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Collective Recognition and Regional Parliaments: Navigating Statehood Conflict

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This study explores whether and how regional parliaments facilitate collective state recognition, a question that has been overlooked within a literature that focuses more on recognition by individual states or international organizations more generally. We do that through a scoping exercise of how regional parliaments of four major international organizations (AU, CoE, EU, OSCE) have responded to past and present contested statehood efforts that are associated with conflicts, such as in Palestine, Western Sahara, Kosovo, or the post-Soviet space. Based on this, we conceptualize three different stances: recognition, non-recognition, and titular recognition (of a right to, as opposed to the presence of, statehood) and we propose that these stances become apparent declaratively, through resolutions or other formal texts of regional parliaments, or institutionally (e.g., through membership). We also find that regional parliaments display a certain agency through using specific parliamentary instruments to respond to statehood claimants, promoting debates on those claims, and expressing recognition stances different from the executive bodies of the organization. Further, we illustrate these arguments through a more in-depth analysis of the European Parliament's approach toward Kosovo's statehood. In this regard, the paper offers a missing but important account of how regional parliaments facilitate collective recognition and contribute to defining what is a state, one of the most fundamental questions of international relations, which sits at the heart of long and complex conflicts. The proposed conceptual and theoretical arguments can facilitate further studies on state recognition, particularly collective recognition and the role of international organizations.

Este estudio analiza si (y de hacerlo, cómo) los parlamentos regionales facilitan el reconocimiento colectivo de Estados, una cuestión que se ha ignorado en una literatura que se centra más en el reconocimiento por parte de los Estados individuales o las organizaciones internacionales de manera más general. Realizamos esa tarea a través de un ejercicio para determinar el alcance de cómo los parlamentos regionales de cuatro organizaciones internacionales importantes (la Unión Africana [UA], el Consejo de Europa [CdE], la Unión Europea [UE] y la Organización para la Seguridad y la Cooperación en Europa [OSCE]) han respondido a los esfuerzos disputados en el presente y en el pasado por obtener la condición de Estado que se relacionan con conflictos, tales como en Palestina, el Sahara Occidental, Kosovo o el espacio postsoviético. Con base en esto, conceptualizamos tres posturas diferentes: el reconocimiento, el no reconocimiento y el reconocimiento titular (del derecho a la condición de Estado, en lugar de la presencia de esta) y proponemos que estas posturas se tornan evidentes de manera declarativa, mediante resoluciones u otros textos oficiales de parlamentos regionales, o institucional (p. ej., a través de la membresía). También observamos que los parlamentos regionales exhiben un organismo en particular a través del uso de instrumentos parlamentarios específicos para responder a los solicitantes de la condición de Estado, promoviendo debates sobre estos reclamos y expresando posturas en cuanto al reconocimiento que son diferentes de las de los órganos ejecutivos de la organización. Además, ilustramos estos argumentos mediante un análisis en mayor profundidad del enfoque del Parlamento Europeo en relación a la condición de Estado de Kosovo. A este respecto, el artículo ofrece una explicación faltante pero importante de cómo los parlamentos regionales facilitan el reconocimiento colectivo y contribuyen para la definición de lo que es un Estado, una de las cuestiones más fundamentales de las relaciones internacionales, que yace en el fondo de los conflictos extensos y complejos. Los argumentos conceptuales y teóricos que se proponen pueden facilitar estudios adicionales sobre el reconocimiento de los Estados, particularmente el reconocimiento colectivo y la función de las organizaciones internacionales.

Cette étude examine si et comment les parlements régionaux facilitent la reconnaissance collective des États, une question qui a été négligée dans une littérature qui se concentre plus généralement davantage sur la reconnaissance par des États individuels ou des organisations internationales. Pour ce faire, nous évaluons la portée de la façon dont les parlements régionaux de quatre grandes organisations internationales (UA, CdE, UE, OSCE) ont réagi à des efforts passés et présents de création d'un statut d'État contesté qui sont associés à des conflits, comme en Palestine, au Sahara occidental, au Kosovo ou dans l'espace post-soviétique. Nous nous basons sur cela pour conceptualiser trois postures: reconnaissance, non-reconnaissance et reconnaissance nominale (d'un droit par opposition à la présence d'un statut d'État) et nous proposons l'idée que ces postures deviennent apparentes déclarativement par le biais des résolutions ou autres textes officiels des parlements régionaux, ou institutionnellement (p. ex. par une adhésion). Nous constatons également que les parlements régionaux font preuve d'une certaine agentivité en ayant recours à des instruments parlementaires spécifiques pour réagir aux revendicateurs de statut d'État en encourageant les débats sur ces revendications et en exprimant des postures de reconnaissance différentes de celles des organes exécutifs de l'organisation. De plus, nous illustrons ces arguments par une analyse plus approfondie de l'approche adoptée par le Parlement européen au sujet du statut d'État du Kosovo. À cet égard, l'article propose un compte rendu manquant mais important de la manière dont les parlements régionaux facilitent la reconnaissance collective et contribuent à la définition de ce qu'est un État, une des questions les plus fondamentales en relations internationales, qui est au cœur des

conflits longs et complexes. Les arguments conceptuels et théoriques proposés peuvent faciliter les études plus approfondies de la reconnaissance des États, en particulier de la reconnaissance collective et du rôle des organisations internationales.

Introduction

In 2009, the European Parliament (EP) encouraged all member states of the European Union (EU) to recognize Kosovo as a state and a few years later did the same with Palestine. In both these instances, the EP took a clear, favorable position toward statehood claims that are contested, not generally recognized, and at the center of major contemporary conflicts. By doing so, the EP also differentiated their position to executive branches of the organization, like the European Council, which stand more neutral, particularly toward Kosovo. Such instances suggest a greater level of political activism of regional parliaments (understood here as the assemblies of major international organizations with a regional character),¹ like the EP, in conflict and statehood issues, and away from intergovernmental constraints of supranational executive organs constituted by governmental actors. More generally, these instances suggest the significance of regional parliaments in defining what is a state, one of the most fundamental questions of international relations, which also sits at the heart of long and complex statehood disputes, such as in Palestine, Kosovo, and elsewhere. For example, the Pan-African Parliament (PAP) of the African Union (AU) has become a forum for discussing questions of statehood and of self-determination, also with reference to Western Sahara (WS), while unilateral secessions in the post-Soviet space (e.g., Abkhazia, South Ossetia, or Eastern Ukraine more recently) have preoccupied other regional parliaments, like the Assemblies of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) or the Council of Europe (CoE). The activity of these parliaments is by itself important for thinking about how statehood is discussed in international relations including by actors, like these assemblies, which, at first glance, might be considered as not relevant to recognition. The more collective nature of these bodies can also be seen as adding gravity to recognition positions expressed through them, simply because they can be seen as representing a larger body of states as opposed to individual recognition (see also Grant 2009). Furthermore, such discussions have important implications for how statehood is constructed and performed. Kosovo, for example, has acknowledged the importance of the support of the EP in increasing its recognition and international participation (Republic of Kosovo 2018).

Yet, the role of regional parliaments in the process of recognizing states as well as related statehood conflicts has not been extensively discussed within a literature that tends to focus more on states, or international organizations as a whole. Indeed, there is now a growing literature on state recognition, including on more complicated cases of statehood (for an overview, see Visoka, Doyle, and Newman 2020). Still relying a lot on insights from international law scholars who for years dominated the debate (e.g., Lauterpacht 1947; Crawford 1979), many studies on recognition concentrate on states, focusing, *inter alia*, on

how states react to efforts at statehood (e.g., Fabry 2010; Griffiths 2017), how they deal diplomatically with groups whose statehood claims are not recognized (e.g., collection of works edited by Ker-Lindsay and Berg 2018), or how they try to stop their efforts at state creation (e.g., Ker-Lindsay 2012). Works on more collective responses are rarer and not always explicitly or only focusing on international organizations, but they offer important insights upon which this analysis builds (see, e.g., Hillgruber 1998; Grant 2009; Newman and Visoka 2018; Caspersen 2020; Vidmar 2020). Even more neglected are regional parliaments, because the research that exists focuses on more executive organs of international organizations or does not differentiate between their executives and assemblies (but see limited yet useful insights for the “parliamentarization” of the WS question by Fernández-Molina [2017] or some discussion by Loda and Doyle [2020] alongside other types of parliaments). In this regard, this paper seeks to systematically explore whether and how regional parliaments are relevant to collective state recognition and the extent to which they display agency in state recognition matters.

Methods and Contribution

In order to answer these questions, we conduct a scoping exercise of how regional parliaments of major international organizations² have responded to post-1945 sustained efforts at statehood that lack general recognition, as expressed in UN membership³ (see, e.g., Kurtulus 2005 for that approach), and present more extensively findings from the EP approach to Kosovo for illustration purposes. Unlike generally accepted states, not generally recognized efforts at statehood are appropriate for exploring more contested statehood claims at the center of major international conflicts and the breadth of different collective recognition stances expressed through regional organizations and their parliaments. Indeed, through our scoping exercise and by building on existing but more sporadic insights found in the literature, we offer a more systematic conceptualization of three different types of collective recognition (recognition, nonrecognition, and titular recognition, that is, the recognition of a right to, rather than presence of, statehood) expressed via institutional or declarative means, and we use them to categorize collective recognition

²We follow earlier literature (e.g., Butler 2009, 123; Edwards and DiCicco 2018) and treat regional organizations as international organizations.

³Such a conceptualization comes close to what Visoka 2018 terms as “emerging” or “aspirant” states but differs in that our focus on “efforts at statehood” allows the inclusion of claimants who lack full control of the territories they claim, such as Palestine or the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) in WS. Previous studies on the matter have also approached statehood as an objective rather than an empirical reality (e.g., Lynch 2004, 145) and more recent rebel governance debates (e.g., Florea 2020) seem to place a new emphasis on this. Lastly, we look at efforts older than two years. This final criterion is borrowed from definitions found in the literature of unrecognized states (e.g., Pegg 1998; Kolstø 2006; Caspersen 2012). Though might be seen as arbitrary, works, including in international law, that suggest permanence as a criterion of statehood (Knight 1992; Grant 1999, 31) and an indication of what differentiates statehood to state government (Crawford 2007, 32) lend support to this approach. Crucially, we are not looking for permanence in institutions (in order to allow for the inclusion of cases with limited institutional capacity), but, instead, we are looking for permanence in the *effort* to pursue or maintain statehood.

¹A close term is supranational parliaments, but we opted for regional parliaments because of the strong intergovernmental characters of the organizations we examined, apart from the EU. Besides, the definition of regional parliaments used in this article should not be confused with parliaments operating at the sub-national level.

Table 1. Regional parliaments and statehood claimants without general recognition

<i>Regional parliament</i>	<i>Historical cases in the region</i>	<i>Contemporary cases</i>	<i>Significant historical cases</i>
EP	Kosova Gagauzia Serbia Krajina	Taiwan SADR TRNC	Eritrea I (1977–1991) Eritrea II (1991–1993) Biafra
PACE	Republika Srpska Chechnya	Palestine Transnistria Somaliland Nagorno Karabakh South Ossetia Abkhazia Kosovo Donetsk Luhansk	Timor-Leste
OSCE PA			
AIPA	Tamil Eelam		
PAP	Katanga Rhodesia Anjouan		

stances facilitated by regional parliaments. We look at the following regional parliaments from Europe and the Global South: EP, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA), ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA), and the PAP. For AIPA we found no evidence, therefore, we are not presenting it as part of the mapping of our findings, even though we return to it in the conclusion to reflect on the lack of findings and possible avenues for further research. Such a selection follows similar research choices on the study of recognition (e.g., [Talmon 1998](#)) and rests on the assumption that membership of all-encompassing clubs at the regional or international level (such as the AU for Africa or the UN globally) matters more for state recognition (as opposed to more functional bodies such as the World Trade Organization [WTO]). For each regional parliament, we look at their responses to all contemporary statehood claimants without general recognition we identify, in addition to historical cases in the region of that particular parliament (i.e., cases that no longer exist because, for example, they were reintegrated into the state from which they tried to secede like Chechnya, see also [table 1](#)). We also look at the significant historical cases of Eritrea, Biafra, and Timor-Leste across all parliaments because of their prominence in conflict and statehood debates (e.g., [Kyrus 2020](#)). Historical cases in Africa (Katanga, Rhodesia, and Anjouan) were not studied as they predate the regional parliament. Bougainville could not be assigned to a regional parliament and therefore was not studied either. In order to identify how regional parliaments responded to these independence claims, we looked at legal texts adopted (resolutions/recommendations from all regional parliaments, plus regulations and decisions voted by the EP), while each case was active as an unrecognized statehood claimant.⁴ We complemented this by research in plenary session records, to explore further the agency of parliaments as spaces of debate in recognition matters, and with research in other sources (e.g., news reports) to triangulate our findings.

⁴We identify cases through a review of the literature on recognition and statehood conflicts, including de facto states (e.g., [Pegg 1998](#); [Geldenhuis 2009](#); [Caspersen 2012](#); [Florea 2020](#); [Kyrus 2020](#)). We consider active cases following clear independence efforts, usually a declaration of independence, and before such aims are practically abandoned (e.g., through integration to a third state, e.g., Biafra and Chechnya) or recognized (e.g., Timor-Leste).

In this regard, this study makes the following arguments and contributions. We find that recognition stances have become apparent declaratively, that is, through resolutions or other formal texts of regional parliaments, or institutionally, that is, through institutional arrangements (e.g., membership) that denote recognition, titular recognition, or nonrecognition. Such a conceptualization is important for facilitating further study of recognition and of the role of international actors in associated conflicts. To be clear, we are not arguing that international organizations or their parliaments have a competence over state recognition in the way that states do. We do, however, contend that organizations are *also* important for state recognition and we provide a missing account of how regional parliaments facilitate recognition positions, which, as we said earlier, could be seen as carrying greater significance than recognition by individual states, not least because they are more collective. We also find three main ways in which parliamentary agency becomes apparent: (1) when parliaments or their members employ specific parliamentary instruments, such as resolutions and external delegations, to independently engage with issues surrounding not generally recognized statehood claimants; (2) in how the parliaments allow pluralistic debates and questions during plenary sessions; and (3) when the recognition stances expressed through regional parliaments differ to that of more executive bodies of the same organization. Overall, we find that regional parliaments have displayed varying degrees of parliamentary agency, which, however, is a remarkable finding when considered against a literature that has largely ignored them as distinct, important agents for recognition matters and statehood conflicts. In order to further illustrate these theoretical arguments, we conduct a more in-depth analysis of the case of the EP approach toward Kosovo's statehood, not least because it is a typical case of extensive involvement of the regional parliament and deviation between the recognition stance expressed through it and through the international organization in general, therefore, allowing us to observe better parliamentary agency (for more on case selection, see the last section). Drawing on our conceptualization of institutional and declarative ways in which recognition stances become apparent, we conduct a historical analysis of the case not only investigating institutional arrangements (e.g., topical parliamentary groups focusing on Kosovo), but also drawing extensively on qualitative content analysis to

identify collective recognition stances reflected in statements (with reference to relevant EU law, i.e., EP resolutions and recommendations, agreements, and regulations) and recognition-related EP questions. The paper proceeds as follows: the next section reflects on the different collective recognition stances that international organizations facilitate and the ways they become apparent, before we present our findings on recognition in relation to regional parliaments in specific and their agency. Finally, we illustrate these findings in the final section that focuses on the EP and Kosovo.

Recognition and International Organizations

The broader literature on recognition offers important insights that we draw upon to offer a missing more systematic conceptualization of different collective recognition stances expressed through organs of international organizations and regional parliaments in specific. In this context, the first way in which international organizations are important for independence claims is when they facilitate collective recognition of such claims. This is with reference to the majority of organized efforts at building a state and seeking its recognition. More specifically, we suggest that international organizations facilitate a collective positive recognition stance either institutionally (via offering state membership) or in more declarative ways via statements. To begin with recognition through institutional arrangements, the practice of international relations suggests that UN membership is often equated with a recognition of statehood. For example, [Dugard \(2013, 64\)](#) documents that many states viewed their approval of South Sudan's entry to the UN as recognition, therefore not moving to explicitly recognize via different means, such as a separate official statement, and elsewhere he sees the UN as "the collective arbiter of statehood through the process of admission and non-recognition" (see [Hillgruber 1998](#) and [Pavković and Radan 2007](#) for similar views). Some regional organizations that sit at the heart of this study, such as the AU or ASEAN, resemble the UN's universality but at a regional level: AU is open to any "independent sovereign African State" while admission to ASEAN shall be based on: "location in South East Asia, recognition by all members, agreement to be bound by the charter and ability and willingness to carry out membership obligations." Indeed, states from these regions that are not members of the respective organization are rare. This association between membership and recognition is also evident in the denial of many international organizations to admit statehood claimants that they do not recognize (see also later on nonrecognition). In terms of regional parliaments which are more at the focus of this research, their membership depends on the membership of the international organization in general, so there seems to be little room for different positions here. However, our study shows a range of different institutional ways which might mean something for recognition and which we explore in the next section.

In what we consider a declarative way of collective recognition, international organizations express a stance via an official statement, such as the EU's reaction to the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. Such an extensive use of declarative ways of recognition might also relate to the fact that the EU and other organizations with more functional or regional character have more specific criteria rather than just statehood, which means that not every state will seek to become a member. This means that the organization might

be compelled to declare a stance toward statehood claims through declarative rather than institutional ways. For example and with reference to the above, the Baltic states and Slovenia joined the EU in 2004 while Croatia in 2013, all years after their recognition statement issued by the EU. Studying these and other cases but not elaborating on the EP as a regional parliament, [Newman and Visoka \(2018\)](#) argue that such common positions that are facilitated by the EU have important implications. As we will see later, recognition stances are also evident in statements of regional parliaments, which sometimes might differ from statements by the executive bodies representing the governments of member states.

At the opposite end, we find the stance of non-recognition, that is, a stance that explicitly or implicitly denotes and/or encourages withholding of state recognition and which is quite often expressed collectively (e.g., [Raič 2002](#)) and with important implications for those subjected to it ([Caspersen 2020](#)). The most explicit form of collective nonrecognition comes in declarations that condemn specific attempts at independence, mostly related to unilateral secessions, and they might even instruct members of the organization to specific action (e.g., United Nations Security Council Resolution 367 reacting to the independence efforts by the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus). In other instances, declarations that affirm the sovereignty of the parent state (i.e., the state from which secession is attempted) suggest an implicit condemnation of other statehood claims in the area, such as the EU call to "the Sri Lanka Government and the LTTE to begin negotiations immediately with a view to securing a peaceful resolution to the conflict in the framework of Sri Lanka's territorial integrity" ([Council of the EU 1995](#)).

Having conceptualized membership of international organizations as an institutional dimension of collective recognition, a question to answer is whether denial of admission to an international organization must be considered as non-recognition. The practice of international relations shows that, like with matters of recognition, the link between collective nonrecognition and nonadmission is clearer at the UN due to its universality (most illustratively in the case of Taiwan, which was effectively expelled by the UN). In cases where the admission criteria stretch beyond the presence of statehood, rejection of admission does not suggest non-recognition. Rejection of application to regional organizations such as the EU says little to nothing about the statehood of the applicants. Because membership of regional parliaments reflects membership of their organization as a whole, institutional nonrecognition of an organization is likely to be reflected in no participation in these assemblies too. Finally, we consider nonrecognition the instance in which an entity is part of an international organization under designations that undermine their statehood status, such as Taiwan taking part in the WTO or elsewhere as "Chinese Taipei." Although such instances are important for how statehood claimants without general recognition might be allowed to take part in international relations, conceptually it is important we distinguish them from recognition.

Furthermore, there is a type of recognition stance that sits somewhere in between the extremes of recognition and nonrecognition and which has not been given the attention it deserves. This has been discussed as the recognition of right to (as opposed to presence of) statehood (see also [Crawford 1979](#); [Geldenhuis 2009](#)), but here we further this discussion by drawing on our scoping exercise to more systematically conceptualize it as a stance, and the

ways in which it becomes apparent through activities of regional parliaments. The history of state emergence shows that many groups that were eventually generally recognized enjoyed collective titular recognition before and that some international organizations played a major role in this regard. For example, the UN Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples can be seen as titular recognition (United Nations 1960). But titular recognition becomes especially evident in more complicated cases of decolonization because in those cases certain groups remain short of general recognition despite being titularly recognized (e.g., Palestine, WS). More rarely, granting observer status can be seen as titular recognition in institutional terms. Our conceptual argument here also draws on Crawford's (2007, 109) view that observer status is reserved for "states in the making," which seems a state of affairs not too different to that of being titularly recognized. Like membership, it seems that regional parliaments follow the position of the organization as a whole. For example, Palestine was given observer status of the PAP following the AU doing the same. Crucially, the status of observer becomes relevant to recognition in cases of statehood claimants not generally recognized.

Finally, an approach toward statehood claims that has become especially apparent in the case of Kosovo in specific is a so-called neutrality toward statehood claims. Because not all of the members recognize Kosovo, the EU (and other international organizations) operates in a neutral manner with regard to Kosovo's statehood (see, e.g., Bolton and Visoka 2010; Greiçevci 2011). A closer look, however, suggests that, in practice, the EU is open to the possibility of Kosovo emerging as a recognized state and is helping this realization through state-building assistance and by including Kosovo in its policy of enlargement. This suggests that neutrality might coexist with titular recognition, in the sense that the EU is neutral about the statehood of Kosovo today, but is open to Kosovo being recognized as a state if circumstances change, particularly in terms of the conflict with Serbia being resolved. As such and based on the cases explored here, neutrality does not look like a distinct possibility, but it is important for our illustration because it shows an instance in which the regional parliament (EP) displayed a certain agency by calling for the recognition of Kosovo, despite neutrality from the European Council and the Commission—we return to that in the last section.

Regional Parliaments and Recognition

Drawing on our conceptualization, this section assesses how the regional parliaments under investigation have responded to statehood claimants without general recognition in ways that suggest collective recognition, titular recognition, or nonrecognition. We identify declarative ways of recognition that are specific to these bodies, such as official statements of the parliaments and also parliament-specific institutional ways, such as themed groups (usually of inter-parliamentary nature). Overall, we find that nonrecognition is the most frequent stance, expressed more through declarations as opposed to institutional ways, and that the EP is more active than the rest of regional parliaments under investigation. We also find that regional parliaments display a certain degree of agency by employing instruments specific to their bodies, facilitating a debate on those statehood claims and conflicts, and sometimes adopting a recognition stance different to that expressed through executive parts of the organization.

The Breadth of Collective Recognition Positions

Collective recognition is the least observable stance as far as our population is concerned. This is not too surprising, given that we focus on cases that do not enjoy general recognition, including from none of the international organizations of which parliaments we investigate (except the AU and SADR). The EP has adopted declarations that endorse the recognition of just two statehood claims in our population: Palestine and Kosovo. Regarding Palestine's status, a titular recognition was apparent in the EP's alignment (European Parliament 2017a) with the EU's support of a two-state solution (e.g., European Council 1999), but, more recently, the EP moved to support a full recognition of Palestine like it has done with Kosovo (for more detailed analysis of Kosovo, see Illustration section). In addition to declarative ways of recognition, in both cases of Palestine and Kosovo, the EP has put in place specific institutional arrangements, which are suggestive of a clearly favorable position toward statehood claims in comparison to other cases. Because this approach of the parliament breaks with the overall approach of the organization, we expand on this analysis in the section below on parliamentary agency. Finally, SADR is unique among the cases we explore in that it is the only one having a clear participation in the regional parliament (PAP), which we consider as an institutional arrangement denoting recognition akin to recognition evident via membership of an organization.

We found more cases of collective titular recognition, mostly through declarations with reference to decolonization in historical cases of our population. While the EP has endorsed the actual recognition of Palestine, we found evidence that the approach by the rest of regional parliaments in Europe under investigation (PACE, OSCE PA) toward this case is closer to denoting titular recognition. Similarly, although SADR is a full member of the PAP, the body's declarations only suggest a titular recognition of a right to independence for the people of WS. EP resolutions have also expressed support to "self-determination of the *people* (our emphasis) of Western Sahara," following previous UN resolutions on the issue (European Parliament 2017b).⁵ Furthermore, the EP has facilitated the titular recognition of historical cases of claimants that are today generally recognized states. In 1991, an EP resolution "stressed the need for a fair and lasting solution that meets the aspirations of the Eritrean *people* (our emphasis), taking into account their right to self-determination" (Commission of the European Communities 1991). Along similar lines, a 1999 resolution expressed the EP's support "for the *people* (our emphasis) of East Timor in their struggle for the right to self-determination" (European Parliament 1999a). Such usage of the term "people" alongside self-determination references concerning statehood claimants has been interpreted to suggest a recognition of the rights of those claims (Dugard 2013). Similarly, PACE seems to have expressed a titular recognition of Palestine, WS, and Timor-Leste. In contrast, there is less evidence of the OSCE PA expressing a titular recognition of cases of our population. The only relevant information we found was of a declaration of the assembly calling the OSCE to give a status of Mediterranean Partner to the state of Palestine (although this never materialized), highlighting "the importance of building two

⁵ More recently, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) tried to amend a deal between Morocco and the EU so as to treat Western Sahara (WS) separately, but it was rejected. However, a recommendation to the Council stated that WS is not Morocco territory. Because of the deal there was an attempt for the first ever EP fact-finding mission in WS in 2018, but Morocco did not allow it.

independent, viable and stable States within a framework of mutual recognition by all actors that guarantees the safety of the population of both States” (OSCE PA 2013, 31).

With regard to institutional arrangements, a populous and cross-party parliamentary intergroup on WS has existed in the EP since 1986, recognizing a right to independence for the Sahrawi people (see also [Fernández-Molina 2017](#)). Moreover, Palestine has been listed as one of PACE’s “Partners for Democracy,” a privileged status given by PACE to nonmember states of neighboring regions, which enables the members of the Palestinian Legislative Council to sit and have the right to speak during PACE’s regular meetings. Similarly, we can find evidence of titular recognition in the fact that the PAP has granted Palestine the status of observer member since 2017, following a similar decision taken by the AU ([SABCNEWS 2017](#)) and has opened negotiation of a memorandum of understanding between the PAP and the Palestine Assembly ([Pan-African Parliament 2017a](#)). To an extent, these institutional solutions of regional parliaments resemble the UN observer status that we discussed before as an institutional set-up denoting titular recognition at the level of the international organization.

Finally, even though the above are significant cases of recognition and titular recognition being expressed through regional parliaments, most cases have been met with nonrecognition, usually apparent in declarative ways. Statehood claimants not generally recognized in the post-Soviet space are typical examples for which the regional parliaments under investigation have expressed a nonrecognition stance. Drawing on our conceptualization before, we note two ways of declaring nonrecognition. One is more explicit, where nonrecognized statehood claimants are named, such as OSCE’s PA reaffirmation of the necessity to define the status of Abkhazia within the state of Georgia (OSCE PA 2005, 20) or the similar treatment of more recent secession efforts in Lugansk and Donetsk. There is also a more implicit nonrecognition, which is evident in the support of a different sovereign over the claimed territory. For example, a 1994 OSCE PA declaration on Transnistria supported “a peaceful solution to the conflict based on respect for the independence, sovereignty and full integrity of Moldova” (OSCE PA 1994). A similar approach has been followed toward Nagorno Karabakh and Chechnya (OSCE PA 2000). Similarly, a nonrecognition stance by PACE can be seen in the use of the term “de facto authorities” to describe secessionist administrations (e.g., [PACE 2018](#), also termed as “grey zones” or “black holes”) in the post-Soviet space versus “legitimate authorities” used to describe the administrations of their parent states. Over the years, EP resolutions have also supported the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan (e.g., [European Parliament 2008](#)) or Cyprus (e.g., [European Parliament 2017a](#)) and we also found evidence of the implicit nonrecognition of Somaliland in a 2013 resolution ([European Parliament 2013](#)), which, despite commending Somaliland’s stability, treated the area as a federal unit of Somalia. Similarly, both the PACE and the EP treated Kosovo⁶ as part of Serbia during the nineties (e.g., [European Parliament 1997](#); [PACE 1998](#)) and Chechnya as part of the Russian Federation ([European Parliament 1996](#); [PACE 1999](#)). Finally, we found little evidence of nonrecognition stances expressed through the PAP and with reference to Kosovo

only. For example, in a 2016 meeting with Serbian Minister of Foreign Affairs, PAP’s Speaker expressed its expectation that African countries would continue not recognizing Kosovo’s unilateral declaration of independence: “the Speaker of the Pan-African Parliament reaffirmed, in view of the excellent and traditionally friendly relations between African countries and Serbia, the continuation of the principled support of the Pan-African Parliament, Cameroon and other African countries to Serbia regarding Kosovo and Metohija, at both bilateral and multilateral level” ([Republic of Serbia 2016](#), 1). Although this statement is not as strong evidence as, for instance, a resolution by the EP, it is nevertheless relevant, given the Speaker presides over the PAP and is supposed to represent the institution internationally.

In our study, we also found evidence of institutional solutions that can be seen as suggesting a nonrecognition of certain statehood claims. For example, the OSCE PA has established an “ad hoc Committee on Abkhazia (Georgia),” a move that suggested nonrecognition and the intention of this body to consider Abkhazia as a territory within Georgia. Similarly, PACE established an ad hoc committee on Chechnya, which included the organization of a fact-mission to the region, given the accusations of human rights violations from Russia. Between 2005 and 2013, the EP also introduced a “High Level Contact Group for the Relations with the Turkish-Cypriots in the Northern Part of the Island” (i.e., Cyprus), which operated in a nonrecognition manner (see also [Kyriz 2013](#)), and has also maintained the “Formosa Club,” a friendship group with Taiwan that otherwise is not recognized (e.g., [European Parliament 2018](#)). Often, such arrangements form part of the so-called engagement without recognition approach (see also [Caspersen and Herrberg 2010](#); [Ker-Lindsay 2015](#); [Ker-Lindsay and Berg 2018](#)). Even more interesting are cases where representatives from territories without general recognition partake in the workings of regional parliaments in ways that suggest nonrecognition. A typical example here is the TRNC. Cyprus, formally a bicomunal state, is allowed six members to the EP: four Greek Cypriots and two Turkish Cypriots. However, because of the conflict, the state is not functioning in the bicomunal way it is designed to do so: the island is now divided between the Greek Cypriots in the south, who continue to represent the Republic alone, and the Turkish Cypriots in the north, who seceded under the TRNC and no longer participate in the Republic. This meant that, for years, the Turkish Cypriots seats in the EP remained empty. In 2019, the first Turkish Cypriot MEP, Niyazi Kızılyürek, took his seat. However, the way this was done suggests a nonrecognition of the TRNC: the Turkish Cypriot MEP was listed with a Greek Cypriot party, took part in the European Elections organized by the Greek Cypriot led Republic and indeed he is now a member representing that state, which is de jure considered the sovereign of north Cyprus territories too, where TRNC is based. We also found a similar story in PACE: Like with the EP, two Turkish Cypriots took part in Assembly activities not as representatives of the self-declared TRNC but as part of the Republic of Cyprus delegation ([PACE 2005](#)).

In this context, the conceptualization developed and the patterns presented based on it invite us to think more systematically about the role of regional parliaments in state recognition matters. In the next section, we elaborate on the degree to which collective recognition might suggest a certain agency of regional parliaments, but our conceptualization raises many other questions for investigating better state recognition. For example, how are these positions negotiated and how do they come about? Why do positions of these assemblies generally reflect positions of more

⁶ Following the new declaration of independence in 2008, PACE has demonstrated support to the CoE’s neutral position on the status of Kosovo: “The Council of Europe follows a policy of status-neutrality towards Kosovo, while supporting its progressive alignment with the Council of Europe’s standards in the areas of democracy, human rights and the rule of law” ([PACE 2018](#), 1). The OSCE PA has followed a similar approach.

executive bodies? The often dominance of executive bodies within organizations might suggest assemblies follow their lead, but we saw that there are cases in which they do not, like the EP and Palestine or Kosovo, and more research will allow us to explain these deviations. Our discussion could also facilitate more research on the relationship between these supranational bodies and state organs, including national parliaments, where there are case-specific suggestions that they might impact collective recognition activities of supranational parliaments (Gianniu 2016, 76). Oppositely, does collective recognition influence recognition by members, and how? Finally, how can we explain variation between the assemblies themselves, for example in the case of SADR being collectively recognized through the PAP while only being titularly recognized by other assemblies like the EP? These questions are important for a more holistic understanding of state recognition and probing more the role of international organizations and regional parliaments in particular.

Parliamentary Agency and Recognition

This section elaborates on what recognition stances expressed through regional parliaments might tell us for the agency of these institutions. We argue that, through engaging with statehood claims not generally recognized, regional parliaments have displayed varying degrees of parliamentary agency, which, however, is remarkable when considered against a literature that has largely ignored their role as distinct, important agents for collective recognition matters. We conceive parliamentary agency as the capacity of parliamentary agents (i.e., parliamentarians, officials of regional parliaments, representatives of specialized committees, external delegations/groups, and political groups) to autonomously perform within their respective organizations, which are mainly controlled by executive agents. This conceptualization relates to recent literature which has applied the notion of parliamentary agency to understanding the institutional development of regional parliaments such as the EP, the PAP, and the Mercosur Parliament (Luciano 2021), as well as to scholarly works that have emphasized the increasing actorness of the EP in specific and in relation to international affairs (Stavridis and Irrera 2015; Herranz-Surrallés 2019; Fromage and Herranz-Surrallés 2021). Through our research, we were able to discern three main ways in which parliamentary agency becomes apparent: (1) when actors employ specific parliamentary instruments, such as resolutions and external delegations, to independently engage with issues surrounding not generally recognized statehood claimants; (2) by promoting pluralistic debates and parliamentary questions during plenary sessions; and (3) when the recognition stances of regional parliaments differ to that of more executive bodies. In this way, our conceptualization of parliamentary agency does not change the way in which recognition has been theorized as, strictly speaking, a state competence, but it does allow us to see how organs of international organizations might be important for how it is manifested more collectively.

First, even when they follow recognition stances similar to that of the executive bodies of the organization, regional parliaments might contribute to regional and international discussions on the recognition of many statehood claimants through actions and instruments specific to their bodies, such as parliamentary resolutions or delegations. Our analysis indicates that, overall, regional parliaments have been following the stance of their respective organizations. This is relevant in terms of parliamentary agency as it highlights

the limits to the autonomous performance of regional parliaments. Like is the case with other policy areas, the strong intergovernmental settings of regional organizations might not have allowed parliamentarians to express recognition stances that differ substantially from executive bodies. This, however, is not to erase the agency of regional parliaments altogether. When regional parliaments facilitate any recognition stance toward statehood claimants, even one that is the same with that of executive organs, it may be seen as a signal of parliamentary agency, inasmuch as parliamentary agents have allocated some of their political resources to engage with and position themselves over the cases, via institutional ways of denoting a recognition stance, such as granting observer/special status, establishment of delegations or generally development of interparliamentary relations with statehood claimants or declarative ways, such as resolutions.

Furthermore, a certain unique agency of regional parliaments becomes obvious in the fact that their plenary sessions offer a space for raising recognition-related questions for more executive bodies and for debates on related issues, which is also an important sign of political pluralism. In addition, the fact that the discussions held in plenary sessions are public increases their visibility and allows us to detect diverging opinions of parliamentarians regarding recognition. In this context, members of the EP pro-actively ask explicit questions about the recognition of self-determination and/or statehood claims, such as the following: “Does the Commission support the Saharawi right to self-determination? Does the Commission support the call for a referendum that will enable the Saharawi to have the right to form their own government?” (P-1736/02). Members of the PAP have also shown strong support to the self-determination of the people in WS. For instance, in a plenary debate in 2015, a parliamentarian stressed that the PAP should “send a clear message to the outside world and the region at issue that we, the African Parliamentarians, are for the unconditional withdrawal of the occupying forces from the Western Sahara with a view to securing complete independence of the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic” (Pan-African Parliament 2015, 251). Similarly, parliamentarians of the OSCE PA, such as Avital, have stressed the two-state solution of Israel and Palestine as the only acceptable end result to the conflict (OSCE PA 2006).

Interestingly, we can also find cases whereby parliamentarians draw parallels between different statehood claimants without general recognition. In 2000, for example, MEP Richard Corbett asked, “Does the Council agree that the legal situation of the Western Sahara bears a number of resemblances to the situation of East Timor prior to its recent independence?” (Corbett 2000, E-1588/00). MEPs have also called the Council to recognize the government of Taiwan as a non-sovereign legal personality akin to the Flemish government (E-5364/08) or fully as a state (E-2434/04). Besides, more general questions might still prompt a response by executive bodies of the organization that might relate to a recognition stance. For example, a 1999 question by MEP Andre Brie of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) about the stance of the Council on the War in Chechnya (Brie 1999, E-1997/99) prompted a response that highlighted the commitment to a solution that respects the territorial integrity of Russia, that is, a nonrecognition of Chechnya statehood claims. Similar EP questions and responses that show a respect to the sovereignty of the parent state have also appeared on Abkhazia (e.g., E-2361/08), South Ossetia (E-5581/08), and Transnistria (E-007339/13), and less so in PACE (e.g., nonrecognition of Nagorno Karabakh through its description as occupied

territories of Azerbaijan—see [PACE 2007](#)). Besides, plenary debates have also revealed a plurality of parliamentary opinions regarding cases of statehood claimants such as Kosovo:

The ensuing debate among OSCE parliamentarians demonstrated the conflicting visions that exist on the topic. Several delegates asserted that they did not recognize Kosovo's declaration of independence on the grounds that it violates Resolution 1244 of the UN Security Council and the Helsinki Final Act, which protect the territorial integrity of internationally recognized states. They stated that a negotiated settlement agreed by both parties was still possible. ([OSCE PA 2008](#), 16)

In addition, parliamentarians have also used the plenary to invite officials from state-seeking territories to argue for their recognition, for example when the Palestinian foreign minister (Press Release 2007) or President (Press Release 2016) used their speeches at the EP plenary to call for more recognition. Similarly, a PAP plenary session of October 2017 was attended by the Speaker of the Palestinian National Council, who seized the opportunity to thank PAP for their support and solidarity to “the state of Palestine” and their fight against Israeli occupation ([Pan-African Parliament 2017b](#)).

Another interesting aspect of the parliamentary debate is that it is instrumentalized by certain parliamentarians with high stakes in specific conflicts. For example, plenty of questions about the TRNC have been raised by MEPs of the parent state of Cyprus or its ally Greece (e.g., H-197/83, 3551/98, E-0167/01, E-005286/13). This is an expected but still interesting finding about how membership of an organization might impact how a statehood conflict is debated within the regional parliament (here the membership of Greece and later Cyprus influencing a debate largely against the secession attempts by the Turkish Cypriots). In a somewhat opposite direction, the fact that parliamentarians from the SADR are full members of the PAP has allowed them to directly participate in the plenary sessions, supporting the motions favorable to WS's self-determination ([Pan-African Parliament 2015](#)). Interestingly, with the readmission of Morocco (the other claimant of the territory of WS) to the AU in 2017, PAP plenary sessions became a new arena for the political clashes between Moroccans and members of the Polisario Front of the SADR (see also [Babas 2019](#)).

Finally, an even stronger degree of parliamentary agency is demonstrated when regional parliaments denote a recognition stance that is different to that of executive bodies of the organization. This is particularly noteworthy when considered against the strong intergovernmental nature of most regional organizations covered by this study and the limited means that regional parliaments have in order to develop a different approach to those of their executive branches. The approach of the EP to Kosovo and Palestine, in particular, has shown that regional parliaments may defy these limitations and eventually facilitate a distinct recognition stance from that of the European Commission or the European Council. The EP maintains a parliamentary delegation for special relations with Palestine (DPAL), which supports the two-state solution and also speaks of meetings with Palestinian “counterparts” of the MEPs ([European Parliament 2020](#)), suggesting a recognition of their assembly. Interestingly, the renaming of the group from “ad-hoc delegation” (1993) to “standing delegation” (1996), then “Delegation for the Relations with the Palestinian Legislative Council,” and, finally, simply DPAL seems to go in hand in hand with a move toward a clearer recognition stance by

the EP (see also [Bouris and Fernández-Molina 2018](#)). As a result, the website of the DPAL seems to explicitly recognize Palestinian statehood: “The Delegation was renamed ‘Delegation for relations with Palestine (DPAL)’ on 9 September 2015, after the EP’s recognized Palestinian statehood on 17 December 2014.” Such a clear reference to recognition by the EP also suggests that the Parliament views itself as an actor with a recognition competence and lends support to our approach of viewing regional parliaments as also important for recognition. Furthermore, it is a reference much more clearly suggesting a recognition of *the presence of* statehood in Palestine, rather than a titular recognition of *a right to* statehood, which the European Council supports. Indeed, a 2014 EP resolution went beyond the official stance of the Council regarding Palestine’s status and endorsed actual recognition, stating that the parliament “supports in principle recognition of Palestinian statehood and the two-state solution, and believes these should go hand in hand with the development of peace talks, which should be advanced” ([European Parliament 2014](#)). Similarly, the current engagement of the EP with Kosovo and the support of its full recognition differs from the more neutral positions expressed through the European Commission and the Council and demonstrates a strong level of EP agency in terms of recognition practices (for more, see next section).

Concluding this section and comparing the different regional parliaments, we see that we find most expressions of stances of collective recognition in the EP, which has been involved with questions of recognition across all cases of our population ([table 2](#)). Other regional parliaments covered by this study, such as the OSCE PA, PACE, and PAP, focused on cases from their own region only, with the notable exception of Palestine, which has been addressed by all regional parliaments ([table 3](#)). This demonstrates that, in contrast to other regional parliaments at the focus of our analysis, the EP has been historically concerned with recognition matters beyond Europe. This partially owes to the fact the EP is an older assembly than the rest we investigate and, therefore, was in a position to engage with some of the older historical cases of statehood claimants without general recognition. In terms of the type of recognition stance, the EP seems most active in expressing recognition or titular recognition, while, oppositely, OSCE seems the most conservative (having only offered titular recognition to Palestine). At the other side of this spectrum, we found no evidence of recognition stances of AIPA, indicating that this is the regional parliament least involved in recognition issues. Finally, the EP is also the regional parliament with the highest number of external delegations/friendship groups with statehood claimants not generally recognized (Taiwan, SADR, TRNC, Palestine, and Kosovo), while, oppositely, the PAP has none. Still, such institutional ways of denoting a recognition stance are rarer than declarative ways ([table 2](#)), but the establishment of external delegations can be seen as another sign of varying degrees of parliamentary agency among regional parliaments, given that some of them have more resources and autonomy than others to set up such bodies, regardless of the recognition stance expressed by the executive parts of the organization.

These differences in terms of degrees of parliamentary agency across regional parliaments may be associated with the membership and functioning of these assemblies. For instance, while members of the EP have been directly elected on a regular basis since 1979, representatives from the other parliaments are in fact members of national parliaments, indirectly appointed, and gather only on a few occasions a year. As suggested by previous literature ([Cofelice 2018](#);

Table 2. European Parliament and recognition

<i>Statehood claimant</i>	<i>Stance</i>	<i>Declarative</i>	<i>Institutional</i>
Taiwan	Nonrecognition	Resolution 2020	Friendship group
SADR	Titular recognition	Resolution 2005	Ad hoc delegation
TRNC	Nonrecognition	Resolution 2017	High level contact group
Palestine	Recognition	Resolution 2017	External delegation
Transnistria	Nonrecognition	Statement 2006	
Somaliland	Nonrecognition	Resolution 2013	
Nagorno Karabakh	Nonrecognition	Resolution 2008	
South Ossetia	Nonrecognition	Resolution 2018	
Abkhazia	Nonrecognition	Resolution 2018	
Kosovo	Recognition	Resolution 2009	External delegation
Donetsk	Nonrecognition	Resolution 2018	
Luhansk	Nonrecognition	Resolution 2018	
Kosova	Nonrecognition	Resolution 1997	
Eritrea	Titular recognition	Resolution 1991	
Chechnya	Nonrecognition	Resolution 1996	
Timor-Leste	Titular recognition	Resolution 1999	

Table 3. Regional Parliaments and Recognition of Palestine

<i>Regional parliament</i>	<i>Stance</i>	<i>Declarative</i>	<i>Institutional</i>
EP	Recognition	Resolution achieving the two-state solution in the Middle East, May 18, 2017	External delegation
OSCE PA	Titular recognition	Istanbul Declaration 2013	N/A
PACE	Titular recognition	Resolution 2202	Partner for democracy
PAP	Titular recognition	N/A	Observer member/MoU

Luciano 2021), differences in their composition may impact the performance and dedication of parliamentarians and the amount of time/resources spent in their activities. This means that direct-elected and “full-time” MEPs are more able to proactively act in several EU policy areas, which may include recognition policies. In this way, our study might confirm the international vocation of the EP as highlighted in other studies (Stavridis and Irrera 2015). Moreover, while the EP has become a relevant decision-making body at the EU level, OSCE PA, PACE, and PAP are more consultative assemblies than organs with legislative competencies. This might mean that they are less invested to fight off recognition positions facilitated by other bodies of the organization. In this context, our discussion of agency here must be seen as the first step toward understanding it better through further questioning of, for example, the explanations of different recognition positions expressed through regional parliaments, and what they mean for the policies both at the level of international organizations and at the state level.

Illustration: The European Parliament and the Recognition of Kosovo

This section explores different collective recognition stances that the EP has facilitated with reference to Kosovo over the years in order to illustrate more how regional parliaments have been engaging with statehood claimants not generally recognized. Following our previous discussion, this section accounts for both institutional and declarative ways of recognition and illustrates the arguments we are proposing about parliamentary agency as evident in (1) specific parliamentary instruments deployed in recognition matters, (2) parliamentary debates on recognition (here of

Kosovo) and (3) a different recognition stance of the regional parliament to that of the more executive parts of the organization. We treat the case as typical of high involvement from the parliament in recognition matters and of distinct parliamentary agency. We base this on a few observations: first and as explained in the previous section, the EP is the most involved parliament from those under investigation. Second, Kosovo is one of the few cases for which we observe both institutional and declarative ways through which the EP facilitates a collective recognition position (see also table 2). Finally, Kosovo is one of the two cases (the other being Palestine) in which the EP has expressed a recognition position different to that of the executive parts of the organization, which are better for illustrating parliamentary agency as defined in the previous section. From these two, we choose Kosovo because of our previous work on the EP as well as Kosovo, which gives us greater access to and familiarity with data.

As far as institutional arrangements are concerned, the EP began to meet informally with local parliamentarians as early as 2001 (European Parliament s/d 2021, 1) and since 2014 maintains an external delegation for relations with Bosnia and Kosovo (DSEE). The formalization of the delegation's focus on Bosnia and Kosovo (initially the delegation focused on countries from the region before they moved on to obtain membership candidate status) followed the signature of the Stabilization and Association Agreements (SAAs) between the EU and the two countries. The SAAs envisioned the creation of a parliamentary committee responsible for organizing regular meetings between parliamentarians from the EU and from Bosnia and Kosovo in order to monitor and exchange views on the progress of the agreements. While Kosovo's SAA includes a formal disclaimer that it does not amount to recognition by the EU

(Council of the EU 2016), the fact that the EP established an external delegation concerned with Kosovo alongside a generally recognized country (Bosnia and Herzegovina) can be seen as denoting a recognition of the former. Indeed, the (in)famous asterisk which the EU uses to disclaim its neutral position toward Kosovo is nowhere to be seen in the Delegation's website. Instead, Kosovo is referred to by its constitutional name "Republic of Kosovo," treated as a separate state to Serbia and the page also hosts links to webpages of Kosovo state institutions, such as the Presidency and the Parliament. Indeed, the EP itself speaks of "official relations with Kosovo's parliament" since 2008.

In addition to these institutional arrangements that denote a recognition of Kosovo, we also find similar evidence at the level of European political groups represented at the EP. For instance, the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) has been listed as an observer member country to the EP's largest political group (European People's Party—EPP) and the president of the group has engaged with institutions of the state in their formal capacity, like the Prime Minister of Kosovo (Tema 2020). Similarly, the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) has become a full member of the European Conservative and Reformist Party (ECR). This party politics dimension highlights the depth of the EP's political relations with Kosovo. It is also a finding that raises questions about the unique institutional ways in which recognition stances facilitated by regional parliaments might be apparent. While before we have conceptualized membership of international organizations, as a full member or observer, as linked to recognition stances, here we see parliament-specific institutional arrangements becoming important. While political groups cannot be seen as representing the regional parliament and the recognition stance it facilitates in general, they are nevertheless important as actors engaging with institutions of entities whose statehood is still contested.

In terms of more declarative ways through which a collective recognition stance toward Kosovo becomes apparent, one may observe a substantial transformation of the stances that the EP has facilitated from a nonrecognition stance to one of titular recognition, and, more recently, to recognition. One of the most self-cited EP resolutions at the peak of the conflict with Serbia (European Parliament 1998) supported Kosovo's autonomy "without changing European boundaries," something that can be seen as a recognition of Serb state claims over the area and, equally, a somewhat implicit nonrecognition of Kosovo's statehood aspirations. A year later, the EP (European Parliament 1999b) noted the important role of the EU in institution building following the NATO operation and the introduction of the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) under UNSC 1244, but continued with an implicit nonrecognition through treating Kosovo as a province (supposedly of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia [FRY]). By 2006, the situation had changed dramatically and now the EP seemed to support independence by excluding the rest of options, that is, return to a constitutional relationship with Serbia and Montenegro, unification with Albania or any other state or territory in the region, or partition of Kosovo (European Parliament 2006). A year after, like the European Council, the EP lent its support to the Ahtisaari Proposal for an independent Kosovo (European Parliament 2007a), which is further clear evidence of titular recognition. As a result, changes in the way the EP treated Kosovo's statehood aspiration mirror the incremental ways in which the stance of many parts of the international community changed over the years and probably have a variety of explanations. For example, the in-

tensification of violence during the nineties has been seen as a reason for the introduction of the UN administration (e.g., Kartsonaki 2018), which, in turn, further added to Kosovar thirst for independence. The Ahtisaari Plan which offered the option of independence and which the EP supported giving a clear signal of greater recognition has been seen as a response to these increased Kosovo Albanian demands for independence (e.g., Pond 2010). In the end, the proposal was not supported by Serbia, and Kosovo declared independence in February 2008. Following this, the EP encouraged "those EU Member States which have not already done so to recognize the independence of Kosovo" (European Parliament 2009). A year later, the EP reiterated this position and linked a common approach (of recognition) to making "EU policies more effective for all the people in Kosovo" (European Parliament 2010) and facilitating its integration into the EU. Austrian MEP Ulrike Lunacek, author of the resolution on Kosovo, remarked that the Parliament had "made clear that European integration is the future of an independent Kosovo" (Euractiv 2009). The latest EP resolution on Kosovo (2018) again invites those five members who have not recognized to do so and stresses that recognition would be beneficial to the normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia.

What is remarkable here is that the case of the EP and Kosovo illustrates very well the agency of regional parliaments, given that we witness the expression of a recognition stance that is different from the other bodies of the EU. Generally, and as noted above, during the nineties, the EP followed a recognition stance similar to other EU bodies, most notably the European Council. And yet, more nuanced, but nevertheless important, differences are obvious from early on. In 1991, the EP urged the Badinter Commission, tasked with making recommendations on how the EU should deal with the dissolution of Yugoslavia, to consider Kosovo as a case of secession, along with the federal republics of Yugoslavia (Bellamy 2002, 26). The Commission was adamant to not do so but this deviation of the EP from Council stances of that time that favored simply *restoring* Kosovo's autonomy (European Council 1992) is very crucial, especially if we consider the huge amount of efforts that Kosovars were undertaking in having their secession considered. During the rest of the nineties, we continue noticing a certain agency on the part of the EP in the way they sought to engineer developments regarding Kosovo. In 1995, the EP requested the European Council and the Commission to open an office in Kosovo, which was anathema to the Serbs (European Parliament 1996b). Interestingly similar demands were echoed by other regional parliaments like PACE (Troebst 1998). The EP also used very strong language against Serbian aggression and recommended the EU not to lift sanctions or normalize relations before Serbs talk to Kosovo Albanians and that an international conference specifically concerned with Kosovo is organized (European Parliament 1998). Strikingly, the EP instructed its President to communicate one of its resolutions not only to the EU bodies and governments of Balkan states, but also to "the President of the Kosovo Parliament in exile" (European Parliament 1996c). This last point is a rather unique implicit recognition of one of the bodies of the Kosova Republic established in 1991 and recognized by no one other than Albania. Following the NATO intervention in 1999, the EP seemed to follow more or less the stances of other EU bodies, though, again, asserting its agency more independently (e.g., first informal interparliamentary meeting in 2002). Like the European Council, the EP supported independence via the Ahtisaari Plan. However, following the

lack of Serbian support and the failure of the plan, the EP has been clearly in favor of recognition of the Kosovo Republic declared in 2008, to which they have also developed very clear institutional links (see also earlier). This is in contrast to the European Council, which, following Serbia's rejection of the independence plan, reverted to a more conservative position toward recognition (as also expressed in the SAA signed by the European Commission on behalf of the EU, see also earlier). Besides, the EP's encouragement of those few member states non-recognizing to change their position is another very useful illustration of the EP's agency in matters of Kosovo's recognition. This is because the EP not only breaks ranks with the general EU approach but actively instructs members of the organization to defy it. We notice something similar in the EP's approach to Palestine (see also earlier) and our tentative assumptions of the ways in which agency of regional parliaments is manifested and presented in the previous section and illustrated here seeks to facilitate more research on deviations between recognition positions expressed through different bodies of international organizations and what they mean for the understanding and practice of statehood within these bodies and beyond.

As for MEP questions on Kosovo, these too illustrate well the agency of regional parliaments, with parliamentarians often using the plenary to argue in favor of certain recognition stances that the organization should adopt toward Kosovo. For example, the 2008 declaration of independence triggered interventions that can be seen as very important for recognition and international organizations. In March 2008, Matsakis of Cyprus argued that "it would have been wiser, in the light of internal EU disagreement, not to allow unilateral recognition by any Member States, but instead to continue efforts to find a common EU position on the matter" (Matsakis 2008, E-1430/2008). In October 2020, Catalan Ramon Tremosa put forward a passionate case in favor of Kosovo's recognition and called the European Council to play a role in instructing Spain on its recognition stance and the Commission to come up with measures if Spain fails to do so:

"The Spanish State is one of the few countries in the EU which has still not recognized the independence of Kosovo, thereby aligning itself with countries severely lacking in democracy and recognition of human rights and individual liberties such as China and Russia [Recognizing Kosovo] is a basic matter of respect for the democratic principle of free, peaceful and democratic self-determination by the peoples and nations of the world [...] Does the Council intend to call on the Spanish State to recognize the independence of Kosovo? What steps does the Commission intend to take if the Spanish State fails to recognize said independence in the next few months?" (Tremosa 2010, E-8574/2010).

These interventions are very interesting for a few reasons. First, the specific recognition positions which each MEP is arguing for seem to relate to statehood conflicts in their respective countries, therefore illustrating how membership of a regional organization might influence the way in which recognition is debated—an area which merits further investigation. Matsakis' call to nonrecognition of Kosovo was probably motivated by the fact that his country Cyprus is one of the few non-recognizers, largely because they face their own secessionist challenges (from the TRNC), while Tremosa's opposite call to recognition might have been informed by his pro-Catalan independence views. Second and

regardless of their different views on Kosovo, both interventions can be seen as making the case for explicit and formal collective recognition by the EU. This is especially noteworthy given common wisdom that casts international organizations as peripheral to recognition matters. Indeed, more research into how these bodies and their members articulate recognition matters will contribute toward the debate on what is state recognition and its sources.

Conclusions

Previous research on recognition has paid less attention to international organizations than states, and the works that exist have mostly focused on the executive branches of these bodies. This study contributes to this discussion by demonstrating the importance of regional parliaments for collective recognition and conceptualizing ways to understand it better. Through a scoping exercise of a wide population of historical and contemporary cases of statehood claimants without general recognition, alongside a range of regional organizations from both Europe and the Global South, we demonstrate how collective recognition stances are facilitated by regional parliaments in institutional or declarative ways, and we also offer some tentative theoretical claims about the different ways in which these bodies display a certain agency. We find that not only do regional parliaments count on distinct declarative and institutional ways of engaging with statehood claims over disputed territories, but in some cases—as observed in the illustration on the evolution of the EP's approach toward Kosovo—they reflect a different, more positive, recognition stance than the executive bodies of their organization. Moreover, we identify that, through plenary debates, members of regional parliaments are able to voice their opinions on recognition and sometimes even question the position of other parts of the organization regarding statehood claimants. With these insights, we highlight how international organizations, and regional parliaments in specific, are important for questions of what a state is, which has often been seen as defining the membership of the international system and which lie at the heart of some of the most complicated security issues and conflicts of past and present international relations.

This study, therefore, aims to facilitate more research on collective recognition that will help us gain better empirical and, ultimately, conceptual and theoretical insights on how international actors, and especially regional assemblies, deal with statehood conflicts. Indeed, our main purpose in covering a wide range of regional parliaments and statehood claimants and applying the notion of parliamentary agency to recognition stances was to facilitate further theory development, rather than develop theory or hypothesize explanations. Therefore, future research may assess why regional parliaments have developed the collective recognition stances we have presented, or the reasons behind deviations or contradictions between collective recognition stances expressed through these parliaments and executive parts of international organizations. To this end, further research could examine the capacity of regional parliaments to influence the recognition policies of other parts of the international organization, but also their members individually. Our conceptualization and our theoretical propositions about the agency of regional parliaments can also facilitate the study of other similar cases not covered here. These could include, for example, the East African Legislative Assembly and the Parliament of the Economic Community of Western African States (Ecowas Parliament) on the African continent, or a more systematic probing of the reasons why

other regional parliaments, like AIPA of the ASEAN, seem to not have been preoccupied with controversial questions of statehood. Crucially, applying the tentative conclusions of this study to a greater number of cases will allow the further testing of their external validity and contribute to a rounder understanding of not only statehood disputes and contemporary security challenges, but also their implications for how the concepts of state and of the international system more generally are theorized and practised. Besides, the conceptual and theoretical tools we propose could also contribute to the study of international organizations more generally. For example, the institutional and declarative ways of recognition we identify might also apply in bodies of international organizations other than the regional parliaments. Such studies will be helpful in producing missing empirical findings on international organizations and the ways in which they facilitate more collective forms of recognition, which have been relatively under-researched.

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