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Secondary Foreign Policy Activities in Third Sector Cross-border Cooperation as Conflict Transformation in the European Union:

The Cases of the Basque and Irish Borderscapes

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Abstract: Comparative research on violent conflict in the Basque Country and Ireland has yielded a sizable body of published academic work. Less well explored is the relationship between conflict transformation and cross-border cooperation in that comparative context. This paper provides a comparative examination of Third (non-public, non-profit) sector cross-border cooperation contributing to conflict transformation in the Basque (France/Spain) and Irish (UK/Ireland) borderscapes. The comparison is based on the premise that the European Union (EU) played a different role in both cases. In the Irish case, the EU contributed to the institutionalization of a peace process that included cross-border cooperation between Third sector organizations among its policy instruments contributing to conflict transformation. In the Basque case, the unilateral renunciation of violence by ETA (*Euskadi eta Askatasuna*) in 2010 did not generate the consistent involvement of the EU in an institutional peace process. However, some Third sector organizations became secondary foreign policy actors using EU instruments for cross-border economic, social and cultural cooperation between France and Spain in order to reinforce their cross-border networks, which indirectly impacted on conflict transformation.

Keywords: European Union, borderscapes, cross-border cooperation, identity politics, Third sector; Ireland, Basque Country, conflict transformation.

Introduction

To what extent can the intensification of formal and informal cross-border cooperation (henceforth referred to a CBC) contribute to the process of conflict transformation in conflictual borderscapes? This core question will be addressed in the context of the Basque and the Irish borderscapes[1]. Through the borderscape conceptual lens (McCall 2013, p. 199), the Basque and the Irish borderscapes are (a) border landscapes displaying cultural and political complexity, with a cross-border cultural identity; (b) socially constructed as shared territories by contested discourses and meanings, struggles over inclusion and exclusion, involving multiple actors: Basque and Irish nationalists advocating for "border transcending" dynamics, in contradistinction to state-driven dynamics which tend to be "border confirming" (McCall and O'Dowd 2008); (c) important landscapes for cross-border relations, that may be favourable for inter-cultural dialogue advancing conflict transformation. Beyond these common features, the articulation between conflict transformation and the uses of the border is very distinct in both cases. In the Irish borderscape, North-South relations involve the two bordering states, as well as secondary foreign policy activities by the local authorities and are the key elements of an institutionalized peace process since the end of the 1990s. By contrast, the lack of involvement of the French and Spanish states in any institutionalized peace process has, to date, disconnected the issues of cross-border relations and conflict transformation. These different framings by the states also inform the distinct involvement of the EU in conflict transformation enterprises in the two borderscape contexts.

As a working hypothesis, we argue that CBC has experienced different processes of institutionalization in the Irish and the Basque cases, with very distinct roles played by the EU, having different effects on conflict transformation. CBC, in both cases, should not be seen as the miracle pill for conflict transformation. Rather the relationship between conflict transformation and CBC presents several, sometimes contradictory, aspects. In order to seize this pluralism, limiting the analysis to central, regional and local governmental actors would be reductive. On the contrary, we propose to observe how Third sector organizations as NGAs engage in secondary foreign policy by capturing CBC schemes and the potential consequences of this involvement for conflict transformation. By "Third sector", we mean the third 'non-public, nonprofit' sector as those organizations (associations, cooperatives or

foundations) presenting a formal constitution, a legally private status, the presence of a form of self-government, the non-redistribution of profits and the presence of volunteers (Salamon and Anheier, 1995). The uses of CBC schemes by local 'grassroots' actors are definitely plural and contingent, and cover very distinct results, ranging from their contribution to the constitution of effective cross-border network governance[2] to instrumental and "back-to-back" cooperation, with intermediate configurations.

Here, as in other conflictive border regions (see Wassenberg and Klatt's introduction), these contrasting uses of CBC result from a multiscalar action, associating EU, state and sub-state policy-makers. However, we argue that similarities and differences between both cases also need to be analysed through the cross-border activism of Third sector actors. We focus on CBC experiences led by the Third sector organizations. In Ireland, we will refer essentially to the community and voluntary sector. In the Basque case, we will consider the Third 'non-public, non-profit' sector, strictly speaking, as well as the cross-border configuration of 'social economy' oriented organizations (such as workers' cooperatives) which have a more developed economic activity but with limited redistribution of profits.

This empirical focus is justified in both cases. In the Basque case, Third sector organizations are located at the intersection between cross-border social movements related, in one way or another, to Basque identity and having a long experience of informal CBC, and policy-makers aiming at the institutionalization of CBC through bilateral or EU cooperation schemes. These Third sector organizations (associations, cooperatives or foundations) are involved in cross-border activities in multiple sectors: Basque language and culture, but also local and sustainable development, small-scale farming and the social economy. In the Irish case, Third sector organizations also have a long experience of working cross-border and have had a central role in promoting intercultural dialogue to advance conflict transformation. Thus, the aim is to provide evidence-based research on cross-border cooperation and the role of the Third sector in a Europeanized form of cross-border network governance that would potentially have a conflict transformation effect.

Most of the Irish/Basque comparative research to date has been devoted to a comparison between militant nationalisms (Irvin 1999), political violence and unconventional political participation (Justice 2005), historical approaches to the rise of nationalism (Flynn 2000), centre-periphery national conflicts (Letamendia 2001, Keating 2001), and conflict transformation processes (Bourne 2003; Alonso 2004; Bew, Frampton and Gurruchaga 2009; English 2009; Espiau 2010). This consistent body of literature is focused on the central role played by identity politics in the two last violent ethno-nationalist conflicts in Western Europe. While benefitting from this comparative base, the key added value of our research is its decentring approach through shifting the focus from governments, political parties and militant organizations to Third sector groups involved in cross-border cooperation (Kramsch and Hooper 2006). In some instances, Third sector organizations can be pivotal in the framing of the "secondary foreign policy" undertaken specifically by non-central governments in conflictive borderscapes (see Wassenberg and Klatt's introduction). Identity politics are contextualised here as 'horizons of meaning' shared by the actors (Taylor 1992). Actors, in this sense, can become aware of their identity when they experience themselves as part of a whole, of a cultural framework of values which gives meaning to both individual and societal experiences. However, these horizons of meaning inform rather than provide the central focus for our research. Our focus remains on the substantive role played by Third sector organizations in CBC as conflict transformation. By doing so, we do not eliminate the role played by ethnonational, ethnoreligious and/or ethnolinguistic identities. On the contrary, we argue that in both cases identity has been and is still a crucial factor in the structuring of CBC/non-cooperation; but we do not focus primarily on the political institutions and organizations which have built their legitimacy on identity politics. Rather, our endeavour is to assess in a qualified manner the degree of influence identity plays in the involvement of Third sector organizations in CBC in both regions. This nuanced approach allows us to observe, in both cases, the involvement of the Third sector in identity-related issues (such as linguistic and cultural ones). But the close analysis of the governance networks shows that CBC schemes can also be used by Third sector and political actors having very distinct and/or instrumental uses of these schemes.

The research builds on continuous fieldwork conducted by the two authors in their respective borderscapes over the past two decades. In the Basque case, 33 interviews were conducted between 2013 and 2016 with public, private and Third sector organizations, on both sides of the border, involved in 26 projects funded by CBC programmes. This paper also draws on previous research conducted around language policy (Harguindéguy and Itçaina 2015) and cross-border social economy (Itçaina and Manterola 2013) in the Basque Country. Research on the Irish case draws on evidence gathered from interviews conducted with 25 Third sector cross-border project providers funded under the EU Interreg programmes (from 1990) and EU Peace Programmes for Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of the Republic of Ireland (from 1995). They are supplemented by focus group material and further interviews with Third sector programme managers, civil servants, and relevant EU officials conducted between 2006 and 2015. The paper is structured as follows: building upon the available literature on conflict transformation and on the role of the EU in these processes, the first section examines the relationship between CBC and conflict transformation in the Basque and the Irish cases. The second section then focuses on the main results of comparative research among cross-border projects led by or involving Third sector organizations.

1. **Cross-border cooperation, the EU and conflict transformation:
    two contrasting processes of institutionalization**

In the regional realm, a network governance strategy is based on cross-sectoral, multi-level, transnational collaborations for tackling socio-economic problems that defy modern state approaches[3] (Reuter 2007). In the context of a borderscape, it may be argued that network governance is a particularly appropriate strategy for dealing with problems arising from socio-economic peripherality and ethno-national complexity because it prioritises local expertise and attempts to transcend the inhibiting effect of state borders in addressing such problems. The Basque and Irish borderscapes may be seen as laboratories for network governance in that the European Commission has sought to engage the Third Sector in decision-making, implementation and monitoring of its regional programmes Interreg and Leader and, additionally and crucially in the Irish case, the EU Peace programmes for

Northern Ireland and the border counties of the Republic of Ireland (commonly known as the 'Peace programmes') from 1995. In both cases, the progressive institutionalization of cross-border relations was strongly supported by the EU and opened a new set of opportunities for the increasing participation of Third sector actors, albeit within two very different contexts. In Ireland, cross-border relations were given a significant boost by the institutional process of conflict transformation emanating from the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, whereas in the Basque Country EU-sponsored cross-border collaboration developed first on a socio-economic, functional and – at first glance - depoliticized basis (Bray and Keating 2013, 144). However, these new policy instruments where seized upon by the nebula of the Basque social movement in order to enhance the affirmation of a cross-border ethnonational identity. In both these contexts, Third sector actors played a key role in this ongoing process of the institutionalization of cross-border relations.

1.1.   Two processes of conflict resolution and conflict transformation

On the one hand, conflict resolution refers to a situation where "armed conflicting parties in a (voluntary) agreement resolve to live peacefully with - and/or dissolve - their basic incompatibilities and henceforth cease to use arms against one another" (Wallersteen 2012, p. 50). In the Irish case, the mid-1990s paramilitary ceasefires and the subsequent British demilitarization of the Irish borderscape were important milestones for conflict resolution. However, political and cultural incompatibilities continued to undermine resolution. In the Basque case, a definitive step towards conflict resolution was made with the announcement by ETA[4] in 2010 and 2011 of the definitive cease of its armed activities (Whitfield 2014). This ceasefire, which resulted from a unilateral decision made by ETA and by the *abertzale*[5] left, did not lead to a political agreement with Spanish political authorities, even if discrete changes occurred concerning the release of some prisoners and the progressive return of refugees and exiled activists to the Basque Country. At this stage, the process of ending violence follows tracks (decommissioning, international mediation, prisoners' and refugees' status) which do not include the cross-border variable as a policy issue.

Conflict transformation, on the other hand, goes beyond the mere cessation of violence. It offers a more multi-level, multi-sectoral and long-term approach for structural change involving international, national and local political and cultural processes. Thus, Cordula Reimann states that "conflict transformation refers to outcome, process and structure oriented long-term peacebuilding efforts, which aim to truly overcome revealed forms of direct cultural and structural violence" (Reimann 2004, p. 10). Michel Foucher also maintains that conflict transformation between states and between borderscape communities is a process that benefits from at least five components: a national and local political will to end conflict and embark on the process of its transformation; intergovernmental cooperation on infrastructure projects and building social capital between the hitherto conflictual parties; an international dimension to the conflict transformation process with third party international actors providing an oversight role; common commemorative projects, including an exchange of collective memories on a conflictual past; and sustained local level cross-border communication, contact and cooperation (Foucher 2007).

In the Irish borderscape, the cessation of violence provided the impetus for conflict transformation involving the institutionalisation of CBC and network governance across the island of Ireland. By the institutionalization of CBC, we refer here to the process of stabilization and normalization of CBC through the provision of a raft of cross-border institutions by the 1998 Good Friday Agreement[6]. The 1998 Agreement was the result of a concerted collective effort aimed at ending a protracted violent conflict that was centred on the territorial status of Northern Ireland and involved Irish republicans, Ulster British loyalists and UK state security forces. The Agreement proposed a new form of governance that had consociational (Northern Ireland power-sharing) and transnational (cross-border, North/South and East-West) dimensions. The EU Peace programmes stretched this conflict transformation to the local level, involving the Third sector, with €2billion resulting in more than 23,000 infrastructural, economic, environmental, educational, training, social, and cultural projects since 1995 (Tonge, 2005; Hayward 2007).

The conflict transformation efforts in the Basque country lacked an institution-building dimension. Instead, since 2010, they have largely focused on the issue of victims (of all violence) and on reconciliation and remembrance. These issues were highly politicized on

the Spanish side of the border but also, and increasingly, on the French side. Basque peace groups, themselves polarized, have emerged since the mid-1980s. The decrease in political violence turned the work of peacebuilding organizations towards a work of memory and "living together". In this long-term process, cross-border relationships are framed by some political actors of the conflict (essentially *abertzale*) as potentially contributing to the agenda of conflict transformation (Zabalo and Imaz 2011). The promotion (by *abertzale* from both sides of the border) of new peace forums on the French side provides evidence of this enterprise. In both Basque and Irish cases, victims and remembrance continue to be fraught and divisive issues that have yet to be effectively addressed by statutory authorities. However, Third sector actors have grasped these issues through their projects organized at local level.

1.2.   The contrasting role of EU cross-border cooperation in conflict transformation

One of the key differences between Basque and Irish processes of conflict transformation is the role of the EU and the political framing of conflict transformation by relating it directly or indirectly to CBC. In a comparison between the role of EU in the conflict resolution in Cyprus, Northern Ireland and the Basque country, Angela K. Bourne (2003) outlined four possible scenarios for the potential of the EU. This typology is useful for advancing a comparative understanding of the Basque and the Irish borderscape cases. It informs our comparative study by referring to different processes of institutionalizing conflict transformation and CBC, and by pointing to changes of meaning between the initial framing of the EU policy and its phase of implementation.

According to *Scenario 1* ("stick catalyst" effect), the EU sought to induce change by creating new external circumstances, events or processes that change the internal co-ordinates of the conflict. The "stick catalyst" constituted an attempt to pressure parties to a conflict to change their behaviour.

In the Basque case, this track took the form of new EU measures to combat terrorism during the early 2000s. In Spain, both the governing People's Party (PP) and opposition Spanish

Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) actively pursued the collaboration of EU partners in the conduct of their state's anti-terrorism policy, notably in 2002 by submitting the names of radical Basque nationalist groups and persons for inclusion on the EU's lists of terrorist groups, persons and entities. The most controversial addition was that of Batasuna, which was outlawed in Spain (in 2003) but not in France. This scenario had two contradictory effects: first, the weakening of ETA; second, the intensification of political conflict. This "stick catalyst" policy also had a cross-border dimension, as illustrated by the European Arrest Warrant that was issued in 2010 against a French Basque member of Batasuna. In the Irish case, the 'stick catalyst' was much less significant, not least because the paramilitary ceasefires predated the introduction of EU counter-terrorism measures.

According to the *2nd scenario* ("carrots"), the EU may also "seek to catalyse the resolution of conflict within EU member and applicant states by providing incentives encouraging parties to a conflict to eschew conflict or pursue compromise" (Bourne 2003, p. 398). In Northern Ireland, the EU offered "carrots" to parties to the conflict through the provision of financial resources to promote cross-border and cross-community cooperation. Basque politicians had sought similar dispensation for the Basque country (Bourne, ibid.) The comparison with Northern Ireland was not well received by the Commission, given that "Northern Ireland was much more seriously disadvantaged by terrorism and it had a much less developed economic base" (Bourne 2003, p. 399). In 2006, the Basque Friendship Group was created in the European Parliament to promote the involvement of the EU in the Basque peace process, but with little impact given the opposition from French and Spanish governments. The *abertzale* and peace movements (Elkarri-Lokarri) were more successful in internationalizing, rather than Europeanizing, the peace process through the monitoring of the Basque peace talks since 2010 by *ad hoc* groups (such as the International Contact Group) and transnational peace organizations.

The Irish process constituted a source of inspiration and a strategic resource to *externalize* the Basque cause for Basque parties and social movements, especially but not exclusively from the *abertzale* side (Espiau 2010). However, these efforts did not lead to the involvement of EU institutions in conflict transformation. First, the opposition of Spanish and French governments to any internationalization of the conflict resolution impeded the

involvement of the EU in an Irish-type institutionalized peace process. Second, and in a similar way to other minority nationalisms (Elias 2008), the Euro-enthusiasm of Basque *abertzale* and of the Spanish Basque Government, on the issues related to peace *and* to multilevel governance (Borońska-Hryniewiecka 2016), gradually gave way to a form of Euro-pragmatism in response to the stagnation experienced by the Europe of Regions. Basque Nationalists quickly realized that the EU could be used for contrary strategic aims by the Spanish state and other Autonomous Communities, which would shift disputes about the Basque tax regime to the European level (Bourne 2008).

The *3rd scenario* is most relevant to the focus of this article. The EU may stimulate the resolution of conflicts through what Bourne calls "subversion": "parties to a conflict may be encouraged to cooperate with each other or make conciliatory moves as part of their compliance with the technical requirements of EU membership or as a consequence of functional objectives otherwise unrelated to the politics of conflict" (Bourne 2003: 400).

In the Irish case, cross-border relations were given a significant boost by the institutional process of conflict transformation emanating from the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, whereas in the Basque Country, EU-sponsored cross-border cooperation developed first on a socio-economic, functional and depoliticized basis.

The political, institutional and funding environment in the Irish borderscape altered radically after 1998. The 1998 Good Friday Agreement provided a new form of devolved consociational (power-sharing) government for Northern Ireland, involving Ulster British unionists and Irish nationalists, supplemented by the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) which is dedicated to cross-border cooperation, collaboration and coordination, and a number of North South Implementation Bodies for the implementation of policy on a cross-border basis[7]. By far the most important Implementation Body is the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) which was charged with managing EU programmes. The SEUPB represents an extra institutional tier at one remove from, but accountable to the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Irish Dáil (Parliament). In theory, it is a 'border transcending' institution that straddles two states and has a remit to manage and promote network governance in the Irish borderscape (O'Dowd and McCall 2008). In this regard, it manages

Intermediary Funding Bodies, drawn from the Third Sector, which oversee the funding of specific cross-border projects.

In the Basque case, in the context of the single market programme's emphasis on the removal of physical borders between member states, France and Spain supported more extensive CBC (Bourne 2003, p. 402; Harguindéguy 2007). CBC became increasingly institutionalized during the 1980s but, unlike the Irish case, on an inter-institutional partnership aimed at reinforcing socio-economic and, to a lesser extent, cultural cooperation between French and Spanish regional and local authorities, with no direct linkage to the Basque conflict. In 1983, the French Aquitaine region and the Spanish Basque Autonomous Community (BAC) were among the nine border regions which founded the Pyrenean Labour Community. Spain's entry to the Common Market saw a proliferation of institutional cooperation schemes. Cooperation between the BAC and Aquitaine developed after 1989, a period which coincided with the reform of structural funding and the impetus given to regional policy by the Single European Act. In the space of just 20 years, internal CBC had transformed from a marginal issue for European integration to an important strand of the European regional policy (Harguindéguy and Hayward 2012). To the identity-based cooperation of Basque movements was added institutional cooperation after Interreg funding became available in 1989.

In the Basque borderscape the institutionalization of CBC had ambivalent effects on conflict transformation. On the one hand, facilitating CBC represented for the *abertzale* an intermediate step towards the unification of the traditional seven provinces. The Spanish government also reinforced its own politicized reading when it opened a legal action against the Basque Government concerning its competences in CBC (Bourne 2003, p. 404). Incidentally, the development of CBC also contributed to pressuring French authorities to institutionalize partly the French Basque country (Letamendia 1997). In the Irish case, the effective operation of the cross-border institutions has been stymied by British unionist ministers in Northern Ireland who are keen to curtail the development of these institutions lest they begin to resemble an embryonic form of All-Ireland governance.

This 3rd scenario was probably the most developed but indirect aspect of the EU influence in the Basque question. It illustrates the gap between the initial aims of this EU-driven policy and changes of meaning, if not of policy, in its implementation phase. Bray and Keating (2013, pp. 144-145) shed light on the multiple understandings of the EU CBC policy in the Basque case. On the one hand, there was a gap between the initial aims of CBC as promoted by a European Commission stressing economic and functional considerations, thus downplaying the cultural and political elements, and its implementation by those Basque activists aiming at consolidating their pre-existing (Basque) 'national' networks. But the reverse was also true, given the functional use of EU CBC schemes by local actors who did not establish any connection between their CBC project and Basque nation-building.

Bourne foresaw a fourth "post-modernist" scenario: European integration, as a manifestation of broader processes of globalization, may transform and 'moderate' national identities (2003, p. 405). Some observers interpreted the development of a "post-modernisation" of identities as heralding a post-sovereign era (Bray and Keating 2013, p. 407). The Ibarretxe plan, as put forward by the then President of the Basque Autonomous Community in 2002, consisted of the commitment to a model of co-sovereignty between the Basque Country and Spain, freely and voluntarily shared, including a reinforcement of CBC. But this post-modernist approach did not help de-emphasize differences and thereby reduce the grounds for conflict dynamic. The Ibarretxe plan, on the contrary, was depicted as being a very nationalist one by its opponents. Thus, the influence of the EU on a postmodernist or 'postnational' scenario (Filibbi 2007) was not effective in the Basque case. Such 'postmodernist thinking' was also discerned in the Irish peace process of the 1990s, particularly in the 'post-nationalist' narrative of John Hume, then leader of the Social Democratic and Labour Party, though British unionist opponents, such as the Reverend Ian Paisley, detected "Jesuitical trickery" to mask Irish nationalist intent. Nevertheless, it has been argued that the infrastructure of governance delivered by the 1998 Good Friday Agreement contained intimations of postmodernity due to its transnational elements (McCall 2001).

According to the 'Bourne model', the scenario 2 ('carrots') and 3 ('subversion') present evidence of the EU contribution to distinct forms of institutionalized CBC in both

borderscapes. As a result, these new policy frameworks allowed the constitution of new cross-border governance networks, which included Third sector organizations.

2. **The involvement of Third sector in EU cross-border cooperation and its impact on conflict transformation**

In the first section, we have contrasted two distinct political framings of EU-sponsored CBC. The Irish case evidences an EU-sponsored *transformative* (and politicized) CBC in the Irish borderscape, as constituting one of the key elements of the institutionalized peace process. In the Basque case, an EU-sponsored *functional* (and depoliticized) CBC developed and achieved a consistent degree of institutionalization, with no direct connection to a peace process. These two contexts generated two distinct circumstances, opportunities and constraints for the Third sector.

The development of a cross-border institutional framework in the two borderscapes, as well as the role of the Third sector in the design and delivery of EU and other programmes, provides the architecture for the establishment of a form of network governance, allowing for processes of agenda-setting, devising and implementing public policies which are more flexible and transparent (Klijn and Skelcher 2007).

The Third sector may be viewed to be at one remove from territorial government and better placed to network with local grassroots organizations. Being part of an hybrid economic sector located "between" market economy and public economy, Third sector organizations, whether they take the organizational forms of community groups, charities, associations, or cooperatives, …, benefit from a social and territorial anchoring that give them specific skills in mediation. On the island of Ireland, the ability of SEUPB and the Third sector to nurture a form of network governance for the Irish borderscape is not solely a function of continued EU support for the Interreg and Peace programmes. It is also a function of Third sector organizations' ability to exploit global, EU and nation-state level opportunities (McCall and O'Dowd 2008). Similarly, Basque Third sector organizations exploited all the opportunities to enhance CBC. Far from being monopolized by the *abertzale*, this participation of grassroots

organizations was facilitated by the very local nature of many cross-border projects which followed the logic "of micro-politics rather than grand visions of nation-building" (Bray and Keating 2013, p. 147). In fact, the informal cooperation between Third sector organizations had largely anticipated the institutionalization of CBC. With ongoing institutionalization, Third sector organizations engaged in EU programmes as well as in cross-border policies implemented by regional and local authorities in various sectors: language and culture, but also sustainable economy, small-scale farming, tourism, memory and heritage.

2.1. Obstacles and disenchantment: The competing politicized framings of cross-border cooperation

The process has had to overcome institutional asymmetries and diverging political framings of CBC. In the Irish case, whereas the two states, potentially at least, provide strong and durable institutional support for intergovernmental or international cooperation, the institutional support for cross-border (transnational) network governance is very weak. Only a skeletal institutional framework for transnational cross-border cooperation exists comprising of the EU Commission, the NSMC, secretariat and Implementation Bodies (including the SEUPB), the Third Sector organizations charged with implementation.

The work of North/South transnational network governance institutions - the NSMC, secretariat and Implementation Bodies (including the SEUPB) – has felt the restraining hand of territorial actors and institutions, notably the Northern Ireland Department of Finance, as well as Northern Ireland British unionist ministers who remain anxious about the place of Northern Ireland in the United Kingdom and see 'North-Southery', to use their pejorative term, as something to be curtailed lest it give succour to Irish nationalist 'United Ireland' aspirations. In this case, if we follow Klijn & Skelcher' typology (2007), unionist political elites have a critical perception of governance networks as being "incompatible". From this perspective, an open participation of different actors (public, private, Third sector…) to governance networks is perceived as challenging the legitimacy of representative democracy. Accountability ultimately lies with the elected politicians, which renders it difficult to overcome inherited divisions. Moreover, the claim that such network governance amounts to secondary foreign policy is anathema to this political constituency because its

identity is firmly rooted in the union of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, with foreign policy being the sole preserve of the UK Government at Westminster.

With the suspension of the guiding NSMC between 2002 and 2007, due to a political disagreement on the disarmament of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), the SEUPB faced a difficult infancy in balancing management and development, as well as all-island and cross-border aspects. During this suspension, its pivotal position in a transnational governance network, stretching from the local community level to the supranational level - principally through managing EU Interreg and Peace Programme funding - was constrained by traditional hierarchical territorial governance, particularly in the form of the Northern Ireland Department of Finance and Personnel which attempted to keep a tight reign on the SEUPB during this period. Though suspension of the institutions was lifted in 2007 British unionist politicians serving as ministers in the Northern Ireland devolved administration have remained unenthusiastic about supporting CBC in general and cross-border infrastructural projects in particular.

In the Basque case, CBC had first to overcome institutional asymmetries: the gap between the Aquitaine region and the BAC (which has a budget ten times greater), not to mention Navarre, has created an asymmetrical arrangement. The same applies to the difference between the extensive fiscal powers of the Basque Provincial Deputations and those of the Pyrénées-Atlantiques General Council, and the central role of the representative of the French state. These institutional asymmetries problematised the engagement of Third sector organizations in CBC.

In contrast, to the south of the border, the BAC was controlled between 1980-2009, and after 2012, by the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV), either alone or in coalition, which, during this period, saw CBC as an opportunity to strengthen ties between Basques and to develop a secondary foreign policy while disregarding the level of the state (Totoricagüena 2005; Bourne 2008;) and to use the European multi-level governance for their own regional empowerment (Borońska-Hryniewiecka 2016). The Navarrese government represented a third configuration with conservative or socialist majorities (before 2015) which favoured a functional approach to cooperation, carefully distancing themselves from Euskadi.

Before the mid-1990s, the lack of territorial institutions in the French Basque Country served as a brake on the effective development of CBC. This situation changed with the establishment of the Development Council, the Council of Elected Representatives for the Basque Country, and the Basque Cultural Institute. These institutions were compromises between nationalists, civil society and public authorities which were partly intended to compensate for the refusal by the State to create a new *département* (Ahedo 2005). These "quasi-governmental institutions" (Klijn and Skelcher 2007) constituted examples of the "complementary conjecture" (ibid.), where governance networks become a means of enabling greater participation of civil society organizations in the policy process and sensitivity in programme implementation. The joint expertise of these new institutions led to the signing of territorial development plans by local and regional authorities and the state. CBC thus figured among the new priorities. Cross-border policies were promoted by heterogeneous coalitions of actors who had instrumental and/or identity-related visions for border reconfiguration. Territorial institutionalisation went a step further in January 2017 when the French Basque Country constituted a unique inter-municipal structure, with potentially more leverage in CBC.

This plurality of political visions of CBC was also to be found among Third sector organizations engaged in CBC. From a Basque nationalist perspective, CBC was seen as a way to strengthen the nation building process, with an opportunistic use of policy instruments. From a second standpoint, while acknowledging the side-effect of CBC as reinforcing a shared Basque identity, CBC projects were first designed to implement sectoral projects organised on a cross-border basis, as in the cross-border association of Basque organic farmers (EHKA) established in 2014[8]. A third category of project denied the Basque identity of the border region, by considering their projects as resulting from a purely Franco-Spanish CBC, as was the case for those projects aimed at social integration through economic activity (Itçaina and Manterola 2013).

2.2.   Competing identity horizons at work: Third sector organizations and cross-border cooperation in matters of minority languages, culture and remembrance

Are these contingent and plural uses of CBC to be found in the sectors which are the most 'identity- sensitive'? By way of illustration, the existence of a cross-border cultural identity in both cases, signalled by the importance attached to minority languages (principally Gaelic and Basque), has historically given impetus to cross-border mobilisation. In the Basque borderscape, grassroots mobilisation was aimed at compensating for the shortfall in the legal status of language on the French side. In Ireland, the 1998 Good Friday Agreement constituted a North/South Language Implementation Body in response to lobbying by minority language activists and the cultural identity agendas of Irish nationalist political parties in negotiations leading to the 1998 Agreement (Coakley, Ó Caoindealbháin, and Wilson, 2006).

However, in Northern Ireland, Gaelic is most closely associated by British unionists with the 'Irish republican struggle' (McCoy 1997; Pritchard 2004). In an effort to counteract the development of Gaelic in Northern Ireland, and especially its ability to attract UK government funding as a medium for education, unionist cultural entrepreneurs resurrected an 18th century Ulster-Scots dialect of the English language (McCall 2002). Institutionally, the result has been that the North/South Language Body is composed of 2 bodies: Foras na Gaeilge representing the Gaelic language and Tha Boord o Ulster-Scotch representing Ulster-Scots. Cultural difference in 'post-conflict' Northern Ireland is often asserted in terms of the Gaelic language versus the Ulster-Scots dialect. As such, these markers of identity provide a platform for the extension of conflict by cultural means. British unionist resistance to an Irish (Gaelic) Language Act for Northern Ireland is but one pillar of this conflict that can destabilise the post-1998 power-sharing dispensation between British unionists and Irish nationalists in Northern Ireland, as when the Irish nationalist Northern Ireland Deputy First Minister resigned in January 2017, sundering the joint office of First and Deputy First Ministers and triggering fresh elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly.

A similar identification between language activism and minority nationalism can be witnessed in the Basque country. Such a perception was reinforced by the cross-border internal structure of many of the organizations supporting linguistic and cultural mobilisations. A second cross-border flux was constituted by funding agreements passed

between public bodies from the South and associative bodies from the North, due to the lack of Basque linguistic policy on the French side. A policy-change occurred in the 1990s and -2000s with the emerging institutionalisation, on the French side, of Basque culture first, with the foundation of the Basque cultural institute (*Institut culturel basque* ICB) in 1990, and language policy with the Public Office for the Basque Language (*Office public de la langue basque* OPLB) in 2005. Both bodies were conceived as mediators between public authorities and civil society organizations, the former remaining an association (ICB) and the latter endorsing a public status (OPLB)[9]. Both engaged in cross-border partnerships associating Third sector organizations and public authorities via EU schemes and cross-border bilateral agreements such as the 2006 agreement between the OPLB and the CAB government (Harguindéguy and Itçaina 2015). The bilateral agreements on CBC also had a spin-off effect on the implicit public recognition of the Basque language on the French side, despite its lack of official status there. In its statutes, the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) Aquitaine-Euskadi recognized French, Spanish *and* Basque as working languages, thus contributing to such a process[10]. Incidentally, these new governance networks around the issue of Basque language also provided opportunities for language activists to become advisors to policy-makers.

This nascent institutionalization of a language policy for *euskera* in the French Basque country did not prevent Third sector organizations from continuing to self-organize on a cross-border basis, sometimes by referring to EU policy instruments for social economy. In 2009, a European Cooperative Society was created between the Northern and Southern networks of Basque language immersive schools *Ikastolak*[11]. Even if not as conflictive as in Ireland, this process of language institutionalization met some resistance, especially on the French side. Along with the expected Jacobine reactions, there was also an attempt to revitalize the *gascon* language on the French Basque coastal zone, partly as a response to the predominance of Basque language activism. This local "Ulster-Scots like" revitalization did not have any significant impact given the very weak sociolinguistic situation of this variant of Occitan, but a minimum level of official recognition was achieved, as testified by the trilingual (French, Basque, Gascon) road signs in the Bayonne area.

In both cases, the consolidation of territorial and CBC policy instruments in favour of minority languages had ambivalent effects. On the one hand, these instruments granted some institutional recognition to minority languages, thus contributing to defusing the issue by satisfying partially the language activists' claims. On the other hand, this emerging process of institutionalization of language was perceived by its opponents as a further concession made by policy-makers to *one* party to the conflict, the one advocating for the political and cultural unification of, respectively, Ireland and the Basque Country.

Beyond linguistic issues, local historical memory cross-border projects have been important repositories of the ethno-national conflict experience (see Harvey et al 2005). These projects usually involve the participation of Third Sector organizations. In Ireland, for example, the Cross Border Archive Project, funded through Interreg IIIA, was a joint initiative between Newry and Mourne Museum in the North and Louth County Archives Service in the South. It provides web-based historical information on the development of the Newry & Mourne – Louth region that may be of interest to tourists, schools, academic researchers, and the general public. Its stated aim is to provide a forum for social inclusion, cross-community dialogue, peacebuilding and reconciliation[12]. Another project, 'Whatever You Say, Say Something', was provided by the Healing Through Remembering group and involved the airing of the experiences of those on both sides of the border, and from Irish nationalist and Ulster British communities, who have been directly affected by the conflict. The project's conversation workshops resonated with the 'bottom-up' approach to conflict transformation advocated by John Paul Lederach (1997)[13].

Local historical memory cross-border projects were designed in two very distinct ways in both cases. In the Irish borderscape, these projects were designed *within* the peace process, and were funded as such, as a further attempt to overcome ethnonational divisions through re-examining the past. In the Basque borderscape, local historical memory cross-border projects were underpinned by two different sets of motivations. Local memory projects supported by institutional CBC funding aimed at re-building a shared memory on local cross-border historical topics: memory of pastoralism in Garazi-Aezkoa[14] and of the mining industry in the valley of Aldudes[15], memory of smuggling, etc. Apart from the institutional

CBC, the *abertzale* movement, for its part, developed projects in order to reinforce its own nationalist narrative on the history of the border, such as, in 2012, the commemoration of the 1512 conquest of the kingdom of Navarre by Castilla. In the Irish borderscape, historical memory projects examined versions of Irish histories that revealed erstwhile hidden commonality. For example, the pivotal year of 1916 had been read as either the Easter Rising (Irish nationalists) or the sacrifice of the 36th Ulster Division at the Battle of the Somme (British unionists). Such encounters were important for remembering the Irish Volunteers who also fell at the Somme.

2.3. Economic difficulties, political uncertainties, and the sustainability of cross-border cooperation

In addition to political difficulties, the 2008 economic crisis impacted upon these processes of institutionalization of CBC in both territories, but with a more pronounced impact in the Irish borderscape. In the Irish borderscape, EU funding for Third Sector cross-border initiatives is diminishing and precarious. Moreover, the post-2008 economic crisis had a decimating impact on Irish state finances and any hopes of British-Irish intergovernmental support for sustaining transnational cross-border co-operation were dashed. Compounding the challenge was a condescending disregard for transnational actors among territorial elites (O'Dowd and McCall 2008). When interviewed about issues of cross-border cooperation and the operation of the SEUPB in Ireland the then Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs asked disdainfully, "the SEUPB? What's that?"[16]. However, it is 'Brexit' that presents a fundamental challenge to CBC in the Irish borderscape. With the UK Government intent on extracting the UK from the EU (including the Single Market and Customs Union) in pursuance of a 'Global Britain'[17], it was reasonable to conclude that Northern Ireland and the Irish borderscape did not feature on its radar. Brexit threatened to turn the Irish border tide from 'soft' to 'hard' with deleterious consequences for communication, contact and cooperation across it.

The consequences of the economic crisis were present, but to a lesser extent, in the Basque borderscape. However, and even if the Basque autonomous community and Navarra were in a relatively better situation than the rest of Spain, budget constraints decided by the regional authorities had also some consequences for CBC. Significantly, in 2013, the

Navarrese government did not issue the Aquitaine-Navarre 2014 bilateral call for projects, prioritizing instead the preservation of jobs in the public sector[18]. As a result, unlike the Aquitaine-Euskadi Euroregion, the Aquitaine-Navarra common fund displayed an asymmetrical character, which raised doubts about its sustainability. These doubts were partially lifted with the slight improvement of the Spanish economic situation after 2014 and the 2015 political change in Navarra.

Conclusions

 A first set of conclusions addresses the ambivalent role of ethnonational identities. In Ireland, Irish nationalist and British unionist ethnonational identities have shifted in large part from a conflictual relationship based on antagonism to a working political relationship that may be described by agonism or adversarialism (Mouffe 2005). Adversarialism still informs attitudes to CBC: nationalists are overwhelmingly in favour, unionists are much more wary and circumspect. However, Third Sector 'unionist' grassroots groups have engaged with many 'hard' infrastructural and 'soft' capital (conflict transformation) CBC projects. In the Basque borderscape as well, identity played the double role of resource and constraint for the establishment of cross-border networks of governance. First and despite an apparent paradox, initiatives motivated strongly by identity (minority language and culture, but also in sustainable farming and social economy), despite being constructed as alternatives to action by public authorities, are today effectively spearheading Third sector secondary foreign policy activities in cross-border governance networks. In the Basque case, the skills of identity activists, who are *also* experienced Third sector activists, have become a source of expertise for building a framework of public action which is now looking for projects that offer some structure. On the downside, Basque identity played a negative role by hindering the institutional relations between the regional governments of Euskadi and Navarra (before 2015), thus leading to separate agreements with their French regional counterpart. In other words, secondary foreign policy led by Third sector organizations may be encouraged, but also hindered, by central foreign policy carrying distinct approaches of identity and cross-border relations.

Secondly, in both territories, EU schemes were used to enhance CBC, but with different scopes. In the Irish borderscape, the participation of the Third Sector was seen as a crucial

condition for conflict transformation, through cross-community and cross-border cooperation. In the Basque borderscape, the institutional framework for cross-border relations did not refer to a potential peace process that, since 2010, followed a separate political path. Rather, it provided a functional rationale for cross-border initiatives. Nevertheless, Third Sector organizations used these new institutional opportunities in order to reinforce their previous identity-based cross-border networks.

Finally, the comparative effort undertaken in this paper needs to be extended to further sectors where the presence of Third sector organizations in cross-border matters is a relevant one. Social services, sports and leisure, workers' cooperatives, sustainable development initiatives, among others, should fall under our examination. Such an empirical extension would reinforce our general claim in favour of a new comparative design between two Western European borderscapes experiencing both a post-violent conflict situation, enduring identity-based territorial politics, a global economic and financial crisis, and a challenged perception of European integration as a functional resource for territorial development and as a source of legitimacy for minority rights. Focusing on the role played by the Third sector in the constitution, consolidation but also the fragility of cross-border governance networks provides one glimpse of the state of the European Union 'from below'.

Endnotes

1. The Basque borderscape comprises of the French Basque region, which is part of the department of the Pyrénées-Atlantiques, and the Spanish Basque areas belonging to the Basque Autonomous Community and to the Foral Community of Navarra. The Irish borderscape comprises of local authority areas, North and South, that are contiguous to the border.
2. Network governance is 'public policy making and implementation through a web of relationships between government, business and civil society actors' (Klijn and Skelcher 2007, p. 587).
3. 'Cross-sectoral' includes public, private, trade union and the Third sectors. 'Multilevel' includes local, regional, national and supranational levels of governance.
4. Euskadi ta Askatasuna, Basque Country and Freedom.
5. Basque nationalist.
6. The institutions provided by the 1998 Agreement include the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) and six North South Implementation Bodies with managerial responsibility for food safety (SafeFood), minority languages (Language Body consisting of two agencies, Foras na Gaeilge and Tha Boord o Ulster-Scotch), trade and business development (InterTrade Ireland), aquaculture (Loughs Agency), waterways (Waterways Ireland), and EU Programmes

(SEUPB). Tourism Ireland Ltd is a semi-official body was also established to promote the island as a tourist destination.

7. East-West, British-Irish institutions - the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference and the British-Irish Council - were also provided by the Good Friday Agreement.
8. Interview, Biharko Lurraren Elkartea (Association of French Basque organic farmers), 2013.
9. Interviews, ICB and OPLB, 2016.
10. Article 14, *Statuts du GECT Aquitaine-Euskadi*, 12 December 2011.
11. Interview, Director of Seaska, Bayonne, 2013.
12. See http://www.louthnewryarchives.ie (accessed 22/04/2016).
13. http://healingthroughremembering.info/images/uploads/HTR_annual_report_2010.pdf (accessed 29/05/2016).
14. Interview, municipality community of Garazi, 2013.
15. Interview, municipality of Banca, 2013.
16. Interview, Dundalk, 22 May 2007.
17. http://www.conservativehome.com/parliament/2016/04/theresa-mays-speech-on-brexit-full-text.html (accessed 18/01/2017).
18. Interview, Government of Navarra, 2013.

Acknowledgments

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