptic positions. This article aims to test these competing hypotheses about the positioning of SNRPs on Europe. It does so by examining the attitudes of SNRPs in two island regions in the Mediterranean: Corsica and Sardinia. The findings suggest that SNRPs in both places can not be adequately categorised as either Europhile or Eurosceptic. The article examines the role of several context- and actor-specific factors in shaping the complex positioning of island nationalists in Corsica and Sardinia on the issue of Europe.

### **Introduction**

From the late 1980s, calls for a 'Europe of the Regions' won the support of stateless nationalist and regionalist parties (SNRPs)<sup>1</sup> across Europe (De Winter and Gómez-Reino 2002; De Winter and Lynch 2008; Elias 2008a,b; Hepburn 2008, 2010). It was hoped that a regionalised Europe comprised of stateless nations and peoples would eventually replace that of an intergovernmental Europe with power wielded by states. In response, many SNRPs altered their self-determination goals to fit the evolving European context: the Scottish National Party, Plaid Cymru in Wales, the Catalan *Convergència i Unió*, *Union Valdôtaine* and the Flemish *Volksunie* perceived the European Union (EU) as an alternative framework to the state for pursuing self-determination (Lynch 1996; Guibernau 1999; Elias 2006, 2008; Hepburn 2006, 2010; McGarry and Keating 2006).

For this reason, SNRPs are generally presented as ardent supporters of European integration (Hix and Lord, 1997; Marks and Wilson, 2000; Marks et al, 2002). Jolly (2007: 114), for example, finds that ‘regionalist political parties are consistently Europhile across issue area, region and time’. Although in reality the picture is much more nuanced than this, whereby Eurosceptical SNRPs such as the Lega Nord exist alongside their pro-European counterparts, and a number of SNRPs have at various times developed ‘hot’ and ‘cold’ responses to integration processes (see Elias 2008a; Hepburn 2010), most scholars maintain that the majority of SNRPs are generally supportive of Europe. Scholars have offered several explanations for the pro-European attitudes of SNRPs. Keating (2001: 225) demonstrates how SNRPs have sought to take advantage of the changing ‘opportunity structures’ presented by spatial rescaling at the European level to enhance regional autonomy. Marks and Wilson (2002) maintain that SNRPs, which seek to undermine the legitimacy of state institutions in their claims to nationhood, have supported European integration precisely because it has eroded the powers of the state. Lynch (1996) argues that SNRPs look favourably on the efforts of European institutions to promote minority languages and cultures. Furthermore, Jolly (2007) argues that market integration may make small states or autonomous regions more viable economic entities. Together, these arguments posit that positive developments in supranational integration have convinced SNRPs that Europe can facilitate the realisation of their territorial demands.

However, other work gives good reason to expect that SNRPs, especially in island territories, may not necessarily always be strong supporters of Europe. For example, Berezin and Díez-Medrano (2008) demonstrate that geographical distance from the EU’s centre of power (Brussels) decreases support for European integration.

People living in territories on the extreme periphery of Europe, and which have a strong sense of national identity, are more likely to be mistrustful of Europe. Such mistrust may be especially pronounced in peripheral island territories where globalising processes are perceived to be in constant tension with island insularity, as they represent a ‘totalizing trend’ that levels territorial boundaries (Baldacchino 2004; Clark 2004). Globalisation and supranational integration may also be perceived as a modern form of colonialism for islands with a colonial past, which often develop ‘discourse of resistance’ to defend their autonomy (Hay 2006: 28-9). This is evident in the fact that every island member-state of the EU, as well as several island regions, have negotiated special arrangements safeguarding their jurisdiction over matters that are perceived as vital to their culture and society (Warrington and Milne 2007: 390). As such, insularity is seen to be an important variable affecting political responses to European integration. Owing to the physical separation of island regions from the mainland, this leads to a degree of isolation in the evolution of island society and politics, as well as dependence (or interdependence) on larger political actors (Baldacchino 2004; Warrington & Milne 2007). While islands arguably constitute just one type of periphery (others include territories isolated simply by distance or geographical barriers such as mountains, i.e. Alpine territories), island scholars maintain that there is something unique about political and social processes on islands resulting from their physical boundedness. This body of literature thus leads us to expect SNRPs in island contexts to be more anti-European than Europhile.

This article examines the European positions of SNRPs in two extreme peripheral insular territories: Corsica and Sardinia. In doing so, it seeks to test two competing hypotheses about the European attitudes of such parties towards Europe. A first hypothesis expects Corsican and Sardinian SNRPs to be Europhile (because of

the opportunities presented by European integration to meet their territorial demands). A second hypothesis expects these parties to be more prone to Euroscepticism (given their island status and geographical distance from Brussels). Thus, we seek to test whether insularity is an important variable shaping the responses of SNRPs to Europe. The choice of cases is motivated by several considerations. Both Corsica and Sardinia are autonomous regions of two of the EU's largest member-states: France and Italy. Both islands are geographically distant from Brussels, in addition to being separated from the European mainland by the Mediterranean Sea. Each island also has a history of self-governance interspersed by conquest and colonisation. Moreover, they are home to Italy's oldest nationalist party and the largest stateless nationalist movement in France. Finally, both islands are geographically distant from Brussels in addition to being separated from the European mainland by the Mediterranean Sea: the capital of Corsica – Ajaccio – is 1048km from Brussels whilst Cagliari – Sardinia's capital – lies 1344km away. Indeed, Corsica and Sardinia are both closer to North Africa than to Brussels. Our focus on these cases will thus enable us to test scholarly claims about the Europhilia of SNRPs in contexts that are physically isolated from the symbolic centre of the EU project.

The article begins by providing background information on the political, economic and constitutional positions of Corsica and Sardinia. The following section tests the hypotheses presented above, by exploring the response of SNRPs on the extreme periphery of Europe to the challenges and opportunities posed by deepening European integration. The findings demonstrate that these parties' responses to European integration are not unconditionally supportive of Europe, but neither are they straight-forwardly Eurosceptic. The complex positioning of SNRPs in Corsica and Sardinia is explained as a function of several context- and actor-specific factors

that have led to distinct patterns of interaction with European integration processes. The article concludes by considering the significance of these findings for the study of SNRPs in other island regions in Europe, as well as for the study of SNRP attitudes towards Europe more generally.

### **The Island Nations of Corsica and Sardinia**

Islands have not generally attracted the attention of political scientists, despite representing the archetypal ‘periphery’ in centre-periphery studies as a ‘body of land surrounded with water which is inescapably isolated from and peripheral to continental areas’ (Royle 2001: 42). And yet, islands are extremely valuable units of analysis for the study of territorial politics. On one hand, they comprise self-contained territorial systems, which provide an excellent testing ground for examining how territory confines, shapes and informs politics. At the same time, the defining characteristic of islands – their insularity or ‘islandness’ – requires a certain degree of interdependence with external actors (Baldacchino and Milne 2000). Insularity or islandness may be defined ‘as the dynamics of the natural boundary and the resulting island qualities, including elements geographical (for example, degree of separation from a mainland), political (often expressed through tensions between autonomy and dependence on a mainland jurisdiction) and social (such as islander identity and sense of place)’ (Jackson 2008).

Island scholars argue that the special characteristics of islands make them quite distinct from other forms of (peripheral) territories. According to Baldacchino (2004), the spatial separateness and ‘geographical precision’ of small islands encourages forms of governance and political dynamics that are quite idiosyncratic. For instance, insularity has led many islands such as Åland, Bermuda, the Canary

Islands, the Isle of Man and Tasmania to share their sovereignty with larger states (though a number of secessionist movements have emerged to contest these relations, for instance in Papua New Guinea and Fiji). Other scholars have focussed on the social aspects of insularity. For instance, Hache (1998: 47) believes that the geographical characteristic of insularity is used by islanders in order to assert a distinctive identity and to justify demands for enhancing their economic, social, cultural and political situation, whilst Hay (2003: 203) believes that the water boundary is conducive to psychological distinctiveness, because it promotes clearer, 'bounded' identities.

Yet whilst many scholars have argued that islands possess unusual characteristics, in this article we envisage islands to lie on a centre-periphery continuum – at the far side of 'peripherality'. This does not mean that islands do not share aspects of peripherality with other non-island territories (we believe they often do); instead, it means that the experience of peripherality and isolation is enhanced *to the greatest extent* in the island context. As such, we seek to explore whether and how extreme peripherality – which we understand as situations of insularity – has shaped island party responses to Europe.

In this analysis, we focus on a particular type of island entity: *island regions*. For the purposes of this paper, an 'island region' is a water-bound territorial entity situated at an intermediate level between local and statewide levels. Island regions may also possess legislative powers, a degree of political autonomy, and a strong sense of national identity, which are evident in both our cases. The French island of Corsica and the Italian island of Sardinia, which are separated by only 15km of water, share a number of similar geographical, social, cultural and economic traits. These include a similar pre-history based on the megalithic civilisation which provides a sense of cultural distinctiveness, and a common legacy of conquest and colonisation,

due to their strategic military and trade positions in the Mediterranean. Both islands are regularly referred to as stateless 'nations' by political and social elites. Their inclusion into the state-building ventures of France in 1769 and Italy in 1861, and the subsequent state economic exploitation of resources on the islands, means that Corsica and Sardinia have also shared a history of dependency on the state.

### *Corsica*

Corsica was a Genoese colony until 1768, when the island was sold to France in response to a declaration of the island as a sovereign nation by the Corsican patriot Pascal Paoli in 1755 (Loughlin 1989; Caratini 2003). The French army swiftly asserted control over its newly acquired territory, and Corsica's status as an island region without any special recognition of its historical, cultural and linguistic specificities remained largely uncontested until the post-World War Two period. From the 1950s onwards, a state programme of economic modernisation initiated a period of dramatic economic growth (Loughlin 1989: 138-145). However, the fact that this economic growth was seen to benefit only 'continental' French interests, in addition to the environmental fall-out of modernisation, provided the conditions for the emergence of nationalist contestation. Two nationalist movements emerged in Corsica that demanded full recognition of the Corsican nation (Elias 2008a: 111-113): a moderate wing represented from 1977 by the *Unione di u Populu Corsu* (UPC), which demanded further political autonomy for Corsica within the French state; and a more radical wing was born with the *Front de Libération Nationale de la Corse* (FLNC) in 1976. Inspired by Marxist-Leninist ideas and the experience of anti-colonial movements, the FLNC adopted a strategy of political violence in pursuit of the national liberation of Corsica.



Nationalist mobilisation drove French authorities to propose several reforms to deal with the ‘Corsican problem’ (Briquet 1998). In 1982, President François Mitterrand, oversaw the approval of the *Statut Particulier*, which established a Corsican Assembly, with responsibilities for administering the social, cultural and economic affairs of the island (Loughlin 1985). A second *Statut Joxe* in 1991 enlarged the competencies of the re-christened Collectivité Territoriale de la Corse and reformed all electoral lists. Prior to the creation of a regional political arena, Corsican SNRPs had been excluded from democratic politics, since representation within statewide elected bodies was monopolised by the island’s two historic clans. Within the devolved assembly, moderate and radical SNRPs quickly established themselves as the island’s second political force. They collectively won 24.9% of the vote in regional elections in 1992, though the FLNC had the greatest electoral success.

A third wave of institutional reform was launched by Prime Minister Lionel Jospin in 1999. However, provisions for enhancing the legislative powers of the Corsican assembly were declared unconstitutional by the French Constitutional Court, and abandoned by President Jacques Chirac in 2002. In a 2003 referendum, Corsican voters also rejected proposals to create a single political and administrative body for the island, with formal but limited legislative powers in areas such as the economy, the environment and transport.<sup>2</sup> This defeat was a heavy blow for all of Corsica’s SNRPs, which had supported further reform as a step towards greater autonomy. The result nevertheless fuelled an electoral alliance between moderate and radical groups ahead of the 2004 regional elections, called *Unione Naziunale*. By mid 2007, however, the partnership succumbed to internal tensions between moderates and radicals. A new alliance of moderate nationalist groups – *Femu a Corsica* - was

formed to contest the 2010 regional elections, and achieved an unprecedented 21.57% of the Corsican vote, and 11 of the 51 seats in the Corsican Assembly.

### *Sardinia*

Sardinia officially joined the newly created Kingdom of Italy in 1871 after exercising autonomy in the Kingdom of Sardinia-Piedmont. Like Corsica, Sardinia was progressively integrated into the Italian state, leading local intellectuals to refer to Sardinia as an 'aborted nation' (Clark 1989). State integration fuelled a nationalist movement in the aftermath of the First World War. The *Partito Sardo d'Azione* (Psd'Az: Sardinian Party of Action) won 40% of the vote in regional elections in 1921, which sought to resist assimilation into the Italian state and instead pursue a meaningful form of autonomy for the Sardinian nation. Nationalist success led state authorities to grant Sardinia 'special status' in the Italian constitution of 1948, along with Sicily and the three ethno-linguistic border-regions of Northern Italy. Sardinia's Statute of Autonomy comprised exclusive legislative powers in certain areas like agrarian reform, extensive administrative powers and some financial autonomy. Most importantly, the *Statuto* contained a unique reference to the state's commitment to the island's 'economic and social renaissance'. As Clark (1989) argues, the autonomy granted to Sardinia in 1948 in fact masked the island's request for, and dependence on material concessions and modernisation'. Since then, debates about the *questione nazionale sarda* have continued unabated (Cesare 1990; Milia 2001).

Like Corsica, a number of economic modernisation programmes were introduced by the Italian state from the 1960s onwards to replace Sardinia's traditional pastoral economy with high-technology industries such as petrochemicals,

steelworks and oil refineries (Mattone 1982; Casula 2005; Hospers and Benneworth 2003). However, as the industrial plants failed to provide many jobs and pollution was rife, people turned against the ‘cathedrals in the desert’. This degenerated into banditry and kidnapping in the mountain areas of Sardinia (Melis 1982), and spurred a reinvigorated nationalist movement focused on valorising Sardinian identity. On the back of a cultural ‘neosardismo’ movement that sought to valorise the language, identity and traditions of the Sardinian nation, the Psd’Az recovered its electoral fortunes, which had dipped to 6-7% of the vote as a result of its participation in unpopular Christian Democratic coalition governments. Following an upsurge in identity politics in the 1980s, the party was able to capture over 15% of the vote. However, at the same time the Psd’Az suffered from internal problems, due mainly to disagreement between the independence-seeking and pro-federalist wings, which splintered the party in the late 1990s. Since then, Sardinia has witnessed the emergence of two radical independence-seeking SNRPs: *Sardigna Natzione* (SN) and *Indipendènzia Repùbrica de Sardegna* (IRS). The competition between these three parties ultimately fractured and weakened the nationalist vote.

### **European integration and stateless nationalism in the Mediterranean**

The deepening of European integration in the 1980s was met with a mixed response from political actors in Sardinia and Corsica. Whilst some SNRPs were supportive of European integration from the outset, others vigorously opposed supranational project as too centralising, too distant, and too unrelenting on peripheral economies. However, changes in European regional policy, the creation of EU committees tasked with alleviating problems of insularity, and the prospects for autonomy within a regionalised Europe changed the attitudes of SNRPs in these two places.

### *Corsican nationalism*

For moderate Corsican SNRPs, such as the UPC, Corsica's geographical location within the Mediterranean and its historical experience at the heart of European trading routes, made the island European by default (Elias, 2008: 115). A deep-rooted ideological Europeanism translated into a keen interest in the implications of European integration for the future territorial status of the island. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the focus of the UPC was on the political implications of European integration for generating new pressures on the French government to devolve political autonomy to Corsica. In contrast, economic integration was perceived to be of little importance, since this would be unlikely to undermine the state's stranglehold on the island's economic decision-making.

With no regional institutions prior to 1982, and with traditional clans' monopoly of parliamentary representation at the state level (Elias, 2008a: 117), the UPC viewed Europe as an arena within which to publicise its territorial demands. The UPC established contacts with international organisations and other like-minded SNRPs in Europe, campaigning for 'an internal statute of autonomy' for the Corsican nation within a 'democratic and progressive Europe of the Peoples' (Arritti 1978). The reform of European regional policies and the creation of a legal framework for protecting minority rights in the 1980s reaffirmed the UPC's belief in the inevitability of the emergence of a regional Europe (Elias 2008a: 121-122). The UPC's success in electing an MEP in 1989, and its membership of the European Free Alliance (EFA), meant the party had access to a new supranational arena within which to publicise Corsica's territorial marginalisation within the French state.

Radical Corsican SNRPs took a very different position on Europe. Unlike the UPC, the FLNC rejected Europe as an alternative arena within which Corsican self-determination could be realised. Inspired by struggles of national liberation against colonialism in the Third World, the FLNC demanded a ‘rupture’ from the French state and the creation of a new model of society inspired by Corsica’s independent past (Elias, 2008a: 116). Even though European integration was not a prominent concern during the late 1970s and 1980s, the FLNC rejected it as a process that was driven by the same capitalist and imperialist interests that had exploited Corsica for over 250 years (U Ribombu 1984). The Single European Act, for example, was denounced on the grounds that it would only accelerate Corsica’s economic, cultural and social decline (U Ribombu 1987).

By the early 1990s, moderate and radical nationalist attitudes towards Europe had not changed significantly. The French referendum on the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 was an opportunity for nationalists of all colours to formally state their positions on the future direction of European integration. The UPC remained an enthusiastic supporter of the European project, and viewed the treaty as an important step towards a federal Europe of the Regions. The FLNC (known from 1991 onwards as the ‘FLNC ‘canal historique’’) rejected the treaty on the grounds that its proposals would be damaging to Corsican interests. In contrast, nationalist groups that had split from the FLNC between 1989 and 1991 (see Crettiez 1999: 124) positioned themselves as either Euro-enthusiasts or Euro-rejectionists. The FLNC ‘canal habituel’ adopted a position in defence of a regional Europe akin to that of the UPC, while *Accolta Naziunale Corsa* (ANC), campaigned for a ‘no vote’ because of the crippling costs of integration for Corsica. The ANC instead advocated closer co-operation between the islands of the Mediterranean.

By the late 1990s, the issue of Europe had varying degrees of importance for different nationalist groups. The UPC's failure to re-elect its MEP in 1994 deprived it of the only platform from which it could articulate its nationalist demands. Within the Corsican political arena, the UPC also lacked the electoral clout to shape the insular political agenda. This was wielded instead by the radical nationalists, with *Corsica Nazione* (CN) as the main group representing this tendency from 1992 onwards.<sup>3</sup> CN's electoral success and new institutional status prompted a revision of the FLNC's long-held Euro-rejectionist position. By the mid 1990s, the party was calling for a 'Statut de Territoire d'Outre Mer'<sup>4</sup>, whereby bilateral conventions with the EU would allow the island to 'benefit from Community funds while escaping the destructive effects of the Common Agricultural Policy and its system of quotas' (U Ribombu 1994). This proposal was replaced in 1998 with the goal of 'independence in Europe'.

CN's symbolic rhetoric was accompanied by a new interest in the EU's institutional set-up and policies. Firstly, the party stressed the importance of European regional funds for an under-developed Corsican autonomy, and based its support on the continued receipt of Objective 1 funding.<sup>5</sup> CN's electoral growth had seen the party adopt the clientelistic practices of its clanist competitors and thus support for European regional funds was driven by an instrumental desire to shore up the party's electoral support (Lefevre 2000: 270; Giudici 1997; Crettiez 1999). A tradition of political patronage, rooted in the fact of insularity and the resultant opportunity for selected political 'families' to serve as a linkage between the state and the physically isolated Corsican citizenry (Briquet, 1997), thus contributed to shaping nationalist responses to Europe. Secondly, CN sought to use Europe to exert pressure on the French state to devolve further powers to Corsica. The party used visits to Brussels and meetings with European officials as a way of highlighting Corsica's lack of

access to state-level decision-making, and the failure of French authorities to respond to insular problems. Among the issues raised were the inadequate transport links to mainland Europe and the need for sensitive development of the island's economy. This instrumental interest in specific institutional and policy dimensions of actually-existing Europe was adopted by the *Unione Naziunale* alliance during the 2004 regional elections (Elias 2008a: 133). A European discourse characterised by demands for the protection of Corsica's EU regional aid and better representation in Brussels was a key theme of the alliance's founding documents, and continued to feature in its rhetoric in subsequent years.

However, this renewed interest in Europe should not be construed as a new commitment to a shared vision of a regional Europe. Firstly, the nationalist movement remains divided on the role Europe can play in achieving self-determination. Whilst the PNC and other pro-European parties applauded the draft European Constitution as a further challenge to the centralised French state, the majority of radical nationalist groups voted to reject the text as it failed to make progress towards a Europe of Nations without States. Only CN was divided on what position to take, due to a tension between opposition to the document's substantive proposals and the feeling that a 'yes' vote would be more appropriate for a party of aspiring government.<sup>6</sup> Secondly, the European dimension remains a minor issue in Corsican nationalist politics. References to either a 'Europe of the Peoples' or a 'Europe of Nations without States' are confined to occasions such as European elections or referenda. The election of the PNC's François Alfonsi as an MEP in the June 2009 European elections<sup>7</sup> will give new prominence to the Europhile agenda of moderate Corsican nationalists, anchored in the twin themes of Corsican autonomy and sustainable development of the island's economy. In this context, there has been renewed interest

in defending a Union of the Mediterranean, a loose initiative to promote European investment in Mediterranean economies and cultures (PNC, 2008). However, such debates have not altered the general disinterest in Europe among nationalists focused first and foremost on insular politics and the on-going struggle for autonomy from the central state. A limited engagement with Europe is symptomatic of an inward-looking political culture, and a divided nationalist movement that is more concerned with advancing the nationalist struggle at home than with European efforts at polity-building. It is the state (rather than Europe) which remains the key target of island nationalists' demands, since it is only the former that can realistically deliver self-determination for Corsica (Martinetti, 2009).

### ***Sardinian nationalism***

From the creation of the first European institutions in the 1950s, many Sardinian parties were sceptical about the supranational project, which was viewed as another form of distant authority that was dominated by Northern European interests (Cardia 1982: 188). This was compounded by the fact that Sardinia's first experience of European economic integration was of 'a cruel and cutting form' (ibid). Owing to the requirements of the Common Agricultural Policy, traditional pastoral areas were supplanted by modern 'agro-zootecnica' producing meat and dairy products, which was resented by the local population. Political debates during the first elections to the European Parliament in 1979 revolved around how to make modernisation less destructive of the traditional ways of life in Sardinia (Cardia 1982: 189).

This situation changed in the 1980s, however, with the reform of the European Regional Development Funds, which sought to increase competitive potential of deprived regions. As Sardinia, like Corsica, is one of the poorest regions in Europe, it



also qualified for Objective 1 status. SNRPs saw European involvement in Sardinia's economy as a way of overcoming the island's economic and political dependence on the state. In contrast, the main statewide parties – in particular the ruling Christian Democrats – discovered that European structural funding served to reinforce their position of patronage. After decades of Sardinia's political elite making the trade-off between 'real autonomy' for the regional distribution of patronage and resources from Rome, clientelism still persisted with Objective 1. EU cohesion policies in the post-1992 period were badly implemented and money was wasted due to the corruption of the regional political class. In particular, European funds were siphoned off to the politicians or businessmen who were given responsibility for implementing local development programmes (O'Neill 2005; Hepburn 2010).

While Italian statewide parties in Sardinia rarely looked beyond the economic ramifications of European integration, there was a strong tradition among moderate Sardinian nationalists of looking to Europe as a broader context for their claims to political autonomy. Similarly to the Corsican UPC, the Sardinian Psd'Az had consistently supported European political integration, and articulated the goal of Sardinian autonomy as part of the creation of a wider 'Europe of the Peoples'. The Psd'Az was a founding member of the European Free Alliance (EFA) and it participated in the European Parliament during 1984-94. Mario Melis MEP – a former President of the Region – played a significant role in developing proposals for the Committee of the Regions, and was one of the most vocal advocates of a regionalised Europe. Melis used his new political platform in Strasbourg to highlight Sardinia's economic plight and struggle for self-determination, as in the case of the Corsican SNRPs. However, even Melis was critical of the undemocratic structures of the EU and the "aggregation of the interests that gathered together in the triangle between

Milan, Paris and Bonn...with the devastating penalisation of all of southern Europe' (quoted in Lepori 1991: 125). Melis argued that a Europe of the States should be replaced with a decentralised Europe of the Regions (Melis 1994). The party sought the recognition of stateless nations and peoples in a European federation, whereby 'Sardinia will be able to constitute, with other regions, a subject of Europe that has its own institutional importance in the ambit of the EU organisation' (Psd'Az 2000). This is similar to UPC demands, whereby regional autonomy within the state *and* Europe is envisaged, in a type of 'European Federation of the Peoples' (Psd'Az 2003).

However, the party also acknowledges that particular aspects of European integration have presented major challenges for Sardinia, whose greatest handicap is one of physical isolation, i.e. transportation and communications with the rest of Europe are highly difficult and costly. In response, the party has proposed a number of Mediterranean-focused strategies to offset the problems of insularity. The Psd'Az supports a Mediterranean zone of free exchange to offset the economic costs of extreme peripherality, and the construction of an oil pipeline between Sardinia and Algeria in order to address the island's lack of oil resources<sup>8</sup> (Psd'Az 2004). Furthermore, the Psd'Az has demanded a form of 'territorial continuity' with the mainland to address the island's inability to endorse the European principle of free movement of goods, capital and peoples (Psd'Az 2004: 6). By this it means the reduction of obstacles to efficient communication, such as transportation costs to and from islands, to put them on a level playing-field with other mainland regions.

To provide an overarching political and legal framework for its Mediterranean economic plans, the Psd'Az argues that Sardinia should be given the right to instigate direct relations with the national community of states with which the EU has a treaty of association, i.e. the countries in the Mediterranean, North Africa, and the Middle

East. The party welcomes a federal or confederal Mediterranean structure in which its autonomy was guaranteed. Here, Sardinia could also assume a key role in acting as a 'bridge' between Europe and Northern Africa (Psd'Az 2003).

More radical nationalist parties in Sardinia have also adapted their constitutional goals to include the European dimension. The roots of SN are in the neo-sardist movement of the 1960s, which was based on an anti-colonialist rejection of the Italian political establishment inspired by the nearby struggles for national liberation in Africa. This type of radical nationalism re-emerged in the 1990s with the birth of SN in 1994. SN argues that the only way for Sardinia to break free from its position as a colony of the Italian state is to achieve independence alongside other island-states such as Malta and Cyprus.

However, the party's goal of independence in Europe does not mean that it is content with actually-existing Europe and the philosophy underlying the single market: 'the real battlefield is not Italy, but Europe, and in this arena, if we do not wish to be the first victims of liberalism, there is need to combat the signs of liberalism'.<sup>9</sup> SN wants to rid the EU of its perceived neoliberal bias and the influence of multinational companies in its quest for Sardinian independence. This would enable Sardinia to take economic policy into its own hands, for example by creating a *zona franca* 'to create equal opportunities for Sardinian businessmen' and an entrance tax (*tasso d'ingresso*) for non-residents and non-Sards, moneys that will be invested in tourism, safeguarding the environment and the agro-pastoral economy (SN 1999). SN also looks towards the Mediterranean basin for developing its networks. For instance it is engaged at the European level through alliances with *Corsica Nazione* and the Basque party *Herri Batasuna*, which even agreed to 'represent' the SN in the European Parliament in 1999-2004 when Sardinia did not have a representative.

IRS has taken its cue from the SN to include the European dimension into its demands for independence. IRS was formed by disgruntled SN members in 2002, who have pursued a similarly radical approach to independence. The party seeks to portray itself as a new bottom-up political movement that has nothing in common with the regional clientelist class that has bought and sold Sardinia's autonomy over the decades through systems of patronage (IRS 2005). The party's goal is for 'Sardinia in Europe as an independent Republic with its own representatives and its own social and economic rights, like many small nations that are entering the EU with dignity and decision-making powers' (IRS 2004). IRS also supports the creation of closer linkages within the Mediterranean (IRS 2004). However, there are very few substantive references to how an independent Sardinia would function in Europe, no specification of whether the IRS prefers a confederal or federal Europe, or very little analysis of EU policies. Despite this, the IRS is involved in European activities but works outside the 'mainstream' networks, such as organising meetings of the European Social Forum, and engaging in bilateral relations with the Catalan ERC.

Yet more important to radical SNRPs is the continuing battle with the Italian state. SN has launched a concerted campaign against the perceived economic and environmental exploitation of Sardinia by Italian authorities. The party vehemently opposed the Italian government's decision to put American military installations on the island, where bombing and other nuclear and chemical tests were carried out to the destruction of the tourist and fishing industries. IRS also vehemently criticised the government's creation of pollution in Sardinia through dumping nuclear waste on the island (SN 1996; IRS 2005). These campaigns indicate that Sardinian SNRPs remains more focused on extracting concessions and demands from the Italian state, and nurturing trade and political networks that are closer to home in the Mediterranean,

than substantive engagement with the institutions of Europe. This is largely because the EU was seen by parties as a distant and bureaucratic structure demanding adhesion to its laws and regulations rather than as a tangible opportunity to advance political projects; and there was no direct representation of Sardinia in Europe owing to the European Parliament electoral law in Italy whereby Sardinia must share a constituency with the much larger Sicilian region. Instead, many SNRPs have sought to turn Sardinia's main handicap of insularity into a resource, by exploiting its central position with the Mediterranean and acting as a link between Europe with North Africa. This is also where many Sards believe their economic future lies – in trade and cultural agreements with Tunisia, Algeria and Libya.

### **Explaining different island responses to European integration**

SNRPs in the island regions of the Mediterranean have developed highly complex responses to deepening European integration. Moderate nationalists in Corsica and Sardinia have always been ideologically committed to the pursuit of autonomy within a broader European framework. In line with many other SNRPs elsewhere in western Europe (Lynch, 1996; Elias, 2009; Hepburn 2010) the UPC and Psd'Az saw several institutional and policy developments at the supranational level during the late 1980s and 1990s as heralding the emergence of a regional Europe. Elections to the European Parliament from 1979 offered Corsican and Sardinian parties direct access to European institutions; the election of UPC and Psd'Az representatives to Strasbourg enabled the parties to pursue their territorial interests at the supranational level. Both parties also supported moves towards creating a Committee of the Regions in 1992, which offered Corsica and Sardinia further institutional representation. More recently, the PNC defended a 'yes' vote for the draft European Constitution in May 2005 (the

PsdAz did not take a position as the document was not put to a referendum in Italy), and the election of a PNC MEP in 2009 once again provided a valuable supranational platform for articulating the party's autonomist demands.

In contrast, during the 1970s and 1980s, radical Corsican and Sardinian SNRPs opposed the European project as a capitalist venture that would exacerbate the economic under-development of the insular economies. FLNC/CN and SN modified their Euro-rejectionism during the 1990s, in favour of qualified support for European integration. However, this was an instrumental change of rhetoric due more to the pressures of party competition and the receipt of EU structural funds, than to specific developments in European integration (Elias 2008a: 131). Importantly, these parties remain highly critical of many of the institutional/policy aspects of Europe.

Based on these observations, the hypothesis positing the innate pro-Europeanism of SNRPs must be qualified in these two cases. Island SNRPs are not unconditionally supportive of European integration across time, space and policy area. Whilst some SNRPs have been shown to be ideologically committed to the idea of European integration, others opposed the European project in principle. The moderation of this anti-Europeanism during the 1990s was a function of the perceived economic benefits received by the substate nation. This indicates a strongly instrumental and opportunistic approach to Europe, with party positions shifting as the costs and benefits of European integration are perceived to vary over time.

At the same time, the second hypothesis regarding the relationship between geographical distance and support for the integrationist project must also be qualified. Although parties in these two peripheral regions were concerned about being further peripheralised and adversely affected by the new centres of political and economic power in Europe, at times SNRPs – especially those of a more moderate persuasion –

were enthralled at the opportunities presented by a regionalised Europe. Both the UPC and Psd'Az were staunch advocates of a 'Europe of the Peoples' and sought to import a more positive European dimension to political debates in their respective territories.

How can the complex positioning of SNRPs in Corsica and Sardinia on European integration be explained? Far from being wholly Europhile (because of the opportunities for stateless nations within Europe) or Eurosceptic (because of their distance from Brussels and their island status), Corsican and Sardinian SNRPs have moved back and forth on questions of European integration. The following section seeks to identify factors that account for this variation in island SNRP responses to Europe. As noted in the Introduction, most scholarly accounts of this party family's Europhilia have stressed the primacy of European-level factors, such as positive developments in European integration. Here, however, we argue that context-specific factors have been equally, if not more, important in determining island SNRPs' varying responses to Europe. Some of these factors – party ideology, relations with the state, and economic status of the stateless nation – have been shown to shape SNRP attitudes towards Europe in other non-insular territories (Elias, 2008a; Hepburn, 2010). However, two other important factors, namely, clientelism in island political cultures and a Mediterranean island perspective, is specific to these cases, and has exerted a distinctive influence on SNRP interpretations of the opportunities presented by European integration.

### *Party Ideology*

Island SNRP positioning on Europe has been influenced by party values and identities. The distinction between radical and moderate SNRPs in both Corsica and

Sardinia serves to distinguish between two very different sets of ideological preferences which have indelibly shaped party attitudes towards Europe.

On the one hand, the post-Marxist, anti-system SNRPs in Corsica and Sardinia during the 1970s and 1980s adopted positions that were hostile towards a process of economic integration driven by the forces of market capitalism. The anti-Europeanism of the SN and FLNC was a natural extension of a more general ideological rejection of the extant domestic political regime. Although these positions were moderated during the 1990s, the tradition of anti-Europeanism continued to inform the scepticism of radical SNRPs towards many of the EU's institutional/policy dimensions. On the other hand, moderate SNRPs espoused a deep-rooted Europeanism which defined the parameters of principled support for the European project. This ideological predisposition to some kind of European framework for Corsican/Sardinian autonomy motivated each party's support for a Europe of the Peoples, and informed their efforts to articulate their territorial demands at the supranational level. It is from this perspective that key developments in European integration from the 1970s onwards were considered to be positive steps towards the creation of a European framework that recognised the rights of stateless nations.

#### *Relations with the State*

Island SNRP responses to European integration have been significantly affected by their relations with the state. Both Corsican and Sardinian SNRPs have articulated a strong grievance of being either exploited, or abandoned, by political authorities in Paris and Rome. In particular SNRPs in Corsica and Sardinia strongly opposed the perceived environmental exploitation of the islands by French and Italian governing authorities, with some portraying themselves as 'econationalist' parties.



At the same time, however, the island nations' different positions within the state have affected SNRP attitudes towards Europe. In Corsica, traditional clans' monopoly on representation within the French Parliament, and the absence of a regional tier of government prior to 1982, forced SNRPs to develop alternative strategies to advance their territorial demands. For moderates, the European arena provided a political space within which such demands could be articulated; in contrast, the FLNC shunned Europe and instead employed political violence as a means of negotiating entry into a closed political system (Crettiez, 1999: 67). Changes in the institutional opportunity structure at the regional level from 1982 onwards had a significant influence on party re-positioning on Europe. In particular, CN's emergence as a major player in the Corsican political arena by the 1990s prompted the moderation of its discourse in favour of an instrumental Europeanism.

In contrast, Sardinia's autonomy is guaranteed in the Italian constitution and SNRPs have participated in regional elections since they were first introduced in 1946. For this reason, radical Sardinian SNRPs (represented by SN and IRS) were never compelled to adopt the strategy of political violence pursued by their Corsican counterparts, although they shared an ideological sympathy with anti-colonial struggles. For the Psd'Az, however, and in spite of the presence of a regional tier of government during the post-war period, the European arena nevertheless still represented an external support structure for the pursuit of SNRP demands. Especially from the 1980s onwards when the party struggled to maintain its electoral presence in Sardinian politics the European Parliament was an invaluable platform for articulating demands for autonomy. Both Psd'Az and the Corsican UPC, therefore, developed strategies for the 'Europeanisation' of the nationalist struggle which sought to maximise the interest-articulation opportunities available at the supranational level.

These differences in constitutional architecture aside, state relations also affected the degree to which 'Europe' was central to nationalist strategies to win greater self-determination. In both cases, the European dimension was of limited salience in nationalist politics because of the overwhelming focus on relations with the state as the main avenue by which autonomy could be enhanced. This is ironic since all SNRPs in Corsica and Sardinia initially adopted their pro/anti EU positions in an effort to liberate themselves from the state.

### *Economic Insularity*

As noted earlier, Jolly (2007) has argued that SNRP support for European integration rests on their belief that Europe enhances the economic viability of regional autonomy. However, whilst this may be true of stateless nations that are economically prosperous, it does not hold for the two underdeveloped island nations examined here. SNRPs in Corsica and Sardinia were initially very much opposed to the economic impacts of European integration on their island economies, which relied heavily on agriculture, suffered from failed state-driven efforts at industrialisation, and struggled with problems of unemployment and population decline due to emigration. In Corsica, the UPC did not consider European integration to offer an economic lifeline for the island, whilst the FLNC was deeply concerned with the negative effects of free-market economics. Likewise, the Psd'Az acknowledged that European economic integration presented major challenges as Sardinia was hampered by the free movement of goods, capital and peoples (Psd'Az 2004: 6). The CAP was also perceived by SNRPs to undermine the islands' traditional pastoral economies.

Moreover, the instrumental Europeanism of SNRPs in Corsica and Sardinia since the 1990s was driven by the increase in receipt of European regional monies,

rather than a reconsideration of the opportunities for economic viability as part of a European single market. SNRP support for European integration was thus dependent on the receipt of financial transfers from Brussels. In both places, however, the prospect of losing eligibility for such regional funds has been decried by SNRPs. A cessation in the tangible financial benefits of integration was met with more critical SNRP positions on Europe, which lament the failure of the EU to remedy the backwardness of the Corsican and Sardinian economies.

### *Clientelism and Patronage*

A number of island scholars have noted that the lack of anonymity on small islands can foster nepotism, patronage, and political clientelism (Royle 2001). This was evident in both cases, whereby mainstream parties regularly rewarded individuals and groups for their support in exchange for state resources. The presence of powerful clientelistic networks and systems of political patronage in both islands has affected SNRP responses to European integration in Corsica and Sardinia in important ways. Firstly, clan monopoly of the electoral process in Corsica, and the dense networks of political patronage of governing Sardinian parties, 'closed' the regional political systems to outside political players. Consequently, SNRPs were forced to search for other ways of articulating their nationalist demands.

For the UPC and Psd'Az, this meant turning to Europe as an alternative political system to access, whilst for the FLNC/CN, this resulted in political violence against the closed nature of the system. After the creation of a regional political arena in Corsica in 1982, nationalists have had to compete against the clans for votes and control of the island's political institutions. A consequence of this is that SNRPs – and CN in particular - which had initially mobilised against the corruption of clientelistic

practices have ended up adopting similar modes of operation to survive in a political system dominated by such behaviour. CN's support for European regional funds can be understood in large part as a function of its need for financial resources to distribute in exchange for political patronage. In Sardinia, the Psd'Az also became part of the patronage system, engaging in coalition governments with the centre-right and centre-left. As an indicator of the extent to which these parties have assumed the practices of the political cultures in which they are active, both CN and Psd'Az have been associated with pilfering of European structural funding (Guidici 1997; Crettiez 1999; Casula 2005; O'Neill 2005; Hepburn 2007; Elias 2008: 235). In response to the 'clientalisation' of politics, other SNRPs in Corsica and Sardinia have sought to present themselves as 'new' parties with no ties to traditional, corrupt elites.

#### *The Mediterranean perspective*

A final element that has mediated SNRP attitudes towards Europe has been the political and economic 'lens' of the Mediterranean. For island SNRPs – especially IRS, SN and CN – the Mediterranean provided an alternative framework to Europe for strengthening trade and cultural cooperation, which – importantly to these parties – was not directed by bureaucrats and multinational companies in Brussels. This Mediterranean perspective manifested itself in various ways.

On one level, SNRPs in Corsica and Sardinia maintained close political ties. SN has developed a number of bilateral contacts with other nationalist parties the Mediterranean, such as in Catalonia, and its relations with CN are extremely close – such that, when the SN added the word '*Indipendenza*' to its party name in 2001, so did its Corsican sibling. On another level, SNRPs in both islands have incorporated a Mediterranean dimension into their territorial projects. SN, IRS and Psd'Az have all

referred to the creation of a ‘Mediterranean of the Peoples’ in which to exercise Sardinian autonomy that sits within, or provides a more easily accessible substitute for, a Europe of the Regions (Hepburn 2008a). In Corsica, a similar Mediterranean-centric vision has been defended by smaller radical nationalist parties, such as the ANC, who remain ideologically opposed to European integration. However, whilst mainstream radical and moderate parties have also expressed a desire to work more closely with other Mediterranean islands to promote shared interests and goals, the initiative in this respect has largely been taken by the island’s two largest clans.<sup>1</sup> The exclusion of Corsican SNRPs from government, and the growing interest of the clans in European affairs since the mid 1990s (Elias, 2008: 135) has meant the latter have been in the best position to develop Mediterranean networks.

As was evident in the cases, SNRPs in both cases maintain that their islands are uniquely placed to act as a bridge between southern and northern European cultures, and to compete in Mediterranean markets. This will enable the island nations to forge a new role for themselves in Europe and the world by bringing together the diverse political and economic contexts obtaining in the Mediterranean basin, and by taking advantage of their geographical positions as cultural and economic ‘trading posts’. This, it is hoped, may lead to the development of a Mediterranean of the Regions that either replaces, or operates alongside, a Europe of the Regions.

## **Conclusion**

Whilst some scholars have argued that SNRPs are consistently Europhile across issue area, region and time, others have posited that distance from Brussels, and the fact of insularity, are more likely to fuel mistrust of supranational integration. The findings

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, Jean Baggioni of the clan Rassemblement pour la République, was at the forefront of the creation of IMEDOC (Islands of the Western Mediterranean) (Elias, 2008: 135).

presented here suggest that neither of these propositions on their own capture the complex attitudes of Corsican and Sardinian SNRPs towards Europe.

On the one hand, moderate SNRP support for European integration has been principled and consistent, and calls for a 'Europe of the Regions' echoed similar demands made by other SNRPs across western Europe. Obstacles to the articulation of their territorial demands at the regional level – because no level of regional government existed in Corsica prior to 1982, and because of the limited electoral clout of moderate nationalists in Corsica and Sardinia from the 1980s onwards – led both the UPC and Psd'Az to look towards Europe for an arena within which their territorial demands could be pursued. On the other hand, radical nationalist groups in both places initially rejected the idea that economic integration could enhance the viability of the island economies, fearing instead the detrimental impact of the single market. The adoption by CN, SN and IRS of a more Euro-realist position from the 1990s onwards was indicative, not of a policy-reversal, but of an instrumental strategy to capitalise on European monies.

This development in SNRP attitudes towards Europe is not necessarily confined to island regions. Other recent work has found SNRPs across Europe have moved back and forth on the issue of European integration, in response to perceived opportunities for, or challenges to, enhancing their territorial autonomy (see Elias 2008a, 2009; Hepburn 2010). As noted above, these perceptions have also been shaped by party ideology, the structure of the state within which stateless nations exist, and the economic status of the national territory. However, the empirical findings also indicate that insularity or 'islandness' is a relevant variable in influencing Corsican and Sardinian SNRPs attitudes towards Europe. Insularity affects the *types of demands* being made by SNRPs with regard to processes of state

restructuring. Thus, for example, insularity enhanced the perception of the state as distant and domineering, augmented the strength of anti-colonial sentiment (linked to their proximity to African struggles for independence) which engendered a distrust of European political structures. Moreover, the existence of strong clientelistic networks of political patronage owing to the isolation of these territories from the mainland indelibly shaped the instrumental Europeanism in evidence among Corsican and Sardinian SNRPs. In both cases, there has also been an interest at different times in the notion of the islands acting as a 'bridge' to Africa and the rest of the Mediterranean, either as an alternative to Europe (in the case of the ANC) or as an alliance of solidarity within the EU (the PNC, Psd'Az, SN and IRS). These aspects were not found (or not emphasised to such a great extent) in other non-island cases that have been examined elsewhere, such as in Scotland, Wales, Bavaria and Galicia (Elias 2008a; Hepburn 2010). The insular context within which SNRPs in our two cases responded to European integration – peripheralised and isolated from the debates in Brussels – thus contributed to these actors' limited engagement with the detail and implications of European laws and policies.

The findings presented here suggest two avenues for further research. Firstly, this article has focused on explaining SNRPs' positioning on European integration in two peripheral island regions. But the extent to which these explanations hold in other cases of peripheral nationalist mobilisation requires investigation. The most obvious comparators are other insular nationalist movements in Europe, such as the Azores in Portugal and the Canary Islands in Spain. However, to fully test whether a geographical water boundary has a real effect on attitudes to Europe, it would also be valuable to extend the analysis to non-island peripheral territories, such as those in Central and Eastern Europe or in the Alpine valleys. As we argued above, islandness

is just one form of peripherality; it would therefore be interesting to test our hypotheses in other regions that are 'remote' from Brussels. Extending the scope of comparison in this way will enhance our understanding of how SNRPs which are distant from Europe perceive and interpret developments in European integration that elsewhere have been considered to bolster the territorial demands of such actors.

Secondly, our shift of focus away from European-level factors to context-specific factors shaping SNRP attitudes towards Europe marks a clear break from existing scholarly analyses. We have focused here on the impact of party ideology, relations with the state, economic resources, and political culture on parties' positioning on Europe. Future work should examine to what extent these are also factors that shape other SNRP attitudes towards supranational integration processes across the regions and stateless nations of Europe. Doing so would help to determine whether insular territories are any different from other cases of substate nationalist and regionalist mobilisation, or whether there is indeed something special about the politics of island regions.

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<sup>1</sup> We employ the terminology of nationalist and regionalist parties in the footsteps of Botella (1989), Keating and Loughlin (1997) and Pallarès, Montero and Llera (1997). These authors maintained that nationalist and regionalist parties should not be treated as entirely separate movements, as they share a unifying commitment to self-determination and substate territorial empowerment. We draw on the arguments used to justify the use of this term, as set out in Hepburn (2011), which include: its emphasis on the territorial (rather than ethnic) aspects of self-determination goals; its ability to capture the changing self-determination goals of parties in this family; its ability to account for various party self-identifications as nationalist or regionalist; and the fact that it enables us to include and compare parties that are rarely brought together (as some are seen as 'regionalist', i.e. the CSU, others are seen as 'nationalist', i.e. the SNP, whilst others still use the language of nationalism *and* regionalism, i.e. the Psd'Az). Furthermore, we employ the term 'stateless' nationalist parties to distinguish these substate actors from majority nationalist parties operating on a state level, i.e. Swedish People's Party. This terminology draws on the concept of 'stateless nationalism' (Guibernau 1999; Keating 2004).

<sup>2</sup> The new territorial assembly would replace the two administrative regional councils on the island.

<sup>3</sup> CN was created as an electoral alliance between moderate and radical SNRPs in 1992. However, the refusal of some radicals to denounce the use of violence led to the withdrawal of moderates from the alliance. As a result, CN became the electoral front of radical SNRPs, with close links to the FLNC 'canal historique'.

<sup>4</sup> Designation as a *Territoire d'Outre Mer* (re-named *Collectivité d'Outre Mer* in 2003) would give Corsica the same status as the islands of French Polynesia, Mayotte, and Saint Pierre et Miquelon.

<sup>5</sup> Eligibility for Objective 1 status requires the regional GDP per capita to be under 75% of the European average. Corsica was classified as an Objective 1 region in 1989-93, receiving €138 million. In 1994-99, the island saw its allocation of funds nearly double to €250 million (Le Monde 1999).

<sup>6</sup> The party did not adopt a formal position on the Constitution, and allowed its members to vote freely.

<sup>7</sup> Alfonsi was elected as part of a joint list with the French Green Party, *Europe Ecologie*, in the French South-East constituency.

<sup>8</sup> Due to insularity, people in Sardinia must pay over 40% more than other Italians in their energy costs.

<sup>9</sup> 'Referendum, Ha vinto La Democrazie e L'antiliberalismo', 28 May 2000, found at <http://web.tiscali.it/sardignanazione/novas1.htm>.