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Frontier Regions: Future Collaboration or Conflict?

Raimondo Strassoldo

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of frontier region assumes a socio-political organisation in a certain area, a community. Though the concept of region has gained a very wide currency in the geographical literature, it belongs to the human sciences; it derives from the latin word *regere* to govern. To speak of frontier regions is to treat them as political actors; hence it makes sense to speak of collaboration and of conflict among them. This was not, as a rule, the case in Europe, in the recent past, and it is still not the case in most of the rest of the world. As long as the monopoly of power is retained by the centralised nation state, and local autonomies are suppressed, it is nonsense to use the term frontier regions, except as a merely geographical expression. Other terms can be found in the literature on border problems, such as 'tension *areas*' or zones.¹

With the rise of the nation state, local communities were deprived of the capacity to act at the 'international' level.² The every-day needs for co-operation in frontier areas – the management of a cross-border road, the regulation of a stream or the pursuit of fugitive goats – came to be a matter for the Foreign Affairs Ministries. Direct contact between local authorities across a frontier was hardly conceived by international law (as it developed in the era of the nation state), which can be 'rather liberal on private transactions, but most strict on public ones'.³ There was also much less need for cross-border relations, since every state concentrated on the development of its own interior and thought of borders mainly in military terms, as points of possible invasion or as bases for further conquest; in both cases, as possible battlefields. Industrial and civilian development of such areas was often considered unwise; communication infrastructures thinned out and often disappeared in the area close to the border. Populations in border areas, however, were usually the object of close attention by the central government, and especially by the police, because they were often of more recent acquisition, or had some affinity with people on the other side, and therefore were potentially less loyal. The 'impress of effective central authority'⁴ is often particularly strong on the cultural landscape of such areas, and nationalistic propaganda more incisive in severing and draining off the cultural ties with people on the other side. Men were forced to keep their attention and minds turned toward the national centre.

Thus, in 'the long polar night' (as Max Weber put it) of the centralised nation state, there were neither strong desires nor capacities for collaboration between local authorities across the borders. Whether located in militarily sensitive areas, with substantial military installations, or in remote, deserted peripheries, people in borderlands were passive components of their own state

system. More often than not, they were victims of national politics. This was especially apparent in economic affairs and in the area of national and ethnic feelings. 'One can get used to hunger but not to Italians', a citizen of Bruneck is said to have sighed in 1919, when it was pointed out to him how much better off South Tyrol was with American-fed Italy than with starving Austria. Border people have often been cynically manipulated by nation states wanting to promote (or to eradicate) irredentism, minority questions, or *casus belli*. Historians and political scientists have usually studied border problems of this kind, in order to examine cases of aggression and expansion of states.⁵ The context in which we now speak of conflict between frontier regions is certainly very different. In the contemporary world, we take it for granted that Western Europe makes up a 'security community', a single societal system from which the use of military force is excluded. Present conflicts have a severely restricted range of expression.

There are, of course, outbursts of political violence in frontier regions, as in other areas of modern societies. Recent events in South Tyrol, Euzkadi, Brittany and Ulster are illustrations of this possibility. What is new is the assumption that European states will not exploit frontier problems to promote aggressive and expansionist policies. Irredentism is dead, and frontier changes taboo, except perhaps in Ireland. It is obvious that future relations between frontier regions will consist both of collaboration and of conflict, because the two are connected and represent two inherent dimensions of political life. The question is one of proportion – how much collaboration? how much conflict? But there is a more fundamental question: how much life? That is to say, to what extent will regions (frontier regions and other regions) become meaningful actors? What are the prospects for local autonomy at the intermediate, regional level? What are the chances for a 'Europe of the regions'? The problems of frontier regions are related not only to the location at the frontier; they also depend on the role and dynamics of the regional entities in the larger national and transnational context. There is some truth in the repeated statement that there are no problems of frontier regions; there are only the problems of 'obstinate' (rather than 'obsolete') nation states and of hesitant European integration.

2. CONFLICT AND COLLABORATION

There is a growing literature and an increasing documentation on European frontier regions covering collaborative activities, co-operation, harmonisation, 'concertation', and other such expressions of good positive relations. This is in part due to the official or semi-official nature of this material, comprising press-releases after meetings of authorities, conferences of public servants and experts of various kinds, and reports of study groups. In large part, it is collected and relayed by public relations officials, and it takes some training in the hermeneutics of diplomatic language to detect clues of underlying tensions embedded in the treacle. A survey of frontier problems through press analysis or, better, interviews and/or participant observation reveals a larger share of conflicts, but such studies are exceedingly scarce.⁶

3. THE PREDOMINANCE OF CO-OPERATIVE RELATIONS

The caveats notwithstanding, relations among frontier regions are almost totally on the co-operative side of the co-operation/conflict continuum. There are at least three reasons for this.

(a) *The Nature of Regions*

The first has to do with the nature of regions. 'Regions are not small states'.⁷ They are administrative units and problem-solving machinery, constitutionally geared to peaceful and co-operative goals like welfare, efficiency, development and planning. They broadly belong to participatory and pluralistic democracy. All this tends to be incompatible with conflict in the stricter meaning of the word. In case of serious conflict in border areas, the state would step in and take over.

(b) *The Compensation Effect*

The second reason is more of a psycho-historical nature. Frontier regions began only about a generation ago to recover from the traumas of a century or more of nationalistic closure. For a long time, as already mentioned, their inhabitants were forcefully encouraged to sever traditional ties with neighbours across the border, and sometimes assumed ultra-patriotic stances. Direct cross-frontier contacts among local authorities and populations date back no further than thirty years; many of the pioneers of this movement are still active. There is still an aura of joy and genuine enthusiasm about these contacts; meetings across frontiers are suffused with good feelings and emotions. There is a feeling that it is necessary to compensate for and exorcise a long history of aversion, of suspicion, of hatred. Studies of 'transactions' in frontier areas seem to suggest that the higher the level of conflict in the recent past, the stronger the urge to meet and establish good relations. In areas of recent genocide, the cross-frontier meetings become a sort of sun-dance, of ritual catharsis.⁸

(c) *The Growth Factor*

The third factor is structural. It has to do with sustained economic growth and its effects on social conflicts within states as well as between them. The process of European integration was accompanied by a generally optimistic outlook for the future (barring nuclear catastrophe) and a faith in economic and technical progress. Transfrontier co-operation dealt not only with the healing of old nationalistic wounds but also with the building of roads, bridges and tunnels, the development of infrastructures, the promotion of cross-border mobility of factors of production – especially workers – and with the exploitation of economic comparative advantages. In such matters there can be competition, difference of opinions over technical solutions, and space for bargaining and trading off; but the game is not conflictual in the strict sense, it is not zero-sum. When there is a feeling of participation in a trend towards common abundance, specific and local problems are less prone to degenerate into conflicts. Western Europe, in the third quarter of this century, seemed to

be living out the vision of nineteenth century sociologists (and of 'international functionalists') that technological and economic progress are the royal road to the pacification and unification of mankind.⁹ In this climate, frontier regions became instruments devoted mainly to the organisation of physical linkages between different national systems; from ramparts they evolved into bridges, 'from barriers to junctions', or crossroads, from 'peripheries' to 'centres'.¹⁰

4. THE CONDITIONS OF CONFLICT

The foregoing outline of the main factors which push relations between frontier regions toward the co-operative end of the scale also suggest the conditions of a possible recession into more conflictual situations.

(a) *The Failure of the Regions*

Regionalism rests on a delicate balance between participation and efficiency, between decentralisation and deconcentration, between self-government and economic planning, between protection of local cultures and promotion of equal economic growth and welfare, between the humanisation and the automation of political-administrative systems, between the urges from below and the conveniences from above. Nowhere can we find convincing evidence that regionalism will mould our future as nationalism has moulded our past. Indeed, the most powerful trends in modern society still seem anti-regional. The homogenising of cultures through mass media, the shrinkage of space through ever more efficient communication and the advantages of a large scale in organisation still fuel the old centralisation-bureaucratisation – the processes which have been worrying social thinkers for more than a century now and against which regionalist doctrines have been directed. Nationalism, although somewhat subdued and no longer as popular at least in Western Europe, is still structurally dominant in the form of 'étatisme', through capillary interpenetration of society by the structures of the state system. The role of the state in the everyday life of people has grown steadily for centuries, and has actually accelerated in the last decades; the internal integration of societies is growing at a faster pace than the integration among them, as K. W. Deutsch demonstrated; real socialism cannot help being nationalist, despite ideological protestations. This thesis seems to be borne out by the West European experience; there is a suspicious correlation between the expansion of state intervention in social and economic affairs and the growing difficulties of inter-societal integration. The competitive character of the international system, which has been proven to be one of the main causes of the centralisation and 'étatisation' of societies,¹¹ is still present, although in different forms, and this does not bode well for regions. In Western Europe it is mainly reduced to economic competition, but is serious enough to slow down the process of integration to its rather miserable present state, and is not without similarity to old-fashioned nationalism. Regionalism requires a more relaxed climate, less international competition and more attention to human needs, less concern for production and efficiency and more for distribution and justice, a keen sensitivity to cultural and social matters and less obsession with economic issues.

It comes as no surprise that the only regions which attract some (small)

attention from the European Economic Community are those defined as 'peripheral' by economic indicators; that the EEC is, among European organisations, the least concerned with the problems of frontier regions, the promotion of local autonomy, decentralisation and regionalism. Emphasis on the integrative function of frontier regions has been a characteristic endeavour of another European organisation, the Council of Europe, not only because it enjoys the 'advantages of weakness', but also because regionalism is essentially a social and cultural matter. It has *some* relation to the hard facts of economics, but also to the more volatile realms of power and of international politics as well as of human values and cultural trends. These are essentially complex worlds, about which predictions are foolhardy.

Will the present very weak trends to decentralisation and regionalisation of European societies gain momentum, or will they be submerged in the mainstream of growing 'étatisme'? The hints are many and contradictory. The federal structure of Western Germany does not prevent her from acting as a unitary state in most important matters; those strongholds of centralism, France and Spain, have suddenly committed themselves to regionalist values; the regional experiment in Italy, one of the earliest and most admired in post-war Europe, is now getting a very mixed reception; in Great Britain, the regional concept seems confined to regional economic policies, and is not linked with political and socio-cultural programmes. Everywhere, the short-term trends of internal and international politics present a varied and changing picture, making it difficult to detect long-term movements underlying them. The 'Greens' denounce creeping 'nuclear fascism', the inevitable centralisation and militarisation of societies that have opted for the nuclear solution of the energy problem. Their alternative programmes propose a radically decentralised, stateless society, based on self-sufficient small, 'ecological' communities. Others present eulogies of the Toquevillean nightmare – the centralised social-democratic state, benignly caring for every individual, womb to tomb, through the equitable rationality of cybernetic systems. Still others plead for a cosmopolitan world society free from local attachments, although we may observe the recurring resurgence of tribalism at every level of territorial organisation, from remote valleys and islands to the most established national societies. What is the underlying pattern beneath all these views, and even whether there is a pattern, is difficult to say. The growth of local autonomies and the emergence of strong regional communities is only one of our possible futures. In calculating its probability, as with any political-cultural forecast, one important variable is our determination to help make it come true; because the future is, among other things, also the outcome of the forecaster's endeavours.¹²

(b) *The Rouinisation of Cross-border Transactions*

As to the second source of the co-operative element, the 'compensation effect' may lose force with time. The emotional involvement in cross-border activities of the 'expressive' type cannot last indefinitely. Charisma gets routinised,

festivals become bureaucratised, new generations grow for whom open borders and free mobility are taken for granted. They do not feel compelled to show great interest and admiration for foreign cultures because they were not, in the first place, schooled in the hate and contempt for them, as their fathers were.

Cross-border relations may come to be seen just as any other social relation, with various mixes of co-operative and conflictual elements. The intense expression of good feelings settles down to normal, casual interaction. This may entail a drastic diminution of co-operative relations at the cultural and emotional level and a comparative increase of conflictual or competitive ones. When the romance is gone, a staid couple can also routinely quarrel. This perhaps would not be a very serious problem; but it would certainly make cross-border relations much less picturesque and interesting as a subject matter for research. It would put it on a par with studies of relations between local governments within a country, which are widely studied by specialists of public law, administrative science, political science, urban economics, geography, etc. Uninspiring? Perhaps. But peace and rationality are somewhat dull.

It would be interesting to test this thesis through comparative research on a variety of border situations, to assess the extent to which co-operative transactions of the cultural and 'expressive' type are related to the duration of the opening of the border and the (re-)establishment of normal relations between local people and between neighbouring states, in comparison to other factors, such as differences between the neighbours (at the social, political, cultural and other levels), the 'national characters', the level of conflict, (previous or actual), and the type of conflict, (economic, political, etc.).

(c) *Economic Difficulties and Competition for Scarce Resources*

An increase in conflictual cross-border relations can be a consequence of economic difficulties and stiffer competition for ever-scarcer resources, which is unfortunately a significant possibility. States may be less prone to neighbourly goodwill if their immediate interests are at stake. Monetary and tariff policies can harden their boundaries and damage the interests of border regions; this may have a ricochet effect on the relations among the latter. A dramatic example of this is now occurring at the Italian-Yugoslav border area, where the stream of Yugoslavian customers has been suddenly and effectively blocked by decree, depressing the commercial sectors of Trieste and Gorizia, which, for two decades, have been orientated towards the extensive market across the border. At least one third of the sector is in danger of bankruptcy.

Financial difficulties of the frontier regions themselves may limit the possibility for co-operation. Competition for investments from the same supranational source is common and so too is competition for major infrastructure development. When the resources are limited and the flows of traffic are not likely to grow indefinitely, frontier regions may be in fierce contention for the location of motorways, bridges and tunnels.

This is evident in the Alpine area, where infrastructural problems have traditionally been the mainspring of contacts among local authorities across

the frontier. All regional capitals vie to become linked to the main trans-alpine routes, and the northernmost Italian harbours (Genoa, Venice, Trieste) strive for better connections with southern Germany. One spin-off of this competition is the creation of 'umbrella' transfrontier organisations, like the Arge Alp and the Arge Alp-Ost (Alpe-Adria). They provide a relaxed institutional setting in which the more serious and potentially divisive problems of infrastructural planning are treated alongside with more pleasant ones, such as cultural exchanges, environmental conservation and general economic co-operation. Economic difficulties may also engender conflicts over employment policies, especially in regions of sizeable frontier commuter traffic, as the non-nationals are usually the first to be laid off by firms.

There is also growing competition for a peculiar kind of resource; environmental quality. This 'good' is growing scarcer both objectively, as industrial society consumes it, and subjectively, as environmental values spread to more people and develop aspirations to clean land, water and air. One of the *leitmotifs* of transfrontier co-operation is that environmental protection stops at national boundaries, whereas pollution does not. The tendency to locate polluting plants in remote places, which often are close to boundaries, is another common observation; this holds for internal administrative subdivisions as for national boundaries. The ancient practice of fixing frontiers along major water ways has always been a source of trouble, as rivers and lakes are very valuable and coveted resources. The building of dams, canals and other works is a frequent focus of transfrontier co-operation and conflict. Recently the struggle to keep waters clean or to decontaminate them has become more heated with the plans for nuclear power plants needing large quantities of water for cooling. Some riverine areas, notably the upper Rhine, are earmarked for a large number of such plants by neighbouring countries; environmentalists and planners are very concerned about the compatibility of such plans with the capacity of the river. The strategic importance of each nuclear power plant to the respective national systems may lead to open conflicts.

International lawyers are paying increasing attention to environmental issues, which are often of a localised, transfrontier character. International economic organisations, such as the OECD, are studying them in order to establish principles for the equitable and rational solution of such problems, and for the harmonisation of conflicting economic and environmental interests, on the two sides of frontiers.

The heightening of environmental consciousness and the relaxing of nationalism are important factors in working out rules and machinery for transfrontier co-operation in this field; but here too the worsening of the general economic situation raises renewed worries. The energy crisis has already demolished many environmental good intentions; increased interstate economic competition may bring about a reversion to more selfish policies in the exploitation of environmental resources in border areas. Countervailing trends, such as closer co-operation to meet common difficulties, can be imagined, but seem less probable as long as national states remain, even in Western Europe, the main locus of power and focus of loyalty. One big question concerning future conflict or collaboration between frontier regions,

then, is whether the current economic difficulties are transitory or whether they indicate a secular downturn of Western societies, as many 'eco-pessimists' fear.

(d) *Ethnic Rivalries as a Source of Conflict in Frontier Regions*

Ethnic regionalism, the revival of long-forgotten 'forbidden nations' at the edges of the major nation states, may be another factor influencing the degree of conflict and co-operation. Some frontier regions owe their existence to these minorities. This is the case of Italy's 'special autonomy regions' along the Alpine arc. Co-operation and conflict in frontier regions are often a function of the minorities' demands for self-government and contacts with the mother-country on the other side of the border. Ethnic issues provide a large proportion of the frontier regions problems.

Modern regionalism has two different main sources; a technical-economic one, having to do with regional disequilibria and planning; and a historical-cultural one, concerned with maintaining and developing specific traditional heritages in language, mores and folklore. The first is usually 'progressive', the second sometimes 'conservative'. But such alignments do not do justice to this complex social movement, which has emerged quite unexpectedly in the last generation.¹³

For some, ethnic regionalism is just another dialectical expression of modern mass society, an effect of alienation from the urban-industrial world, a retreat into a past utopia, a consequence of the failure of revolutionary millenarianism at the societal level. Disillusioned leftist intellectuals seem to make up a sizeable part of the movement of ethnic revival. Long-repressed minorities are seen by them as another vulnerable point at which to attack bourgeois, one-dimensional society. Others see in ethnic regionalism a genuine revival of values, life-styles, communities and other cultural elements that the Jacobin state has for a long time suppressed. They point to the persistence of outward signs of ethnicity such as language, and speculate on underlying potentials which may be activated. In practice, the ethnic movements in Western Europe are made up of a small elite of intellectual 'vanguards', while the masses seem still firmly enmeshed in the national society. But the question is whether the potential for mobilisation is really there; whether the ideas of micro-nationalists have enough 'elective affinity' with deep-seated, widespread values, to rally people's loyalties (in competition with the old nationalisms).

There is ground for doubt: the micro-nationalists have been active for quite a few years now, in many European countries, but they do not seem to have made much effect on the national systems; their political force seems stabilised at very modest levels, seldom more than 5 per cent of the electorate in the regions concerned. However, it must be admitted that they have captured the interest of important bodies, such as the European Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. The real problem concerns the *viability* of a societal system based on ethnic regions, on micro-nations. Some ideologies of regionalism envisage a redrawing of European boundaries along ethnic lines, which would imply the breaking up of all major nation states and the re-emergence of ancient cultural areas. Others are not so sure that such

a system would be viable; and if it were, they suspect it would not be a great advantage. If ethnic movements co-operate to some extent it is mainly because they have a common enemy in the nation state, but should this wither away, they would have innumerable grounds for conflict among themselves. A major problem is that the definitions and the boundaries of ethnic regions are blurred. Instead of the 6,000 km of present-day national boundaries we would have many times more, with a proportional growth in border disputes.

In addition, traditional ethnic spaces have little to do with modern economic spaces, and it is scarcely possible to adapt the latter to the former. Most of, if not the whole of, the economic and infrastructural systems would escape the control of the mini-nation. The *droit au pays*, the right to control the import of activities in one's ethnic territory and deny the use of land to objectionable 'foreign' investments is a principle which threatens the very foundations of modern civilisation, based on the open markets and the free flow of capital across ever-larger areas. It also conflicts with the principle of hierarchical organisation of services and infrastructures. It highlights a very real problem – the claim to self-government and to self-preservation of ethnic communities. The *droit au pays* represents a needed countervailing principle to the nation state; but flexibility is required to implement it.

Micro-nationalism is in principle no better than macro-nationalism, if it implies ethnocentrism, parochialism and hostility to aliens. Micro-nations cannot wage large wars and this is certainly a great advantage, but their grip on individuals can be as suffocating as that of the nation states. Ethnicity cannot be the only organising principle of regions. It is very useful as a corrective of large scale nationalism and mass society; it could be one of the driving forces for political participation. But it must be reconciled with other principles, such as the 'functional' one; the polemical rhetoric against the nation state should not overlook the historical merits and present uses of this level of political organisation.

There are serious practical difficulties in the way of realising the aspirations of the micro-nations. The taboo on boundary changes is not likely to be lifted, in Western Europe or elsewhere. The problems of national minorities that found themselves 'on the wrong side of the border' after the Second World War are not going to be solved by redrawing the borders but only by their 'dfunctionalisation'. In other words, the solution is not secession or re-annexation to the 'mother country', but wider autonomy, freedom of internal organisation, and 'transparency' of the border – these latter seem to be the only realistic paths. This can be argued both for classic 'border fringe' minorities like the South Tyrolese and even more for those ethnic regions, also as a rule located at the periphery of nation states, that have no 'mother country' or protecting nation, but claim recognition as (mini-)national identities. Their claims for self-government clash with an unwritten rule of the international system which grants the self-determination and secession rights to overseas colonies, but not to internal ones.

The established states will not admit any exception to the principle of territorial integrity. There are good grounds for this, as any precedent is likely to trigger an avalanche of claims and throw the whole system into chaos. But there also is a strong emotional and perhaps even biological basis to the

territorial integrity principle.¹⁴ Ethnic regions should meet some minimum viability standard. Size, space, quantity, numbers, are critical and unavoidable factors in human organisation. Exceedingly tiny minorities cannot claim the same rights as major ones, because such rights usually require facilities, organisation and personnel that may be disproportionately expensive or simply not available.¹⁵ This is not to equate numerical might with right, but to point out the physical limits to the viability of communities. A similar problem is faced by those minorities which, though more numerous, are scattered in ethnic 'islands' within 'alien' territory. Here the problem may be more logistic and communicational than merely physical, but no less difficult to solve. An ethnic region, then, to be viable should also have a reasonable territorial structure; but the old fascination for cartographic tidiness and the 'planimetric fallacy'¹⁶ should equally be avoided.

The quality of ethnic patriotism, 'mini-nationalism' and regional loyalty ought to be deeply different from old nationalism. Naïve tribalism is an archaic phenomenon. The aura of necessity and inevitability of one's 'national' loyalty cannot be revived in a world of high mobility and circulation of knowledge. The new mini-nationalism is distinguished from the old one in its voluntary (or 'synthetic') quality. This means that the new ethnic and regional patriotism should be more rational and less instinctual, more human and less violent than the old one. Ethnic and regional loyalty must learn to grow in a social environment vastly different from the environment of traditional nationalism. It is an environment among whose official values are a tolerance of cultural diversity and rejection of violence. It must learn to spread by peaceful means, to reconcile the conservation and development of ethnic culture with the respect of other cultures, to integrate the *Volksgeist* into the *Melangeist* and to maintain both identity and openness.¹⁷

The significance of this is that the further development of ethnic regionalism is conditional on a rather complex and demanding set of constraints. The ethnic-regional order in Europe is a possible, highly desirable but not very probable scenario. This makes it difficult to assess the likely role of ethnic movements in promoting collaboration or conflict among European frontier regions. In the short run, they are likely to promote collaboration, as they exchange experiences and seek each other's support in their struggle against the common foe, the centralised nation state. It is also conceivable that they will manage to raise the level of conflict between nation states, if their drive for autonomy spills over into separatism and 'irrendentism'; and this may trigger a reaction of the central government and the development of the well-known patterns of border 'minority' disputes. In the longer run, the strengthening of the ethnic-regional institutions, the emerging of a Europe of the ethnic regions, may increase exponentially the number of conflicts. The Occitans, the Catalans and the Sicilians may experience a brotherhood of arms when fighting against their respective central governments, but are not immune to leaping at each others' throat over issues of wine and tomatoes.

(e) *The Role of European Organisations*

The future state of the relationships among frontier regions depends on a large

matrix of variables: the trends toward decentralisation; economic cycles; the fortunes of ethnic revival; international politics; and so on. Among them, a distinctive and important role can be played by European organisations.

The debate on frontier regions has sprung spontaneously through the contact of local authorities across the borders; but it was identified, encouraged and relayed mainly by the Council of Europe. The EEC has always been more than reluctant either to become involved in this debate or to lend an ear to the complaints of frontier regions. There are many possible explanations for this; one is a certain division of labour between the two; another is the 'over-restraint' syndrome, also dubbed 'the weakness of the strong'. The EEC is a comparatively powerful organisation, whose behaviour is very prudent in view of the possible harm it can inflict and the protests it may stir. By contrast, the Council of Europe is relatively powerless, and can therefore engage in politically very sensitive issues without alarming anybody, except perhaps ultra-nationalists like Michel Debré. The most important fact is that the problems of frontier regions are defined as 'political', that is historical, institutional, cultural, social and psychological, more than economic. The EEC only deals with the last mentioned type of problems. The only typology of regions the EEC acknowledges is based on economic criteria, the only problems are those deriving from insufficient economic integration of the member states, and the only solution envisaged is a more perfect integration, both within each state and among them. Curiously, in EEC parlance the term 'frontier region' has come to be restricted to *internal* frontier regions, some of which happen to be among the better-off from the economic point of view. Thus the problems of the external ones, along the borders of the EEC area with non-member states are excluded from the attention of the European Commission. To many observers this indicates too restrictive an interpretation of the scope of the EEC. The argument that there are no problems of frontier regions which need special policies, but only problems of imperfect integration, makes the questionable assumption that the former will be automatically solved with the advent of the improved levels of integration. There is also a problem of time – frontier regions problems are present, perfect integration is very far away. Moreover there will continue to be EEC regions on borders with non-EEC countries – Switzerland, Austria, and Yugoslavia, for instance – which will continue to experience typical frontier problems perhaps to a heightened degree when more perfect integration has been achieved. It would be desirable to study these questions, to plan measures and solutions, to stretch the letter of the Rome treaty, to emphasise the problems of frontier regions in order to highlight the shortcomings of the slow process of integration. The EEC has not done these things for political, not technical reasons.

The Council of Europe for many years has taken cognisance of the enduring and peculiar character of frontier region problems in order to propose means of overcoming them. The Council has been using the ingenuity of international and administrative lawyers, and has been considering frontier regions as a laboratory for testing new machinery of transnational integration. For example, to declare that some cross-border relations among local authorities are not *international* relations but a mere extension of municipal activities, is certainly an innovative step. More significant is the Council of Europe's effort

to identify frontier regions as showcases for the problems and potentialities of European integration. The Council has contributed in important ways to the systemisation, legitimisation, and awareness of a formerly haphazard and often frustrating activity of local authorities. It has built up frontier regions as something of a pressure group lobbying not only for petty interests, but also for a higher form of European integration; it has offered new ingredients to contribute to the 'fraying at the edges' of the nation states. Whereas the EEC attitude keeps the lid on frontier problems and thus lets tension mount, the Council of Europe tries to use the steam to do useful, if modest, work. Whether there will be, in the medium term, more conflict or more co-operation in frontier regions, will depend to some extent on the policies of those two European organisations; the capacity of the Council of Europe to persuade the states to apply the outline convention on frontier regions and the appended model-agreement, and the willingness of the EEC to act more positively in this issue area.

6. CONCLUSION

The social scientist is often asked to make forecasts. This was indeed the original Comtian motivation for the study of social sciences. Forecasts can be done in two ways: in the form of conditional-causal statements of the 'if-then' type, or in the form of statistical extrapolation. What we have done here, informally and implicitly, is a little of both. We have pointed out that the future of collaboration and/or conflict in frontier regions will depend mainly on the development of larger societal processes, and these cannot accurately be foreseen, due to the enormous complexity of the forces involved. Complexity is one of the keywords of social sciences (it justifies their poor forecasting performances). One of the reasons for setting up social institutions is the reduction of complexity. For example, a major reason for the success of that peculiar institution, the nation state, is its relentless drive towards uniformity. The state imposes a fundamental simplification on the social world, dividing the inside, the area under full control and order, from the outside, the area of international anarchy. Sub-national and supra-national regionalism both interfere with this fundamental organising principle of human society. They have met and will meet all sorts of difficulties and resistances, and there is no way to foresee the outcome of the dialectics between regions, states, and Europe.

A 'Europe of the Regions', if it is ever allowed to emerge, is going to be a system of the highest level of complexity. A non-reductive management of complex systems of this kind requires not only appropriate institutional machinery and cybernetic technologies, but also a peculiar *forma mentis*, highly tolerant of variety, differences, ambiguity, disorder, indeterminacy. The problems of frontier areas in the Europe of the Regions would be taken care of by several institutional levels—local authorities, regions, state, Europe—according to sophisticated principles of competence allocation (for example, 'variable geometry'). The problem-solving processes could be long and complex, but will hopefully be some progress over the brutal solutions that states used to impose on frontier populations.

Differences of opinion and interests over border problems will not, probably, be simply 'computed out', as Leibniz dreamed, in a fully rational world. But some of the passionate heat about 'sacred' frontiers, ethnic rights, and other such issues can undoubtedly be cooled down if the parties do not threaten the use of force or do not feel threatened in their vital interests. We can conclude that in a future Europe of the Regions, problems in frontier regions will be even more common, and the processes for their solution longer and more complex, as more and more actors will be involved; but they will be of weaker emotional content, and the problem-solving processes far more of the co-operative than of the conflictual type. Other scenarios can perhaps be drawn—as the one envisaging a reversal of the process of European integration, or, a contrasting one, the Galtung scheme of Europe as a 'superpower in the making'. The destiny of frontier regions would accordingly vary.

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