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THE ÅLAND OFFICE IN BRUSSELS

An analysis of its channels of influence

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Abstract

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This thesis is a case study of the Åland office in Brussels that sets out to analyse its extra-state and intra-state channels of influence in use in order to influence European policy- and decision-making and at the same time try to shed light on how the Åland office circumvent and, on the other hand, work in tandem with the central government of Finland. In this respect, the bypass-theory of the multi-level governance approach will be used to understand and analyse these regional paradiplomatic activities both without the state and in tandem with the state. This approach will offer elaborate insights into how the Åland office use various channels of influence, including lobbying and interregional organisations and networks. In the end this study will find that the Åland office is able to bypass the central government by: lobbying and creating influence in the European Parliament; forwarding the positions of the Åland Government to relevant political players and EU-institutions, organizing or taking part as speaker in seminars or conferences; forming direct (both formal and informal) contacts and dialogue with officials at the Commission; creating and using ad-hoc groups/networks/alliances with cooperating partners; organizing and setting up official meetings with high-profile officials and politicians; promoting certain important political goals, values and activities of the Åland Government and the Åland community at the wider EU-arena; informal advocacy work at an early stage; trying to get access to new important forums at the EU-level; cooperating with specific industry interest organisations; and membership and engagement in European networks. On the other hand, the Åland office work in tandem with the central government by: cooperating with Finnish MEPs and actors supporting the positions of the national government; accreditation to the Council, with all its informal and formal advantages; presenting positions and taking part and engaging in meetings in the Council and other EU-institutions (the latter if in cooperation with officials from national authorities); cooperation between Åland and Finnish officials at the EU-level; and influencing the national political agenda in the Council. Finally, the thesis concludes that the extra-state channels in use of the Åland office in Brussels - being less-institutionalized, more policy-specific cooperation – rather complements formal intra-state mechanisms of cooperation and interest representation than the other way around.

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1. Introduction

Regional representations are nowadays a mainstay in the plenitude of actors that have set up offices in Brussels with an objective to foster a closer relationship with the European Union (EU). A large, and increasing, number of sub-state actors make their presence felt in Brussels in order to exert their influence on matters related with the EU, European integration and the increasing competencies of the EU (Rowe 2011, p. 1; Huysseune & Jans 2008; Hutchinson 2020).

The representative offices of regions in Brussels provide a significant connection link between regional interests and EU institutions as well as with cooperation partners and like-minded actors. These regional offices are a functional element within EU's multi-level governance structure (Rowe 2011, p. 3). Questions that arises are how a regional representation office in Brussels, operating in an environment with an abundance of interest organisations, work and which different types of channels it uses when it *with* or *without* the state (Tatham 2010) tries to affect policy- and decision-making? These rhetorical questions address European integration, the mobilisation of regions towards Brussels and the multi-level governance structure within the EU. According to research about regions' and regional representation offices' channels of influence, the existing intra-state influence-creating channels that are in use when a regional office try to influence EU-matters with interaction with its member state ('with the state') are the most important compared to the extra-state channels that are in use when trying to influence EU-matters without its member state ('without the state') (see Keating et al. 2015; Tatham 2010). However, some research also proposes that extra-state channels (the Brussels route) and channels of lobbying and paradiplomacy not in tandem with the central government – thus bypassing the state – might be as important as intra-state channels (Trobiani 2019). This research puzzle will be at the heart of this thesis.

Perhaps a paradox the evolution and the substantial increase of regional representations in Brussels is the notion that the EU suffers from 'regional blindness' (Stephan 2010; Rowe 2011, p. 199; Cygan 2014, p. 266; Weatherill 2005, p. 3). However, EU's blindness towards regions and the member states' internal arrangements might be a rather deceptive assumption (Palermo & Kössler 2017, pp. 24). In contrast to the concept of the 'regional blindness' in understanding the regions' role in the governance structure of the EU, the multi-governance approach view the EU as a single, multi-level polity that allows regions to systematically engage in the European policy processes in the different levels of governance, and as a consequence sub-state regions have the ability to bypass the state and the central government when trying to influence EU-matters (Marks 1993, p 392; Marks et al 1996, p. 169; Hooghe and Marks, 2001; Olsson 2010, pp. 119, 125). The academic discussion whether or not regional governments actually engage in and successfully use this process of continuous negotiation and represent their interests at the EU arena (Högenauer 2014, pp. 451-452) is still very much active.

In this regard, when studying regional representation offices and multi-level governance in the EU, legislative regions¹ are particularly interesting cases (Högenauer 2014, pp. 452). This can be motivated by; a) these regions can be expected to have more impact at the European level

¹ For the purposes of this study a definition of a 'region' focus on regions with legislative competencies (a region with lawmaking authority and with a working regional Parliament and a Government) in the EU. Therefore, this study defines 'legislative regions' as politically elected intermediate levels of government in EU member states, which have legislative autonomy in a number of policy areas affecting that territory (Rowe 2011, p. 9-10).

compared to solely administrative regions, b) as European integration has led to a transfer of legislative competences from regions to the European Union, these regions with legislative authority have a strong propulsion to affect European legislation and policy-making in order to balance the power, and c) legislative regions have more channels of interest representation to choose from (compared to administrative regions) as their constitutionally guaranteed possibilities grants them the ability to also use intra-state channels (i.e. through the national government) when trying influence EU matters (Ibid).

There is moreover a lack of research looking at regional interest representation in concrete cases (Högenauer 2014, pp. 452). Due to the lack of research looking at regional interest representation in concrete cases as well as the difficulty to provide comparative or large-scale research on how regions bypass the central government and how they work in tandem with the central government – or the prominence of these two ways – it is important to deal with these issues in a case study of a regional office in Brussels.

Åland's office in Brussel is an interesting case of how a region with strong identity and constitutional status effectively try to influence decision- and policy making at the EU institutions in Brussels and at the same time create a channel of information and contact between the Åland Government, the Finnish Permanent Representation in Brussels, and the institutions of the EU and external actors. The Åland case is even more interesting when considering that the special adviser of the Åland office in Brussels is accredited to the Council of the European Union (the Council) and the office is embedded within the Finnish Permanent Representation to the EU. The only other regions that are part of the EU that has officials accredited to the Council are the German Länder (Självstyrelsepolitiska nämndens betänkande 1/2018-2019). An important aspect is also that the Åland office and the Government of Åland is very small in size and resources compared with its counterparts at the EU-level (Ibid). Åland is moreover one of very few legislative regions in the EU with strong constitutional status (both within the member state and within international law) that operates within a member state (Finland) that is not a federacy but instead applies an asymmetrical governance structure.

1.2. Aim and research questions

According to the multi-level governance approach, regions (and regional representations) can and will mobilize beyond the control of the central governments directly in the EU arena (Hooghe & Marks 2001; Keating et al. 2015). One elementary hypothesis that can be drawn from this understanding is that there will be direct interaction between regional actors and EU institutions unmediated by central governments (Högenauer 2014, p. 453; Keating et al. 2015). This 'bypass-theory' of the multi-level governance approach holds that regions can bypass their central governments in order to reach their policy goals at the EU level (Olsson 2010, pp. 119-121; Keating & Hooghe 2001).

In short, by analysing Åland Government and Åland's Brussels office textual reports, this case study² will use an analytical framework based on the multi-level governance approach and its 'bypass-theory' as defined by for example Olsson and others (Olsson 2010; Tatham 2010), in order to differentiate the intra-state and extra-state channels of influence, and the analyse how

² The research in this thesis is a part of a larger research project in cooperation with the Åland Peace Institute. The research project is a collaboration between the Åland Peace Institute and ÅSUB and is about the significance of EU membership for Åland and to the people of Åland.

the Åland office in Brussels in certain politically prioritized matters bypass the central government as well as work in tandem with central government at the Brussels arena. In the end it may be possible to outline if there is any propensity to highlight any of the two above ways (or strategies if you like) of bypassing or working in tandem with the central government when trying to influence politically prioritized matters at EU level. The scope of the analysis will be limited to the time period of the Juncker commission (2015-2019), as the special adviser of the Åland office in Brussels got new goals and priorities during this period – focusing more on lobbying and less on information gathering (Självstyrelsepolitiska nämndens betänkande 1/2018-2019). Hence the office has a clear political mandate to exert influence decision- and policy-making (Ibid).

Research questions

The research questions are as follows:

1. By differentiating between intra-state and extra-state channels of influence, how is the Åland office in Brussels in certain politically prioritized matters a) bypassing the central government and b) work in tandem with central government at the Brussels arena?
2. Can it be perceived (through any obvious or underlying meanings) whether the analysed material suggests any propensity of the Åland office to concentrate on either the strategy of bypassing or working in tandem with the central government?

2. Theory and previous research

2.1. Theory

There are in general three different views on the effects of the EU on regions (or sub-national authorities); the EU has a) strengthened regions, b) weakened regions, or c) not substantially made any difference (Fleurke & Willemse 2007; Bourne 2003). Proponents of the first view (a), for example Hooghe & Marks (2001 & 2003), use the concept of multi-level governance to explain the idea that governmental power is no longer centralized within one single actor (e.g. the central government), but that it is shared between different actors at different levels. This concept (and its theories) is connected with the “hollow state”-thesis. It implies a strengthening of the position of regions in relation to the central government because of the opportunities the EU offers to regions (Fleurke & Willemse 2007, p. 71). The second view (b) is largely constitutional and propose that at least regions with legislative power loose authority and autonomy as EU integration “undermines legal and constitutional arrangements guaranteeing regional autonomy” (Bourne 2003, p. 59). The understanding that the EU suffers from ‘regional blindness’ (Stephan 2010) can be attributed to this view. The third view (c), which is an intergovernmentalist approach, holds that in the end, in relation to regions, there are no substantial effects of EU integration and stresses the supremacy of the EU member state in EU policy- and decision making (Bourne 2003). From the intergovernmentalist perspective, the EU is perceived as a highly institutionalized international organization designed to serve the purposes of their member states (Scharpf 2010, p. 66). In opposition, there are however several scholars that have convincingly argued that the EU remains highly significant for regions and vice versa, as regions plays an important and increasing role in implementing, forming and directing European integration (se e.g. Elias 2008 and Bienefeld 2009).

The academic discussion whether or not regional governments actually engage in and successfully use the process of continuous negotiation and represent their interests at the EU arena (Högenauer 2014, pp. 451-452) is still very much active. Down below, I will further discuss the first two views mentioned above through the scope of ‘regional blindness’ and ‘multi-level governance’.

Regional blindness – a ‘pessimistic’ view of regional influence in the EU

It can be argued that any significant mechanisms to institutionalize, or any development of, the formal role of regions in the EU since the 90’s has not been achieved (Elias 2008, pp. 485-486; Keating 2017, p. 616). According to Cygan (2014, p. 280), regions “remains on the periphery of the constitutional and institutional architecture” of the EU in relation to their Member States.

It is claimed that the Member States of the EU through the Treaties formally leaves out regions with legislative power from effectively taking part in the governance structure of the EU (Stephan 2010, p. 7, 18), and that this impedes “constitutionally guaranteed competences of the regions by virtue of its institutional set-up” (Stephan 2010, p. 18). Among several European regions with legislative power and a strong identity, there is thus a notion in some political quarters that the EU suffers from ‘regional blindness’ (Stephan 2010; Cygan 2014, p. 266; Weatherill 2005, p. 3). It is argued that the Community method of decision-making has generally been a “state-centric and centralizing legislative process” (Cygan 2014, p. 266). This notion is maybe most visible in some specific regions with special autonomy arrangements where there are have been a loss of self-determination and difficult challenges concerning lack of direct representation at EU-level. Here the Åland autonomy and the Basque country are two

telling examples (Bullain 2008, p. 20-23). The Open Method of Coordination (OMC) as well as the subsidiarity principle and the Early Warning Procedure of the Lisbon Treaty (with regard to regional parliaments), it is argued, offer little scope for regional authorities extend their formal influence (Palermo & Kössler 2017, pp. 19-20; Rowe 2011, p. 8; Pazos-Vidal 2019, chapter 8; Cygan 2014). Some scholars even consider the extended rights of the regions in the Lisbon Treaty only as “symbolic” (Bauer & Börzel 2010, p. 258). Especially the extent to which regional elected parliaments have been restricted in their lawmaking (‘de-parliamentarization’) and marginalised in the political processes in the EU, as well as the resulting democratic deficit, has been in the forefront of ongoing debate (Schüttemeyer 2009; Rowe 2011, p. 199; Bursens & Högenauer 2017; Arribas & Högenauer 2015, p. 133). To tackle the issue of under-representation (as there is no EU-wide response), legislative regions have reacted differently depending on the mechanisms of regional influence on EU matters within the member state and whether the region is represented in the European Parliament with a MEP³.

The multi-level governance approach

The multi-level governance approach⁴ developed mainly as an alternative to neo functionalist and nation state-centric models of European integration (Hooghe & Marks 2001; Bache & Flinders 2004; Olsson 2010, p. 119). It is from the beginning closely related to specifically European governance and European regional policy (Palermo & Kössler 2017, p. 26). Marks defines multi-level governance in the EU as “a system of continuous negotiation among nested governments at several territorial tiers” (Marks, 1993: 392). The part ‘multilevel’ represents here the increasing interdependence of governments of various levels (Palermo & Kössler 2017, p. 26).

Multi-level governance is not only a normative paradigm but could also be used as a description of how the EU works and how it accommodates the member states’ regions increasing salience (Pazos-Vidal 2019). According to Pazos-Vidal (2019, pp. 1-3), the paradigm of multi-level governance – and the complementary principle of subsidiarity – have been more or less integrated in the EU integration process since their formation with the signing of the Maastricht Treaty. Indeed, it is a fact that the EU’s institutional balance includes a wide range of informal and formal structures and institutions that regions can take part in, and sub-state regions have taken advantage of new channels of lobbying, networking cooperation and formal participation at the EU-level which have opened up EU policy- and decision-making to influence from regional authorities. Several developments have benefited the regions’ participation and ability to apply influence on EU policies and decision-making, for example; the provisions of the Maastricht Treaty and the Lisbon Treaty have increased the formal channels of which (especially legislative) regional authorities can take part in, (Bomberg & Peterson 1998; Tatham 2008; Cygan 2014; Arribas & Högenauer 2015, p. 134),

Even though no ‘Europe of the Regions’ has emerged to constitute a ‘third level’ (Jeffery 1997; Bauer & Börzel 2010, pp. 255-260), regions do get access to important channels that they can use in attempts to influence the EU policy processes (Tatham 2008, p. 511; Elias 2008, p. 487). Thus, the EU remains highly important for regions, and regional politics in the union plays an important part in shaping the nature and direction of European integration (Elias 2008, p. 487).

³ It can here be noted that whether a territorial autonomy enjoys representation in the European Parliament depends on the electoral system of the member state at hand.

⁴ The multi-level governance approach was primarily developed by Hooghe and Marks in the early 1990s.

Bypassing of and working in tandem with the state

The strength of the multi-level governance approach, in case of regional influence, is that it includes the possibility of regional actors to be “entrepreneurial” and to form direct communication channels, networks and interest alliances with other actors within the framework of the EU. Regions (including regional representation offices) can continuously mobilize beyond the control of the central governments directly in the EU arena (Hooghe & Marks 2001). Thus, there will be direct interaction between regional actors and EU institutions unmediated by central governments (Högenauer 2014, p. 453; Keating et al. 2015, p 452). Both regions and EU institutions (e.g. the Commission) seeks these direct links to each other (Berglof 2002, pp. 112-116). This understanding – part of the wider multi-level governance approach – can be referred to as what Olsson defines as the ‘bypass-theory of regionalism’⁵ (Olsson 2010, p. 119-121). This bypass-theory has been elaborated extensively in academic research on ‘new regionalism’ (Olsson 2010), for example by Keating & Hooghe (2001). The bypass-theory, with roots in early functionalist theory of European integration, holds that functional linkages would increasingly bypass the nation-state, but admitting that the state still has a great deal of power (Olsson 2010, p. 120; Keating 1995; Keating et al. 2015). Put in other words, regional para-diplomatic activities (formal and informal) sometimes bypass the central governments of EU member states (Tatham 2010); hence, the central governments of member states are no longer the sole players in foreign affairs and negotiations at the EU level (Tatham 2008, p. 511; Ansell et al. 1997, p 363; Marks & Hooghe 1996, p 90).

The debate whether regions increasingly bypass the central government or whether the state is still an efficient gatekeeper has however settled into the understanding that, “far from being mutually exclusive, bypassing and co-operation [with the central government] are complementary strategies which different SSEs [sub-national entities] employ in different measures” (Tatham 2010, p. 77). Nonetheless, it is often argued that regional influence at EU-level is seldom powerful without cooperation with a national government, and regional offices in Brussels tend to work together with their national government to achieve common policy goals “much more frequently than bypass it” (Keating et al. 2015, p. 454). Tatham (2010), studying bypassing paradiplomacy (understood as substate interest representation without interaction with its member state) and co-operative paradiplomacy (understood as sub-state interest representation in cooperation with its member state), similarly finds that strong autonomous regions are more prone to co-operative paradiplomacy as they are in a more favourable “position to influence their central government and hence have less of an incentive to bypass it” (Tatham 2010, p. 83). Tatham argues that the degree of devolution and party politics constitute an influential role in determining the prevalence of cooperation and bypassing (Ibid). Some scholars argue that mainly those regions which are peripheral and have few channels of access to their central government use the bypass-option frequently (Arter 2001).

With regard to regional offices in Brussels, Bauer & Börzel 2010 (p. 258) holds they provide the regions with an effective and direct entrance into EU policy-making, and “they tend to take the form and function of lobbying organizations rather than political representations”. While the offices “hardly present a threat to the gate-keeping position of the central state in EU policy-making” (Bauer & Börzel 2010 p. 258), they can nonetheless bypass the government of the central state through informal channels as they work with mitigating the effects of EU-decision

⁵ Further on in the study the theory will be referred to as the ‘bypass-theory’

making and the process of EU integration. Examples of when regional offices bypass the central government includes; trying to get MEPs to defend certain positions, taking part in Commission consultations, approaching Commission officials, or organize lobbying events or participating in events (e.g. conferences or meetings) that are designed to inform and influence EU matters at the EU level (Högenauer 2014, p. 454). Bypassing is not happening when participating in the Council of Ministers, COREPER, Council working groups or Commission committees as it normally requires the permission of and the agreement of a common national position with the national government (Ibid).

Arguing for the use of the multi-level governance and the bypass-theory of regionalism

The ‘multi-level governance’ approach, and the theories connected to it, are contested in the academic literature (Hooghe & Marks 2001, 2003; Piattoni 2010) due to its many definitions and the difficulty in its operationalization (Bache & Flinders 2004, p. 4). Specifically, there is criticism whether the concept and theory of multi-level governance provides the normative, ontological or analytical tools needed when trying to understand the complete role of regions, and their influence, in Europe (Keating 2017, pp. 621-622; Keating 2008, pp. 75-76). Similarly, as is the case with intergovernmentalism and neo-functionalism, the bypassing-theory of the multi-level governance approach probably cannot capture the complete picture of “the emerging, multiscalar order in Europe” (Keating 2017, p. 621). Multi-level governance and the bypass-theory have also been criticized for not paying enough attention to the intra-state environment of sub-state regional authorities, which according to several scholars (as we will see in following chapters) plays an important role as a catalyst for sub-national mobilization (Greer 2006). However, this problem has often been dealt by scholars using the multi-level governance approach by including intra-state channels in analysis of regions’ and regional offices’ interest representation in Brussels (see for example the recent studies by Antunes & Magone 2020 and Antunes & Antunes 2020).

Despite the above criticism, a serious amount of research based on multi-level governance and regional bypassing has yielded clarity regarding the regional and national dynamics in the EU (Antunes & Magone 2020, p. 221; Olsson 2010). According to Bienefeld (2009), for example, the multi-level governance approach and its bypass-theory provides new insights into examining the phenomenon of regions’ ‘circumvention’ of their central governments through informal representational channels, including lobbying and membership in interregional organisations, at the EU-level. It can thus be presumed that regional offices in Brussels – as is the case with regions at large – are seeking to take advantage of opportunities to bypass central government control and establish their own direct channels of communication with key actors at the European level.

This study assumes that the EU influences the decision-making of regions with legislative power, and vice versa, to a fairly large extent, both in a direct manner and in an indirect manner (Fleurke & Willemsse 2007, pp. 85-86; Trobbiani 2019, pp. 187-188, 195-196). A second assumption is that the EU constrains regional decision making while also enhancing it in other areas – i.e. the EU can create opportunities and enhance regional decision-making but can also constrain regions’ decision-making through the Treaties and EU-legislation (Fleurke & Willemsse 2007, pp. 85-86). In line with this logic this study is based on the assumption that regions with legislative power mobilize their resources in order to get access to, create

communication channels and exercise influence on EU policy-making and legislative processes (Jeffery 2000, p. 3).

2.2. Previous research

Regions' ability to influence policy- and decision-making in the EU

The increasing level of European integration into the sphere of regional and local area of competence has coincided with political decentralisation and the growing political and social importance of regions and cities across Europe (Greenwood 2011a, p. 231; Loughlin 1997, p. 148; Hooghe et al. 2008; Hooghe & Marks 2010, p. 17; Jeffery & Schakel 2013; Jeffery 2008). The EU has prompted Member States to transition as it has introduced an “extra-state scale of political authority” that “introduces additional multilevel interactions that both respond to and bear on changes within the state” (Jeffery 2008, p. 553). Sub-state regions within the EU have thus adjusted their strategies, communication channels and priorities to prevailing circumstances in a world of multi-level governance in relation to time and space, and they have used both ‘intra-state’ and ‘extra-state’ channels, and formal and informal channels, when exerting influence on matters of interest depending on the situation (Trobbiani 2019, p. 195; Loughlin & Antunes 2020, p. 316; Rowe 2011, pp 8-9;). Regional influence, and the channels of influence in use, thus varies depending on the stage in the policy cycle (formulation, decision- making, implementation) and on the capacities of the respective regional actors (Bauer & Börzel 2010, p. 256). Consequently, the regional strategies for dealing with the EU level are based on the internal politics of member states and regions, the level of investment into the strategy, and the diverse constitutional, governmental, financial and ideational resources that regions have and can muster along the way (Rowe 2011, p. 12).

Concerning regional strategies towards the EU a dividing line can be seen between legislative regions and administrative regions (Rowe 2011, p. 81-82). It is more likely that a region with a strong constitutional status will be viewing EU integration more pessimistic in core political domains compared to regions with only administrative competences. Hence, regions that exercise significant constitutional power generally want the emerging EU constitutional order to be sensitive to their authority within the member states (Jeffery 2004). They will have more thorough EU strategies and channels of influence and will more actively push for change and influence at the EU arena compared to administrative regions.

Antunes & Magone (2020, p. 223), in their analysis of Portuguese regional authorities' mobilization in the EU, concludes that three sets of domestic mediating factors decide the degree of influence in EU matters and the channels and rationales that are supporting these regions' strategies in the EU; structural factors (includes the level of authority of the regions, the quality of inter-governmental relations and legitimacy issues), agency factors (capacity-building and regional entrepreneurship) and contextual factors (e.g. impact of the external crises such as economic crisis)⁶. In their analysis it is demonstrated that the two constitutionally stronger autonomous regions of Madeira and Azores apply significant more influence through their extra-state and intra-state channels of influence compared with the Portuguese administrative mainland regions (Antunes & Magone 2020, p. 237).

⁶ Antunes & Magone (2020) derives their domestic mediating factors from Risse, Cowles & Caporaso (2001, 9–12); Börzel & Risse (2003, 63–69) and Graziano (2003).

There is thus a common notion in the academic research about regions' influence capabilities, that the relative strength of a region within the EU, and its ability to influence EU policies is dependent on its pre-existing constitutional set-up within the member state (Palermo & Kössler 2017, p. 26). Similarly, it has been argued that the domestic politics perspective should be focused on, as intra-state factors which – taken together – explain the extent to which regions are more likely to exert their influence in EU policy- and decision-making and establish an important role alongside their central government in the relationship with EU (Jeffery 2000, pp. 11-18).

Important factors explaining the degree of influence, it is argued, can be attributed to regions' degree of embeddedness within the EU and demographic weight (Keating et al. 2015, p. 453). Level of decentralisation, connection to the civil society and cultural traits could also play a role in (Tatham 2013; Greenwood 2011b; Tabellini 2007). Jeffery (2000, pp. 11-18), on the other hand, attributes four variables whether sub-national authorities are expected to insert their influence on European policy processes: 1) constitutional factors (the most important), 2) intergovernmental relations, 3) regional entrepreneurship, and 4) legitimacy and social capital. Thus, he makes the following propositions (Jeffery 2000 p. 12-17):

- *SNAs constitutionally endowed with extensive internal competences are likely to exert stronger influence over European policy than their more weakly endowed counterparts.*
- *Formal structures of central–SNA intergovernmental relations are likely to provide more effective channels for policy influence than more informal interactions.*
- *Effective administrative adaptation, leadership, and coalition-building strategies in response to the challenges posed by European integration are likely to improve the prospects for influencing European decision-making.*
- *The credibility of SNA claims for influence in EU decision-making is likely to be enhanced by the perceived legitimacy which SNAs bring with them into the European policy process.*

Stephan (2010), studying the cases of Åland Island and the German Länder, upholds that three of those indicators are of special importance as “[w]hether participation leads to influence [...] depends on the constitutional position of regions within their Member States, their interregional relations and the degree of regional entrepreneurship exhibited”. The concept of regional entrepreneurship is interesting for the purpose of this study (connected to point 3 above) as it puts focus on the region itself and the local conditions of the region (Jeffery 2000, pp. 14-15).

According to Keating et al. (2015, p. 453), regional influence in Brussels "is usually confined to narrowly circumscribed issues and tends to be the privilege of the larger, politically autonomous and resourceful regions" and that research usually shows that "regional influence in Brussels is modest". However, Pazos-Vidal's analysis (2019) provides evidence how regional entrepreneurship can influence EU policy-making by showing how regions "with few or no formal privileges at EU level can exert disproportionate influence in the EU decision-making process over theoretically more powerful actors under the existing institutional framework" (Domorenok 2020, p. 2). This argument is especially interesting also in the case of the Åland Island and its office in Brussels considering the size of Åland and its extremely small office (only one official employed).

Previous research about the Åland Islands and the EU – a short introduction

Studies and reports have dealt with the institutional set-up and legal aspects concerning Åland's relation to the EU. Some of the more important contributions include *EU:s behörighet och Åland* (Jääskinen 2003), *EU-rätten och behörighetsfördelningen mellan riket Finland och landskapet Åland* (Sjölund 2016), *Constitutions, Autonomies and the EU* (Spiliopoulou Åkermark (ed.) 2008), *Ålandsprotokollet och EG-rättens icke-diskrimineringsprincip* (Sjölund, 2008), *De rättsliga ramarna för vissa autonomiers och mikrostaters förhållande till Europeiska unionen* (Silverström 2004), and *Regional voices in the European Union – regions with legislative power and multi-level governance: Perspectives for the Åland Islands* (Stephan 2010). The latter report is perhaps the foremost academic literature that has contributed most to our understanding with regard to the channels of influence that are used by Åland's institutions of autonomy. According to the report the formal channels of influence includes the CoR, The Åland Parliament's possibility to use the Early Warning Mechanism (EWM), the Åland special adviser to the EU (embedded in the Finnish Permanent Representation), the constitutional right of the Åland Government's officials and ministers to participate in the preparation and processing of the Government of Finland's EU-positions in matters of interest to Åland (Stephan 2010, pp 26-49). Stephan (Ibid) maps also informal channels, and includes in this category; consultations and meetings with the Commission, cooperation with MEPs and the EP, various networks at the EU-level (such as the Regional Advisory Council for the Baltic Sea and CALRE) joined by Åland's institutions of autonomy as well as associations closely linked to the Åland Government. Stephan (2010) argues that the influence that the Government of Åland can exert via the channels of influence that are in use to influence EU matters has to take into account a) the constitutional position of the region in the Member State, and b) interregional relations and c) regional entrepreneurship at the EU-level (Stephan 2010, pp 46-49). Of the three type of factors, only the first (constitutional factors) strikes high points due to the fact that the autonomy of the Åland Islands is guaranteed under the Finnish Constitution and under Public International Law (Ibid). As Stephan (2010) mostly focused on the channels of influence that the autonomous Åland had access to in more general terms – and not specifically the Åland office in Brussels – the thesis you are reading now is a relevant complement and addition. Additionally, what is necessary to take into account here, is that when Stephan (2010, p. 39) conducted her research, the current Åland office in Brussels was not seen as a somewhat independent office; instead the Åland special adviser (or the councillor) to EU was seen as an integrated part in the Finnish Permanent Representation and had not that much space to actively engage in lobbying activities outside the Council and the Finnish representation office. During the last decade, however, the special adviser's role has evolved considerably (Ålands landskapsregering 2015; Ålands landskapsregering 2016). Nowadays the Åland flag is also waving outside the Finnish representation office which it did not do back then.

Channels of influence regions use

At EU-level, formal sources of influence for regions can be found in the realization of Maastricht Treaty (the establishment of the CoR as an advisory body and the provision that regional ministers could attend the Council of Ministers) and the realization of three key principles in the Treaty of Lisbon; including regional and local autonomy and protection of the national identity of the member states (Article 4(2) TEU), subsidiarity (Article 5(3) TEU), and democracy (Article 10(3) TEU). The Lisbon treaty also introduced the EWM in the Treaty's Protocol on the Application of the Principles of Subsidiarity and Proportionality. Even though the regional parliaments are not able participate in the EWM directly, the Protocol (Article 6)

states that national parliaments, where appropriate, consult with regional parliaments with legislative powers (Ibid). The CoR moreover has gained the competence to appeal to the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) for the annulment of an act on the grounds of subsidiarity (Arribas & Högenauer 2015, p. 134). These principles above and the reinforcements of regional participation do not only result in the fact that the EU needs to uphold a relationship to, and protect the treaty rights of, sub-national authorities, but also entails that the sub-national authorities themselves actively participate in the multi-level governance structure in the union (Panara 2016, pp. 611-612; Cygan 2014, p. 268; Huysseune & Jans 2008, p. 4). This particularly true with regard to regions with legislative power (Cygan 2014, p. 268).

There are quite a lot of research about the channels of influence that regions can use in their pursuit of influencing EU policy- and decision-making. Scholars have identified the many available channels of influence that regional authorities can use of various efficacy depending on the political context and the subject to be pursued (Mazey & Richardson 2001; Tatham 2007, pp. 218-224; Tatham 2008, p. 498; 2010; Greenwood 2011a; Keating et al. 2015). Other scholars have focused on the objectives pursued by and the activities of regional authorities (Rowe 2011; Callanan & Tatham 2014).

When making their voices heard, legislative regions use the channels of influence available through the central state (e.g. the government ministries, the national parliament or the national permanent representation to the EU), their regional MEP in the European Parliament (if any), formal channels made available by the treaties (e.g. the CoR, subsidiarity checks of regional parliaments and the possibility of regional ministers to represent the member state in the Council of the European Union), regional offices in Brussels, various lobbying channels and inter-regional networks like the Conference of European Regions with Legislative Power (REGLEG).

At the most basic level, the two different channels of interest mediation that regional authorities can use are a) the ‘national route’ (referred to as the intra-state channel), trying to go ‘with the state’, and b) the ‘Brussels route’ (referred to as extra-state channels), sometimes trying to go ‘without the state’, whether through formal and informal channels, including regional representation in EU institutions (Antunes & Magone 2020, p. 223). Important channels in the intra-state category are channels through Member States themselves, which includes for instance the National Permanent Representation to the European Union and formal negotiations between the regional government/parliament and the central government/parliament. Concerning extra-state channels, Rowe (2011, p. 51-53) and Tatham (2008) identifies six primary extra-state channels in the EU that regions can use to communicate interests and affect outcomes:

- Regional representation offices
- Committee of the Regions
- The European Commission
- The European Parliament
- The Council of Ministers
- European networks and associations, such as CEMR (Council of European Municipalities and Regions), AER (Association of European Regions), CPMR (Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions), and EURO CITIES, ERRIN (the European Regions Research and Innovation Network), EUREGHA (the European Regional and Local Health Authorities Platform).

On the same subject, Jeffery (2000, p. 16), on the other hand, make a distinction between four types of cooperation and coalition-building with external actors which regions can use at the EU level:

- private sector actors (e.g. companies, associations, interest groups etc.);
- other sub-national authorities within the Member State (e.g. cooperation between authorities representing regional minorities or between regions with similar authority and status);
- sub-national authorities in other Member States (e.g. the functional interregional associations and cross-border co-operation agreements);
- EU institutions (e.g. with the Commission, which sub-national authorities have periodically struck alliances with, in order to exert influence on central state institutions).

Importantly, intra-state opportunities are most often associated with formal national structures and channels while extra-state channels normally include both informal and formal channels at the EU level (Loughlin & Antunes 2020, p. 313). Bauer & Börzel (2010, p. 258) argues that, due to their limited formal access to EU level decision- and policy-making, regions have focused on formal intra-state channels when trying to influence EU proposals and policy-making. Other scholars have also argued that domestic intra-state channels (via the national government) are the most important ones compared with those that are formed directly with actors at the EU level (Keating et al. 2015, pp. 450-451). Similarly, Jeffery (2000, p. 3) have argued that existing influence-creating channels within the member state where regional actors can exert influence on EU policies are arguably the most important compared to external channels as the central governments in member states are by far the most significant actors within the EU. However, it is important to note here that Jeffery has partly shifted stance and have acknowledged that too much focus has been state-centric research (Jeffery & Schakel 2013; Jeffery 2008; Macneill et al. 2007).

Antunes & Magone (2020) article shows that the autonomous regions of Azores and Madeira combine both intra- and extra-state strategies and channels to exert influence in matters primarily concerned with ‘regulatory’ purposes. When comparing the five mainland Portuguese regions (CCDRs) and the legislative and autonomous regions of Madeira and the Azores Antunes & Magone (2020, p. 237) conclude that the intra-state channels are the most important as the autonomous regions are the most “active and influential policy actors, acting side-by-side with the national government”. This perspective on the importance of the channels through the member state, and the role of regional representations in Brussels in this model, is illustrated by Rowe (2011, p. 5). Rowe (2011, p. 5) – already categorizing the channels in intra-state and extra-state channels – also uses a distinction between formal and informal channels that regions act within to influence EU decision- and policy-processes.

However, perhaps a contradiction to the focus on formal intra-state channels; due to the perceived flaws and inefficiency of several of the official channels available for them to exert their influence, regions have developed – many times through their regional offices – various alternative lobbying channels, such as inclusion of economic, social and cultural stakeholders in the interest representation process and cooperation through thematic interregional networks (Greenwood 2011b; Knodt 2011, p. 420; Bouza García 2011; Trobbiani 2016; Trobbiani 2019, pp. 185-188). Various networks (both interregional and other types) of interest representation

at the EU level can provide chances for regional offices to influence and work on such EU policies which are not processed through the CoR or other formal channels (Trobbiani 2019, p. 188; Keating et al. 2015, p. 454).

According to Bienefeld (2009) studying the case of the Basque country's influence in the EU, the effective capability of legislative regions' influence at EU-level depends on the formal and informal institutional contacts attained. Bienefeld (2009, p. 233) argues that legislative regions can combine formal and informal channels to more effectively impact EU policies and decisions, and that the effectiveness of the channels is for the most part reliant on two factors: a) the regions' level of expertise and b) their central state's facilitation of formal representational opportunities. Importantly, academic research seem to agree that sub-state regional authorities use both intra- and extra-state channels of influence, with the understanding that a combination of both in their work will be most beneficial for them (Bomberg & Peterson 1998, p. 234; Tatham 2007: pp. 218–224; Blatter et al. 2008: 467–8).

Sub-national mobilisation through the establishment of regional offices

The sheer number of regional offices in Brussels have increased substantially, and they have become important influential players as they have expanded their resources and capacities during the last decades (Rowe 2011, p. 7; Greenwood 2011a; Bartolini 2005, pp 260–268; Huyseune & Jans 2008; Moore 2006; Hutchinson 2020). This follows the general trend that the overall number of Brussels-based organised actors following their interests has increased substantially (Coen 2007; Eising 2007). The concept of “sub-national mobilisation” (or regional mobilisation), developed by Hooghe (1995), is often used to refer to the general trend of increasing regional engagement with the EU and the establishment and increase of regional offices in Brussels since the 1990s (Hooghe 1995; Rowe 2011, pp. 3-4, 47).

According to Huyseune & Jans (2008, pp. 4-5), regional offices have been drawn to Brussels for several different reasons, mainly; the search for and access to EU- funding opportunities, the expansion of EU competencies and policies into policy areas close to the concerns of (or under the authority of) regional government, the institutional openness of the EU, growing pressure (both internal and external) to be present in Brussels (e.g. the ‘spill-over’ effect⁷), and possibilities to lobby for regional interests. Additionally, regional representation offices and their direct communication links with EU institutions (such as the Commission), have been used to increase the regional government's political leverage, bargaining power and information gathering vis-à-vis national authorities thus breaking up the central government's monopolized contacts with European institutions (Huyseune & Jans 2008, pp. 4).

In explaining the establishment of regional offices in Brussels Marks et al (1996) on the other hand emphasize two political explanations that most likely will lead a region to the opening of a Brussels office, namely; regions that are most affected by decisions made at the EU-level (regional governments with the greatest autonomy or the most extensive political role), and those regions that have substantial political demands that sometimes are in conflict with those of the central government (i.e. regions with a strong distinctiveness and identity in relation to other national regions). Similarly, social movement theory has proposed that regional mobilization in Brussels has mainly materialized for those regions with the strongest identities and the most institutionalized domestic structure (Olsson 2010, pp. 123-125). Thus, legislative regions tend to emphasize regulatory mobilization, while in contrast regions with only

⁷ i.e. the substantial number of representations in Brussels stimulates and put pressures on unrepresented regions

administrative powers generally emphasize financial mobilization (Callanan & Tatham 2014, p. 190).

The ability of regional authorities to bypass the central government has also been put forward to explain regional EU-mobilisation. For instance, it has been used to explain the somewhat paradox phenomenon of traditionally ‘minority nationalist’ regions, protective of their legislative competencies, sometimes are among the most EU-friendly regions (Marks et al. 1996; Olsson 2010, p. 121). Another popular view of the factors that facilitate mobilisation and encourage the establishment and the continuation of a regional representation has focused on resource “pull” and resource “push” factors (Rowe 2011, p 55-58, 81-82; Macneill et al. 2007). Resource “push” factors indicate pressures from within the domestic arena in the region (e.g. constitutional factors or protection of regional interests vis-à-vis the EU), and resource “pull” factors indicate external pressures from the EU arena (e.g. EU resources available to regions and the ability to influence the distribution of those resources) (Rowe 2011, p 56-57; Macneill et al. 2007).

The activities and channels of influence of regional offices in Brussels

Regional offices in Brussels serve as important channels of communication and interaction with EU institutions and other Brussels-based agencies, and other stakeholders representing regions of member states (Rowe 2011, p. 2). In explaining why presence in situ in Brussels is deemed important by regions, Rowe (2011, p. 6) points to the fear of missing out on opportunities if not fully engaged in European policy- and decision-making and access to EU programmes and funding. She also points to the long-term perspective; “[a] presence in Brussels represents a foothold in a vibrant network of ideas and involvement in the longer-term development of proposals, particularly those which emanate from the European Commission” (Ibid).

According to Greenwood (2011a, pp. 185-186), the most important goals supporting regional presence in Brussels includes, accessing EU funds, lobbying, gathering and providing information and cooperating with other regions. There is a set of classic activities which represent the majority of any regional office’s work in the EU. According to Huysseune & Jans (2008, p. 5), the main activities of these offices can be summarized into four categories: information management, networking, liaison between local, and regional authorities and the EU, and the influencing of EU policy. Rowe (2011, p. 83-84) instead divides the activities into five categories: intelligence gathering, policy interpretation and analysis (‘downstream’ activities); representation and lobbying (‘upstream’ activities); networking and co-operation; commercial opportunities, partner searches, and funding analysis; and promotional activities for the region showcasing culture, goods, tourism and investment opportunities.

Using channels of interest representation and influencing politically prioritized matters constitute an integral part of the activities of regional offices in Brussels.

As we have noticed above, regional offices are most often seen only as one part in the regions’ efforts to influence EU policy- and decision-making, and is then categorized as an extra-state channel and part of the ‘Brussels-route’ (Rowe 2011, p. 51-53; Tatham 2008; Antunes & Magone 2020). What is then forgotten is that regional offices can be seen as an independent agent of the regional government (Greenwood 2011b) and the office themselves can use both intra-state and extra-state channels of influence, for example when influence through the Member States’ central government representation is available (as is the case for the Belgian regions for instance (Huysseune & Jans 2008, p. 7)). As it happens, academic research on the

channels of influence that regional offices in Brussels can use specifically are quite scarce. At least one notable exception is Trobbiani (2019), who have recently studied the channels which is most likely to be used (both individually and through the work of associations/networks) at regional offices when trying to influence EU policy-making. In his survey⁸ he finds that the following channels are used the most (from top to bottom): informal meetings with EU policy-makers, based on Brussels-based networks (avg⁹ 7.94); presenting and circulating position papers (avg 7.59); organizing events with the participation of EU policy-makers (avg 7.56); informal meetings with EU policy-makers based on nationality (avg 6.90); open consultations (avg 6.84); informal meeting with EU policy-makers based on nationality and party politics (avg 6.56); European Commission's expert groups (avg 6.52); through your Committee of the Regions representatives (avg 6.31); European Parliament intergroups (5.94); Council preparatory bodies through permanent representations (avg. 5.88); European Parliament fora (avg. 5.34); Commission comitology (avg 4.67); and other (avg. 3.80).

What we can see here is that official routes is downgraded and a clear prominence of informal contacts and the use of opinion papers. The convergence between territorial and functional interest representation, that often has been acknowledged within the multi-level governance concept (Greenwood 2011a; Piattoni 2011; Knodt et al. 2011), mean that the activities (and the channels of influence) of regional interest representations in Brussels have converged towards models of interest representation adopted by other interest and lobbying groups that count on the inclusion of like-minded cultural, social and economic actors to support their expertise and representativeness (Greenwood 2011b; Trobbiani 2016). Trobbiani (2019, p. 188) finds that the inclusion of cultural, social and economic actors in a regional office's advocacy and lobbying activities is an important factor in order to gain credibility and influence in EU policy-making as well as to provide EU policy-makers with expert knowledge and first-hand experience on the policy fields at stake.

However, as we have noticed above, intra-state influence-creating channels within the framework of the Member State where regional actors (including regional Brussels-offices) can exert influence on EU policies are by scholars often associated with the most important channels for regions compared with those extra-state channels of influence that are formed directly with actors at the EU level (see for instance Jeffery 2000; Berglof 2002; Keating et al. 2015, pp. 450-451). In order to shed some light on this research puzzle this case study will try to contribute to our understanding on which route is give more prominence in a specific case and how a regional office in Brussels can bypass (i.e. circumvent) its member state and central government as well as how a regional office can work in tandem with its member state and central government at the Brussels arena. According to my knowledge there are not that much research studying the channels of influence of regional offices in Brussels in individual cases. Moreover, in general, there is a "scarcity of research looking at regional interest representation in concrete cases" (Högenauer 2014, pp. 452).

⁸ Compiled in January 2017 by 39 senior officials and directors of service working in 39 regional offices in Brussels (Trobbiani 2019; p. 1816).

⁹ Average; 1=least likely to use, 10= most likely to use

3. Method and material

The main focus is to study the case of the Åland office in Brussels by analysing its current extra-state and intra-state channels of influence in use when trying to influence EU policy- and decision-making and at the same time try to shed light on how the Åland office circumvent and, on the other hand, cooperate with the central government in Brussels. In this respect, the theory of bypassing of the multi-level governance will be used to understand and analyse these regional paradiplomatic activities both without the state and in tandem with the state. This approach will offer elaborate insights into how the Åland office use various channels of influence, including lobbying and interregional organisations and networks.







3.2. Analysing the Åland regional office in Brussels – building an analytical framework

The analytical framework is constructed so that it will first categorize the channels of influence¹⁰ by the concepts of intra-state (e.g. cooperation with the member state's Permanent Representation or taking part in Council preparatory bodies) and extra-state channels (e.g. participation in RegLeg and informal contacts with MEPs) that have been used by the Åland office in politically prioritized matters at the EU arena. This will lead to the possibility of either bypassing or working in tandem with the central government. If the Åland office bypass or work in tandem with the central government, in specific politically prioritized matters, certain means will be applied, and specific circumstances will be present (the "how"-question). In the end working in tandem with or bypassing the central government in specific prioritized matters will lead to at least the possibility of either influencing central government's position or EU-institutions', EU-actors' and/or other member states' central governments' position in those matters. During the document analysis textual codes will be linked to any of the two categories and then grouped in either the extra-state channel or the intra-state category. Both formal and informal channels be taken into account. This construction of the analytical model is in line with Loughlin & Antunes' (2020, p. 313) constructed analytical framework of their analysis of regional influence in small unitary states. As such, in the analysis, informal channels will encompass for instance informal contacts to MEPs or coalitions and alliances (Ibid), and formal channels will encompass for instance representation in working groups in CoR or accreditation to the Council.

When conducting the analysis, there were some cases of ambivalence concerning whether an influence-creating activity was part of an extra-state or intra-state channel, and whether if it was used in tandem with or bypassing the state. That is perhaps not that strange as it is quite logical that several types of influence-creating activities can be used in different ways and in different manners depending on the situation. Another important note is that the analytical framework and the result of the analysis are not really saying anything automatically about whether the position of the Åland Government/Åland office is in opposition or aligned with the central government's position. This way of understanding is in line with Tatham's understanding (2010) about paradiplomacy with or without the state. In this thesis these positions have not been in focus and therefore not that interesting.

¹⁰ For examples of channels used by regional offices Brussels see the work done by Trobbiani (2019)

The constructed analytical model of the study:

<p>A) Types of channels of influence that a legislative region’s regional office in Brussels might use to bypass the central government</p>	<p>B) Types of channels of influence that the legislative region’s regional office in Brussels might use to go through the central government, ministries or central state authorities aligned with the central government</p>
<p>Extra-state channels</p> <p style="text-align: center;"></p> <p>Using extra-state channels of influence in politically prioritized matters leads to the possibility of bypassing the member state/central government</p> <p style="text-align: center;"></p> <p>If the regional office bypasses the central government, in specific politically prioritized matters, certain means will be applied, and specific circumstances will be present (the “how”-question)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"></p> <p>Bypassing the member central government in specific prioritized matters leads to the possibility of influencing EU-institutions’, EU-actors’ and/or other member states’ central governments’ position in those matters</p>	<p>Intra-state channels</p> <p style="text-align: center;"></p> <p>Using intra-state channels of influence in prioritized matters leads to the possibility of working in tandem with the member state/central government</p> <p style="text-align: center;"></p> <p>If the regional office work in tandem with the central government, in specific politically prioritized matters, certain means will be applied, and specific circumstances will be present (the “how”-question)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"></p> <p>Working in tandem with the member state/central government in specific prioritized matters leads to the possibility of influencing the central government’s position in those matters</p>

3.3. Method

The thesis uses document analysis, with inspiration from the qualitative content analysis method (Drisko 2015), when analysing the documents. The advantage of using content analysis is to analyse subjects and social phenomenon in its non-invasive nature, in contrast to simulating social experiences or collecting survey answers.

My take-off of the study will be deductive – meaning that through an analytical framework based on theory and the research problem, I will analyse a number of documents on EU matters from the Åland Government and the Åland office in Brussels in order to answer the research questions, and in the end say something general that can fulfil the aim of the thesis.

Through systematically label and categorize the content of the texts in the documents, I will be able to analyse patterns of content qualitatively and analyse meanings of content within texts. Qualitative content analysis uses a set of techniques that systematically analyse different kind of texts, not only addressing manifest content but also the themes and core ideas found in the texts being analysed as primary content (Drisko 2015, pp. 82-85; Mayring 2010). I will conduct my qualitative content analysis with inspiration from the ‘structuring’ analytical procedure

(Titscher et al, 2000, ch 5, p. 8). The meaning is to find a structure (or reconstruct) from the document, define codes, construct categories and try to find latent contents (Titscher et al, 2000, ch 5). The meaning is to indicate the presence of interesting, meaningful pieces of content.

The constructed sub-categories and its descriptions and meanings – that will be organized into two separate columns under separate main categories – will form the primary content when answering the research questions. The second research question will then benefit from a third constructed category used in the content analysis that have specifically grouped the themes and core ideas from a holistic viewpoint of the material, trying to find arguments that supports either category A or category B. I have systematically read through the documents. During the reading I extracted the codes which I interpreted to be connected to either Category A or B based on the analytical framework. After that I grouped the codes, themes and ideas in constructed sub-categories. In the coding I have tried to include as many codes as possible that I could find related to either main category, irrespectively if the code or meaning was mentioned several times or only one time. The reason is that a code can be equally important even though it is only mentioned one time in a text. The codes could be just a couple of words to smaller and larger sentences depending on its context and meaning. Importantly, the context of the codes needs to be included when extracting the codes.

3.4. Material

The research questions in the introduction will be answered by using the following material 1) reports produced by the special adviser on EU affairs at the Åland office in Brussels, and 2) annual external reports by the Åland Government to the the Åland Parliament. The former documents have been gathered electronically from the website of the Åland Parliament (www.lagtinget.ax). The reports from the Åland Government's Special Adviser in EU affairs, have been sent to the author by e-mail¹¹. The reports from the Åland Government includes EU-issues of priority the coming year and a report about the previous year's work on EU-matters. The reports are more or less about 30 pages long (excluding content not dealing with EU affairs) and were produced from years 2015 to 2020. The report from the special adviser on EU affairs on the other hand are more informal and takes the form of some kind of intelligence reports with analyses and information. The reports being studied are from September 2014 until December 2019. During this period a total of 33 reports have been produced which all have been included in my content analysis. The reports are differing in length from 3 pages to 7 pages. The delimitation of the reports being studied is because of the limited availability of material, the expanded mandate of the Åland office to more actively pursue lobbying activities from 2014 and onwards and the thesis' focus on the time period of Juncker commission (2015-2019).

What can be said about the differences between the two types of reports being studied? First, the language in the special adviser's reports is less bureaucratic than the official reports of the Åland Government. Implicitly, one can notice there are parts in the reports that originate from informal discussions with officials at Finnish Permanent Representation to the EU and perhaps from partners and informal contacts. The special adviser's reports are more analytical and focus on describing more in detail the working processes, events and timetables of the legislative processes, and initiatives and proposals of interest at the EU-institutions. These reports as are

¹¹ All documents – included with all the highlighted codes that were used in the analysis – can be obtained from the author of this thesis.

also in great detail taking care to outline the positions of other member states, the positions of the Finnish authorities and also the Åland Government's positions. There is also a focus on trilogue negotiations between the EP, the Council and the Commission. In the special adviser's reports, more care is taken to juxtapose Åland's positions with that of the Finnish Government or the positions of the responsible Finnish ministry. This is done in order to know if there will be a need to negotiate with the responsible Finnish authorities and perhaps present the Åland position in the Council meetings and in order to decide which channels of influence that should be used. The Åland Government's reports on the other hand is more descriptive in general and also describes in more detail and try to hammer out, the Åland positions in different EU-matters of interest.

It is a clear focus on the intra-state channels of influence in the special adviser's reports. While the descriptions of the working methods and intra-state channels of influence in some specific instances are in more detail in the special adviser's reports than in the Åland Government reports, it is a bit surprising that descriptions of channels of influence in use and how the Government of Åland and the Åland Office works to influence policy- and decision-making in EU institutions are more vividly presented in the reports written by the Åland Government compared with those written by the special adviser.

4. Result

First it can be mentioned that the main functional channel of contact directly between Åland and the EU-institutions¹² is the Åland office in Brussels headed by a special adviser (or councillor) in EU affairs. Additionally, quite often the special adviser is assisted by an intern at the office. The special adviser is appointed by the Åland Government, but is assigned – as is the whole Åland office – to the Permanent Representation of the Republic of Finland to the European Union in Brussels. The special adviser is thus embedded in the Finnish national representation, is accredited to the Council, and an official member of the Foreign Ministry.

The Åland office monitors the legislative process of matters of interest, reports back to the Government of Åland (GoÅ), works actively to promote and inform the Åland Government's positions to the EU-institutions and other relevant actors already during the preparation and processing of initiatives, creates and maintains relevant networks, and perform lobbying activities in various instances (Ålands landskapsregering (ÅLR) 2020, p. 25). Besides actively presenting the positions of the GoÅ at EU institutions¹³, it is very often mentioned that the GoÅ (including the Åland office) follows matters and monitors them actively¹⁴. Implicitly, and sometimes more obvious, in the texts analysed, I conclude that this general strategy is pursued in order to activate influence through the channels at hand if the political interests of the GoÅ, or the economic or social interests of the Åland community, are threatened (see e.g. ÅLR 2018 pp. 30, 33, 41). Another quite clear feature of the Åland office and the GoÅ's external priorities, is the limited resources at hand and the emphasis that is put on the political priorities (see e.g. ÅLR 2019, p 19). There is no way that the GoÅ and the Åland office can follow every potential matter of interest, so clear priorities need to be done.

In light of the conducted document analysis it is quite straightforward (present in all analysed documents) that the main task of the Åland office is to follow politically prioritized matters in the EU-institutions, gather information about those matters, analyse it and report downstreams to the GoÅ. This finding is in line with what scholars such as Keating et al. (2015, p. 453) have argued. The information that is gathered usually includes such aspects as the processes, timetables as well as the positions of the GoÅ, various EU-institutions, the Government of Finland (GoF) and that of other Member States (MS)¹⁵. Special focus is given to the GoÅ positions vis-a-vis the Finnish positions if there is a discrepancy between the two¹⁶. The intra-state channels through the GoF and the Finnish Permanent Representation is almost always present in prioritized issues and political important subjects, while extra-state channels mostly are used as an important complement in certain political significant cases¹⁷. The fact that the special adviser of the Åland office is accredited to the Council shines through most of the material being studied. Thus, the intra-state channels are central to the mission of the Åland office and a mainstay in prioritized matters and are almost never abandoned. The extra-state

¹² Other contact points in Brussels are a politically appointed Ålandic special assistant to the Finnish MEP representing the Swedish People's Party in the European Parliament, and also (unregularly) secondments of officials from the Åland Government to EU institutions (mostly the Commission).

¹³ "[...] a greater emphasis [...] to drive the GoÅ's positions at the institutions of the EU" (ÅLR 2016, p. 14).

¹⁴ "[i]mportant to keep on monitoring the important [fishing] quotas" (ÅO-report 2014 September, p.1)

¹⁵ See for instance ÅO-report 2019 September, p. 3

¹⁶ "PL drives the issue that the ban against drift-netting [drivgarnsfiske] in the Baltic Sea should ease up, which FI, SE, DK and EE are against. The GoÅ's deviating position was announced [...] at the working group meeting at the Council" (ÅO-report 2017 March, p. 3)

¹⁷ See for instance ÅO-report 2019 May p. 4 & ÅLR 2015, p. 29

channels instead are used as a perfect complement in more general political aims of the GoÅ, when the Åland-case is presented, or when their most political salient issues are on the GoÅ agenda¹⁸.

4.1. Bypassing the central government

A) Extra-state channels of influence in use that the Åland office (ÅO) in Brussels might apply to bypass the GoF

The following extra-state channels have been confirmed in document analysis to be in use, however it has not confirmed in the data if they have been used in any specific politically prioritized matter:

- Creating and maintaining contacts and networks with representatives from other legislative regions and organizations from other MS within the CoR in order to pursue issues of interest for the GoÅ (ÅLR 2015, pp. 10-11 & ÅLR 2017, p. 17)
- Organizing special events for invited guests in Brussels, e.g. the celebration of the day of the Åland self-rule (ÅLR 2017, p. 17)
- The special adviser of the ÅO participate in the REGLEG (ÅLR 2015, p. 39)
- The special adviser of the ÅO is a member and takes part in the Subsidiarity Expert Group of the CoR (ÅLR 2017, p. 17)
- Spreading Åland culture in Brussels; the Åland office participate in the network the Nordic Culture Committee, which works to shed light on Nordic culture in Brussels through joint Nordic cultural activities¹⁹ (ÅLR 2020, p. 25).

Channels that have been confirmed to be used in politically prioritized matters leading to bypassing, or partial bypassing, of the central government:

- Cooperation and contacts with MEPs and political parties of the European Parliament (EP) (example of issue: lobbying in the EP for accepting snuff in the EU/Åland (the new tobacco directive)) (ÅLR 2015, pp. 12, 30; ÅLR 2014, p. 10; ÅLR 2018, p. 24)
- Working to put on the agenda of the EP subjects of Åland interest (example of issue: arguing for the re-arrangement of MEP-places so that legislative regions would attain a MEP-place in the EP) (ÅLR 2014, p. 10)
- Presenting and circulating GoÅ position/expert papers and letters to politicians and actors at the EU-level (example of issue: the Finland's and Åland's fishing quotas in the Baltic Sea) (ÅLR 2015, pp. 12, 30; ÅLR 2020, p. 25; ÅO-reports 2014 September & October; ÅLR 2019, p. 28; ÅLR 2018, p. 28)
- Cooperation and contact with industry interest organisations that are active at the EU level (example of issue: cooperation with the Shipowner's Association of Finland in the area of maritime shipping) (ÅO-reports 2014 October & November)
- Organizing and taking part actively in seminars and conferences (example of issue: promoting the Development and sustainability agenda for Åland) (ÅO-reports 2019 January March & May)
- Direct (both formal and informal) contacts with officials at the Commission or representatives of other regions or MS (example of issue: promoting change in the EU copyright law easing geo-blocking of national TV-channels online) (ÅLR 2015, pp. 12, 18; ÅLR 2016, p. 19; ÅO-report 2015 January)
- Organizing official meetings between Åland political representatives (e.g. ministers of the GoÅ) and politicians (MEPs) or other important persons or partners in Brussels (example of issues: arguing for the re-arrangement of MEP-places and promoting change in the EU copyright law) (ÅLR 2020, pp. 31-32; ÅLR 2016, p. 19)
- Creating and using ad-hoc groups and networks of cooperating partners in certain joint matters of interest (example of issue: lobbying for change in the EU copyright law easing geo-blocking of national TV-channels online) (ÅLR 2018, p. 21, 24)
- Using EU-wide forums in order to promote certain important political goals, values and activities of the GoÅ (example of issue: actively trying (and then successfully managed) to win the European Sustainability Award 2019) (ÅLR 2020, pp 24, 41; ÅO-reports 2019 January, March & May; ÅLR 2018, p. 3; ÅLR 2019, p. 3)
- Representing the GoÅ the special adviser of the Åland office is a member of the Regions4 network (example of issue: promoting and developing the Development and sustainability agenda for Åland) (ÅLR 2020, p. 59)
- Gaining access to important future forums, such as the Conference on the future of the EU, in order to try to affect the agenda (ÅLR 2020, p. 32; ÅO-report 2020 March)

¹⁸ See for instance ÅLR 2015, p. 29 & ÅO-report March 2018, p. 1

¹⁹ It consists of representatives from the Embassy of Finland, the Finnish Cultural Institute, the Danish Embassy, the Danish Cultural Institute, the Faroe Islands Representation, the Greenland Representation, the Iceland embassy, the Norwegian representation and the Swedish embassy

If the regional office bypasses the central government, in specific politically prioritized matters, certain means will be applied, and specific circumstances will be present (the “how”-question). According to the document analysis, bypassing of the central government has occurred by means of;

A1) Lobbying and creating influence in the EP²⁰. The Åland office has a well-worked network and good contacts in the EP. Regular cooperation with relevant MEPs and political groups of the EP (the ALDE-group) during the period being studied. There is cooperation with both Finnish²¹ and other MS’ MEPs depending on the subject in hand. Through dialogue with MEPs, the GoÅ has the opportunity to influence the political process within the EP in favour of the interests of the GoÅ. It can be noted that the most frequent cooperation with a MEP is with Nils Torvalds of the Swedish People’s Party²².

A2) Forwarding the positions of the GoÅ to relevant political players and EU-institutions²³. The Åland office (together with the GoÅ) regularly forwards the GoÅ’s positions (sometimes through position/expert papers) and letters to actors, EU-institutions and partners within its EU-network, including MEPs, EP’s rapporteurs and shadow rapporteurs and political groups in the EP.

A3) Organizing or taking part as speaker in seminars or conferences²⁴ where the Åland case, or high-profile politically important goals, in different prioritized matters are presented and discussed.

A4) Forming direct (both formal and informal) contacts and dialogues with officials at the Commission²⁵ in order to affect proposals, initiatives and decisions processed in the Commission as well as presenting positions of the ÅG, but also in order to organize meetings for politicians from Åland.

A5) Creating and using ad-hoc groups/networks/alliances with cooperating partners²⁶ (including other sub-state regions and interest organisations) that have the same aim in trying to affect the processing of initiatives and decisions and other legal and political processes in the EU-institutions concerned (e.g. the EP, the Council and the Commission).

A6) Organizing and setting up official meetings²⁷ between Åland political representatives (e.g. GoÅ ministers) and politicians (especially MEPs) and Commissions representatives, or other important persons or partners in Brussels depending on the issues at hand.

²⁰ ÅO-reports 2015 January & May; ÅO-report 2016 April; ÅO-report 2018 January; ÅO-report 2019 September; ÅLR 2015, p. 12

²¹ Note that cooperation with MEPs that are in same party as the central government, or otherwise in tandem with any of the parties of the central government, is defined as an intra-state channel

²² ÅLR 2018, pp. 27-28

²³ ÅLR 2019, p. 28; ÅLR 2020, p. 32; ÅLR 2020, p. 59; ÅO-report 2017 September

²⁴ ÅLR 2019, p. 32

²⁵ ÅLR 2018, p. 24; ÅLR 2019, p. 32; ÅLR 2020, p. 26; ÅO-report 2016 April; ÅO-reports 2017 September & November; ÅLR 2014, pp. 31-32

²⁶ ÅO-reports 2017 September & November; ÅLR 2018, p. 21, 24

²⁷ ÅLR 2020, pp. 31-32; ÅLR 2016, p. 19

A7) Promoting certain important political goals, values and activities of the GoÅ and the Åland community at the EU-arena²⁸ and at forums (such as taking part in European awards) for the purpose of putting the Åland Islands on the map and influencing actors at the EU-level in matters of political interest.

A8) Informal advocacy work at an early stage²⁹ in the legislative process in the EP or in the processing of a Commission initiatives as well with regard to future policy priorities of the Commission. It is argued that the work of trying to influence decision-making an early stage is a useful for the GoÅ even though the result of active influence is negative, as it will benefit from the network that has been built up.

A9) Trying to get access to important forums at the EU-level³⁰, such as the Conference on the future of the EU, in order to try to affect the agenda of the future of EU (thus meaning stronger formal channels of influence for legislative regions, democracy and multi-level governance).

A10) Cooperating with specific industry interest organisations³¹. The Åland office sometimes cooperate with the Finnish Shipowner's Association, for expert support and to find work-able compromises for the Åland maritime industry in the Council in industry-specific issues (e.g. in the area of maritime shipping).

A11) Membership and engagement in European networks³². Since 2019, the GoÅ has been a member of the Regions4 network, the purpose of which is to make visible and support the work of regional governments in biodiversity, climate change and sustainable development. The special adviser of the Åland Office in Brussels acts as the network's contact person as long as biodiversity, climate change and sustainable development are matters that the provincial government intends to prioritize at EU level.

In the analytical model I suggest that bypassing the central government in specific prioritized matters leads to the possibility of influencing EU-institutions', EU-actors and/or other member state central governments' position in those matters. In the studied material there are indications of two influence-creating processes, where the Åland office has (at least in part) bypassed the central government, that might have led to some sort of influence on the positions of the Commission. First, we have the lobbying and promotion work in connection with the Development and sustainability agenda for Åland. The GoÅ and the Åland Office had in 2018 direct dialogues with European institutions with regard to EU's implementation of the UN Agenda 2030. The Åland agenda was presented on several occasions (e.g. seminars) at the EU-level in 2018 and 2019. In April 2019 the Development and sustainability agenda for Åland was named the winner the Commission's European Sustainability Award 2019 (in the category for communities up to 100,000 people). As a result of the award, interest in Åland's development and sustainability work at the EU-level has increased plentiful, showcased by the presentations of Åland's sustainability work that was held in a variety of international contexts. Winning of European awards is a type good-will channel that has been used extensively to

²⁸ ÅLR 2020, p. 59; ÅLR 2018, p. 3; ÅLR 2019, p. 3

²⁹ ÅLR 2020, p. 26; ÅLR 2015, p. 12

³⁰ ÅLR 2020, p. 32; ÅO-report 2020 March

³¹ Depending on the subject, this is a channel that might lead to either bypassing the central government or working in tandem with it.

³² ÅLR 2020, p. 59

promote Åland political goals and the Åland lifestyle externally³³. The second indication of some sort of influence on the Commission was when the Åland office early on in the legislative process tried to bring about extensive changes in the EU copyright law that would, among other things, open up the possibility to take away geo-blocking of online content from national TV broadcasters³⁴. Positions was presented to the Commission, the EP and to relevant actors at the EU-level. During a period of several years, the Åland office, partnered together with the Commission and worked for a higher level of ambition compared to the majority of MS and formed together with an ad-hock alliance of regions and organisations in order to influence the processing, negotiations and decision-making of the matter within the EU institutions³⁵.

4.2. In tandem with the central government

B) Intra-state channels of influence that the Åland office might apply to work in tandem with the GoF, ministries or central state authorities aligned with the central government

The following intra-state channels of influence that are in tandem with central government have been confirmed in the document analysis to be in use in politically prioritized matters:

- Cooperation with Finnish MEPs³⁶ (example of issue: pursue compensation for damages done by seals and cormorants on fishing) (ÅLR 2014, p. 10; ÅLR 2015, p. 12; ÅO-report 2019 September)
- Accreditation to the Council trough the Finnish Permanent Representation, thus gaining informal chance to discuss matters with officials of the Permanent Representation (in general all prioritized matters that pass the Council) (visible consistently throughout the material, see for instance ÅLR 2014, pp. 10-11, 22, 24; ÅLR 2015, p. 30; ÅLR 2018, p. 3; ÅLR 2019, p. 22, 32; ÅLR 2020, p. 24, 26; ÅO-report 2015 January; ÅO-report 2017 January, March & September)
- Taking part and presenting the GoÅ positions together with GoF-representative in those instances (e.g. working group meetings) when EU-institutions (most often the Council and sometimes the Commission) are processing subjects that are of interest of the GoÅ (example of issue: the special adviser actively participated the work of the Agenda 2030 working-group in the Council) (ÅLR 2014, pp. 11, 22, 32; ÅLR 2015, pp. 12, 22, 32; ÅLR 2016, p. 36; ÅLR 2019, p. 21; ÅLR 2020, p. 41; ÅO-report 2016 October; ÅO-report 2017 January)
- Actively following, and sometimes taking part, in the presentation of the Finnish positions at negotiating- and decision-making meetings of the Council (applies in general to all politically prioritized matters that pass the Council, especially in those matters where the GoÅ's position shall be presented) (ÅLR 2014, pp. 10-11, 24; ÅLR 2015, p. 30; ÅLR 2019, p. 22; ÅLR 2020, p. 26; ÅO-report 2014 September & October; ÅO-report 2015 May; ÅO-report 2016 October; ÅO-report 2019 December)
- Cooperation between officials of the GoÅ, Åland office and responsible Finnish ministries to reach compromises in issues of importance for Finland and Åland (example of issue: maritime shipping, the EU's tax code and tax-border issues) in the processing of proposals in the Council (ÅLR 2014, p. 32; ÅO-report 2014 October; ÅLR 2015, p. 22; ÅO-report 2016 June; ÅO-report 2017 January & March)
- Cooperation between officials of the GoÅ, Åland office and responsible Finnish authority (e.g. the Customs) to reach compromises in issues of importance for Finland and Åland (example of issue: trying to keep or improve the current principles when handling the Åland tax border (the union's customs code)) in the processing of implementing and delegated acts in the Council and in the Commission (ÅLR 2015, p. 32)
- Cooperation between officials of the GoÅ, Åland office and GoF/responsible ministry in certain issues in meetings and working/decision processes in the Commission (example of issue: meeting with TAXUD regarding new customs laws) (ÅLR 2016, p. 36)
- Promoting certain important political goals, values and activities of the GoÅ towards the GoF representatives at the EU-level in order to affect the agenda of the GoF at the Council (example of issue: the work of the GoÅ to influence the the program of the Finnish 6-month presidency of the Council (in 2019)). (ÅLR 2014, p. 10; ÅO-report 2018 March; ÅLR 2020, pp. 24, 26).

³³ ÅLR 2020, pp 24, 41; ÅO-reports 2019 January, March & May; ÅLR 2018, p. 3; ÅLR 2019, p. 3

³⁴ So that it would be possible for Åland consumers of Swedish cable TV to also watch the content online.

³⁵ ÅLR 2018, p. 21, 24; ÅLR 2016, p. 19; ÅLR 2015, p. 18; ÅO-report 2016 April

³⁶ Note that cooperation with MEPs that are in same party as the central government, or otherwise in tandem with any of the parties of the central government, is defined as an intra-state channel

If the regional office work in tandem with the central government, in specific politically prioritized matters, certain means will be applied, and specific circumstances will be present (the “how”-question). According to the document analysis, work in tandem with the central government has occurred by means of;

B1) Cooperating with Finnish MEPs³⁷, i.e. those MEPs that are associated with the Finnish Government (e.g. belong to any of the political parties of the GoF) or pursue matters that are in line with GoF’s position. For instance, the GoÅ and the Åland office cooperated with the MEP of the Swedish People’s Party when working to pursue duly compensation for damages done by seals and cormorants on fishing³⁸.

B2) Accreditation to the Council³⁹ and access to the Foreign Ministry through the Finnish Permanent Representation. The accreditation gain access to internal resources, information, contacts and meetings in the Council as well as gaining access to informally discuss matters with officials of the permanent representation office.

B3) Taking part in meetings within the Council and other EU-institutions⁴⁰. The GoÅ’s ability to influence the Council’s position in a specific matter is closely tied to the process of hammering out the GoF’s position at the Council⁴¹. Therefore, the GoÅ back home actively participate in the national preparation of Finland’s position. However, when a common position cannot be reached, or when the GoÅ has a specific standpoint in an prioritized issue, the GoÅ’s positions, at the request of the GoÅ, should be presented at Council meetings in parallel with the national position presented by the GoF representative. If the special adviser is not able to present the position, the GoF-representative should – and in those cases the special adviser is able to control that the request is fulfilled⁴². The special adviser of the Åland Office can take part (with due respect of the working methods of the institution) and present its positions together with the representative from the GoF in those instances (e.g. working group meetings) when EU-institutions (most often the Council) are processing subjects that are of interest of the GoÅ and the GoÅ requests to take part⁴³. The representative of the GoÅ has however no independent right to express the GoÅ opinion regardlessly of the Finnish positions. The GoÅ’s positions in the Council can be presented orally during Council-meetings and then also sent in as a written comment⁴⁴. The special adviser of the Åland Office, on request, can follow (if possible according to working routines of the Council) negotiating- and decision-making meetings (including meetings of ministers) of the Council, however the Finnish Government

³⁷ ÅLR 2014, p. 10; ÅLR 2015, p. 12; ÅLR 2016, p. 14; ÅLR 2017, p. 17; ÅLR 2018, p 24.; ÅLR 2019, p. 20; ÅLR 2020, p. 26

³⁸ ÅO-reports 2019 January, March, May & September

³⁹ Visible consistently throughout the material, see for instance ÅLR 2014, pp 11, 22; ÅLR 2015, p. 12; ÅLR 2016, p. 14; ÅLR 2017, p. 17; ÅLR 2018, 23-24; ÅLR 2019, pp. 19-20; ÅLR 2020, p. 24-26; ÅO-report 2014 October; ÅO-report 2015 January; ÅO-report 2017 September

⁴⁰ ÅLR 2014, pp 11, 24; ÅLR 2015, pp. 12, 30; ÅLR 2016, p. 14

⁴¹ ÅLR 2020, p. 26

⁴² ÅLR 2020, p. 26

⁴³ ÅO-report 2016 October; ÅO-report 2019 December; ÅLR 2020, p. 25; ÅLR 2019, p. 20; ÅLR 2018, p. 24; ÅLR 2017, 16

⁴⁴ ÅO-report 2014 September

representative/representative of the responsible ministry decides how Finland uses its vote in the Council⁴⁵.

B4) Cooperation between officials at the EU-level⁴⁶. Cooperation between officials and experts of the GoÅ, the Åland office, and responsible Finnish ministries and authorities to reach compromises and common goals in joint issues of importance for Finland and Åland respectively during the processing of proposals and processing of implementing and delegated acts in the Council and in the Commission, as well as in meetings with Commission officials.

B5) Influencing the national political agenda in the Council⁴⁷. Through promoting certain important political goals, values and activities at the GoF-level and at the Finnish representation office, the GoÅ and the Åland office can influence the political agenda of the GoF in the Council. This strategy was adopted when purposeful work of the Åland office and the GoÅ put the sustainability agenda on the program of the Finnish 6-month presidency of the Council and also on the common 18-month program with the other two next-coming chairmanship countries.

In the analytical model I suggest that working in tandem with the member state and the central government in specific prioritized matters leads to the possibility of influencing the central government's position in those matters

In the studied material there are indications (such as maritime shipping, sustainability and Åland tax-border issues) where the position of the GoÅ and the work of the Åland office has to some degree been influential in affecting the position of the central government in the Council. However, the lobbying of environment and sustainability matters and the promoting the sustainability work of the GoÅ stands out⁴⁸. From the onset the GoÅ and the Åland office expressed its desire to establish a civic-anchored and sustainable vision for the EU as one of Finland's priorities during their presidency of the Council⁴⁹. Moreover, as a result of the work together with GoF in the Council, on behalf of Finland's Permanent Representation to the EU, the Åland office conducted a survey of the European Commission's political will to prioritize sustainable development during the Finnish Presidency in the autumn of 2019⁵⁰. I argue that the Åland office, together with the GoÅ, promoted the agenda of sustainability and democracy during the forming the program of the Finnish presidency at the Council for the purpose of putting the Åland Islands on the European map and influencing actors at the EU-level in matters of political interest of the GoÅ. The end-result was positive as sustainability and implementation of the Agenda 2030 was one of the foundations in the program of the Finnish presidency. As part of the work on the Development and Sustainability Agenda for Åland, the GoÅ and Åland office actively participated in the Finnish presidency's work in sustainable development at EU level; for instance, by participating in the work of the Council's working group for Agenda 2030⁵¹.

⁴⁵ ÅLR 2014, p. 11; ÅO-report 2015 May; ÅO-report 2016 October

⁴⁶ ÅLR 2014, p. 32; ÅO-report 2014 October; ÅLR 2015, p. 22; ÅO-report 2016 June; ÅO-report 2017 January & March; ÅLR 2016, p. 36 ÅLR 2015, p. 32

⁴⁷ ÅLR 2018, p. 3; ÅLR 2019, p. 21

⁴⁸ ÅLR 2019, p. 32

⁴⁹ ÅLR 2020, p. 26

⁵⁰ ÅLR 2020, p. 24

⁵¹ ÅLR 2019, p. 21

5. Conclusions

The research questions that this thesis set out to answer was:

- 1) By differentiating between intra-state and extra-state channels of influence, how is the Åland office in Brussels in certain politically prioritized matters a) bypassing the central government and b) work in tandem with central government at the Brussels arena?
- 2) Can it be perceived (through any obvious or underlying meanings) whether the analysed material suggests any propensity of the Åland office to concentrate on either the strategy of bypassing or working in tandem with the central government?

When aggregated and summarized, the result of the analysis shows us that bypassing of the central government has occurred by using a set of extra-state channels of influence and by such means as;

- lobbying and creating influence in the European Parliament,
- forwarding the positions of the Åland Government to relevant political players and EU-institutions,
- organizing or taking part as speaker in seminars or conferences
- forming direct (both formal and informal) contacts and dialogue with officials at the Commission,
- creating and using ad-hoc groups/networks/alliances with cooperating partners,
- organizing and setting up official meetings with high-profile officials and politicians,
- promoting certain important political goals, values and activities of the Åland Government and the Åland community at the wider EU-arena,
- informal advocacy work at an early stage,
- trying to get access to new important forums at the EU-level,
- cooperating with specific industry interest organisations⁵²,
- membership and engagement in European networks.

When aggregated and summarized, the result of the analysis shows us that working in tandem with the central government has occurred by using a set of intra-state channels of influence and by such means as;

- cooperating with Finnish MEPs and other Finnish actors that support the positions of the national government at the EU-level,
- accreditation to the Council, with all informal and formal advantages,
- presenting positions, taking part and engaging in meetings and in the processing of matters of interest in the Council and other EU-institutions (the latter if in cooperation with officials from national authorities),
- cooperation between Åland and Finnish officials at the EU-level,
- influencing the national political agenda in the Council.

Concerning the question whether it is suggested in the material being studied if there is any propensity of the Åland office to concentrate on either the strategy of bypassing or working in tandem with the central government the following can be concluded from the result. The intra-state channels through the Government of Finland and the Finnish Permanent Representation in the Council is almost always present in prioritized issues and political important subjects,

⁵² Depending on the subject and the position of the association, this is a channel that might lead to either bypassing the central government or working in tandem with it.

while extra-state channels mostly are used as an important complement in certain political significant cases. Extra-state channels at the EU-level are perhaps more in use (at the expense of intra-state channels) in matters that are connected to broad politically salient goals, such as supporting and promoting the Åland culture and way of life or the autonomy regime of Åland and its minority protection mechanisms. In this study it has been quite apparent that even though the Åland Government and the Åland office in Brussels to some degree has managed quite well to take from central state authorities a share of the monopoly of influencing European policy- and decision-making – and regularly bypasses the central government – it still the central government that has the significant formal power. This finding is in line with arguments from scholars such as Keating et al (2015) and Antunes & Magone (2020). However, through the lens of the Åland office in Brussels, we can see how intense and advanced the interaction between EU and regional actors can become (Macneill et al. 2007, p. 413). But very few regional offices, with the backing of their governments, can aspire to individually influence EU decision-making. Instead regional offices use both bypassing paradiplomacy (using mainly extra-state channels without the state) and co-operative paradiplomacy (using mainly intra-state channels with the state) (Tatham 2010). In line with what Trobbiani (2019, p. 190) suggests, it seems as if when the Åland office is using extra-state channels not in tandem with the central government – despite the importance lobbying – the only way to achieve some positive results is to cooperate through networks (ad-hoc or permanent) with other regions and organisations in Brussels. The case with the Åland office, however, contradicts Trobbiani's argument that lobbying in various networks are more important for regional offices than channels through the Member states' Permanent Representations (Trobbiani 2019, p. 191). Importantly though, far from being mutually exclusive, bypassing and cooperation with the member state “actually represent merely two possible options available” to regional offices (Tatham 2010; p. 91). The case of the Åland office shows that those extra-state channels that are used - being less-institutionalized, policy-specific cooperation – rather complements formal intra-state mechanisms of cooperation and interest representation. Yet, this conclusion should not be misunderstood to connect to Loughlin & Antunes' (2020) ‘damp squib’-thesis about the state of regional influence in small unitary states. Instead, it is more in line with the findings of Bursens & De Blauwer (2018) regarding the use of extra-state and intra-state channels. Interestingly, it seems as if the Åland office to some degree can influence the position of the Finnish state in the Council through its close integration and cooperation with the Finnish Permanent Representation of the EU. The Finnish position can then of course influence the standpoint of the Council in for example trilogues with the Parliament, the Commission and the Council. However, it is important to acknowledge that the Finnish bargaining-power in the Council is relatively low due to Finland's comparatively small size and political power (Hyvärinen 2009).

This thesis has set out to study a very small regional office where the "magic" (in terms of influence) happens and how a regional office actually works in "the real world" trying to make its voice heard. The Åland office in Brussels is apparently still highly appreciated by the Åland Government, as the political discussion is about expanding the office's resources rather than the other way around (Självstyrelsepolitiska nämndens betänkande 1/2018-2019). The future may require the Åland Government to substantially increase its allocated resources to the office. In the wake of Brexit and in the light of the growing nationalism in many European countries, there is a stronger interest in a Europe of the regions (Ålands landskapsregering 2015, p. 3), and more voices are heard that argue for increasing the formal role of the regions in the EU, but how this would be realized in practice is not clear.

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