

**BELGIUM: FROM REGIONALISM TO FEDERALISM**

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In: *The Territorial Management of Ethnic Conflict*, edited by John Coakley.  
London: Frank Cass, 73-99.

[10,021 words]

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Liesbet Hooghe

## INTRODUCTION

Ethnic conflict in Belgium has been intense, but peaceful. Its roots are linguistic: a majority of the population speaks Dutch, but the official language in the nineteenth century was French. Ethnic demands and conflict management strategies were initially non-territorial, but increasingly acquired a territorial aspect. The fact that Dutch- and French-speakers were to a large extent territorially segregated facilitated this evolution. At a later stage, ethnic conflict also acquired a socio-economic dimension. The increased territorial emphasis in ethno-linguistic politics had made the emergence of economic ethno-nationalism easier and was in its turn reinforced by these later developments.

Each of the two forms of nationalism demanded a slightly different type of territorial settlement. This made the ethnic challenge ambivalent in two ways. First, language and socio-economic interests were treated as separate criteria in drawing and redrawing boundaries. Which was to have priority? Second, the two were to some extent contradictory. Was a territorial solution really the better choice for the management of ethnic conflict in Belgium, or did the nature of ethnic conflict call for a non-territorial solution? This ambiguity gave ammunition to those who sought to postpone or prevent territorial devolution.

Hence, political actors in Belgium had considerable leeway in dealing with the ethnic issue. This leeway was a consequence of the structure of the conflict, and the actors used it to their political advantage. Thus they were likely to change definitions of the groups-in-conflict when political opportunities altered. Furthermore, actors who favoured a territorial position on one occasion might be found to take a much less radical or even a non-territorial stand in another situation. Put differently, political actors in Belgium were prepared to draw and redraw boundaries such that inter-group contact was lessened, but only when it was to their advantage.

This contribution starts with a short historical introduction and data on the current ethno-linguistic balance. It continues with an analysis of the principal sources of ethnic conflict and change over time. The following section tries to show why the territorial approach became the dominant strategy for conflict management and how Belgium evolved from regionalism to federalism. Finally, this approach is placed in a broader context of political conflict management in Belgium. It is argued that federalism is an attempt to continue the traditional consociational approach by other means, but that the legacy of consociationalism is strong.

## EMERGENCE OF THE ETHNIC PROBLEM

Belgium was created in 1830 when it seceded from the Netherlands after only 15 years of union. The national question in Belgium was initially defined as a language issue. Cultural deprivation spurred a Flemish movement, whose roots are to be found in

the nineteenth century. After 1945 divergent economic developments between north and south gave rise to a genuine Walloon nationalism. Finally, in the 1960s and 1970s the lines of conflict converged in and around Brussels, where a Francophone 'nationalist' movement became articulate.<sup>1</sup>

These different types of nationalism developed against the background of early industrialization and liberal democracy on the one hand and relatively late mass democracy on the other hand. This had important consequences. First, nationalism and the emergence of a modern society evolved quite independently in Belgium. In many European countries nationalist movements were pivotal in the break-up of the old regime and the diffusion of liberal democratic ideas. The Belgian state, however, was created by a coalition between traditional groups (nobility or landowners, and the Catholic Church) and new middle classes (industrialists and the intelligentsia). When this coalition broke down shortly after independence, politics rapidly became competitive. Nation-wide political parties were formed along the conservative (or, more precisely, Catholic)-liberal cleavage. Put differently, modern political cleavages and modern politics came first; nationalist movements appeared afterwards. New middle classes in search of political incorporation turned more readily to politics defined by the conventional liberal-Catholic or capital-labour cleavage than to nationalism. Hence nationalist movements took root only slowly in Belgian political life, and the older cleavages continued to cause divisions within them.

Second, the retarded break-through of mass democracy inhibited popular mobilization on the nationalist issue. Suffrage was limited to the upper classes until the last decade of the nineteenth century; the first elections according to the 'one man, one vote' principle were held in 1919.<sup>2</sup>

Third, the combination of early liberal democracy and late transition to mass democracy influenced the agenda of the early nationalist movements and has marked nationalist conflict to this day. Nationalists had little chance of becoming the major advocates of civil rights or social rights and democratization, let alone of monopolizing these issues. The Liberal Party had defended civil rights and the liberal secular state since the creation of Belgium.<sup>3</sup> Universal suffrage and better labour conditions were advanced by left wing elements within the two traditional parties, and from the 1880s onwards also by a small socialist party. Nationalists played only a marginal role in this debate, especially since social and cultural grievances did not coincide geographically. The social class cleavage was most salient in Wallonia, which was assimilated fairly smoothly to the Francophone culture of the Belgian state; the capital-labour conflict was much weaker in rural, Dutch-speaking Flanders.

Flemish nationalism was provoked by language grievances and remained very weak on the labour and agrarian issues throughout the nineteenth century. This thwarted mass mobilization. However, the small group of Flemish nationalists, most of them intellectuals or members of the higher middle class,<sup>4</sup> was successful in its narrow political agenda: by the end of the nineteenth century Dutch was accepted in Flemish public life and gradually replaced French in Flanders. Flemish nationalism 'imagined its community'<sup>5</sup> predominantly along cultural-linguistic lines. When universal suffrage was introduced, the Flemish nationalists again failed to reap the expanded mobilization potential. Democratization strengthened the Belgian Socialist Party and the Christian

Democratic labour wing in the Belgian Catholic Party instead, groups that monopolised the socio-economic cleavage.<sup>6</sup> But democratization was also a deathblow for unilingually Francophone Belgium: a Flemish public life, complete with its own elite, emerged parallel to the Francophone one. Flemish nationalists had been demanding this since the 1850s, and have continued to imagine their community mainly in terms of these successful cultural-linguistic criteria.

After 1945 the industrial decline of Wallonia became apparent, and this sharpened Walloon regional consciousness (as distinct from a consciousness based on language). Walloon nationalism imagined its community primarily along socio-economic lines, and continues to do so.

## THE ETHNO-LINGUISTIC BALANCE

In the Belgian census of 1846 42.1 per cent reported French as the language they spoke most frequently, 57.0 per cent Dutch and 0.8 per cent German.<sup>7</sup> In the Flemish provinces two to four per cent reportedly spoke French only (most of these belonged to the upper classes).<sup>8</sup> The most recent official figures on language usage date from the census of 1947, and demonstrate how little the situation had changed by then.<sup>9</sup> Its general findings are reported in Table 3.1 **and in Map 3.1**. It may be seen that Flanders and Wallonia were to a large extent linguistically homogeneous in 1947, especially when the 'unknowns' (most of them infants under two years) are disregarded. The five per cent Francophone minority in Flanders was widely dispersed. However, critical masses were to be found in large cities (notably Antwerp, Ghent, Bruges and Louvain) and in some villages along the border with France or Wallonia. Detailed studies of their socio-economic background are lacking, but most Francophones reportedly belonged to the aristocracy, the upper bourgeoisie or the liberal professions.<sup>10</sup> In Wallonia, the most sizeable minority in 1947 was German speaking. The great majority of this group was to be found in the so-called East Cantons, which were acquired from Germany after the First World War. The Flemish minority in Wallonia consisted mostly of immigrants of lower economic status in a process of cultural assimilation. By contrast to the two larger regions, Brussels (within its current boundaries) had undergone significant changes since Belgian independence. Until well into the nineteenth century the Brussels area was predominantly Dutch speaking, but with urbanisation and expansion Dutch was rapidly losing ground to French, which had clearly overtaken Dutch by 1947.

[Table 3.1 and Map 3.1 about here]

Language usage became a sensitive issue after 1947, to such a degree that subsequent population censuses no longer provided data in this area. It is therefore a rather risky enterprise to assess the current linguistic balance in the three regions. Linguistic homogeneity has undoubtedly increased in Flanders and Wallonia, and, of equal importance, the formally unilingual character of the two regions is no longer a political issue. This is to a large extent the result of the language law of 1963, which transferred 25 communes (with some 87,000 inhabitants) from Flanders to Wallonia, and 24 communes (with some 24,000 inhabitants) in the opposite direction. Many more meticulously defined bits of territory were transferred one way or the other across the linguistic border. The development of mass society also stimulated homogenisation. In

Wallonia, the Flemish immigrants quickly integrated. In Flanders, most Francophone families of elite backgrounds quietly adjusted to the change of language patterns: Dutch has become their working language, but their cultural identity seems to have remained primarily French-orientated. The one significant exception concerns Flemish municipalities adjacent to Brussels, where the Francophone presence has undoubtedly increased since the last census.

Language usage is still a sensitive question in and around the Brussels region. Many efforts were made to develop alternative measures of language use.<sup>11</sup> None of them seems to be reliable, although it is clear that *verfransing*, or assimilation to French culture, has continued in Brussels since 1947. Current estimates of the proportion of Dutch speakers fluctuate between 10 and 20 per cent for the 19 municipalities that constitute the Brussels Capital region.<sup>12</sup> Passions run particularly high in six Flemish municipalities adjacent to Brussels (especially south of Brussels,) where French-speakers constitute up to 30-50 percent of the population. These areas, formally part of the Flemish region, form a narrow territorial corridor between the predominantly French-speaking Brussels metropolis to the north and the unilingually French-speaking Walloon region to the south.

## PRINCIPAL SOURCES OF INTER-ETHNIC TENSION

Interethnic conflict in Belgium does not resemble a simple two-actor game. There are three major games, each with a limited number of parties involved: Flemish nationalism versus French-speakers on cultural identity, Walloon nationalism versus Flanders and Brussels on socio-economic grievances, and (Francophone) Brussels versus the rest of the country on centre-periphery matters. Each game is played by rather distinctly defined actors. But the distinctions are small, making it hard to keep the games separate all the time. A singular feature of ethnic politics in Belgium is that the three games collapse regularly into a single game of Flemish against Walloons or Flemish against French-speakers.

### *Flemish nationalism*

While the constitution of 1831 guaranteed linguistic liberty, French became the only official language.<sup>13</sup> Soon after independence, however, some intellectuals in the Flemish provinces began to advance language grievances.<sup>14</sup> The first issues were purely linguistic and literary, but gradually the language grievances reached out to broader aspects of social life. Under Flemish pressure, language policy in Belgium evolved gradually from *laissez-faire* to language planning.

The first series of language laws of the late nineteenth century imposed asymmetrical bilingualism.<sup>15</sup> Flanders became bilingual, while the rest of the country remained unilingual. The legislation was limited in scope. The most important act symbolically was the Equalization Act of 1898, which made Dutch an official language on equal footing with French.<sup>16</sup>

The second wave of language laws, adopted in the 1930s, moved towards territorial unilingualism in Flanders and Wallonia and bilingual institutions in Brussels and in

areas with linguistic minorities. The laws were more comprehensive than their nineteenth century predecessors. The switch to territorial unilingualism allowed Flemish and Francophones (and especially French-speaking Walloons) to preserve their interests. Many Flemish feared that French would remain a highly attractive language for the leading classes in Flanders. The spread of French as 'the language spoken only or most frequently', in the terminology of the census reports, reached a maximum in the 1920s and 1930s: between six and 14 per cent in the urban centres of Flanders.<sup>17</sup> Territorial unilingualism was to isolate this small, but strategic, Francophone minority in Flanders from Brussels and Wallonia. Walloons and Francophone Brussels residents feared that the alternative to territorial unilingualism, nation-wide bilingualism, would take jobs away from Francophones because of their poor knowledge of Dutch. Territorial unilingualism secured the essential: a unilingual Wallonia.

After the core law of 1932, which regulated the use of languages in the administration and in its dealings with the public, parliament passed language laws on education, judicial matters and the army. The different pieces of legislation rested on the same broad principles. First, official unilingualism was introduced in Flanders and Wallonia, but the boundaries could be adjusted after each language census. Municipalities with a significant official language minority offered certain public services in the minority language. Second, the general rule for the central public service was bilingualism of services but unilingualism of employees. Unilingual working units were created where possible, in order to restrict the number of bilingual positions. Third, Brussels was declared bilingual.

The law of 1932 and others in the 1930s were pivotal in transforming Flemish society into a Dutch-speaking community with a Dutch-speaking elite.<sup>18</sup> Flemish nationalists now perceived a Francophone threat on their boundaries. After each language census some Flemish territory was lost, especially around Brussels. In 1960-61 the language questions in the census were boycotted on a large scale by Flemish local government authorities.

These grievances, along with gaps in the previous language laws, led to the last series of laws, which were passed in the 1960s. They refined and hardened territorial unilingualism. Most significant was the 1963 law, which divided Belgium into four language areas: unilingually Dutch-speaking (Flanders), unilingually French-speaking (Wallonia) and unilingually German-speaking areas, and the bilingual area of Brussels.<sup>19</sup> Some municipalities on the two sides of the Flemish-Walloon border, six communes around Brussels and the German-speaking area retained some limited bilingual facilities. The 1963 law froze the linguistic frontier between Dutch-speaking Belgium, French-speaking Belgium and bilingual Belgium. But many Francophones have never accepted the freezing of the linguistic frontier around Brussels. Attempts to negotiate a permanent settlement for boundaries and linguistic minority rights around Brussels have failed consistently, most recently in 2001. The other contested area is Voeren, a conglomerate of six villages of altogether 5,000 inhabitants, the majority of which now speak French, which was transferred from Wallonia to Flanders.

In the process of interaction with the Belgian-Francophone state and the emerging Francophone-Walloon movement the Flemish movement became nationalist. After the First World War cultural autonomy became the most urgent demand of the nationalist

movement. In 1919 a genuine Flemish nationalist party, the *Frontpartij*, gained its first electoral success. In the 1930s, the *Vlaams Nationaal Verbond* (VNV) succeeded it. Its success forced the Catholic Party in Flanders to support demands for some form of cultural autonomy. Several Flemish nationalist leaders collaborated with the German occupiers during the Second World War. The Flemish movement made a fresh start in 1954, when a new Flemish party, the *Volksunie* (VU), entered parliament on a federalist platform. However, its breakthrough came only in 1965. The VU obtained its highest share of the vote in 1971 with 19.4 per cent of the Flemish vote. The success of the Flemish nationalists at the polls gradually heightened Flemish-Francophone tensions in the traditional parties, which split along linguistic lines after 1968. The Flemish Christian Democrats and Socialists wrote federalism into their party programmes in the 1980s, while the Liberals remained more reluctant. The VU was damaged by this co-optation of their primary issue, and it has been declining since, obtaining its lowest result since 1965 in the November 1991 parliamentary elections: a mere 9.4 per cent of the Flemish vote. Since then, its fortunes have waxed and waned; it obtained just over 10 per cent of the vote in 1999. The VU also suffered from the defection of more extreme elements: in 1978, a breakaway group, the *Vlaams Blok*, entered parliament on a separatist and traditionalist platform. In the 1980s, elements moved the party to the radical right, espousing an anti-immigrant stance, Euro-skepticism, support for law and order, and for traditionalist values. These radical-right views overshadow its traditional Flemish separatist stance. Its support jumped from three per cent of the Flemish vote in 1987 to 10.4 per cent in 1991 and 15.5 per cent in 1999.<sup>20</sup>

#### *Walloon nationalism*

The breakthrough for Walloon nationalism came only after the Second World War,<sup>21</sup> and it was a reaction against Wallonia's economic decline in the twentieth century. The Walloon economy was dependent on the heavy steel and coal industries, which were rapidly losing importance after 1945. Light industry lagged behind in modernization or moved out of Wallonia and new industry tended to avoid the region.<sup>22</sup>

Uneven patterns of economic development and an increasingly negative demographic balance caused widespread resentment. First, Belgian high finance, which had made considerable profits in the heyday of Wallonia's industry, made few new investments and turned instead increasingly to Flanders. Flanders overtook Wallonia between 1963 and 1966 in terms of gross regional product (GRP) per capita (based on residence), and by the end of the 1980s had established a considerable lead, as may be seen from Table 3.2. This gap widened in the 1990s. Wallonia felt abandoned by high finance in Brussels and by Flanders.

[Table 3.2 about here]

Second, many Walloons were afraid of political domination by the Flemish, because the latter held a majority of the seats in the national parliament.<sup>23</sup> Table 3.3 shows that the Walloon population increased at a much slower pace than the Flemish. Until the 1970s this was mainly due to a significantly higher birth rate and higher life expectancy in Flanders. Although the two rates of natural increase have converged (the Flemish birth rate was even lower than the Walloon one for several years in the 1980s), it is



expected that the share of Flanders in the total Belgian population will increase further due to earlier high birth rates in Flanders and to divergent migration patterns.

[Table 3.3 about here]

Walloons feared that in a unitary state the necessary restructuring of their economy would be done on Flemish terms. Political preferences in Wallonia have traditionally been more supportive of state intervention than in free market-oriented Flanders or Brussels. This was due to a larger socialist movement, but it can also be explained by divergences in the economic structure of the three regions. The general pattern of development was analogous in the two larger regions: near-disappearance of agriculture, decline of the industrial sector, and growth in the tertiary sector. In 1966 the industrial and tertiary sectors were almost equally important in terms of their contribution to the GRP of Wallonia (46 and 48 per cent respectively) and of Flanders (44 and 51 per cent). By 1988 the tertiary sector accounted for 64 per cent in Wallonia and the secondary sector had dropped to 35 per cent. In Flanders the evolution had been less dramatic: 61 per cent for the tertiary sector and almost 39 per cent for industry. By 1995, the tertiary sector in Wallonia constituted 70 per cent, against less than 28 per cent for industry, while the figures for Flanders were respectively 65 per cent and 33 per cent. The standard of living in Brussels has traditionally been highly dependent on the tertiary sector (71 per cent in 1966; 84 per cent in 1988; and 81 per cent in 1995). However, the evolution within each region has been different. Walloon industrial production has depended heavily on three sectors (the metallurgical industry, iron and steel, and construction), and all three experienced abrupt recessions in the 1970s or 1980s. Flemish industrial production was more diversified, was more often based in advanced sectors (the car industry, the chemical industry and electronics) and did not experience comparable setbacks. Similarly, the tertiary sector has developed differently in the three regions. In Wallonia, growth has been most pronounced in the services category (public services and education especially). Increase in Flanders has been more evenly spread over different categories. In Brussels, financial services and insurance have boomed. In a nutshell, tertiary growth in Flanders and Brussels has depended more on private initiative than in Wallonia.

The first serious challenge to the Belgian unitary state came from the Walloon movement. At a conference of all major Walloon and Francophone leaders in 1945 an overwhelming majority opted for an autonomous Wallonia in a federal Belgium. However, the dust settled quickly and very little changed. Walloon nationalist party formation did not take place until the 1960s. In 1961, a popular Walloon labour leader broke away from the socialist party. His popular movement, *Mouvement populaire wallon*, carried a radical federalist and socialist platform. Four years later two Walloon nationalist parties each won a seat in the national parliament. In 1968, a new party, the *Rassemblement wallon* (RW), suddenly won 11 per cent of the regional votes. However, in the 1980s the RW became almost completely absorbed by the Francophone socialists (PS) and Christian Democrats (PSC). In the 1980s the PS endorsed a radical federalist programme for economic autonomy; the nationalist parties in Wallonia obtained less than two per cent of the regional vote in the elections of 1991, and they have disappeared since.

The economic expansion programme of the 1950s and 1960s and subsequent decentralisation of industrial policy and regional development in 1970 were in part a response to Walloon nationalist demands. The new structures respected the linguistic border between Flanders and Wallonia and became the first regional (as opposed to local) policy instruments. But genuine regional autonomy was not realized until the state reform of 1980.

### *The defensive reaction of Brussels*

In the 1960s and 1970s the Flemish and Walloon movements transferred the battle about the appropriate state structure to Brussels, although there was also an independent Brussels component.<sup>24</sup> The two most significant features of the development of Brussels since independence are its expansion into the Flemish countryside and its becoming increasingly French-speaking, especially since the 1950s. Nearly one out of ten Belgians is an inhabitant of Brussels, approximately 85 per cent of whose population is solidly French speaking. Approximately a quarter of French-speaking Belgians lives in Brussels, but fewer than three per cent of the Dutch-speaking Belgians do so.

As Flanders became solidly Dutch speaking in the 1960s and 1970s, the Flemish movement shifted its attention to Brussels. It seemed a logical step, because the expansion and *verfransing* of Brussels echoed the earlier Francophone threat to Flemish culture in Flanders. The Flemish movement won the first round in the 1960s. Expansion was stopped by a 1963 law, which defined the linguistic frontier. Creeping *verfransing* was made more difficult by the establishment of more rigid rules and more effective control mechanisms on the implementation of official bilingualism in the capital. But the Francophones reacted against this “*cordon sanitaire*” and the restraints upon their majority position in the capital. Brussels produced its own Francophone nationalist movement, the *Front démocratique des francophones* (FDF, founded in 1964), which obtained at the height of its success in the 1970s more than 35 per cent of the votes in the Brussels metropolitan area. By 1991, however, its support had been reduced to approximately 12 per cent, and in the 1990s, the party merged with the local Liberal party.

Flemish and Francophones diverged on the appropriate institutions for bilingual Brussels, and its place in the Belgian constitutional structure. The Francophones of Brussels favoured an autonomous Brussels region. They found support in the Walloon nationalist movement, which wanted to transform Belgium into a federation of three regions. The Flemish movement was reluctant to accept a tripartite federal model. In an autonomous Brussels region the Flemish minority would be cut off from Flanders, which might put pressure on them to assimilate. At the national level Flanders could be pushed into a permanent minority position by a Francophone Brussels region and a Francophone Walloon region. It argued instead for federalism based on the two large communities.

Only in 1989 were Flemish and Francophones able to agree upon autonomous regional institutions for Brussels with special minority guarantees for the Flemish. The boundaries of the Brussels metropolitan area were confirmed without granting additional rights to the Francophones in the adjacent municipalities. However, for many

Francophones from the Brussels area the debate is not closed. At the time of writing (December 2001), attempts to settle the issue have failed.

## **FROM REGIONALISM TO FEDERALISM**

Belgium's unitary state structure resisted ethnic pressure until 1970, when the government declared before parliament that 'the unitary state, its structure and functioning as laid down by law, had become obsolete'.<sup>25</sup> Reform then came in three waves. In 1970 the existence of different territorial and cultural identities and the right to autonomy were constitutionally recognized. The second wave came in 1980, when the state was regionalized. The third wave of federalization began in 1989. The constitutional reform of 1989 stopped short of creating a federal state, but the 1993 reform formally characterised Belgium as a federal state. A mini-reform in 2001 further deepened federalization.

### *Intergroup conflict recognized, 1970*

The constitutional revision of 1970 was the first significant institutional response to regionalism (or nationalism). The modification of the unitary state followed two distinct tracks: regionalization on the one hand, and acknowledgment of regionalist (or nationalist) aspirations in national-level institutions on the other. The reform attempted to protect the principle of unity of authority, which had for so long been characteristic of the Belgian state.

The first track concerned the recognition of the principle of language group rights at state level. The constitution entrenched four measures of power sharing between the two language groups. First, from 1970 on the government was to consist of an equal number of Dutch- and French-speaking ministers, taking decisions by consensus. Second, members of the national parliament were subdivided into separate Dutch and French language groups. Third, language policy legislation and certain constitutional laws were subjected to special voting requirements (the presence of a majority of each language group, support by a majority within each, and an overall two-thirds majority of yes-votes). Fourth, an 'alarm bell procedure' was approved: if 75 per cent of a language group judged a legislative proposal harmful to relations between the Flemish and French communities, the measure would be postponed and referred to the national cabinet.

On the other hand, two models of devolved government were entrenched in the constitution: recognition was given to three distinct communities for cultural autonomy (French, Dutch (later renamed Flemish) and German) and to three regions for socio-economic autonomy (Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels). The proposed regional socio-economic autonomy was not implemented during the 1970s, but a limited form of cultural autonomy was put into effect in 1971 with the establishment of cultural councils for the communities, each with its own executive.

This cultural devolution was peculiar. First, it was the language groups in the national parliament that acted as the communal legislative bodies; the cultural councils were not elected separately. Second, the community executives remained part of the national government, which collectively was still fully responsible for the implementation of cultural policy legislation. The communities thus did not get a

separate administrative apparatus.<sup>26</sup> Although Belgium gave up its formal unitary structure, the new system tried to maintain unity of authority by a conscious intertwining of central and regional/community levels.<sup>27</sup> This conflict management tactic of blending these two levels in personal, institutional or policy domains was repeatedly tried out in later reforms.

### *Regionalization in 1980*

The reform of 1980 opted more unambiguously for regionalization. The cultural communities gained new competences, the socio-economic regions were given institutional infrastructures and regional autonomy in general was strengthened. But nationalist pressures, as in 1970, pushed the reform in conflicting directions: regionalization preserved unitarian features, but at the same time adopted some federal or even confederal attributes. Communities and regions obtained separate institutions, including a separate executive and civil service.<sup>28</sup>

The regional reform of 1980 went beyond regionalization in several respects. First, legislative acts of the regional and community councils were given the same legal status as national laws. Second, Belgium opted for a devolution in which most competences of regions, communities or the national state were exclusive instead of concurrent. Regionalization established also a jurisdictional rather functional division of labour: a government would combine legislative authority and implementation. Each level had its field of interest, which was reserved exclusively for it. This is different from Germany, where the federation often sets the broader legislative framework but leaves more detailed legislation and administrative implementation to the *Länder*. The intention of this combination of separate institutions, equal legal status, exclusive competences and jurisdictional division of labour was to create 'watertight compartments', and this was meant to keep conflict low.

But at the same time, there were several features that continued to compel close interlocking between central and regional levels. For one thing, the regional and community councils were not directly elected, but continued to consist of the members of the language groups in the national parliament. So the same people exercised political control over national and regional executives. Second, the financial resources of the new structures, which were modest (less than ten per cent of public expenditure by 1988), came predominantly from block grants. Regions and communities had no significant financial responsibility. Third, policy areas were divided into thin slices that were then distributed among two or three arenas (central state, community or region)—not in coherent policy packages. Fourth, regionalization in Belgium combined constituent units based on the principle of territoriality (regional economy: two regions) and on the principle of nationality (language: three communities). Ethnoregional interests were thus institutionalized in two ways.<sup>29</sup> This made it more difficult for a unified regionalist counterforce to emerge.<sup>30</sup> Thus the blending of central, community and regional levels not only restricted regional autonomy; it also forced the different arenas to consult or collaborate to render policy making effective.

The 1980 reform combined efforts to segregate and equalise central and regional arenas with attempts to link them and maintain some hierarchy. The result was an

unstable and destabilizing mechanism. The distribution of competences necessitated collaboration, but each arena's exclusive control over 'its' thin slice of a policy area complicated this. Furthermore, the divergent forms of institutionalization of ethnoregional interests created divisions: Flemish, Francophones, Walloons and Bruxellois disagreed on whether the territorial or the nationality principle should take priority. These clashes contaminated the central level, which was divided along language lines.

### *Proto-Federalization in 1989*

The reform of 1989 attempted to strike a new balance between centrifugal and centripetal tensions by opting for federalization. But similar tensions were built into the new model: a process of cooperative federalism was promoted in a constitutional framework of predominantly dual federalism (with exclusive competences and jurisdictional division of labour).

The reform gave effect to a considerable transfer of powers, with a division of labour between the federal level and the constituent units of the federation (community, region).<sup>31</sup> Allocation, that is the delivery of public goods, was almost completely transferred to regions and communities. Communities or regions could now, for instance, subsidize cultural events, organize and pay for education, invest in a cleaner environment (within national and European norms), undertake public housing, and seek to attract industrial investment (within ceilings for aid or subsidies set at the federal and the European levels). The federal level retained control over the largest public utilities (such as the railways, telecommunications, postal services, the national airline, nuclear power plants and electricity). Stabilization, that is, manipulation of inflation, employment and economic growth levels through budgetary, fiscal and monetary policy, remained federal (or European). Redistribution (meaning, in effect, social security) continued to be fully federal.

The state reform of 1988-89 opted for a more systematic implementation of the dual federalism ('two worlds') model than that of 1980, but with a peculiar twitch. As usual under dual federalism, very few competencies were concurrent; most competencies were exclusive. This reduces opportunities for the federal level to interfere with the regions and communities and vice versa. But the second component of dual federalism, according to which the division of powers runs along jurisdictional rather than functional lines, was weak. In several areas from environment to health to energy policy, the federal government retained control over the general legislative and fiscal framework, while detailed legislative and executive work was transferred to regions or communities.

Two more features induced co-operation. First, the 1989 reform intentionally limited fiscal devolution.<sup>32</sup> Regions and communities obtained only circumscribed fiscal autonomy: some fiscal powers, a mechanism for automatic funding and a solidarity mechanism, but no powers over tax scales and tax base. But they received considerable financial autonomy. That is, they gained limited powers to tax, but they received considerable discretion to spend their share of the total national budget, which was increased from less than 10 percent in 1980 to one-third in 1990. This fiscal power provided the national government some leverage over subnational policy.

Furthermore, the regional and community parliaments were composed of the members of the national parliament. For example, the Walloon regional council consisted of all members of the national parliament elected in Walloon constituencies. The French community council consisted of all members of the national parliament elected in Walloon constituencies as well as all French-speaking members of parliament elected in the Brussels bilingual region.

Relations between central and subnational were thus bound to be extensive, and effective policy-making would necessitate mechanisms for cooperation. The state reform of 1989 created a deliberative structure to stimulate a cooperative federal process. The central institution for federal – regional – community relations was the Deliberation Committee (*Overlegorgaan* or *Comité de concertation*). The composition of the 12-member committee conformed to the ‘double parity’ rule: parity between federal and community/regional levels, and between Dutch and French speakers.<sup>33</sup> The German community voted on matters of its concern. The Deliberation Committee established more than a dozen Interministerial Conferences (IMCs) of functional ministers. They were authorized to conclude collaboration agreements, which are legally enforceable. Each IMC could set up working groups and commissions to prepare political meetings or handle technical decisions. These bodies consist of public servants or political aides of the minister (members of her *cabinet*,) often assisted by experts. They may also include representatives from interest groups.

### *Federalization*

With the constitutional reform of May 1993, Belgium became finally a federal state *de jure*. The revisions put in place the full panoply of institutions and mechanisms typical for a modern federation: direct election of regional councils; a senate representing constituent units’ interests; residual competencies vested within constituent units; fiscal federalism (changes in financing mechanism and more fiscal autonomy); constitutional autonomy for each level over its working rules; international competencies and treaty power; coordination machinery and conflict resolution.

The list of subnational competencies is extensive. Regions have competencies with a territorial logic. These consist of regional economic development, including employment policy; industrial restructuring; environment; nature conservation and rural development; housing, land-use planning and urban renewal; water resources and sewage; energy policy (except for national infrastructure and nuclear energy); road building; waterways; regional airports and public local transport; local government; agriculture; external trade. However, as under the 1989 rules, framework rule making remains federal in most of these areas. The communities have responsibility for matters related to individuals: culture (including arts, youth policy, tourism); language policy (except in communes with a special language regime); education (three-quarters of the community budget); health policy and welfare (but not social security); and international cooperation in these areas. The communities set the normative framework for culture and, with some exceptions, education autonomously. The list of exclusive federal competencies is short, though substantial: defence, justice, security, social security, fiscal and monetary policy. Under EMU, monetary policy has largely shifted to the European Union and fiscal policy is considerably constrained by EMU criteria.

The basic blend of autonomy (exclusive competencies) and cooperative incentives (functional division of labour) remained unchanged. This is a blend that increases, rather than reduces the chance of conflict. The lawmaker provides four arenas in which federal vs. subnational or Flemish versus Walloon/Francophone interests can be addressed.

Federal institutions remain the prime venue for the resolution of much horizontal Flemish-Francophone conflict. Federalization has left the constitutional recognition of language group rights at the national level unchanged. The most important provision is that the federal cabinet must have an equal number of Flemish and French-speaking ministers. And because the federal cabinet decides by consensus, this ensures the two large linguistic groups a veto at the federal level. The other non-majoritarian measures introduced by the 1970 state reform are also still in place: the two federal chambers are organized in language groups; sensitive legislation needs to pass with super-majorities; and a grieved language group can invoke the alarm bell procedure.

The second arena is the reformed Senate, a hybrid of the American and German senates. It is composed of three groups: 40 directly elected senators (25 elected in the Flemish community and 15 in the French community); 21 delegated from regional and community councils, with 10 Flemish, 10 French-speakers and 1 German member; 6 Flemish and 4 French-speaking individuals appointed by the previous two groups. The Senate is to advise on conflicts of interest between the various governments. Although its decisions are not binding, its advice carries considerable political weight. It is not involved in ordinary legislation, in budgetary control, or parliamentary control over the federal government, but it plays a full role, together with the House of Representatives, in constitutional reform and legislation on the organization of the state.

The third arena for conflict regulation is the complex maze of intergovernmental relations, created in 1989 and strengthened in 1993. Regional, community, and federal executive are intertwined through an elaborate network of collaborative agreements. The central institution in this executive network, the Deliberation Committee for the Government and the Executives, takes decisions by consensus. Although its decisions are not legally binding, its recommendations are difficult to reject because it consists of the

political heavyweights of each government. The 1993 reform extended the scope of this network to international relations.<sup>34</sup> The core component is a 1993 cooperation agreement in the Interministerial Conference for External Affairs by the federal government, the three regional and the three community governments. It lays down the composition of the Belgian representation in the EU Council of Ministers and decision rules concerning negotiation strategy and voting in the absence of agreement among the governments from Belgium. Regions and communities are fully competent to regulate international cooperation within the scope of their competencies. That includes the power to conclude treaties. Detailed machinery arranges the coordination of a partitioned Belgian foreign policy. For EU policy, for example, the agreement categorizes the EU Councils in four categories, depending on the relative importance of federal and regional competencies in a policy area. This categorization is then used to determine whether federal or subnational officials represent Belgium in the Council of Ministers and related council working groups. For areas with regional or community competence, regions and communities handle affairs on a rotation basis.

A final arena for territorial conflict resolution is the Court of Arbitration (set up in 1980, but significantly strengthened in 1989) a quasi-constitutional court composed of an equal number of judges/ legal authoritative figures and former politicians (and an equal number of Dutch- and French-speakers.) It guards the legal division of competencies between the various levels of government, and it checks the conformity of federal laws and regional or community decrees with specific constitutional provisions (equality of all Belgians, protection of ideological and philosophical minorities, and the freedom of education.) However, it is considerably less powerful than the German, Canadian or US constitutional courts. For example, it cannot scrutinize the constitutionality of laws and decrees beyond the aforementioned three provisions.



Contrary to the three previous reforms the 1993 reform was presented as the final round in ethnic conflict management. And yes, the intensity of Flemish-Francophone conflict has abated, and the pace of centrifugal change has slowed down. Nevertheless, senior politicians on either side still plead for further devolution, and some do not exclude full independence. Particularly among Flemish politicians of the right and center-right, separatism is discussed as a viable option. A broad consensus has emerged among the political parties on either side of the linguistic divide to siphon off a few portions—in areas as diverse as education, agriculture, external trade and immigrant policy—from federal to regional or community control. This would strengthen the jurisdictional features of federalism. In June 2001, the parliament passed a near-complete regionalization, including rule making, of agriculture and external trade. Yet the most important changes are financial: regions obtain extensive fiscal autonomy, and the budget for the communities is increased considerably. Most financial changes will be phased in, but the bottomline is that the Belgian centre is set to shrink considerably, and federalism is due to take a decidedly dual-type turn.

## **INSTITUTIONAL PERSISTENCE: THE CONSOCIATIONAL LEGACY AND TERRITORIAL SOLUTIONS**

How does one make sense of this durable mix of cooperative and autonomist features in Belgian nationalist conflict management? Why has this mix been so resilient? This last section argues that the consociational tradition in Belgian politics is responsible for this.<sup>35</sup>

### *The consociational legacy: cooperation and separation*

Consociationalism is a particular way of combining autonomy (or separate existence) with power sharing (or cooperation). The literature on consociationalism usually emphasizes power sharing, or to use the typical consociational term, elite accommodation. However, this underestimates that the incentives for a centrifugal, separatist course are embedded in a consociational logic. When the conflict is territorial, these centrifugal features may lead elite conflict managers to hollow out the centre.

Classical consociational devices to constrain majority rule specialise in maximising benefits to the groups while minimising loss of the centre. These mechanisms were initially developed to deal with religious and class conflict in Belgium, but from the 1960s they helped to contain nationalist conflict.

*Carving up the center.* One way to achieve peace among competing groups is to give each group control over those central policies that matter most to them. Belgian conflict brokers traditionally applied this technique to the allocation of ministerial portfolios. They often gave big expenditure departments like defence, public works, or public housing to Walloon Socialist ministers, who could thereby create jobs for the declining Walloon economy. And they allocated agriculture and culture to Flemish Christian Democrats, who wanted to satisfy their sizable rural constituency or felt pressure from cultural nationalists.

*Mutual checks.* Mutual checks may be used when parties are not keen to vacate a central policy area. This technique was introduced first in education policy after ‘the school war’ in the 1950s to alleviate tensions between the catholic private school network and the secular state network. The solution was to appoint a deputy minister for education from the opposite side of the religious cleavage than the minister’s side. When in the early 1970s the ministry of education was divided along linguistic lines, this mutual check system was simply extended one level down. A non-Catholic became minister for education in the Flemish community with a catholic deputy-minister on his side; in French-speaking Belgium, a Christian Democratic minister had a non-Catholic deputy. That way, non-Catholics in Flanders were assured that they would not be discriminated against by the powerful catholic network, while Catholics in Wallonia gained the same assurance with respect to the dominant non-catholic state system. In the 1960s and 1970s, mutual checks became a more general feature when several ministerial departments introduced linguistic deputies.

*Allocating new resources.* The centre may also buy off disaffected groups by putting more resources on the table. This technique was used to settle educational conflict after the school war in 1958, and at a high financial cost. It became quickly a widely used technique for buying nationalist peace as well. The Belgian centre released additional resources to fund linguistic quotas in public service and public procurement. One famous package deal was the construction of a new university in Louvain-la-Neuve to put to rest Flemish/ Francophone conflict over the bilingual university of Leuven in the late 1960s. Another, in the 1980s, concerned the construction of a highway connecting two Walloon towns in exchange of a Flemish kindergarten in Comines (Francophone commune with special language rights for Flemish.)

Each of these three techniques affects political cohesion differently. The first two—carving up policy, and mutual checks—make competing groups more interdependent. One cannot move without the consent of the other; this is *interlocking*. The latter strategy—to share out new resources—allows groups to go separate ways; this is *unlocking*. While the former two manipulate the balance of power *at the centre*, the latter manipulates power *between centre and groups*.

There is one catch to this system. These consociational devices are expensive. Partly as a result of this, Belgium has the highest public debt per head in the European Union. Public finance ran out of control in the late 1970s, a period of chronic nationalist conflict and social friction, paralysed governments, and expensive deals between parties in power. As money ran out in the late 1970s, conflict managers introduced a new currency for making deals: while they used to trade goods (jobs, subsidies, infrastructure), penury forced them to start trading competencies (slices of authoritative decision making in culture, education, regional policy, environmental policy etc.) It is not difficult to understand why this transition from goods to competencies occurred. In the late 1970s, nationalist conflict appeared close to descending in violence. Consociational techniques had successfully abated potentially violent religious conflict; they promised to achieve the same for potentially violent nationalist conflict.

But this consociationalist style of conflict management created an incentive structure in which nationalism became an attractive strategy. Even non-nationalist actors were tempted to raise the nationalist banner to bolster their case. This conflicts with the

traditional argument of consociationalism scholars, who assume that elites always prefer compromise to conflict unless constituents force them into conflict. It is their prudent wisdom that justifies elitist governance in consociational regimes. In contrast, as George Tsebelis has argued forcefully, given a certain incentive structure it may be rational for elites to initiate nationalist conflict so as to maximize electoral utility. By the late 1970s, this situation had emerged in Belgium.<sup>36</sup> Nationalist demands became part of the standard competitive game between regional parties in Belgium.<sup>37</sup>

The consociationalist legacy was crucial in Belgian elites' capacity to contain nationalist conflict. They successfully exported consociational devices from religious to nationalist conflict, and they flexibly changed the currency for compromise from goods/money to competencies. The upshot of this is that nationalist conflict in Belgium avoided violence. However, this efficient and flexible response made it profitable for contending groups to perpetuate nationalist conflict. Consociational cooperation and group benefit became intimately linked to group separatism. As a result, the centre was being hollowed out.

### *Consociationalism and the transition to federalism*

Why did the major parties in Belgium finally replace consociationalist devices by federal rules? One reason is that federalism offered them an opportunity to curb the creeping separatism embedded in consociationalist politics. Federalism became Belgium's best chance for survival. Another reason is that unchecked nationalist conflict had become a threat to the major parties' predominant position in Belgium. It is useful to remind oneself that Belgium has been a partitocracy, with a preponderant role for Christian Democrats and Socialists since the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Party leaders—not governments, the electorate, or societal actors—have been the architects of all major reforms.<sup>38</sup> A top-down federal reform would allow these party leaders to design the rules in ways that would help them sustain their positions in authority.

From the standpoint of party leaders traditional consociational devices appeared less effective in contending with nationalist conflict than federalism. First of all, consociational conflict resolution requires that elites represent relatively monolithic segments; opposition within a segment is destabilizing. Yet interparty competition within the regional/linguistic "segments" undermined the dominant parties' authority. The Flemish Christian Democrats' capacity to deliver a deal was threatened by nationalist parties, and even by the nationalist outbidding from the Liberal and Socialist parties. The Walloon Socialists faced similar challenges in Wallonia from the regionalist movement and nationalist factions in the other mainstream parties. In a federal system, opposition within a territorial segment is institutionalized. Governments backed by a simple majority rather than near-unanimous support make and break deals. The Flemish Christian Democrats and the Walloon Socialists could anticipate being major coalition partners in governments of their respective regions.<sup>39</sup>

Second, consociationalism works best when government is limited. This is why consociational elites usually seek to hive off functions to semi-private segmental organizations. Yet nationalists ordinarily demand an expanding role for public authority—not limited government. Federalism can accommodate such demands for

greater authoritative autonomy. The Flemish Christian Democrats wanted and received extensive community autonomy in education and cultural policy; the Walloon Socialists wanted and obtained extensive regional autonomy in economic development policy, industrial policy and public housing. The extent of federalization has been to a large extent a function of the particular policy preferences of these two dominant parties.

And finally, consociationalism requires a secure equal status among the segments. If the institutional mechanisms to prevent one segment from dominating the other are insecure, consociationalism may become a control regime.<sup>40</sup> A potentially destabilizing situation emerged in the 1970s, when the end of Flemish linguistic discrimination and the reversal of economic fortunes briefly tempted the Flemish demographic majority to pursue a majoritarian logic within a unitary Belgian framework. Federalism blocked these ambitions.

## CONCLUSION

Federalism is Belgium's best chance for survival. Yet the political logic of dual federalism is stacked against the Belgian centre. The costs of unresolved territorial conflict are relatively low for regions and communities while they are potentially considerable for the federal level. A weak federal level, composed of Flemish and Francophone representatives, has an interest in preventing deadlocks. In a framework of dual federalism, it can do so most easily by shifting more competencies to regions or communities. For example, throughout the 1990s Flemish politicians have demanded the federalization of health insurance funds on grounds of the principle of dual federalism. With health policy a competence for the Flemish and Francophone communities, they argue, it is simply more efficient to devolve all levers of health policy, including national health insurance, to the communities. While the federal government has held out so far, the logic of the Flemish argument is a powerful one in a context of dual federalism with a non-existent autonomous federal level. In 2001, the federal level gave way in two contentious policy areas—agriculture and external trade, but more importantly, it was willing to take out a mortgage on its hard-won financial solvency in return for placating intense subnational demands for greater financial resources for education policy and greater fiscal autonomy. The financial deal, observers agree, constitutes a total victory for communities and regions at the expense of the federal treasury.<sup>41</sup> The hollowing of the Belgian centre is likely to continue—be it at a slower pace than under consociationalism.

**TABLE 3.1**  
**BELGIUM: LINGUISTIC COMPOSITION, BY REGION, 1947**

Language	Flanders		Wallonia		Brussels		Belgium	
	000s	%	000s	%	000s	%	000s	%
Dutch	4,184.0	90.4	59.5	2.0	231.7	24.2	4,475.2	52.6
French	225.4	4.9	2,671.2	90.8	675.0	70.6	3,571.6	41.9
German	8.2	0.2	67.0	2.3	3.4	0.4	78.6	0.9
Unknown	198.6	4.3	145.4	4.9	45.9	4.8	389.9	4.6
Total	4,616.2	100.0	2,943.1	100.0	9,560.0	100.0	8,515.3	100.0

*Note:* Respondents were asked which language they spoke only or most frequently. Absolute figures are in thousands. More than 80 per cent of the 'unknown' category were infants under two years of age; if included, the linguistic composition would be something like 55 per cent Dutch-speaking and 44 per cent French-speaking.

*Source:* Computed by the author from Nationaal Instituut voor de Statistiek (NIS), *Algemene Volkstelling op 31 december 1947: indeling naar de gesproken landstalen* (Brussels: NIS, 1954), pp. 58-63, 72-3, 152-3.

**TABLE 3.2**  
**BELGIUM: EVOLUTION OF GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT AND**  
**GROSS REGIONAL PRODUCT, 1955-88**

Year	Flanders Brussels	Wallonia	Brussels	Flanders	Wallonia	
	<i>Share of GDP</i>			<i>GRP per capita</i>		
1955	44.2	34.2	21.6	87.3	100.6	140.8
1963a	46.0	30.8	23.2	89.6	93.3	147.8
1963b	49.8	31.3	18.9	90.0	93.2	169.7
1970	53.9	29.1	17.0	96.0	88.9	152.6
1980	56.9	27.6	15.5	99.6	84.4	152.4
1988	58.7	26.3	15.0	101.9	80.8	152.6
1998	56.6	24.0	19.3	97.5	73.5	206.4

*Note:* The data refer to the share of each region in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Gross Regional Product (GRP) per head (national=100), average yearly growth of GRP and average yearly increase of GRP per head. The Brussels region was reduced in 1963 and Flemish territory was expanded; the two series of figures on 1963 refer to the positions before and after this change.

*Source:* Computed by the author from NIS, *Statistische studiën*, No. 91 (Brussels: NIS, 1991), pp. 76-83; for recent data: [http://statbel.fgov.be/indicators/home\\_nl.asp](http://statbel.fgov.be/indicators/home_nl.asp)

**TABLE 3.3**  
**BELGIUM: DEMOGRAPHIC EVOLUTION, BY REGION, 1947-2025**

Year	Flanders	Wallonia	German Region	Brussels	Belgium
1947	4,552 (53.5)	2,950 (34.6)	54.8 (0.6)	956 (11.2)	8,512.2 (100.0)
1961	5,064 (55.1)	3,045 (33.1)	57.7 (0.6)	1,023 (11.1)	9,189.7 (100.0)
1971	5,417 (56.1)	3,102 (32.1)	62.0 (0.6)	1,075 (11.1)	9,650.9 (100.0)
1981	5,630 (57.2)	3,156 (32.0)	64.9 (0.7)	997 (10.1)	9,848.6 (100.0)
1991	5,769 (57.8)	3,188 (31.9)	67.6 (0.7)	954 (9.6)	9,978.7 (100.0)
2001	5,950 (58.0)	3,350 (32.6)	-	964 (9.4)	10,263 (100.0)

*Note:* Absolute figures are in thousands; figures in brackets are percentages. The NIS projections for Wallonia include the German region.

*Source:* NIS, *Volkstelling, 1947, 1961, 1971, 1981*; *Belgisch Staatsblad*, 15 October 1991 (figures for 1991 census).

## NOTES

1. This account is largely based on L. Hooghe, *A Leap in the Dark: The Belgian Federal Reform* (Ithaca: Cornell University Occasional Papers of Western Societies Program, No. 27, 1991).
2. In 1893 suffrage was extended to all male citizens, but its democratizing effect was tempered by a system of plural voting based on educational and economic status.
3. The secular state was contested by one part only of the Catholic Party.
4. For an analysis of the social bases of early Flemish nationalism see M. Hroch, *Die Vorkämpfer der nationalen Bewegungen bei den kleinen Völkern Europas: eine vergleichende Analyse zur gesellschaftlichen Schichtung der patriotischen Gruppen* (Prague: Universita Karlova Praha, 1968), pp. 103-12. Hroch categorized the Flemish nationalist movement among the unsuccessful cases, because it did not develop into a mass movement.
5. See B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991).
6. The Flemish nationalists tried to build a fourth pillar (*zuil*) next to the christian, socialist and liberal *zuilen* in the interwar period, but the repression of Flemish nationalism immediately after the second world war thwarted these efforts. Hellemans defined a *zuil* as ‘an ideological and subcultural, integrated network of several (more than two) organizations that are task-specific and enjoy a monopoly in the movement. One of these organizations is a political party’; see S. Hellemans, *Pleidooi voor een internationale en tegen een provincialistische benadering van verzuiling* (Leuven: K.U. Leuven, Sociologisch Onderzoeksinstituut, 1990), p. 26.
7. Infants were either classified in the language group of their parents or not counted at all; K. McRae, *Conflict and Compromise in Multilingual Societies: Belgium* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1986), pp. 36-7.
8. McRae, op. cit., p. 40.
9. More recent population censuses do not have questions on language usage. During the 1947 census Flemish politicians accused census takers from pressuring Dutch-speakers to report themselves as French-speakers. In the subsequent census in 1960-61, grassroots mobilization among Flemish local authorities effectively boycotted the language questions in the census. The national government was forced to drop questions on language usage from subsequent population censuses.
10. McRae, op.cit., pp. 276-85.
11. For a discussion of alternative measurements see M. De Metsenaere, ‘De taalverhoudingen sinds Hertoginnedal’, *Taal en Sociale Integratie: het probleem Brussel sinds Hertoginnedal (1963)* (Brussels: VUB-Press, 1990), pp. 37-57.
12. A figure somewhere in-between these was suggested by the first direct election of the Council for the Brussels Capital Region in 1989, when the Dutch-speaking parties obtained 15.3 percent of the vote. All parties were required to submit unilingual lists. And due to the salience of linguistic issues in capital politics at that time, very few voters crossed linguistic lines, so that it seems reasonable to extrapolate these 15/85 proportions among voters to the population. This is probably less so for subsequent elections in 1994 and 1999, where there are more signs of some linguistic crossvoting. Note that the figures refer here to Belgian citizens only; close to 30 percent of Brussels population is non-Belgian, and most prefer French in public life. In October 2000, EU citizens among these non-Belgians were able to vote for the first time in local elections, but only 10 percent of eligible voters registered. Mainly because of potential electoral implications in and around Brussels, the Flemish parties were extremely reluctant to support the 1993 Treaty of European Union, which grants non-national EU citizens voting rights in local and European elections. They finally agreed, though not before the Belgian government negotiated some



exemptions. Registration for participation in these elections was extremely laborious, which helps explain why so few eligible voters registered.

13. This decision was taken by the Provisional Government, which was formed after the secession, on 16 October 1830.
14. See H. Elias, *Geschiedenis van de Vlaamse gedachte* 4 vols. (Antwerp: De Nederlandsche Boekhandel, 1970-1971).
15. See P. Berckx, *150 jaar institutionele hervormingen in België* (Antwerp: Kluwer Rechtswetenschappen, 1990).
16. The official Dutch version of the Belgian Constitution obtained legal force under the law of 10 April 1967.
17. McRae, op. cit., p. 278.
18. W. Dewachter, 'Elite-circulatie en maatschappelijke ontvoogding. De Belgische elite tegenover de Vlaamse Beweging', *Tijdschrift voor Sociologie* Vol. 11, No. 3-4 (1981), pp. 199-258.
19. These were incorporated in the Belgian constitution in 1970.
20. B. Maddens, R. Beerten and J. Billiet. 1996. *Ethnocentrism and Nationalism: Towards a Contextual Approach*. Leuven: Departement Sociologie, ISPO; B. Maddens, J. Billiet and R. Beerten. 2000. "National Identity and the Attitude towards Foreigners in Multi-National States: The Case of Belgium." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 26, 1: 45-60.
21. L. Genicot (ed.), *Histoire de la Wallonie* (Toulouse: Univers de la France et des pays francophones, 1973); H. Hasquin, *Historiographie et politique: essai sur l'histoire de Belgique et la Wallonie* (Charleroi: Institut Jules Destrée, 1982); C. Kesteloot, 'Stratégies wallonnes et francophones à Bruxelles', *Taal en sociale integratie* (Brussels: VUB, 1982), pp. 445-80; A. Mommen. 1994. *The Belgian Economy in the 20th Century*. New York: Routledge; A. Murphy. 1995. "Belgium: Regional Divergence along the Road to Federalism." In: Graham Smith ed. *Federalism: The Multi-Ethnic Challenge*. London: Longman.
22. M. Quevit, *Les causes du déclin wallon* (Brussels: Editions vie ouvrière, 1978).
23. Kesteloot, op. cit., pp. 448-80; J. Tyssens, 'De Mouvement populaire wallon en de kwestie Brussel (1961-1964)', *Taal en sociale integratie* (Brussels: VUB, 1989), pp. 373-401.
24. For the Brussels situation see especially the series *Taal en Sociale integratie* from the *Centrum voor Interdisciplinair Onderzoek van de Brusselse Taaltoestanden*, Vrije Universiteit Brussel.
25. *Parlementaire Handelingen, Senate, 1969-1970*, 18 Feb. 1970, pp. 777-8.
26. In the meantime the central public service was increasingly reorganized along language lines. The public service had begun to create unilingual working units from the 1930s. It had also adopted a division of labour along language lines; for instance, Dutch-speaking public servants usually dealt with dossiers originating in the Dutch language area or drawn up in Dutch. This strategy was generalized through the 1960s and 1970s. The evolution was most drastic for the ministry of education and culture, which in 1963 was entirely restructured along language lines. In 1966 the two 'wings' drew up separate budgets for the first time. In 1969 a French and a Dutch ministry of education and culture were established. Semi-federalization in 1980 transferred cultural policy almost completely to the communities; the administrative units for cultural matters were subsequently regionalized. The two national ministries were slimmed down to the ministry of Dutch-speaking education and the ministry of French-speaking education. Finally, in 1989 these two ministries were transferred to the Flemish and Francophone communities respectively. Note that partition in the 1960s preceded the first major move towards regionalization in 1970.
27. Berckx, op. cit., p. 150.

28. The Brussels region was not given separate institutions because the parties could not choose between the bipartite or tripartite model. They 'left Brussels in brackets', i.e. a subcabinet within the national government took care of the regional affairs of Brussels. The institutions of the Flemish region were merged with those of the Flemish (previously Dutch) community.
29. The third path was the national arena, where rules for linguistic parity in parliament, cabinet, national public service and most policy areas protected the linguistic groups.
30. The nationality principle did not mean that the communities had no territorial boundaries. Territorial delineations were fairly unambiguous; only in Brussels could persons or institutions choose their community adherence. To the Flemish community belonged the citizens of the Flemish region (including those who did not speak Dutch) and the Dutch-speakers in the Brussels region. The French community united the citizens of the Walloon region (including those who did not speak French) and the Francophones in the Brussels region. The German community consisted of a limited number of predominantly German-speaking municipalities in the east of the country. It was part of the Walloon region for regional matters.
31. D. Heremans and P. Van Rompuy, 'Economische beleidsautonomie voor Vlaanderen in het Europa van morgen', in P. Van Rompuy (ed.), *Vlaanderen op een kruispunt: sociologische, economische en staatsrechtelijke perspectieven* (Tielt: Lannoo, 1990), pp. 152-174.
32. For an overview of fiscal policy since the 1989 reform, G. Stienlet. 1999. "Institutional Reforms and Belgian Fiscal Policy in the 90s." *Institutions, Politics and Fiscal Policy*, edited by Rolf R. Strauch and Jürgen von Hagen. Boston/Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 215-234.
33. The committee consists of a six-member federal delegation headed by the prime minister and containing an equal number of Dutch and French speakers; two members of the Flemish executive (which represents both region and community), including its president; the presidents of the Walloon regional executive and of the Francophone community executive; and the French-speaking president and a Dutch-speaking member of the Brussels regional executive. The German community does not have a permanent seat, but takes part as a voting member on matters of concern to it.
34. Y. Devuyt. 1993. "De omzetting van EG-richtlijnen in de Belgische rechtsorde en de Europeanisering van de Belgische politiek." *Res Publica*, 35:39-54; L. Hooghe. 1995. "Belgian Federalism and the European Community." In Barry Jones and Michael Keating, eds. *Regions in the European Community*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 135-165; F. Ingelaere. 1994. "De Europeesrechtelijke raakvlakken van de nieuwe wetgeving inzake de internationale betrekkingen van de Belgische Gemeenschappen en Gewesten." *SEW*, 2:67-82.
35. This section is based on L. Hooghe. "Hollowing the Center: Managing Territorial Conflict in Belgium," forthcoming in *Does Federalism Matter? Political Institutions and the Management of Territorial Cleavages*, edited by Nancy Bermeo and Ugo Amoretti, forthcoming with Johns Hopkins Press.
36. G.Tsebelis. 1990. "Elite Interaction and Constitution Building in Consociational Democracies." *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 2,1:5-29; see also M.Covell. 1981. "Ethnic Conflict and Elite Bargaining: The Case of Belgium." *West European Politics* 4, 3:197-218; M.Covell, Maureen. 1982. "Agreeing to Disagree: Elite Bargaining and the Revision of the Belgian Constitution." *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 15: 451-469; M.Covell. 1986. "Regionalization and Economic Crisis in Belgium: The Variable Origins of Centrifugal and Centripetal Forces." *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 19, 2:261-282.
37. K.Deschouwer. 1998. "Falling Apart Together: The Changing Nature of Belgian Consociationalism 1961-1998." Paper prepared for presentation at the Conference 'The Fate of Consociationalism in Western Europe, 1968-98', Harvard University.
38. See Deschouwer. op.cit.; also K. Deschouwer. "Waiting for the 'Big One'. The Uncertain Survival of the Belgian Parties and Party Systems." *Res Publica* 38, 2:295-306.

39. That proved to be a miscalculation for the Flemish Christian Democrats, who were relegated to the opposition banks after the 1999 election. But few would have anticipated their electoral demise at the time of the negotiations for federalization in the late 1980s and early 1990s.
40. Lustick, Ian. 1979. "Stability in Deeply Divided Societies: Consociationalism versus Control." *World Politics* 31:325-344; see also B. Barry. 1975. "The Consociational Model and its Dangers." *European Journal of Political Research* 3: 393-412.
41. See Jerry van Waterschoot. "De verzwegen aderlating van Lambermont." *De Standaard* 8 August, 2001.