

# Changing intra-European borders through secession: Explanations for the attitude towards nation states and the EU in separatist regions within the EU.

**Johannes Rabenschlag, University of Mainz**

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Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz  
Department of Political Science  
Chair of International Relations

Georg Forster-Building  
D-55099 Mainz  
Phone: +49 (0)6131-39-21051  
Fax: +49 (0)6131-39-27109  
E-mail: [mpiep@uni-mainz.de](mailto:mpiep@uni-mainz.de)  
<http://international.politics.uni-mainz.de/>

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**Johannes Rabenschlag** is a PhD student at the University of Mainz

[jrabensc@students.uni-mainz.de](mailto:jrabensc@students.uni-mainz.de)

# Changing intra-European borders through secession: Explanations for the attitude towards nation states and the EU in separatist regions within the EU. <sup>1</sup>

Johannes Rabenschlag

## Abstract

It seems reasonable to suppose that Brexit has influence on separatist movements in the EU, making the exit from the EU an actual possibility. This has an impact either on the national level like Italy, which threatens to leave the Eurozone or on sub-national level like Scotland, which threatens to leave the United Kingdom to remain in the EU. Obviously, the direction of the refusal differs in these examples: There is an urge to part from the EU and there is an urge to part from a nation state. The motivation for such behavior is often based on the (perceived) loss of independence. Therefore, it should be assumed that regions want to leave nation states as well as the EU. However, this assumption cannot be observed in studying press coverage or statements made by the respective politicians. There are regions like Scotland or Catalonia which want to leave their nation states but stay in or join the EU. Regarding the rejected loss of independence, this behavior seems irrational, as the gain of power of the separation from a nation state would be lost again when joining the EU. Therefore, analyzing the attitudes of the people in certain regions have towards their nation state and the EU seems a promising tool for further researching this anomaly.

**Keywords: Secession, Euroscepticism, Brexit, European Union, European Regions.**

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<sup>1</sup> The article is based on a master thesis submitted to the Institute of Political Science at the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz in August 2018.

## **1. Introduction**

When a region parts from a host state, the process is called secession. It occurs in multiple shapes and characteristics. For example, the secession must not necessarily result in a distinct separation, but there are different possible outputs. Examples could be just more autonomy in certain policy fields like taxes, culture, and education without the actual and clear separation. However, all phenomena labelled secession do have one similarity: they are final. According to Young (1994, pp. 791–792), “there has never been a case of reunification after secession. The whole project of the seceding state is to acquire more autonomy. The exercise of these greater powers would be compromised by integrative arrangements”.

At first, this statement seems comprehensible. However, there are recent developments which are contradictory to this assumption. The current situation in Scotland is one example for this. Since the Brexit took place, a rising number of politicians from Scotland openly think about a secession from the United Kingdom and an accession to the EU becomes a realistic possibility, supposedly through another referendum (Campanella, 2014; Anderson, 2017; Brown, 2017; Wirtz, 2017).

Another example is the current situation in Catalonia (Oskam, 2014; Cuadras-Morató, 2016; Guinjoan and Rodon, 2016; Clua-Losada, 2018; Rodon and Guinjoan, 2018; Lecours, 2018). The independence movement, which wants Catalonia to be separated from Spain, received increasing attention. In 2017, a referendum took place, which resulted in the flight of the movements’ leader, Carles Puigdemont, to Belgium and repressive reactions of the Spanish government. However, the secessionist movement clearly states that an independent Catalonia would seek to join the EU, as Puigdemont (2017) points out: “Catalan citizens are [...] European [...], we want to contribute to [...] European governance.

Besides those quite current examples, other regions in the EU express similar attitudes. Flanders, a prosperous region in Belgium shows support for a secession from their host state. The rising separatist party Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie (N-VA) (2018) clearly stresses that they want Flanders to join the EU if they would secede from Belgium: “The N-VA wants a stronger Flanders in a stronger Europe. After all, more and more challenges are arising in this globalized world that we must deal with at a supranational level. The macro level for us is the European Union”. Laible (2008) names the party as cautious positive towards the EU. Another example is South Tyrol, where parties as well demand autonomy from Italy, but at the same time want to give the control over their currency-, defense- and external policies to the EU (Betancur et al., 2012).

To summarize, all those regions have two things in common: they want to gain autonomy from their host state but at the same time give up the same or similar autonomy to another host, which is the EU. This seems somehow contradictory to the assumptions by Young (1994), who argued that integrative arrangements would be diametrical to the desire for more autonomy and therefore would not happen. This paper tries to explain this anomaly using the common explanations for a secession and the attitude towards the EU.

## **2. Literature Review**

According to Bartkus (1999, p. 6), secessions are a “less-well developed area of social science and international relations research”. However, since this statement, a lot of work was published covering different perspectives of a secession. Two important angles can be identified: First, why secessions happen, and second, why are some secessions successful and others not. For this paper, the first aspect is important.

This section will present a short overview of the literature on the one hand around the phenomenon secession and on the other hand the attitude towards the EU. A secession is accompanied

by or a result of a negative attitude towards a host state. Hence, only the negative attitude towards the EU is considered, mostly referred to as Euroscepticism. The most influential work in the area of secession research is Wood (1981, p. 107), who first noted a missing “systematic way of analyzing the origins [...], the conditions [...] [and] the consequences” of secessions and therefore developed a first model. Based on this framework, a lot of other work was published, highlighting different aspects: the work of Bookman (1992), Ayres and Saideman (2000), Sorens (2004), Sorens (2005), Piris (2017) or Ryabinin (2017) stressed the relationship of economic aspects and secessions<sup>2</sup>. Additionally, the cultural difference to the host state and a perceived discrimination seem to play an important role in the cultivation of secessionist movements (cf. Smith (1979), Heraclides (1992), Sorens (2005), Walter (2006), Schaeffer (2008), Coggins (2011), and Alaaldin (2015)).

Summing up, two angles of explanations can be identified throughout the research on secessions: First, citizens feel a negative impact on their economic circumstances and second, they feel cultural and ethnic distinct from the host state. The evaluation of European integration measures is a central issue in research on the European Union. Especially the negative attitude towards the EU is of relevance and is mostly referred to as Euroscepticism. Research on this phenomenon is numerous. Based on the frequently cited work of Taggart (1998), a lot of work has paid attention to this phenomenon (cf. Hooghe and Marks (2007), McLaren (2002) or Vries and van Kersbergen (2007)). This seems reasonable, as “Euroscepticism has become increasingly mainstreamed, in the sense that it has become increasingly more legitimate and salient [...] across Europe as a whole” (Brack and Startin (2015, p. 240)). Like the research in the area of secessions, two perspectives are mainly covered: the nature of dissatisfaction with the EU and the circumstances which drive those attitudes.

Especially the latter angle is relevant for this paper. There is work stating that the subjective (cf. Gabel (1998)) or objective economic situation (cf. Eichenberg and Dalton (2007)) is responsible for the rise of a critical attitude towards the EU. A national identity which is suppressed by the EU is another commonly named explanation (cf. Carey (2002), McLaren (2002), McLaren (2004), Bruter (2005), or McLaren (2007)). Ideology and parties (cf. Hooghe (2007), Lubbers and Scheepers (2010) or Steenbergen et al. (2007)) or immigration (cf. Stockemer et al. (2018)) are other often referred to issues.

Both terms describe a similar phenomenon, only situated on different levels: An entity wants to gain more independence from or become less integrated into another entity on a macro level because of distinctive identifiable issues. There is barely work on the connection of secessions within member states and Euroscepticism. One example is Laible (2008) but the author misses the latest important developments like the Brexit or the referendum in Catalonia. Additionally, because of the qualitative approach, a generalization of the results is only to a limited extent possible, but they will be the base of the hypotheses which will be quantitatively tested in this paper. Other work on the assumed connection include Keating (2004) or Bourne (2014). However, they miss a quantitative approach as well.

Summing up, this section has shown that there are two phenomena, secessions and Euroscepticism, which are respectively widely researched but, when put together, are missing a systematic approach, especially given the newest developments like Brexit. Therefore, this paper clearly fills a gap in research.

### 3. Theory and Hypotheses

Before introducing the hypotheses, the two theoretical phenomena presented in the section above should be described in more detail focusing, especially, on their connection. I argue that Euroscepticism can be viewed as a manifestation of a secession. In other words: Euroscepticism describes the special case of a secession or a secessionist movement from the EU. To underline this, three lines of argumentation are presented in the upcoming paragraphs.

First, both phenomena have a similar definition but differ only on the target of their rejection: the respective host country or the EU. This becomes quite clearer, when the term secession is broader

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<sup>2</sup> The direction of the effect is still not confirmed. Some authors argue that there is a negative connection, others argue for a positive connection.

defined: The separation from a host country does not always result ultimately in the creation of a new state, but rather often just gives the separatist region more rights and autonomy of certain policy areas. This is easily comparable with Eurosceptical demands for more autonomy for the European member states without parting the union. To deepen this proposed comparison, the upcoming section will introduce both theoretical frameworks in more detail.

A secession is “demand for formal withdrawal from a central political authority by a member unit or units on the basis of a claim to independent sovereign status” (Hechter (1992, p. 267)). The final target is not necessarily a complete sovereign state but there can be also some mixed models, like for example a fundamental independence without actually leaving the host state (cf. Heraclides (1992, p. 400)). Wood (1981, p. 110) specifies the term secession rather technical by describing it as a “demand for formal withdrawal from a central political authority” whereas other researchers stress the use or threat of force (cf. Bartkus (1999, p. 10), Dahlitz (2003, p. 6), Brancati (2006, p. 654) or Crawford (2006, p. 375)). In the EU, until now no secessionist region tried to achieve a secession by force, therefore, a definition which stresses the political disintegration will be used in this article.

Having a critical view on the EU which can be found within most of the member states is described using the term Euroscepticism. It is defined as “contingent or qualified opposition, as well as incorporating outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration” (Taggart (1998, p. 366)). This definition specifies the object of opposition as the European integration and not the EU itself. But, as pointed out for example by Leruth et al. (2017, 3-4), Euroscepticism is “profoundly elusive” to define. Hence, the term addresses negative attitudes towards the integration process, the EU or certain aspects, policies or areas which relate to the European Union in a broader sense (cf. Sørensen (2008, p. 6)). In this article, Euroscepticism is defined as a negative attitude of citizens within a European Union member state towards the EU. The negative attitude ranges from a distinct separation from the EU like the Brexit to a constitutive change of the political nature of the EU (cf. Flood and Usherwood (2007, p. 3)). The latter is mostly accompanied by demands like moving a certain policy area back to the responsibility of the national governments but without giving up the European project entirely.

To describe different forms of Euroscepticism, multiple dimensions of Euroscepticism were brought forward, ranging from a binary system (cf. Rovny (2004, p. 37)), to four (cf. Kopecký and Mudde (2002, p. 303)) or six (cf. Flood and Usherwood (2007, p. 7)) categories. However, the differentiation between soft and hard Euroscepticism is the most common one and therefore used in this article. Soft Euroscepticism refers to an opposition to certain areas within the EU. Taggart and Szczerbiak (2002, p. 2) stress the “qualified opposition” when using this term. Therefore, when an attitude is considered as soft Eurosceptic, it could oppose for example common fiscal policies but at the same time does not question the existence of the EU. Whereas hard Euroscepticism completely opposes the membership of a member state in the EU, like for example the attitudes which lead to the Brexit. In this sense, the EU as an integrating project is complete rejected (cf. Taggart and Szczerbiak (2002, p. 7)).

Both terms can be interpreted as a pronounced scale of Euroscepticism ranging from light critics to heavy opposition. Besides this differentiation, the determinants, and reasons for being sceptical towards the EU are similar. Bringing the above together, both phenomena share the base assumptions regarding the relevant actors (host entity, member entity) and the same structures (member entity wants to leave host entity to become its own host). Therefore, a first line of argumentation for an equation is developed.

The second perspective of argumentation are the theoretical determinants of both a secession and Euroscepticism. They are clearly similar, which will be argued for in the upcoming paragraphs, starting with the theoretical assumptions of secessions. Bartkus (1999, p. 4) argues that solely the economic aspects of a secession can be considered as determinants of a secession. He confronts the costs and benefits of a continued membership with the costs and benefits of a secession. If there is a change in

the ratio of those variables, a secession likely occurs<sup>3</sup>. Economic issues as a reason for a secession are also brought up by Sorens (2004, 2005). He points out that “relatively high-income regions” tend to be more open to a secession (Sorens (2005, p. 310)). Additionally, he finds an effect of increasing as well as decreasing economic situation of a region compared to the rest of the country as a driver of secessionist movements (Sorens (2004, p. 728)). Following this, no clear effect of economic circumstances can be derived, and the literature is unanimous on this relationship. For example, Smith (1979, p. 23) or Ryabinin (2017, p. 7) propose a dissatisfaction with an economic situation as a reason for regions to rebel whereas Walter (2006, p. 109) names economic resources as a condition for a secession. Hence, a clear decision on this issue cannot be given.

Besides the economic dimension there is a lot of attention given in research to the cultural and ethnic aspect of a region which clearly influences the urge to separate from a host state. Especially the existence of a distinct region or “community” (Heraclides (1992, p. 401)) are a strong indicator for a secessionist movement. Alaaldin (2015) calls this a “‘them and us’ framework”. Supposedly, this effect is even greater when a minority experiences “discrimination or exclusion at the hands of majorities” (Schaeffer (2008, p. 1890)). A strong and united group is also more easily able to gather around a separatist issue and mobilize (Coggins (2011, p. 441)), especially due to modern communication means like the internet (McGarry et al. (2006, p. 6)). To conclude, two theoretical angles are considered as determinants of a secession or movements which are subsumed under this term: the economic situation, both subjective and objective as well as the perceived cultural and/or ethnical distinctiveness and mostly accompanied by discerned disadvantages or discrimination from the majority population.

One of the most common explanation for having Eurosceptic views is the economic situation, both perceived and objective. This is explained by Hooghe and Marks (2007, p. 120) using the steady evaluation of the EU by citizens regarding its economic effects. The EU is simply rated by its costs and benefits (cf. McLaren (2007, p. 237)). Therefore, an economic situation which satisfies the needs of the citizens correlates positively with the evaluation of the EU (cf. Gabel (1998, p. 351)). For example, the austerity policies introduced due to the financial crisis in 2008 lead to a decrease of support for the EU (cf. Treib (2014, p. 1551)).

Besides the economic dimension, cultural issues play another great role when predicting the attitudes towards the EU. Having a strong national identity, especially an exclusive one (cf. Vries and van Kersbergen (2007, p. 311)), influence to a great extent the negative evaluation of the EU (cf. Luedtke (2005, p. 102)). Citizens fear that they lose their unique identity<sup>4</sup>, mostly based on aspects like language, history, sports, and art (cf. Wilde (2010, p. 12)). Vries and van Kersbergen (2007, p. 308) argue that both the economic and the cultural dimension “fit in one single explanatory framework of support for European integration”. Therefore, this article will concentrate on both, leaving other less often tested approaches out of the research design. This paragraph has shown that both phenomena, Eurosceptical and secessionist movements have the same determinants and explanations, backing the argument of this article that both are the same phenomenon, or more accurate: similar aspects in different contexts.

Third, both phenomena resemble each other to the extent that both are no distinct political ideology but rather accompanying other ideologies. In the case of Euroscepticism, for example Rovny (2004, p. 36) argues that Euroscepticism can be viewed as an “appendix, likely to be attached to original [...] identities”. This is confirmed by Serricchio et al. (2013, p. 54) who points out that as well as left-wing as right-wing parties tend to be Eurosceptic whereas more centrist parties are more likely to support the EU. Sørensen (2008, p. 8) backs this as well.

The same can be contested for secessionist movements. As for independence striving regions do not have necessarily similar ideologies, secessionist drives are able to append themselves to multiple ideologies. Of course, at the very core of an independence movement lies Nationalism. But, there are different motives for and shapes of Nationalism, making it a multidimensional ideology (cf. Jaffrelot

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<sup>3</sup> This is indirectly backed by Anesi (2012, p. 53) who argues that a central government is trying regions to believe a separation would be too costly and economically unreasonable.

<sup>4</sup> This effect relates to the evaluation of migration as well, because the EU is seen as responsible for immigration issues (cf. Stockemer *et al.* (2018)).

(2005)). This underlines that secessionist movements add themselves to different forms of nationalism and therefore different ideologies as well.

For example, South Tyrol was heavily suppressed under the Fascist rule (cf. Lantschner (2008, p. 7) making the fight against the Italian government anti-fascist whereas today South Tyrol independent movement is considered as a right-wing movement (cf. Carlà (2016, p. 58)). Another case is the Catalanian party Crida Nacional per la República which tries to include other parties and movements from the complete political axis (cf. Crida Nacional per la República (2020)) using a catch-all approach. This highlights again the independence of secessionist movements from certain political ideologies.

The aforementioned third line of argumentation showed that both phenomena are supplements to other ideologies and cannot be viewed as a distinct political ideology. That is another argument to consider them both as the same phenomenon. Coming back to the determinants and explanations for Euroscepticism and secessionist movements, they should occur at the same time. In other words: When a region wants to leave its host country to get a greater autonomy in economic issues, it should want to leave the EU or rather not join it because it wants to keep this autonomy. This is a hypothesis brought up by (Young, 1994, pp. 791–792) who stated that “the exercise of these greater powers would be compromised by integrative arrangements”. To come up with another example: if a region wants to leave its host country to get its own currency, it does not make sense to join the EU’s monetary union having to give up its autonomy again. Therefore, this paper will test whether the same economic and cultural determinants explain the variance of attitudes towards the host country and the EU. Following Young (1994), it is expected that if a determinant explains an attitude towards the host state it should be the same for the EU and vice versa. Hence, all presented hypotheses in the next section will be split between the two host entities, the host state, and the EU.

First, economic issues as a reason for wanting to leave the state or the EU will be tested. As the research stated that the EU is assessed by its economic value for the citizens, the first two hypotheses are:

**H1a:** The lower the perceived economic situation of an individual living in a secessionist region is, the worse are its attitudes towards the EU.

**H1b:** The lower the objective economic situation (GDP) of an individual living in a secessionist region is, the worse are its attitudes towards the EU.

The same should be expected regarding its attitude towards its host state<sup>5</sup>. It is expected that citizens evaluate their government regarding their economic situation. Therefore, the next hypotheses are:

**H2a:** The lower the perceived economic situation of an individual living in a secessionist region is, the worse are its attitudes towards the host state.

**H2b:** The lower the objective economic situation (GDP) of an individual living in a secessionist region is, the worse are its attitudes towards the host state.

The second angle is the cultural one. Possible examples are the feeling of a belonging to an ethnic group. This is characterized by for example a distinct language, history, or general broader defined general culture. Therefore, the following hypotheses will be tested:

**H3a:** The greater the identification of an individual living in a secessionist region with a distinct culture is, the worse are its attitudes towards the EU.

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<sup>5</sup> As pointed out earlier in this section, it is not clear whether the objective and subjective situation of individuals to secede from a host state are negative or positive. To follow the same direction as the economic determinant of Euroscepticism, the hypotheses suppose a negative relationship between economic issues and the attitude towards the host state.



**H3b:** The greater the identification of an individual living in a secessionist region with a distinct culture is, the worse are its attitudes towards the host state.

Summing up, this chapter has presented three lines of arguments underlining that both phenomena, secession and Euroscepticism can be analysed as the same phenomenon but just on different levels. Following this, it was derived that the determinants should point into the same direction for both phenomena. Finally, building on this, three groups of hypotheses were proposed.

## **4. Data and Methodology**

Before describing the actual data which this paper is based on, it is necessary to explain the selection of the regions which will be included in the analysis. Since the number of secessionist regions in Europe is limited, this paper will have a quite small number of cases which will be compared with each other. Following Lijphart (1977, p. 685), this “many variables, small number of cases” problem is one of the main issues the comparative method has. Additionally, selection bias will occur since there is no randomly selected population.

To solve this problem, King et al. (1994, p. 129) propose to select the cases in such a way, that there is “at least some variation on the dependent variable”. Hence, the regions which will be considered by this paper should vary as much as possible. Of course, this is again limited by the number of available regions at all and additionally the similarity of certain regions, like for example Catalonia and the Basque Country. Furthermore, certain independent variables as for example cultural and ethnic distinction cannot vary in the European regions to a broader degree, as within all the regions a high degree of cultural and/or ethnic homogeneity can be found. However, the economic variables differ at least to some extent. Following those assumptions, four possible regions were selected as base for this paper: Catalonia, Scotland, Flanders, and South Tyrol.

Another issue which should be discussed here is the varying size of the population in those countries which results in a great variance within the number of cases in each group. Especially South Tyrol has just around 350,000 inhabitants whereas the three other regions range from 5.5 million (Scotland), to 6.5 million (Flanders) and 7.5 million (Catalonia). Obviously, the case ratio of the case number in the sample data is similar, therefore a comparison should be made more carefully.

The statistical approach of this paper is a multivariate linear regression model. For the individual micro data, the European Social Survey (ESS) dataset (R6, 2016/17) (Norwegian Centre for Research Data, 2016) was used, containing altogether 44,387 observations. The ESS is a solid base for this kind of work since a strict quality control and a high-quality random sampling can be attested (Häder and Lynn (2007, p. 33)). The foundation for the aggregate level (GDP) is based on data from the Eurostat (Statistical Office of the European Union (Eurostat), 2017). Both data sets were merged using the NUTS (Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics) codes as identification.

The dependent variable is either the attitude towards the nation state in the respective regions or the attitude towards the EU. Both of those variables were created using an additive index and additionally checked for their internal consistency. Furthermore, a factor analysis was applied to validate the indices. As dependent variables on the micro level, the perceived economic situation as well as the belonging to a distinct ethnicity were used. Again, all those were created using an additive index and checked for possible problems and validity. Additionally, to measure the objective state of the economy, the GDP per capita of the regions as well as of the member states was included in the model. Moreover, it was also controlled for the attitude towards migration as well as the satisfaction with democracy itself as there is evidence that those determinants influence the attitudes towards the EU. Finally, the usual control variables like gender, age, education, and left-right self-placement were incorporated into the modelling.

## 5. Results

The upcoming section will describe the results of the fitted models. For a quick overview and summary refer to table one. Before coming to the actual results, the validity of the models should be discussed in short. In total, the adjusted R2 ranges from around .09 to .45. The attitude towards the nation states is slightly better explained (see table two) compared to the evaluation of the EU (see table three). This indicates that the latter model explains smaller amounts of the variance. However, other models like for example the attitude in Scotland towards the United Kingdom (UK) is explained to a greater degree (around 45%) by the included determinants.

Starting with the first group of hypotheses which supposed that there is a negative relationship between on the one side the perceived and on the other side the objective economic situation and the attitude towards the EU. The model estimates show that there is a significant positive relationship between the attitude towards the EU and the subjective evaluation of the economy in all regions showing that hypothesis H1a can be confirmed now for the case of the EU (see table three). Similar results can be found looking at the subjective evaluation of the individual economic situation within all the regions except for South Tyrol as a positive significant relationship can be found indicating that the individuals who are less satisfied with their economic situation are less satisfied with the EU as well. This shows, that H1a is to be accepted for the time being for three of the four regions as well.

Table 1: Overview of the tested Hypotheses<sup>6</sup>

	Attitude towards State				EU	Attitude towards EU			
	Catalonia	Scotland	Flanders	South-Tyrol		Catalonia	Scotland	Flanders	South Tyrol
Subjective Economy	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	F
Objective Economy	F	F	S	F	n/a	F	F	F	F
Culture / Ethnicity	F	F	S	F	S	F	F	S	F

Hypothesis H1b supposed that the negative objective economic situation measured using the GDP per capita is correlated with a more negative view of the EU. This assumption cannot be confirmed for the time being and must be rejected. The next group of hypotheses again make assumptions on the relationship between the subjective and objective economic situation of individuals in secessionist regions and their evaluation of their respective host states. The estimates show that the perceived

<sup>6</sup> S indicates success, F indicates failure and n/a indicates not applicable.

economic situation has a positive significant relationship with the evaluation of the respective host country in all four regions, indicating that hypothesis H2a can accepted for now (see table two).

Table 2: Regression coefficients for the dependent variable: attitude towards the respective host country

Variable	Catalonia	Scotland	Flanders	South Tyrol
<b>Economy</b>	.465*** (-8.854)	.405*** -6.034	.445*** -1.866	.259** -1.864
<b>Ethnicity</b>	-.860 (-1.181)	-.521 (-.775)	-.494* (-1.818)	1.930 (.948)
<b>GDP (region)</b>	.	.	>.001** -2.686	> -.001 (-1.723)
<b>Ideology</b>	.218*** -4.362	.251** (3.546)	.025 -1.123	-.007 (-.049)
<b>Gender</b>	.325 -1.476	-.148 (-.587)	-.371*** (-4.455)	-.311 (-.478)
<b>Age</b>	.006 (.923)	.021** -2.558	.008** -3.289	.013 (.708)
<b>Education</b>	-.164** (-3.014)	.144** -2.294	.009 (.422)	.065 (.349)
<b>Intercept</b>	1.830*** -5.437	1.402** -3.187	1.957*** -5.063	9.044** -2.612
<b>N</b>	232	143	1,028	28
<b>Adj. R2</b>	.390	.450	.285	.099

Standard error in parentheses. \*\*\*p < 0.01; \*\* p < 0.05; \*p < 0.1

Note: . indicates collinearity.

A different picture emerges for the objective economic situation which was measured using the GDP per capita as a predictor for the evaluation of the respective host state (hypothesis H2b). Only for the case of Flanders a significant connection could be measured which indicates that hypothesis H2b can only be confirmed for one case and rejected for all other ones.

The last section of hypotheses was grouped around the cultural and ethnic affiliation within the regions. Hypothesis H3a assumed a connection between the identification with a national culture and the evaluation of the EU. As seen in table three, only for the EU at all and Flanders a significant relationship could be found. Hence, the hypothesis H3a can be accepted only partly. Finally, hypothesis H3b supposed a relationship between the identification with a national culture and the evaluation of the respective host state. This could as well only be found for the case of Flanders, falsifying the hypothesis for all other regions.

Table 3: Regression coefficients for the dependent variable: attitude towards the EU

Variable	EU	Catalonia	Scotland	Flanders	South Tyrol
<b>Economy</b>	.091*** -1.835	.405*** -7.004	.192* -2.059	.404*** -1.325	.258 121.191
<b>GDP (state)</b>	>-.000** * (-4.152)				
<b>Ethnicity</b>	-.533*** (-8.311)	-.868 (-1.119)	-.075 (-.083)	-.981* (-2.834)	2.477 (.760)
<b>Immigration</b>	.285*** -60.708				
<b>Democracy</b>	.442*** -4.349				
<b>Ideology</b>	-.009** (-2.056)	-.158** (-2.948)	.009 (.095)	-.094** (-3.277)	-.273 (-1.410)
<b>Gender</b>	-.209*** (-1.156)	-.012 (-.049)	.036 (.104)	-.353** (-3.340)	-1.071 (-1.197)
<b>Age</b>	-.003*** (-6.761)	.009 -1.280	-.007 (-.609)	-.006* (-2.113)	.043 -1.438
<b>Education</b>	.005 (.968)	.076 -1.289	.099 -1.166	.122*** -4.277	.274 -100.448
<b>GDP (region)</b>	.	.	.	>.000 -1.499	>.000 (-1.652)
<b>Intercept</b>	2.703*** -63.902	4.435*** -1.213	3.326*** -5.577	2.360*** -4.812	1.128** -2.377
<b>N</b>	28,614	212	135	1,021	26
<b>Adj. R2</b>	.311	.196	.020	.208	.321

Standard error in parentheses. \*\*\*p < 0.01; \*\* p < 0.05; \*p < 0.1

Note: . indicates collinearity.

After presenting the individual results, the upcoming section will analyse whether the evaluation of the EU and the host state resemble each other regarding their determinants and explanations. From this could be derived, that both phenomena are the same. Starting with the economic perspective, only the subjective economic evaluation could be identified as a determinant for both the attitude towards the EU as well as the respective host state of the regions (aside from South Tyrol). This confirms the argumentation build up in the theory section of this paper. Citizens living in those regions tend to evaluate political entities in the same context. The same is true for the cultural dimension: Only in Flanders, the perceived affiliation with a certain culture or ethnicity as a driver for the evaluation of the EU and the host state could be found. Overall, there are no differences regarding the determinants of both theoretical frameworks.

## 6. Discussion

Finally, this section will discuss the results and will be structured threefold: First, it will recap the theoretical assumptions on which the tested hypotheses were based on. Second, it will answer the

research guiding questions and how the results contribute to the current state of research. Third, it will discuss the findings including some problematic assumptions as well as possible follow-up research approaches.

This paper draws its relevance from the fact that there are regions within the EU which want to become more autonomous from their host state or even become a sovereign new state. Simultaneously, those regions promote that they want to join or stay within the EU giving up their new gained autonomy. This situation was considered as exceptional, indicating the need for further research. Hence, the research guiding question asked, whether it is true that some regions at the same time drive for autonomy and for more or integration into the EU at all. To describe the separation of a region from a host state, the theory around secessions was introduced and amended with Euroscepticism, to describe the negative attitude towards the EU. Following up, looking at the previous research, no approach including both frameworks combined in the context of European regions could be identified.

Building on this, three lines of argumentation were introduced suggesting that both phenomena were the same regarding their structure but only target different entities, namely the respective host state and the EU. This was supported by the fact that both phenomena are defined similar in the literature, have the same determinants and both can be considered an accompanying ideology.

In the next step, the determinants and explaining factors for both phenomena were introduced: On the one side the objective and subjective economic situation and on the other side the perceived cultural and ethnic affiliation with a group. Subsequently, the data and methodology were described, highlighting the selection process of the region and the operationalization of the chosen variables.

The results of the tested hypotheses showed that (1) the subjective evaluation of the individuals' economic situation could be identified as a determinant for both the attitude towards the EU as well as the respective host state for three of the four regions. Additionally, (2) the cultural and ethnic affiliation with a group could not be identified as a driver for the evaluation of the host state and the EU (aside from Flanders). If the assumption of Young (1994) saying that giving up autonomy after gaining them is "compromising" the original urge for independence is true and the operationalization works as expected, there should not be the same determinants for the attitudes on both levels (nation state and EU). But as this paper has shown, there is light evidence that there are the same determinants at play.

What can be derived from those results? It could be argued that the theory Young (1994) proposed cannot explain the behaviour of those regions within the EU. Another interesting explanation could be the fact that those regions just see the EU as an alternative to their host state as they could get more autonomy under the EU being a smaller evil as they already have under their host state. However, it is not clear whether this is actually true, as a lot of those regions already have a great autonomy and additionally the EU is likely to become even more integrated in the greater picture.

Another explanation would be the leverage the regions have over their host state when they turn to the EU. Especially policy areas like external or trade would be taken over by the EU, making the regions in possible negotiations stronger. But what would happen if a region would leave their host state and join the EU? – which is unlikely to happen<sup>7</sup>. One interesting finding of this paper is the situation in Flanders. Obviously, this region does seem to be different from the other included regions, because all the proposed determinants explain the attitude towards a secession from the host state - in this case the Netherlands - quite well. Further research should discover interesting findings, especially in comparison to the other regions. Building on this, a possible next step could also be the inclusion of other regions within the EU to further test the hypotheses.

After presenting the results it is reasonable to assess them more carefully as there are some problematic assumptions and flaws in the developed model which will be discussed in this section. This should help to place and assess the validity of the results. Most of the problems are owed to the

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<sup>7</sup> As potential new member would have to use Article 49 of the TEU and such a decision would have to be decided on by the respective state as well. And supposedly this would not happen. Additionally, other states maybe would not want to open the Pandora's Box of including regions into the EU.

quantitative approach. Hence, they cannot be solved by a better fitting model, but should be considered when interpreting the results.

One problem lies with the operationalization of the urge for secession from a host state or the EU. It is obvious, that the connection of a negative attitude towards a state does not necessarily result in the actual urge to leave that state. However, there are arguments for this operationalization regardless these problems. First, there is (currently) no better data. There is no other survey data which has the same high standards and comparability over the European regions as the ESS and additionally has the same or even better items to measure the urge for a secession. Second, the goal of this paper was to find only general patterns and therefore it uses a quantitative approach. A qualitative approach is reasonable to better understand motives of the citizens to a deeper extent.

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