Comparing similar countries: Italy and Belgium

by Lieven DE WINTER, Donatella DELLA PORTA and Kris DESCHOUWER

Lieven De Winter is professor of Politics at the Université Catholique de Louvain
Donatella Della Porta is professor of Local Government at the University of Florence
Kris Deschouwer is professor of Politics at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel

I. The logic of binary comparison [1]

Italy and Belgium are two countries that are similar enough to be compared in a systematic way. And therefore knowledge on Italy can help us to understand Belgium, and vice versa. This is the very straightforward and maybe a bit bold assumption of this volume. This assumption has two origins. The first is not a scientific one. It is the fact that in the public debate on Belgian politics the country is often said to be close to 'Italian situations'. This is then not meant as a positive description. It refers to ungovernability, chaos, instability, corruption, crime, clientelism, lack of legitimacy of the system. It is also used as an argument to defend the need for radical changes in the system, because this is the way in which Italy tried to get rid of the Italian 'situations'.

These statements, that can be heard among both journalists and politicians (especially those opposing the system), are not spelled out in a very scientific way. It is more a matter of intuition, and the will to launch some provocative ideas. Yet the fact that this intuitive reference to Italy is so often made, is a first good reason to check whether we have here indeed two similar cases. It also raises the question of the nature of the two cases. What is it exactly that makes them similar? There is a great need for conceptual clarification of the 'situations'.

The second source for the assumption of similarity is also slightly intuitive, but builds on a -hopefully - more solid scientific ground. Many sociologists and political scientists, both in Italy and in Belgium, who are engaged in comparative analysis, often realise that the two countries are close to each other on a number of variables. This is obviously not enough to state that they are similar, but it raises a least the question. It is a question that needs a closer examination. This close examination should in the very first place show an awareness for the methodological pitfalls (but also advantages) of a binary comparison (Dogan & Pelassy, 1984).

There is one major pitfall that is not at all recognised by the more intuitive political debate. By referring to Italy to 'explain' Belgian features, further evolutions in Italy are believed to be a predictable future for Belgium. If both countries look alike, then much more corruption must become visible in Belgium, and

1 We would like to thank Hans Daalder (University of Leiden), whose concluding remarks at the conference were very inspiring for this introductory chapter

the electoral system is about to be changed, and the traditional parties are about to collapse, and the judges are about to play a major political role, etcetera. Similarity is however not enough to use the first case as a model that can explain or predict evolutions in the other.

Another danger of a binary comparison (and of scientific research in general) is that one believes too readily that the cases are similar, because only the similarities are taken into account. Of course two cases can never be completely similar, and it is methodologically very defensible to define the cases as belonging to one single homogenous category because they simply share a number of relevant characteristics. But there should then at least be the full awareness of the variables that are left out of the building of the category. One should have good reasons to leave them out, and be sure that they do not affect the kind of relations that are assumed by using only the selected variables. Belgium and Italy are different countries, and there are some very striking and maybe highly relevant differences.

At the side of the similarities, we can produce a fairly long list. And this is of course the reason why one gets the feeling that they belong to a same category. Without any systematic ordering, the list can be the following:

- a rather weak civil culture
- a clientelist political culture
- a low degree of satisfaction with the system
- multiple cleavages and a high degree of fragmentation of the party system
- multi-party coalitions with at least four parties in government
- a high level of government instability
- a permanent presence of Christian-Democracy in the coalition and a relatively high degree of factionalism within the Christian-Democracy
- a high degree of patronage
- a high degree of party interference in all circuits of decision-making
- a judiciary system that is slow, inefficient and experienced as unjust
- regional tensions between a declining south and a more prosperous north
- high scores for neo-populist and right-wing extremist formations
- a generous welfare state under financial pressure
- an enormous public dept
- a late state (and nation) formation and hostility of the Catholic Church against the new secular state

But there are also a number of important differences. There is the fascist experience in Italy, the organised crime in Italy, the geographic proximity of the Catholic Church in Italy, the federalisation of the state in Belgium, the devolution of the party system in Belgium, the persistence of the monarchy in Belgium, the different structure of radio and especially television, the presence of a large communist party in Italy. These differences are too important to be simply neglected.

The list of common features is a very crude one. One major distinction is not yet made: which are the causes and which are the consequences? Or more precisely, which combination of which consequences produce (explain) a combination of characteristics that are typical for Italy and Belgium, and eventually for

other countries? Sorting this out supposes much more research. The articles in this volume are an attempt to start with a more systematic analysis of what belongs together and what explains what.

A good way of course to try to reorganise the list, is use an existing concept that has often been suggested when dealing - among others - with both Italy and Belgium. This concept is 'partitocracy'. It is a broad concept, too broad maybe, but we propose to use it as a 'pars pro toto', as a single indicator of a score on a set of variables. The idea is that the two countries are close to each other on a number of social and political characteristics. They are believed to belong to a specific type of polity, a type that we label in general as partitocracy.

We will first try to explain what the concept means. That will illustrate that indeed a number of the variables in our list of common features can be considered to be characteristics belonging to a partitocracy or facilitating partitocracy. In the second place we will present a first general empirical test for the hypothesis that Belgium and Italy belong to a similar type of political system. The ambition is not to conclude with a solid an fully fledged theory. Therefore we need even more clarification of the concepts and a more thorough analysis of causes and effects. This is something for future research. Our aim here is to prove that this research is relevant, and worthwhile to be undertaken.

II. The concept of partitocracy

The term partitocracy usually refers to some kind of 'degeneration' of party government, to something that is not legitimate. That makes it a tricky concept for scientific analysis. Furthermore it is not at all clear what is meant by 'party government' in the first place. If we want to use the concept of partitocracy as a leading one in our attempt to compare Belgium and Italy, we need to clarify it. By browsing through the literature, we will see that the main defining elements of partitocracy shifted between the organisational characteristics of political parties, the institutional role of the parties in the government and the actual use the parties make of public resources.

A. *Partitocracy and mass parties*

A first element used for defining *partitocrazia* is the presence of mass political parties (Pasquino, 1990). In Italy, in the years immediately after the Second World War the term was in fact used to single out and criticise the growing power of mass parties. The post-war period in Italy did indeed see the rise of two mass political parties capable of creating social integration on a subcultural basis: the Communist PCI and the Christian-Democratic DC. A typical feature of these kind of parties is a strong leadership that controls the well-organised machine. It makes the presence and the weight of the parties in the political decision-making structures very visible. And furthermore the mass-type parties and their ancillary organisations are very visible in society.

In Belgium the term of partitocracy also comes to the front as soon as the mass parties start playing a major role. That happens from the thirties on, and is especially the case for the Belgian Workers party, and to a certain extent also for the Catholic party. It becomes clear then that parties make politics, and not individuals. To condemn this evolution, the term partitocracy is used by the conservatives.

The further evolution of the parties (especially the erosion of their 'classe gardée' (Kirchheimer, 1957)) might reduce the presence of the parties in daily life in society, but does certainly not mean a reduction of the power of the leadership. Party leaders remain the major political actors. In the seventies the Belgian public debate condemned the existence of a so-called 'junta of party presidents'. The party leaders were indeed in a very open and visible way the people who reached the major decisions and who were leading the government.

B. *Partitocracy and the partyness of government*

Attention to the role of partitocracy re-emerged with the development of the research on the role of political parties in government. It is worthwhile recalling that there are two different 'classical' definitions of party government. According to the first, extensive definition, party government in the form in which government decisions are taken in a democracy. A normative approach took into account the responsiveness of party government to the citizens. According to this line of thinking, democratic responsiveness derives from the fact that government positions are assigned to representatives, elected on party lists.

A second, intensive definition refers instead to the specific form of government organisation in a parliamentary, majoritarian system, in particular in the 'Westminster model'. In this case the party government is a particular type of government in democratic regimes: a type in which political parties keep the control on their representatives in the government.

More recently, Richard Katz (1986) used party government to define a continuum: the degree of 'partyness of government' varies in different democracies, although in each democracy there is a certain degree of it. For there to be an ideal type of *party government* at least three conditions are necessary. "Firstly all major governmental decisions must be taken by people chosen in elections conducted along party lines, or by individuals appointed by and responsible to such people (...). Secondly policy must be decided within the governing party, when there is a 'monocolour' government, or by negotiation among parties when there is a coalition (...). Thirdly the highest officials (e.g. cabinet ministers and especially the prime minister) must be selected within their parties and be responsible to the people through their parties" (Katz 1986: 43). In Katz's analysis, however, these characteristics define just one element of party government. He suggests in fact to distinguish between *partyness of government*, referring to a narrow institutional sense of party government as party control of the formal government apparatus, and *party governmentness* referring to a broader sense of party government as a general social characteristic. The broader concept, party governmentness, refers to a characteristic of the *Herrschaftsorganisation* of the overall society, and indicates the proportion of social power exercised by parties within the framework of a party government model (Katz 1986: 45).

While Katz looks mainly at the 'formal institutions of government', others considered the capability of the parties to implement their policy choice. According to Rose (1974: 381) there is party government when the parties are able to implement their policies, that is when the parties clearly formulate policy preferences, identify the means to reach their aims, and appoint a number of public officers sufficient to implement governmental policy choices. Summarising, party government implies that the arena in which governmental decisions are taken are the parties and that the 'partisans' in the government are able to implement the decisions they take.

Partitocrazia would be a degeneration of a specific form of regulation of social conflict, counterpoised to neo-corporatist (organisation of strong interests), pluralist (strong civil society) and policy network (strong technocracy) formulations. Applying the concept of partitocracy, both the Italian and the Belgian systems can be defined, for instance, as an 'extreme' case of government by the parties, with the parties in a position to control pressure groups (counting only through a client or kin relation to the parties themselves), the technocrats (being appointed in proportion to party strength) and civil society (social movements too being aligned around party actors). The power of the parties therefore, is seen as having characterised both society and institutions. As Pasquino observed: "The party presence in Italian society, in the centres of decision-making, has been permitted by the expansion of the public sector, by the existence of municipal enterprises, by the number of positions subject to political nominations. As regards the institutions, at the risk of furnishing too rudimentary an explanation, it is opportune to remember: firstly, that recruitment to administrative and political posts is largely the monopoly of parties; secondly, that in the formal centres of decision-making the presence of personnel of party extraction in not only dominant but frequently absolute" (Pasquino, 1987:60). This could also be a description of the Belgian situation.

C. *Partitocracies and patronage*

More recently, in fact, partitocracies have been defined as a peculiar type of party government based on a particular combination of two dimensions of party power: the capacity to select policies and the capacity to select personnel. Distinguishing between 'policy orientation power' (*potere di indrizzo*) and 'appointment power' (*potere di nomina*), Vassallo (1994: 48) built a typology including four types of party government: a) *organic party government*, that implies high power on both politics and appointments; b) *programmatic party government*, with high power on policies, but low appointment power; c) *'splitting' party government*, meaning low power on policies and high power on appointment; d) *residual party government*, with low power on both.

In the common language use, partitocracies became in fact a synonymous for party control over society, via an appropriation of public resources for the benefit of a party, or of politicians. In this way, the term partitocracy refers to both organic and 'splitting' types of party government. The reference to the influence of parties on appointments - not only on high government positions, as in Katz's definition, and not oriented towards the implementation of party policy choice, as in Rose's one - recalls another concept, already since a long time established in the social science literature: political clientelism or patronage. As it is well known, in fact, patronage defines power relationships between individuals or groups in unequal positions, based upon a personal exchange of favours (Scott, 1972). While anthropologists stressed the *dyadic* nature of patronage, political scientist focused on the use of *public resources* by political leaders for their private aims, involving an exchange of favours for votes (Weingrod 1968: 379).

If we agree to define partitocracy as a type of party government based on a large use of patronage, we can proceed to ask ourselves which are the characteristics of the political system that favours the development of partitocratic elements. Following Vassalo's suggestion, we should try to distinguish between those characteristics which ensure party control on policies, and those that favour patronage. In this attempt to single out the main facilitating factors for partitocracy, we can develop a hypothesis which seems to emerge from the comparison of our

two countries. The Belgian case seems to be closer to the 'organic' type, while the Italian seems to come closer to the 'splitting' type. The next paragraph will seek to explain this difference.

III. Partitocracies: their causes and consequences

The literature on party government is very rich in hypotheses on facilitating factors. Explanations for the development of party government are searched for in the social system, the political culture, the parties and the party system, the electoral system, the parliament, the government, and the characteristics of policy making. We will have a look at each of them, and indicate to what extent the favourable conditions are present in Belgium and in Italy.

First of all, like many 'pathologies' of the political system, patronage has been considered as being favoured by some characteristics of the *social system*. First of all, patron-client relationships spread in societies in which the patrons have a lot to offer and the clients have a strong need for asking (and accepting) favours - that is in situations characterised by high levels of social inequalities. From the economic point of view, clientelistic relationships have been said to develop in extensive and extractive economies, with low internal specialisation and low propensity for technological innovation. In general, higher levels of social segmentation seem to facilitate party government. Also according to Katz: "Where each party unity will be easier to maintain, the distinction between parties will be clearer, and party government will be more likely (Katz, 1986:59).

As for the *culture* of patronage, the development of patron-client relationship is accompanied by cultural codes emphasising honour, reciprocity, mediation, fatalism, the role of kinship ties, and characterised instead by a lack of generalised loyalty to the state. In fact, in cultural environments strongly affected by traditional norms, patrons develop an instrumental 'generosity': through their distribution of favours, they bind the clients to reciprocate with their vote and their loyalty. As Eisenstadt and Ronigen (1984) suggested, patron-client relationships are influenced by the structure of trust diffused in a society. In particular, they are more likely to spread up when there are low levels of trust within the major ascriptive groups and a fragile expansion of trust beyond the basic primordial units to broader institutional complexes. In these situations, there is a combination of contractual and precontractual elements, a confusion between the public and the private sphere, and high internal conflictuality. Because of the lack or weakness of universalistic criteria of resources allocation, members of different classes have to build alliances.

Most of these conditions are more likely to develop in phases of transition, when the capitalist way of production and a large public bureaucracy have not yet penetrated the whole system, while urbanisation and immigration already jeopardise the traditional assets. The political institutions are not strong enough to mediate, especially at the local level, between the citizens and the state, and traditional loyalties, although weakened, survive. At the same time, while the primary groups are not anymore able to offer protection, horizontal class relationships and identification have not yet emerged. Patronage however, does not disappear with the development of modern democracies. In the sixties and the seventies, a new wave of sociological studies indicated that in industrial societies the increasing power of the state is accompanied by always more aggressive attempts to get access to public resources via privileged links with power-holders. Moreover, political parties try to acquire blocs of votes by granting particular favours to certain groups of electors.

A relevant question is therefore: what determines the strategic choice of a *political party* between the distribution of collective benefits and the distribution of divisible benefits through patronage. According to Martin Shefter (1977:403) the orientation and preferences of their voters, the type and amount of resources available for the party, and the interests and preferences of party activists and allies are among the most important variables in defining parties' choices. As for the voters, for instance, immigrants, displaced peasants and, in some case, middle classes are supposed to be more sensitive to parties that offer divisible benefits. Industrial working class voters on the other hand seem to respond more favourably to parties that offer collective or programmatic benefits. It is also worth noticing that party preferences have a high degree of resilience, since the conditions under which a political party arose - and in particular its degree of access to patronage when it started to mobilise a popular base - define its propensity to use divisible or collective goods also later in its evolution.

Moving from the characteristics of the parties to those of the *party system*, high levels of party government have been related to the structure of political competition. A bipolar competition tends to produce a direct appointment of the government via the elections, although the parties may keep an important role in the selection of the candidates. A multipolar competition tends, instead, to give more power to the parties as negotiators of the governmental pact. The presence of antisystemic parties may diminish responsiveness in so far as they reduce the possibilities for an alternance. However, for the very same reason, they increase the control of some parties on public resources, ending up in dominant coalition, without alternance.

The development of party government is very much linked to the role and characteristics of the *parliament*. As Katz observed, comparing presidential and parliamentary systems, "party government is more likely in parliamentary systems because party is more useful to political leaders in such systems. A parliamentary cabinet needs a continuous majority (of those voting) to remain in office (...). Presidential government, on the other hand, both makes personalism more likely and entail two rival arenas for decision-making" (1986:55). In fact, the role of the party is reduced when the sources of legitimation of the parliament and the government do not coincide.

Sources of legitimation are in fact related with the *electoral system*, also considered to influence the degree of party government. According to Katz: "Where a candidate must compete with other candidates of his own party, support of and by the party is unlikely to be adequate for election. Instead, the candidate is forced to develop his own base of support" (1986: 57). This undermines party cohesion in so far as it creates conflicting loyalties. Therefore, "electoral systems in which the choice of candidates may cut across party lines (single transferable vote, PR with panachage, or the open primary) should be particularly inhibitive of party government" (ibidem). In general, PR system increases the 'partyness of party', that is the degree of organisational cohesion, but it obscures accountability. Moreover, "the more different kinds of elected officials there are, the weaker party government is likely to be. In particular, election of more than one official at the national level (e.g. a president and a prime minister) is likely to weaken party government by multiplying the number of individuals with personal claims to speak for the party" (Katz 1986: 58).

Moving to the characteristics of the *government*, the presence of a dominant party should favour party government as the party control on resources (although it does not favours responsiveness to the electorate). Consensual demo-

cracy, based on large agreements among representatives of different social segments, would reduce the possibility for reciprocal control, as well as the elaboration of clear party preferences on policy choices, but increase the role of the parties in negotiating these general agreements. As for the coalition dynamics, one-party government and a direct electoral investiture increase policy capacity of the government and, in particular, the head of the government, but reduce the role of the party as negotiator. In multiparty governments, based on post-electoral coalitions, policy capacity is reduced, but the influence of the parties on the government increases. In majoritarian systems the parties play an important role before the election, in the selection of the candidates and the definition of the party program (although it is not always the case that party leadership and institutional leadership coincides). In general, the more concentrated the institutional power, both geographically and functionally, the more favourable the conditions have been considered for party government (Pasquino, 1986; Katz, 1986).

As for the *policy making and implementation*, conditions for the development of party government are those which reduce the autonomous influence of the other actors, in particular the bureaucracy and the interest groups. The lack of a tradition of a professional and autonomous bureaucracy increases the probability of a fragmentation of the public bureaucrats along party lines, with a political control on the careers, and the exchange of material benefits for party loyalty - or, better said, with the connivance between protected bureaucrats and their political protectors. A weak bureaucratic tradition will increase the power of the political parties as the only gatekeepers of the decisional arena. Similarly, the institutionalisation of industrial relations - and in particular the development of neocorporatist assets - increases the autonomous organisational resources for the interest groups. Vice versa, the delays in the development of a modern system of industrial relations increases the dependence of interest groups from political parties, and therefore the social power of the parties.

IV. The similarity of Belgium and Italy: an empirical test [2]

A. *Preliminary methodological remarks*

We start from the presumption that the Belgian and Italian system represent a specific type of political system, a type labelled and defined above as "partitocracy". This pretension supposes that on the one hand, we should find a large number of similarities between the two cases for the "core" or "systemic" features that characterise the type. On the other hand, one should also find a large number of dissimilarities between the Italo-Belgian type and other countries of the universe of democratic systems. In addition, as we can presume that the particular systemic characteristics of the Italo-Belgian case are to some extent caused, or at least facilitated, by a similar set of factors, we can also expect to find strong similarities between the two countries as far as the facilitators of the emergence and survival of a partitocracy are concerned, and again, on the whole, rather strong dissimilarities with other countries. Finally, a partitocratic political system also has its effects on other features of the political system. Likewise we can assume that the core characteristics of the Italo-Belgian type cause a similar set

2 We would like to thank Patrick Dumon, researcher at the Department of Political Science of the Université Catholique de Louvain, for preparing the date set used in this article.

of consequences for the larger political system, we should also expect to find large similarities between the two countries as far as the consequences of a partitocracy for the larger political system are concerned, and again, on the whole, we should not find these consequences, or not as strongly in countries that do not belong to the partitocratic type.

Hence, the data set to be used in order to test the similarities between Italy and Belgium and their dissimilarities with other countries can be divided into three sets of variables:

1) the "core" variables of a partitocratic system;

2) the "facilitators" of a partitocratic system;

3) the "consequences" of a partitocratic system.

For each of the three sets of variables we expect the similarities between Belgium and Italy to be on the whole larger than similarities with other countries. In order to test the hypotheses of the existence of a specific Italo-Belgian partitocratic type, we will use cluster analysis. This procedure aims at establishing typologies on the basis of the similarities and dissimilarities of the cases compared with regard to a number of selected variables. The end result of this type of analysis is the classification of a universe of cases into clusters whereby on the average the variability of the variables within each cluster is less than the variability between the clusters. For each of the three subsets of variables, a separate cluster analysis will be performed. [3] Unfortunately, given the fact that the overall number of considered variables is quite large and the number of cases is small (16), it is technically impossible to perform a cluster analysis including the three subsets of variables at the same time.

In order to overcome this handicap, we will perform a different type of analysis on the overall set of variables. We will the rotate the date set by 90 degrees, so that the new variables will be the 16 countries, and the cases the z-scores of the values the original variables taken for each country. By calculating pairwise pearson correlations between countries, we will be able to identify the countries that correlate most strongly. Here were expect that Italy will have the highest correlation with Belgium. The strength of the correlation vis-à-vis other country pairs (or two-member clusters) will also give us an indicator of the strength of the similarities between the two countries. Finally, this type of analysis will allow us to identify the other countries that come closest to the Italo-Belgian type, as far as their overall characteristics are concerned.

Apart from Norway, the countries that are included in the comparison are those belonging to the European Union. For these countries, we find most easily complete longitudinal data especially with regard to survey data thanks to the existence of Eurobarometer and the European Values Studies, and other data brought together in some solid comparative analyses of West-European countries (Gabriel & Brettschneider,1994; Lane & Errson, 1994; Gallagher, Laver & Mair,1995; Edye & Lintner, 1996), while also many recent comparative research projects have tried to include all or most EC or EU countries (the Budge & Keman party and policy project (1990, 1993), Blondel's cabinet projects (1988, 1991, 1993, 1996), the Beliefs In Government project (1995), Döring parliaments in Western Europe project (1995), the Katz & Mair party organisations project (1994), etcetera).

3 We use iterative cluster k-means analysis, iteration criterion = 0.02, with pairwise deletion of missing values and maximum 10 iterations

The fact that the comparison is restricted to 16 countries does not jeopardise the results of this empirical test, at least as far as the degree of similarities between the Belgian and Italian case is concerned. It is however possible that by restricting our analysis to Western Europe, we have excluded partitocracies in other parts of the world, Japan for instance. [4]

As far as the period of comparison in concerned, it is obvious that we will not take into consideration the features of the Italian system after its radical transformation in the post-1992 period. As we claim that the heydays of partitocracy in both countries were situated in the 1970-1990 period, where possible, we used data that covered this period rather than the entire post-war period, at least as far as the main features of the partitocratic types are concerned. For indicators of facilitators, scores on earlier periods are included as the influence of some of these facilitators tend to be long term. With regard to the consequences of partitocracy, data relating to post 1990 features are sometimes included as well as some of these consequences can be felt even after the partitocratic regime has collapsed (like for instance the size of the public debt).

Finally, we do not include in our comparison features on which Italy and Belgium score in a quite similar way but that are irrelevant to the partitocracy approach, such as the tensions between an affluent North that wants to disengage itself from a less affluent South that still has a significant grip on central government, the electoral strength of extreme right parties, the occurrence of right-wing terrorism in the 1980s, the predominant catholic character of the population, etc. Although they would enhance the degree of similarity of the two countries, they are not included in our analysis as these features are not theoretically related to the core features, the facilitators nor the consequences of the partitocratic type of political system.

B. *Analysis of the core variables of a partitocratic system*

a. selection of the core variables

As argued above, the predominance of parties in a political system can be viewed in terms of political personnel and government policies. As indicators for the impact of parties on the recruitment of the government personnel, we used the following (see Table 1):

- ***MINISMP***: percentage of ministers recruited from parliament as opposed to non-parliamentary ministers. The latter tend to be technicians recruited for the expertise and specialised skills (De Winter, 1991)(Source: De Winter, 1995:130, data for the 1970-1985 period);

- ***MINSELEC*** (ministerial selectorates): degree of involvement of members of the party organisation in selecting the parties' ministers (source: De Winter, 1995:130; score 2 = selection exclusively in hands of intraparty actors, score 1 = selection shared with other selectors (PM, parliamentary party, etc.); score 0 = exclusively by other selectors));

4 The comparison between Italy and other political systems will be examined in a workshop organised by Richard Katz (Italy as a case of comparison) organised at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco, August 1996

- ***PMSELECT*** (prime-ministerial selectorates): degree of involvement of members of the party organisation in selecting the PM (source: Dewachter, 1981:130; score 2 = selection exclusively in hands of leaders of the party organisation, score 1 = selection shared with other selectors (head of state, voters, etc.); score 0 = exclusively by other selectors));

- ***SPEAKSEL*** (selectorates of Speaker of the Lower House): degree of involvement of leaders of the party organisation in selecting the Speaker of the Lower House. In some countries, the selection of the Speaker is part of the interparty and intraparty bargaining between party leaders over the distribution of ministerial portfolios during the formation of the government. In other systems, the legislature enjoys a certain degree of autonomy on selecting its chairman (source: Müller & Jenny, 1995:350; index of partisanship of parliamentary presidents, 1970-1992);

- ***CSSELECT*** (selectorates of top civil servants): degree of involvement of leaders of the party organisation in nominating top civil servants. In some countries, the nomination of top civil servants is heavily dependent on partisan criteria and direct interference of leaders of the party organisation (*lottizzazione*). In others, top civil servants are selected by their peers or by individual ministers (source: Dewachter, 1981:130; score 1 = selection shared between leaders of the party organisation and other selectors (individual ministers, peers, etc.); score 0 = exclusively by other selectors).

Comparative data with regard to the impact of party on government policy in West-European countries are less available. [5] Therefore we only use two indirect indicators for party policy interference:

- ***FORMADUR***: average duration (in days) of government formation process (source De Winter, 1995:118, data covering the 1970-1994 period). The long duration of the government formation process in some countries is basically due to the difficulties parties have in arriving at an agreement on government policies (and usually not on portfolio allocation). In countries where very little time is spent on the elaboration of a detailed government policy program, many matters concerning the content of concrete policies must be solved during the cabinet's term, usually at the level of the government by the ministers themselves, sometimes through interparty and intraparty consultations (De Winter, 1993:163-171; 1995:142). Hence, we can use formation duration as an indicator of the degree in which governmental parties (at least attempt to) determine the policies of the government to be formed;

- ***GFCONSUL***: the degree in which the formation negotiators inform and consult the party executive during formation talks. When no such consultations are held, one can presume that the impact of the party organisation on the policy content of the negotiations will be less than when consultations are frequent (source: De Winter, 1995:129; 1 = consultation held; 0 = no such consultations, period 1970-1990).

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5 The Laver & Budge (1992) study covers proximity between electoral manifesto and coalition agreements on the left-right cleavage only. Therefore, it is not very suited for analysing multi-dimensional bargaining situations as is the case in Italy and Belgium The more ambitious analysis of Klingemann, Hofferbert & Budge (1994) covering manifestos, coalition agreement and departmental expenditure structures unfortunately does not include Italy. The data of the Blondel cabinet project do not provide clear-cut indicators either (Blondel & Müller-Rommel, 1993).

Finally, in a partitocracy, parties do not only stand at the cradle of governments, but also at their grave. As an indicator for the impact of parties on government resignation, we use:

- ***GVTDISOL***: the proportion of government dissolutions that are caused by non-party reasons, such as regular elections, death or health reasons of PM, etc. (source: indices calculated on data offered by Woldendorp, Budge & Keman, 1993:116, period 1950-1983).

It is clear that the above eight indicators only capture a part of the core variables of the partitocratic type. We would have like to have found reliable comparative data for the 16 European countries considered for the degree of party interference in the policy making and implementation process after a government takes off, and this not only at the level of the cabinet but also at lower levels of ministerial deprtments, for the degree of patronage exercised by parties over the lower levels of the civil service and in the semi-public sector, for the degree of independence of the judiciary from party interference, for the grip of the party organisation on the parliamentary party and on career developments of individual MPs, etc.

As in a partitocratic system parties exercise their predominance mainly through their grip on central government actors, one could also take into consideration the predominance of the government via-à-vis other institutions, such as the legislature, the judiciary, the head of state in terms of recruitment and their decision making autonomy with regard to policies. We have not included the latter variables into our cluster analysis as they are relevant to the degree of partitocracy only if the parties also control the executive. If this is not the case, executive predominance over other institutions cannot serve as a valid indicator of partitocracy.

Also the relative weak role of other actors in the decision making process, such as the voters (due to the lack of referendum or the lack of choice of candidates across party lines, Katz 1987:57), neo-corporatist actors, of the judiciary, etc., is not included as a core variable. This weakness will evidently facilitate the predominance of parties in the political system, but not necessarily of parties only, but potentially also of any other actor, like the Head of State, the PM, etc. Therefore they will be included in our analysis of facilitators, and not as core characteristics of partitocracies.

TABLE 1

Core features of partitocracy

VARIABLE/CASE	MINISMP	MINSELEC	PMSELECT	SPEAKSEL	CSSELECT	FORMADUR	GFCONSUL	GVTDISOL
Italy	96	2	1	7	1	52	1	0,10
Belgium	94	2	1	5	1	78	1	0,18
Austria	66	1	0	2	0	39	1	0,50
Denmark	79	1	2	0	0	15	1	0,57
Finland	65	1	1	7	0	55	0	0,40
France Vth Rep.	70	1	0	8	0	22	0	0,40
Germany	80	1	0	4	0	39	0	0,57
Greece		2	0	9		8		
Ireland	94	1	0	4	0	23	0	0,35
Luxembourg	88	1	1			34	0	0,60
Netherlands	64	1	1	3	0	76	0	0,44
Norway	61	1	1	3		30	1	0,62
Portugal		1	1	8		51	1	
Spain		1	0			33		
Sweden	63	1	1	2	0	24	0	0,65
United Kingdom	99	1	0	2	0	4		0,33

b. analysis

In this type of analysis with very small numbers, the number of clusters is usually defined by the researcher himself on the basis of his assumptions about the complexity of the universe under consideration. As we only put forward an hypothesis about Italy and Belgium as sole members of a single cluster, but not about the way other countries cluster together, we will let the number of clusters vary over a wide range (from 10 to 2 clusters). The frequency of occurrence of an Italy-Belgium two-member cluster at each level of analysis will give us an idea about the robustness of the Italian-Belgian cluster we expect to encounter.

For the eight core variables defined above, the cluster analysis strongly confirms our hypothesis of Italy and Belgium belonging to a particular type. [6] In the range of 3 to 9 clusters, Italy and Belgium constitute a cluster, *without any other country joining*. If we set the number of clusters at 10, the two countries constitute each a single member cluster. When the number of clusters is set to two only, Italy and Belgium are joined by Greece and Portugal. Hence, the analysis of the core variables does indicate that Italy and Belgium constitute a very robust cluster, which will most likely remain intact if in the future we were able to add new core variables or better indicators for the ones we used in this analysis.

Now let us turn to the analysis of the factors facilitating partitocracy. Here we expect to find a less strong similarity, as we have argued above that different factors can lead to partitocracy.

6 Calculations are based on the standardised "z-scores" of the values of the variables included.

C. *The causes, determinants, facilitators of a partitocratic system;*

a. selection of variables

It has been argued above that partitocracies emerge and/or flourish with a particular political culture, one in which civic attitudes are underdeveloped. As indicators of such a facilitating weak civic culture, the following variables were included (Table 2):

- ***POLINTRE***: (lack of) political interest (Source: Gabriel & Brettschneider, 1994:544, average percentage of people interested in politics in 1983-1990 period);

- ***INDIVIDM***: degree of individualism, as defined and measured by Hofstede (1995:71-73) [7]. This variable points to the strength or weakness of solidarity ties that go beyond the close family ("amoral familism") and therefore can serve as an indicator for the a lack of generalised loyalty to the state; [8]

- ***PREFDEMO***: preference for democracy as the best form of state organisation in any circumstance. This attitude is used as an indicator for the general attachment to democracy (source Gabriel & Brettschneider, 1994:548, 1992 data).

A second group of variables refer to fragmentation of the party system at the parliamentary and executive level. The main idea is that the higher the number of cleavages that are politicised in a polity, the more fragmented will be the party system (usually a consequence of a high number of politicised cleavages), and the higher the number of parties needed to constitute a viable coalition. This fragmentation of the government will necessitate the use of coalition maintenance mechanisms that necessarily enhance parties' impact on the governmental system (Ström & Müller, 1997). As only the government fragmentation is conceived as having a direct impact on the degree of partitocracy, and the party system fragmentation, being determined by the number of cleavages, is a determinant of government fragmentation, we will not include the first two indicators of the fragmentation of the polity and party system. Although Belgium and Italy display a very similar picture, including these two variables would put too much weight on the fragmentation aspect vis-à-vis the other facilitating factors. [9] Hence, the following variables concerning government fragmentation were included:

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7 "A society is individualistic when the reciprocal links between individuals are loose: everybody is supposed to take care exclusively of him or herself or of his close relatives. A society is collectivist if individuals are from their birth on integrated in strong, tightly knit groups, which offer livelong protection in exchange for unconditional loyalty".

8 Belgium and Italy score in a similar way on a related attitude, i.e. lack of trust in fellow citizens, a facilitator of patron-client relationships (see: Gabriel & Brettschneider, 1994:559, percentage of people that believe that one cannot be careful enough in trusting other people, data for 1985). Similar scores are also found for an extreme case of generalised loyalty to one's country and state, i.e. willingness to die for one's country (Ashford & Timms, 1992:90-91, data of 1981).

9 For the number of politicised cleavages in the party system, see Lijphart (1984:130). For the degree of party system fragmentation in terms of effective number of parties, see Lane & Errson (1994: 184).

- ***NGVTPTY***: average number of parties in government (source: data calculated on data set of Woldendorp, Budge & Keman: 1993);

- ***COALBAL***: degree of power balance between governmental parties. The more balanced the coalition, the more parties will have to bargain about each share in office and policies payoffs (Source, Lane & Errson, 1994:243, average calculated for the 1950-1985 period);

- ***DOMINPTY*** (permanence of dominant party): number of months the party with the longest government experience was in power (Source: calculated from data of Lane & Errson, 1994:149-153). The balanced nature of the power relations between coalition parties is not incompatible with the existence of a dominant party that remains for al long time in power. The longer a dominant party has stayed in power, the more time it had to consolidate its grip on the executive branch and other political institutions.

Finally, a number of facilitators refer to general features of the political system, especially with regard to the influence of other political actors:

- ***NEOCORP***: degree of neo-corporatism, as an indicator of the power of socio-economic pressure groups. Above was argued that delays in the development of modern system of industrial relations increases the dependence of interest groups from political parties, and therefore the social power of the parties (source: Lijphart & Crepaz, 1991);

- ***DIRELHOS*** (direct election of the Head of State). The power and legitimacy of the Head of State is related to the way he or she is nominated. In case of direct election, the Head of State's democratic legitimacy will be high, and allow for a more independent stand vis-à-vis the parties (source: Gallagher, Laver & Mair, 1995:18, direct election = 1, others = 0);

- ***REFEREND***: importance of use of referenda in settling major issues. The more referenda are used, the more voters are empowered, the less parties and other collective actors determine the decision-making process (source: Lane & Errson, 1994:234, scale based on the number and political importance of referenda).

- ***GVTCENTR***: government centralisation or the degree of federalism, as measured by the central government's share of total central and noncentral tax receipts (source Lijphart, 1984:178). The more decision making is dispersed over different territorial levels, the less likely parties will manage to establish a firm grip on the political system. Although the degree of government centralisation in Belgium has weakened dramatically by the end of the 1980s, the use of data referring to the 1970s is preferable, as we are looking for factors that have facilitated the partitocratic state in its heydays in the 1970-1990 period.

TABLE 2

Factors facilitating partitocracy

VARIABLE/CASE	POLINTRE	INDIVIDM	PREFDEM	NPTYGVT	COALBAL	DOMINPTY	NEOCORP	DIRELHOS	REFEREND	GVTCENTR
Italy	27	76	72	2,94	45,60	522	1	0	1	96
Belgium	33	75	70	3,90	37,20	453	1	0	0	93
Austria		55		1,60	54,60	481	2	1	0	70
Denmark	67	74	93	1,84	0,80	326	2	0	1	71
Finland		63		3,34	63,80	474	2	1	0	70
France V	45	71	77	2,36	7,20	395	0	1	2	88
Germany	56	67	84	1,70	5,60	400	1	0	0	51
Greece	49	35	90		1,00	128	0	0	1	
Ireland	43	70	63	1,30	0,00	363	0	1	1	92
Luxembourg	50		85	2,00		460		0		82
Netherlands	53	80	82	3,00	43,20	371	1	0	0	98
Norway		69		2,00	0,00	394	2	0	0	70
Portugal	11	27	83		7,60	143	1	1	0	
Spain	33	51	78	1,00	0,00	83	1	0	1	
Sweden		71		1,35	0,00	462	2	0	1	62
UK	56	89	76	1,00	0,00	317	0	0	0	87

b. analysis

The cluster analysis of these facilitators once again produces an Italian-Belgian two-member cluster, when the number of clusters is set between 6 and 8. Above eight the ratio variables/cases is too high to perform this type of cluster analysis. When the number of clusters is set to five to three, Italy and Belgium are joined by Finland and the Netherlands (and by Austria at five clusters only). [10]

Hence, also with regard to the facilitators of partitocracy, Italy and Belgium constitute a cluster, but this time somewhat less robust as in the case of the core features. Yet, as we argued, partitocracies can be facilitated by a wide variety of factors, and we do not have to find exactly the same set of facilitators in each case. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Italo-Belgian clusters is less robust.

C. *The consequences of a partitocratic system.*

a. selection of variables

In both countries the partitocratic nature of the political system has been associated with problems of governability and failing policy outputs. For this type of "pathological consequences" of partitocracies, we have selected the following variables (Table 3):

- ***GVTSTAB***: government stability. Conflicts on policies and patronage between the (numerous) parties in government tend to shorten the life of governments, especially if one party (the pivotal one) can be assured to be part of the next gov-

10 When the number of clusters is set to two, the Italo-Belgian cluster comprises an entirely different set of countries: France, Greece, Ireland, Spain and Great Britain.

ernment (Mershon, 1994) (Source: Woldendorp, Keman & Budge, 1993:108; data represent the average proportion a government rules vis-à-vis the theoretically maximum government duration (or time left to a government if it was not formed after a general election. Period: 1945-1990);

- ***PUBDEBT***: size of public debt in relation to the gross domestic product (in percentage). In a partitocracy, the norms of budgetary orthodoxy are often violated, given the fact that (multiple) parties in government have to serve a wide variety of clienteles in order to maintain their electoral strength (Source: Edye & Lintner, 1996:149, data refers to 1993). One could also use alternative indicators for the countries' problems related to controlling the budget (on which Italy and Belgium get similar high scores), such as degree of deficit spending and the ratio interest payments on public debt/gross domestic product (Gabriel & Brettschneider, 1994:528, 540);

- ***EUVIOLAT***: violations of EU regulations, in terms of the number of judgements of the European Court of Justice to which member states have not complied. The degree in which national policies violate internationally accepted "standards of good government" in different policy fields can serve as an indicator for the degree of policy failures in a country (Source: Gallagher, Laver & Mair, 1995:104, situation of 1993).

We can presume that mediocre or failing policy outputs of partitocracies will affect the way citizens relate towards their political system. For these consequences of partitocracy on the political culture we use the following indicators:

- ***SATISDEM***: satisfaction with the way democracy works in one's country. The failing policy outputs of partitocracies should undermine the satisfaction of citizens with their political system (source: Gabriel & Brettschneider, 1994:549, average 1976-1992).

- ***ALIENAT***: degree of alienation of politics. The political elites in a partitocracy tend to loose touch with the represented, which make the latter feel that "those in power are not concerned with what regular people want" (source: Gabriel & Brettschneider, 1994:558, survey of 1986).

In spite of the negative consequences of the excessive influence of parties in partitocracies, party membership remains high, as it is a prerequisite eligibility to the benefits of party patronage. For this feature, we used:

- ***PTYMEMBR***: ratio between number of party members and party voters (Source: Gallagher, Laver & Mair, 1995:, 245)

Finally, one could argue, as Richards (1994:21) does for Italy, that the policy failures of partitocracies make people turn to EU institutions "for the kind of decisive and wise leadership they themselves have lacked". In this sense, Europe represents a way of modernising a partitocracy's inefficient and unjust legislation and regulations. [11] As an indicator for this positive and hopeful attitude towards the EU as an alternative and more effective policy level, we use:

- ***PROEUGVT***, attitudes in favour of a European government (Source Gallagher, Laver & Mair, 1995:, p.121, data for 1993-1994).

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11 In both countries, national politicians systematically (ab)use "Europe" (especially the Maastricht convergence norms) as a means of justifying otherwise difficult policies.

TABLE 3

Consequences of partitocracy

VARIABLE/CASE	GVTSTAB	PUBDEBT	EUVIOLAT	SATISDEM	ALIENAT	PTYMEMBR	PROEUGVT
Italy	17,90	116	21	22,60	69,80	12	68
Belgium	33,40	138	17	50,00	64,70	12	59
Austria	59,60	57					26
Denmark	42,40	79	0	68,30	41,50	9	21
Finland	26,20	60				23	
France Vth Rep.	25,90	56	8	45,50	62,00	4	53
Germany	44,40	50	14	73,20	50,00	6	45
Greece		114	10	50,80	59,10	4	58
Ireland	51,80	93	4	55,00	69,50	5	45
Luxembourg	59,60	10	2	69,30	49,50	12	56
Netherlands	54,20	83	5	61,90	64,10	4	57
Norway	52,50	47				16	
Portugal		70	0	59,90	53,50	5	51
Spain		56	3	54,10	57,50	2	55
Sweden	65,20	67				17	
United Kingdom	56,70	53	6	55,10	59,90	5	31

b. analysis

The cluster analysis of the seven consequences of partitocracy produces a three member cluster containing Italy and Belgium in the range of 3 to 5 clusters. Between 6 and 9 clusters, Italy constitutes a single member cluster, while Belgium is linked with Greece when the solution contains six or seven clusters. Finally, in case of only two clusters, the Italo-Belgian cluster is joined by France and Greece.

Hence, in terms the seven consequences of partitocracy considered above are concerned, Belgium and Italy also constitute a cluster, but a less robust one, and less exclusive, as Greece also appears to be related to the Belgian case (but less frequently as Italy).

D. *Alternative method: country correlations*

In order to grasp the degree of similarity between Italy and Belgium for the three types of variables taken together (with 25 variables a number too large to use cluster analysis), we rotated the date set by 90 degrees, so that countries now constitute the variables, and the z-scores of value the original variables taken for each country constitute the cases.

The pairwise pearson correlations between countries are presented in Table 4. The correlation between Italy and Belgium is striking ($r = 0.81$, significant at the 0.01 level). No other country pair is so strongly positively correlated. [12] Hence,

12 The second strongest positive and significant correlation is between Norway and Sweden (0,64), Norway and Denmark (0,55), Sweden and Denmark, and Ireland and the UK (each 0,51).

if we consider core features, facilitators and consequences together, Italy and Belgium constitute highly similar cases.

Second, the Italo-Belgian type is quite dissimilar to all other cases. In fact, Belgium nor Italy correlates significantly in a positive way with any other country. [13] With most other countries, correlations are negative, in some cases in a significant way (Belgium vis-à-vis Sweden and Luxembourg; Italy vis-à-vis the same countries plus Denmark, Norway and Germany). Hence, the Italian and Belgian cases are not only the most similar countries, together they are most dissimilar to the other 14 countries considered, as they often display different, if not entirely opposite, features.

Third, although the way in which other countries cluster together does not constitute the focus of our analysis, the results of the correlation analysis suggest, next to the existence of a clear two member cluster comprising Italy and Belgium, other clusters which may indicate alternative types of political systems as far as the role of political parties is concerned, its origins and consequences. We can discern a clear Scandinavian cluster containing Denmark, Norway and Sweden (all three countries correlate positively and significantly with each other), to which one could possibly add Luxembourg (correlated positively but not significantly with these three) and to some extent Germany. An Anglo-Irish cluster is also discernible ($r = 0.51$). A Mediterranean cluster of "new democracies" is somehow also apparent, as Greece, Portugal and Spain are positively (but not significantly) correlated. Austria, Finland, France and the Netherlands are more difficult to classify. Austria is positively correlated with Norway and Sweden but not with Denmark, the third member of the Scandinavian cluster. In addition, it is positively correlated with Finland, which is not related to any other country. France is significantly correlated with Ireland, but not with the UK, and therefore difficult to add to the Anglo-Irish cluster. Finally, the Netherlands do not strongly positively correlate with any country.

13 The Netherlands is very weakly positively correlated with Belgium ($r = 0.16$). France and Greece are very weakly positively correlated with Italy ($r = 0.15$ and 0.19). None of these correlations are statistically significant.

TABLE 4

Correlation matrix of rotated data set containing core features, facilitators and consequences of partitocracy

	A	B	DK	SF	F	D	GR	IRL	I	L	NL	N	P	E	S	UK
A	1,00															
B	-,32	1,00														
DK	-,07	-,39	1,00													
SF	,47	,02	-,23	1,00												
F	-,30	-,21	-,32	,04	1,00											
D	,14	-,33	,22	,08	-,20	1,00										
GR	-,46	,05	-,18	-,49	,23	-,06	1,00									
IRL	-,22	-,02	-,35	-,40	,46	-,27	,02	1,00								
I	-,40	,81	-,48	-,01	,15	-,50	,19	,06	1,00							
L	,03	-,59	,32	-,02	-,18	,40	-,39	-,26	-,58	1,00						
NL	-,12	,16	-,08	,19	-,15	-,02	-,36	-,08	-,11	,12	1,00					
N	,44	-,33	,55	,09	-,50	,26	-,60	-,64	-,49	,33	-,04	1,00				
P	,03	-,01	-,09	,12	-,09	-,32	,22	-,14	-,14	-,15	-,17	-,08	1,00			
E	-,26	-,27	-,09	-,46	,22	-,07	,47	,11	-,13	-,15	-,05	-,34	,33	1,00		
S	,31	-,59	,51	-,01	-,22	,40	-,44	-,20	-,60	,49	-,07	,64	-,58	,01	1,00	
UK	-,20	-,13	,16	-,60	-,02	,16	-,09	,51	-,14	,19	-,02	-,20	-,68	-,20	-,07	1,00

Single underlined: significance < 0.05 (2-tailed)
Double underlined: significance < 0.01 (2-tailed)

V. Conclusion

Our empirical analyses have clearly demonstrated that Italy and Belgium constitute quite similar political systems on a wide range of indicators that operationalise core features, facilitators and consequences of the type labelled partitocracy. The strategy on focusing our research on features related to the concept of partitocracy has proven successful. Still, one should not forget that the countries are similar, yet not identical. Although, apart from the variables selected with the partitocracy approach, the two countries also are very similar with regard to some other features, they obviously differ with regard to some other ones as well. Also, even when the two countries are, or better, were very similar, this does not mean that exactly the same factors are at the basis of the emergence and maintenance of partitocracy in each case. The sudden collapse of the old partitocratic regime in Italy indicates that also developments of partitocracy in the future are not necessarily identical either.

Future research should focus on:

- further conceptualisation and theory building with regard to the core features of partitocracy as a particular type of political system;
- as Katz (1986) did for party government, explicit hypotheses should be formulated and tested with regard to the causal relation between core features, facilitators and consequences;

- improvement of empirical indicators of the core variables, facilitators and consequences of partitocracy;
- expansion of the analysis to other parliamentary democracies that display some features of partitocracy, like Japan; Yet, as the correlation analysis has indicated that no other EU country display a significant degree of similarity with the Italo-Belgian type, a most dissimilar cases approach may be more fruitful;
- identification of factors that provoke the collapse or undermine the partitocratic nature of a political system;

But one conclusion should be very clear. It is not a bad idea at all to try to analyse in a systematic way the analogies and similarities of Belgium and Italy. This is what will be done in this special issue.