

Belgian politics in 1994

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Two cases of possible corruption created quite some political tensions and even some difficulties for the federal cabinet of christian-democrats and socialists. The cabinet, that was reshuffled a couple of times, could present acceptable budget results. It was however also confronted with some linguistic or 'communautarian' matters. Both the European and the local elections confirmed the success of right-wing extremist parties.

I. The Agusta and Uniop cases

A. *Agusta and the resignation of the "three Guys"*

On January 6 the news was spread that judge Véronique Ancia from Liège was accusing Guy Coëme, the minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Public Enterprises of forgery. In 1988, when he was minister of Defense, he would have used a falsified document in the decision to buy 46 A109-helicopters from the Italian firm Agusta. The judge's file was also said to contain proofs of corruption in this case. At the end of 1993 the Parliament had already been asked to lift the parliamentary immunity of Guy Coëme and of two other Walloon socialists, Guy Spitaels and Guy Mathot. The first was the prime minister of the Walloon regional government, the latter was minister of the Interior in that same regional government. Judge Ancia had found the documents that suggested corruption in the Agusta-case while investigating the murder (on July 18 1991) of André Cools.

The House of Representatives set up a special commission that had to see whether there were indeed enough reasons to accuse minister and MP Guy Coëme and to bring him to the Court of Cassation. In the Senate the commission of Justice had to decide on the immunity of senators Mathot and Spitaels.

After January 6 the press started giving several details from judge Ancia's file. It was said that some negative comments concerning the Agusta helicopter, which was in competition with the German BK117 of Messerschmitt and the Ecureuil of the French Aérospatiale, had been left out of a document produced by army experts. The file was also supposed to contain the reports of some indirect witnesses, among whom former minister Philippe Moureaux, who said that Agusta had paid slush money to the Parti Socialiste. The control over that money would have led to internal struggles in the PS and therefore to the murder of André Cools.

Still according to the press, Guy Mathot would have had several meetings with Georges Cywie, the representative of Agusta in Belgium. In return for his role as go-between he would have received a house in southern France. Mathot however denied these accusations, and said that the whole case was set up by Philippe Moureaux in order to stop his political career. He declared that he had already bought the house in France in 1987.

On January 10 the party bureaus met for the first time after the Christmas holidays, and most parties asked the vice prime minister Guy Coëme to resign. The PS however backed its ministers.

Both Mathot and Spitaels refused to accept the lifting of their parliamentary immunity, because it would enforce the suggestion of guilt that was already been spread by the press. Their lawyers furthermore suggested that Willy Claes was named by Agusta as being the person that 'had been bought'. At the time of the purchase of the helicopter, Claes was minister of Economic Affairs, and had written a letter to Coëme (23 November 1988) in which he expressed a 'slight preference' for Agusta. Claes himself declared that he had had one single meeting with the representatives of each of the three firms, and that he had never received any unlawful offers.

The commission of Justice in the Senate advised on January 14 a partial lifting of the immunity of both Mathot and Spitaels, in order to let judge Ancla interrogate them and confront them with other witnesses. The Senate followed that advice on January 20.

After days of ongoing discussions about the case, the position of minister Coëme became rather difficult. He finally decided to resign, when a debate in the House of Representatives made clear that the Flemish governing parties CVP and SP would not support the minister any more. Coëme then resigned on January 21, immediately followed by Spitaels and Mathot, who said they did not want Coëme to carry the burden alone.

That same night the bureau of the PS gathered and confirmed its trust in the federal government. And one day later the presidents of the four governing parties agreed formally to go on together until the end of the term in December 1995.

The resignation of the three Guys required a reshuffling of both the federal and the Walloon regional government. Guy Coëme was replaced by Elio Di Rupo, who was minister of Education and Media in the French Community government. Bernard Anselme, minister of Social Affairs, was replaced by Magda de Galan, and became himself the successor of Guy Mathot in the Walloon government. The former tasks of Magda de Galan in the federal government (Health, Environment and Social Integration) were taken over by Jacques Santkin. Guy Spitaels was replaced at the head of the Walloon government by Robert Collignon, whose former tasks went to Willy Tamineaux.

On February 1 the House of Representatives followed the advice of its special commission, and decided to send Guy Coëme to the Court of Cassation for the accusation of corruption. The accusation of forgery was not retained. Guy Coëme had himself asked to be sent to Court, in order to be able to defend himself.

The Agusta-case also led to a huge incident between Willy Claes and the newspaper *Het Laatste Nieuws*. The paper wrote on January 29 that Agusta had offered Claes in 1988 15 million BEF. Claes would have discussed this offer in a meeting with the SP ministers and the SP-president Frank Vandebroucke on January 1989. Still according to the paper, that cited a 'witness from inside the SP', Claes would have been furious when Vandebroucke refused the offer. Claes was extremely angry at *Het Laatste Nieuws*. The witness from inside appeared to be MP Pierre Chevalier, who had in 1992 joined the liberal VLD. Yet Chevalier said that he never mentioned the financial offer. Claes sued the paper, and the paper sued Claes.

B. *The Uniop case*

A second case of possible corruption that emerged immediately after the Agusta case, was again to bring especially the PS in trouble. Judge Jean-Claude Van Espen from Brussels had closed the investigation on the Uniop-case, and asked for the lifting of parliamentary immunities again.

Uniop was a research institute of the Université Libre de Bruxelles and was said to have billed fake research projects to different politicians. Some of the payments would then have flown back to the politicians or to their parties. In 1989 this case had already led to the arrest of the Uniop-director Camille Javeau, ULB-professor Nicole Delruelle and Robert Willermain, the former head of the personal cabinet of minister Robert Urbain (PS).

The PS-president Busquin reacted quite angrily, and said he believed this was another organized attack on his party. He resigned as PS-president, but was re-elected two weeks later by the PS-congress.

The affair finally reached the parliament in July. The file contained the names of eleven politicians. For six of them the case had to be closed because the facts were already older than five years. It concerned André Kempinaire (VLD), André Degroeve (PS), François Guillaume (PS), Raymonde Dury (PS), Elio Di Rupo (PS) and Philippe Busquin (PS). The House of Representatives had again to set up a special commission to decide on the fate of vice-prime minister Willy Claes and of the two former ministers Guy Coëme and Philippe Moureaux. For Guy Coëme the House decided on July 14 that he would also be sent to the Court of Cassation for this case. The House decided that for Moureaux and Claes there were not enough indications of their guilt to send them to court. The Senate decided not to lift the immunity of Guy Spitaels and of former ULB-rector Hervé Hasquin. At the end of 1994 there was still no final judgment in the Uniop-case.

II. The budget policy

A. *Correction of the 1994 budget*

The minister of the Budget, Herman Van Rompuy, announced on February 3 that the deficit in the federal accounts for 1993 was 376 billion BEF, or 5.3% of the GNP (against 5.4% in 1992). That was 12 billion more than planned in the budget, which was - given the rather sloppy economical situation - considered to be a satisfactory result. The deficit of all state authorities (federation, regions, communities, provinces, local municipalities and social security) would be 516 billion or 6.6% of the GNP (6.5% in 1992).

When he had made up the balance of the Belgian presidency of the European Union in December 1993, prime minister Dehaene had declared that extra financial efforts would have to be made by the regions and communities. They had reacted rather reluctantly, all saying that their budget policy and budget results were perfectly according to the rules. The National Bank, in its yearly report published on February 17, backed the idea of the prime minister. After recommendations made by the High Council of Finance, and a reiteration of the question by the Minister of Finance Philippe Maystadt, the regions and communities accepted on July 19 that they would cooperate to reduce the deficit of all state authorities to a total of maximum 3% of the GNP, which is the convergence-norm of the Maastricht Treaty for the countries wanting to participate in the European single currency.

When on March 25 the results of the budget control were published, both the prime minister and the minister of the Budget stressed the fact that the recovery of the economy enabled to limit the review of the 1994 budget to some technical aspects that would not really hurt the population. The changes in the budget were a better management of the debt (extra income 16 billion) and the increase of the expected results of privatisations. The telephone company Belgacom and the National Lottery were therefore put on the list of companies that could be sold by the state.

These measures would have to allow the deficit for 1994 to be reduced to 315 billion. Early 1995 the result proved to be a deficit of 313 billion or 4.4% of the GNP.

B. *The 1995 budget*

The National Bank announced on July 11 that its economic growth estimate for 1994 was raised from 1% to 1.8%. That caused some scepticism, but other banks followed this optimistic estimate, and the National bank would even rise it to 2.8% in October. This higher estimate for the economic growth meant of course that the income of the state would also rise. A few days before the government started the work on the 1995 budget, the minister of Finance was glad to announce that the state income from taxes in 1994 was already 35 billion higher than budgeted. This all meant that only 40 billion had to be found to keep the budget under control.

After only a few days of talks the federal government presented on July 25 its budget for 1995. The government hoped again to get more money from privatisations, and had taken some rather painless measures in the social security. The budget looked forward to a total income of 1425 billion and to 1696 billion expenses. That meant a budget deficit of 271 billion, or 3.6% of the GNP.

For all the state authorities together the deficit was budgeted on 4.2% of the GNP.

Since the deficit has to be down to 3% at the end of 1996 - the Maastricht norm - the budget of 1996 will be crucial. Therefore the governor of the National Bank Verplaetse had launched the idea that it might be wise to hold the next parliamentary elections, scheduled for December 1995, before the summer of 1995. He also said that a deficit of 3.999% might be acceptable for 1996. Yet the prime minister replied that the governor should not interfere with the activities of the government, and that he certainly should refrain from comments on the election date.

C. *The execution of the crisis plan and the social negotiations*

After the New Year's recess the trade unions and the employers' organizations had to discuss the execution of the crisis plan that the federal government had announced on November 17 1993. The government had asked the social partners to present concrete measures for a smooth introduction of the 'company plans' to redistribute labour. The negotiations were rather difficult, since the trade unions had gone on strike against the plan in November 1993.

On January 24 the National Labour Council could finally agree on measures concerning the redistribution of labour, a reduction of the employers' costs for the lower incomes, the extension of temporary contracts and new rules on terms and payments for the ending of white-collar contracts. There was no agreement

on part-time work, on the rules for overtime work and on the regulation of social conflicts. The bureaus of the two main trade unions, ACV/CSC and ABVV/FGTB although immediately rejected the agreement. They stated that the employers were not giving enough guarantees for new jobs in turn for the reduction of their costs. The government then announced that it would itself deal with the aspects on which there was no agreement, in order to allow the social partners to start at least sectorial negotiations on the redistribution of labour. Yet this did not lead to many concrete agreements at that level either.

The implementation of the crisis plan was realized through a global social law that was passed in the Parliament in March. It contained - among others - the creation of 'odd-job services' or local employment agencies for the long-term unemployed and a reduction of the growth of social security expenses. It also introduced the 'objective responsibility' in road traffic, which means that the driver of a car will always have to pay indemnities to bikers or pedestrians who are involved in an accident.

During the second half of the year the relations between the social partners defroze, which led in the end to a central and general agreement for the private sector for 1995 and 1996. The agreement copied the formula of the previous plans to help the youngest unemployed, but left out the age limit. This means that the reduction of the social security contributions for the employers would be given from January 1995 on for every new job given to somebody who has been unemployed for at least one year.

D. *Privatisations*

The government expected in 1994 an income of 57 billion from the privatisation of state services and companies. The selling of the national investment company (NIM/SNI) did not go that easy. On January 14 the federal government accepted the suggestion of the minister of Finance Maystadt to sell the public holding to the group Ackermans & Van Haaren. The expected price was 14.5 billion. The buyer would then sell the public holding's participation in Distrigaz to Tractebel, a company belonging to the Société Générale group. Local municipalities would also have the possibility to participate in Distrigaz, and a part of the Distrigaz shares would be sold on the stock market. The remaining parts of the public holding NIM/SNI would be taken over by the ASLK/CGER-holding as Federal Investment Company. Yet the Flemish government did not like this construction, because it would mean the transfer of Distrigaz to the too francophone and France-oriented Tractebel. The Flemish prime minister Van den Brande suggested, within his general principle of 'Flemish anchoring', not to sell shares on the stock market but to a Flemish group of investors. Such a group reached an agreement with Tractebel, but the federal government did not change its plan. After some remarks by the European Commission, the public holding could finally be sold in December 1995 for 15.5 billion BEF.

The selling of the National Lottery was not realized. The government only decided that the Lottery had to pay an extra concession right of 15 billion. The privatisation of the telephone company Belgacom was also not yet realized. In order to be able to book the budgeted 25 billion, the government decided on October 7 that the ASLK/CGER-holding would pay this amount to the Belgian state, while the holding would then later have the right to sell the Belgacom shares.

III. The European and the local elections

The Belgian citizens had to vote twice in 1994: on June 17 for the European Parliament and on October 9 for the councils of the local municipalities and for the provincial councils. For these elections the parliament passed a law aiming at a more balanced representation of men and women on the electoral lists. The law of May 24 1995 stated that one quarter, and from 1999 on one third of the candidates have to be female.

A law was also passed on the maximum expenses for the campaigns, expanding and refining the rules that were already introduced for national elections. For national and European elections each party can spend a maximum of 50 million, for the regional elections a maximum of 40 million (9 million in the Brussels region) and for the local elections a maximum of 15 million. The expense limits for individual candidates vary according to their place on the list and the size of the constituency. Distributing presents and gadgets is forbidden. For European and national elections each party can use a maximum of 600 posters of more than 4 square meters. These large posters are forbidden for local elections.

A. *European elections and reshuffling of the cabinet*

Belgium elected on June 12 25 members of the European parliament. That is one seat more than in 1989. As a result of the Saint-Michael's agreement the Flemish community would have 14 seats (plus one), the French community 11 seats (minus one) and the German community one (new) seat.

European citizens living in Belgium could vote in the European elections. They had to register as a voter in their local municipality. Only very few European citizens did so.

The European campaign was, as usual, dominated by Belgian political issues. Especially the opposition parties seized the opportunity to call for a vote against the government. For the VLD, this was the very first election since the creation of the party, and the polls indicated a score that could reach 30%. The results of the VLD however were very disappointing. It polled 18.4%, which was even less than the result of the Flemish liberals at the national elections of 1991. VLD-president Guy Verhofstadt admitted that he had lost a battle, and even considered the possibility to resign.

For the Vlaams Blok the European elections were a confirmation of the success of 1991. A new party called WOW (Waardig Ouder Worden), and aiming at the votes of the elderly, polled a surprising 3.4% in Flanders. Another surprise was the 7.9% and one seat for the Front National in the French constituency.

Freddy Willockx, who was elected for the SP, was replaced as minister of Pensions in the federal government by Marcel Colla. The minister of Internal Affairs Louis Tobback was also elected (because of his very high number of personal votes), but did not take his seat in the European parliament.

During a few months it seemed that prime minister Dehaene would himself leave the government to become president of the European Commission. On March 9 The Guardian had mentioned this for the first time. Yet it was not before June 17 that Dehaene confirmed that he was indeed a candidate for that function. He was backed by most member states of the European Union, and especially by France and Germany. Other candidates were the Dutch christian-dem-

ocrat and former prime minister Ruud Lubbers and the British European Commission member Leon Brittan.

European elections of June 12 1994

	European election				National elections
	1994		1989		1991
	%	seats	%	seats	
CVP	27.4	4	34.1	5	27.0
VLD	18.4	3	17.1	2	19.2
SP	17.7	3	20.0	3	19.2
VL. BLOK	12.6	2	6.6	1	10.6
Agalev	10.7	1	12.2	1	7.8
VU	7.1	1	8.7	1	9.5
WOW	3.4	-			
PS	30.5	3	38.5	5	35.7
PRL-FDF	24.2	3	22.8	2	25.4
PSC	18.8	3	21.0	2	20.5
Ecolo	13.0	1	16.5	2	13.6
FN	7.9	1	-	-	1.7

At the European top conference in Korfoe (24-25 June) both Lubbers and Brittan withdrew, but the British prime minister John Major vetoed Dehaene, who was believed to be too much of a European centralist. Since Britain held on to its veto, Dehaene had no other choice but to stay in the Belgian government.

B. Local elections and new reshuffling of the government

On October 9 the Belgians elected after six years their new municipal councils. For the first time the provincial councils were elected simultaneously and for a fixed six years term. That is a result of the Saint-Michael's agreement of 1993. For the first time the councils of the two new provinces, Flemish Brabant and Walloon Brabant were elected. They would replace the former (bilingual) province of Brabant.

Compared with the national elections of 1991, the provincial elections meant a slight improvement for Agalev and the CVP, a serious decline for the Volksunie and a decline for SP and VLD. The Vlaams Blok stayed on level. In Wallonia both PS and Ecolo lost (still compared with 1991), while the PRL slightly improved its score and the PSC kept a status quo.

In the local elections, which are more difficult to analyze nationwide, the Vlaams Blok proved to be the winner in Flanders. In Antwerp the party polled 28% (18% in 1988). The other parties (SP, VLD, Agalev and Antwerpen 94 (a common list of CVP and VU)) needed two months to produce an anti-Blok coalition with Leona Detiège (SP) as mayor. In all the other larger cities and in the old mining areas of Limburg the Vlaams Blok scored extremely well.

The VLD increased its number of local councillors, but once again these elections did not mean the breakthrough of the newly reformed liberal party.

In Wallonia the christian-democrats improved their position. The PS lost votes, but was able to repeat its former high scores in its traditional 'red fortresses' in the cities and industrial areas. PRL and Ecolo kept their positions. The Front National confirmed its European score, and won also seats in most of the Brussels municipalities. In the city of Brussels François-Xavier De Donnée (PRL) became mayor of a coalition with PS, Ecolo, CVP and VLD.

Reacting to the repeated successes of the right-wing extremist parties, CVP-president Van Hecke and prime minister Dehaene suggested the idea of an electoral threshold and the abolition of the obligation to vote. This would counter the fractionalization of the Belgian party system. There was however no consensus on these ideas within the federal coalition. Yet the four governing parties did agree on the introduction of the consultative local referendum and the expansion of the multiple personal vote (used only for local elections) to all elections.

After the local elections two federal ministers of the SP were replaced. Willy Claes, who had been appointed Secretary-general of the NATO on September 29, was replaced as minister of Foreign Affairs and as vice prime-minister by SP-president Frank Vandebroucke. Johan Vande Lanotte succeeded as minister of Internal Affairs to Louis Tobback, who became president of the SP and mayor of Leuven. Jean-Maurice Dehousse (PS), who was to become mayor of Liège, left the federal government on December 23 and was replaced as minister of Science Policy by Michel Daerden.

IV. Reform of the state and related problems

Following the reform of the Constitution in 1992-93, introducing in Belgium a genuine federal structure, both the House and the Senate accepted early 1994 a completely new, more logical and more readable renumbered version of the Constitution. It was solemnly signed by the King on February 17. Before that the parliament had introduced two new articles, one on the protection of the privacy and the other on economical, social and cultural basic rights.

Also following the federal reform of the state, the federal state and the regions and communities signed on March 8 four treaties on cooperation in international politics. One of these agreements dealt with the representation of Belgium in international organizations. On May 30 the federal state and the three regions settled the final separation of the old province of Brabant, and the distribution of buildings, budgets and personnel.

The state reform of 1992-93 being concluded did not stop the political elites of thinking about the further evolutions of the Belgian state. Especially the Flemish prime minister did so. In a speech on July 11, the Flemish national holiday, he repeated his preference for a bipolar confederation, with Flanders and Wallonia as senior partners, and both the Brussels region and the German community as junior partners. On that same day the King was present at some Flemish festivities - an absolute première - and was seen 'lipping' the Flemish national anthem. The reactions on the French-speaking side were very negative. Robert Collignon, the Walloon prime minister, did not attend the official part of the Flemish festivities. On July 14 the House of Representatives organized a debate on the question. Prime minister Dehaene assumed the full responsibility for the King's acts. He thought that in the light of the new state structure the presence of the

King was absolutely normal. He announced that the King would also be present to honour the French community's and the Walloon region's national holidays. As for Van den Brande's ideas on the future Belgian state, Dehaene declined obviously all responsibility. He said that the state reform was certainly not finished and that one could reflect on it. He warned however for precipitation.

In the margin of the state reform, the discussions on the possible reform (splitting) of the social security system went on. Flemish minister Johan Sauwens (VU) published on June 6 the results of a research that had been ordered by the Flemish government. It proved - according to Sauwens - that Flanders is able to pay for its complete social security with only the contributions of workers and employers, while Wallonia and Brussels would not be able to do so and therefore needed extra tax-payers money.

Professor Danny Pieters, who had led the research, defended on June 16 the almost complete splitting ('federalization') of the social security. Only unemployment, occupational diseases and pensions would remain federal. Yet not all members of the research group agreed with this political conclusion. Four professors said on October 3 that a federalization of the social security would only be meaningful if the system in general would be rationalized and if the same goal (more regional responsibility) could not be achieved with other means like a better control.

In December the Walloon prime minister Collignon declared that according to a similar research conducted by francophone universities, Wallonia did prove to receive more from the social security than it pays for, but that these differences are due to objective structural differences between the regions, and that the balance might well favour Flanders in the future. He rejected any federalization of the system.

B. *More 'communitarian' tensions*

The year 1994 had the usual list of miscellaneous quarrels between the two linguistic groups in Belgium. On February 8 the European Commission asked the federal government to interfere with the Walloon government to suspend the order for buses that had been placed with the company EMI (province of Luxembourg). That company would cooperate with Renault in France. But the Flemish company Van Hool, which felt discriminated against, had complained to the Belgian Council of State and to the European Commission. The Council of State had first suspended the order, but had then withdrawn the suspension since Van Hool would not face real important losses. The Commission however said that the principle of equal treatment for all offers had been broken, and brought the case to the European Court of Justice. The Court also refused to suspend the order, and postponed to 1996 its final judgment. Van Hool will then only be able to claim indemnities anyway.

On October 19 the minister of Science Policy Jean-Maurice Dehousse caused quite some controversy when visiting a conference on North Sea research in Oostende (Flanders), and spoke - in the presence of the King - only French and English. He had although, so said the press, a Dutch version of his speech with him. The Flemish government protested heavily against this 'lack of federal loyalty'. Federal minister of Defense Leo Delcroix even asked the resignation of Dehousse.

Prime minister Dehaene had to respond on interpellations on this problem on October 27. He said that he deplored Dehousse's attitude and that he had sent all the members of the federal government a letter in which he set out a new eth-

ical rule, asking federal ministers who visit one of the linguistic regions to be as courteous as possible and to speak at least in part the language of the region. Of course the law does not oblige any federal minister to be bilingual. Dehaene added that he had reminded minister Delcroix of another rule of ministerial ethics, which is to not criticize the colleagues in public.

Another source of conflict was the European decision to grant the right to vote in local elections to all European citizens from 1995 on. At the European top of Essen (9-10 December) Belgium asked and received the right to introduce exceptions. In local municipalities where the number of European non-Belgians exceeds 20% of the population, a minimal stay of six years in Belgium can be required to receive the right to vote. Both the French Community Council and the Walloon Council protested against this exception, which was granted to give in to the Flemish fear of seeing the numerous Europeans living in the Brussels periphery voting mainly for francophone lists. Yet it appeared finally that only a few municipalities in the German-speaking area would possibly fall under this exception.

Much more tension caused the decision of the Flemish Council (December 16) to ask the Court of Arbitration to nullify the budget for 1995 of the French Community, because it contained again a number of subsidies for the development of francophone activities in Flanders (among which the distribution of the francophone periodical 'Carrefour' in the Brussels periphery). The Flemish Council considered this to be a violation of the principle of territoriality. Responding to interpellations on this question, prime minister Dehaene urged the regions and communities to try to solve their mutual quarrels by concluding treaties. A draft treaty between the two large linguistic communities is ready, but can however not be concluded exactly because of this different interpretation of the principle of territoriality.

And finally the Happart-case surfaced again in 1994. Apparently to follow a request from Happart, the federal government decided on June 28 to change the working principles of the 'council of provincial governors'. The new text requires it to meet once a month. Happart had previously accused the Limburg governor not to convene the council. This council controls the local municipality of Voeren for all its decisions, except the use of languages. Not using the council of all 9 governors meant that the Limburg governor largely controlled Voeren on his own. Happart was still not happy with the government's decision, and declared that he would, during the absence of mayor Droeven, act as mayor of Voeren.

Against one of the activities of Happart during that period, the Flemish alderman of Voeren Huub Broers filed a complaint to the Council of State. In its decision of December 19 the Council of State confirmed its ruling of 1986, saying that Happart was never legally mayor or acting mayor of Voeren, since he did not master Dutch in 1986 and provided since then no further proofs of change in this situation. Happart then reacted by saying that he still was a candidate to become the new mayor of Voeren in 1995. The PS let understand that it might want some compensation if Happart was not to become the new mayor. Prime minister Dehaene was going to need the Christmas holidays to find a solution for this (recurrent) Belgian problem.

V. Foreign policy and defense policy

A. Foreign policy

Ruanda - Belgium was involved in a dramatic way in the bloody conflict between Hutus and Tutsis in Ruanda. Since the end of 1993 there were 421 Belgian troops participating in the UN peace force UNAMIR that controlled the implementation of the peace agreements of Arusha (1993) between the Hutu government and the Tutsi liberation movement FPR.

During a visit to Ruanda in March the minister of Defense Delcroix criticized the Ruandese president Habyarimana for slowing down deliberately the implementation of the peace agreements. Secretary of state for Development Eric Derycke then announced on March 22 that development cooperation with Ruanda would be stopped for all projects not having a strictly humanitarian character.

On April 6 Habyarimana died in a plain accident, together with his Burundese colleague Ntaryamira. The killing was to be the start of massive massacres of opponents of the regime, both Tutsis and moderate Hutus. During the riots some members of the presidential guard killed ten Belgian soldiers. The murders were related to the feelings of distrust and even hatred for the Belgians among parts of the Hutu majority. These feelings were further aroused by the private radio station Radio Mille Collines.

The Belgian government met on April 6. It decided, together with France and other western countries, to withdraw all the white people from Ruanda. The operation Silver Back lasted from 10 to 17 April. It brought back 1258 Belgians. All Belgian blue helmets also left Ruanda. The closing of the Belgian embassy in Kigali was the end of one century of Belgian involvement in that country. Belgium did however send help to the Ruandese refugees in Zaire, and agreed in December to send some experts to Ruanda to help the new Tutsi government to rebuild the judicial system.

Zaire - The tense and troubled relations with Zaire improved slightly during the second half of the year. Secretary of state Eric Derycke declared on August 9 that Belgium was ready, under certain conditions however, to normalize the relations with the former colony. He based this decision on a report produced by a group of professors who had analyzed in depth the situation of Zaire and the possible relations with Belgium. The conditions were that the government of Kengo Wa Dondo had to prove its complete control over the central bank, the army and the police forces and that human rights had to be respected.

The press questioned this so-called U-turn of the government. It denied that it had changed its policy, especially because the conditions mean in fact that president Mobutu has to reduce some of his powers. The minister of Defense Delcroix went further, and said that he was ready to have Belgian soldiers play a predominant role in the rebuilding of Zaire. But both the minister of Foreign Affairs Claes and the Walloon socialists rejected this idea. A visit to Kinshasa by several Belgian enterprises, on the initiative of Sabena president Pierre Godfroid did not really please the federal government.

On October 13 and 14 Kengo Wa Dondo was in Brussels. But all he brought home was the promise that the humanitarian help would be continued.

Water treaties - On March 8 the discussions between Flanders, Wallonia, the Netherlands and France on the deepening of the Scheldt and the improvement

of the quality of the Meuse water were terminated with a possible agreement. There had been talks on the deepening of the Scheldt (very important for the Antwerp harbour) since 1980, for the Netherlands asked clean Scheldt water in exchange, and (recently) also an agreement on the tracé of the high-speed train from Brussels to Amsterdam.

The agreements on the water quality of Meuse and Scheldt were signed on April 26 by the governments of France, the Netherlands, Wallonia and Belgium. Flanders refused to sign because the Netherlands still refused to agree on the deepening of the Scheldt. That agreement came finally on December 1, when the problem was no longer linked to the high-speed train. The agreement was to be signed on January 17 1995. The tracé of the train would be settled in the Spring of 1996.

B. *Defense policy*

The year 1994 meant the further implementation of the reform of the Belgian army that had been started by minister Leo Delcroix two years earlier. The reform included the abolition of the military service, the creation of a fully professional army and the retreat of most Belgian soldiers from Germany. On May 20 1994 the Parliament accepted five bills dealing with these reforms.

On February 22 minister Delcroix suggested the introduction of a free 'community service', to replace the military service, and to enable boys and girls between 18 and 25 to do voluntary work in sectors like health care, social welfare, environment, third world development, culture or security. They would then receive 15.000 BEF per month. The implementation of this plan, which required negotiations with the regions and communities, was very much delayed.

In an intermediate report the special commission of the House of Representatives that had been created in 1993 to investigate the big army orders since 1970, proposed to set up after the 1995 elections a special parliamentary control commission that would be able to see any new file on army orders and that would have the right to give the government a binding advice. The government would then have to motivate any other decision than the one suggested by the control commission. So far the special commission did not seem to have found major irregularities in army orders in the past.

VI. Other facts and developments

Resignation of Leo Delcroix - Leo Delcroix (CVP) resigned as Belgian minister of Defense on December 8. In an interview earlier in 1994 he had declared that he did not own a house at the French Côte d'Azur. Yet on December 6 both the magazine Humo and the newspaper De Morgen confirmed that he did own such a house in Bornes-les-Mimosas. The house was said to have been built by postmen on leave, and it was said that Delcroix had used the 'empty' French company Capricorne Sud to buy the house, which had made possible the use of dirty money.

At a press conference on December 7 Delcroix admitted that he had not told the truth, but he rejected the accusations of fraud. The press did not accept this explanation, which made the minister resign on December 8. He was replaced by Karel Pinxten.

Brussels Regional government - Dominique Harmel succeeded on March 24 to Jean-Louis Thys as regional minister of Public Works and Transport. Thys want-

ed to be full-time mayor of the Brussels municipality of Jette, but his name had also been cited in an investigation of illegal party finance.

Royal family - Prince Philip, the oldest son of King Albert and Queen Paola took the oath of Senator on June 21. The Constitution states that the King's children are Senator by right from the age of 18 on. The other children of the King did not yet use that privilege.

Governors - On July 31 Lode De Witte and Valmy Féaux were sworn in as governors of the new provinces of Flemish Brabant and Walloon Brabant. The provinces were to be created on January 1 1995. Amand Damel succeeded to Emile Waty as governor of Namur.

Amnesty - In his New Year's speech on February 1 the King repeated, following an earlier proposal of his predecessor and brother Baldwin, that 'the pacification between the Belgian communities should enable us to look for measures to reconcile all the citizens of the country'. This referred obviously to the question of amnesty for the Belgian citizens who had been collaborating with the Nazi forces during the Second World War. The prime minister announced that he would try to find a solution through discrete talks. The francophone parties, which had always rejected any general amnesty rule, said that they were prepared to reconsider the social effects of the post-war repression 'case per case'. At the end of 1994 Dehaene admitted that he had made no progress in this matter.

VII. The evolutions in the political parties

The Agusta case caused a great turmoil in the Parti Socialiste, as a result of both the accusations against Guy Mathot, Guy Coëme and Guy Spitaels, and as a result of the accusing declarations of Philippe Moureaux to the judges. Party president Busquin tried to keep the troops together by announcing a new set of moral rules for all the party members, and by starting a reorganisation of especially the intermediate organs (the constituency federations) of the party.

When Busquin himself was named in the UNIOP case, he resigned as party president on February 28, and said that he would announce at the end of that week whether he wanted to go on as party president. No other candidates stepped forward, and the party congress reelected Busquin with 485 votes out of 499. His position in the party had certainly been reinforced after this rather strange move.

Johan Van Hecke, president of the CVP, announced on January 12 that he was working on the creation of a new 'centre party'. He therefore attracted a few well-known cultural personalities on the European CVP-list and he supported for the Antwerp local elections a cartel of CVP, VU and independents.

Very surprising was the arrival in the CVP of Paul Staes and Leo Cox, the first a former MEP for Agalev and the latter the secretary general of the Green group in the European Parliament and former party secretary of Agalev. They said that they were convinced of the sincerity of Van Hecke to change the CVP. Party president Van Hecke had presented his ideas in a book ('Beyond the slogans'), in which he defended a political reorientation of his party along the materialist-post-materialist cleavage.

Van Hecke's plan caused quite a bit of discontent among the representatives of the Christian labour organisations. The overall organisation ACW (General Christian Labour Movement) announced that it would rethink its privileged relation with the CVP.

For the VLD the European elections, being the first elections after the creation of the new Flemish liberal party, were a huge disappointment. Party president Verhofstadt thought of resigning, but was convinced to stay. Within the party some people asked for a more pragmatic and less ideological strategy, but the party bureau decided not to change its strategy. Yet it accepted to take more care of translating to the population the new ideas and principles of the party. The local elections were also rather disappointing, and the internal discussions in the party went on and on.

At a congress meeting on March 18-20 the VLD had proposed a plan for a new social security system, in which the private insurance sector would play a larger role. The other parties, and especially the socialists, reacted heavily, and used the threat of a destruction of the old social security system during the electoral campaigns.

The Volksunie fought in 1994 for its survival. Paul Van Grembergen, the party leader in the Flemish Council, said on January 8 that the party had to disappear if it failed to reach 5% of the votes at the European elections. The results were acceptable (7.1%) but then the local elections in October were again rather disappointing. Some people in the party were thinking of merging the party with the CVP, but others defended the idea of choosing for a more radical Flemish nationalist profile.

The green party Agalev was confronted with a conflict between the 'founding fathers' and the current party leadership. The defection of Paul Staes and Leo Cox added to the malaise. At a congress on December 3 the party was able to gather a large audience and to make some clear choices for the future. Agalev rejected the idea of forming a 'progressive front' with CVP, SP and VU. It declared to be ready to accept governing responsibility and suspended the rotation principle. This latter decision allowed most green members of parliament to be on the lists again in 1995.

After Frank Vandenbroucke left the presidency of the SP to become minister of Foreign Affairs, the party bureau appointed Louis Tobback as the new president. Tobback said that he supported the initiative taken by the former Volksunie MP Maurits Coppieters and two SP leaders Norbert De Batselier and Freddy Willockx to create a 'progressive front' and maybe even a new progressive party. Yet VU, Agalev and the Christian labour movement rejected the plan.

Gérard Deprez was reelected president of the PSC with a very small margin of 51.1% of the votes. Almost 50% of the members had participated in the election.

The PRL created on January 22 an 'Assembly of Walloon federations' and a 'Regional Brussels wing', to adapt itself to the logic of the state reform. On September 1995 the PRL reached an agreement with the Brussels francophone party FDF. They would propose common lists for all elections, except for local elections.

The congress of Ecolo decided in January to reinforce the party leadership by reducing the membership of the federal secretariat to three members (formerly five). Jacky Morael, Dany Josse and Isabelle Durant were elected as federal secretaries on April 25. Jacky Morael had therefore to resign as member of the House of Representatives.