

Dynamics of international activity of sub-state regions

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The paradiplomatic activity of sub-state regions has become an important element of international relations. The sub-state regions are able to implement specific international programs and deal with supra-regional challenges. The ability of regions to interact internationally depends primarily on the political and legal system of a given country, but also on the economic and socio-cultural potential as well as the geographical location. The paradiplomatic actions are also influenced by processes taking place in international relations, in particular globalisation and technological development. The author examines the dynamics of international activity of sub-state regions with a particular focus on the factors and premises that encourage regional authorities to undertake paradiplomatic actions. The main research objective of the article is a diagnosis of the motivation of regional activity in the international arena. A brief analysis of the development of international activity of sub-state regions is a starting point for considerations about economic, political and socio-cultural motives to paradiplomatic actions. Democratisation, liberalisation, development and ethnic diversity are considered as having a particularly significant impact on shaping the dynamics of international activity of sub-state regions. In his deliberations, the author primarily references the literature on the subject as well as his own achievements in the field of paradiplomacy studies.

Keywords: sub-state actors in international relations, region, paradiplomacy.

Introduction

The article aims to analyse the dynamics of international activity of sub-state regions. The author asks what factors enable and what premises encourage regional authorities to undertake para-diplomatic actions. The diagnosis of the motivation of regional activities in the international space is therefore the main research goal of the work.

The term “region” is regarded as one of the most ambiguous in the field of social sciences. This is due to the complexity, comprehensiveness and multidimensionality of this concept, which is commonly used not only in political science, but also in geographic, economic, sociological and cultural studies. Even within the political sciences and their subdiscipline, which is the science of international relations, one can encounter various approaches to the term “region”. There are two reference levels of this concept: supra-state (international) and sub-state (intra-state). In the article, the concept of a region is understood as a unit constituting the first level of the basic territorial division of a state (occupying the highest place in the structure of its territorial organisation), designated on the basis of legal acts defining its competences, having strictly defined linear borders and its center (seat of authorities) [1, p. 5] (see also: [2; 3, p. 9; 4; 5, p. 59]). Moreover, it is assumed

that the region has self-governing political authorities capable of representing its interests outside the state [2; 6, p. 18].

To describe the participation of sub-state regions in international relations, the article uses the term “international activity of regions”, synonymous with the term “paradiplomatic activity of regions”. The author considers the international activity of the region to be the participation of regional authorities in international relations by building formal and informal contacts, both permanent and temporary, with foreign public or private entities in order to implement the broadly understood interests of the region, as well as other within a given state, formal competences (constitutional, statutory) that relate to the international sphere [7, p. 40].

In his deliberations, the author based primarily on the analysis of the literature on the subject¹, also using his own achievements in the field of paradiplomacy studies².

Development of international activity of regions

In the last few decades, international relations have been characterised by a dynamic quantitative and qualitative change in relation to their participants. The increase in the number of entities participating in international trade was accompanied by the deepening of their diversity. States retained their superior position and the greatest influence in shaping the international order. However, they acquired, often with their consent, “competitors” in international relations. These are non-state and sub-state actors, especially regional and municipal authorities. The development of international activity of sub-state entities is usually associated with globalisation processes that have affected all spheres of public life. Such entities began to develop international activity even before the present “era of globalisation”. For example, in 1857, the Australian state of Victoria opened its office in London. Although Australia was a British dependent territory then, this fact can be considered the first instance of an action referred to today as “institutionalised paradiplomatic activity” [8, p. 36].

Various forms of this activity took place in the period preceding the emergence of the modern centralised nation-state. For this reason, some sub-state actors treat modern paradiplomacy in terms of a return to bygone traditions and “regaining” lost privileges. Therefore, globalisation should be considered not so much as a cause and effect factor of international activity of regions, but as a factor enabling sub-state entities to develop their contacts with foreign countries in a more diversified and intensified manner compared to the previous period, especially thanks to the “networking” of the world, progress in the field of communication and transport, development of new international institutions [10, p. 15–16]. Moreover, globalisation by itself does not facilitate the understanding of the spatial diversity of the international activity of sub-state entities. Openness to contacts with the external environment does not have to automatically mean the freedom to establish and develop international cooperation in the scope and directions desired by regional communities.

However, contemporary globalisation processes have strengthened such tendencies, stimulating the activity of sub-state entities, especially in countries with a liberal-democratic system. The globalisation processes have encouraged local government units to

¹ Partially recalled in the paper.

² In particular: [8; 9].

implement a specific policy aimed at protecting and promoting their own interests, shared values, expressed identity, as well as promoting universal goals such as solidarity, peace, development or cultural pluralism. Tendencies to increase the influence of regions on international contacts of states strengthened under globalisation processes also in states with authoritarian regimes, e. g. in the PRC. In some countries, however, they were the result of an increase in centrifugal processes, resulting in, for example, deepening decentralisation in Belgium, devolution in Great Britain or systemic transformation — the transition from authoritarian regimes to democracy. The latter factor was especially true of the Latin American states and the former Eastern Bloc.

When it comes to Europe, three “waves” of development of international activity of sub-state regions can be distinguished:

- since the 1980s, an increasing number of regions have tried to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) by taking their own initiatives in this direction, as well as to use culture (possibly also to emphasise identity) to mark their presence in international relations; these activities were often of an ad hoc nature and were usually not coordinated within the same body;
- in the next decade, within numerous regions, the legal and institutional base was formed, constituting the basis for own paradiplomatic activity, parallel or supplementary to the foreign policy of the home states; it was characteristic that this activity was coordinated by a specialised institution operating within the regional administration; efforts were made to include in this structure also international activity implemented by local authorities belonging to a given region;
- in the 21st century, regional structures began to be expanded (“vertically”, but also by developing their presence abroad), implementing paradiplomatic activity, trying to integrate it (merge) organisationally to an even greater extent and to direct it through the creation of comprehensive regional international strategies [11].

The growing importance of the international activity of the regions was evident through the increasing number of their foreign representations, increasing budget expenditures for related purposes and stronger use of “third sector” organisations operating in sub-state entities and on their behalf. Interregional cooperation can be developed effectively when certain baseline conditions are met. The literature on the subject usually emphasised in this context:

- institutional compatibility, which provides for the functioning of cooperation partners, inter alia, local government (possibly: constituent parts of federal states or autonomous regions), which is characterised by a certain decision-making autonomy within the home state;
- the existence of a sufficient “supply” of services offered by the public and private sectors;
- the presence of a relatively well-developed communication infrastructure, which is particularly visible in the case of cross-border cooperation (see more: [12]).

The international activity of regions creates a new plane of influence in international relations, referring primarily to their economic, social and cultural dimensions. Regions enter into relations not only with their counterparts in other countries (interregional relations), but also with other sub-state entities, as well as private entities, and even

authorities of other countries and their subordinate institutions and international organisations (intergovernmental and non-governmental). Paradiplomacy appears “alongside” the existing, traditional diplomacy, complementing it and remaining subordinate thereto. Paradiplomatic activity is therefore not diplomatic activity and paradiplomacy is not part of diplomacy [13, p. 120]; unlike “traditional diplomacy” it is not aimed at implementing a previously defined state interest (national interest). Instead, it carries the characteristics of a “more functionally oriented, opportunistic and experimental” activity. Regions become participants in international life, acquiring the ability to formulate their own interests and transfer their implementation to the international level [14, p. 11, 14].

Motivation of regional authorities to paradiplomatic activity

The prerequisites for the degree and nature of the growing participation of sub-state entities in international relations are varied. There are external (universal) and internal (national) causes of paradiplomatic activity of regions. Within the first group, the phenomena of globalisation and regionalisation, which are key determinants of the modern world shaping the global conditions of political, economic and cultural development of states, should be emphasised. The interdependencies between these development forces and their synergy make decision-making processes related to all spheres of social life less dependent on regulation at the level of nation states and at the same time increasingly conditioned by supranational and sub-state factors. Important external factors also include democratisation (including the pluralisation of the decision-making process related to foreign policy) and the blurring of clear differences between the issues belonging to the sphere of domestic and foreign policy. Among the internal determinants of paradiplomatic activity, one can distinguish factors related to the processes of federalisation and decentralisation of states, phenomena related to the issues of state-building/autonomisation processes, ineffectiveness of foreign policy implemented by the central authorities, asymmetry of potentials of individual regions of a given state and external stimuli stimulating interest in international activity in region level. In this context, the importance of regional leaders and political parties, as well as the border location of some regions, are also revealed [15, p. 102–108] (see also: [16, p. 44–48]).

The author of the article, like most of the authors publishing on the international activity of sub-state entities (see, e. g.: [14; 17]), recognises the following premises as the basic motives of the regional elites striving to activate the paradiplomatic activity of their regions:

- economic: accelerating socio-economic development, increasing profits from international exchange of the entire economy of the region or specific enterprises, attracting foreign investments, increasing the competitiveness of the region, also in terms of a given country, etc.;
- political: various types of political ambitions of these elites, including the desire to raise their own position within the national political system, implementation of specific political goals in the international arena (such as the promotion of human rights or development policy) or autonomisation/separatist tendencies and search for support (recognition) abroad;
- socio-cultural: building contacts with socio-cultural communities (ethnic, linguistic, religious, moral), represented not only by other states and sub-state enti-

ties, but also non-governmental organisations or religious associations; this is of particular importance in the case of regions inhabited by minority communities in a given country, which find close / socially and culturally identical partners abroad.

The border location remains an important condition that is objectively conducive to greater international activity. Regional authorities usually strive to use the benefits of this and to tackle cross-border challenges more effectively (communication, educational, cultural, commercial, environmental projects together with a neighbouring region of another country, cooperation in the field of migration management, etc.).

One of the main reasons for the paradiplomatic activity of many regions, especially in the case of countries undergoing systemic transformation or developing countries, has become the search for the most beneficial solutions in the field of management, municipal economy, education, communication and other areas of social life by using the experiences of foreign partners, especially the best organised regional and local communities in the most developed western countries, but also sub-state partners in other countries, as long as they could be an example to follow in a specific field. This is evidenced by the international activity of numerous Polish regional and municipal authorities, seeking development patterns or specific technological solutions as part of cooperation with Western and non-Western partners³. Interestingly, while in the 1990s, virtually every sub-state entity from Western Europe could be a source of “good practices” for Polish local government officials, a decade later the attractiveness of many of them in this respect decreased and Polish communes, entities and local governments have become themselves “exporters of experience” and solutions in the field of administration and management, especially in relations with Eastern European partners⁴.

The research highlights a number of benefits for entities implementing active paradiplomacy and their inhabitants, which additionally strengthen the willingness to implement international projects. For example, the context concerning the interdependence between the scope of international activity of regions and the degree of their socio-economic development, especially in the area of innovation, is important [18]. Usually, in this context, emphasis is placed on the increased opportunities for development obtained mainly due to: intensification of trade in goods and services, including improvement of the quality of public services⁵; attracting foreign investment; reviving the network of business relations by ensuring better contacts between entrepreneurs, other parties and business representatives with the public administration; expansion of communication infrastructure, especially transport; increasing the free movement of people, goods, services and capital; additional impulses for the development of education and culture; creating various types of partnerships between professional and social cooperation partners⁶; increasing the

³ The pursuit of implementation in Polish Rzeszów of solutions “observed” in Boston, Hannover, Sydney or Shanghai may be an example thereof.

⁴ The author’s own observations collected on the basis of his involvement in international cooperation of sub-state entities. Already at the end of the last decade, it often turned out that for example Italian or French local communities did not have much to offer to Polish partners in this respect. Moreover, numerous Polish local government units have become valued sources of practical development solutions from the point of view of Eastern European entities, especially Ukrainian.

⁵ The expansion of the educational offer, e.g. through the exchange of school and cultural youth, is as obvious example.

⁶ Of a non-commercial nature, e.g. cooperation between the so-called third sector or academia.

quality of public sector staff through training courses preparing for international cooperation, participation in contacts with foreign countries and acquiring new experiences, etc.; building an open, tolerant, better educated and prone to international activity society⁷; strengthening the ability to solve various types of problems: internal (especially of a socio-economic nature), as well as of an international nature (including building understanding and reconciliation between states and their societies and influencing the regulation of international disputes by states); easier access to EU funds (in the case of cooperation with EU entities) and various banking and financial institutions; improving one's own image in the environment of the subject-partner; general improvement of the well-being of one's own community (the level of satisfaction with the quality of life in the material and non-material context).

Regional paradiplomacy may be part of the foreign policy of the home states or hinder its implementation. In extreme cases, the actions of sub-state entities in international relations may be dictated by the central authorities or, on the contrary, they will be clearly disadvantageous for the latter and contrary to the national interest of the state as a whole. The activity of regions may be aimed at increasing their own autonomy and even at decomposing states. Regions often try to look for partners in international relations to pursue their particular interests both at the international level and in the domestic dimension [8, p. 10].

Democratisation, liberalisation, development and ethnic diversity: specific conditions for international activity of regions

In the author's opinion, particular interest and a slightly broader commentary in the context of the analysis of the dynamics of international activity of regions should be devoted to the processes of democratisation and liberalisation as cause and effect factors of paradiplomatic activities of regions, development differences (both between international regions, individual states and sub-state regions) and ethnic diversity and aspirations to express one's national aspirations.

The freedom of action created by the democratic political system and the free market economy should be considered the main causal factor of paradiplomatic activity. In the absence or significant limitation of democracy and the freedom to conduct business, it is difficult for sub-state entities to develop independent activity in the international arena, regardless of the degree of involvement of a given state in globalisation processes. Briefly speaking, the more freedom in the sphere of politics and economy (and indirectly in other areas of public life) in a state, the greater the possibilities of "self-realisation" of sub-state entities also in international relations. Restricting the freedoms in these areas reduces sub-state entities to a service role towards central authorities. Then, even the formal possibilities of sub-state influence in the international environment will be associated with the "subcontracting" of the state's foreign policy and paradiplomacy will become its next instrument. The scope of actual autonomy and the possibility of pursuing one's own interests, expressing one's own values and creating one's own identity by regions and local

⁷ Particular attention is paid to the participation in international cooperation of specific social groups, such as children, youth and women.

communities in contacts with foreign countries are closely related to the development of democracy, the rule of law and market freedoms [10, p. 15–16].

It would be best illustrated by the comparison of the level of development of paradiplomatic activity in democratic countries — Western European, Nordic, USA and Canada — with the independence practically limited to zero of sub-state entities, including Western European Spain and Portugal, in the period preceding their democratisation in the second half of the 1970s. The authoritarian state authorities tried to ruthlessly eradicate autonomous traditions in this area (strong especially in the case of Catalonia and the Basque Country), considering them a threat not only to the cohesion of states, but also to the durability of undemocratic political regimes. Certain elements of the “old” paradiplomatic activity could be found in the activities of representatives of the émigré communities of both Spanish regions, concentrated in democratic countries. Democratisation has stimulated involvement in international relations not only in the aforementioned autonomous regions of the Kingdom of Spain, but also in a number of others, also autonomous, such as the Portuguese Azores and Madeira, and the Spanish Canary Islands and the Balearic Islands.

Importantly, democratic regimes allow the authorities of sub-state entities, as well as individual citizens, to express publicly a dissenting opinion from central authorities also on issues not directly falling under their competence⁸.

The liberalisation of the Indian economic system carried out in the early 1990s created unprecedented opportunities for participation in international economic relations for the regions of that country. Some of them⁹ have benefited from this, in particular by increasing their own exports, attracting foreign direct investment and boosting tourism [19, p. 4, 13–14].

Democracy and economic liberalism create incentives for independence for individuals and economic entities, as well as for regional authorities. Sometimes it is even necessary: in order to develop and maintain the ability to compete, one must act autonomously. Thus, the incentives created by democratic-liberal states often become a necessity, not always desirable from the point of view of regional communities. Especially that, as in the case of individuals and economic entities, regions that are stronger (with greater potential, more advantageously located, better managed, etc.) benefit from it to a greater extent than the others.

Clearly, the democratisation and marketisation of the economy made it possible to decentralise nation-states in terms of their management. This was also reflected in their administrative structure. Understandably, paradiplomatic activity is greater in countries with free market economies, democratically elected authorities at the state level, analogically created regional and local authorities, political parties competing with each other at the central or regional level, and effective systems of human rights protection, including it is the protection of property rights. However, how to refer to the undoubtedly growing involvement of sub-state entities from some formally authoritarian states, where one can

⁸ For example, in 2016, several Italian regions (through resolutions of their legislators) voted in favor of lifting the sanctions imposed on Russia by the EU in connection with the conflict in Ukraine, calling on the Italian government to act appropriately on the EU forum.

⁹ E.g. Maharashtra and Gujarat — two of the most industrialised states in India, Tamil Nadu (third place after Maharashtra and Delhi in terms of FDI), Delhi, Andhra Pradesh, Haryana and Karnataka. The coastal location was also important for the possibility of gaining greater benefits from the activity of regions in the sphere of international trade.

speak of deconcentration rather than decentralisation of management? It remains a moot point, considering that the local regions and communities, pursuing international contacts, undoubtedly strive to achieve goals that are beneficial to them, although they do so under the strict control of central authorities. In this context, the greatest challenge remains to assess the international activity of sub-state entities in the People's Republic of China (PRC).

For example, the concept of “multilayered diplomacy” was applied to the PRC, stating that Chinese foreign policy, while retaining the dominance of the central government, has rebecome¹⁰ multi-faceted. The growing international activity of PRC regions and local governments since the early 1980s is emphasised. Some differences and competition in foreign relations between the central government and sub-state entities are pointed out, but it is recognised that the PRC’s “institutional system” is capable of “stopping” such negative phenomena. Mainland China’s regions and local governments therefore act “in most cases” as “agents and partners” of the central government in international relations [20, p. 335–336]. In the author’s opinion, in the case of the PRC, the international activity of sub-state entities should be understood not so much in terms of the implementation of their autonomous interests (understood in the context of the principle of limiting the scope of state government interference in the sphere of rights reserved to the powers of lower-level authorities), but as another channel of international influence of the state and an instrument of its foreign policy. It is difficult to talk about the decision-making autonomy of local provincial governments under the conditions of the PRC political system.

From the point of view of the central government of the PRC, the slow (as to European standards) decentralisation/deconcentration in the late 1970s allowing sub-state entities to participate in foreign trade was simply an element of the country’s modernisation process. It was primarily about adjusting the PRC economy to the challenges of globalisation in the context of gradual inclusion of the “Middle Kingdom” in the world capitalist economy. Therefore, it was necessary to adjust to some extent institutions on the Chinese side to the needs of foreign partners, using the sub-state level. Such “flexibility” of relations with foreign countries allowed for more effective creation of international trade and investment with the PRC. This area of activity of Chinese sub-state entities was given priority importance, subordinating it to other spheres of international activity (especially culture, science, cooperation of social/non-governmental organisations, etc.), treated more in the context of branding regions and increasing their economic potential, rather than as goals.

Paradiplomatic activity is definitely more widespread in countries more developed in terms of socio-economic as well as legal and institutional parameters (with developed constitutional systems). Although in this context we are also dealing with differences resulting from internal political conditions. The economically well-developed provinces of the PRC are characterised by, for example, limited activity in contacts with foreign countries compared to their counterparts in democratic countries, even those that can hardly be considered the most developed, such as Mexico (see, e. g.: [21]).

The most developed (taking into account the HDI index [22, p.6], see also: [23]) and at the same time the richest states of Mexico, the Federal District and Nuevo León, are considered to be “cosmopolitan” and having an extensive network of international

¹⁰ A reference to the decentralised (even if not formally then practically) system of China before 1949.

contacts. On a Mexican scale, the developed regions of Baja California and Jalisco are also active on the international stage. The poorest state of Mexico — Chiapas — has a regional institution dedicated to international cooperation and cooperates with over 40 countries, the European Union, the World Bank Group, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and other international institutions. In the case of Chiapas, this state of affairs is primarily due, paradoxically, to its internal problems. The region is inhabited by a significant indigenous population (Indian, some of which do not even speak Spanish) and there has been a conflict on its territory for many years involving anti-government, leftist guerrillas (the so-called Zapatista movement — Zapatista Army of National Liberation), which created autonomous structures on the territory of the state. It is worth adding that the ideology of zapatism refers not only to socialism, liberation theology, Indian and ecological movements or alterglobalism, but also to municipalism promoting decentralisation, self-governance in all spheres of public life and the creation of a confederation of local communities.

The example of Mexico shows that the scale of international activity of sub-state entities is determined not only by its financial base and — more broadly — the economic potential, but also by the policy of the regional (local) elites. This factor can take on extremely varied faces, which favor contacts with foreign countries, despite sometimes extreme differences. In Baja California and Jalisco, the political elites are exponents of rather right-wing, neoliberal views on socio-economic life (liberalisation and deregulation of the economy, limiting the functions of the state), while in Chiapas, the state authorities represent a left-wing ideology, the Zapatista movement — even of the extreme left. Chiapas' openness to the world, which can hardly be considered “modern”, has a different character than in the case of the other Mexican states mentioned above. In each case, local communities (their elites) seek, through participation in international relations and contacts with politically close entities, to increase the possibility of pursuing their own interests.

Activity in the international area is also fostered by the situation in which one or more regions in a given country show a strong ethnic identity separate from the other components of that country and state-creating aspirations based on national, racial, linguistic, religious and other foundations rooted in culture. In such a case, these “other” sub-state entities usually become the centrifugal forces in the home state (see more: [24]), emphasising in particular their own cultural and/or linguistic difference. The policy of regional Quebec authorities in the 20th century is usually cited as the “flagship” proof of this thesis. The lower level of development, economic weakness, political, legal and economic limitations hinder the international influence of regions in multinational countries of the South, such as Ethiopia, India and Nigeria. A certain exception consists in the aforementioned poor — even on a Latin American scale — Mexican state of Chiapas.

Among sub-state entities, regions of developed countries created on the basis of ethnic and cultural distinctiveness (such as Catalonia, Quebec, Scotland, Tatarstan) stand out, treating international activity also — but not exclusively — in terms of another area in which they can emphasise their own national identity, being different from the “rest” of the home state, or finally take steps to build one's own independence. At the same time, they have adequate resources for related projects.

The cultural distinctness of a given region in relation to other administrative and territorial units of the home state usually implies the desire to manifest this difference also in the international environment. Involvement in international relations allows the com-

munity of such a region to reaffirm their “self-identity” in a special way. Presence “in the world”, and thus international recognition and recognition of the region’s distinctiveness (not in the international legal sense, of course, but in the cultural and socio-economic sense), becomes an important component of the regional identity. This allows raising the sense of “uniqueness” and importance among the local community. It also strengthens the region’s rank in relations with the state authorities and its other regions. Finally, it has a symbolic dimension, usually related to the history of the province, traditions of self-determination in the past, unique (at least subjectively) cultural elements, etc., often becoming a substitute for sovereignty. Therefore, paradiplomacy can play a substitute function for building one’s own statehood, especially in symbolic and cultural terms¹¹. The lack of developed contacts with foreign countries means masking the different identification of the region within the broader identity of the nation state [8, p. 49].

Conclusions

The international activity of regions has become an important element of international relations. Regions, without sovereign authorities capable of defining something like a national interest and then implementing it in a unified and coherent form, are forced to use the support of their home states in the implementation of specific international programs or in dealing with supra-regional challenges.

The ability of regions to interact internationally depends primarily on the political and legal system of a given country, but also on the economic, socio-cultural potential and geographical location. The scope of these impacts is also influenced by processes taking place in the international environment, in particular globalisation and technological progress. The factors determining the scope and nature of the growing participation of regions in international relations are therefore varied, as are the motivations of regional elites, prompting them to undertake efforts to influence beyond the borders of their home countries. Undoubtedly, they include economic, political and socio-cultural reasons.

The processes of democratisation and liberalisation, development and ethnic diversity and the desire to express one’s national aspirations should be considered as having a particularly significant impact on shaping the dynamics of paradiplomacy.

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¹¹ It is clearly visible in sports. Having your own “national” team (which is also related to the membership of a given sports association in the relevant international sports organisation), participating in competitions on the continental or global level, is a unique reason for pride in a given region or dependent territory and a symbol of its position. It can be treated as an element of the growing autonomy of this subject or as a way to “discharge” emotions related to ethnic and cultural distinctiveness.

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