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PARTITOCRACIES BETWEEN CRISES AND REFORMS: THE CASES OF ITALY AND BELGIUM

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Comparing similar countries: Italy and Belgium

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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 at 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 and 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 'partyiness 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 *partyiness 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 is 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 indirizzo*) 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 Vassallo'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 'partyiness 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 data 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 partyocracy 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 partyocratic 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 partyocratic system;
- 2) the "facilitators" of a partyocratic system;
- 3) the "consequences" of a partyocratic 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 partyocratic 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 rotate the data 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 we 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 is 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).

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 liked 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 departments, 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:

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 lifelong 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);

- **GOALBAL**: 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 a 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 clientele 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 judgments 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).

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



Culture Conflict and its Consequences for the Legitimation Crisis

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The notions of 'political culture' and of 'legitimacy' are no longer unproblematic, but the subject of discussions that question their very usefulness (Topf, 1989). It is not the aim of this article to address the many theoretical issues raised by those discussions. The focus of this article is the empirical analysis of some recent political developments in Flanders, that have been interpreted as a "protest", that are widely perceived as indicative of a loss of legitimacy of the political system, and that have been explained on the basis of shifts in political culture¹. Yet, before embarking on such an analysis it is necessary to indicate which options we take with regard to some of the main theoretical issues involved. Needless to add that some of these options are theoretically grounded, while other are simply forced upon us by the available data.

I. Civic culture

The conventional notion of political culture has been strongly influenced by Parsonian sociology and by the empirical and theoretical analysis in Almond and Verba's *The Civic Culture* (1963). In this tradition culture is seen as differentiated from action systems and practices, and as constituted by symbols and patterns of symbols: meanings, informations, beliefs, representations, values, etc. We shall maintain this analytical distinction in our analysis. Political actions (for instance, non voting) will be considered as possibly influenced by political culture or values, but not as indicating political culture in any direct sense. As 'action' political behaviour can be influenced by many factors besides political culture, and can therefore not serve as an indicator of political culture. This implies that the latter can not be "read" from observable political behaviour, but only from symbolically mediated reflection about such action. The specification of this theoretical option also allows us to point towards one of the limitations of our analysis. In order to observe culture we rely, as many other investigators of political culture do, on survey analysis, specifically the 1991 Flemish voter's study (Carton et al., 1993). It is possible that other research methods, such as the ethnography of discourse or focus group interviews, would yield more insights.

The conventional notion of political culture is further specified as "civic culture" (Almond & Verba, 1963). At the level of the polity this refers to a balance between responsiveness and efficacy of the system. At the level of the individual

1 Ackaert & De Winter, 1993; Billiet, 1993; Billiet, Swyngedouw & Carton, 1993; Elchardus, Deschouwer, Pelleriaux & Stouthuysen, 1993; Elchardus, 1994: chapter 4; Huuse, 1994.

citizen this is seen as involving a delicate combination of belief in the efficacy of personal participation, a willingness to participate and an absence of political cynicism, with a readiness to accept representation, a respect for the rules of the game, and a measure of deference towards the political elite. The required attitude is far from evident: the citizen must believe in the efficacy of his or her participation, yet not demand too much participation and leave sufficient scope for the elite to conduct the complex business of politics. Political culture as civic culture thus comprises different, seemingly contradictory elements: belief in the efficacy of political participation or absence of feelings of political powerlessness and cynicism on the one hand, an element of loyalty, and deference to authority on the other. One of the goals of this article is to gauge the extent to which this notion of civic culture is still relevant to understand the perceived symptoms of a legitimization crisis.

II. Legitimacy according to procedural and substantive conceptions of democracy

The notion of legitimization is even more problematic than that of political culture. The legitimization crisis was a relatively popular topic in the seventies and early eighties (Müller, 1988). The resulting literature is much more explicit about the causes of such crises than about the way in which they become visible. Apparently a lack of legitimacy can express itself in a great variety of ways: lack of participation, protest voting, lack of compliance with the law, tax evasion, an increase in anti-government demonstrations, political terrorism, rejection of crucial democratic values such as individual freedom, etc. Theoretical attention has been focused on the causes of those symptoms, rather than on their specific meaning. This need not really surprise us. The discussions about legitimization have been primarily concerned with the philosophical foundations of democracy, rather than with the specific forms the rejection of those foundations could take. The core discussion has opposed what Michael Walzer has recently called "Liberalism 1" to "Liberalism 2" (1994): proponents of a purely procedural (or formal-functional) conception of democracy to proponents of a more substantive conception of the good society. In sociology the former position is associated with Niklas Luhmann, the latter with Jürgen Habermas and Robert Bellah².

The meaning that is given to the symptoms of crisis depends in part on the position taken with regard to the issue of procedural versus substantive conceptions of democracy. If one takes an extreme procedural position, the notion of legitimacy becomes largely meaningless because liberal democracy can then be considered as essentially a procedure to adapt to any set of expectations and their corresponding notion of legitimacy, that might arise in the citizenry (Rufin, 1994, chapter 8). When one takes a substantive view of democracy and, for instance, sees the nation as implying popular sovereignty (Schnapper, 1994) or a set of core values (Bellah et. al., 1991), then a political attack on those values can be regarded as a legitimization crisis. While for procedural conceptions of legitimacy the symptoms of crisis are less easy to define, participation in the procedures themselves, for instance participation in the elections, is frequently regarded as a sym-

² Secondly this literature has dealt with tensions or contradictions between the differentiated economic and political systems, leading to democratic overload, according to liberal inspired authors (Crozier, Huntington & Watanuki, 1975), to a fiscal crisis of the state according to marxian inspired authors (O'Conner, 1973).

bolic expression of the necessary acceptance of the procedures and of trust (Milbrath & Goel, 1977; Luhmann, 1979). For substantive approaches, deligitimation occurs when movement or parties call into question the values that are implemented by or dominant in the existing political system (e.g. Habermas, 1973).

Those are in fact also the definitions of the symptoms of a legitimation crisis one encounters in contemporary journalistic and political discourse. Recently in Belgium politicians and journalist have presented two political developments as symptoms of such a crisis or as expressions of a so called "protest vote". First the rising non-participation which, under the Belgian legislation that makes voting obligatory, expresses itself as non participation, a non vote (returning an unused voting bulletin) or a purposefully invalid vote. Secondly, the rise of parties that are explicitly anti-political or that are perceived as calling into question core values of our society and polity, and that are therefore regarded as expressing a protest against the political system. This is the case for the "libertarian" party ROSSEM, which was formed in view of the Parliamentary elections of 1991, obtained 5.2% of the vote in Flanders, but had disappeared by the time of the 1995 elections. The second case to which this diagnosis is applied is the extreme right wing or Populist-Right wing party VLAAMS BLOK, which from the elections of 1981 to the elections of 1995 has climbed from under 2 to over 12% of the Flemish vote. While the success of ROSSEM was a factor in fuelling the public debate about a legitimation crisis, that party turned out to be too volatile and ephemeral a symptom to make analysis sensible. We shall therefore focus on both the non-participation and the extreme right wing vote as possible symptoms of a legitimation crisis. Again we should draw attention to the partially of this approach which focuses on specific electoral expressions of the legitimation crisis, to the exclusion of other political actions (such as demonstrations, strikes and petitions), everyday behaviour or such symptoms of delegitimation as tax evasion. Furthermore we

Figure 1: Non-participation in the Belgian national elections (1946-1995)

Source: J. Ackaert, Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken

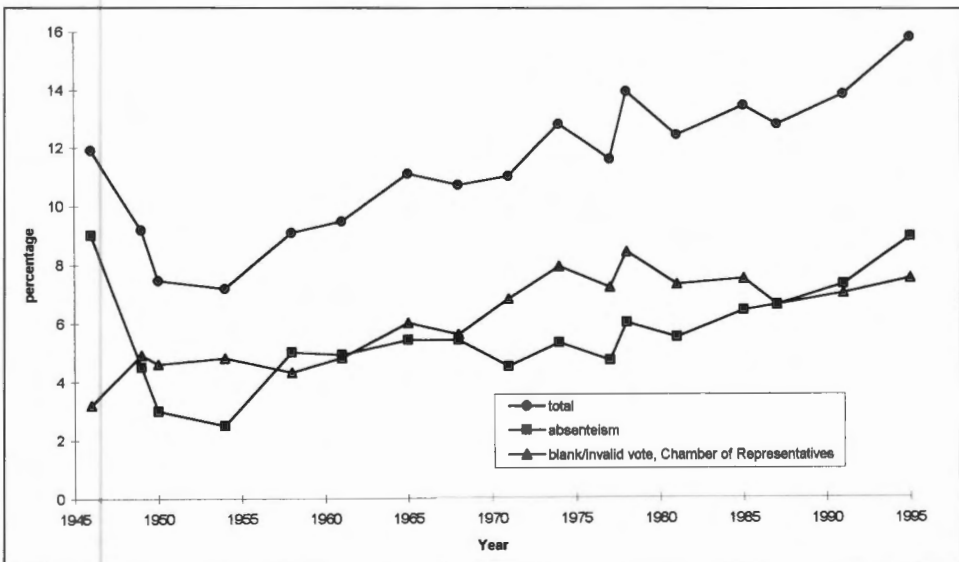
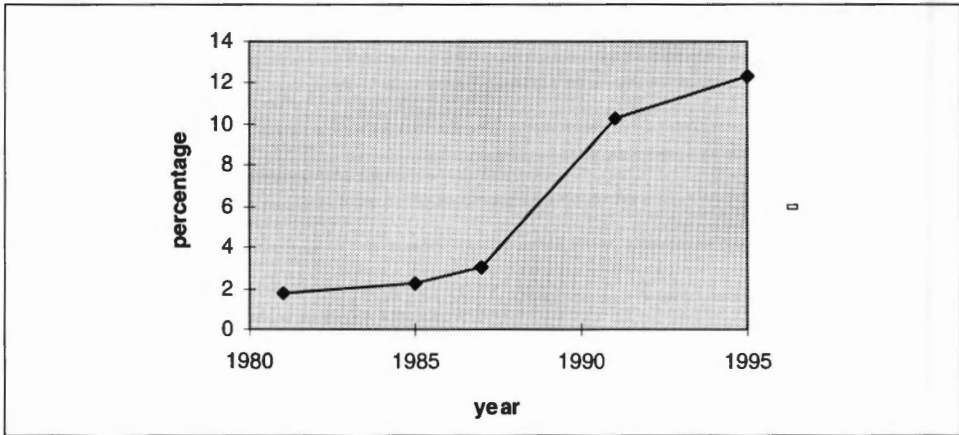


Figure 2: Extreme-right wing votes (Vlaams Blok) in Flanders (1982-1995)



should emphasise that our goal is certainly not a sociography or an attempt at exhaustive explanation of either non-participation or a vote for the extreme right. We want instead to empirically investigate whether these forms of political action can indeed be linked to a legitimisation crisis, and how they are related to shifts in political culture.

III. Signs of a growing legitimacy crisis

When non-voting and voting for an extreme right wing party are taken as symptoms of a legitimisation crisis, one can indeed, as many political commentators do, conclude that the legitimisation crisis has been growing over the last decades (see Figures 1 & 2).

The non-participation figures pertain to the whole of Belgium, and not to Flanders alone. Non-participation is higher in the French speaking part of the country, and especially in the capital region of Brussels, than in Flanders. Yet, it is rising in the three regions.

IV. Legitimacy, protest and civic culture

When searching for an explanation of the growing legitimisation crisis on the basis of political culture, the first question to ask is whether the alleged symptoms of crisis are at all related to the conventional notion of political culture, the so called civic culture hypothesis. The voters study of 1991 comprised a scale of political powerlessness or political cynicism (see appendix 1) which can be taken as an indicator of the extend to which people belief in the political efficacy of their participation. The other element of the civic culture -compliance, passivity and deference- has not been measured directly. Yet, there is a possible proxy indicator that can be used. This proxy is based on the assumption that practising

Catholics³ are more deferential towards elites and authority than non-practising Christians and secular humanists (Elchardus, Deschouwer, Pelleriaux & Stout-huysen, 1993; Elchardus, 1994b). If the civic culture hypothesis is still relevant to explain contemporary symptoms of a legitimation crisis, we should find that the probability of non-participation and a vote for the extreme right, increases as the feeling of political powerlessness increases and the deference for authority decreases. The civic culture hypothesis should however be correctly understood. Technically speaking it does not predict an additive effect of those two conditions, but an interaction effect: symptoms of a legitimation crisis are predicted to be maximised when powerlessness or cynicism is high and deference low; they are predicted to be minimised when powerlessness or cynicism is low and deference is high.

Table 1:

Delegitimation and the combination of political cynicism and deference⁴

	low political cynicism	average political cynicism	high political cynicism	total %
practising catholic	3 % Vlaams Blok 2 % non-particip.	3 % Vlaams Blok 2 % non-particip.	6 % Vlaams Blok 13 % non-particip.	4 % Vlaams Blok 6 % non-particip.
others	8 % Vlaams Blok 1 % non-particip.	12 % Vlaams Blok 4 % non-particip.	14 % Vlaams Blok 14 % non-particip.	12 % Vlaams Blok 7 % non-particip.
total %	7 % Vlaams Blok 1 % non-particip.	10 % Vlaams Blok 4 % non-particip.	14 % Vlaams Blok 12 % non-particip.	10 % Vlaams Blok 7 % non-particip.

It is clear from table 1 that political cynicism or feelings of political powerlessness seriously increase the probability of non-participation and a right-wing vote. The role of deference to authority can be less clearly established. The probability of a vote for the extreme right is, as predicted, higher when feelings of political powerlessness are combined with a religious self-definition that is considered to lead to less deference to authority. The same does however not hold for non-participation. It is possible that non-participation is considered a less "strong" or less radical expression of protest against established politics, so that deference to authority does not really constitute a brake. A vote for the extreme right in 1991 could, on the contrary, be considered by many people as a strong, radical statement and, as a consequence, be inhibited by deference to authority. One should keep in mind that non-participation and a vote for the extreme right are not measured independently of each other. They are alternatives between which voters have to choose. It is therefore plausible to interpret table 1 to mean that feelings of political powerlessness or political cynicism are expressed in a "protest vote" which is more likely to be channelled towards "exit" or non-participation when deference for authority is high, towards a more radical "voice"-option -a vote for the extreme right- when deference to authority is low. We come back to this hypothesis in section 7.

3 Practising Catholics are defined as Catholics who attend Mass more than once a month.

4 Non-participation is henceforth defined as: returning a blank voting bulletin, purposefully invalidating the voting bulletin, or not going to vote for other reasons than sickness, professional duty or travel.

It is however also possible that religious self definition is not a fully adequate measure of deference to authority. Due to the use of a proxy-variable, the validity of which can be doubted, the interpretation of table 1 can not be unambiguous. Still, the findings indicate that the civic culture hypothesis can not be as readily dismissed as for instance Richard Topf suggests (1989:68) when he writes that "the conventional notion of political culture has served its term" and can now be forgotten. Topf reaches that conclusion for Britain, but on the basis of inadequate (additive) testing of the hypothesis. The civic culture hypothesis still seems relevant to understand the distribution of non-voting and the extreme right wing vote in Flanders, yet the effects of the feelings of political powerlessness and deference to authority that are observed, are moderate. They suggest that even under more optimal measurement conditions that hypothesis can hardly be expected to explain a great deal of the observed symptoms of the legitimization crisis.

That observation seems rather obvious in the light of the contemporary sociology of culture. The present state of the art in that specialty suggests that one needs to link the conventional notion of political culture to broader changes in value orientations in order to understand its effects on political participation and voting. It is indeed by no means certain that the probability of non-participation and an extreme right wing vote, can be directly related to the civic culture, i.e. to the feelings of powerlessness and deference to authority. It is on the contrary more likely that these specific attitudes are part of broader value-orientations or sub-cultural patterns, and can only be correctly understood when analysed in the light of the cultural patterns to which they belong.

The conventional notion considers political culture as a specialised part of culture, comprising the meanings, values and beliefs that "make sense" of citizenship and political participation, and that orient actions towards the political organisation of society, such as respect for the constitution and the law or a readiness to participate. The idea that one can consider political culture as a specialised part of culture, frequently leads to an instrumental approach in which political culture is seen as a tool for fine tuning the participation of the citizen (Verba, Nie & Kim, 1978: 301). This easily leads to a rationalistic bias. That tendency has become more pronounced as some authors have recently tried to describe the fine tuned political culture that they deem appropriate for multicultural political systems. They propose that the political culture that orients the citizens, should be radically divorced from all other feelings of identity and cultural specificity (Ferry, 1991; Costa-Lascoux, 1992), an attitude for which Jürgen Habermas has coined the apt expression "constitutional patriotism" (1994). Whatever the instrumentality of such a notion of political culture, it flies in the face of much of the empirical analysis of culture which highlights the limited rationality of action (Swidler, 1986), and especially the mixture of emotional, cognitive and ethical elements that is always present in the culture or the moral order by which political arrangements and political positions are given meaning and on the basis of which people conduct politics (Bellah, 1986, Topf, 1989; Schnapper, 1994; Taylor, 1991, 1994). We should therefore investigate whether the orientations implied by the civic culture are part of a more encompassing alignment of value orientations, that can give rise to different (political) cultures, some of which might find expression in non-participation and the extreme right.

V. A new alignment of value orientations

In order to do so it is necessary to look at the issues that have been prominent in the recent political agenda. The two attitudes that are relevant for the civic cul-

ture hypothesis -feelings of political efficacy and deference to authority- have been rather important political issues during the second half of the eighties and the first half of the nineties. During that decade, various parties have tried to induce and exploit an anti-political mood, they have highlighted political corruption and have appealed to the feelings of political cynicism. Certainly the extreme right but also segments of other parties, have expressed worries about the decline of traditional values, about too much permissiveness and the decline of traditional forms of authority. This has been related to an emphasis on crime, and law and order. This has, of course, not only been observed in Flanders, but in different European countries and in North-America (Aaron et.al., 1994; Dionne, 1991; Hunter, 1991; Ignazi, 1992; Minkenberg, 1992; and various other contributions in Ignazi & Ysmal, 1992).

The issues, that are directly related to the civic culture, were part of a larger set of issues and conflict matters that have occupied the political agenda of the last decade. Many of those themes were popularised by the Green parties and somewhat later by the Populist- or extreme right wing parties. The issues emphasised by the Greens can more or less be grouped under the familiar heading of post-materialist concerns and positions. The populist Right has not only reacted to those, but has put different matters on the political agenda as well. Their most important theme, up to now, has been the presence of ethnic minorities, the so called "migrants". In Flanders it is clearly this issue that has enabled the extreme right to transform itself into a significant populist Right-wing party. Economically the agenda of the decade has been characterised by a sharp conflict between laissez-faire or neo-liberal policies, and elements of Social Darwinism on the one hand, a defence of solidarity or, more concretely, the welfare state and the social security system, on the other.

If there are politically significant value orientations, then these should concern attitudes that are pertinent for the various issues that have occupied the political agenda. These value orientations should in fact allow one to predict the position people will take on those issues. Looking at the latter, the relevant value dimensions seem to involve postmaterialism versus materialism, libertarianism versus authoritarianism, ethnocentrism or racism versus tolerance, social solidarity versus utilitarian individualism or Social Darwinism, feelings of political efficacy versus feelings of political powerlessness or political cynicism, traditionalism versus modernism.

The Flemish Voters' Study of the 1991 General Election enables us to not only measure the feelings of political efficacy or powerlessness, but also most of the other relevant value orientations.

- Individualism versus solidarity. Individualism is understood here as the doctrine according to which each individual is allowed to pursue one's interest or pleasure, without much regard for the implications of that attitude on others. That attitude is seen as also implying that everybody should care for oneself and that those unable to do so are failures (Social Darwinism).
- Ethnocentrism versus tolerance. Ethnocentrism stands for negative attitudes towards "migrants" and ethnic minorities that are perceived as different (in Flanders these are mainly people of Moroccan and Turkish origin). The scale used, measures negative attitudes towards ethnic minorities, not just racism. The proportion of people with racist attitudes is estimated at about 10 to 15%. The negative attitudes of most people derive from the fear that the "migrants" are taking their jobs, are destabilising the social security system

and are getting too much government attention (50 to 75% of the electorate tends to hold such views).

- Authoritarianism versus more democratic relationships. Authoritarianism stands for an emphasis on obedience, respect for authority in general and, to some extent, belief in the political benefits of a "strong leader".
- Materialism versus post-materialism ⁵.

The analysis of the relationships between those attitudes and the feelings of political powerlessness, shows that they are strongly interrelated. Empirically there is a clear alignment of attitudes in which utilitarian individualism, authoritarianism, ethnocentrism, political cynicism and materialism go together and are opposed to solidarity, non-authoritarianism, tolerance, belief in political efficacy and post-material values. A factor analysis of the five scales that measure the different value orientations, yields only one factor with an eigenvalue greater than one (equal to 2.4). This factor explains about 49% of the total variation ⁶. This means that we should consider feelings of political efficacy (and civic culture) as part of a broader, more encompassing alignment of values and attitudes. It might therefore be very misleading to directly relate a specific political behaviour (in casu non-participation and voting for the extreme right) to a specific attitude or value-orientation (in casu ethnocentrism, political cynicism, authoritarianism, etc.).

As a cultural phenomenon this alignment is, strictly speaking, not really new. Only its political relevance is new, in the sense that people with extreme positions on this alignment are likely to vote for the new parties: the Greens (AGA-LEV) on the one hand, the extreme right (VLAAMS BLOK) on the other (Elchardus, 1994, chapter 6; Elchardus, 1994c). We shall therefore refer to this alignment as the "new alignment". We furthermore adopt the convention of calling the ethnocentric, individualist, authoritarian, politically cynical and materialist side of the alignment the New Right, the opposite position the New Left.

From the emergence of a new cleavage, quite directly related to positions concerning cultural and ethical issues, one should certainly not conclude that the old Left/Right-cleavage is losing its relevance (as many authors claimed in the eighties, e.g. Schmitt, 1989; Minkenberg & Inglehart, 1989; Kitcheld & Helleman, 1990). As a matter of fact, the "new" and the "old" Left/Right-cleavages exist alongside each other. Both influence the electoral behaviour and constitute important dimensions of the political space (Elchardus, 1994c). The new cleavage does however play a more important role in the legitimization crisis than the "old" Left/Right-divide. For that reason it is the focus of this article.

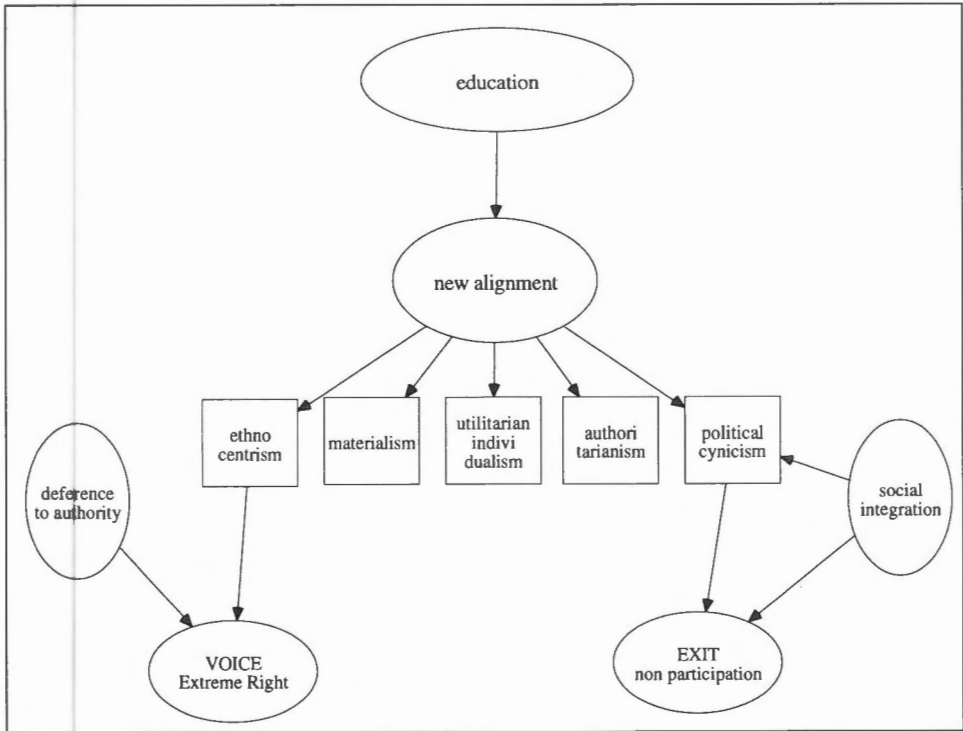
VI. Culture conflict and political protest

In order to further explore the relationship between the new alignment and the symptoms of the legitimization crisis, we looked, on the one hand, at the factors that influence the individuals' position on the alignment and, on the other, at the way in which the alignment influences the symptoms of the legitimization crisis. We refrain from describing in detail the different steps that led to the mo-

⁵ Those scales are measured as additive scales as indicated in Billiet, 1993b; Billiet & De Witte, 1993, except for utilitarian individualism which is based on a sum-score of items V27.1 to v27.4 included (see Billiet, 1993 & Carton et.al., 1993).

⁶ For other analyses of this alignment see, Elchardus, 1994: chapter 6; Elchardus, 1994c.

Figure 3: synoptic presentation of the delegitimation-model



del we present and interpret here. The technical detail concerning that structural model is presented in appendix 2. Figure 3 summarises the main conclusions.

When investigating the characteristics that influence the position people take on the alignment, education emerges as the main determinant, far more important than, and overshadowing factors related to a weak socio-economic position. Education appears as such an important determinant that one is tempted to see the alignment as the cultural expression of educational inequality. If this interpretation is correct, then the rising number of non-participants and the rise of the extreme right should be related to a sharpened and intensified cultural and moral conflict between categories of people distinguished on the basis of their diploma⁷. It does not seem wholly appropriate to describe these categories as "classes" for, as the observed alignment of value orientations illustrates, educa-

7 Topf, 1989 reaches a similar conclusion for Britain. The conclusion drawn here should be supplemented by the observation that on the familiar, "socio-economic" Left/Right-cleavage, higher education is accompanied by a shift to the right or to the inegalitarian position (Elchardus, 1994c). People with low levels of education are therefore opposed to people with high levels of education along two dimensions: both on the "old" Left/Right-cleavage and on the new alignment.

tion does not only indicate different life chances, but also different relations to the cultural and moral materials that are used to perceive the world, foster an identity, give meaning to one's position in society, and orient one's political behaviour. In that sense the conflict uncovered is, sociologically speaking, as much related to life style as to class.

The symptoms of the legitimation crisis are rather strongly related to the new alignment and are clearly an expression of the rightist position on that alignment. In the 30% of the population with the most leftist position on the alignment we find 8% protest votes (5% VLAAMS BLOK and 3% non-participation). Of the people belonging to the 30% of the population with the most rightist position, one in four voters opted either for a non vote (11%) or a vote for the Vlaams Blok (14%). This observation lends credibility to the view that both non-participation and a vote for the extreme right can be viewed as different, albeit related expressions of a similar political culture.

Table 2:

Delegitimation and the new alignment

Left position	Centre position	Right position
5% Vlaams Blok	11 % Vlaams Blok	14 % Vlaams Blok
3 % non-participation	7 % non-participation	11 % non-participation

The New Left/Right alignment describes a new political cleavage and draws attention to some of the issues around which the cultural conflict between the higher educated and the lesser educated is taking shape. The New Right position on this alignment appears as an expression of opposition against the educated elite's definition of appropriate value orientations. When the latter are formulated by the educational elite itself, as in the case of the value-dimensions measured on the basis of survey questions, they sound like "tolerance", "solidarity", "democratic relationships", "belief in political efficacy" and "post-materialist concerns". The position of the people with low levels of education then becomes: "intolerant", "ethnocentric" or "racist", "authoritarian", "politically cynical", "individualist", and "materialist". Such a description of the conflict is clearly biased in favour of the educational elite's point of view.

Because it concerns value orientations, it is not easy to give a neutral formulation of the conflicting positions. One should also keep in mind that the observed alignment captures cultural materials that are evolving, sensitivities and ways of speaking that can be elaborated by various actors, such as cultural entrepreneurs, social movements, and political parties. Of course the influence such groups can have, depends, among other things, on the way in which the values, beliefs, meanings, and information that are diffused, dovetail with the everyday experience of the people concerned. It is quite clear that those conditions play a role in the cultural conflict as the observed alignment expresses it. A more neutral description of the elite's position, would describe their options as: a rejection of ethnicity as a basis for political organisation, belief in solidarity, despite inequality (maybe even instead of policies effectively pursuing equality), rejection of authoritarian relationships in favour of reflexivity and critical discourse, belief in political efficacy and participation based on civic culture, post-materialist concerns and low regard for materialist concerns. The opposition to such values can in part be understood on the basis of the cultural, social and economic means at

the disposal of the less educated. It is simply more difficult for them to believe in a benign world and in solidarity (Elchardus, Derks, Glorieux, Pelleriaux, 1995). Materialist concerns are often more pressing for them. Reflexivity and critical discourse usually means that they will lose the argument. Those are in fact the values against which they have been measured at school, and found lacking. Authority, unambiguous definitions of rights and duties, can therefore seem more just, and predictable than reflexivity and critical discourse. Political cynicism appears as a rather realistic estimate of their political influence. An ethnic definition of identity, just like a traditional definition of virtue, has at least the merit of being familiar and of creating the impression that borders are still possible in a world where globalisation often means the loss of a job. The alignment and the culture in which it is embedded both reflect, interpret, and represent a set of conditions and the way meanings and values are mobilised in responding to them.

Looked upon in this way the so called protest vote appears as one kind of response. It appears to express a rejection of a set of values that is perceived as threatening and demeaning. Because both non-participation and a vote for the extreme right are quite strongly related to the new alignment, it makes sense to consider them as an expression of the cultural conflict described by that alignment. Because non-participation and a vote for the extreme right are political actions, this should not be interpreted to mean that they can be exhaustively understood in terms of the new alignment. A proper interpretation of our findings is that this alignment constitutes one of the important keys to a more adequate cultural understanding of the electoral behaviour that is interpreted as a sign of a legitimisation crisis.

VII. Channelling the protest towards "voice" and "exit"

If that diagnosis is correct, it becomes important to explain why in some cases the protest expresses itself in extreme right wing votes, in other cases in non-participation. The latter can be considered the "exit" option, the former "voice". The exit option is chosen by people for who the feelings of political powerlessness predominate. The voice option is taken by people for who the anti-migrant sentiment predominates. On the basis of this observation one could, as Georgi Verbeeck & Hans De Witte (1995) do, argue that the non-participation is an expression of political protest, while a vote for the extreme right is an expression of a value option. Such a conclusion does however give an exaggerated importance to the statistical fact that of different attitudes that are all strongly interrelated, political powerlessness is somewhat more strongly related to non-participation, and ethnocentrism to a vote for the extreme right. Taking into account the strong relationships between the different components of the new alignment, it seems

Table 3:

non-participation for the elections and the combination of political cynicism and social non-participation

	low political cynicism	average political cynicism	high political cynicism
member of at least one assoc. association	0%	3%	11%
no memberships	2%	4%	16%

more correct to interpret the non-participation and the vote for the extreme right as different expressions of the same oppositional culture.

Both these expressions are influenced by other conditions, besides the position on the new alignment. In our model we did not try to include all the relevant factors, but focused on two themes that have played an important role in the conventional theory of political culture: the civic culture hypothesis, and the relation between social integration and civic culture (Putnam, 1993).

"Exit" is further increased by a lack of social integration which we measured as non-participation in associational life (see Table 3). This confirms the old Durkheimian hypothesis which sees in politics a reflection of social life and in political non-participation a reflection of social non-participation. A lack of social integration, measured as the absence of membership in associations, increases the likelihood of non-participation in politics⁸. Among the persons who belong to the one third of the electorate which feel the most powerless and who hold no memberships in associations 16% did not participate. In the case those people do hold at least one membership, this percentage drops to 11. When this effect of social integration or social participation is looked at more closely, it turns out to hold for the people with relatively low levels of education. Apparently prolonged education promotes social integration and can serve as an alternative for participation. For less educated people other means of social integration, particularly associational life, do make a difference.

Table 4:
extreme right wing votes (Vlaams Blok) by attitudes towards
immigrants and deference

	low ethnocentric attitude	average ethnocentric attitude	high ethnocentric attitude
practising catholic	1%	4%	9%
other	3%	10%	23%
low authoritarian attitude	2%	12%	31%
average authoritarian attitude	4%	9%	21%
high authoritarian attitude	3%	5%	15%

In the case of "voice" the civic culture hypothesis seems to play an important role. The extend to which feelings of ethnocentrism or racism are translated into a vote for the extreme right is strongly mediated by deference to authority. In table 4 we show these effects on the basis of two different proxy-variables for deference for authority, the first is based on religious self-definition, the second on the authoritarianism scale. We assume that authoritarianism is associated with respect for authority and authority figures. The probability of a vote for the Vlaams Blok increases as people's attitudes towards migrants become more negative. But, at each level of ethnocentrism we see that the probability to vote for the extreme

⁸ Ackaert & De Winter (1993:76) do not find such an effect of social isolation. The difference between their and our finding might be due to differences in model specification, but is more likely due to the choice of indicator. They measure social isolation as feelings of loneliness, we emphasize social participation in associational life.

right is much lower for practising Catholics than for other religious groups, and much lower for people with authoritarian attitudes than for other people. Of the people that belong to the one third of the population with the most ethnocentric outlook and that are practising catholic, 9% voted for the Vlaams Blok. Of the people with the same degree of ethnocentrism, but that are not practising Catholics, 23% did so. Of the people that belong to the one third of the population that are most ethnocentric and the one third that are most authoritarian, 15% voted Vlaams Blok. Of the people that belong to the one third that is the most ethnocentric and the one third that is the least authoritarian, 31% did so. Other things being equal, a deference for authority, decreases the chance of "voice". At equal levels of the feeling of political powerlessness, it somewhat increases the probability of "exit" or non-participation.

VIII. Summary and conclusions

Our analysis indicates that it is correct to interpret non-participation and a vote for the extreme right as at least partly due to a legitimation crisis. Even though the conventional notion of civic culture has not lost its relevance in understanding this crisis, it can no longer adequately explain it. That crisis rather seems to be the expression of a new alignment of values. This alignment describes a deep cultural cleavage that divides the higher from the less educated. This cleavage also expresses itself politically. People who hold pronounced positions on this alignment are more likely than others to turn away from the established, "traditional" parties. People with the values and attitudes typical of the "progressive" or "new left" side of the cleavage, vote disproportionately for the Greens. People with the values and attitudes typical of the "conservative" or "new right" side of the cleavage, opt disproportionately for non-participation and for the extreme right. One should therefore look upon this cleavage as a source of political change.

In the recent political debate in Flanders, non-participation and the extreme right have been regarded as symptoms of a legitimation crisis, and of political protest. It seems right to do so, because both forms of political action are influenced by a set of common value-orientations that are opposed to the value orientations associated with established politics and the educated elites. The difference between the two expressions of cultural opposition or political protest can be understood as a choice for either an "exit" or a "voice" option. People select the "exit" option when they feel especially politically powerless and when other crucial value conflicts, such as the attitudes toward ethnic minorities, are somewhat less salient for them. The "exit" option is further stimulated by a lack of social integration, as well as by deference to authority which makes the more radical "voice"-option look too daring. The "voice"-option is chosen by people for which the value conflict over the position of "migrants" is the most salient issue. The extent to which ethnocentrism translates itself in "voice" or a vote for the extreme right, is however strongly determined by deference to authority. Identities and attitudes indicative of the latter, decrease the proportion in which ethnocentrism translates into a vote for the extreme right with a quarter to a third.

While our findings suggest an interpretation of non-participation and the extreme right, they do not give us a verified explanation for the rise of those phenomena over the past decades. It is of course this rise which has fuelled the diagnoses that our political system is in the midst of a legitimation crisis. One easy way to explain this rise would be to say that feelings of political powerlessness and ethnocentrism have increased. We do however have no data to document

such a rise. A strong increase of feelings of ethnocentrism and political cynicism, is moreover, not very plausible. In Great Britain where data relevant for the civic culture hypothesis have been collected since 1959, feelings of political powerlessness or cynicism have always been rather high and have increased less than is usually assumed (Topf, 1989:56). One should not confuse the rise of feelings of ethnocentrism and political powerlessness, with the rise of the political relevance of such feelings. When searching for an explanation for the growing political salience of feelings of powerlessness and ethnocentrism, and their expression in non-participation and a vote for the extreme right, it seems far more plausible to focus attention on the growing cultural conflict between the higher and the less educated and on the expression of that conflict in a new alignment of values.

The long term causes of the symptoms of a legitimation crisis seem to be the growing economic and cultural gap between the higher and less educated, and the ensuing growth of a conflict in which cultural and social-economic differences are strongly linked. The different expressions of this conflict, non-participation and a vote for the extreme right, can be understood as respectively a weaker "exit" and a more radical "voice" response to the withdrawal of loyalty from the established political system. The exit option is, especially among the less educated, further stimulated by demographic and other developments that decrease social integration and participation in associational life. The voice option is further stimulated by de-traditionalisation, the steadily diminishing number of practising Catholics, and the decline of deference towards authority.

Appendix 1: Scale for political cynicism (Carton et. al., 1993)

Likert items (1=completely agree / 5=completely disagree):

v72.1: There's no sense in voting; the parties do what they want to do anyway. (49 % agrees)

v72.3: Parties are only interested in my vote; not in my opinion. (67 % agrees)

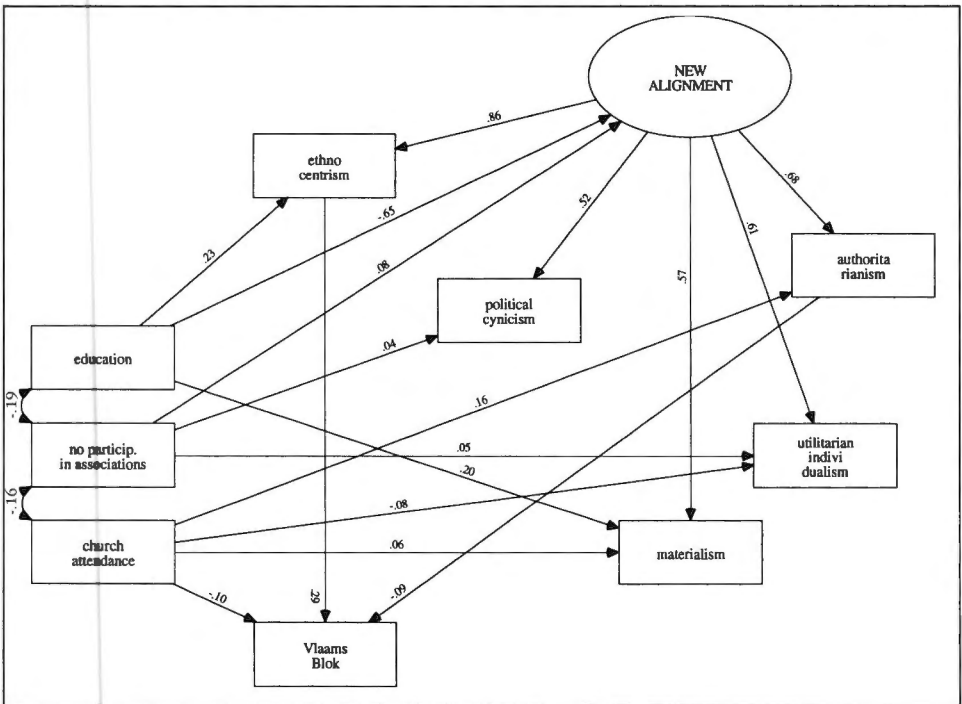
v72.5: So many people vote in elections that my vote doesn't make any difference. (23 % agrees)

Cronbach alpha.71

Appendix 2: Structural Models⁹

Amos (analysis of moment structures) procedure (Arbuckle, 1988).

Model 1: extreme right (Vlaams Blok) votes

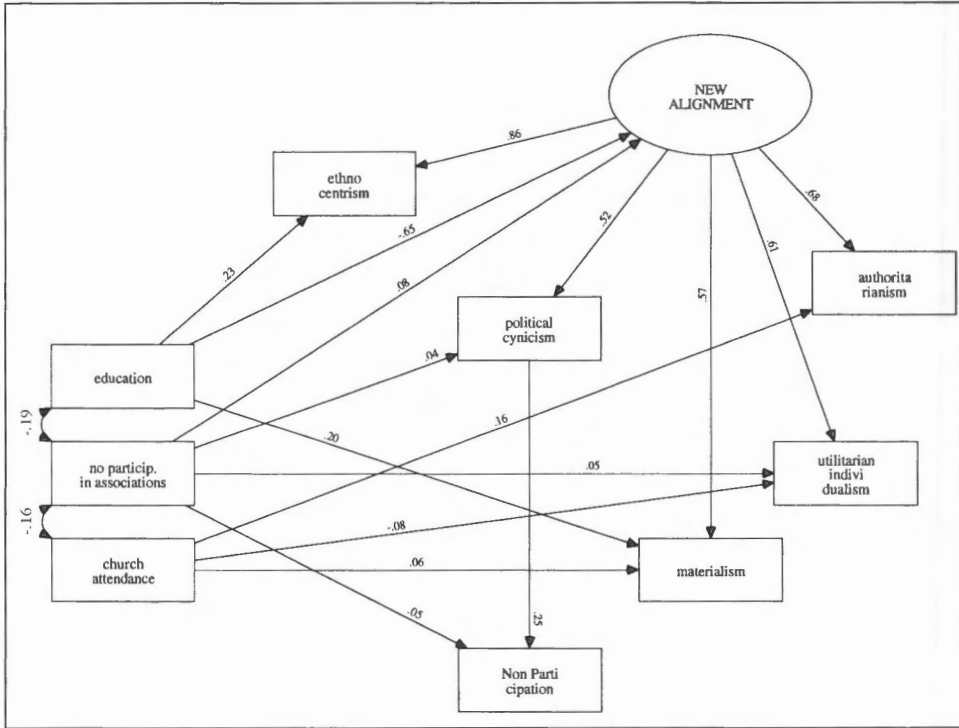


N = 2691

Chi-square = 21.0	Degrees of freedom = 16	Probability level = .178
RMR = .012	GFI = .998	AGFI = .995

9 For reasons of clarity, the error terms have not been depicted in the graphical representation of the models. All correlations between error terms have been fixed to zero, except the error terms for the variables "political cynicism" and "materialism" (correlation -.11).

Model 2: Non-participation in the elections



N=2691

Chi-square = 19.12	Degrees of freedom = 17	Probability level = .332
RMR = .012	GFI = .998	AGFI = .996

Squared Multiple Correlations:

Model 1 & 2:
 New Alignment .46
 political cynicism .29
 ethnocentrism .53
 authoritarianism .49
 materialism .22
 individualism .39

Model 1:
 Vlaams Blok .08

Model 2:
 non-participation .07

Abstract

Our analysis indicates that it is correct to interpret non-participation and a vote for the Extreme Right as at least partly due to a legitimization crisis which seems to be the expression of a new alignment of values. This alignment describes a deep cultural cleavage that divides the higher from the less educated. People who hold pronounced positions on this alignment are more likely than others to turn away from the established, "traditional" parties. People with the values and attitudes typical of the "progressive" or "new left" side of the cleavage, vote disproportionately for the Greens. People with the values and attitudes typical of the "conservative" or "new right" side of the cleavage, opt disproportionately for non-participation and for the Extreme Right.

In the recent political debate in Flanders, both non-participation and the Extreme Right have been regarded as symptoms of a legitimization crisis, and of political protest. The difference between the two expressions of cultural opposition or political protest can be understood as a choice for either an "exit" or a "voice" option. People select the "exit" option when they feel especially politically powerless. The "voice"-option is chosen by people for which the value conflict over the position of "migrants" is the most salient issue.

The long term causes of the symptoms of a legitimization crisis seem to be the growing economic and cultural gap between the higher and less educated, and the ensuing growth of a conflict in which cultural and social-economic differences are strongly linked.



Electoral Reform and electoral Behaviour in Belgium: Change within Continuity... or conversely¹

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Introduction

The November 1991 general elections, which saw the breakthrough of the Flemish ultra-nationalist Vlaams Blok and the significant progress of the French-speaking Greens, were generally considered as a "political upheaval", especially in Flanders. Since then, it has become a common statement to argue that Belgium has entered a more changing, more unstable, more uncertain period. Indeed, since the 1991 elections, most traditional parties have performed their own house-style *aggiornamento*, some of them have been struck by corruption scandals, and there is a widely shared belief that a broadening gap is opening up between the average citizen/voter and the political sphere.

The aim of this article is to test this widely agreed-upon "diagnosis" of change and instability: to what extent can it be confirmed or contradicted? The analysis shall revolve around three basic components of the Belgian political system: the electoral system, the behaviour of the citizen/voters, and the behaviour of the political decision-makers. As shall be demonstrated, these three components can hardly be isolated from one another. The main focus of the analysis shall be placed on the first two elements, but the third element of the triad will often be referred to as well. Indeed, the political elites design and/or challenge the electoral system and continuously attempt to anticipate and orientate the behaviour of the individual voters. Hence, the political elites shall be considered as a kind of "independent" variable. It is assuredly not fully independent, as the behaviour of the political decision-makers is also influenced both by the expected or actual electoral results and by the institutional-legal framework -including the electoral system- which they (or their peers or predecessors) have designed.

The central underlying question which shall be addressed can thus be stated as follows: to what extent has the Belgian electoral arena of the first half of the

1 This article is a thoroughly modified version of a paper presented at the Conference on "Partitocracies between crises and reforms: the cases of Italy and Belgium", Brussels, 29-30 September 1995, co-written by the author and A-P. Frogner: "Electoral behaviour, elite behaviour and electoral reform in Belgium. Some change amidst much continuity". The author wishes to thank A-P. Frogner for his cooperation, as well as L. De Winter for insightful critics and advice.

1990s been more unstable -or more stable- than it was in earlier periods? Building upon that, what are the implications for the future of the Belgian political system ²: is it more or less "stabilised" or on the brink of collapse? Hopefully, this contribution shall complement other contributions in this volume (especially Deschouwer; Elchardus & Derks; Van Dyck) which address quite similar questions.

The analysis will mainly centre on the post-World War II period, more particularly from the 1960s to the current situation. However, some earlier developments -especially regarding the evolution of the electoral system- are also worth considering, as they deliver interesting keys to understand more recent trends. The focus will mainly be placed on the national(federal) elections, but the other institutional levels will be analysed as well whenever it is judged appropriate.

I. Evolution of the electoral system: reforms and "non-reforms"

In order to understand the current electoral system, one needs to examine its origins. Indeed, some significant changes did take place in a longer time perspective. The technical aspects of the reforms which were implemented will not be discussed in great detail. The emphasis will rather be placed on the political causes and consequences of these reforms. On the other hand, from an analytical viewpoint, it is perhaps even more interesting to investigate the reasons why some reforms did *not* materialise since the introduction of male universal suffrage in 1919, even though some of these reforms reached the agenda at one point.

A. 1831-1949: the long road towards PR and full universal suffrage ³

During the 19th century, from the creation of Belgium as an independent state to 1899, Belgium had a majority electoral system for the House and the Senate, based on the British system. It was basically the same system for the two Houses, at least for the main features. The main differences were constituency size, the age of eligibility and the presence of indirectly elected senators (Fitzmaurice, 1988: 26). It was initially a male system based on strict property qualification (about 2 voters per 100 inhabitants). In 1877, vote secrecy was introduced. In 1893, male universal suffrage, still moderated by a plural vote (about 22 voters per 100 inhabitants; some voters could cast two or three ballots), was introduced, as well as compulsory voting.

In 1899, PR was adopted, but with elements of disproportionality. The D'Hondt seat allocation system was chosen. ⁴ The electoral districts differed sometimes markedly in size. From then on, the plurality preferential vote was abolished: one could only vote for the party as a whole ("head-of-the-list"), for a candidate and/or a substitute, or for both. ⁵ Furthermore, one could not vote anymore for more than one party. In Rae's terms, the ballot structure was hence transformed from an ordinal to a categorical one (Rae, 1971: 126). ⁶ As a result of these reforms,

2 Or political systems, as it were (see herebelow).

3 For further analyses and more detailed information, cfr. Stengers, 1990; Witte, 1990, as well as other sources quoted in this section.

4 At the local level, the Imperiali system was chosen. In the Belgian case, the Imperiali formula which was chosen is more favourable to larger parties than the D'Hondt system.

5 The plurality preferential vote was maintained at the local elections.

6 The possibility to cast a vote for candidates of different parties ("*panachage*") was maintained at the local elections until 1976.

the ranking of the candidates on the lists as decided by the parties became increasingly important (see herebelow).

In 1919, genuine male universal suffrage was introduced, as well as a system of provincial second tier allocation (*apparentement*)⁷. A rather low legal threshold was adopted as well: 66% of the electoral divider ([total number of votes]/[number of seats]), both for the House and the Senate.

The reasons why the majority system was transformed into a PR system are quite straightforward. The conjunction of the previous majority/plural systems had two direct impacts: an increase in the differences between the electoral results in the Flemish-speaking and French-speaking parts of the country, and a very strong negative effect on the Liberals. This was rapidly leading towards the predominance of the Catholics in Flanders and of the Socialists in Wallonia, whereas the Liberals suffered from an enormous distortion between their electoral scores and the number of elected MPs (about twice as many votes as the Socialists, but twice less seats). The introduction of PR and universal suffrage was a means to attenuate these differences: it favoured the Catholics on the French-speaking side, the Socialists on the Flemish side, and the Liberals in both areas. Hence, these reforms allowed some Catholic leaders to open up the possibility of Catholic-Liberal coalitions against the rapidly developing Socialists. Conversely, the continuation of the majority system could have durably pushed the Catholics back in the opposition, just after they had conquered the absolute majority of seats in 1884. In fact, the Catholics remained unchallenged for the 30 next years, even after the PR was introduced.⁸

Hence, the changes in the electoral system which were introduced at the turn of the century clearly modified the balance of power between the main existing parties (Catholics, Liberals and Socialists) and also affected their relationships. This also had a clear impact on coalition formation (Mabille 1986: 196). Furthermore, the successive reforms almost put an end to absolute majorities in parliament, and thus also to single-party governments.⁹ This situation can be compared with the Italian case in 1994, where one observes exactly the same evolution, but in the opposite direction. In Italy, the adoption of a majority system (even in an attenuated form) has generated the effect one was precisely trying to avoid in Belgium in the 1890s: the creation of electoral zones in which one single party would clearly be predominant (the North, the South and the Centre). Of course, these zones do not coincide in the Italian case with an ethnic differentiation, but they do coincide -as in Belgium- with different levels of economic development and prosperity.

As far as the 1919 reforms are concerned, the introduction of the (male) universal suffrage was basically the result of the development of the Socialist party and of the support of most Liberals and some Catholics to that principle. The second-tier seat allocation was adopted following pressures by the Liberals, whereas the legal threshold was supported by the larger parties (Catholics and Socialists). The three components of the 1919 reforms can thus be considered as bits of a global compromise agreement (Dewachter, 1983: 97).

7 For a more detailed description and technical discussion of the Belgian PR electoral system, see Gassner, 1993.

8 Hence, it looks as though the Catholic leaders modified an electoral system which seemed to favour them in the short term in order to avoid possible (or even probable) disadvantages in the longer term.

9 Only one exception: the Catholic majority from 1950 to 1954.

Finally, after another minor reform in 1947¹⁰, the universal suffrage was extended to women in 1948. It was first implemented in 1949. This reform does not seem to have had any significant impact in terms of the electoral results of the different parties, as it has been estimated that the women's vote only affected about 2% of the results.

B. 1949-1980s: extension and stabilisation

Before turning to the more recent debates, one has to mention the discussions around the referendum, which date back to 1950. The Belgian Constitution does not permit referendums. A *consultative* referendum was however organised in 1950, in order to try and settle the extremely conflict-laden "royal question" which virtually brought the country on the brink of civil war. The issue was whether or not King Leopold III should remain on the throne following his attitude towards the Nazis during WW II, as he ordered the surrender in 1940, personally and without consulting his government, and as he remained captive during the war while a government in exile was formed in London. Eventually, the results in the North and the South of the country differed significantly, as a majority of Flemings (72%) voted in favour of the King, but only 42% of Walloons did so. Overall, 57.6% voted in favour of the King. After violent outbursts of protest, Leopold was eventually forced to abdicate in favour of his son Baudouin.¹¹

The 1950 referendum has left profound wounds during the following decades, as it not only revealed significant differences between the North and South of the country, but also left a deep feeling of frustration in Flanders, as the (Flemish) voters' majority vote was not followed. Hence, the effect of the 1950 referendum was so devastating that this particular instrument was completely wiped off the agenda (and the party programmes) for many years.

However, from the early 1980s on, the Greens tried to put the referendum back on the agenda. They advocated the introduction of *decisional* referenda at the local level, and consultative referenda at the higher levels. From 1992 onwards, the Liberals also advocated the introduction of referenda at all levels. In 1993, the French-speaking Liberals put forward a referendum to settle the reform of the state. This proposal was rejected by the Christian-democrat/Socialist coalition. Eventually, a *consultative* referendum was introduced in 1994, but only at the local level.¹²

In the post-World War II period, discussions on the electoral system have been taking place periodically. In the course of the 1960s, smaller parties advocated the creation of a single electoral district. In the course of the 1970s, PM Tindemans advocated the creation of a single district for the first universal suffrage European parliamentary elections in 1979, and the larger (pillarised) parties contemplated -amongst other things- the suppression of provincial second-tier seat allocation (Dewachter 1983: 98-99). In the course of the 1980s, the Greens attempted to bring the electoral system back on the agenda, e.g. by advocating the

10 The threshold was lowered from 66% to 33% of the electoral divider for the Senate.

11 About the "royal question", see Fitzmaurice, 1988: 42-47; Luyckx, 1977: 441-552; CRISP, 1974; Mesnil, 1978; Theunissen, 1986.

12 In fact, the designation "popular consultation" (*consultation populaire*) was chosen instead of "referendum". The initiative is left either to the local council, or to 10% of the electorate. A few *communes* implemented it already in 1995, generally obtaining quite satisfactory results.

ELECTO

duction of a "pure" PR system. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, on the Liberals and Greens' side, proposals were made to suppress compulsory voting.

None of these proposals were directly transformed into a concrete reform. In this respect, it is quite remarkable to note that the first stages of the gradual federalisation process (from 1970 onwards) did not lead to significant changes in the electoral system, as the existing system -i.e. the system which prevailed in unitary Belgium- was basically "transposed" to the newly formed entities (Regions and Communities), with few modifications. Furthermore, from 1970 to the 1991-1995 legislature, the Regions and Communities did not have their own directly elected representatives¹³, as the national MPs were also present in the regional and community assemblies (they "changed hats"). This was a sign that the decision-makers did not want to urge the evolution towards more autonomy for the new entities.

Some reforms were however implemented in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but only one of these affected the legislative elections.¹⁴ In 1981, the voting age was lowered from 21 years to 18 years. This reform was not so much the result of long political debates, but was rather considered like an harmonisation with other elections¹⁵ and with the general trend towards a lowering of the age of legal majority. It did however have quite significant political consequences, as it clearly constituted a facilitating factor for the first electoral breakthrough and consecutive entry into Parliament of the Greens, who were the first party choice amongst the 18-25 age category (Bouillin-Darteville, 1984: 134-137).

C. The early 1990s: many debates, a few reforms

From 1992 to 1995, the electoral system stood once again on the legislative agenda. Indeed, during the 1992/93, 1993/94 and 1994/95 parliamentary sessions, about 150 legislative proposals¹⁶ were introduced in the House or in the Senate. As most of these proposals were introduced by the opposition parties, only a few bills were actually voted. Only some of the main proposals and the debates which eventually lead to the passing of bills will be mentioned here.

All parliamentary parties intervened in the debate. Actually, it was not only initiated by the opposition parties (mainly the Liberals and the Greens), but also by PM Dehaene himself, self-admittedly to counter the progress of the extreme-right wing parties who had made much progress from 1991 on, at all levels. He notably advocated the suppression of compulsory voting¹⁷ in order to generate

13 Except for the Brussels Region from 1989 on, and the German-speaking Community from 1986 on.

14 Two other significant reforms deserve attention. At the local level, the *communes* were merged into larger entities in 1976, and *panachage* was abolished. Needless to say, these two changes had significant political consequences. At the first universal suffrage elections of the European Parliament (1979), two "electoral bodies" (*collèges électoraux*: French-speaking and Flemish-speaking) were created, as well as three electoral districts (see note 20).

15 At the local elections, the voting age was lowered from 21 years to 18 years in 1970. From 1979 onwards, the voting age for the European elections was also 18 years.

16 Own computation, relying on a computer listing provided by the CEPES (Study centre of the PSC and CVP).

17 The suppression of compulsory voting had already been put forward by other parties: Ecolo, Agalev, the PVV (then the VLD) and the Vlaams Blok.

a more "responsible" vote, and the introduction of a threshold for access in Parliament. However, most reactions were negative and the PM's proposals were rapidly dismissed. Eventually, only one reform was introduced: the extension of preferential voting (see herebelow). From 1992 onwards, the French-speaking Liberals also advocated the suppression of the head-of-the-list vote, unsuccessfully so far.¹⁸

Some significant electoral reforms were however introduced in the wake of the 1993 institutional reforms which finally transformed Belgium into a fully-fledged "federal" state.¹⁹ They were implemented for the first time at the 21 May 1995 legislative elections. The three main modifications were:

- the strong decrease of the number of MPs at the federal (former national) level
- from 212 to 150 in the House and from 184 to 71 in the Senate- and the creation of directly elected regional parliaments. This also implied the suppression of "double mandates" at the regional/community levels, on one hand, and the federal level, on the other hand;
- the creation of three electoral districts and two "electoral bodies" (*collèges électoraux*) for the Senate, identical with those of the European elections since 1979²⁰;
- the extension of preferential voting, i.e. the possibility to vote for several candidates on the same list (as was already the case for the local elections).²¹

The timing of the elections was also significantly modified by the 1993 reforms. Beforehand, only the local and European elections were characterised by a guaranteed fixed term (respectively six and five years), whereas the legislative and provincial elections had a theoretical four-year term which was hardly ever put in practise. In October 1994, for the first time, the local and provincial elections coincided. This will become a fixed feature, as they will both have a six-year term. The regional elections will also have a fixed term of five years, and will coincide with the European elections from 1999 onwards. Finally, at the federal level, the theoretical four-year term has not been modified. Although anticipated elections will still be theoretically possible, they will be much less likely to occur, since the dissolution of Parliament will require a constructive motion of defiance ("*motion de défiance constructive*"). In any event, the 1993 reforms have instituted a new "electoral cycle" (Mabille, 1994: 25; Lentzen et al., 1995) which will only be fully established for the first time in the 1999-2000 period.

It is still too early to draw any conclusions on the impact of the 1993 reforms. As far as the single constituency for the Senate is concerned, two points can be made. On one hand, this system is presumably more favourable to smaller parties, quite similarly with the European elections. On the other hand, the 1995 experience has shown that the party "heavyweights" concentrated on the Senate

18 From 1994 on, they also advocated the direct election of mayors at the local elections.

19 For a detailed presentation of the 1993 institutional reforms, see e.g. Brassinne, 1994.

20 To put it simply, the three districts correspond to the Flanders Region except the Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde *arrondissement*, the Walloon Region, and the Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde *arrondissement* (that includes notably the Brussels Region). The third district is "mixed".

21 For a detailed presentation of the electoral aspects of the 1993 institutional reforms, see Brassinne, 1994.

list, in order to drain votes in the whole constituency, once again quite similarly with the European elections. Furthermore, there are indications that the single constituency lead to a sharp increase in the proportion of preferential votes (see note 47).

Another issue which raised intense debates from 1994 on was the extension of the political rights (including voting and eligibility rights) to non-Belgian EU citizens. Until then, there was little doubt that the right to vote and to be elected was linked with the Belgian nationality. Following the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty, the member states are due to extend the voting and eligibility rights to EU citizens for the local and European elections. This reform was implemented for the first time at the June 1994 European elections²². Accordingly, most political parties included candidates which were labelled "European" on their lists, but they were never in standing order on the ballot. Eventually, the electoral turnout of EU citizens turned out to be quite low, as only 5.1% of the potential EU voters actually registered on the electoral lists²³.

At the local level, Belgium finally accepted to extend the voting and eligibility rights to EU citizens from the year 2000 on. However, this reform met much resistance in Flanders (Blaise & Martens, 1992: 62-63), notably in the Brussels periphery where most Flemish parties fear that the balance of power will be changed to the detriment of Flemish interests. As a result of this, Belgium was granted a "favour" by the European council: for the October 2000 local elections, Belgium will have the *possibility* to restrict the voting and eligibility rights to the EU citizens with at least six years of residence in Belgium, in a limited number of *communes*. This will only be possible in *communes* with more than 20% non-Belgian EU citizens. Furthermore, Belgium will have to justify this request by an "exceptional" situation. The debate remains latent, and will most likely resume in the pre-electoral period of the October 2000 local elections.

One also has to mention the extension of the voting right to non-EU citizens (i.e. non-EU immigrants). From the 1960s onwards, several legislative proposals were introduced in order to grant the voting right to non-EC citizens, at the local level and sometimes at higher levels as well (Mabille, 1990; Blaise & Martens, 1992: 61-63). The voting right for non-EC citizens at the local level was even included in the government agreement of the Martens I cabinet (1979-1980; PSC, CVP, PS, SP and FDF coalition), but it never reached the decision-making agenda (Mabille, 1990; 1994: 21). Amongst the current parliamentary parties, only the Greens still openly -and unsuccessfully- advocate such a reform.

The introduction of gender quotas on the electoral lists was also a passionately debated issue. Some radical proposals were issued, such as the obligation of a 50/50 quota on the electoral lists, or the obligation to alternate male and female candidates on the lists. Eventually, a bill passed in 1994 introduced a gender quota at all levels (local, provincial, community/regional, federal, European). According to the new rules, an electoral list cannot count more than two-thirds of

22 Which saw two reforms compared with the 1979, 1984 and 1989 elections: the proportion of seats allocated respectively in the Flemish and French-speaking districts was changed from 13/11 to 14/10, and a new district was created, which covers the German-speaking community (only one seat to be allocated). Hence, in the German-speaking community, a *de facto* majority system was introduced for the European elections!

23 I.e. 23,999 votes out of 471,277. The Italians reached the highest percentage (8.1%), and the French reached the lowest percentage (0.3%) (for comprehensive data, cfr. press release of the Ministry of Interior, 6 June 1994).

candidates²⁴ of the same gender. In practise, this means a *de facto* one-third female quota in most cases.

This reform will only be fully applicable from 1999 onwards. At the 1994 local and provincial elections, a transitory lower quota was fixed (three-quarters/one quarter). The same quota will be applicable at any election which would take place between 1 January 1996 and 31 December 1998. No compulsory quotas - only a "recommendation" - were set for the elections which took place in 1995 (European, federal, regional).

There are indications that this reform already brought about a significant increase in the actual proportion of women in the various elected bodies. At the 1994 local elections, the percentage of female candidates reached about 32%²⁵, i.e. way above the 25% quota, and the percentage of elected female councillors reached 20%, i.e. an increase of more than 6% since 1988.²⁶ At the 1995 legislative elections, the percentage of female MPs increased in all the elected bodies: from 11% to 27.5% in the Senate, from 9% to 11% in the House, from 10% to 18% in the Flemish Council and from 7 to 9% in the Walloon Council (Cabinet du Ministre de l'Emploi (...), 1995). The increase was thus much more significant in the Senate and in the Flemish Council. As far as the House is concerned, this does not seem to constitute a significant breakthrough, especially if one considers that the 1970s and 1980s were already characterised by a gradual increase of female representation.²⁷

Finally, a recent reform of a technical kind is worth mentioning: the gradual introduction of the "electronic vote" since 1991, i.e. the replacement of paper ballots by computers. It is still too early to judge whether or not such a technical modification will have a significant impact on electoral behaviour. However, two possible induced effects were already observed in 1995 in the constituencies in which the computers were introduced. On one hand, one observed a decrease of the blank/invalid vote. Indeed, the computer programmes do not allow one to choose more than one list, to include alien documents or to write outside the spaces (i.e. the three most common types of invalid vote). They only give the possibility to select a "blank vote" icon at one point of the procedure. On the other hand, one has observed an increase of absenteeism in some cases. The causes of this phenomenon have not been systematically investigated so far. One may assume that some categories of voters (such as elderly persons or less educated publics) are more reluctant to use the computers instead of paper ballots. Furthermore, the fact that the new procedure brought about longer queues in some polling stations as a result of technical problems²⁸ probably deterred some potential voters.

24 I.e. effective and substitute candidates.

25 More than 40% in the 19 Brussels *communes*. Every individual party stood above the 25% quota; the highest percentages were reached by the Agalev (43%), Ecolo (44%) and the FDF (53%) (Cabinet du Ministre de l'Emploi (...), 1994/1).

26 28% in the 19 Brussels *communes*. The highest percentages were reached by Ecolo (32%), Agalev (35%) and the FDF (39%), whereas the "traditional" parties hovered around the 20% mark (Cabinet du Ministre de l'Emploi (...), 1994/2).

27 Between 1949 and 1971, the proportion of female MPs stagnated between 2% and 4%. In 1978, it already stood at 7.5% (De Winter, 1995: 33).

28 Mainly an insufficient number of computers terminals, as well as technical failures.

D. *Diagnosis: continuity in spite of recent reforms*

Looking at the post-World War II period, what can be said about the evolution of the Belgian electoral system(s)? Does one observe more continuity or more change?

Let us first look at the 1946-1991 period, and resort to the four main dimensions put forward by Lijphart to characterise an "electoral system", i.e. "*sets of essentially unchanged election rules under which one or more elections are conducted*" (Lijphart, 1994: 7): electoral formula, district magnitude, electoral threshold and assembly size (Lijphart, 1994: 10-14). If one applies the criteria of "*electoral system change*" used by Lijphart (Lijphart, 1994: 13 ff.), one can confirm the conclusion Lijphart himself reaches about the Belgian case in the 1946-1987 period and extend it to the 1991 legislative elections: Belgium stands amongst the countries in which the electoral system for the legislative elections has remained basically unchanged. The only significant change was the adoption of a (partly) new system for the European Parliament elections from 1979 onwards (Lijphart, 1994: 53).²⁹ The 1948 and 1981 extensions of the universal suffrage (see hereabove) should of course not be overlooked, but they did not modify the core characteristics of the prevailing electoral system.

However, still using Lijphart's criteria, the 1993 institutional reforms did bring about significant changes on two dimensions: district magnitude (for the Senate only) and assembly size (both for the House and the Senate). One could perhaps add a third element: the extension of the preferential vote. However, one should also stress that the two other key dimensions -arguably the most crucial ones in terms of proportionality-, i.e. the electoral formula and the legal threshold have *not* been modified.³⁰

All things considered, the overriding conclusion is that, in spite of the Second World War, in spite of the successive political crises and the cyclical discussions revolving around the electoral system, in spite of the major institutional reforms which have been implemented from the 1970s to 1995, and in spite of the introduction of recent electoral reforms -most of them deriving from the institutional reforms-, the Belgian electoral system has not been radically modified since 1919 (or 1948, if one takes into account the extension of the vote to women). One of the main points is that the core characteristics of the electoral formula (list PR system, d'Hondt) have remained basically unchanged since 1899.

II. *A modus vivendi around the electoral system(s)?*

How could one account for the relative stability of the Belgian electoral system(s) so far? For one thing, this should not be considered as an exceptional feat. Indeed, "*(...) one of the best-known generalizations about electoral systems is that they tend to be very stable and to resist change. (...) Fundamental changes are rare and arise only in extraordinary historical situations.*" (Lijphart, 1994: 52; Nohlen, 1984: 218, quoted in Lijphart, 1994: 52). In the Belgian case, one should look at the political decision-makers. Why did they not implement more radical reforms?

29 Possibly with one exception: the lowering of the legal threshold from 66% to 33% of the electoral divider for the Senate in 1947 (see hereabove).

30 Ibid.

A. *Elites from the pillarised parties: cautious reformism*

This relative stability is mainly the result of the consensus of the main established parties not to significantly change the system from which they have all benefited, and indeed still benefit. Let us examine this argument.

It is an established fact that, amongst the variety of PR electoral systems, the d'Hondt systems range amongst the least proportional and systematically favour larger parties (Lijphart, 1994: 23-24).³¹ Furthermore, one could argue that the different district sizes constitute an additional element of disproportionality.³²

Moreover, the prevailing electoral system (PR, electoral formula and "head-of-the-list" vote) gives much control to the party headquarters on the selection of actually elected MPs. This is confirmed by several empirical analyses. From 1919 to 1958, the voters "confirmed" 2378 (i.e. 99.62%) of the elected MPs out of the 2387 candidates in standing order on the ballot (Stengers, 1990). Hence, only 9 candidates which were not in standing order were actually elected! From 1919 to 1991, only 31 MPs (30 representatives and one senator, i.e. 0.43% of the total number of elected MPs) which were not in standing order managed to obtain a seat on the basis of their preferential votes (Das, 1992: 155). In fact, it has been estimated that the suppression of the head-of-the-list vote would have modified the election of about 15% MPs from 1919 to 1977 (Dewachter, 1983). Interestingly, the creation of much larger constituencies at the European (since 1979) and Senate (since 1995) elections has reinforced the hold of the party apparatus on candidate selection, as it has transferred much of the decision-making from the constituency parties (usually at the *arrondissement* level) to the central party headquarters (Mabille, 1994: 24).

Not surprisingly, whenever one of the three "family" of pillarised parties is pushed on the opposition benches (e.g. the Liberals from 1988 onwards), it tends to take a somewhat more radical stance. But the experience has shown that, once it returns in office, it tends to return to the usual compromise agreements as well.

To sum up, one may argue that the established parties have designed an electoral system which has generally proved favourable to them. Hence, they have never had any serious reason to significantly modify that system.

B. *Elites of smaller and non-governmental parties: cautious radicalism?*

To start with, it looks as though the successive "waves" of newly-emerged parties (regionalists, Greens, extreme-right) have not been able to exert a durable pressure on the pillarised parties -e.g. through participation in coalitions- and to promote new political practises. Some of these more recent parties did achieve significant electoral successes (successive "peaks" from 1971 to 1991). However, for some of these parties, these successes were followed by much less favourable results, and eventually to crisis and dissolution. For instance, the regionalist parties did play an important role in the transition towards federalisation, but even-

31 Along with the LR Imperiali systems, one variant of which is also used at the local level in Belgium.

32 However, the larger parties are only favoured in smaller constituencies, whereas the smaller parties are favoured in larger constituencies (Dewachter, 1983: 97).

tually they could not withstand the pressure of the pillarised parties³³, as the latter have been able to largely "incorporate" their themes by achieving the full federalisation of the country. In other cases, they have managed to become quite "institutionalised" and durable parliamentary parties, but they have not been able to achieve further electoral successes (e.g. the Greens and the Vlaams Blok).

Hence, one could argue that the pillarised parties were sometimes challenged, but never really put in danger, as they have been able to keep a sufficiently broad electoral *clientele*. This is assuredly linked with the permanence of the pillars and to the still extensive range of patronage products at the disposal of the political personnel of the "traditional" parties (De Winter, this volume). These ingredients are also there at the more recent regional and community levels. Even though there are some indications that pillarisation and consociational practises are declining, they still act very much as "system stabilisers" (Deschouwer, this volume).

Besides, although the new parties - whether predominantly "reformist" or "anti-system" - initially demanded modifications of the electoral system, these demands became less insisting through time. This constitutes a major difference with the Italian case: in Belgium, *the critique of the political system has not coincided so far with the radical critique of the electoral system*. Why has this been the case?

One could argue that, although it is not purely proportional, the current PR system has on the whole largely benefited the smaller parties. Let us consider the *effective* threshold of representation, which provides an important indication on the degree of "openness" of a given electoral system towards smaller parties. Lijphart computes a figure of 4.8%³⁴ for the 1946-1987 period (Lijphart, 1994: 34). This places Belgium in an intermediate position amongst the 52 post-World War II PR electoral systems identified by Lijphart: 24 electoral systems produce higher effective thresholds, but 27 electoral systems produce lower effective thresholds (sometimes much lower; i.e. the Netherlands from 1956 onwards: 0.67%).³⁵ Furthermore, if one considers the 57 PR (and assimilated) electoral systems, Belgium stands below the average effective threshold of 6.6% (Lijphart, 1994: 51). Besides, the provincial second-tier seat allocation system basically benefits smaller parties. Hence, it comes as no surprise that, amongst the d'Hondt and Imperiali systems, the Belgian effective threshold also stands below the average of 6.5% (Lijphart, 1994: 51).

Hence, the prevailing electoral system has allowed smaller parties with *some* electoral potential - not the very small parties³⁶ - to gain access to parliamentary representation. Even a more episodic phenomenon such as the political "entrepreneur" Van Rossem obtained parliamentary seats at the 1991 elections. If one also considers the considerable increase of the public financing of parties since the late 1980s and early 1990s (Van Bunder, 1993) - primarily based on the num-

33 The Walloon RW disappeared, the Brussels FDF is being "integrated" into the PRL in order to survive, and the VU now stands in a difficult position between the radical Vlaams Blok and the increasingly determined SP, VLD and CVP (Dewachter, 1987; Deschouwer, 1994; Deschouwer, this volume).

34 Taagepera and Shugart have computed another estimate of 4,2% (Taagepera & Shugart, 1989: 127-128).

35 Figures compiled from tables 2.2. to 2.5. (Lijphart, 1994: 22-35).

36 Such as the PFU in the seventies, the declining Communist party, "small Left" parties such as the PTB-PVDA from the 1980s onwards, various unitarist lists such as BEB, UNIE, etc...

ber of parliamentary seats-, one could argue that the current system is quite favourable to the smaller (or mid-size) political parties which have acquired some political relevance.

All things considered, it seems plausible to argue that most strategists of the smaller parties who have gained parliamentary seats (currently: Ecolo, Agalev, VU, FDF, VB and FN at the federal level) have been increasingly reluctant to put forward a radical electoral reform as one of their top-priority objectives, as most modification scenarios (majority system, threshold) -which, eventually, would be set up by the governmental parties- would probably run against their interest.

III. Electoral results and behaviour: looking for change

A. *Limitations of the analysis*

One can rely on numerous indicators to assess the changes or the continuities in electoral behaviour. In this section, some of these indicators will be used to try and see whether or not the most recent period (particularly the early '90s) has seen more changes than the previous periods. At this point, two major limitations of the following enquiry must clearly be stated.

On one hand, the focus shall mainly be placed on the legislative (national/federal) elections. This constitutes of course a major limitation, as post-unitary Belgium possesses not one, but two political and party systems (Flanders and Wallonia), not to mention the "mixed" Brussels Region and the German-speaking Community (Dewachter, 1987; Deschouwer, 1994; this volume; De Winter & Dumont, 1996). For any given election, the main differences between these sub-systems would deserve a systematic investigation. So would the electoral results at the different levels: local, provincial, regional/community, national/federal and European. This will not be the case here, although a few obvious points will be made in that respect.

The second limitation has to do with the available data. Aggregate data are quite easy to come by and allow one to compare the data from different periods quite easily as well. However, as aggregate data show clear limits both in descriptive and explanatory terms, one needs to resort to individual (voter) level data, i.e. survey data. The problem is that very few data sets permit satisfactory comparison through time. The most recent period is quite well covered, but one is unable to really systematically compare the trends of the 1990s with, say, that of the mid-1960s.

Hence, this section should be considered as an overview of the various indicators of continuity and change, both at the aggregate and at the individual levels, rather than an in-depth investigation of each individual indicator. Hopefully, each indicator contributes to some extent to a better assessment of the relative amplitude of change.

B. *Pillarised versus non-pillarised parties*

A first way to assess the amplitude of electoral change is to look at the share of valid votes for "pillarised" versus "non-pillarised" parties (see table 1). The "pillarised" character of Belgian society, the central role the large established parties play in that context, and the "consociational" character of the Belgian polity have

Table 1

House of representatives 1961-1995. Indicators of stability and change

	% pillarized parties ¹ (% v.v.)	% other parties (% v.v.)	Index of electoral fragmentation (Rae) ²	% Total volatility without Others ³	Number of parties in parliament	E.N.P. ⁴	% Abstent. ⁵	% Blank/invalid ⁶	% Total non-vote	% Preferential vote ⁷
1961	90.5	9.5	.63	9.9	6	2.69	4.9	4.8	9.7	33.0
1965	84.4	15.6	.72	31.6	6	3.60	5.4	6.0	11.4	39.0
1968	80.6	19.4	.80	11.9	7	4.97	5.4	5.6	11.0	41.6
1971	74.0	26.0	.83	13.7	7	5.85	4.5	6.8	11.3	45.7
1974	75.5	24.5	.83	6.5	8	5.76	5.3	7.9	13.2	49.8
1977	79.3	20.7	.81	12.7	8	5.21	4.7	7.2	11.9	50.3
1978	78.0	22.0	.85	12.4	11	6.77	6.0	8.4	14.4	51.9
1981	73.0	27.0	.87	28.7	14	7.71	5.5	7.3	12.8	48.4
1985	78.6	21.4	.86	19.5	11	7.00	6.4	7.5	13.9	48.5
1987	79.0	21.0	.86	8.6	10	7.17	6.6	6.6	13.2	48.9
1991	70.1	29.9	.88	24.7	13	8.41	7.3	7.0	14.3	48.3
1995	72.8	27.2	.88	13.4	11	8.06	8.9	6.8	15.7	55.9 ⁸

¹ Socialists (currently PS and SP), Christian-democrats (currently PSC and CVP), Liberals (currently PRL and VLD). See Deschouwer, 1992, 1994 and this volume for more details on the evolution (particularly the linguistic split) of parties from the 1960s on.

² Computations by P. Dumont (De Winter & Dumont, 1996).

³ Bartolini & Mair formula (Bartolini & Mair, 1990: 20). The figures should be read as follows: from 1958 to 1961: 9.9% total volatility; from 1961 to 1965: 31.6% total volatility, etc... Computations by P. Dumont (De Winter & Dumont, 1996). The following parties have been considered for the computation: PSC, CVP, SP, PS, VLD, PRL, FDF, RW, PCB, VU, Agalev, Ecolo, VB, UDRT, FN, Rossem (and their forerunners, when that is the case).

⁴ Laakso & Taagepera formula (Laakso & Taagepera, 1979). Computations by P. Dumont (De Winter & Dumont, 1996).

⁵ Sources: De Winter et al., 1991; Mabille et al. 1991; Lentzen & Blaise 1995. Until 1977, in the official statistics, the total number of non-voters was considerably over-estimated. The figures from 1961 to 1977 have been computed accordingly by De Winter (1978).

⁶ Sources: De Winter et al., 1991; Mabille et al. 1991; Lentzen & Blaise 1995.

⁷ Source from 1961 to 1991: Das, 1992: 158.

⁸ Rough estimate based on preliminary computations regarding the PSC (+10.2% preferential votes from 1991 to 1995), the PS (+7.4%) and the PRL (+5.5%).

been vastly documented and discussed elsewhere.³⁷ From a strictly electoral viewpoint, are there indications that the pillarised parties are losing ground?

The picture is mitigated. On one hand, throughout the whole period, the three (then six) "traditional" parties have been able to mobilise more than 70% of the

37 On the body of growing literature on "pillarisation" and (especially) "de-pillarisation", see e.g. Lorwin, 1974; Lijphart, 1981; Huyse, 1981; 1987; Dewachter, 1987; Deschouwer, 1994; this volume).

valid vote, in spite of the increasing number of "non-pillar" parties. On the other hand, their share of the vote has clearly dropped since the early '60s. But this process has not been a linear one. The three clearest peaks in the aggregated results of "non-pillar" parties were observed in 1971-1974, 1981 and 1991. They were basically the result of different -though partly overlapping- phenomena: respectively the rise of the regionalist/linguistic parties (FDF, RW and VU), the Green parties (Ecolo and Agalev) and the extreme-right parties (Front National, AGIR, and especially the Vlaams Blok)³⁸. The historical low so far was reached in 1991. And yet, in purely quantitative and electoral terms, the pillarised parties taken together are not significantly weaker in 1995 than they were in 1971 or 1981, for instance. This is not to say that the electoral balance of power *between* the pillarised parties did not evolve through time, quite the contrary (see herebelow).

C. Electoral fragmentation

Rae's index of electoral fragmentation does not only provide information on the number and relative electoral strength of the various political parties. It also gives an indirect assessment of the relative electoral predominance of the pillarised parties.

The figures from table 1 indicate that the general trend is one of an increase of fragmentation, i.e. a decrease in the predominance of the pillarised parties. This trend was much clearer in the 1960s. From the 1960s to the 1990s, the Belgian party system has undergone dramatic changes: it has been transformed from a three-party system (Catholics, Liberals, Socialists) to an extremely fragmented multiparty system, following the linguistic split of the pillarised parties and the creation of new parties (see hereabove). Hence, it comes as no surprise that, amongst the thirteen countries investigated by Bartolini & Mair, only Switzerland comes durably close to post-unitary Belgium in terms of electoral fragmentation.³⁹ Actually, most Belgian figures from 1978 onwards constitute "records" in terms of electoral fragmentation.

The evolution of the number of parties in parliament and of the effective number of parties (see table 1) provide additional evidence of this trend. By combining the three indicators, the 1981 and 1991 elections stand out as the elections which have produced the highest level of fragmentation.

D. Volatility and individual electoral shifts

Let us first consider volatility at the aggregate level, and particularly total volatility (table 1), i.e. the sum of changes in the aggregate vote for the different parties (the sum of individual party volatilities) divided by two in order to avoid double-counting of the same electoral shifts (Bartolini & Mair, 1990: 20). These figures should be considered as an indicator of the *minimum* proportion of voters who did change their electoral behaviour between two given elections (Bartolini & Mair, 1990: 21). For sure, aggregate volatility only constitutes an indirect indi-

38 Other smaller or more ephemeral parties also intervened in the process (such as the UDRT-RAD, the "Rossem" list, etc... See also Deschouwer, 1994; this volume; De Winter & Dumont, 1996.

39 Data gathered from the Bartolini & Mair database (Bartolini & Mair, 1990: 323-358). As well as the Netherlands in the early '70s. One could also mention other countries, but only during more ancient periods (such as Weimar Germany).

cator of actual shifts at the individual (voter) level, but it is still a useful and valid indication (Bartolini & Mair, 1990: 34).⁴⁰

The figures from table 1 deliver clear indications that the three most volatile periods were 1961-1965, 1978-1981 and 1987-1991. In 1965, this coincided with the breakthrough of the VU, the first electoral successes of the RW and FDF, the strong gains of the newly reformed Liberal party, and losses for the Socialists and the Christian-democrats (Delruelle et al., 1970). The 1965 changes appeared to be so dramatic then that some authors argued that this was the first major electoral rupture since the establishment of male universal suffrage in 1919 (Delruelle et al., 1970).

This claim deserves closer attention, by considering a longer time perspective, i.e. since 1919. Delruelle et al. used a somewhat different operationalisation of volatility ("external mobility ratio": *taux de mobilité externe*), by differentiating clusters of parties (based on ideological criteria) rather than individual parties.⁴¹ The results of these computations are presented in table 2.

Table 2

House of representatives 1919-1977. External mobility ratio

Elections	External mobility ratio (%)
1919-1921	3.18
1921-1925	7.04
1925-1929	4.65
1929-1932	2.65
1932-1936	16.85
1936-1939	9.87
1939-1946	21.60
1946-1949	8.99
1949-1950	9.81
1950-1954	6.82
1954-1958	4.55
1958-1961	4.61
1961-1965	16.94
1965-1968	6.45
1968-1971	6.69
1971-1974	3.50
1974-1977	4.76

Sources: from 1919 to 1968: Delruelle et al., 1970: 11-12. From 1968 to 1977: Dewachter, 1983: 102. Eight clusters of parties have been defined as follows: communists, socialists (including dissident lists), liberals (including dissident lists), Rex (1936 and 1939), Flemish lists (VNV frontists, then VU, etc...), catholics (including dissident lists), Walloon and French-speaking regionalist lists, and "others".

⁴⁰ "Although it is not entirely satisfactory, using aggregate figures to discuss trends in electoral volatility does not (...) seem to be an unreasonable procedure" (Denver, in Crewe & Denver, 1985: 406, quoted in Bartolini & Mair, 1990: 30). For further developments, see Bartolini & Mair, 1990: 27-34).

⁴¹ Unsurprisingly, the figures from 1961 to 1977 in table 2 are lower than the corresponding figures in table 1.

There is indeed evidence that the 1919-1961 period was characterised by low levels of volatility, with two notable exceptions directly linked with the events of World War II. In 1936, the new *Rex* list (French-speaking nationalists) achieved a major breakthrough (11.5%), along with the Flemish nationalists. In 1946, all nationalist lists (French-speaking and Flemish) disappeared, and the communists reached their historical high. Hence, if one puts aside the exceptionality of the 1936-1946 period, one may confirm the statement that, until 1965, the Belgian electorate was quite stable (Delruelle et.al., 1970: 9-31).

Finally, still in an aggregate perspective, let us mention an alternative operationalisation. By distinguishing two basic "blocks" of parties, the pillarised and the non-pillarised ones⁴², one observes that the 1961-1965 and 1978-1981 peaks are better explained in terms of volatility *between* the pillarised parties, and that the 1987-1991 peak is better explained in terms of volatility between the pillarised and non-pillarised parties (Lago, 1995).

As a provisional conclusion, relying solely on these aggregate figures, it looks as though the 1978-1981 and 1987-1991 shifts were quite significant, but not so exceptional in a longer-term perspective. Of course, this diagnosis has a quite relative value, as one should consider the -sometimes quite dissimilar- trends at the sub-national level as well.

Evidently, the aggregate measurements of electoral change show clear limits, as they do not measure the actual electoral shifts which take place at the level of the individual voters. Unfortunately, one can only rely on a few solid estimates. A first set of figures was computed by Delruelle for the 1961-1965-1968 legislative elections. She estimated that about 76% voters could be considered as "*stable*" voters -who never modified their voting behaviour-, 17% as "*changing*" voters -who only changed once, and possibly returned to their 1961 choice in 1968- and 7% as "*floating*" voters -who modified their voting behaviour twice- (Delruelle et.al., 1970: 97-108).

More recent survey data provide more precise estimates, and allow one to assess the proportion of "*stayers*", i.e. voters who stick to the same party between two elections (or to the same electoral behaviour, e.g. non-vote), as opposed to "*movers*". Both in Flanders and Wallonia, measures at the individual level confirm the importance of electoral mobility. For instance, between the 1987 and 1991 general elections (House), some 32.5% Flemish voters and 27% Walloon voters modified their electoral behaviour (Swyngedouw et.al., 1992: 24, Aish & Swyngedouw 1994: 62). In the Flemish case, these figures were much higher than in the previous period: between the 1981, 1985 and 1987 elections, the equivalent figures respectively amounted to 20% and 14.5% (Swyngedouw, 1986; Swyngedouw & Billiet, 1988).

Still in the Flemish context, between 1991 and 1995, even though the aggregate results of the main parties did not change as dramatically as they did between 1987 and 1991, the percentage of "*movers*" was still estimated at 32% (Swyngedouw, 1995).⁴³ The fact that the partly equivalent figures⁴⁴ at the aggregate level (total volatility; see table 1) were significantly lower between 1991 and 1995

42 I.e. a definition of "blocks" which differs from the classical "block volatility" model.

43 Cfr. the different sources quoted in the two paragraphs hereabove for more precise analyses of vote transfers between parties.

44 Only partly equivalent, as the figures in table 1 are computed at the national/federal level.

than between 1987 and 1991 illustrates once again the minimalist character of such aggregate computations, and demonstrates the need to look at individual-level estimates as well.

Hence, the proportion of "movers" has been quite high in the more recent period, especially since 1991. Arguably, on the basis of the lacunary available data, this constitutes a significant element of change as compared with the earlier period.

E. *Absenteeism, blank vote and invalid vote*

Although one does observe a general trend towards more "non-voting", this trend is not a linear one (see table 1). Obviously, the level of electoral participation remains very high, way above the 80% line. This is of course largely linked with compulsory voting. Thus, in a nutshell, one does not observe a spectacular increase of the non-vote in the last three decades.

However, one does observe a stronger increase during the last few elections, especially absenteeism which reached record heights in 1991 and 1995. The total non-vote figures reached a historical high in 1995, especially due to the ever-increasing percentage of absentees from 1981 onwards. The total number of individuals who do not cast a valid vote now stands at about 1 million. Interestingly, since 1977, the figures have always been higher in Brussels than in Wallonia, and higher in Wallonia than in Flanders.⁴⁵

How could one account for these trends? As far as absenteeism is concerned, demographic factors such as the ageing process of the population should not be minimised, as elderly individuals tend to be less socially integrated and tend to have more mobility problems, and as these two phenomena obviously hinder electoral participation (Ackaert et al., 1992: 211; De Winter, 1990: 7). The recurrent differences which are observed between the three Regions -which also happen to have different age structures- provide additional support to this hypothesis. If one looks at the individual voters, it has also been demonstrated that absenteeism is a more occasional, less "structural" (i.e. stable through time) behaviour than the invalid or blank vote (De Winter et al., 1991; Ackaert et al., 1992: 221-222). All things considered, absentees are politically alienated citizens, who are either indifferent or hostile towards politics.

That is also the case for non valid and blank voters, who also display more specific negative attitudes towards the political institutions and identifiable actors, such as the political parties and political personnel (Ackaert et al., 1992: 224). Hence, the strong increase of blank and invalid votes in Wallonia between the 1987 and 1991 legislative elections (as compared with a slight decrease in Flanders) comes as no surprise. Indeed, in Wallonia -as opposed to Flanders with the Vlaams Blok and Rossem lists-, there were fewer alternatives for the alienated voters willing to cast a "protest" vote (Ackaert et al., 1992: 218).

Besides, there is a strong *potential* absenteeism: according to survey data, if the compulsory vote was abolished, only 45% to 55% voters (according to the

⁴⁵ One also observes notable differences between the types of elections (local, provincial, House, Senate, European). As far as blank and invalid votes are concerned, this can be accounted for by factors pertaining to the (subjective) importance and proximity of the elected body, the social distance between the candidates and citizens, and the main issues of the elections (Ackaert et al., 1992: 217-220).

type of election) would still cast a vote (De Winter et.al., 1991: 128 ff.).⁴⁶ It has also been demonstrated that the suppression of the compulsory vote would clearly advantage some parties and disadvantage other parties (Ackaert & De Winter, 1993: 76-77; De Winter, 1994), and that the compulsory vote has played a "social correction" role, i.e. it has compensated some negative effects of socio-economic status on electoral participation (Ackaert & De Winter, 1993: 81; De Winter, 1994).

F. *Head-of-the-list versus preferential vote*

One observes a strong increase of the preferential vote in the course of the 1960s and early 1970s. This was mainly a consequence of the growing importance of the mass-media (especially television) coverage of campaigns and the expansion of personal propaganda (Dewachter 1987: 305-307), as well as the growing level of cognitive mobilisation connected with the increasing proportion of more educated publics. There is also evidence that the growing clientelistic relations between MPs and their constituents from the 1960s on has played an additional role (Dewachter 1987: 310, De Winter, this volume).

However, the picture differs quite a lot between parties and types of elections, and also of course from one electoral district to the other (Dewachter 1987: 307-309; Das, 1992). From the mid-1970s to 1991, no further increase of preferential voting has been observed. However, at the 1995 elections, there are indications that the proportion of preferential votes increased significantly (see table 1).⁴⁷ One may assume that this was a direct consequence of the 1993 electoral reform (see hereabove).

H. *Evolution of the determinants of voting behaviour*

Until the 1950s and early 1960s, there was little doubt that electoral behaviour could largely be explained by variables linked with the two main cleavages which had become institutionalised in the Belgian society and polity: the left-right cleavage and the denominational cleavage. Indeed, by combining these two dimensions (social class/ professional status and religiousness/religious attendance), one could predict a large part of the actual voting behaviour (De Smet & Evalenko, 1956). In the course of the 1960s, in spite of major electoral shifts (see hereabove), four "classical" variables still constituted important predicting factors of electoral behaviour: religious affiliation (PSC/CVP versus PSB and Liberals), professional status (PSB, PSC-CVP), as well as age (PSC/CVP, PSB; Liberals) and gender (PSC-CVP) (Delruelle et.al., 1970: 76-88; 199-222).

However, as is all other Western European nations, societal changes gradually took place -or accelerated- from then on: secularisation, development of the service sector, development of the educational opportunities, development of the mass-media, general increase of welfare,... This also generated new political/electoral behaviour. In 1965 already, no significant relationships could be found between the first two above-mentioned variables and the vote for the newly emer-

⁴⁶ According to a nation-wide survey research conducted in 1992, about 41% Flemish and 36% Walloon voters would "sometimes" or "never" cast a vote if compulsory voting was suppressed. (ISPO/PIOF, 1995: 84).

⁴⁷ The 1991-1995 increase has been even sharper at the Senate elections, where the single constituency was installed: + 16.6% for the PS, + 8.8% for the PSC and + 13.6% for the PRL (preliminary computations).

ging regionalist parties (RW, FDF and Volksunie). The only clear indication was that younger voters were significantly over-represented in the electorate of these parties (Delruelle et al., 1970: 76-88).

At the 1981 elections, one observed that social class and professional status played a less predominant role than in the 1961-1968 period. The importance of religious affiliation declined as well, although it remained more important than social class in Flanders (Delruelle-Vosswinkel, 1983: 169-171). Moreover, and for the first time, there were indications that women (especially in non-rural areas) were not anymore more "traditional" and stable in their voting behaviour than male voters, quite the contrary (Delruelle-Vosswinkel, 1983: 155-156).

At the 1991 elections, classical variables related to the two above-mentioned cleavages (i.e. religious affiliation and social class/professional status) still played a predominant role in Wallonia, at least for the three "traditional" parties. Indeed, these variables were still the main predictors of the vote for the PRL, the PS and the PSC (Frognier, 1994: 56). That was also the case in Flanders, where professional status, age, gender, religious affiliation and level of education still discriminated the different electoral publics (Swyngedouw et al., 1993: 19-23).

However, quite a few elements of change have also been observed. This is mainly linked with the development of different types of electoral behaviour, especially "issue voting" and "protest vote". These phenomena clearly provide a key explanation of the substantial proportion of "floating" or "changing" voters (see hereabove).

At the peak of the linguistic/community struggle, i.e. the 1968-1978 period, it is an undisputed fact that the success of the regionalist parties was basically the result of massive vote transfers from the traditional parties to these "new" parties, as well as a surge of new voters which supported the regionalist claims of these new parties (Delruelle, 1970; 1983). It can also be assumed that these parties received "system-critical" votes, as they also carried a "new politics" agenda. Identically, one may assume that the same combination of issue-voting (environment and quality of life in that case) and protest vote was the key to the breakthrough of the Green parties.

Recent survey evidence confirm these assumptions for the 1991 elections, and allow one to extend this explanatory model to the extreme-right parties, especially the Flemish Vlaams Blok. In the Flemish case, it is confirmed that electoral support for the VU, Agalev and the Vlaams Blok is primarily based on issue-voting (on specific issues: respectively community conflicts, environment and immigration) and protest vote (Billiet et al., 1992a; 1992b; Maddens, 1993: 52-55). The same conclusion can be drawn for the French-speaking Greens (Rihoux, 1994: 111-116). Political protest, as well as a general feeling of political helplessness, is a key to the understanding of the success of these more recent parties (Elcharidus et al., 1993: 27-31; this volume; Swyngedouw et al., 1993: 24).

I. Anything new in the 1990s?

Do all the above-mentioned indicators suggest that the more recent period -especially the first half of the 1990s- have been characterised by more change, more instability than previous periods? It seems that three different stories are told. To start with, as far as *head-of-the-list versus preferential voting* is concerned, the answer is negative, as no significant trends have been observed since the late 1970s, at least if one restricts the analysis to the global figures until 1991.

As far as most other indicators are concerned, this is room for discussion:

- *pillarised versus non-pillarised parties*: the record low of the pillarised parties was reached in 1991, but it was not much lower than in 1971 or 1981;
- *index of electoral fragmentation, number of parties in Parliament, effective number of parties*: the most recent figures have reached record heights, but not markedly higher than throughout the 1980s;
- *volatility at the aggregate level*: the 1987-1991 shifts were indeed considerable, but they were quite comparable with the 1961-1965 and 1978-1981 shifts;
- *absenteeism, blank and invalid vote*: there is a general trend towards more non-voting (especially absenteeism), but this trend is not so spectacular in a longer-term perspective;
- *determinants of voting behaviour*: "protest vote" and "issue-voting" have become significant phenomena, but similar mechanisms were arguably already there in the 1970s and 1980s. Besides, the socio-economic and denominational cleavages are still the main determinants for a majority of voters.

Finally, only for one indicator is there reasonable evidence to suggest that the early 1990s have been characterised by more change. Indeed, if one examines *vote shifts at the individual levels*, the proportion of "movers" does seem to be significantly higher than in previous periods.

All things considered, looking at the different indicators individually, one cannot conclude that the amplitude of change or instability in the first half of the 1990s has been "exceptional" or "unprecedented". However, this conclusion should be moderated for three reasons.

To start with, if one puts aside head-of-the-list versus preferential voting, one does observe that all the indicators of change and instability are there *simultaneously*. Secondly, one should certainly not play down the discrepancies between the different political "sub-systems" of the country. A more detailed enquiry of the various indicators would probably deliver a significantly more changing picture in the Flemish case⁴⁸ than in Wallonia or Brussels. Thirdly, it is now an clearly established fact that a significant proportion of voters (or potential voters) operate outside the realm of the "classical" determinants of voting behaviour and/or are significantly disconnected and alienated from the political sphere.

IV. Provisional conclusion: continuity within change so far...for much longer?

A. An ambiguous diagnosis

As far as the electoral system is concerned, the overriding conclusion is that no radical modifications have been introduced in the post-World War II period, in spite of profound institutional reforms and numerous political crises. In a nutshell, one may argue that the prevailing electoral system (including the successive reforms which have not dramatically changed it) has been considered as a fairly reasonable system by most relevant political parties. The successive reforms were basically the result of compromises between the "traditional" governmental parties. Their cautious initiatives conform quite well with the "fine-tuning" of elec-

⁴⁸ Where more changes have taken place at the level of the political parties as well (Deschouwer, 1994; this volume).

toral systems observed by Lijphart (Lijphart, 1994: 139). At the other end of the spectrum, the attitude the "non-traditional" parties, be they more reformist or more anti-system, has been one of "cautious radicalism" in terms of electoral reform, as they would have more chance of being "losers" than "winners" in the event of a significant reform. And still, it would be somewhat overstated to contend that all parliamentary parties totally agree on the prevailing electoral rules.

As far as electoral behaviour is concerned, the picture is much more ambiguous: the early 1990s were assuredly characterised by change and transformation, but we have found no evidence that the amplitude of these changes are "unprecedented" since the 1960s.

In their disputed essay, Bartolini and Mair argue that political scientists are often tempted to prefer the "(...) *spectre of instability*" to the "(...) *empirical reality of persistence*" (Bartolini & Mair, 1990: xvii). Indeed, even though there was much talk of "breakdown" and "rupture" e.g. after the 1965 and 1981 elections (e.g. Delruelle et al., 1970; Thoveron et al., 1983), the breakdown failed to materialise so far: a majority of voters still vote for the pillarised parties, the older cleavages still "structure" the electoral behaviour of a majority of voters, and one observes little change in terms of coalition formation and decision-making. Besides, the existence of a sizeable proportion of "protest voters" is not a phenomenon which suddenly appeared in 1991. The potential "reservoir" of protest vote has shifted through time, first from the regionalist parties to the Green and other smaller parties, and then to the extreme-right parties, not to mention the different forms of non-voting. Protest has thus become a stable feature of the Belgian electoral scene (Elchardus et al., 1993: 31).

And yet, the indicators of change should not be minimised, although they concern a smaller proportion of voters: i.e. transfers towards "new" parties, the increase of "issue-voting" and "protest voting", the increase of "non-voting" behaviour (especially absenteeism). For one thing, these changes have brought about a dramatic transformation of the party system (Deschouwer, 1994; this volume; De Winter & Dumont, 1996). Furthermore, from an analytical viewpoint, factors of change deserve a priority attention, as they often provide clues to predict future trends (Frogner, 1994b: 261). Indeed, there are increasing indications that a new cleavage is currently developing in the Belgian society and polity.⁴⁹ If that is the case -and provided that this new cleavage really corresponds to a genuine societal cleavage (see e.g. Elchardus, this volume)- what will be the practical consequences in terms of stability or instability of the Belgian political system(s)? Will it bring about not only an electoral "dealignment", but also a durable "realignment"? A detailed discussion of this question goes beyond the scope of this article.

Finally, it is quite clear that the changes in electoral behaviour have *not* been brought about by changes in the electoral system, as the significant electoral changes did not coincide with electoral reforms. This is one more confirmation that electoral systems explain far from everything about electoral behaviour and party systems (Lijphart, 1994: 151). Indeed, one should not look for a direct causal relationship between the electoral system and electoral behaviour. It may very

49 A detailed discussion of this point goes beyond the scope of this article. On the "new cleavage(s)" discussion in the Belgian context, see e.g. Swyngedouw, 1993; 1994; 1995; Billiet & Swyngedouw, 1995; Frogner 1994c; Kitschelt & Hellemans, 1990: 34-41; Elchardus, this volume.

well be that causality should be inverted, i.e. that electoral reforms are often implemented because of (actual or anticipated) electoral shifts.

B. *What next? Approaching the breaking-down point?*

So far, no "system breakdown" has taken place. But how long will that state of fact remain unchanged in post-unitary Belgium? The argument shall not be restricted to the electoral system and electoral behaviour, as they both (at least partly) depend on other factors. Indeed, one observes numerous factors of potential instability which could lead to more significant changes. For the sake of the argument, four questions will be addressed separately, but it is quite clear that they are tightly linked together.

a. *Different electoral rules at the regional level?*

So far, it has been demonstrated that electoral reforms have been the result of political compromise agreements. What will happen if different balances of power between the *regierungsfähig* parties at the regional level lead to the formation of different coalitions, especially in Flanders and in Wallonia? The Regions have been granted the right to modify the electoral districts as well as the assembly size -only as far as the regional elections are concerned-, whereas all the other rules (including the all-important electoral formula) remain a federal prerogative. Hence, it may well be that a significant reform will be implemented only in one region, which would for instance lead to an increase or (less probably) a decrease of the *effective* threshold of representation. This could lead to an even more "disjointed" political system. For instance, some Flemish parties (Agalev, VU, SP) have already put forward the introduction of a single district for the Flemish regional elections. Besides, some issues related to the electoral system which are now "buried" are bound to come back on the agenda in the 1999-2000 period, i.e. when the new "electoral cycle" (see hereabove) is really installed for the first time. For instance, at the 2000 local elections, how will one apply the voting obligation to non-Belgian EU citizens, who are most often not bound by such an obligation in their country?

b. *A broadening gap between the voter and the political sphere?*

As far as electoral behaviour is concerned, one should not underestimate possible additional destabilising factors which would be impossible to counter by "electoral engineering". As in pre-Berlusconian Italy, one observes growing pressures and frustrations vis-à-vis the political system: problems of "governability", political alienation, crisis of confidence *vis-à-vis* politics and low levels of political satisfaction (Frogner & Aish-Van Vaerenbergh, 1994: 13-14; ISPO-PIOP 1995)⁵⁰. One also observes party-political fragmentation, political corruption, and there are indications that the patronage resources of the political personnel are declining (De Winter, this volume). Besides, the non-negligible proportion of "movers" does not constitute a homogeneous category, and it becomes increasingly difficult for the mainstream political parties to effectively mobilise the vote of the more detached and alienated individuals.

⁵⁰ This argument would deserve a more detailed enquiry. Actually, according to survey evidence, it looks as though the current level of political dissatisfaction is not lower (or even a but higher) than it was e.g. in the early 1980s (see. e.g. Eurobarometer data).

And yet, a broadening gap between the citizens/voters and the political sphere would not automatically bring about more protest and more instability: alternatively, it could lead to more apathy and more passive modes of electoral behaviour.

c. Less checks and balances in federal Belgium?

So far, coalition mechanisms have constituted an important element of checks and balances, both at the national/federal and regional/community levels. Indeed, Belgian multipartism has been moderated so far by two mechanisms. On the one hand, at the national/federal level, coalitions always brought together whole party "families" (i.e. PS and SP, PSC and CVP, PRL and PVV). So far, these mechanisms have ensured the protection of the weaker partner (Socialists in Flanders, Catholics in Wallonia). On the other hand, one observes that the regional/community coalitions have always brought together the same parties (i.e. Socialists/Christian-democrats or Liberals/Christian-democrats), with the notable exception of the recently formed executive of the Brussels Region (Liberals/FDF and Socialists) (see also Deschouwer, this volume). It remains to be seen what the (centrifugal?) effects of the new Brussels case will be, whether it constitutes a prefiguration of similar developments from 1999 on, and whether this will have direct or indirect implications on the evolution of the electoral legislation (see hereabove).

Furthermore, the potential political consequences of the disjointment of the regional and federal elections from 1999 onwards should not be minimised. This could produce even more "disjointed" regional political systems.

d. Towards a more disjointed political discourse?

An important consequence of the gradual formation of separate political systems (Flanders, Wallonia, Brussels) is the fact that -except in the Brussels case-, there is no constituency in which Flemish or French-speaking politicians can be held "accountable" by the voters of the other community. Hence, a non-cooperative and aggressive attitude by a politician from one community cannot be "punished" by the other community, e.g. in electoral terms. This state of fact reinforces the centrifugal trends, as politicians can easily resort to "double language", i.e. change their discourse when they are addressing their own constituency or the other linguistic community.

e. Towards a real-scale breakdown (for once)?

Most of the issues and uncertainties which have been stressed hereabove will be on the agenda in the 1999-2000 period which will be characterised by a succession of elections: regional and European (1999), federal (1999), provincial and local (2000). At the end of this new electoral cycle, one will be able to judge whether or not the famed ability of Belgian political decision-makers to "muddle through" difficult situations still holds true... It is becoming increasingly doubtful that all major political parties from the different regions are still willing to "play the Belgian game". Besides, one cannot exclude a "system overload" in the 1999-2000 period, i.e. an accumulation of conflicts pertaining to each one of the main cleavages of Belgian society: socio-economic (e.g. around social benefits, employment,...), denominational (e.g. around the education system, ethical issues,...), linguistic (e.g. federalism versus confederalism or separation,...) and even uni-

versalistic/libertarian versus particularistic/authoritarian (e.g. immigration, minority issues,...).

This could mean the final explosion (cfr. *"the big one"*, Deschouwer, this volume)... or just another package deal *"à la belge"* -probably the most inventive one so far. Will the Belgian political decision-makers be willing and/or able to perform one more "miracle"? At this point, nothing can be taken for granted, and no scenario can be excluded.

Abstract

Since the November 1991 elections, it has become a common statement to argue that Belgium has entered a -possibly unprecedented- period of change and instability. This article focuses on the evolution of the electoral system and electoral behaviour, in order to test this widely agreed-upon judgement.

All things considered, one observes that the electoral system has not been radically modified since World War II. In spite of the transformation of the country into a federal state and several severe conflicts, political decision-makers have opted for the "fine-tuning" of the electoral system instead of radical reforms.

As far as electoral behaviour is concerned, the picture is less clear. On one hand, relying on various indicators, one does observe that the early 1990s were characterised by change and transformation. On the other hand, one cannot conclude that the amplitude of change or instability in the early 1990s has been "exceptional" or "unprecedented" as compared with earlier periods.

Building upon this ambiguous diagnosis, the author speculates on the probability of a major breakdown of the Belgian political system at the turn of the century.

Change in the Italian Party System

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I. Introduction ¹

The Italian party system appears to have undergone a rather dramatic transformation in recent years. Its extent is revealed by the fact that none of the 13 major competitors in the 1994 Chamber of Deputies' proportional election (accounting for almost 95% of the votes and all but a handful of seats) were present with the same names and symbols as in the 1987 election. Moreover, all but four of them, the Democratic Party of the Left (PDS) and Communist Refoundation (RC) as well as the Catholic inspired La Rete and the Radical Party's (PR) new electoral incarnation, Lista Pannella, experienced important formal or even substantial changes since the 1992 election. Although only one of the 13 lists, Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia, appears to be completely new, the sheer number of these changes, albeit formal and superficial in some cases, reveals not only the magnitude of the party system's transformation, but also the radical shift in public attitudes toward the old, party-based, regime. Because party is now a word used only with contempt by politicians and commentators, it is a label which electoral competitors carefully try to avoid. In the 1994 election only three of the most important competitors (PDS, PSI, PPI) still called themselves "parties" ².

By 1994 even Italy's surviving historical parties had adopted new organizational models. The PDS remained closest to its earlier tradition, and the preliminary party rules accepted in 1991 provided a formal structure which resembled the mass party model, albeit in a context of emerging factionalism and stratarchy. All of the other traditional parties, by contrast, were caught up in self-reform processes which threatened to produce even more radical results ³. Moreover, there was also a widespread belief that representation should be developed through non-party organizations, with the idea of partyhood being considered a thing of the past, and, as we have seen, with "party" itself becoming almost a dirty word. This article attempts to assess the extent and the significance of the change and to provide some tentative explanations for at least some of its aspects. These ob-

1 This paper is based on research on party organizations and anti-party sentiment conducted within the framework of international projects. More extensive analyses can be found in Bardi and Morlino (1994) and Bardi (1996).

2 The PSI has since dissolved and refounded itself dropping the word *partito* and calling itself *Socialisti Italiani* (SI). A fourth contender, RC, officially calls itself *Partito della Rifondazione Comunista*, but the word "Partito" is almost always omitted.

3 The 1995 split between the *Partito Popolare* and the *Cristiani Democratici Uniti* (CDU) may have put an end to post-1994 transformations, but the restlessness of Italy's political parties would be rekindled in case of a new electoral law and probably at election time even if elections should be held with the present system.

jectives will be pursued addressing three set of questions. For one, the magnitude of the change, involving parties, organizational models and even the party-based notion of representative democracy, is in itself a question that requires an explanation that goes beyond the consideration of the importance of the tangen-topoli scandals and mani pulite investigations. These were perhaps necessary catalysts to start the process that led to the downfall of once very powerful, even if corrupt, individuals. But they cannot by themselves explain, among other things, why the process was not limited to the replacement of those individuals and spread to the party system and even to the party-based model of democracy. Secondly, it is important to determine the actual extent of party system change. If the effects produced by the change on the actors in the Italian party system, the parties themselves, were rather evident and dramatic, those affecting the party system's structural elements were more difficult to assess. In other words, the units interacting in the system definitely underwent profound changes, but the system's structure (number of parties, competitiveness) was not necessarily changed by the transformation or replacement of some or even all of its units. Finally, party system change, be it superficial or structural, requires in itself an explanation. Changes in the structure of electoral competition (the electoral law, the increasing importance of the media), anti-party sentiment, the erosion of sub-cultures, and even the emergence of new cleavages or the rekindling of dormant ones have all been blamed or praised, depending on viewpoints, for being factors in the party system's transformation. Although they all deserve equal consideration, special attention will be devoted in this paper to a discussion of anti-party sentiment. In fact, a study of anti-party sentiment, being directed at elites as well as masses can help us identify and analyze pressures for change coming from within the parties as well as those coming from without.

II. The organizational adaptation of Italian parties

The collapse of Italy's historic parties was rather sudden, but a certain malaise had been affecting them at least since the early 1960s (Bardi and Morlino, 1994). Throughout this period, social changes posed demands which required parties to attempt organizational reforms. However, the most important transformations did not really bear fruit until the early 1990s. Indeed most Italian parties underwent a gradual process of organizational adaptation with the declared intent to open up to the needs and requests coming from an evolving society. This process was in most cases very superficial and did not represent a proper response. In fact, at the same time, parties developed to its fullest extent the partitocrazia system with the clear effect of *making society and the state adapt* to their needs. During the early years of the Italian Republic political parties had established very important links with organized interest groups and created the conditions for their occupation of the state. This was to made possible by the intrinsic weakness of Italian civil society (Pasquino, 1985, p. 1 and passim). Most importantly, Italian civil society lacked a hegemonic class, a role never acquired by the Italian bourgeoisie. Party predominance over society became even stronger after 1960. The historic parties continued to maintain very well developed roots in at least some parts of the country. In the case of the MSI, however, the extension of such roots was rather limited. If anything, the nature of this relationship changed, especially after the end of the 1960s. A "growth" of civil society either caused or simply coincided with a decline of "ideology" and a parallel growth of "opinion" within the Italian electorate (Farneti, 1983, p. 156). Moreover, the frequent resort to referendums after 1974 tended to make the Italian electorate in-

creasingly more issue oriented and, consequently, less ideological⁴. The modest efforts made by political parties to respond to these changes proved to be inadequate. It would then appear that the parallel process of organizational adaptation and societal encroachment by political parties had the dual effect of delaying the crisis of party in Italy while at the same time deepening the separation between the parties themselves and important sectors of civil society, those that did not benefit directly from the *partitocrazia* system.

Indeed the amount of resources drained by the *partitocrazia* system had reached enormous proportions. The reality of Italian party organizations can be grasped only by exploring the complex, and often illegal, system of relationships between political parties and organized or even individual interests. Italian party organizations certainly were enormously expensive machines, even if scarce availability and unreliability of financial data makes accurate assessments very difficult. Official party finance data are practically impossible to obtain prior to 1974, when party budgets first became public and standardized according to the law on the public funding of political parties. The new law was also intended to discourage illegal contributions, but failed to curb political corruption as well as the involvement of public companies in illegal party financing. The cost of party politics in Italy increased enormously since the mid-1970s as a result of the "media revolution", of the "office revolution", which required huge investments, and of increasing paid staff salary expenditures. Parties could therefore hardly afford to give up funding from public companies, despite its becoming illegal; hence the explosion of the *tangenti* system since the 1970s. The total amount illegally obtained by Italian political parties was estimated at some 3,400 billion lire a year (*La Repubblica*, 20 February 1993, p. 7), at least ten times the total official income of all Italian political parties. The *tangentopoli* investigations should have considerably reduced these amounts, determining serious financial problems for all traditional parties.

Italian parties' links with civil society were also very problematic. During the first two decades of the Italian Republic the most important parties had a firm grip on the trade unions which were seen as voters' and activists' reservoirs to be used at election time. The situation changed after the momentous late 1960s in response to growing popular demands for more assertive behavior. As a result, the unions sought and obtained more autonomy and even a degree of independence from the political parties. This could be seen in the near-unification of the three major confederations (CGIL, CISL, UIL) and in the acquisition of an autonomous role in their relationships with the government and with the State at large. Party hegemony over the unified workers' movement was definitively broken during the 1980s. The prime minister Craxi's decision to modify the cost of living adjustment mechanism known as the *scala mobile*, created a split in the union movement, and in the CGIL itself, between the Catholic and socialist components, on the one hand, and the communist component, on the other⁵. The emergence in the late 1980s of powerful autonomous unions and COBAS (*comitati di*

⁴ It could be surmised that the referendums, for the first time in Italian history, forced electors to make decisions on the basis of desired policy outcomes rather than ideological prejudice. On these grounds one could perhaps explain why sizeable minorities of Catholic voters supported divorce and abortion in extremely divisive referendums. Moreover, such issues cut across the traditional left/right dimension, which can be arguably construed as weakening ideological positions.

⁵ The communist and socialist components of the CGIL have since been disbanded.

base, or grassroots committees), which mainly organized teachers, civil servants and railroad workers, eventually favored a return to more unified action by the traditional confederations, but by then they had lost most of their political importance.

The de-ideologization and secularization of the 1960s also strongly affected the relations between the parties and their collateral organizations. As the traditional organizations declined through the erosion of the subcultures, the parties tried to develop new structures or strategies in order to open themselves up to new social movements and actors in civil society as a whole. Moreover, they made every effort to obtain control of mass-communication media and expand their reach beyond the fading subcultural confines. Political parties always had a very important role in news publishing in Italy. During the 1950s, in addition to their official newspapers, the larger parties had also acquired control of some important "independent" titles, whose line was then controlled by the party-sponsored appointment of editors and journalists. The DC, as the cornerstone of every governmental coalition, also had a strong predominance in the control of radio and television until a 1976 Constitutional Court ruling put an end to state monopoly of radio and television broadcasts. The ruling permitted private broadcasts at the local level. But by the mid-1980s, many of the newly created local stations were concentrated into three national networks owned by Silvio Berlusconi. Berlusconi was able to go beyond the limits posed by the Constitutional Court with the decisive support received from the PSI and Bettino Craxi, who was in turn able to redress the television media balance which at the time was still heavily pro-DC (Marletti, 1987). The DC controlled the presidency of RAI (the state-owned broadcasting network) and RAI 1, the most popular channel, while the PSI controlled RAI 2. A possible PCI opposition to this partition was prevented by giving that party control of RAI 3, the most recently created and least popular state channel. The impression made on the public by this strategy was extremely negative because of the visibility of the sector affected by the partition and was very effectively exploited by the opponents of the *partitocrazia*, such as Marco Pannella.

This brief description of the organizational evolution of Italian political parties and of their changing relationship with civil society illustrates how changes in the party system and in the party organizations themselves, which were triggered off by the *mani pulite* investigations in 1992-93, can only partially be explained as the simple consequence of these investigations. The investigations rather served as a catalyst for changes which the party leaderships had been trying, successfully up to then, to postpone indefinitely, even if pressures for extensive reform had been building up for almost thirty years. To be sure, the discovery of *tangentopoli* and the consequent public outcry against the political parties and "their system" may well explain the *timing* of the transformation, but they shed only limited light on the reasons why it occurred. Italian party organizations' inadequacies could already be seen in the important changes that took place *prior* to 1992. These include: the 1991 reform and split of the PCI (Ignazi, 1992) and the emergence of new actors, such as the PR, the Verdi, and La Rete, all of which organized according to non-traditional models, not to mention the Lega Nord, with its overtly anti-system goals. Each of these new actors (and later again, Forza Italia) seemed better able than many of their traditional counterparts to respond to the emerging needs of certain sectors of civil society. While the party elites rhetorically emphasized the need to adjust their organizations to these new circumstances with repeated calls for the "opening up" of parties to civil society, reforms responded only superficially to social demands, and were in fact catering only to the needs of the party elites themselves at various levels. After 1992, the

manipulative investigations had some direct effects on the political parties and their organizations (for one, the complete disruption of the illegal system of party financing made the old party models obsolete), but, most of all, started a process of much more radical changes that were simply long overdue. Political parties responses to ostensibly "adapt" to societal demands were certainly important in delaying such changes but could not hold off indefinitely the transformation.

III. The party system after the 1994 elections

Although the full extent of the change only became manifest as a result of the vote, the 1994 elections did nothing but formalize changes that had been unfolding since the beginning of the decade. In fact, the period was also marked by important societal and political system changes: in the electoral laws and in the relations between politics and civil society, besides those in the party system and in individual parties⁶. The Leghe (Leagues), now collectively known with the name of their federation, Lega Nord (LN), became a force to be reckoned with already in the regional elections in May 1990; in February 1991 the Communist party (PCI) dissolved itself and formed the Democratic Party of the Left (Partito democratico della Sinistra, PDS); in June 1991, for the first time, the result of a referendum ran counter to the positions of the traditional parties; the general elections in April 1992 witnessed the establishment of a new dimension in the national political space represented by the opposition of a variety new parties (e.g., the Leghe, Verdi, La Rete and Lista Pannella) mobilizing against the traditional formations⁷; in 1993, the complex relationship developed over the years between political parties, civil society, and the economy virtually came to an end as a result of decision by the government to privatize a large share of the Italian public sector⁸; and finally, the March 1994 general elections that resulted in a substantial victory for a right-wing electoral alliance led by Silvio Berlusconi's newly-formed Forza Italia, and including both the Lega Nord and the former Movimento Sociale (MSI), now renamed Alleanza Nazionale (AN), appeared to have made the change irreversible.

Thus, it should come as no surprise that the Italian academic debate after the 1994 election has been focussed, among other things, on the assessment of the magnitude and the quality of party system change (Bartolini and D'Alimonte, 1995; Melchionda, 1995; Bardi 1996; Morlino, 1996; Pappalardo, 1996). In general such efforts have analyzed changes in the party system's structural elements such as number of relevant parties, ideological distance and concentration, competitiveness and direction of competition, size and distribution of opposition parties, referring more or less explicitly to Giovanni Sartori's (1976) well known criteria. Here we shall limit our attention to Sartori's model's more clearly structural ele-

6 In this article I will only refer very briefly to the new electoral law and to the debate on electoral reform, topics of another contribution in this issue. Considerations on societal changes will be included in the second part of this article, which will attempt to formulate some hypotheses about the change.

7 It could be argued that, even before the reform of the electoral law, the 1992 elections also marked the beginning of important changes in the Italian party system (Bardi, 1996).

8 It must be admitted, however, that the implementation of this decision, the symbolic value of which remains very high, has encountered many more difficulties than originally expected.

ments, number of parties and ideological distance, and only cursorily to other, non-structural, characteristics.

TABLE 1
ITALY 1987-1994
Parties in the Italian party system: indicators

	TV	BV	MP	PwS	EP	PP
1987	8.4	1.3	9	14	4.1	12- 9
1992	14.2	7.5	10	16	5.7	13-10
1994	36.2	8.9	10	20	5.7	8-10

Sources:

TV = total volatility; BV = Block volatility; EP = Number of effective parties; MP = Number of major parties: my own calculations based on official electoral results.

PP = Number of parliamentary parties; PwS = Number of parties that obtained seats: Bartolini & D'Alimonte (1995).

Notes:

In 1994 the number of effective parties' index in the Chamber of Deputies is calculated on the basis of seat distribution among parliamentary parties; the index is 3.6 when calculated counting electoral cartels as single parties.

The TV, BV, and MP indices were calculated according to criteria used by Bartolini & Mair (1990); the EP index is from Laakso & Taagepera (1979).

PP: the first figure in each cell relates to the Chamber of Deputies and the second one to the Senate.

Table 1 lists scores on a number of indicators of the extent of changes in the party system concerning voter mobility and the number of parties between the 1987 election, whose scores well summarize the continuity experienced by the Italian party system since 1958, and the 1994 election⁹. The immediate impression one gets from at least some of the indices is that the 1992 and 1994 elections have almost completely transformed the Italian party system. In fact, if the 1993 electoral law reform is certainly responsible for some of the dramatic effects reflected in most 1994 scores, some of the factors at the root of the Italian party system's transformation must have already been at work at least two years before as demonstrated by values registered in 1992. Between the two elections there is indeed more continuity than initially meets the eye. To be sure, the 1994 TV score, perhaps the highest ever observed in non-exceptional democratic elections (Bartolini & Mair, 1990, p. 69), gives a dramatic impression of the change. But volatility is a measure which is very much affected by changes that may occur in the composition of the field of parties contesting the election, some of which, such as the emergence of Forza Italia and the splits that affected the DC, were very important in 1994. This consideration points to the relevance of the 1992 TV score, which was not influenced by equally important changes on the offer side and remains, after the 1994 one, the highest ever in the Italian Republic's

⁹ Analyses of such continuity and pre-1987 values for most Table 1 indices can be found in Bardi (1996) and Morlino (1996).

electoral history. The departure from the past and the relative continuity between 1992 and 1994 are confirmed by the similarity in the two elections' BV scores which are obviously more impervious to effects determined by variations in party labels.

It would then appear that a higher degree of voter mobility was already at work in 1992. The full extent of the phenomenon, partially reflected in TV scores¹⁰, was certainly magnified in 1994 by changes on the offer side caused by the effects of the manipulative investigations, but also by anticipations of the possible effects of the new electoral law. The Chamber of deputies' new electoral law and the referendum that modified the Senate's introduced the plurality system for 75% of the seats, which were to be elected in single-member districts. This feature of the new electoral law(s) was expected by many to produce structural effects on the party system, such as a visible reduction in the number of parties. Critics of this view on the other hand asserted that the remaining 25% of the seats to be assigned through proportional representation, were a sufficiently large portion to help perpetuate the Italian party system's chronic fragmentation. One election is certainly not enough to produce the full effects of electoral reform, but at least some were expected. The new electoral law, indeed forced a multitude of parties to join electoral cartels. But post-election political dynamics, such as the formation of parliamentary parties, showed that some parties and groups interpreted electoral alliances as means to obtain more seats in the election, and not as first steps towards the formation of more permanent common party structures. As we just said, this was indeed expected and even anticipated by critics of the new law (for one Giovanni Sartori who did so in numerous newspaper commentaries) even before the 1994 elections. But this is not to be ascribed exclusively to inadequacies of the new electoral law. In fact, only electoral competition rules have been changed with respect to the past, whereas parliamentary organization and procedures, government formation tactics and rules, coalition strategies and dynamics have virtually remained the same¹¹. In other words, even if new electoral competition rules can perhaps foster tendencies towards a reduction in the number of relevant parties in what could be called the "electoral" party system, such pressures lose much of their importance after the election, and other sets of rules condition inter-party relations in what could be defined the "parliamentary" party system. Obviously this is an analytical more than a conceptual or even substantial distinction. The two labels actually represent two facets of party systems which in the present Italian one appear to be particularly distinct: the "electoral" one responds to the requirements of plurality competition and is structured accordingly around two major coalitions, now generally referred to as *Polo* (center-right) and *Ulivo* (center-left); the "parliamentary" one is on the other hand regulated by the other, mostly consensual (Lijphart, 1984), features of the Italian political system and is still characterized by very high frag-

10 As is well known volatility is not a very accurate measure of voter mobility and does not reflect the actual number of voters who switch preferences between elections. Changes in volatility indices are however assumed to reflect changes in voter stability/mobility trends.

11 The only modification are the result of the disappearance/emergence of actors in the system and not of reforms of the formal rules of the game(s).

mentation¹². The two "systems" coexist, with the electoral one surviving even between elections, but with very limited impact on inter-election dynamics¹³.

It should come as no surprise that electoral reform has produced in Italy a greater divergence between the "electoral" and the "parliamentary" party systems that is commonly observed, and that changes in the former are much more evident than in the latter. All the other table 1 indices, which are calculated on the basis of individual parties and lists rather than on electoral cartels, in fact show no or very little change between 1992 and 1994. MP and EP scores are exactly the same, as are the PP ones for the Senate. The 1994 Chamber of Deputies' PP score, 8, is on the other hand much lower than the 1992 one, 13. But this appears to be much more a consequence of a more rigid application of rules for the formation of parliamentary groups (Bartolini & D'Alimonte, 1995, p. 432) than to an actual reduction in the number of parties that obtained seats, which actually increased from 16 to 20¹⁴. Overall the situation is perhaps best summarized by taking a closer look at EP index scores: 1987's 4.1 is slightly above the average (3.7) for all the elections contested up to that point whereas for 1992 and 1994 we can observe much higher, identical, scores (5.7). On the basis of these indicators alone, it would appear that the greater fragmentation, produced perhaps by increased voter mobility between 1987 and 1992 was not offset by the new electoral law and in general by developments that occurred between the last two elections. Obviously indices are biased by the methods that are used to calculate them. But if we accept formal parliamentary affiliation as a criterion for determining the number of parties in a party system, we must come to the conclusion that, at least from a numerical viewpoint, the structure of the Italian party system changed somewhat between 1987 and 1992, but did not change at all between 1992 and 1994.

One should not however discount completely the importance of changes in the electoral party system, as its shape is crucial for one very important overall party systemic dimension: competition (Sartori, 1976, *passim*). The EP index, if calculated on the basis of electoral cartels is 3.6, a score slightly below the general Italian average and much lower than the 1992 one. Sartori (1976, p. 315, *passim*) considers mathematical indicators useful and perhaps even important, but certainly prefers what he calls "nominal routes" for counting relevant parties. The use of nominal criteria for the counting of parties in the electoral party system requires an analysis of electoral competition under the new electoral laws. The new laws effectively divide the competition into two different arenas, respecti-

12 The two labels have the sole purpose to highlight the nature of the units making up the two systems' units (*electoral* cartels and *parliamentary* groups). The latter, however, in most polities, especially those where the identification of extra-parliamentary parties is easier than in the current Italian situation, would correspond to parties proper.

13 The two electoral cartels even have official leaders (Silvio Berlusconi for the center-right, Romano Prodi for the center-left), but it is clear that the political game is again the prerogative of individual *party* leaders, who often express positions which cut across electoral cartels as is the case of the debate on institutional reforms. According to Giovanni Sartori (1996), Italy has a two-layer political system whose units are "the cartels at the official level.... and the parties at the actual operational level" and whose dynamics are highly dysfunctional.

14 As our interest here is to assess the structure of the "electoral party system", all figures in table 1 refer to the immediate post election situation and do not reflect ulterior, successive, fragmentation (see below).

vely regulated by proportional and plurality criteria for seat assignment. In the proportional arena numerous parties appear to be relevant (Bartolini & D'Alimonte, 1995; Melchionda, 1995), whereas only two/three parties/coalitions seem to be competitive in the plurality one. Only the left-wing coalition (then called *Progressisti*) presented candidates in most single-member constituencies. The right wing on the other hand presented candidates under different labels in the North and in the South respectively called *Polo delle libertà* and *Polo del buon governo*. Berlusconi's Forza Italia joined forces with the Lega Nord in those regions where that party had at least some electoral following and with Alleanza Nazionale in the rest of the country. While jointly the left and right coalitions won all but handfuls of plurality seats in the Chamber of Deputies and in the Senate, the center coalition *Patto per l'Italia*, besides winning about half of the remaining plurality seats (seven in total), was competitive in about 15 percent of the constituencies (Melchionda, 1995, pp. 143-144). The combined effects of the proportional and plurality electoral competitions were different in the two chambers: in the Chamber of Deputies the right's strong overall majority (366 seats out of 630) made, in Sartorian terms, every other group irrelevant, with the sole exception of the leftist opposition (213 strong); but in the Senate, the right's failure to obtain an absolute majority allowed also the centrist pact (31 seats) and even the three senator strong *Südtiroler Volkspartei* (SVP) to meet Sartori's relevance criteria by giving them coalition or at least blackmail potential¹⁵. It must be stressed, however, that the Senate's results were to a large extent determined by the right wing coalition's flawed electoral strategy in a number of regions. It is almost certain that similar errors will not be repeated in the future. We can therefore conclude that at least potentially the number of relevant parties in the Senate's electoral competition is very close to the Chamber of Deputies and significantly lower than in the pre-1994 system.

But shortly after the elections, with the formation of parliamentary groups no longer bound by electoral pacts to respect coalition agreements, and even more evidently a few months later when the Lega Nord withdrawal from the right wing coalition brought down the Berlusconi government, the Italian party system was returned to its pre-1994 fragmentation in both houses, with the additional complication represented by the absence of a strong center pivot such as the DC (Morlino, 1996)¹⁶. Even what appears to be a deliberately conservative count made according to Sartori's nominal criteria identifies six relevant parties, which can be reduced to five (Sartori's crucial threshold) only by admitting that the Lega Nord (whose coalition/blackmail potential during the present transitional phase has on the other hand been proven to be crucial) lies outside the left/right dimension (Pappalardo, 1996). In any event, there is almost unanimous consensus that what we have defined as the parliamentary party system remains very fragmented; the pressures that come from the electoral party system do not seem to be sufficient to reduce such fragmentation, even if, as Pappalardo points out, the independence of some of the parliamentary fragments from the political line of

15 Actually even individual senators were relevant in the election of the Senate's President which was decided, in favor of the right coalition's candidate, Carlo Scognamiglio, by only one vote.

16 The trend towards fragmentation is still in process. The recent split of the PPI and the emergence of numerous other groups and parties have made parliament more fragmented than it ever was, as demonstrated by the record twenty-six parties consulted by President Scalfaro after the resignation of the Dini government.

the dominant parties within their respective electoral cartels is rather limited. This last observation makes more uncertain a prognosis for the future of the Italian party system, at least on the sole basis of the relevant number of parties criterion.

Of course no conclusion, let alone prognosis, can even be attempted without an analysis of the other structural variable: ideological distance. The assessment of ideological distance, just like counting the relevant parties in the system, depends on the indicators one chooses, but also on the type of party system, electoral or parliamentary, one considers. Two contributions that have recently tackled the task of measuring or assessing ideological distance in the post-1994 party system (Morlino, 1996; Pappalardo, 1996), have come to rather diverging conclusions, possibly as a result of the different indicators they used. Moreover Pappalardo's own indicators can have different values depending on the level (type of system) chosen in the analysis¹⁷. Morlino observes that after a period of party system de-radicalization, leading to the 1994 elections, we are now observing a new radicalization resulting from post-election instability (high volatility, uncertainty about the rules of the game, low institutionalization and weak societal rooting of the new actors). This new radicalization, and the associated increase or maintenance of ideological distance at values typical of the old, polarized, system is illustrated with electoral data, which show a post-1994 increase in support for left and right and a drop for the center, and with the description of an "accentuated verbal violence in political discourse throughout 1994 and 1995", and of the associated intensity of the political conflict. Pappalardo uses other indicators attributing most importance to one based on mass-surveyed left-right self-placements which he calls "left-right polarization". The index is calculated as the difference between the two extreme parties' identifiers' left-right self-placement averages, customarily measured on a one to ten scale. Pappalardo traces the evolution of the index with time-series data between 1975 and 1995. During this period, and as a consequence of the already described party-system transformation (at least in terms of its basic units, as we are still looking at the structure), the two extreme parties have undergone some changes: on the left, the PCI has been replaced by one of its splinters, RC; on the right, the MSI has evolved into AN, an organization that includes it, while at the same time trying to appeal also to broader, more moderate, sectors of the electorate. It is felt that both these parties no longer have their predecessors' anti-system characteristics (Morlino, 1996), but this does not produce a dramatic change in ideological distance, which drops from 5.8 to 5.4 between 1975 and 1995 (Pappalardo, 1996). This finding would seem to confirm Morlino's differently based analysis according to which the Italian party-system is presently at least as radicalized as it was in its polarized pluralism heyday. But according to Pappalardo extreme parties and lateral "poles" are no longer one and the same thing: the latter would now coincide with the center-left and center-right "blocks", as a consequence of shifts in both the electoral and the inter-electoral competition's "centers of gravity". The system's relevant maximum ideological distance has to be measured as the difference between *electoral-coalition* averages. If this is done, the 1995 index score drops to 4.2, a value considerably lower than those previously observed in Italy and closer to other European countries', such as Great Britain's (3.0 in 1993). Even if we are not yet in a position to accept Pappalardo's argument that both the electoral

17 In actuality, as we shall see, Pappalardo, in measuring ideological distance, examines two sets of values of his indicators, but his conclusions are based on only one set, relative to electoral cartels, which he considers more relevant than individual parties.

and the inter-electoral competition's "centers of gravity" have shifted, his analysis confirms the differences that exist between what we have defined as coexisting party-systems. In fact his center-left and center-right blocks are nothing but the basic units of the electoral party-system.

Summing up, the two components of the dual party-system created by the electoral reform, in the absence of a more extensive, and with it consistent, institutional reform, the electoral and the parliamentary party-systems, are not only formed by different basic units, but also present different structural characteristics. To be sure, the parliamentary party-system's transformation concerns its basic units more than its structure: number of relevant parties and ideological distance seem to be practically unchanged¹⁸. The electoral party-system, on the other hand, in terms of both number of relevant parties and ideological distance tends towards a form of moderate pluralism. Although post-electoral political events seem to indicate that the electoral party-system and its actors are playing a subordinate role, it is evidently exerting some pressure on the parliamentary one. This is certainly visible in the efforts made by the various components of the two major electoral coalitions to present united fronts on most major questions. Effects on ideological polarization are not as visible in this transitional phase, but on specific policy questions, such as institutional reforms, a degree of convergence can be observed at least between selected components of the two major electoral parties.

IV. Anti-party sentiment as a factor of change

If one single factor of party-system change should be singled out in the current Italian case, anti-party sentiment would be the obvious choice. Although other factors contributed to the change, anti-party sentiment, expressed in the vote for anti-party parties in the 1994 general election, appeared to be its immediate cause. Moreover, it also contributed to make or made more effective other factors of change, such as, respectively electoral reform (via a referendum) or the investigations on political corruption (through unprecedented popular support). Focussing on anti-party sentiment also presents an analytical advantage "as it can profitably be studied at two levels: the elite level and the mass level" (Poguntke and Scarrow, 1996). This could also permit some inferences about the existence of a causal relationship between the two. Elite anti-party sentiment may develop first and then generate mass anti-party sentiment, with the aim of producing changes agreeable to both masses and elites; elites may instrumentally use for their own purposes existing mass anti-party sentiment; or elites may even have to bow to insuppressible eruptions of mass anti-party attitudes. To understand their relationship and their joint or separate effects, it is necessary to observe empirically the evolution of both sets of sentiments.

Italy's major party system change indeed appears to be connected to the development of anti-party sentiments at both levels. An unprecedented number of anti-party parties contested the 1994 parliamentary election possibly reflecting a visi-

18 The only caution here is suggested by the disappearance of anti-system parties. This would mean that, even if the system is very fragmented and radicalized, it no longer responds to Sartori's polarized pluralism model. Hence, probably, Morlino's (1996) definition of the current system as "neo-polarized pluralism".

ble manifestation of elite anti-party sentiment¹⁹. Moreover, all three major components of the winning coalition(s), Forza Italia (FI), the Lega Nord (LN), and Alleanza Nazionale (AN), appeared to be standard-bearers of anti-party sentiment. Their electoral success was interpreted as a triumph of anti-party sentiment at the mass level as well. A closer look, however, shows that the values embodied by the winning coalition(s) were also strongly anti-system and represented challenges to the country's very Constitution. This was the case for the MSI, the anti-constitution party *par excellence*, for the LN, perennially demanding a decentralization of powers and threatening secession, but also for FI, which rejects the Constitution's solidaristic ethos. This characteristic of the beneficiaries of anti-party sentiment is very important because it can help us understand the magnitude and the suddenness of the change.

As is generally well known and as research has adequately demonstrated, Italian society has been characterized by the presence of "chronic, widespread [citizen] dissatisfaction" with political system performance (Morlino and Tarchi, 1996). Italy's traditional parties were remarkably successful in responding, or rather in avoiding to respond, to latent demands coming from the "dissatisfied society". Their success was based on gradual co-optation of the opposition and slow organizational adaptation, clearly intended to limit party, and political system, response to a bare minimum (Bardi and Morlino, 1994). Such lack of effective response was supplemented through supportive policies and patronage practices. As a result, mass attitudes about parties were very contradictory, shifting between negative evaluations and positive orientations. Still in 1990, on the very threshold of the transformation, the great majority of Italian citizens (about three quarters of respondents to a survey on electoral behavior) appeared to be uninterested in politics, uninformed, frustrated, alienated (Bardi and Pasquino, 1995). Yet they seemed to be willing to give political parties a blank mandate and even to ignore their preferred party's errors²⁰. Anti-party sentiments were emerging but they were still confused with opposition to the system the parties were trying to preserve. To the extent that parties were able to deflect, mostly by dispensing the kind of material rewards we just mentioned, their responsibilities towards a more abstract target, such as the "system", such confusion persisted and so did the distinction between anti-party and anti-system sentiments. This is certainly an obstacle if the purpose of the analysis is to assess whether elite and/or mass sentiments express a refusal of the party-based model of democracy or more simply a rejection of Italy's traditional parties²¹. But our present interest is to determine whether such sentiments were a factor in the demise of once powerful Italian parties; in this case we can consider anti-party and anti-system sentiments as equivalent, given that established parties were the immediate target of anti-system sentiments as well.

Although popular dissatisfaction is an endemic Italian problem, as we have seen, clearly focussed anti-party sentiments were expressed first at the elite level. Italy has always had a number of anti-system parties and, from the 1970s on, also anti-

19 The presence of anti-party parties appears to be the best indicator of elite anti-party sentiment, at least in the Italian context (Bardi, 1996).

20 On this last point, there appears to be less consensus. In actuality only a bare majority of respondents indicated that they were willing to vote for the party they trusted irrespective of its possible errors (Bardi and Pasquino, 1995: 41).

21 This was a concern of one of this author's recent contributions (Bardi, 1996).

party parties. Mass response towards anti-system parties was constant, and very high, until the 1970s, when it rose sharply, as a result of the PCI's success. It is doubtful whether the post-1976 PCI can still be classified as an anti-system party. Certainly it cannot be considered one if the purpose of the classification is to infer mass attitudes towards the system from electoral behavior. Therefore it is not a coincidence that during the 1970s we have the emergence of the first clearly anti-party party, the PR²². In the following years, also as a result of the PCI's cooperation into the dominant party cartel (Katz & Mair, 1995), more anti-party parties emerged, such as two federations of ecological movements and several regionalist leagues, also to be federated in the 1990s. The irruption of the LN into the Italian political scene was perhaps the decisive factor in developing mass anti-party sentiment. Anti-partyism had grown rather slowly until the LN successfully channelled mass dissatisfaction and anti-system attitudes towards the system's custodians, the established parties. The PR's strategy and never been concentrated on an unrealistic mass electoral success but rather on challenging the party cartel by presenting issues directly to the public through referenda. The PR also tried to elicit mass anti-party response by encouraging abstentionism and considered the fact that from the 1979 election on valid votes constantly remained under the 90% level, to drop to about 80% in 1994, a demonstration of its strategy's success. Thus anti-party voting rose slowly and unevenly from the mid-1970s on. It surged sharply between the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s precisely because of LN's success²³. The LN replaced its anti-party rhetoric with its "anti-First-Republic" equivalent after its successful 1994 electoral strategy, which involved an alliance with a newcomer (FI), with one established (albeit marginalized) party (the MSI), and with splinters from old established parties, like the DC and the PSI. The LN's new allies accepted and even shared this anti-system stance. Lists that described themselves as anti-party outnumbered (8 to 7) the traditional ones and obtained well over 50% of the votes and an even higher percentage of the seats. The success of ostensible anti-party groups was so sweeping as to result in a complete replacement of the pre-1994 governmental coalition (Bardi, 1996). To be sure, in 1994 old and new anti-system and anti-party lists obtained an unprecedented victory, but they were favored by institutional and political conditions that had radically been changed in the interim, also as a result of the 1993 referendums.

As we have mentioned, calling referenda is an important instrument in the manifestation of elite anti-partyism. Likewise, referendum voting can in itself be regarded as another important electoral indicator of anti-party or anti-system sentiment: referendum proposals can only aim at repealing existing laws or parts of existing laws, that is, at undoing what Parliament (dominated by the party cartel)

22 In actuality the Radical Party was founded in 1955 as a left-wing splinter of the PLI. For the first fifteen years of its existence it was not very active, but its un-party style was already evident in the late 1960s when it participated in the pro-divorce campaign mainly through one of its collateral, single-issue, organizations, the *Lega Italiana per il Divorzio* (LID). Only in 1976 did the PR run for the first time in national elections.

23 Depending on classification criteria anti-party lists obtained about 20-25% of the vote in the 1992 parliamentary elections. This level put Italy at the top among western democracies, a primacy which was greatly strengthened in 1994. For detailed data on anti-party voting and on other mass anti-party sentiment indicators see: Poguntke, 1996; Bardi, 1996.

has done²⁴. Prior to 1987 the Italian electorate confirmed the established parties' parliamentary output and rejected all abrogation proposals; thereafter, they endorsed all referendum proposals. However, only from 1991 onwards can these results be interpreted as manifestations of popular anti-party sentiment, because most parties supported the five referendum proposals in 1987²⁵. The successful 1991 referendum on preference voting was interpreted as the first clear and effective manifestation of popular dissatisfaction with the party regime and in April 1993, at the crest of the anti-party tide caused by the *tangentopoli* investigations, majority parties' positions were defeated on eight referendums. This was described by analysts and commentators as the end of a regime. These referendums altered two of the institutional cornerstones of the party regime, the legislative electoral system (which was effectively modified into a mixed plurality/PR system) and the party funding laws. The referendum on public funding of political parties fully revealed the extent of popular anti-party sentiment when it received the highest percentage of "yes" votes, over 90%, among the eight referendums in 1993²⁶. The votes on the eight referendums, which took place between two political elections at the height of the political corruption scandals, were perhaps the highest and most genuine manifestation of mass anti-party sentiment in Italy. They certainly accelerated the collapse of traditional party organizations and set the institutional and political conditions for the 1994 elections, that officially marked with their results the beginning of the transition.

V. Conclusions

This paper addressed three basic questions concerning the ongoing process of party system transformation in Italy. 1) what accounts for the apparent magnitude of the change; 2) what is the actual extent of the change (in other words, does it only concern the basic units, the parties, or also the structure of the system); 3) what were most important factors in the change. To the first question the basic answer is that the magnitude of popular rejection of traditional parties and for some even of the party-based model of representation was due to the delaying strategies of the party cartel which stalled for thirty years necessary reforms by only apparently responding to societal demands while at the same time contributing to the deepening of the problems at the roots of such demands. The parties, albeit informally, did adapt very effectively to environmental changes. Indeed, in some cases, as was the case with the build-up of the public sector, they responded by modifying the environment themselves. Our answer to the second question has to be necessarily much more tentative. While it is clear that the system's basic units, the political parties, have individually undergone profound transformations, the impact of the change on the system's structure is much more difficult to assess, also because of the contemporary, even if perhaps temporary, presence of two party systems: electoral and parliamentary. The "hardest" indicator at our disposal, number of parties, gives contradictory answers, which are

24 Because in a number of cases traditional opposition and even majority parties supported referendums, referendum results cannot be used as a time series indicator of anti-party sentiment. Selected results can however be extremely useful, albeit discrete, indicators.

25 In fact, two of these proposals were not only introduced by the PR, but also by two government parties, the PSI and the PLI.

26 A similar proposal had been defeated in 1978 by almost sixty percent of the voters.

to a large extent determined by the analyst's arbitrary choices. On other variables, the situation is even more uncertain because of the continuous changes in the party system's basic units and of the consequent difficulties in determining the various actors' ideological positions.

On the third question, we limited our attention to the impact of anti-party sentiment. Anti-party sentiment was indeed a factor in Italy's recent party system changes. Most indicators confirm experts' and observers' opinions according to which anti-party sentiment rose sharply near the end of the 1980s and culminated in the early 1990s. It would also appear, however, that the effects of recent, genuine, anti-party sentiment were magnified by the incorporation and transformation of long established elite anti-system orientations, and of mass apathy and disillusion. Anti-system parties have always existed in post-war Italy, but they always failed to effectively channel the popular dissatisfaction which was consistently revealed by opinion polls. The gradual incorporation of the PCI into the party cartel, in the mid-1970s marked the end of the prevalence of anti-systemic protest. Anti-party sentiment found its first expression, at least at the elite level, with the emergence of the PR in the early 1970s. Its open anti-party rhetoric and the long-term effectiveness of its referendum centered strategy gave frustrated anti-system or simply disillusioned electors a focus: it is because of the PR that abstentionism came to be considered as a political (anti-party) choice, and it is because of the PR that "party" replaced "politician" as a focus of popular disenchantment and frustration. The LN's ascent and the successful 1991 and 1993 referenda turned all forms of popular dissatisfaction into anti-party sentiment and contributed, with other factors, to the collapse of the old party system. The fall of the party cartel can thus be ascribed, at least partially, to the success of anti-party elites in channelling otherwise undirected or unfocused popular dissent.

The present phase is no doubt one of transition for the Italian political system. This cannot but have serious consequences for the party system as well. The problems facing Italian decision makers are so numerous and daunting that a full consolidation of the system appears to be many years ahead. The political vacuum left in the party system by the disappearance of the DC and the PSI has not been permanently filled yet. Most present day major actors are facing political and organizational problems of their own which are making the reaching of important decisions such as those necessary for the completion of the electoral reform or for the launching of an all-encompassing institutional reform extremely difficult. But unless these crucial compromises are reached the uncertainty about the future of the party system is bound to continue.

Abstract

The article attempts to trace the origins and to assess the extent of party-system change in Italy in the 1990s. It also examines some hypotheses on the possible causes of such changes. Building on research on anti-party sentiment and on changes in party organization the paper begins with an analysis of the evolution of the party system in the last 30 years which identifies organizational adaptation as a delaying factor in party system change. This is followed by a description of the party system after the 1994 elections based on generally accepted party system characteristics and indicators (volatility, number of parties, ideological distance). The assessment is made difficult by the, perhaps tem-

porary, coexistence of two party-systems, respectively relevant for electoral and inter-election competition. The evidence however, suggests, that party-system transformation is under way, while it might still be inappropriate to talk about structural change. Degeneration of parties and a deep institutional crisis appear to be the factors leading to the explosion of pent-up alienation and anti-party sentiments, and to demands for institutional and constitutional change that preceded and appeared to be the immediate causes of party system transformation.

Waiting for 'The big one': The uncertain survival of the Belgian Parties and Party Systems(S)

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This article wants to analyze the present state and potential future state of the Belgian parties and party system. Since it wants to do it in a comparative perspective, and with special reference to the Italian case, the basic line of analysis will be the search for the stability of the parties and the party system. Is there any chance of Belgium going Italian? Can one imagine a rapid implosion or collapse of the system? Can one imagine a sudden disappearance of the major political parties? Can one imagine the rise and success of something similar to Forza Italia, on the Belgian or Flemish or Walloon level?

The answer is obviously yes. Why would political evolutions that have proven to be possible in Italy, be completely impossible in Belgium? They might at first sight be unthinkable, but that goes also for what happened in Italy. The unthinkable simply happened.

The article will thus be slightly biased. We would like to deliberately defend the idea that the unthinkable is possible, that Belgium can indeed and maybe even quite easily 'go Italian'. We will look for the features that might be the omen of the coming collapse of the parties and party system. We will deliberately overlook most of the indicators of stability and rigidity. We are well aware of the fact that this strategy is debatable, even if it has been the strategy of quite some party research and electoral research of the last few decades. By measuring change and focussing on change, we might forget that what we still need is some kind of theory that enables us to explain the incredible amount of stability in parties and party systems.

Still, we do believe that change is what we need to look for. There are two reasons for this. In the first place there is the very strange assumption that the Belgian parties and party system have always been stable, and that only recently some major changes are becoming visible. This assumption is very present in the political debates that started in the Flemish part of the country on the night of the general elections of November 24 1991. This election day, quickly labelled 'black Sunday', is too often believed to be a starting point. And therefore changes in the electorate and changes in the parties are seen as a result of this 'black Sunday'.

The second reason is that one can simply not defend the idea that everything has always been smooth and stable, when in only one single decade (1968-1978) all the major Belgian parties *disappeared*, and at the same time the Belgian party system simply *disappeared*. If there is something strange to be explained, it is not the stability of the parties and the party system, but the hardly changed perception of the Belgian parties and party system being solid and stable. The persistence of this perception might of course be an argument against our strategy: it might illustrate that what a political scientist believes to be major changes, does

not really affect the functioning of the system, and therefore is not perceived as change by the political actors.

Nevertheless, we will search for change. Because change there is, even if it is not perceived as such. Anyone walking around in the city of San Francisco will find it hard to believe that this city could be completely blown away by a major earthquake. Of course there have been some heavy quakes in the past, but the city has been able to recover, even from the devastating quake of 1906. So it looks nice and solid again. But the scientists knowing the underground, those knowing and understanding the deep cleavage that hides beneath the surface of the earth and that caused the minor quakes, know for sure that San Francisco is only waiting for 'the big one'.

The Belgian parties and party system have experienced some quakes: 1965, 1981, 1991. Parties have reacted. Parties have been rebuilt, parties have been searching for quake-safe structures. And the 1995 elections (with a low volatility rate) seemed to be the proof for the solidity of the structures. But the (political) scientists knowing the underground, those knowing and understanding the deep cleavages that hide beneath the surface and that caused the minor quakes, know that the Belgian parties and party system might only be waiting for 'the big one'.

I. Belgium: a consociational partitocracy

Until the early sixties, Belgium was a relatively stable democracy indeed. It was considered to be one of the typical examples of a consociational democracy (Lijphart, 1977), where the potential instability was countered by prudent leadership and techniques of power-sharing.

The role played by the political parties in this type of democracy, is very important (Luther, 1992: 46). The parties are deeply rooted in society. They are much more than purely political organizations. They are the political expression of a subcultural network of organizations. At all levels of society, and in almost all spheres of life, the parties can be seen. At least, the subcultural divisions can be seen, but then the party belonging to that subculture is never far away.

At the same time, the parties are the structures that organize the seeking of consensus at the level of the political elites. It is actually the parties' elites that must be 'prudent leaders', in order to prevent the subcultural divisions (which they themselves organize and mobilize) from becoming the source of centrifugal conflicts. The political agreements then also have to be implemented, and therefore the parties need a firm control over the parliament and over the public administration. The parties - like we said above - are almost everywhere. A consociational democracy tends to be a partitocracy.

Looking at the parties' internal life, certainly reveals a number of characteristics that can be understood as the consequences of the role played by the parties under conditions of consociationalism. The most obvious is the need for a *strong leadership*. The party elites must have the means to make the most appropriate strategic choices, without constantly being challenged for it. Too high a level of internal criticism would diminish the credibility of the leaders when negotiating with the other party leaders, and would therefore undermine the power and the weight of the party in these negotiations. Strong leaders are a blessing for the party, and are necessary to make the consociational system work. This is the iron law of consociational oligarchy.

The counterpart of a strong leadership is obviously a very *low degree of political participation*. Passive citizens are an important precondition for the good functioning of consociational democracy. It is a 'favourable' condition that was not so much stressed by Lijphart, but made very explicit in Huyse's analysis of the Belgian democracy (Huyse, 1969, 1971). The voters and the militants have to be loyal, in order to keep the whole system stable. They must be ready to follow the leaders, one day in getting mobilized to defend their sub-cultural values, the other day in accepting the compromise that has been reached.

If the members of the subculture, and the voters of its party in particular have to be loyal, it is hard to imagine that their commitment to the party can be very ideological. If the incentives offered to the participants were mainly purposive incentives (Clark & Wilson, 1961), the party leadership would not be able to keep its strategic freedom. A social organization with ideologically committed members, can not be flexible. It has to stick to its declared purpose, and prove it constantly to the members. These will always be ready to choose the exit option, when they feel that the organization is moving too far away from its original goal. The political and electoral stability in a consociational (and thus compromising) democracy, is an indicator of the relative absence of ideological or purposive incentives being used to keep the subgroups together.

The incentives used are then rather solidarity or associative incentives, and material or selective incentives (Clark & Wilson, 1961; Panebianco, 1988; Deschouwer, 1990). The first mean that the participants are attracted by *appealing to a sense of belonging* to a relevant and visible social group or community. They participate because they feel at home in the group in which they participate. In a consociational democracy, with separated and closed societal subgroups, this kind of incentives is very much available to the parties. They are in the centre of a societal segment, in which the members see and meet each other at all levels and in all spheres of social life. The pillars then provide the parties with a reservoir of loyal members and voters.

The societal segments in a consociational democracy are more than just subcultures. One of the consociational techniques is granting them a large degree of autonomy, and thus delegating to them a series of state tasks. They can organize - with state subsidies - their own religious services, their own schools, their own cultural organizations, their own hospitals and social welfare organizations. They can distribute to their members the services of the welfare state. The links between the parties and all these organizations, provide them not only with a social community out of which they can recruit, but also with a large reservoir of *selective incentives*. And since the pillarized organizations are also those being recognized as the representative pressure groups in the corporatist circuits of decision-making, the parties - by being almost everywhere - can offer almost everything. They can act as brokers, offerings services to their clients. It makes and keeps them strong, with a loyal and elite-directed rank and file.

A final typical feature of the parties in a consociational democracy, is the *weakness of the parliament*. The role of the parliament is a reflection of the procedures of decision-making. It is the party elites that agree on what has to be done. And even if the constitution states - like all democratic constitutions - that the parliament makes the rules, its real role is the mere approval of decisions that were already reached elsewhere. This means that the parties need a firm control over their parliamentary groups. They can not allow them to go their own way, to be too critical, to bring the delicate governmental consensus in danger. It is not really important who is in the parliament. The important thing is how many MP's each party has, and how well they can control them.

II. The end of the consensus

The year 1960 is an excellent moment to start with a story on the evolution of the Belgian parties, especially since the description of changes is what we are looking for. In 1960 the parties were more or less the same as those in the beginning of the century. The party system could be labelled a 'two and a half' system (Blondel, 1968), with a large socialist and christian-democratic party, and a smaller liberal party.

The 1961 elections were the last almost normal and predictable elections: the three traditional parties polled together 90.5% of the votes, while the Communists got 3%. The rest, and here is the start of a new story, went to other and new parties. These new parties would really break through in 1965.

The 1965 election was a dramatic event. It can be considered as the beginning of a new era, for which the major characteristics are the high volatility and the increasingly high fractionalisation. The Liberal party almost doubled its score, while Christian-Democrats and Socialists each lost more or less one fifth of their voters. The old consociational and stable system came under pressure. There was also the rise and success of the nationalist parties. In Flanders the 'Volksunie' gained momentum in 1965, while in Brussels a party of Francophone defense (The Front Démocratique des Francophones Bruxellois) was created, winning three seats in 1965. In Wallonia a smaller and less successful Walloon Rally (Rassemblement Wallon) was created in 1965, associating itself electorally with the Brussels FDF.

These nationalist or regionalist parties produced a double challenge to the traditional system (Deschouwer, 1994a). In the first place there is their primary ideological concern: the granting of more autonomy to the regions and linguistic communities. They did not introduce the idea - it had been heard before - but their electoral success obliged the other parties to become aware of the fact that a new political problem had arrived, and could not be avoided any more.

But asking autonomy was not the only value being stressed by these new parties. They also presented themselves as an alternative way of doing politics in Belgium. They challenged the system as such. They criticized the pillarization, the control power of the traditional pillarized parties, the poor democratic quality of the system.

Two explanations can be put forward for the rapid success of these new parties (apart from the general explanations of value changes and generational changes that made all democratic regimes move). The first lies in the consociational system itself. It is indeed a very closed system, with a small cartel of elites arranging things the way they want. It locks out those who at a certain moment would like more and better participation. The reaction will then be stronger.

And second there is the nature of the traditional parties. Since they are real mass parties, they lack the flexibility to adapt themselves easily to new challenges, or to incorporate new questions and new movements. These have then to go and create new movements and parties outside the existing ones (Deschouwer & Koole, 1993).

The stability and survival of the Belgian parties is thus at stake as the result of two challenges. We will further refer to them as the 'first' and the 'second' challenge. The first is the linguistic problem. The second is the challenge to the consociational system and procedures, and of the kind of political parties than come with these procedures.

The reaction of the traditional parties on the challenges of the new parties, was clear and coherent on the first one, but much less consistent on the second one. The urge to take into account the demands put forward by the Flemings and the Walloons, finally led to the death of the traditional parties. They all fell apart into two different parties. The Christian-Democrats divorced in 1968 (creating the unilingual CVP and PSC), the Liberals did it in 1971 (giving birth to PVV and PLP) and the Socialists died in 1978 (creating SP and PS).

The challenge to the traditional parties did not only come from the regionalist parties. More new parties appeared and were electorally successful. There are the two Green parties Agalev (Dutch-speaking) and Ecolo (French-speaking), the Vlaams Blok (a radical Flemish nationalist party that moved towards right-wing populism in the eighties) and the Front National (right-wing populist and French-speaking).

In 1961 there were three major parties, with a tiny communist party and a very young and small Flemish nationalist party. In 1995 twelve parties have representatives elected in the Parliament. The three decades in between have been decades of change, both in the parties and in the party system.

III. The divided party system

When in 1978 the Belgian Socialist Party disappeared, the Belgian party system was also gone, or had at least taken a rather strange and awkward form. In the electoral arena, the party system has disappeared, since the Belgian parties do not compete directly (except in the Brussels constituency) with each other. The Flemish parties do not compete with the French-speaking parties. An electoral result on the Belgian level is therefore absolutely meaningless. Whether for instance the Flemish Christian-Democrats poll 15% or 17% of the Belgian votes, is for them and for the other parties not a significant piece of information. Since it is a Flemish party, its result will be looked at *within* the Flemish part of the country. The 17% at the Belgian level means there something like 28% of the votes.

Furthermore it is important for that Flemish Christian-Democratic party to know what the results of its electoral opponents are. The 12% or 13% of the Walloon Socialist Party is less relevant than the 20% *at the Flemish level* of for instance the Flemish Liberal Party (which is also about 13% at the Belgian level). The bottom line of this, is that the parties compete within their own language group, and therefore one must recognize the existence of *two electoral party systems*.

Yet there is more than just the absence of a national electoral arena. The characteristics of both party systems are very different. The Flemish party system is much more fragmented and is more oriented to the centre (the strongest party being the Christian-Democrats). The largest Walloon party is a Socialist party, and its *regional* strength and dominance is more important than that of the largest Flemish party. The Flemish party system is also more polarized, with a right-wing party polling almost 13% of the Flemish votes. One can use all the classical party system measurements, and find different results for the two Belgian party systems.

In the governmental arena however, the parties still compete. But they do so in a strange way. The governmental level is the place where the two party systems join. This juncture is made relatively strong by the unwritten rule that national coalitions ought to be symmetrical, with the parties belonging to the same ide-

ological family being together either inside or outside the government. This has so far always been the case. But it is a rule that is difficult to abide to, if at the same time there needs to be a relation between the electoral result and the right to govern.

This relation is seen in the public debate as a relative one, i.e. a party that improves its score is considered to have 'won' the elections, while those who score less than what they did before are believed to be the 'losers' of the elections. Although it is a strange way of interpreting the results, it is an understandable way of giving substantial meaning (producing a meaningful link between election result and government making power) to elections under the proportional rule. The other way of doing this, looking at the largest party, is meaningless in Belgium since there is more than one largest party in the electoral arena. The fact that the Flemish Christian-Democrats are larger than the Walloon Socialists, is simply due to the size of the Flemish electorate, and not to the relative strength of the Christian-Democrats in Flanders. They score less than the Socialists in Wallonia. The two electoral systems produce two different largest parties.

So the expected and legitimate link between electoral result and government building, a link that can produce something like a Belgian party system at the governmental level, is problematic. It assumes (or hopes) that the electoral movements up or down of the members of the same ideological family are the same. Yet this is not the case. The parties in the two party systems move in different directions. The table below gives an overview of the electoral movements (up or down) for the six traditional parties since 1981. It shows clearly how the two electoral party systems move in different (or at least unpredictable) directions. The result as it is seen in the public debate can be and often is very different in the two party systems. To form a government that 'respects' the will of the voter, is a difficult exercise, and it is bound to go against the expectations of the public. The split of the parties and of the electoral party system, did certainly not help to bridge the gap between the elites and the citizenry.

	Christ-Dem		Socialists		Liberals	
	Flem	French	Flem	French	Flem	French
1981	DOWN	DOWN	UP	DOWN	UP	UP
1985	UP	UP	UP	UP	DOWN	UP
1987	DOWN	-	UP	UP	UP	DOWN
1991	DOWN	DOWN	DOWN	DOWN	UP	DOWN
1995	UP	-	UP	DOWN	UP	UP

The existence of two electoral party systems in a country that attempts to have one governmental party system, is a feature that has furthermore not improved the stability of the coalitions. The linguistic cleavage as such has proven to be a very effective coalition killer, but the effects of the cleavage on the parties and the party system have even reinforced this killing power (Deschouwer, 1994b)

At first sight the parties might seem to have a more easy job now. They do not have to seek internal compromises any more. For the parties this is easier indeed, but for the coalitions it is a major problem. When before the split of the parties a linguistic issue could eventually be solved by reaching a compromise within the parties, almost every linguistic issue that comes to the surface now after the split of the national parties, ends on the table of the government, and thus means a conflict in the governmental party system. It is impossible to avoid these issues.

The effect on the life of coalitions is obvious: the partners compete in the national governmental arena, but they are not sanctioned at that level. Elections can not really solve problems, because when an election is called as a result of a linguistic issue, the Dutch-speaking voters are offered no choice between different attitudes: all the parties will defend the Flemish point of view. And in Wallonia everybody defends the other view. And after the election, the two dissenting opinions have to coalesce again anyway. There is thus no danger to be sanctioned by the voters for blowing up a coalition. The parties in the opposition will often have defended an even more radical view than the parties in the government. When a linguistic problem comes up, parties feel a lot of pressure to be radical, and eventually to leave or kill the coalition, and not so much pressure to try to find a compromise in order to save the coalition. The separation of the national Belgian parties has built in a strong mechanism to shorten the life of the coalitions.

Since 1970 the Belgian constitution obliges all the coalitions at the national level to respect a perfect balance between the two language groups. It means that the numbers of French-speaking and Dutch-speaking ministers (except for the Prime Minister) have to be exactly the same. This is called 'linguistic parity'. The Belgian government is a collective body that reaches its decisions by consensus. That is not a written rule, but it is generally accepted. It enforces the meaning of parity, for no decisions can be taken against the will of any of the language groups. The consequences of this for the life of the coalitions are again very important.

At first sight this device can help the coalition to stick together. It obliges the partners to look for consensus, and it offers the possibility of solving conflicts by log-rolling. A very often used technique to avoid a cabinet crisis, is letting several problems come together, and then solve them all at once. When the tension in the cabinet becomes very high, the solution can be very close.

Yet this consensus-type of decision making, combined with the linguistic parity, can also work in the opposite direction. It can attract problems, and especially - once again - the problems concerning the linguistic divisions. If one group feels that an issue is very important, and that it should be solved very quickly, it will try to get it on the agenda of the government. Then the other group is not able to avoid it, and when it does so, it opens immediately a crisis. A good example of this is what happened in 1981. The French-speaking Socialists wanted absolutely that the national state gave subsidies for the steel industry of Wallonia. The Flemish partners did not really refused this, but did not want to be pressed too hard. They wanted to deal with other matters first. The PS Ministers then went on strike, refusing to start any cabinet meeting if the first agenda item was not the Walloon steel industry. It meant the end of the coalition, also because the other French-speaking partner in the government had to follow this radical line.

If one party has a dissenting opinion, it might well decide to forget it and stay with the others. For the outside world there is then consensus. But if the issue is linguistic, it is never the problem of one party, it is immediately the problem of half of the government, and thus of the government as a whole. The Belgian coalitions are extremely vulnerable for these kind of problems.

IV. Federalism without federal parties

So far we have described how the linguistic cleavage has caused direct and even dramatic changes in the Belgian parties and party system. At the same time we have been able to show that these changes had quite some effects on government-

tal stability, and on the legitimacy of the parties. The starting point was that parties in a consociational democracy are under pressure to be centralized, have autonomous leaders, reduce the degree of internal participation. The split of the parties and the split of the party system have not taken away these systemic pressures on the parties. The political system and the political game is even more complex than before.

If we want to understand the reactions of the parties to the second challenge to the old consensus, the challenge of the consociational procedures, we need to keep in mind that by adapting to the pressures caused by the linguistic cleavage, the Belgian parties have put themselves in a position out of which it is even more difficult than before to change and to accommodate to the challenge of those parties and movements that want them to become more open, more responsive, more democratic.

Maybe the federalization of the country offers new possibilities. Indeed, the introduction of the federal state structure might take away (part of) the linguistic pressure, or might offer an institutional setting in which the parties have more possibilities to deal with the second challenge. The federalization might take away the continuous obligation to accommodate, to bargain, to compromise.

The federal system is very young, and it is difficult to assess already its effect on the functioning of the parties. But the way in which the federal system has been set up, and the way in which the parties act in it, can already give us some ideas. The point we like to make, is that the federal logic will certainly not reduce the degree of partitocracy, *because there are no federal political parties*. We still see the same logic: the way in which the parties adapted to the linguistic cleavage, pushes them further away from the possibility to change the fundamental (bargaining) logic of the Belgian political system. And by not changing, by not being able to change, they can not avoid that the pressure from below increases. It is the pressure coming from the electorate, the erosion of the legitimacy of the system.

The Belgian federalization, being the result of a bargaining in which (hardly) nobody defended the centre, has given a very large degree of autonomy to Regions and Communities. Furthermore the policy packages are fairly homogeneous. When Regions or Communities received some policy domain, they received (claimed) it almost completely. There are of course some notable exceptions (in financial matters for instance), but if the Belgian distribution of competences is compared to other federal states, it is clear that there is very little room for joint decision-making of the federal state and the federated entities. And since the distribution of competences is so clear-cut, there are no procedures for joint policy-making.

There are of course procedures to deal with conflicts of competences, but these are (almost) strictly judicial. There are also procedures to deal with conflicts of interest, and these procedures will prove to be very important. Policy domains are not static. They constantly change according to the demands that are produced by the changing society. One of the newer policy domains, that seems to be discovered in almost all the western countries, is 'the city'. The cities, and especially the inner cities, are some kind of focal point where many current societal problems merge into one new question for the future: how to make sure that the inner cities are still places to live, that they do not become the place where all those that lose touch with society get concentrated.

When in the Belgian (and other federal systems) a policy for the city has to be developed, it is not clear who will have to do it. 'The city' as such was not part of

the policy domains that were allocated. But the different aspects of it (security, housing, education, employment,...) have been. And a policy for the city requires cooperation and therefore involves conflicts of interest.

This will in two ways strengthen the role of the parties. In the first place the conflicts between the regional and the federal level are conflicts *within the same parties*. Unlike in other federal systems, it is not the federal party that deals with the federal level, and the regional party that deals with the regional level. The Belgian regional parties are present at both levels. They will be obliged to develop internal procedures to solve conflicts between regional and federal ministers, between regional and federal MP's. They will need a good organization and in the first place a strong and authoritative leadership.

In the second place there is the way in which conflicts of interest can be solved. The Belgian federation has developed a very Belgian institution to deal with them. It is called 'concertation committee'. Whenever a conflict of interest is put on the agenda by one of the actors, the committee meets. It is composed in a very consociational way: an equal number of representatives of the federal and of the regional governments, with of course also linguistic parity. It reaches a solution by consensus. That means that the *governments* reach (have to reach) a compromise, that will then afterwards be ratified (have to be ratified) by the parliaments. Once again the parties dominate. The parliamentary groups have no choice but to follow the leaders. If they refuse, they bring down the subtle compromise. If they don't - which they might as well do in the future - they simply bring down the system. But the only way to rebuild or repair it, is yet another compromise between the parties.

A federation without federal parties has at least the in-built danger of keeping the partitocratic procedures going. A federation without federal parties therefore adds to the erosion of the legitimacy of the system. The Belgian federation without Belgian federal parties intensifies the 'second' challenge to the Belgian parties.

V. The crisis of legitimacy

Several other chapters in this volume deal with the legitimacy crisis of the Belgian political system, the electoral changes, the rise and success of right-wing extremism. We will not discuss these developments in detail. We will just assume that they are there, and look at their consequences for the political parties. And we will consider them as a challenge, as the 'second' challenge which is the questioning of the basic features of the Belgian consociational partitocracy. This discontent with the classical structures is (was) present in the regionalist parties, in the Green parties, in the right-wing populist parties. Recently the Flemish Liberal party also joined this line of protest and opted for a radically different type of internal organization.

It is not easy for the parties to decode the messages coming from the electorate, and to react or to adapt in a proper way. One can even say that the parties in the Belgian consociational partitocracy are trapped. There is not really a way out, because there is a double pressure, a double challenge that seems to ask for opposite and maybe even incompatible answers. The first challenge has been dealt with. The linguistic tensions produced a double party system and a federal state structure. But the cooling down of the linguistic tensions has increased the complexity of the political system and has kept and even reinforced the necessity of subtle arrangements and compromises. The systemic pressure to produce the type

of party that we described in the beginning of this article, is not gone. Parties are still better fit to deal with the Belgian problems, if they are centralized, have a strong leadership, control their parliamentary groups, have a low degree of internal participation, have possibilities to offer associative and material incentives to the rank and file.

The second pressure is one towards more internal democracy, towards more responsiveness, towards more ideological clarity, towards loosening the links with the pillarized pressure groups. This pressure comes from below, from the electorate that is getting dealigned, that is leaving the traditional pillarized electoral behaviour.

A close analysis of the evolution of the party structures in Belgium, shows a true concern for answering to this second pressure. Parties try to offer their members more possibilities to participate. They lower the thresholds for participation in the party congresses, they try to have genuine elections for the party leaders, either at a congress or through a poll in which all members participate. And whenever they introduce these kind of changes, they try to explain at large that they have understood the message, that they really want to be an open and democratic membership organization.

But these kinds of changes in the internal party life do not change the perception of the party in the electorate. How important is it really that a party adopts a slightly more open procedure for the drafting of electoral lists? How important is it really that a party bureau is elected by all the members and not by a congress of representatives? How important is it really that the congress takes a secret vote to elect the party president? The problem with this kind of changes is that they are genuine attempts to link the party's central office in a more democratic way to the party's membership, when this link is not the most relevant aspect of political parties any more (Mair, 1993).

But (slightly) changing the way in which the party leadership is connected to the membership, does not affect at all the position and role of the parties in the Belgian political system. The problematic relationship, the one that is questioned and challenged, is the relation between the party leadership and the state. The challenge is to *the position of the parties in the political system*. What is at the centre of the debate is not the responsiveness towards the membership, but towards the electorate. A party can easily change or adapt its internal life, but changing its position in the system is less a matter of free choice. The systemic and societal pressures dramatically reduce the freedom to choose in this respect.

Mair (1994) and Katz & Mair (1995) have nicely described the evolution of the political parties in democratic regimes as a slow 'migration into the state'. They say that parties, which originated out of (subgroups in) society, tend to loosen their links with society (see also the catch-all thesis of Kirchheimer) and to seek and find their resources for survival in the state rather than in their link with society. The parties need the state to communicate with the public, need the state for their personnel, need the state for their financial resources.

The comparative research on which Katz & Mair rely to defend this point, also shows that parties have increasingly been taking advantage of public resources for rewarding the rank and file. Patronage is a phenomenon that has certainly not faded away. It is a perfect example of the use of the state to provide something (in casu incentives for the participants) that can not or to a much lesser extent than before be provided through social or ideological linkages with society, or through privileged links with service-providing pressure groups. And if the

pressure groups provide services, they are also able to produce them through their linkage with the state.

If parties rely increasingly on the state, as a result of their inability to keep stable linkages with a loyal electorate, it means that parties have to rely increasingly on themselves. The resources provided by the state, are obviously produced by the parties themselves. It is the parties themselves which decide - to cite only this one example - on public funding of the parties. These evolutions also account for the increasing convergence of the parties. They all have governing experience, they all have to rely on state rules and state funding, they all rely on expensive professional advice for campaigning, and therefore use very similar campaign techniques.

This all accounts for a greater power of the parties, and certainly not a decline of parties. But at the same time this greater impact of the parties, the sometimes spectacular growth (in terms of means and personnel) of the parties' central office, also accounts for an increasing *perception of remoteness* of the parties. They are far away, dealing with their own - very crucial - problems of survival in a changing and dealigning society. And the way to deal with the difficulty of linking themselves in a stable and predictable way to society, seems to be the further migration to and reliance on the state.

In a consociational partitocracy, where the linguistic issue has even increased the necessity of the party elites to accommodate, to constantly meet and negotiate, to produce subtle and complicated solutions, this migration into the state and this perception of remoteness can be expected to be even more important. The Belgian parties, by adapting to the linguistic and systemic pressures, are increasingly unable to meet the expectation of responsiveness to the electorate. The parties have always been seen as remote (Huysse 1969). That is the consequence and condition of the consociational logic. But depillarization and dealignment has not changed this position. That is of course to a great extent due to the fact that in the linguistic cleavage there is no 'depillarization' (on the contrary), and no dealignment, because the party system has been broken up along the lines of the linguistic cleavage. The newly built federal state still contains the continuous need to bargain and to compromise, and the impact of the parties in this process is still enormous.

Conclusion

Referring to the story above on the parties' migration into the state (a story for which we heavily relied on Mair (1994)), Peter Mair writes: "This picture resembles the image of the dying years of the traditional Italian parties (...), an image which rightly emphasises those long-term preconditions of transformation that preceded the catalytic 'mani pulite' investigations. The Italian case, to be sure, is *exceptional* (my italics, KD), as is the sheer extent of party system transformation which subsequent ensued. At the same time, however, the crisis which was evoked in parties which had become far too entangled with the state, which had neglected to adjust to changes in civil society, and which had become almost entirely caught up with their own internal manoeuvrings, is one to which the established parties in all western democracies could well pay heed" (p. 19-20).

We totally agree with this analysis, but not with the Italian exceptionalism. The collapse of the Italian party system can be explained with a general theory of party change, which is based on empirical evidence in eleven European countries (Katz & Mair, 1992). Of course one needs the details of the Italian society and

history to understand why Italy is an *extreme* case of the general pattern. But Italy is not exceptional.

The aim of this article was to show and to explain that Belgium, with its consociational tradition and its hidden effects of the linguistic tensions, can at least be considered as a case that comes close to Italy. Long term changes have made the parties move towards a position in which they are more vulnerable than ever before. The vulnerability lies in the lack of legitimacy, the lack of responsiveness to society. The consociational tradition and the adaptations to the linguistic tensions give the Belgian public more reasons than in other countries to perceive the parties as remote and slightly self-sufficient. The consociational tradition and the adaptations to the linguistic tensions brought the Belgian parties in a position out of which they can not answer the challenges. The conditions in which the Belgian parties function allow therefore for the building up of a very high degree of tension. There are therefore more chances for a dramatic earthquake than for a slow and smooth process of change.

Italy is not exceptional. Belgium comes close, and countries like for instance Austria might belong to the same category. It would then be the category of countries in which the parties and the party system should be prepared for 'the big one'.

Abstract

The Belgian party system is often considered to be or to have been very stable. This article investigates the possibility of the Belgian parties and party systems to 'go Italian', i.e. to be confronted with a radical change resulting from a fundamental lack of legitimacy. This problem of legitimation can be expected from the fact that Belgium is a very consociational democracy, in which the parties play a very important role, but tend to become very entangled with the state. The split of the national parties and the federal reform of the state have made the decision-making structures even more complex than before, and have therefore not at all reduced the 'partitocratic' nature of the system. For these reasons a future Italian-style collapse of the parties and the party systems is certainly not to be excluded.

Italy: The decline of a Parliamentary Party Government*

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I. Introduction: party government and *partitocrazia*

Definable as a party government is a government whose members (head of government and ministers) are of political party provenance and whose policies are defined by the party. Thus understood, a party government is a government in which the parties control appointments and of which they influence policies. From this point of view, postwar Italian democracy belongs to the family of democratic party governments. The Italian political parties - recognized moreover by the 1948 constitution as the only actors in the governmental process (article 49 runs: "all citizens have the right to associate freely in parties in order to concur democratically in determining national policy") - invariably (until 1992) controlled government appointments and policies. To use Katz's (1987) well-known conceptualization, that of Italy is a case of marked "partyism of government" (i.e. the parties' capacity to control government appointments and policies), although it is not dissimilar from other European parliamentary democracies.

However, and it is here that the Italian case acquires its distinctive character, this partyism of government has come about in a context of a political economy extraordinarily favourable to the parties: both on the side of the state (where the parties have been able to act as surrogates for a traditionally weak and colonizable administration) and on the side of the economy, on account of the extremely broad and intrusive presence of the state in productive activities and services. Thus never challenged and long unchallengeable by any other political or institutional actor, the Italian political parties were able to transform themselves into authentic oligopolist public-capital corporations, able to condition not only government appointments and policies but also a large part of the Italian political economy (through control of the appointments and choices of banks, firms, financial institutes, welfare agencies, etc.). Consequently, again following Katz, also high has been the "party governmentness" of Italian democracy, by which is meant the capacity of the parties to extend their control to extraordinarily broad areas of economic and social life. Here resides a specific distinction between party government and *partitocrazia* which is analytically critical in order not to confuse the Italian case with that of other party democracies (Lijphart 1984). If one bears this distinction in mind, it is possible to understand why the crisis of the *partitocrazia* has had systemic origins (that is, it is due to the crisis of the spe-

* I wish to thank Lieven de Winter and Salvatore Vassallo for their comments and suggestions.

cific party intermediation that had arisen in the relationship between state and society, Fabbrini 1995a) while the decline of party government, which was naturally affected by that crisis, had instead more directly institutional origins (being due to the exhaustion of the model of parliamentary democracy adopted in Italy). With the consequence that the superseding of the *partitocrazia* does not (necessarily) entail abandonment of party government.

In fact, the decline of Italian party government (which began in 1992 on the wave of the explosion detonated by *Tangentopoli* and accelerated after 1993 by the *de facto* abolition by referendum on April 18, 1993 of the proportional electoral system and then, after parliamentary approval on following August 4 of a new electoral law, by establishment of 3/4 majoritarian representation on the basis of a uninominal constituency and 1/4 proportional representation with a list vote on a district basis, Katz 1995) may lead to different outcomes (the boosting or curbing of the government role of the parties) in relation to the institutional perspective possibly chosen in reforming the government system (Fabbrini 1995b). Here, however, I shall only concern myself with the historical evolution of Italian party government (i.e. of the role of the parties in determining the policies and in controlling the appointments of the government), which I shall assess both at the level of government formation and at that of the organization and decision-making process of the executive. And I shall do so by comparing the periods before and after 1992 (till the elections of April 1996), thereby seeking to argue the thesis that the decline of the Italian (parliamentary) party government - since it has occurred in the absence of serious attempts to reform the government system - engendered an institutional hybrid which I call "residual semipresidential party government" (or better: semipresidentialism with residual party government).

If we assume, as does Vassallo (1994), that a *residual* party government is one in which the parties have little or no control over its appointments and over its policies, while an *organic* party government is one in which the parties exercise close control over both (and, to anticipate a typology that I shall use later, that a party government is *spartitorio*¹ when the parties control only government appointments but have no interest in controlling its policies), then one may say that in July 1992, with the formation of the Amato government, and then especially with its reshuffling in the following February and March 1993, there began a phase of the so called "technical governments"² - unprecedented in the history of the Italian republic - which lasted till January 1996, where I stop my analysis, connoted by party governments with low (if not zero) partyiness of government. The point is that this low partyiness of government has been matched by the marked influence of the president of the republic, almost as if the legitimation of govern-

1 I leave the Italian word for its difficult English translation. Roughly speaking, *spartitorio* is a party government mainly interested in dividing up the spoils of power.

2 For "technical" governments are meant those governments whose ministers are, in their majority, non parliamentarians, being chosen for their supposed technical expertise. They are: the Amato government (July 1992-April 1993), the Ciampi government (May 1993-April 1994) and the Dini government (January 1995-January 1996: although it lasted three months more presiding over the interlude period between its resignation and the new national elections of April 1996). Moreover, in the cases of the Ciampi and Dini both were not parliamentarians. This phase registered the exception of the brief period of the "political" Berlusconi government (May 1994-December 1994). In any case, since the end of the Eighties Italian politics has been growingly influenced by non-professional politicians (Regonini 1993).

ments has passed from the parties to the president. Whence the institutional hybrid as defined above.

II. The process of government formation

A. 1948-1992: *discontinuity within continuity*

That in this period the parties maintained control over government appointments and policies (which policies, we will see below) there is no doubt, although there is equally no doubt that this control assumed different modalities according to different *political seasons*. Cotta writes (1994: 122): "the modalities of government formation (and the specular ones of their dissolution) are one of the central planks in Italian criticism of the *partitocrazia*, but also one of the cornerstones of the definition of party government". Why have these modalities been the object of criticism? To answer the question, it is necessary to have in mind the framework of processes and relationships within which Italian governments were formed in the protracted postwar period (Fabbrini 1994a; Hine 1993). The highly proportional electoral system adopted in constitution-making debate (although not formalized in the constitution), combined with a multi-party system following a dynamic of polarized pluralism (Sartori 1982), were both the cause and effect of a stably closed electoral market and invariably gave rise to an electoral outcome that reflected the relationships among the political parties, rather than a clearcut political majority (Fusaro 1995).

Of course, given the characteristics of the party system - that is, given the presence of a strong anti-system party on the left and a less strong anti-system party on the right, neither with sufficient legitimacy to assume governmental responsibility (the former for international reasons of geopolitical alignment, the latter for internal historical reasons) - government majorities were inevitably markedly centrist in character, generally taking the form of majorities by default, that is for want of anything better (Pasquino 1987). After all, as Duverger (1988) has pointed out, in democracies in which alternation is not possible government is *from* the centre, whereas in those in which it is possible, government is *with* the centre. The fact is, however, that the electoral market, given the close and enduring bond of ideological identity between large sections of the electorate and the main parties (the DC, or Christian Democrats, and the PCI, or Communists, especially), permanently assumed the form of a closed electoral market in the sense (to use the apt phrase of Mannheim and Sani 1987: 155) that internally to it "the fight between the parties in the field [could be] intense and head-on, but it did not [serve] to change a single vote".

Thus, in the presence of a multi-party system polarized to extremes that made access to government impossible for the second party, the proportional electoral system exalted the role of the centrist parties over that of the electors in the formation of governments. The electors did no more than write a sort of blank cheque for the parties, utilizing elections to affirm their allegiance rather than assert their choice. And this is why the centrist parties fulfilled their role of government-formation in the phase subsequent to the elections, activating a long-drawn-out bargaining process aimed at establishing the exact hierarchy of power within the government coalition. In short, as happens in all consensual democracies in which governments are formed by post-electoral negotiation (Laver and Shepsle 1994), the Italian (centrist) parties were the sole protagonists in the process of government-formation.

Now, although the government majorities had inevitably a markedly centrist character, and although their party composition was largely predictable, their precise ministerial composition was anything but a foregone conclusion. I use the expression 'ministerial composition' deliberately because it is here that Cotta's criticism resides. Once the terms of the inter-party agreement had been defined (*Centrismo* in the 1950s; the *Centro-Sinistra* in the 1960s; *Solidarietà Nazionale* in the 1970s; the *Pentapartito* in the 1980s), the parties exercised their government-forming role more in the distribution of government appointments among the coalition parties than in defining the government policies. In short, their principal concern was posts more than policy directions. To the extent that within the framework of the inter-party accord, elaboration of programmes and the defining of government priorities resolved themselves into the ritual celebration of commitments and problems without any systematic selection from the electoral manifestoes of the coalition parties (Mastropaolo and Slater 1987).

Then, analysing the Italian party government experience, temporal specifications are in order. They are in order because party government can be conceived as a *continuum* along which one can plot different combinations between party control of appointments and policies, and especially because irregular and at any rate reversible shifts can be created between one combination and another. Using the only empirically relevant benchmark combination for Italian history of this period - that between an organic party government and a *spartitorio* party government - we may say that the post-war period (till 1992, of course) was marked by alternating phases of (generally brief) *organic* party government and of (generally long) *spartitorio* party government. With the analytically important specification that the phases of organic party government coincided with periods in which the parties had to define or redefine the terms of the accords among themselves (those, that is, which inaugurated what I called the four principal *political seasons* of the time), while those of *spartitorio* party government coincided with periods of administration (of and internally to) already defined accords.

In fact, once the policy-programme framework had been defined, and given the impossibility of alternation, the parties could attend first to the distribution of governments posts and then, especially, to particularist management of government action. Why 'particularist'? Again Cotta (1994: 127) has proposed an interesting classification of government policies pursued in post-war Italy, which are ranked at three distinct levels. The first of them, which Cotta calls the level of metapolicies, is that at which the "fundamental arrangements" of the political regime are defined; the second, called the level of "medium-range" policy, is that at which "important aspects of economic, social, foreign, etc. policy" are defined; the third, the level of "micropolicies", is that of definition of "the ways in which particular interests are to be handled". On the basis of this classification, we may say that the phases of *spartitorio* party government coincided with the party control of micropolicies, while only in phases of organic party government did the parties have to concern themselves with medium-range policies. Of course, the parties (all of them, but the two largest ones, the DC and the PCI, especially) never ceased to occupy themselves with meta-policies, apart from anything else in order to sustain that particular ideological-cultural cleavage (communism vs. anti-communism) on which Italian consensual democracy had come to structure itself (thus distinguishing itself from the other consensual democracies instead motivated by ethnic-cultural cleavages).

Although the over-riding concern of the government parties was to control micropolicies, the latter, in their turn, proved extraordinarily conducive to compromise between the government majority and the out-of-government minority. This

point should be stressed (Pizzorno 1993). Whereas in Italian consensual democracy, unlike others of ethnic-cultural character, the government could never had developed into a Grand Coalition of the main parties, because of the *conventio ad excludendum* which penalized the second party (the PCI) for its placement in the international cleavage of the Cold War, some involvement of the PCI in the decision-making process was necessary, given its electoral and political importance. Thus, since it was impossible to integrate the PCI into the government majority (and, of course, even more impossible to turn it into the fulcrum for an alternating pole), the only recourse was to create a second (semi-official) government majority in the legislature. Naturally, these two distinct majorities could co-exist because the government system progressively structured itself along polycentric³ lines (Cotta 1987); progressively but on institutional premises nevertheless specifically established by the constitution.

Italian parliamentary democracy was therefore characterized by horizontal relationships between legislature and executive, and not by the vertical ones (in favour of the latter) distinctive of the other parliamentary democracies both majoritarian and consensual (ethnically-culturally based, however) (Cotta 1991). In Italy, both parliament and government retained their respective institutional autonomy, internally structuring themselves, moreover, on an equivalent horizontal and (at any rate) anti-centralist pattern. As we shall see, in the executive this structuring assumed the features of government "by individual ministries"; that is, a government in which the (ministries of the various) coalition parties were granted full autonomy in running the area of government assigned to them. In the legislature, this structuring assumed the features of a diffused-power parliament on account of its undifferentiated bicameralism, of the committees with law-giving powers which organized its work, and of the scant coordinating capacity of the parliamentary party groups (especially those of the centrist parties). In a parliament with little or no institutional centralization, with poorly cohesive parliamentary groups, it was evidently possible to fashion majorities which varied (with respect to the official government majority) according to the various issues under discussion.

Since confrontation on medium-range policies (those, that is, which marked out the government majority with respect to the parties excluded from it: consider economic or foreign policies) was temporally limited to the period of the opening of a new political season⁴, while the regularity of the process of government was set by micro-policies, and since the latter (because of their sectorial nature) could not mark out a majority from a minority, micro-policies showed to be extraordinarily fertile terrain for the formation of semi-official majorities (in the legislature) different from the official one (in the executive). After all, micro-policies were also indispensable for the principal party of the left, which was excluded from government and knew that it could never enter, so that it could strengthen links with its electorate and demonstrate to it its legislative efficiency despite such exclusion. At the same time, the predominance of micro-policies in the action of the majority and minority parties transformed them into arenas of corporative interests and thereby exposing them to the danger of political and

³ Polycentric is a system (of government) with multiple center of decision-making power.

⁴ It is important to bear in mind that the Italian governmental majorities were set up by default, that is for want of anything better. Consequently, the confrontation on medium-range policies could not last too much for the risk to show the internal fragility of the majority.

organizational fragmentation. Whence the periodic recourse to meta-policies, since only these, given their ideological nature, could maintain the borders among parties (and between the two main ones in particular) otherwise largely indistinguishable in terms of the interests that they represented. The outcome was that micro-policies and meta-policies fuelled (and justified) each other, to the inevitable detriment of the only policy level, the intermediate one, able programmatically to connote a party government.

There thus arose something akin to reciprocal guarantees between the two main parties and between the two institutions of government. With its involvement in legislative decision-making the PCI could neutralize the *conventio ad excludendum* in its favour in the executive, consequently allowing the DC to dominate the latter but without achieving majoritarian control over the whole governmental process (Di Palma 1990). Moreover, there is considerable testimony that the same ministerial composition of governments, given the above-mentioned reciprocal guarantees, although directly determined by the preferences of the parties in the government coalition, it was, with the Sixties, also indirectly influenced by those of the parties excluded from it (i.e. the PCI); indirectly because they were expressed by default through indication of the ministers they did not wish to see installed in ministries of particular importance.

B. After 1992: continuity in discontinuity

The crisis of the *partitocrazia* made manifest in 1992 drastically curtailed the role of the parties in government formation. Indeed, the national elections of 5-6 April 1992 presented the country with a new situation: the four-party government majority (DC, PSI or Socialist, PSDI or Socialdemocrats and PLI or Liberals - but no longer the PRI or Republicans) which had sustained the seventh Andreotti government (formed in April 1991) emerged in reduced form from the elections, without, however, a new majority coming about. A contradictory effect of an electoral market which was beginning to open itself up (Mannheimer and Sani 1994). The new parliament, already precarious at the level of inter-party power relationships, was even more shaky at the level of institutional legitimation, due to the torrent of *avvisi di garanzia* (writs of judicial investigation) that had politically decimated the parties of the previous government majority (Ricolfi 1993). As if this were not enough, once installed, the new parliament found itself faced with the problem (of great institutional importance at that stage) of electing the new president of the republic. Right from the first round of voting, it was evident that the previous government majority, reeling from the onslaught waged by the electors and the judges, was unable to obtain the election of its own nominee and, somewhat humiliated, had to cut its losses by supporting another candidate (the just-elected chairman of the senate, Scalfaro) who, though a member of the party dominant until that time (the DC), had distinguished himself by maintaining his distance from the erstwhile leaders of the five-party and then four-party majority (i.e. Craxi from the PSI, Andreotti and Forlani from the DC). As soon as he was elected, both because he wanted to stress his different outlook from the previous president (Cossiga, who was an outspoken critic of the republican "partitocratic" institutions) and because he was deeply convinced of it, the new president declared himself to be an "absolute" admirer and servant of parliamentary democracy. But, faced with a party system in growing disarray and with a parliament unable to generate a reliable government majority, the new president of the republic left immediately the previous declaration in the air. And in fact, "malgré monsieur le Président", the presidential powers, which were after all ambiguously regulated by the Constitution (Merlini 1995), passed through a dramatic process of expansion, since 1992.

Consider the formal power of nomination of the president of the council of ministers (as provided for to the president of the republic by art. 92.2). Although presidents of the republic has been traditionally obliged to precede the formal "nomination" (or *nomina*) with the informal "appointment" (or *incarico*, not envisaged, of course, by the Constitution) - because candidates for the presidency of the council of ministers had to verify by their own their proposed government's degree of acceptability to the parties, with the result that many informal "appointments" were never transformed into formal "nominations" - with 1992 the boundaries between the two became blurred (Ceccanti and Fabbrini 1995: 262-3). Already with Amato, and then especially with Ciampi, the president of the republic announced an "appointment" that was universally perceived as a "nomination". Hence the two appointees were able to "sciogliere positivamente la riserva" (literally "positively dissolve the reserve", i.e. report to the president of the republic that their government may plausibly obtain the confidence - or the non-no-confidence - of the two chambers of parliament) in record time: ten days in Amato's case and indeed only two in Ciampi's (whereas, for example, twenty-eight days were required in the case of De Mita in 1988). Thus, amid deligitimated parties and a parliament unable to produce alternative majorities, an unprecedented area of influence was created for the "governmental" action of the president of the republic. Starting from the task of choosing a president of the council of ministers able to marshal 'crosswise' support both in parliament and in public opinion.

Furthermore, while still evident in the inauguration of the Amato government was the influence exerted by the parties of the previous majority on the distribution of government posts, as well as on the same choice of the candidate for the presidency of the council of ministers, this influence progressively dwindled until, in February and March 1993, fully five ministers were forced to resign because they had received *avvisi di garanzia* (although only four of them were subsequently replaced), followed by the replacement of a further three ministers (the first because he had resigned in dissent with government policy, the second on his transfer to another ministry post, and the third because he was seconded to run the recently-created ministry of privatization). In all these cases the influence of the president of the republic predominated over that of the four parties DC, PSI, PSDI and PLL, which nevertheless continued to support the government (Amato 1994). And it was an influence that reached its culmination with the formation of the Ciampi government in May 1993, as regards both the choice of the president of the council (amongst other things, Ciampi was then governor of the bank of Italy, and thus became the first non-parliamentarian president of the council in the history of the republic) and the composition of the list of ministers (explicitly drawn up jointly by the president of the republic and the candidate for the presidency of the council with ample recourse to technicians and university professors).

In short, there is considerable evidence that, in the reshuffling of the Amato government and in the composition of the Ciampi government, the leaders of the principal parties were informed of the names of ministers only after the list had been drawn up. The government programme, in particular when the Ciampi government was formed, was an agenda of policy priorities derived principally from the interpretation given by the president of the republic to the country's problems. Suffice it is to point out that the Ciampi government was formed in the aftermath of the electoral referendum of 18 April 1993, when a large majority of the electorate pronounced in favour of abolishing the proportional electoral system until then in force. And it was the president of the republic who pledged

to ensure that parliament would approve the package of measures that the government was about to present (and first and foremost the new electoral law that should be approved "under the dictate" of popular will, as well as under the pressure applied by the agent of the latter, that is, the government desired by the president of the republic).

The influence acquired by the president of the republic in government formation generated severe institutional conflict on the occasion of the third government of the period subsequent to 1992: that of Berlusconi. The reason is straightforward: unlike the two previous ones, the Berlusconi government was a government of electoral not presidential derivation. It was born, in fact, from the national elections of 27-28 March 1994; that is, from the first largely bipolar contest held in the conditions of the new party system which had (if partially) risen from the ashes of the previous one overwhelmed by the electoral referendum and judicial inquiry. However, because of the nature of the alliances that formed on the occasion of the elections, the outcome was the defeat of the left rather than the victory of the right. Although the left presented itself in relatively homogeneous manner in most of the single-member constituencies (232 for the senate and 435 for the chamber) established by the new electoral law, the right took the form of two distinct alliances in the north and south of the country, with the feature in common that in both alliances the dominant party was the same (i.e., FI or Forza Italia allied, a part from minor groups, in the south with the MSI or Movimento Sociale Italiano in the *Polo del Buon Governo* and in the north with the LN or Lega Nord in the *Polo della Libertà*)⁵. Thus more appropriately it was FI which 'politically' won the elections, displaying an extraordinary ability to establish indirect links between manifestly irreconcilable political forces (MSI and LN) (on these elections, see the volumes edited by Bartolini and D'Alimonte 1995 and Pasquino 1995).

Although the sum of the two distinct poles gave rise to a clearcut majority in the chamber but a much narrower if not non-existent one in the senate, the president of the republic was forced to acknowledge the success of FI by mandating its leader (on April 30) to form the new government. This mandate was anything but formal, however, given that it was issued after a month of intense consultation with the various party leaders (while the new parliament was installed on April 15). And when he issued the mandate, the president of the republic assumed the explicit function of guarantor of the formation of the new government: both because the leader of FI, and therefore the appointed president of the council, continued to wield private economic power (with a large slice of the telecommunications sector crucial to democracy) irreconcilable with the new public functions that he was to perform, and because his majority appeared to be anything but cohesive (one need only consider that Berlusconi took fully twelve days to "sciogliere la riserva", that is to report the president of the republic his government might obtain the parliamentary confidence).

5 Forza Italia, the new center-right party, was set up in the few months before the national elections of March 1994 by its leader, Mr. Silvio Berlusconi, who utilized the resources, personnel and organizations of his huge telecommunications company or Fininvest (McCarthy 1995). The pro-fascist MSI changed in the post-fascist party of AN or Alleanza nazionale right after the March 1994 national elections. Lega Nord first appeared in two regions of the North (Veneto and Lombardia) in the Eighties, but did not get representation in the Camera dei deputati (or lower chamber of the national parliament) till the national elections of 1992 when she got 55 parliamentarians, more than doubled (117) in the following national elections of 1994.

The president of the republic's function as guarantor was manifest in both spheres of government action. Regarding government policies, on the one hand, on May 10 the president took care to make manifest his correspondence with the appointed president of the council; correspondence in which he marked out the confines (for that matter, already specified in a speech of April 26) within which the new ministers should operate (viz., "full commitment to alliances, to the policy of European unity, to the policy of peace" as regards foreign policy; "the unity of Italy and respect for republican legality" as regards internal security policy; "social solidarity" as regards welfare policy). On the other hand, concerning government appointments (on which he had already been obliged to intervene when rebutting a motion passed in the European parliament on May 4 criticising the possible presence of erstwhile fascists in the Italian government), he repeatedly invited the appointed president of the council to choose "ministers who command respect at home and abroad". These were not solely rhetorical recommendations, considering that he vetoed the appointment of a leading member of the MSI loyal to the fascist experience of the end of the war Salò Republic (who had claimed the ministry for Italians Abroad for himself) and, just before the swearing-in of the government, demanded the exchange of ministries between the FI lawyer (assigned the ministry of Justice) and a representative of the *Unione di Centro* (assigned the ministry of Defence). Given these premises, the eight months of the Berlusconi government were not surprisingly marked by constant tension with the presidency of the republic, whose "governmental" interference was nonetheless fed up by Berlusconi's reluctance to resolve his conflict of interests.

Although under the tutelage of the president of the republic, the Berlusconi government decisively broke with the practice of the two previous ones (Ciampi's in particular) by returning (more out of necessity than desire, it seems) to coalition party government practices. Thus government appointments were once again controlled by the coalition parties, which distributed them according to the bargaining criteria of the coalition policy, with the inevitable corollary of infra-coalitional conflict. Accordingly, the post of vice-president was reinstated, and then doubled so that it could be assigned to members of the two larger parties (MSI now become AN and LN, although only the AN leader saw himself invested with the power to substitute for the president of the council in his absence). FI took the largest number of ministries (eight) while the other two larger parties (AN and LN) took five each. Independent non-parliamentarian ministers were drastically thinned out (there now being only two of them, one at the Treasury ministry, the other at the newly-created ministry of Italians in the World). The number of vice-ministers (or under-secretaries) returned to the level prior to 1992, both to counterbalance the ministerial appointments (to the point that three vice-ministers, two from the FI and one from the AN, were appointed to the ministry of the Interior, which the LN wanted), and to satisfy all the coalition parties as regards their representation in the most important ministries (to the point that fully four vice-ministers, one for each of the basic parties in the coalition - FI, AN, LN and CCD or new Christian Democrats⁶ - were appointed to the independent Treasury ministry). The coalition parties were authorized to create their own "government delegations" with their relative spokesmen. And finally the new gover-

6 The dissolution (before the national elections of March 1994) of the largest party of the Italian post-war republic, the DC, left on the ground several Christian Democrats micro-parties. The two more politically significant (but electorally insignificant) were, on the center-right, the CCD or Comitati Cristiani Democratici and, on the center-left, the PPI or Partito Popolare Italiano.

nment contained a numerically significant proportion (almost one-quarter of ministers) of political personnel from the previous five-party majorities.

So, although the Berlusconi government had managed to break the sequence of residual party government, it proved unable to relaunch organic party government. And this was not only due to the conditioning imposed by the president of the republic; it also and especially stemmed from the heated conflict over policies that very soon broke out internally to the government (between the LN and the other coalition partners) and which plunged it into crisis (Berlusconi tendered his resignation on 22 December 1994). It is interesting to note that, in terms of durability, the Berlusconi government (with eight months and twelve days) was even more short-lived than the average duration (12 months and 3 days) of the governments of the period 1945-1989. Of course, the contradictory electoral reform law was partly responsible for the premature crisis of that government. Yet the main reason for its failure lay in the new political context that had arisen after the crisis of 1992, and namely the fluidity of party alignments and the provisional nature of the cleavages among them. For that matter, no electoral law, even the best of them, can create institutional order where there is political disorder (Barbera 1994). One cannot save to note, however, that the new electoral law, although imperfect, was able to prevent greater fragmentation than that which would have occurred if the elections had been held using the previous system (Agosta 1994).

Thus, after the crisis of the Berlusconi government, the country returned to a residual party government presided over by Dini. In this case too, the President of the Republic played the protagonist's role in resolving the crisis, on the basis, however, of parliamentary consensus that had been previously and explicitly sought, and therefore in contrast, at least in these terms, with the circumstances surrounding the formation of the Ciampi government in May 1993. Indeed, in January 1995, the new Dini government was based on the support of an unprecedented alliance between the LN and the (centre and left) parties defeated in the elections of the previous March. An alliance, however, which did not command the majority of the parliamentary seats, to the point that the Dini government has been made possible, formally, by the abstention of the parties which supported the Berlusconi government (infact the government got only 302 votes of the 316 parliamentary votes required). However, when the new government was formed, the parties supporting it were largely uninfluential in the distribution of government appointments (the ministers were once again selected by the president of the council jointly with the president of the republic). In fact the months that followed saw fierce conflict between certain ministers and certain parties of the new parliamentary majority (an emblematic example being the minister of Justice, whose resignation was formally requested and obtained by the *Progressisti Federati* parliamentary groups -that is the coalition of the leftist parties- in the senate and chamber). And, as well, the parties exerted only limited influence on the definition of the government's policies. In fact, the Dini government committed itself to the pursuit of an extremely limited range of objectives (four in all) - while also undertaking formally to resign once they had been achieved as it did finally in January 1996- objectives that reflected the common sense of national priorities rather than the programmes of specific parties. Although the president of the republic solicited, in the month following the Dini parliamentary resignation, the formation of a new "technical" government, this time the parties (especially of the center-right) halted his pressure obliging him to dissolve the parliament in February and to call for new elections in April 1996.

III. Cabinet organization and decision-making

A. 1948-1988: *the acephalous republic*

At least until the beginning of the 1980s, Italian parliamentary democracy was the archetype of a "coherent model of acephalous republic" (Cavalli 1992: 237). Although art. 95.1 of the constitution solemnly states that "the President of the Council of Ministers directs the general policy of the Government and is responsible for it. He maintains the unity of political and administrative direction by promoting and coordinating the activities of the ministers", the head of the Italian executive has rarely been anything more than an equal among equals. After all, the same article of the constitution, after celebrating the role of the president of the council, immediately takes pains to point out in the next sub-paragraph that "the ministers are collectively responsible for the actions of the Council of Ministers and individually for the actions of their ministries".

This is why, given the coalitional nature of the executive, this latter came to be necessarily interpreted as the projection of the party secretariats in the coalition, which were represented internally to the executive by the various ministers (whose ministerial responsibilities were commensurate with the electoral weight of their respective parties, or of their internal factions, or again of the success of their personal preferences, Calise and Mannheimer 1982)⁷. And since the policy directions of the executive were established externally to the executive itself - that is, in the coalition parties and at their 'negotiating tables' - it followed that its directive body (the presidency of the council), devoid of any programme-making autonomy, was unable to develop its decision-making autonomy. After all, in an acephalous democracy, leaders with a transactional rather than transformational role are rewarded (Fabbrini 1991: 513). Hence, as Cotta has written (1988: 133), the prime minister, at least until the mid-1980s, exerted influence "when he assumed the role of mediator among the various actors in the governmental arena". Of course, there has been no lack of political leaders who, in particular circumstances, managed to impose their political preferences on refractory coalition partners, or on their own party. However, these leaders have been the exception rather than the rule. And the rule has been that of acephalous governments, sustained by the practice rigorously respected internally to the predominant party (the DC) in postwar governments of keeping the role of party leader and head of the government distinct.

Given these characteristics of Italian coalition government, it is not surprising that the organizational structure of the presidency of the council has been invariably weak and inefficient. In fact, a robustly organized presidency of the council would have altered the equilibria among the coalition partners entirely to the advantage of the party able to control it. As Hine writes (1988: 215): "the technical support which the Prime Minister receives is... poor. There is no Cabinet secretariat as such. The Prime Minister's office houses a number of specialised functional agencies which have found a home there for no particularly clear reason, and which have been of some marginal use to the Prime Minister in his central political role." The president of the council was able to rely on a sort of personal cabinet consisting of a handful of cronies from his political faction and which partially compensated for the absence of a genuine staff structure. Internally to this small cabinet an important role was played by the under-secretary to

⁷ Those ministers behaved as the delegates of their own parties, defending jealously their decision-making powers within the respective ministries.

the presidency of the council, helped organizationally by the head of the cabinet secretariat. The point, however, is this: in both cases their activity was aimed at maintaining control over relationships with parliament (and therefore with the parties in the government coalition) and not over those with other ministries and the various branches of the executive (as happens in the competitive and majoritarian democracies). In short, also the personal cabinet itself had to help the president of the council to exercise his role of mediator in the coalition, rather than bolster his role as head of the government.

B. *The reform of 1988: a head sprouts*

The situation changed in the 1980s. The electoral and political decline of the PCI, and the difficulties besetting the DC, pushed the new government coalition, the *Pentapartito*, in the direction of greater cohesion towards the outside and greater equilibrium among its internal components (the DC, on one side, and the lay parties led by the PSI, on the other side, Pasquino 1994). Specifically, the ascent, political more than electoral, of the PSI tended to make that party the guarantor of governmental stability (and its secretary the overall leader of the government coalition). Thus, both because of the universally decried cumbersome nature of "government by individual ministries" (that is, by the government split into lots and organized around governmental substructures endowed with decision-making autonomy and linked to their corresponding parliamentary committees), and because of the influence exerted by the powerful socialist leadership in the period 1983-1987 (which proved itself able to impose a specific agenda on the government and continuity on its action, Fabbrini 1994b), the presidency of the council underwent a series of organizational innovations which progressively strengthened its role in the government system (and with it the authority of the president of the council) (Cassese 1986). Innovations, these, which culminated in enactment of an important reform law - no. 400 of 1988 - which with a forty-year delay finally (Manzella 1991) implemented the constitutional commitment to more precise definition of the duties of the executive (article 95, in fact, states that "the law provides for the institution of the the Presidency of the Council and determines the number, attributions and organization of the ministries").

It is worth dwelling on this law (Vassallo 1995; Merlini 1991), because it enables us to gauge the changes that have taken place in the presidency of the council and in its decision-making processes. First of all, the law assigns considerable regulative powers to the government, favouring the de-legislation of many administrative matters; powers which, moreover, the government had appropriated some time previously (Calise 1994), thereby giving rise to a sort of legislative autonomy of the executive (De Siervo 1992). Indeed, the latter (but also the president of the council and his individual ministers) may promulgate rules (by decree or via a decree issued by the president of the republic - or DPR) relative to matters of public policy which have not been the subject of parliamentary legislation (indeed the parliament has gone so far as to abrogate certain legislative measures, thereby enabling the government to regulate such matters by means of specific decrees)⁸. But it is above all membership of the European Community that has enabled the government to increase its regulative powers, begin-

⁸ This is a possibility of which the government has taken advantage, for example in regulating the organization of the public administration, or in disciplining the employment relationships of civil servants, or in instituting the ministry of University and Scientific Research (L. 168/1989, art. 12), or in defining the criteria for implementation of the national energy plan (L. 9/1991, arts. 1 and 17).

ning with definition of the procedures for fulfilment of EC obligations, or those relative to participation in EC law-making (L. 146/1990, art. 18), or regulations for the reception of EC dispositions (L. 428/1990, art. 4).

Secondly, the law has given more rigorous definition to the organizational structure underpinning both the action of the presidency of the council and of the president of the council. As regards the former, the law provides for the institution of: a secretariat of the president of the council with the task of coordinating the council of ministers; a cabinet council⁹ consisting of the most influential ministers in the executive (influential, of course, because of their role as semi-official representatives of the coalition parties) and with the task of supervising government policy directions; a number of inter-ministerial committees on matters of especial importance (fewer in number, though, than previously); a vice-president of the council with the task of establishing a balance among the main parties in the government coalition.

As regards the president of the council, he may draw on the services of several new departments¹⁰ and he is authorized to create, by decree, *ad hoc* offices and study and work groups, as well as to reorganize those already in existence with a certain margin of discretion¹¹. Again as regards the office of the president of the council, the most significant aspect is the creation of an authentic general secretariat headed by the general secretariat of the presidency of the council, which has rapidly come to assume the role of providing strategic support to the president of the council. This is because internally to the general secretariat there are those organizational structures (15 of them) which help the president of the council in his direction and coordination of the government's programme.¹² This organizational redefinition of both the presidency of the council and of the office of the president of the council has also considerably expanded the personnel employed in the various bodies supporting each of them. This expansion was fixed by the law at 432 councillors (i.e. staff with managerial and consultative roles) and 3269 officials and office-workers (organized into ten functional categories).

9 An organism which institutionalizes a body already set up by the first Craxi government of August 1983-April 1987.

10 A department for Relationships with Parliament which liaises with the legislature; a department for Regional Affairs, and a department for the Coordination of Communitarian Policies, as well as a State-Regions Conference: all of these with tasks of inter-governmental coordination. New ministerial departments have also been created, directed by ministers without portfolio or by under-secretaries with special authority, agents on behalf of the president of the council, like the department of Civil Protection, the department for Extraordinary Intervention in the *Mezzogiorno*, the department of Urban Areas and the department for Social Affairs.

11 Indeed, since 1990, the following bodies have been created: the National Commission for Equality and Equal Opportunity between Men and Women; the Commission for Access to Administrative Documents; the National Committee for Handicap Policies; the National Commission for the Environment; the Commission for the Exercise of the Right to Strike in Essential Public Services and for the Safeguarding of the Rights of Constitutionally Protected Persons; the Commission for Human Rights; the Commission for Data Protection; the Consultative Committee for the Mountain Environment; the Adriatic Authority.

12 Such as: the Committee of Experts for the Government Programme; the Department for Legal and Legislative Affairs; the Office for Administrative Coordination; the Office of the Diplomatic Councillor and that of the Military Councillor; the Press Office; the Department of the Budget and of Administrative and Technical Services; the Department for Economic Affairs.

In addition to these 3,701 persons, 144 executives and 448 officials and office-workers are employed in the government commissariats in the twenty Italian regions.¹³

C. After 1988: which executive model?

If these are the functional and organizational features of the new law, to what model of the executive do they relate? The new law, besides reinforcing the collective nature of the executive decision-making context with new structures¹⁴ and powers, pursued all the three plausible strategies (Andeweg 1993:33) of distribution of decision-making power within a cabinet system (the collegial, the oligarchical and the prime-ministerial). In fact, as regards the collegial strategy, the law has not only recognized the autonomy of individual ministries (as guaranteed by the constitution) but has explicitly stipulated that all the principal decisions of government policy (art. 2) and all the principal decisions concerning appointment of government personnel (art. 3) should be taken by the council of ministers as a whole. Furthermore, it is the responsibility of the council of ministers to approve the proposal of the president of the council to apply to the chambers for a vote of confidence (art. 2.2), just as it is the responsibility of the council of ministers to resolve conflicts of jurisdiction among ministers. Of course, this set of measures¹⁵ is coherent with the collegial model of the executive, if we assume a collegial model as the one in which "all ministers should have an *equal* say in the decision-making process" (Andeweg 1993:26).

As regards the oligarchical strategy, and if we agree with Andeweg (1993:28) that "the indicators *par excellence* of an oligarchical cabinet system is constituted by the existence of an inner cabinet", the new law formalized the two crucial institutions of the cabinet council and the vice-presidency of the council. These were frequently used by the governments of the *Pentapartito* (and therefore by the four-party 7th Andreotti government) prior to the crisis of 1992. Thus the De Mita government (April 1988-July 1989) used the cabinet council (composed of 4 DC ministers, 1 PSI, 1 PRI, 1 PSDI and 1 PLI) and the vice-presidency (De Michelis, PSI), and so too did the 6th Andreotti government of July 1989-April 1991 (cabinet council: 5 DC ministers, 1 PSI, 1 PSDI, and 1 PLI; vice-presidency, Martelli PSI). Yet these institutions have been entirely forgotten by the "technical" governments of Amato (July 1992-May 1993), Ciampi (May 1993-May 1994) and Dini (January 1995-January 1996). But they could not have been entirely ignored by the Berlusconi government, which, as we have seen, was forced to reactivate the vice-presidency, doubling it in order to satisfy the demands of the other two main partners in the coalition (besides FI). Finally, as regards the prime-ministerial strategy, the law has equipped the president of the council with struc-

13 This figure, however, should be treated with caution: both because the staff levels established by the law have not always been reached, and indeed have been cut by the governments of the period post-1992 and because these figures do not distinguish between personnel employed in activities in support of action by the presidency of the council or of the president of the council and personnel working in the ministries without portfolio but with no functional connections with the latter.

14 The structures are organized into a hierarchy ranging from the secretary general to the departments to the service offices, with the option of creating free-standing offices independent of either a department or a service.

15 Which was then formalized by the *Regolamento interno del Consiglio dei ministri* enacted by Ciampi with decree by the presidency of the council of ministers on 10 November 1993.

tures and powers which have reinforced his capacity to direct the government. Furthermore, should the president of the council deem an action by an individual minister to be at variance with government policy, he may suspend him, although evaluation of the case depends on the council of ministers (art. 5). To be sure, the most salient prime-ministerial feature is the constraint imposed on individual ministers to submit their public declarations on matters concerning government policy to the president of the council for approval. The coexistence of these three different models of cabinet organization, however, should come as no surprise because, in the absence of breakdown, institutions tend to develop themselves in successive stratifications (Panebianco 1995).

In any case it has been politics which has dispelled the ambiguity of the new law in favour of one or other model of the executive. In short, first the crisis of the old party system and then the stalling of the new party system, allowed the three "technical" governments of the period July 1992-January 1996 to neglect the innovations intended to rationalize the collegial and oligarchical politics of the government coalition and to strengthen the capacity of the president of the council to direct the government. This, though, was not the case of the other government (the only one coming out from an election) of the period, which was indeed obliged to resort to a laborious process of coalition-tuning in order to maintain the unity of the coalition, nevertheless proved fruitless. With the result that the only significant organizational innovations introduced by that government were a strengthening of both the personal staff of the president of the council and the public relations staff of the presidency of the council.

IV. A 'semi-presidential' residual party government?

In the 1990s, under the powerful thrust of the crisis of the *partitocrazia*, Italian party government has progressively dwindled. After the forty-year alternation of brief phases of *organic* party government with much longer phases of *spartitorio* party government, in 1992 a phase began of practically uninterrupted *residual* party government which lasted (for now) till January 1996. Since 1992, in fact, and with the exception of the second half of 1994, government formation has been increasingly less determined by party choices and increasingly more conditioned by the strategies of the president of the republic. Decision-making processes internal to the government have displayed (also given their "technical" nature) the growing pre-eminence of the president of the council, because of the personal investiture of the latter by the president of the republic; pre-eminence which in its turn has been made possible by the recourse to one of the strategies pursued by the reform of the presidency of the council with the law of 1988. In the absence of an institutional and constitutional adjustment of the government system to the new electoral arrangement introduced in 1993, the inability of the latter (made manifest especially with election of 27-28 April 1994) to produce stable majorities for the fluidity of the new party system have greatly expanded the powers of the presidency of the republic in the formation and then in the strategic choices of governments. With the paradox (which has grown more marked over time) that a 'parliamentarist' president has found himself having to act in an increasingly 'presidentialist' manner.

Of course, this expansion of powers has not been contrary to the constitution; it results, indeed, from an ambiguity in the constitution itself concerning the proper role of the president of the republic. The fact of the matter is that the president of the republic - who is elected (art. 83) indirectly by the parliament in joint session, with the presence of three delegates from each region (only 1 delegate

from Val d'Aosta) (art. 83.2), and who is "not responsible for the acts committed in the exercise of his function" (art. 90) has increasingly assumed a political role. Although the constitution (art. 92.2) assigns the president of the republic the task of nominating the president of the council of ministers "and, on his proposal, the ministers", it not assign to him that of politically guaranteeing the government. Devoid of effective institutional counter-powers (because the other guarantor institutions, beginning with the constitutional court, traditionally controlled by the parties, have been impaired by the crisis of the latter), the president of the republic has come to perform a role not dissimilar from that of the president of the French fifth republic (who, however, Sartori 1994: ch.7, is elected by the electors of that country and obliged to give account of the policy choices made in the exercise of his mandate, besides being kept under control by an effective *Conseil Constitutionnel* because not controlled by parties).

Naturally, various factors have been at work in the diminution of the governmental role of the parties. Some of them are apparently contingent, both as regards government appointments and policies. For example, during the Berlusconi government, it was evident that the new parties that had recently moved to the forefront still did not possess professional politicians able to absolve government functions. And it was evident, as well, that a president of the council who was simultaneously the owner of almost half the country' radio and television station could not be left alone in deciding his strategies. Other factors seem less contingent, and regarding government policies in particular. In strategic areas of public policy (economic, monetary, budgetary and social policies) the government priorities and their fulfilment are increasingly imposed by the external environment (and therefore externally to the national parties themselves) via compelling signals emitted by international markets and the no less peremptory demands of EC institutions and Italy's major international partners.

In these circumstances one may legitimately ask, given that (for four years) the parties had scant influence on the distribution of government appointments and were devoid of significant influence over policies, whether the time has not come for them to leave the scene. It is difficult to answer although the outcome of the national elections of April 1996 seemed to reopen a new phase of organic party government. Anyway, for the moment, one can only point out that the Italian parliament, has ended up by justifying the effective evolution (between 1992-1996) of the latter into a semi-presidential system. For roughly four years, government formation was weakly controlled by the parties and closely influenced by the president of the republic. Semipresidentialism with residual party government, precisely.

Abstract

The article deals with the evolution and transformation of Italian party government in the period 1948-1996. Considering the two crucial dimensions of "government formation" and "cabinet organization and decision-making", the article compares the period before and after 1992 (till the elections of April 1996). The comparison shows the extraordinary experience of the four years 1992-1996: universally defined as the years of the "Italian transition". If the parties controlled both the processes of government formation and cabinet decision-making in the period 1948-1992, in the following period of 1992-1996 both processes were controlled more by the president of the Republic (and by the "technical" president of Council of ministers selected by him) than by the parties (with the partial exception of the Berlusconi government of May-December 1994). The parties were so unimportant in the four years of the Italian transition, that we can define this one as a period of an unprecedented semipresidentialism with residual party government.



Party encroachment on the executive and legislative branch in the Belgian polity

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I. Introduction

The grip of political parties of central government actors (cabinet, parliament, the bureaucracy, judiciary) in Belgium was most striking in the 1970s and 1980s. In this period Belgium, like Italy, constitutes a very strong case of *partitocracy*. Yet, while the Italian *partitocrazia* collapsed brusquely in the early 1990s, the Belgian *particratie*¹ underwent a number of gradual modifications (some imposed by external factors, others were the product of genuine voluntarist autocorrections), which prevented the complete collapse of the *partitocratic* system and to some degree restored the governability of the country.

In this article, we will present for each sector of central government first the main features as they were under full *partitocratic* rule during the 1970s and 1980s; second, we will indicate which corrections were introduced, that reduced the (negative consequences of) the grip of political parties on central government actors, structures and processes. Finally, we will discuss the problem of the public debt and policy inertia.

A large number of features of the Belgian executive and legislative system stem from the features of the party system which is characterised by extreme fragmentation (see the contribution of Deschouwer in this issue). While electoral competition between parties on the left-right and denominational conflict dimensions has become more centripetal, competition on the linguistic-regional cleavage line has become increasingly centrifugal, a type of party system which Sartori labels "polarised pluralism", with hardly any party in the centre of the ethno-linguistic divide, and most parties drifting away from this centre. The negative repercussions of such a party system for the executive/legislative system are most noticeable during the process of government formation, the internal organisation and functioning of the cabinet, the role of parliament and individual MPs, and the working of the bureaucracy.

II. Government formation

The growing number of potential coalition parties, the increasing complexity of matters to be dealt with, and the growing opposition between regions and communities, has made the process of government formation increasingly difficult in

¹ For an analysis of the main features of party government in Belgium, see DE WINTER (1981, 1989).

the 1968-1992 period. This is especially true where the question of which parties will constitute a coalition and which policy the coalition will pursue is concerned.²

A. *The composition of coalitions*

The growing fragmentation of the party system increased the number of parties needed to constitute winning majorities. While until 1968 usually the government included two parties and exceptionally even a single party³ the splitting of the traditional parties into two independent parties evidently doubled the number of coalition members. In addition, the growing saliency of the institutional cleavages led to the formation of several surplus governments that controlled a two-third majority in both chambers, required to reform the constitution. This necessitated the inclusion of one or two "surplus" parties. Hence, while the average number of "parties in government" in the 1950-1968 period, i.e. before the splitting of the traditional parties, was only 1.6 (10 governments), the 19 governments in the 1968-1995 period included on the average 4.5 parties.⁴

Yet, in spite of the fact that the number of *regierungsfähige* parties has increased dramatically, and the number of possible minimum winning coalitions rose exponentially, in practice coalition formation in terms of party composition is less chaotic as one might expect it to be (Ström, Budge & Laver, 1994). First, except for the 1954-1958 period, the christian-democratic parties have always been included in the coalition. Not only have the christian-democrats been in power since 1958. In addition, given the fact that they were the pivotal as well as the largest party family, they constituted the main coalition builder, that could usually freely choose between liberals and socialists as coalition partners.⁵ Therefore, since 1958, only once (and only for one year) the Prime Minister was not a christian-democrat. This continuous presence in government of the CVP-PSC also explains the high degree of policy stability in the post-war period (infra).

B. *Long duration of formation of process*

The growing number of *coalitionsfähige* parties has rendered the formation process much more complex and also more crucial to the functioning of central government. In fact, Belgium has become the European record holder in terms of the duration of government formation. In the 1968-1990 period it took on the average 78 days to build a government after general elections (two days more than the Netherlands, while Italy comes fourth with 52 days) (De Winter, 1995).

² For a detailed analysis of government formation, see DE WINTER, FROGNIER & RIHOUX (1996) and DE WINTER, TIMMERMANS & DUMONT (1997).

³ Due to specific circumstances of the first years after the liberation some oversized coalitions were formed.

⁴ Figures calculated on data of WOLDENDORP, BUDGE & KEMAN (1993) and updated with own data for the post-1988 period, excluding the present Dehaene II four-party government.

⁵ Occasionally, when two thirds majorities were required in order to reform the constitution, a tripartite coalition between all the traditional parties (1973-1974, 1980), or a bipartite coalition with one or more regionalist parties would be formed (1974-1980, 1988-1991).

The impact of the fragmentation of the party system is clear: in the period before the splitting of the traditional parties, the process consumed less than half the time it took afterwards (1946-1965: 31 days; 1968-1995: 74 days).⁶ Also the number of "informateurs", "negotiators" and "formateurs" per formation has grown.⁷

The spectacular increase in the time necessary to form a government is due to the difficulties the growing number of *regierungsfähige* parties have to arrive at an mutually acceptable compromise on policies, and not on the question of who gets which ministerial portfolio, a question which is usually dealt with in a couple of days.

C. Centrality of the policy agreement

The increasing number of autonomous veto players involved in the process of government formation has considerably reduced the rewards of government participation in terms of offices and policies. Parties can claim less ministerial portfolios, patronage resources, and policies favourable to their electorates and clientelles than before. The decline of the rewards of office made government participation more hazardous, and the risks of some partner "shirking" on the others more likely. This increased the need for contracts *ex ante*, i.e. for clear, encompassing and enforceable agreements on policy as well as on patronage rewards, and for means that allow for monitoring and enforcing these contracts *ex post*.⁸

Hence, since the beginning of the 1970s, coalition parties started to draft elaborate and lengthy agreements (usually over 100 pages), in which most policy fields are covered in detail. These governmental agreements grew in length and became more detailed and encompassing more and more different policy fields, at least until 1992.⁹ Yet, this practice of the drafting, the publication and approval of these agreements by the respective party conferences of the new majority parties dates from 1965 only. Until the mid 1970s, these agreements only counted about ten pages and tended to be rather vague. Until then, the governmental declaration before the two Chambers before the vote of investiture constituted the prime policy contract between the coalition parties (Neels, 1975).

6 Governments that controlled a two-third majority in parliament take 27 more days to emerge than those that control only a normal majority. The Pearson correlation coefficient between the duration of the formation of a government and the number of parties included in the coalition equals 0.59 (LISSOIR, 1995).

7 In the 1950-1966 period, it took on the average 1.9 "informateurs", "negotiators" and "formateurs" to form a government, while in the 1968-1992 period, it took on the average 2.4 (calculated on data of LISSOIR, 1995, p.74).

8 For a discussion of shirking, *ex ante* and *ex post* monitoring, see STROM (1995)

9 The 1992 Dehaene I government broke with this tradition and started on the basis of a very limited and rather vague document. The reason for this change is that the main parties, after their disastrous results at the election of 1991, could not come to an agreement on several important policy areas, in particular on institutional reform. Hence the government legitimated this new procedure by considering itself as an 'emergency government', not capable of following the regular procedures. Hence, the agreement of this "emergency" government counted only 10 pages. However, the current Dehaene II government has drafted again a more substantial agreement.

Through designing these government agreements, supporting parties manage to define in detail what kind of policies the government and individual ministers should elaborate, when these should be implemented, and what kind of policies or problems should not be tackled due to lack of consensus. Ministers and party presidents often refer to the governmental agreement (called 'the bible') in order to defend a specific policy measure, or attack a measure taken by a minister which is not conform to the agreement. Breaches of the governmental agreement are considered a very serious matter, and are at the heart of intracoalition conflict and government resignation.

Another factor that increased the complexity of the formation process of national governments is coalition building processes at the level of the region and community. Up until now, the process of the formation of regional coalitions started at the same moment as when the national coalitions were built, i.e. after general elections which also reconstitute the regional and community legislatures.¹⁰

D. Role of party actors in formation

Top party leaders are the main actors in the formation process, the parliamentary leaders *as such* are not involved at all.¹¹ The government (in-)formateur talks with party teams which are usually composed of the party president, and two top party leaders, often candidate for the office of vice-PM or another major cabinet post. In order to solve technical problems, subcommittees are created, presided by a trustee of the formateur and composed of party technicians, often members of the party research centre. They report back to the formateur and their respective party presidents, who will meet again to solve the remaining points of disagreement.

In nearly all parties, the government composition and policy agreement has to be approved by the national congress, the supreme decision-making body of each party, which formally makes binding decisions for all party members. These congresses are constituted of representatives of the rank-and-file level, selected at the level of the communal or constituency party organisation. In practice, all party-top and mid level party elites are amongst those selected.

Since the 1970s, no party conference has ever rejected a coalition agreement. The usually large consensus on government agreement is not only due to the attractiveness of the policies the new government promises to implement, or the brilliance of the defence of the party negotiators of the deal they struck.¹² It is also due to the fact that a large number of conference participants have - directly or indirectly - an interest in having their party in power. First, most top party lea-

¹⁰ Yet, since 1988, the process of formation of regional coalitions has gained a certain degree of autonomy. Since then, they are usually concluded before the ones at the national level. They have started to complicate and to slow down the formation of national governments.

¹¹ While during this process, the party executive is kept regularly informed of the progress made, the party at large and the parliamentary party will get formally involved only after the policy negotiations have been concluded.

¹² Yet, more recently, outspoken rebellions of considerable minorities have occurred sporadically. The 1988 agreement was rejected by more than a third of the participants at the PS and PSC conferences. In 1992, the CVP conference approved the agreement by only 62%.

ders are promoted to the cabinet, a position every normal MP aspires. Second, MPs are supportive of the government as participation facilitates the success of their individual and collective constituency service. Third, the party intelligentsia is awarded with positions in the ministerial cabinets and with promotions into the highly politicised public sector. Fourth, the intraparty factions do not only find a government favourable to their demands, but often can nominate the ministers relevant to their interest, and appoint trustees in the relevant cabinets and ministerial administrations. Finally, most constituency party organisations can have some of their administrative personnel be paid by the state by 'parking' them in the ministerial cabinets. Hence, it comes as no surprise that party congresses usually approve governmental participation by overwhelming majorities, as most congress participants personally benefit from participation.

E. *Nomination of ministers*

Once the party conferences have approved the coalition agreement, the party presidents negotiate over the departments and competences ministers and secretaries of state of their party will obtain in the new government. Finally, they nominate the persons who will occupy these positions. This nomination does not have to be approved by other party instances (like the executive or congress).¹³

F. *Other matters decided during the formation process*

In Belgium also other matters are decided in the formation process:

- the size of the government in terms of number of ministers and secretaries of state (*infra*);
- its hierarchical structure (i.e. the relations between the PM, vice-PMs, and the autonomy of secretaries of state vis-à-vis the regular ministers competent in their sector);
- the cabinet's methods of co-ordination (the composition of standing cabinet committees);
- distribution of patronage (until recently, agreements were reached on the division of public jobs between the coalition parties (*infra*));
- coalition building at other levels;
- the division of parliamentary leadership positions (since the end of the 1960s the position of Speaker of the Chambers is included, and "weights" as much as a regular ministerial portfolio);

¹³ Yet, party presidents are evidently not entirely free in nominating those they personally prefer. Former ministers will demand to be nominated again, ministers representing strong constituency parties or intraparty factions will demand ministerial representation, ministerial appointments have to be spread in a fair way over the provinces and constituency parties, the sexes, and between Representatives and Senators. In addition, the degree of freedom of a party president depends strongly on his authority within his party. This authority depends on party culture, as well as on his personality and background. For the constraints on the nomination power of party presidents in Belgium, see DE WINTER, FROGNIER & RIHOUX (1996).

- the role of parliament in the decision-making process;¹⁴
- and finally, in some cases, also the duration of the coalition¹⁵.

G. Confirmation by parliamentary actors

The parliamentary groups are only involved at the very end of the government formation process, during the investiture debate. Since the coalition programme and configuration are approved by the general congress of the respective coalition parties before the government seeks the investiture by Parliament, a negative vote by majority MPs would openly defy the decisions of the party's supreme decision-making body. Thus, during the investiture debate, it does occur that majority MPs criticise some governmental intentions as contained in its programme. But seldom do they dare to follow this up with a negative vote.¹⁶

To conclude, the process of government formation has become the most crucial political process in Belgium as far as public policies are concerned. The growing complexity of this process has strongly jeopardised the policy making role of the legislative and executive system.

III. The impact of parties on the structure and functioning of the executive

A. Cabinet size

The increase in the number of parties constituting a coalition has expanded the size of the government. In the 1950-1966 period, the average number of ministers (excluding secretaries of state) was 17.9, in the 1968-1981 period it rose to 23.5. However in the 1981-1991 period it fell back to 17.8 ministers¹⁷. However, the reduction of the cabinet size in the 1981-1991 period was compensated by an increase in secretaries of state: in the first period, governments counted on the average only two secretaries of state, in the following period, the average rose to 7.1, while in the most recent period, it rose to 8.2.

14 Some coalition agreements stipulate that some delicate policy issues (like abortion or institutional reform) will be left to parliament to decide autonomously, without government initiatives or interference. In other issues, the cabinet sometimes reserves itself the right of initiative and orders Parliament not to touch upon the matter until the government has introduced its policy proposal as a bill. The most recent agreements conclude with a clause stating that all other policy initiatives not mentioned in the agreement, are subject to the rule of consensus between coalition parties in the cabinet as well as in the parliamentary arena.

15 During the formation of the Tindemans IV government (1977), the leaders of the five coalition parties decided to maintain this particular coalition for a period of two legislative terms, i.e. eight years, as many of the constitutional reforms included in the coalition agreement could only be implemented by the next parliament (the constitution can only be modified with regard to those articles that the preceding parliament declared subject to modification).

16 HOLVOET (1980) showed that discipline on votes of investiture is very high (2.23 percent of dissident votes in the House for the 1946-1979 period).

17 Data drawn from WOLDENDORP, BUDGE & KEMAN (1993).

Yet, also here one can notice a major self-imposed correction at the beginning of the 1990s. While in 1988 the Martens VIII government still counted 18 ministers and 13 secretaries of state, the Dehaene I government (1992-1995) counted only 15 ministers plus one secretary of state. The Dehaene II (1995-) government counts the same number of ministers, but with two secretaries of state.

This increase of the cabinet size in the 1970s and 1980s is due first to the creation of ministerial portfolios competent for one region or community only (like Education, Culture and Regional Development), portfolios that were part of the central government until 1981. Second, the higher number of parties in the coalition also inflates the number of positions, as more ministrables in each party have to be satisfied. Third, more parties also makes it more difficult to respect the rule of proportionality which governs the distribution of portfolios between coalition parties in Belgium (Schofield & Laver, 1990). Hence, in order to fine-tune the proportional distribution more and more secretaries of state were added to the office cake to be divided amongst more and more coalition partners.

B. *Decreasing cabinet collegiality and collectiveness*

The increasing number of ministers has made the principle of collegial and collective cabinet decision-making more difficult.¹⁸ First, a hierarchisation of government positions occurred in the 1970s and 1980s. Since then, we find amongst the regular cabinet members basically three categories: first there is the Prime Minister, who is sometimes also in charge of a small policy department (like recruitment of the Civil Service). Second, there are the vice-prime ministers, usually equal to the number of supporting parties.¹⁹ They are in charge of a large department but also serve as the leader in cabinet of the ministers of their party, and constitute with the other vice-PMs and the PM the so-called *Kerncabinet*. These vice-PMs are supported in their cabinet leadership role by a special *cabinet ministériel*, of about seventy personal collaborators, whose main tasks is to follow the decisions prepared by other ministers and safeguard the party's interest.²⁰ Third, there are the regular ministers, who head a specific department, for which they also can rely on a ministerial cabinet. Finally there are the secretaries of state, who only participate in cabinet meetings when issues related to their competence are on the agenda. In addition, they often work under the responsibility of a regular minister, in charge of a large department, whereby the secretary of state is responsible for only one sector of that department.

The most important issues, in terms of political delicacy or complexity, are increasingly settled in formal (in the Kerncabinet) or informal meetings between the PM and his vice-PMs. Once an agreement is reached between them, the matter is transferred for final approval by the Council of Ministers, in which the matter usually passes with little discussion and even less amendments (Frogner, 1988). Hence, the collegial character of cabinet decision making is formally maintained, but in practice the vice-PMs clearly play a predominant role. However, given the reduction of the size of the Dehaene I & II cabinets, much more mat-

18 For a discussion of collegiality and collectiveness of cabinet decision making, see ANDEWEG (1993).

19 Usually with exclusion of the party which provides for the PM.

20 In addition to this ministerial cabinet for general affairs, they can rely on a cabinet for each ministerial portfolio. Thus, as they often have three cabinets, these vice-PMs often can rely on more than two hundred personal collaborators.

ters are decided within the full cabinet meeting than in the previous decade, and the pre-cooking of decisions by the Kernkabinet has been reduced considerably.

Finally, the position of the PM vis-à-vis the members of his cabinet has become less powerful in comparison with the 1950s and 1960s. More than ever he is a *primus inter pares*, who can only govern with the consensus of his vice-PMs. Therefore, the most influential PMs are those that most actively and rapidly can generate consensus between the representatives of the coalition parties in and outside the cabinet.

C. Modes of party interference in cabinet decision-making

1. Ministerial cabinets

The Belgian government system is characterised by large ministerial staffs. Statistics reveal a permanent increase from 1966 to 1988.²¹ Yet, the most recent governments have tried to reduce this inflation.

In the traditional parties, most of the cabinet members are appointed by the party organisation, even at the superior cabinet level, including the *chef de cabinet* who is the main collaborator of the minister. Ministers can usually only appoint themselves a small number of collaborators at the superior level, but have more leeway for the lower levels. The party leadership has thus its men of confidence in the immediate entourage of the ministers, serving as a channel of relay, information and control.

The members of the ministerial cabinet spend a considerable time on following government's conduct of business at the level of the Council of ministers and in the cabinet committees of which the minister is member. They prepare the minister's interventions in these meetings as well as in parliament. Evidently, they also prepare with particular care the minister's own projects, which often require numerous consultations with the administration and with other ministerial cabinets. These consultations can be formally organised, for instance in inter-cabinet groups, or informally. Sometimes the *chefs de cabinet* or other superior level collaborators can replace the minister in certain cabinet committees.

Yet, all the cabinet members do not participate in governmental work. An important part, especially those at lower levels, exercises clientelist functions with regard to the minister's electoral constituency. Another group of superior level collaborators work directly for the party, scrutinising decision-making in policy fields where the party does not have a minister or secretary of state of his own. Parties also drop in the ministerial cabinets MPs who were not reelected, or young politicians in order to acquire some political or governmental apprenticeship. Cabinet members recruited amongst the civil service use their passage through a ministerial cabinet as a way to ensure their promotion in the civil service (*infra*).

21 For the whole of ministers, the number of collaborators at the superior level (i.e. at the level of university educated civil servants) grew from 205 in 1966 to 589 in 1988. Per minister, it grew from nine to eleven, with a peak of 13 in 1980. To this one has to add cabinet collaborators at lower levels. In 1973, there were 330 cabinet members at the superior level, and 1658 in total. In 1988, 488 and 2525 respectively, an increase clearly above the increase of the number of ministers.

2. *Other intraparty modes*

In all Belgian parties, by now nearly all ministers attend regularly the weekly meeting of their party executive. In addition, in all parties ministers and secretaries of state have a meeting with the chairman of the party (who by definition is not member of the cabinet) the day before the cabinet session. During these intraparty meetings, the agenda of the cabinet is carefully scrutinised, and the positions to be defended by the ministers the following day in the cabinet are defined. In all parties, these meetings with the president and some top party leaders²² exert a more important influence on the positions of ministers than meetings with the executive. The importance of these meetings depends on the power of party leader outside government vis-à-vis the party's ministers.

Finally, apart from these regular and formal types of contacts, informal and ad hoc contacts are important as well. For instance, when important issues or new facts are unexpectedly evoked during the cabinet meeting, the cabinet meeting is sometimes suspended in order to allow ministers to phone their party leader for advice, or the matter is put on the agenda of the next meeting, so that there is ample time for consulting party headquarters.²³

3. *Interparty mode*

Supporting parties also influence cabinet decision-making through direct formal and informal contacts between leaders of the parties outside government (and outside the parliamentary arena) during which decisions are reached which are binding for cabinet members. Some crucial denominational and linguistic conflicts have been solved by way of such party summits. Agreements reached at these summits are presented as political pacts, not amendable by the cabinet nor by the parliamentary majority. The role on the interparty mode became extremely visible and important during the negotiations in the seventies with regard to the federalisation issue. In this policy area the cabinet was a lame duck, and most important decisions were taken by the party presidents outside the cabinet.²⁴ Yet, in the 1981-1988 period (and to a lesser extent in the period after 1988), most parties have preferred to appoint their real leaders as vice-PMs. Thus, in that period, the cabinet became again the most prominent arena in which policy compromises between parties were made.

22 In some parties, these meetings are attended by the leaders of the parliamentary groups in the House and the Senate, the national party secretary, the head of the party research centre, etc.

23 Hence, it comes as no surprise that according to a reputational survey amongst Belgian decision-makers, some party presidents emerge amongst the most important decision-makers (but after the PM) in a large variety of policy domains (DEWACHTER & DAS, 1991).

24 During the Tindemans IV government, party leaders (the so-called 'junta of the party presidents') had often come to the aid of the cabinet, each time a blockage between ministers occurred while trying to further the implementation of the governmental agreement on institutional reform.

4. *Parliamentary mode*

Through the parliamentary mode, parties influence cabinet policy through the direct and indirect contacts of cabinet members with the parliamentary parties as a collective actor, and with individual parliamentary leaders and backbenchers of the majority party or parties (De Winter, 1993). In Belgium, this mode is only of relevance for the CVP. Ministers do not only attend carefully parliamentary group meetings and inform the backbenchers of their policy plans. Ministers policies and concessions towards the coalition parties are sometimes challenged. In addition, crises of the party's confidence in the cabinet more often stem from the parliamentary group than from the party executive.

D. *Cabinet conflictuality and stability*

As far as cabinet stability is concerned, with 36 governments in the 1944-May 1995 period, or an average duration of 1.4 months, Belgium comes close to the Italian "pathological" case. Yet one should not overestimate the degree of governmental instability. In the 51 years of 36 post-war governments, about half of that period (26 years) was governed by only seven governments: four (nearly) completed the regular four years, two called for anticipated elections during the fourth year intending to reinforcing the parliamentary strength of the reigning coalition), and one government lasted nearly three years. The low overall stability is caused by a large number (15) of governments that lasted less than six months. Often this short life-span was due to an ill-conceived departure (like the two attempts at forming a minority government of the 1940s), the imminent enlargement of the coalition, and some attempts to resurrect virtually dead coalitions.

Governmental instability also fluctuates strongly over time. During the period of post-war reconstruction and the settlement of war-related issues (which was terminated by the settlement of the King's Question), governments were extremely unstable (9 governments in 6 years). In the following period August 1950-June 1968), one finds a period of moderate stability (8 governments in 18 years). The splitting of the traditional parties, the inclusion of regionalist parties in governmental coalitions and the primacy of regional/community problems on the political agenda²⁵ provoked high levels of governmental instability in the 1968-1981 period (13 governments in 13 years).

Yet, the higher stability of Belgian governments in the most recent period (1981-1995) (4 governments in 14 years²⁶) must be seen not as a consequence of a fading of (regional) conflicts, but rather as a consequence of the drastically increased complexity of the formation process. As regional/community conflicts have become increasingly salient and more difficult to solve, the formation of a government has become such a difficult enterprise, that parties that support the government have become less eager to provoke a governmental crisis. In addition, since the formation of asymmetrical majorities (a national government supported by a different coalition in the North than in the South) or asymmetries between the national and regional coalitions are more likely to occur, no party can be sure to be included in a new coalition.

²⁵ Analyses of intra-cabinet conflicts indicate that governments that tried to proceed with institutional reform were also the most conflictual cabinets (EECKHAUT, 1990).

²⁶ If one excludes the Martens VII and IX governments, which were very short-lived attempts at reviving a coalition that had collapsed over a communautarian issue.

E. Parties and executive patronage

1. Government jobs: recruitment and promotions

Nearly a quarter of the working population is employed in the public sector.²⁷ With regard to normal jobs within the national administration, recruitment is organised by the Permanent Recruitment Secretariat, on the basis of exams. At that level, no or little patronage is possible. Political patronage is made possible by circumventing these normal provisions, through a variety of mechanisms, like the abuse of the rule which allows for the exceptional nomination of outside candidates of unique value to the civil service, the recruitment of temporary personnel or personnel for newly created departmental services (both types do not fall under the normal recruitment requirements), and finally the 'regularisation' of temporary personnel.

Belgian parties exert an even stronger influence on the promotion process in the public sector. Until the end of the 1980s, the promotion of university trained civil servants was strongly controlled by the majority parties. Two types of interparty negotiations govern the distribution of promotions between coalition parties. First, the distribution of top positions in the civil service (director and secretary general) are decided by the cabinet itself, whereby evidently a candidate's support by a coalition party is taken into full consideration. Second, for the lower ranks of university trained civil servants, an unofficial interparty committee was established in the seventies, chaired by a collaborator of the PM.²⁸ Each coalition party has one representative in this committee. This committee was installed to prevent ministers to nominate their own protégés, without taking protégés of other coalition parties or candidates supported by other politicians of their own party into consideration. Hence, where political patronage of central government resources before the 1970s remained controlled by individual politicians, since then patronage has become controlled by central party offices.

The committee meets regularly, often twice a month, depending on the number of promotions to be decided upon. For each position, the committee considers the candidates for promotion, and the support each candidate has from a coalition party. In principle, each coalition party can make nominations in proportion to its parliamentary strength. When no candidate is backed by any party, the committee nominates the candidate proposed by the board of directors of the ministerial department. In order to prepare the meetings of this committee, parties have installed intraparty nomination committees, in which the value of candidates supported by party leaders, MPs and other patrons are compared, and whereby a decision is reached on which candidate the party will eventually support for a specific post. Depending on the party, these intraparty nomination com-

²⁷ The public employment sector included in 1990 85.979 civil servants in national, regional and community administrations, 85.411 in the special corps (army, judiciary), 266.334 persons employed in public and other subsidised education networks, 185.217 civil servants at the local and provincial levels, and finally 180.000 in "public interest organisations" (public enterprises and services).

²⁸ Since the federalisation of the national civil service, similar committees have been set up to monitor the patronage of the promotions of civil service of the regional and community level.

mittees consist of party president, prominent ministers and their cabinets, factions, constituency parties, MPs and other brokers.²⁹

Moreover, the grip of parties on the Belgian society does not end there. Also the recruitment and promotion of judges is nearly completely determined by party patronage.³⁰ In the media sector, the promotion of the personnel of the public radio and television companies are subject to similar party influence.³¹ Finally, it comes to no surprise that in most other sectors in which parties are influential, like public education, public, semi-public and quasi-autonomous enterprises and services, local government, etc., parties (together with trade unions) interfere with the recruitment and promotion of personnel, at different levels (ranging from the janitor in a public kindergarten to the chairman of the board of directors of SABENA).³²

Hence, political patronage of recruitment and promotions in the public sector is a very widespread phenomenon in Belgium. All traditional parties participate in job patronage. However, as Liberals and Socialists are not always in power (contrary to the Christian-democrats), they try to effectuate a catch-up operation, which should compensate for the fact that these parties have not been able to nominate their clientele for the years they were in opposition.³³ Hence, at the moment of the coalition talks, parties usually agree upon the quotas of nominations and promotions each party has a right to effectuate and the extent of the catch-up.³⁴

29 Provincial councillors and deputies, mayors, aldermen and members of the local council, all engage in service activities towards individual citizens. In terms of numbers of clients and jobs involved, patronage at the local and provincial level probably exceeds the one on the national level.

30 Since the Martens VIII government (1988), the minister of Justice has launched concrete proposals for reducing partisan interference.

31 Given the pillarised nature of Belgian society, most newspapers are affiliated to a specific pillar, and until the mid seventies, a majority of the leading positions in these newspapers were occupied by trustees of the party or of its pillar organisations. DE WINTER (1981) calculated that in the 1945-1975 period, the number of party politicians who occupied a leading position in a newspaper (members of the board of governors, directors and chief editors), fell from 34.4% to 13.9%. In the same period the representation of leading figures of the pillars rose to 20.8%. However, since the end of the 1970s, the ties between party and the newspapers of their pillar have weakened considerably.

32 The probably most fertile job patronage fields are not situated any more at the level of the national administrations, but that of the regional and community administration. Since 1981, these levels have been building up their own administrations, which were often created from scratch, which allowed for massive circumvention of the normal statutory recruitment proceedings. The constitutional reforms of 1988 and 1993 have and will give rise to another wave of patronage recruitment into the newly created or expanded administrations.

33 The need for this seems real, as for instance data for 1990 indicates that six out of ten higher civil servants belong to the Christian-democratic ticket (TEGENBOS, 1990). However, the figures published by DE WINTER (1981), HONDEGHEM (1990) and TEGENBOS (1988) suggest that Liberal and Socialist parties do not manage to recuperate a lot of the lost ground, and that the quotas agreed upon correspond closely to the parties' parliamentary strength.

34 For instance, in the Martens VIII government, of the jobs attributed to the Flemish parties, the CVP obtained 47%, the SP 35% and the VU 18%. The distribution between the francophone parties was as follows: PS 68%, PSC 32%. For quota's used in previous governments, see DE WINTER (1981), HONDEGHEM (1990).

2. Government contracts and pork barrel legislation

Governments contracts are to some extent subject to political patronage. Political actors (party leaders, ministers, trade union and employers leaders) can and do lobby for different companies competing for a government contract. It is however difficult to assess which actors are involved most in this allocation process, as one clearly enters into the sphere of political corruption and illegal party finance. In fact, it is usually only with regard to corruption dossiers that one learns to what extent political and other actors have been lobbying and have been rewarded for this. Yet, it is very difficult to judge to what extent the revealed facts are common practice, or rather exceptional.³⁵ De Winter's (1992) survey of amongst Belgian MPs indicates that MPs are quite active in procuring collective benefits to their constituency, and therefore that pork barrel legislation is an important patronage commodity.³⁶

The prominence of pork barrel activities of the Belgian MP is related to the 'non-rational' way in which public expenditures are allocated in Belgium. Given the ongoing conflicts between the different regions and cultural communities, departmental spending is carefully distributed over the regions and communities, so that each unit receives public investments according to its size. Hence, many projects are allocated to constituencies which normally, in terms of socio-economic cost/benefit calculations, would not be able to attract such investments. As the decisions on the allocation of public investments are largely based on political criteria, rather than on socio-economic cost/benefit calculations, politicians in Belgium have a larger pork barrel market to manipulate than in many other countries.

3. Other forms and sectors of party patronage

De Winter's (1992) analysis of the content of MPs' constituency case work also reveals that apart from the patronage products mentioned above, several other public service products and services are subject to political patronage. Apart from public jobs, the second most important sector relates to income problems, generally to obtaining a (or a higher) social security transfer (like pensions, child allowances, etc.). Problems of professional army men and draftees are also impor-

35 A former party treasurer of the CVP declared that during an election campaign, he would visit companies that had been obtaining contracts of the government in the last term, and asked contributions of them in proportion to the size of the contracts involved. As a compensation for his "taxation", he offered each entrepreneur an interview with a minister of his choice (ACKAERT & DE WINTER, 1984).

36 With regard to the policy sectors in which MPs seem to be most effective to attract pork barrel legislation, the survey indicates that a large majority of MPs managed to attract governmental subsidies for communication and transport infrastructure works (like roads, ports, rail, and telephone connections) and attract governmental and private investments stimulating the economic development and employment in their constituency. Other collective constituency services include the provision of infrastructure relating to the educational, health, cultural and sport sector, solving urbanisation, housing & environmental problems.

tant.³⁷ Then one finds four sectors of about equal importance: education, culture and leisure (which basically concern problems of obtaining scholarships), taxes (problems of tax declaration, evasions and overtaxing), transport and communication (getting rapid telephone connections, car license plates and road repairs), and family problems (divorce, juvenile delinquency, adoption). The least important sector is related to problems with the police and justice (annulment of traffic fines³⁸, immigration, legal support, prisoners).

Hence, as far as the executive branch is concerned, one can conclude that in Belgium parties have not only occupied the state in terms of nomination of government personnel, ranging from the cabinet until the lowest public servant, in terms of the definition policies to be pursued, but also that through direct monitoring and the politicisation of government bureaucracy, the implementation of these decisions and the allocation of government outputs heavily depends on partisan criteria.

IV. The role of parliament in the Belgian partitocracy

As parliaments in the Western world are reputed to be in decline (Loewenberg, 1971), one can expect this to be particularly true in a partitocracy.

A. Main structural weaknesses of the Belgian Parliament

1. Congruent, isomorphic and symmetrical bicameralism

Until May 21, 1995, the Belgian Parliament consisted of the House and the Senate, which were not only isomorphic in structural terms, but also basically performed the same functions (De Winter, 1996). This type of bicameralism is ineffective especially with regard to lawmaking. Under this system, legislative proposals can be introduced by Representatives as well as Senators, each in their respective Chamber. In order to become law, a bill has to go through a large number of stages in each chamber. Any modification by one chamber have to be confirmed by the "other" Chamber. Hence, bills are often shifted back and forth between Chambers. This process continues until both Chambers have adopted and voted the same version of the bill. Hence, under the old system there were no rules that allow stopping the navette. Yet, after the 1993 constitutional reforms, the Belgian parliament will shift into the direction of "strong" bicameralism, with

³⁷ The cabinet of the Ministry of Defence received annually about 25.000 recommendations of politicians with regard to the placement of a draftee in the barracks close to his home. This represented about two thirds of the annual number of draftees.

³⁸ An internal evaluation of the *Gendarmerie* revealed that 20% of the speed violations files 'get lost'.

incongruent composition and formal powers, the new Senate having lost several of its old competences.³⁹

2. Poor collective and individual resources

The Belgian parliament is characterised by a lack of institutionally provided resources to individual MPs in terms of space⁴⁰, individual staffing⁴¹, collective institutional resources⁴² and parliamentary party resources⁴³.

The poor resources of individual MPs and their parliamentary party in contrast to the relatively well subsidised party research centres add to the MP's dependency on his party organisation. In each party research centre (which is financed mainly by the parliamentary group contributions) specialised policy preparation committees operate. MPs often rely on information provided by their research centre as far as the drafting of bills, amendments, and interpellations are concerned. For most policy sectors, a group of permanent experts and volunteering specialists associated with the party research centre prepare the party's policy proposals in collaboration with the MPs specialised in these fields. Thus MPs are to a large extent dependent on their party's braintrust, in case they do not have alternative resources at their disposal (like support by the research centres of pressure groups).

39 In fact, in the future only the House can invest or dissolve a government, vote the budget and allow the interpellation of ministers. All government bills are introduced in the House. Hence, the House becomes the "political" chamber. Yet, the new Senate remains with the House equally competent for constitutional reforms, "regional and community" matters, ratification of treaties and the organisation of the judiciary. It is exclusively competent for conflicts between the national and regional/community legislatures. Hence, the Senate moves into the direction of a chamber of reflection and meeting place between the federal and regional/community level of government. Only the future can tell to what extent these fundamental constitutional changes will affect functioning of both Chambers and the behaviour of individual MPs.

40 Only a few leading MPs had a personal office in the building. Only in the mid-1980s, the problem of tightness has been solved through the annexation of a spacious adjacent building (now called the "House of the Parliamentarians") that offers each MP a private office and each parliamentary group meeting rooms and secretarial office space.

41 Only in 1981 was each MP allocated funds for employing a full-time helper paid at the level of *clerk*. In most cases, this aid performs only secretarial work (correspondence, filing, individual constituency service), and very few are involved in the preparation of parliamentary work (DE WINTER, 1992). Since May 1995, MPs are also allocated funds for recruiting a full-time collaborator paid at the level of university trained civil servants. In most cases, they have been claimed by the party research centres.

42 The House counts (in 1993) only 475 permanent employees, of which only about a quarter have a university degree. Of the latter only those working for the Service for Studies, Documentation, Statistics and Archives (about three dozens) and the Library of Parliament (a dozen) can provide intellectual assistance to individual MPs. Each permanent committee has just one documentalist who can provide committee members with documentation. Until a few years ago, none of House bodies and the information they provide were computerised. Thus, there are no means for assessment of policies or prediction of the effects of proposed policies.

43 The secretariats of the parliamentary groups are not very well staffed either and usually only comprise a secretary and a typist, and in most cases only perform secretarial tasks.

B. *The functioning of Parliament and the role of the individual MP*

1. Lawmaking

Legislation, the traditional function of the Belgian legislature has - like in most Western parliaments - become redundant as this function is largely usurped by the executive. A large majority of bills approved by the Belgian Parliament were introduced by the government, rather than by individual MPs. Yet, the declining role of Parliament in legislation does not exclude considerable levels of lawmaking activities of individual MPs. In fact, one does not notice a steady decline in the yearly number of private member bills introduced in the House. On the contrary, the number of private member bills per legislative term introduced by House members tends to increase (De Winter, 1996).

Thus the decline of the legislative function of the Belgian Parliament is situated elsewhere. In fact, the success rate of private member bills and amendments is very low, given the high number of bills introduced, while a large majority of bills introduced by the government becomes effective law.⁴⁴ Roughly speaking, about nine out of ten of all legislative proposals originate from parliamentary initiative, but of those, only one out of ten becomes bill.⁴⁵ The proportion of private member bills in the total amount of approved bills tend to however increase from about less than one out of five in the 1960s to about one out of three in the 1980s.

This lack of success is mainly due to the detailed and extensive governmental agreements reached between the majority parties that pre-define to a large extent the legislation to be initiated by the government and to be enacted by Parliament in the following legislative term. The MPs of the majority parties have very little leeway to amend these proposals, as this would destabilise the delicate agreement reached between governing parties. Thus, in principal, only private member bills which do not cover an area discussed in the governmental programme, and on which members of the coalition parties can agree, have a chance to become law. Secondly, private member bills - also the successful ones - are usually of little importance in terms of policy content and are often introduced for pure clientelist and publicity-seeking reasons (Van Schoor, 1972). Yet, contrary to Italy, the number of *leggini* introduced by individual MPs remains quite low, only a (few) dozen(s) a year. Third, as the majority parties hold most legislative leadership positions and therefore can set the agenda of the general assembly and of the committees, governmental proposals usually get a priority treatment. Fourth, given the increasing complexity and size of the decision-making process and the need for rapid decisions, the executive uses increasingly 'cadre laws', 'task laws', 'royal' and 'ministerial decisions', 'special powers', etc. which

⁴⁴ Yet, also many government legislative proposals do not become law, as they get stuck in the parliamentary lawmaking 'pipeline' when a government resigns.

⁴⁵ With regard to amendments, the large majority originate from parliamentary initiative. Of those only one out of ten gets accepted, against nine out of ten of the amendments introduced by the government (CLIJSTERS, VAN SCHOOR & MEEUSEN, 1980).

further undermine the law-initiating and lawmaking role of Parliament.⁴⁶ In addition, given the consociational nature of the decision-making process in Belgium, politically delicate or extremely controversial matters are often transferred from the parliamentary arena to round table conferences, where special pacts are concluded between party leaders outside Parliament (*supra*). Parliament only ratifies these pacts later on, without any modification. Finally, Parliament's legislative role is by-passed in many socio-economic matters by the agreements reached in the neo-corporatist network between trade unions, employers, agricultural and middle class organisations, and the government.

2. Government control

The House of Representatives has also become more active with regard to activities intended to control governmental decisions and intentions, like interpellations and parliamentary questions. Yet, in spite of this increasing activism, the majority's function of government maintenance considerably undermines Parliament's control function. For instance, after an interpellation related to an important policy of a minister or the entire government, members of the opposition usually introduce a motion of non-confidence, while majority members traditionally counter this demand with a motion demanding the 'returning to the pure and simple order of the day'. The latter type of motion has voting precedence on motions of confidence and annuls all other motions. Since one finds for every motion introduced by the opposition an 'order of the day motion' introduced by the majority, a large majority of interpellations do not manage to ask the House for a formal disapproval or sanction of the policy of government or the minister involved, or a formal expression about the attention the government should give to a matter and the course of the action to be taken. Thus, majority members are not obliged to express themselves on the political problem raised during the interpellation, a face-saving device in case the government or a minister has failed to satisfy the House with his reply, especially when the interpellation was held by a member of a majority party. A formal disapproval would nearly automatically lead to the resignation of the government. Thus, interpellations remain "more bark than bite" and can not order a minister of the government to alter its policies.

The use of parliamentary questions has also steadily increased. Yet, many questions are only a means of information, inspired by mere electoral and publicity-seeking motives. Often, the introducing MP is aiming less at clarification of an issue than at obtaining a written proof that he has taken to heart a matter raised by his constituents or client pressure and action groups. In addition, many ministers fail to give a prompt reply to written questions. Finally, the minister's answer to oral and urgent questions is not followed by a debate, which limits their utility for controlling government.

With regard to budget control, governmental budget proposals - until the 1989 reforms - were often introduced at the last moment, and rushed through the Chambers by the government and its majority. In many cases, most of the money

46 In the 1960-1985 period, the Belgian Parliament issued 4.000 laws, while the government issued 40.000 'royal decisions' and 12.000 'ministerial decisions'. In the 1926-1986 period, the government ruled with special powers for about 15% of the time (ALEN, 1986).

was already spent before the budget was approved. The control by the parliamentary auditing office covers only the regularity and legality of governmental expenditures, and does not consider their efficacy and necessity. The critical yearly reports of this office to the Parliament usually only cover abnormalities concerning expenditures effectuated several years earlier. Hence, often the minister politically responsible for eventual abuses is not in office any more and therefore not sanctionable. Hence, these reports rarely serve as a source of inspiration for control activities for MPs.

Finally, committees of parliamentary investigation are quite uncommon to Belgian parliamentary life. The rare use of this means of parliamentary control basically results from the attitudes of the majority MPs, who - in solidarity with the government - will not allow an investigation which can embarrass a specific minister or the entire government. In fact, in the last hundred years (1880-1988), the House established only nine such committees. Yet, most of them were established during the past two decades.

3. Government maintenance

The support of the government has become a permanent duty for majority MPs as far as voting on legislative projects, governmental declarations and votes of confidence is concerned. This follows from the way governments are formed and dissolved in Belgium (*supra*). In Belgium a government - even if it is constitutionally not obliged to - will step down after a defeat on a major bill, whether or not the cabinet has explicitly turned the vote on the bill into a matter of confidence. Therefore, the fact that chance mishaps are more likely to provoke disastrous results, further enhances the need for strict party voting discipline.

From 1995 on, like in Germany and Spain, the type of vote that may not be lost is defined very restrictively. A government may suffer as many defeats as the House of Representatives deals out, as only a constructive motion of censure can bring the government down. As it is often easier to agree upon what one opposes rather than on what one supports, this obligation will make it much more difficult for the House to unseat a government.

Yet, one can wonder whether this reform will reinforce government stability, or enhance the role of parliament. The role of the Belgian parliamentary groups and individual MPs with regard to coalition maintenance collapse is extremely limited. Since 1947, not a single cabinet fell through loss of a confidence vote in Parliament.⁴⁷ Usually, the internal governmental cohesion collapses due to interparty and intra-party conflicts and cabinet resigns before giving Parliament a chance to formally register its failure. Hence, majority parliamentary groups do not constitute a menace to the survival of a government. They are docile dogs, that once in a while will bark but not bite. The 1995 reform will make even more difficult for them to bite. But barking will become more easy...

⁴⁷ Of the 36 governments in the post-war period (1944-1995), only two governments resigned after not having obtained a majority in Parliament at their vote of confidence (1946 and 1947). Three governments resigned after general elections, and two minority governments resigned in order to enlarge the coalition. In four cases, the government collapsed due to intra-party conflicts. In all the other cases, interparty conflicts were at the basis of the collapse of a cabinet.

4. Shifting representational roles of MPs

With regard to the representational function of Belgian MPs and their institution, we will discuss only MPs' representational focus and the components of representational behaviour. The representational focus of a legislator comprises the 'represented', the individuals, groups, categories or organisations a legislator believes he represents. Belgian MPs see themselves as representatives of socio-economic and demographic categories and their organisations (like workers, farmers, middle classes, often defined nation wide), of linguistic communities and regions (Walloons, Flemings, Francophones, etc.), of denominational groups (Catholics and freethinkers), and, last but not least, as representatives of their party and their voters at different levels. The diversity of representational foci of Belgian MPs is related to the nature of the party and electoral system, the cleavage system, the pressure group system and the pillarisation of Belgian society. In fact, the traditional parties aggregate, articulate, defend and implement to different degrees the interests of a wider network or organisations of their pillar, which include trade unions, farmer and middle class organisations, socio-cultural organisations, educational and health service networks, press networks, etc. Often MPs hold leadership positions in these pillar organisations or are sponsored by them. Thus, MPs act as representatives not only of their party, but also as spokesmen for the specific interests of adjacent pillar organisations.

Given this diversity, representational behaviour of Belgian MPs in terms of the four components offered by Eulau & Karps (1977) is multi-faceted. With regard to policy responsiveness, which refers to the interaction between the representative and the represented with respect to public policy making, the most important focus of Belgian MPs is clearly the national party, which is illustrated by the high degree of party voting discipline in Parliament. Yet, the relevance of other foci is noticeable if one takes into consideration the content of private members' bills, interpellations and questions. They often relate to problems of specific interest to the constituency, the pressure groups to which they are affiliated and other clienteles MPs seek to satisfy (*supra*).

However, given the high fragmentation of the party system and government coalitions, Belgian MPs encounter increasingly difficulties in playing this role successfully. Given their obligation to adhere to their national party programme, and in case of majority MPs the permanent obligation to obey the stipulations of the coalition agreement, it is not easy to adopt a profile which fits best the programmatic demands of their specific constituencies.

Thus, most MPs try to circumvent this handicap by generating support through non-policy representational behaviour, by increasing their efforts with regard to case work, pork barrel politics and symbolic representation. This also explains the rather levels of parliamentary absenteeism in the Belgian parliament.⁴⁸

As far as case work is concerned, Belgian MPs invest considerable amounts of time (5 hours a week) and effort. This emphasis is on the one hand related to the clientelist political culture in Belgium, and on the other hand the wide variety of services MPs can offer given the infiltration of political parties in most sectors of

⁴⁸ On the average, about a quarter of MPs do not attend the committee meetings of which they are permanent member (JANSSENS, 1972; DRION, 1980; DE WINTER, 1992). As far as attendance when the House was meeting in plenary session is concerned, the average MP is absent nearly four out of ten times (DE WINTER, 1992).

public life (supra). Case work activities are nearly exclusively directed towards constituents, as MPs believe that this activity is the most beneficial for getting preference votes. It also seems that constituents are served well, as MPs manage to resolve about two thirds of the cases they handle (ISPO-PIOP, 1995). This relative high rate of achievement explains the success of case work in Belgium in terms of number of people making use of this system of redress of grievances. The importance of case work in Belgium is in fact related to the lack of other sources of administrative redress and the closed nature of the Belgian public administration.⁴⁹ On the other hand, it strengthens the public's opinion that in Belgium citizens cannot obtain their rights through regular administrative channels without the support of a politician, which enforces the illegitimacy and corruption connotation of case work⁵⁰.

Belgian MPs are also very active in terms of allocation responsiveness, which concerns the legislative allocations of public projects which involve benefits and advantages accruing to the constituency as a whole. Not only are these concerns reflected in MPs private member bills, interpellations and questions, behind the scenes, MPs serve vis-à-vis ministers and their administration as promoter, lobbyist and advocate of specific projects, usually beneficial to the electoral constituency. But also other clienteles, like pillar organisations, are served by these "pork barrel" activities. Our survey amongst MPs suggest that they play this representational role rather convincingly (supra) (De Winter, 1992).

Finally, as far as symbolic responsive behaviour is concerned, Belgian MPs spend about half of their working time in the constituency and attend numerous meetings and social gatherings organised by a wide variety of local and constituency organisations, groups and institutions (like chambers of commerce and trade unions, pensioners, cultural, sports, youth or women organisations in and outside the pillar, local government boards, etc.). In addition, they traditionally spend their evenings and weekends inaugurating buildings, festivities, distributing prizes at schools, dedications, *vernissages*, balls, receptions, openings of commercial and cultural initiatives, sports manifestations, fancy fairs, even funerals and weddings. Belgian MPs have ample opportunities to participate in community life, as the distance between the capital and the constituency is for most MPs less than an hour's drive and most MPs tend to go their constituency home every evening. Finally, on the average about two out of three MPs also hold public office (as mayor, alderman or councillor) in their commune, which facilitates their contact

49 Until 1991, public administrations did not have to motivate their decisions, and civil servants were legally obliged to remain silent even in the case of serious mismanagement in their services. In spite of many legislative proposals, Parliament has never approved the installation of a parliamentary ombudsman (ANCI AUX, 1990). Departmental ombudsmen in federal ministries do not exist, and the *Conseil d'Etat* can only judge on formal mistakes made in the recruitment and promotion of civil servants. Only since 1988, individuals have access to the *Cour d'Arbitrage* if they feel their equality rights are violated. Since the beginning of the 1990s, some public services and large cities have installed ombudsmen.

50 Some politicians artificially reinforce this opinion by performing imaginary services. In this case, the politician manages to get from a certain administration the list of all the people in his constituency who have applied for a certain public good (like a scholarship, a building subsidy), and upon whose cases the administration has reached a positive decision, but has not communicated this decision yet. In this case, the politician announces to his constituents that thanks to his intervention the administration has arrived at a positive decision, and that he soon will receive formal notice. Hence, in this case, no services have been demanded, or actually performed.

with constituents and strengthens their localist, particularist representational focus.

C. Other sources of party control on MPs

Candidate selection in most Belgian parties is situated at the level of the constituency party organisation. In all traditional parties - except for the Parti Socialiste - a gradual shift away from the poll procedure, i.e. a selection procedure which involved all party members has occurred in the 1960-1990 period (De Winter, 1980, 1988). In most parties, the process is now in the hands of the local and constituency party activists, while in the CVP it is controlled - also at the constituency level - by the three intra-party factions. Selectors not only have preferences concerning the background characteristics of the candidates they select, they also hold strong expectations with regard to the behaviour their candidates display inside and outside Parliament, and usually have - through deselection - the means to sanction an MP who does not live up their expectations.⁵¹

Most party statutes stipulate that office holders are elected as candidates of the party, on the basis of the party programme which they have to carry out. Statutory constraints also refer to eligibility criteria and to the intra-legislative behaviour of the candidate once elected, and his rights and duties as MP. In some parties most role descriptions are contained in the national party statutes, while in others they are complemented by parliamentary group statutes. In about all parties, the rule is that MPs have to ask permission from their group or their group leader for the introduction of private member bills or amendments, for holding interpellations, and for supporting a bill sponsored by another party. In some parties, permission is required even for parliamentary questions.

Parliamentary party statutes stipulate that the parliamentary party can explicitly enforce a 'vote of discipline', to which all MPs have to adhere. Breaches of votes of discipline can be, according to the statutes, sanctioned in a variety of ways. However, usually groups are cohesive enough to vote in a disciplined manner without the threat or application of such formal sanctions. Thus voting behaviour of Belgian MPs is nearly exclusively determined by the collective party factor.⁵²

51 The ICSOP-IMSA (1986) survey revealed that 48% of the Belgian MPs believe that an MP must adhere to party discipline if he wants to receive a safe place on the candidate list at the next election.

52 Yet, this does not mean that MPs are constantly coerced to vote and act in ways which differ from their own opinion and policy preferences. Decisions in parliamentary groups are taken more through consensus than by majority votes because the ideological and programmatic beliefs and issue positions of individual MPs closely correspond to those of their parties. Several authors found that the Belgian MPs position themselves on the three traditional conflict dimensions and on specific issues in a way closely corresponding to their parties' positions. See for instance DE BAKKER (1969); FROGNIER (1978); FROGNIER & DIERICKX (1980); DE WINTER (1991b). However, DE RIDDER, PETERSON and WIRTH (1978) revealed that while on the average cleavage and issue positions MPs are consistent with those of their party, within parliamentary groups cleavage and issue positions do vary considerable between individual members. This is not surprising, as many parties explicitly aim at representing parts of the population which are situated at different sides of the conflict dimensions.

Parliamentary groups can also sanction members' attendance of committee and plenary voting sessions. Finally, the parliamentary groups are collectively responsible to the party. In most parties, group leaders have to communicate to the party executive a report on the collective parliamentary activities of the group, and of their individual members, with regard to absenteeism, questions, private member bills, etc. Concerning absenteeism and other abuses, the national party can decide to communicate these to his constituency party and suggest to deselect him.

D. Parliamentary reforms

1. The end of symmetrical bicameralism

Four major constitutional reforms (1970, 1980, 1988, 1993) have transformed Belgium from an unitary state into a genuine federal state. The creation of fully autonomous regional/community executives and legislative assemblies, with specific competences, has had a profound and positive effect on the functioning of the federal executive. By transferring competences to the regions/communities which had become too conflictual and difficult to solve within the national government, decision-making at this level has become potentially less conflictual in regional/community terms.

This long process eventually put an end to the symmetrical and isofunctional bicameralism.⁵³ The 1993 reforms the Senate into a Chamber of regional representation and reflection. While the new Senate has lost several of its old competences (in the future, only the House can invest or dissolve a government, vote the budget and allow interpellations of ministers), the Senate is with the House equally competent for constitutional reforms, community matters, ratification of treaties and the organisation of the judiciary. Bills adopted by the House will only be transferred to the Senate if 15 senators ask so. Yet, the House has the final word for all bills, also those stemming from senatorial initiative. Hence, the tiresome navette system without stopping rules has finally been abolished.

2. Other parliamentary reforms

First there is the modernisation of the budgetary process. Under the old system, budget bills were often introduced at the last moment, and rushed through the Chambers by the government and its majority. In many cases, most of the money was already spent before the budget was approved. Since the 1989 reforms, a much more strict timing is imposed, which allows for - at least in procedural terms - a more scrupulous budget control. Second, from 1995 on, a position of minister and that of member of the House or the Senate will be incompatible, which should reinforce the principle of separation of powers and increase parliament's autonomy vis-à-vis the executive. Up until then, ministers voted with the majority, and therefore were at the same time party and judge when it con-

⁵³ The new Senate is composed of 71 members, of whom 40 will be directly elected. The Flemish Council and the Francophone Community Council each delegate ten members, and the Council of the German-speaking Community one. These can be considered as the representatives of the Communities to the federal parliament. The other ten senators will be co-opted by the first two categories of senators.

cerned the evaluation of government initiatives and actions (De Winter, 1991a). Third, in order to reduce the amount of business conducted by the plenary assembly, more and more interpellations and oral questions towards ministers take place within committee meetings, that are gradually opening up to the public.

V. The role of the bureaucracy in a partitocracy

The impact of political parties on the functioning of the bureaucracy has an quantitative and qualitative element. As far as the size of the bureaucracy is concerned, political parties have contributed directly and indirectly to the very large size of public employment in Belgium. First, most of the historical "pacts" between the main political parties and pillars (like the "Schoolpact" and the "Culture Pact") have boosted public employment in the concerned sectors, as each of the conflicting pillars was given sufficient funding to organise education, culture, health care, etc. within its own pillar, at the expense of the federal government. This practice of solving deep societal conflicts by granting large subsidies to each of the conflicting camps evidently boosted public employment. This for instance explains why the number of secondary school teachers per capita in Belgium is the highest of the twelve EC member-states (Matthijs, 1994). Second, growing electoral volatility and slacking private employment boosted the width and debt of political patronage over government employment. Hence, during the heydays of *particratie*, the proportion of public employment in the overall employment rose spectacularly, from 12.7% in the 1960-67 period to 19.9% in the 1980-1990 period (Matthijs, 1994). This rise in public employment in the 1970s is one of the main causes of the giant public debt (Bohets, 1996). On the other hand, the oversized civil service is not paid well and their salaries have been the first to be frozen when the governments in the 1980s finally tried to control the budgetary crisis.

But the growing grip of parties on the civil service also had some qualitative effects. Political nominations undermine the quality of civil servants. It created career insecurity and discouragement amongst the regularly nominated civil servants, spoiled a good working atmosphere and undermined the creation of *esprit de corps*. Given the politicisation of a large section of the civil service, ministers could not any more rely on the loyalty and political neutrality of their civil servants, and more and more they delegated the functions of policy conception to the ministerial cabinet, which reduced the role of the civil service to one of mere implementation. When a minister newly appointed to head a department that has been controlled for a long time by another party, he and his cabinet tended to work with those civil servants that were of his own political tendency, and often by-pass and shortcut the normal hierarchical channels within the department. This undermined the normal functioning of its services and increased the communication gap between ministers and higher civil servants (De Winter, 1981).

Finally, direct interference with the operation of the civil service rendered obsolete the use of objective cost/benefits analyses for public investments, government subsidies to industries in decline, new social security measures aimed at satisfying old and new needs, etc. All these have contributed to the largest public debt in the European Union (*infra*).

Yet, also here some auto-corrections have occurred. First, party interference with the promotion of civil servants have been dramatically reduced since the end of the 1980s, at least in central civil services. In fact, the Martens VIII government decided to reduce partisan interference in the promotion of civil servants. In 1988,

still 80% of the promotions were divided between coalition parties. Since 1990, the committee followed in 80% to 85% of the cases the advice given by the board of directors.⁵⁴

Second, more and more civil servants that been by-passed for a promotion by a political appointee bring their case before the Council of State, and often win their case. Hence, governmental parties have become more careful in pushing their protégés in the civil service. In addition, some recent laws oblige public bureaucracies to motivate their decisions and give concerned citizens access to their files in the administration. In theory, this enhanced transparency should reduce the number of political inter- and circumventions with the ways the bureaucracy handles cases of individual citizens and firms.

Finally, steps have been taken at modernising, restructuring and rationalising the civil service. In terms of personnel policies the Dehaene governments aim at a smaller, more flexible and mobile, but better remunerated civil service. Also at the level of the judiciary, several steps have been taken to deal with the problems of gigantic delays, political nomination and lack of training of judges, archaic equipment, overpopulated prisons, victim support, etc.

VI. Main problems of governability

A. *Public debt and budget deficits*

Public debt is currently around 132% of the GNP. The size of this debt increasingly cripples the federal governmental in budgetary terms. Around 40% of the annual federal budget is allocated to the payments of interests on this debt (currently 39%, with a peak of 44% in 1993).

The payment of the current interests caused by this debt, let alone its repayment, reduces enormously the policy-making capacity of the central government. Given the fact that a large amount of the remaining 60% of the budget is contractually "fixed" (wages for regular civil servants, rents for public buildings, etc.), economies are sought in rejecting projects necessitating new expenditures. Hence, little money is left for policy innovation and the meeting of new needs. Only if the political consequences of inadequate or lack of policy making become menacing, like the breakthrough of the extreme-right at the end of the 1980s, money is made available (like is the case for urban renewal, fight against criminality and illegal immigration, modernisation of the judiciary system). Therefore, the possibility of the central government to meet new societal needs has been severely restricted. In addition, also the capacity for meeting old needs, especially with regard to infrastructure (maintenance of roads & railroad network) and in the social security sector, has gradually gone down.

Given the permanent search for budget cuts and new sources of income, the centre-left Dehaene governments have launched a privatisation programme of public and semi-public enterprises and financial institutions. Given the budgetary pressure the government could not effectuate these privatisations in the best conditions: they did not occur at the most beneficial moments (some too early, some too late); given the time pressure, the negotiation position of the government vis-à-vis interested buyers was weakened; to the outside world the privatisation

54 TEGENBOS (1988, 1991, 1992a, b).

process seemed obscure and confusing; and finally small investors and the Brussels stock exchange did not profit from the process at all as the privatised institutions were bought by a few main holding companies, most of them in foreign hands (De Ruyter, Michielsen & Mortelmans, 1994).

In the end, it does seem that Belgium will meet the Maastricht norm as far as the budget deficit norm of 3% of the GNP is concerned, but that the public debt of maximally 60% of the GNP remains out of reach for the next decades.⁵⁵

B. *Policy stability*

In spite of rapid growth of government expenditures in the 1960s and 1970s, and the alternation between centre-left and centre-right coalitions, the departmental pattern of expenditures has remained remarkably stable. Analyses of the effect of parties on governmental expenditures in Belgium (De Grauwe, 1984, 1987a, b), reveal first that during the 1960-1983 period growth of governmental spending vis-à-vis GNP was higher under centre-right governments than under centre-left coalitions. Second, when total expenditures are disaggregated into 'functional' expenses (for the 1960-1982 period), one comes to some remarkable findings, especially as far as the ideologically sensitive categories are concerned. For instance, defence spending decreases more under a centre-right government than under a centre-left. Social security, public health and public housing increase less fast under a centre-left government than under a centre-right one. Third, in the 1960-1983 period, under centre-right governments the tax burden increased on the average 3.3% annually, against 2.2% under centre-left ones. Finally deficit spending seems to be more a habit of centre-right governments than of centre-left.

Hence, the main author in the field of research, De Grauwe (1987b, p. 281) concludes that "the evolution of the total governmental expenditures and its composition nearly never reflects the ideological preferences of the consecutive governments" and that "in some partial domains of governmental finances plays a perverse effect". Also the more sophisticated analyses of Keman (1994), examining the link between on the one hand policy preferences expressed in party programmes and electoral manifestos and on the other hand departmental expenditures point to the lack of relationship.

The most plausible explanation for this policy stability can be drawn from the conclusion of Hofferbert and Klingemann (1994) concerning the large impact of pivotal parties on the structure of government expenditures in Germany. The pivotal party in Belgian coalition building is the CVP, the Flemish Christian democrats. They are situated in the centre of the left-right divide, and can usually choose between a coalition with socialists or liberals. Hence, their pivotal power gives them a strong say in the drafting in the governmental programme. Second, the CVP is not only a pivotal party, it is also the largest party. This strength allows it to make additional policy claims. Third, since 1958, they have always been in power, which also adds to the stability of the policies pursued in that period. Fourth, given the party politicisation of the Belgian civil service, the CVP-PSC have also managed to appoint a large number (60%) of christian-democratic civil servants

⁵⁵ In the most optimistic scenario, the public debt would be at 84% of the GNP by the year 2010 (LAMMENS, 1993).

in that period, in spite of the fact that since 1958, the CVP-PSC itself never captured a majority of seats in Parliament.⁵⁶

Evidently, this type of policy stability does not increase the policy credibility of the other *coalitionsfähige* parties, and the overall legitimacy of political parties in Belgium. In fact, Keman (1994, p. 238-239) concludes that "Socialist and Liberal programs are hardly worth reading as predictors of policy", that the Christian democratic electoral programme "is most useful as a signal of upcoming government action", that "general ideological positions, as measured by left-right programmatic trends, are of no value in anticipating general policy directions", and that "elections, or at least the issues talked about at election time by the parties, do not seem to matter".

Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the PIOP-ISPO survey revealed that in 1992 a large majority of Belgian citizens believed that parties and politicians were not responsive to policy preferences of ordinary citizens. In fact, 50.3% of the respondents agreed with the statement "there is no sense in voting; the parties do what they want to do anyway"; 67.6% agreed with the statement "parties are only interested in my vote, not in my opinion", while only 18.1% agreed with the statement "if people like me let the politicians know what we think, then they will take our opinions into account" (ISPO-PIOP, 1995, p. 162-163).

VII. General conclusion

In this article we argued that in the 1970s and 1980s and as far as central government is concerned (cabinet, parliament, bureaucracy), Belgium constituted - like Italy - a very strong case of *partitocracy*. As far as the executive branch is concerned, parties have not only occupied the state in terms of nomination of government personnel, ranging from the cabinet until the lowest public servant, in terms of the definition policies to be pursued. In addition, through direct monitoring and the politicisation of government bureaucracy, the implementation of these decisions and the allocation of government outputs heavily depends on partisan criteria. One of the main and clearest negative consequences of the deep and wide reach of parties on the Belgian public sector is the explosion of the public debt to an EU record level. As 40% of the annual federal budget is allocated to the payments of interests on this debt, the payment of the current interest caused by this debt, let alone its repayment, reduces enormously the policy making capacity of the central government. The possibility of the central government meet new societal needs, as well to maintain current levels of public service, is severely restricted, and currently forces the government to precipitate the privatisation of public enterprises.

As far as the legislative branch is concerned, while most parliaments in the Western world are in decline, this tends to be particularly true in the Belgian *particratic*. Given the limited policy role of the Belgian parliament and the permanent pressure on majority MPs to support the government unconditionally, most MPs try to circumvent this handicap by generating personal support through non-policy related representational behaviour, by increasing their efforts with regard to case work, pork barrel politics and symbolic representational activities.

⁵⁶ Data for 1990 indicates that six out of ten higher civil servants belong to the Christian-democratic ticket (TEGENBOS, 1990).

Still, survey research indicates that a large majority of Belgian citizens believe that parties and politicians are not responsive to the policy preferences of ordinary citizens. This public disaffection with Belgian parties has reached alarming degrees at the end of the 1980s, with the breakthrough of the extreme-right and other protest parties. Yet, while the Italian *partitocrazia* imploded brusquely in the early 1990s, the Belgian *particratie* underwent a number of gradual adaptations, that reduced the (negative consequences of) the grip of political parties on central government and prevented a full collapse of the partitocratic system and restored - to some degree - the governability of the country. Still, even while major corrections have been made, one can wonder whether these are sufficient to cope with the strong outburst of public dissatisfaction with the way parties have run the country in the past decades. The heavy burden of the repayment of the gigantic public debt will remember the population for decades of the excesses of the Belgian partitocracy, and for a long time undermine the legitimacy of the main political parties. Their ultimate chances of survival will eventually depend on the scale of the *mani pulite* operation recently launched by the Belgian judiciary.

Abstract

The grip of political parties of central government actors (cabinet, parliament, the bureaucracy, judiciary) in Belgium was most striking in the 1970s and 1980s. In this period Belgium, like Italy, constitutes a very strong case of partitocracy. Yet, while the Italian partitocrazia collapsed brusquely in the early 1990s, the Belgian partitocrazia underwent a number of gradual modifications (some imposed by external factors, others were the product of genuine voluntarist autocorrections), which prevented the complete collapse of the partitocratic system and to some degree restored the governability of the country.

This article presents for each sector of central government first the main features as they were under full partitocratic rule during the 1970s and 1980s. Second, it indicates which corrections were introduced, that reduced the (negative consequences of) the grip of political parties on central government actors, structures and processes. Finally, it discusses the problem of the public debt and policy inertia.

Controlling political corruption in Italy: What did not work, what can be done

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Incentives to corruption grow, as they do for any other illegal activity, the less the probability of being discovered and punished.¹ We can distinguish mechanisms of control *internal* to the state apparatus (control bodies, commissions of inquiry) and *external* (the mass media, public opinion, international organizations). Both forms of control are nonetheless problematic. Internal controls suffer from a congenital weakness: the *vulnerability to collusion between controllers and controlled*, to the detriment of the principal (Elster, 1989). External controls also present problems because of the "public good" character of their results: the incentives for citizens to combat illegal behavior may prove insufficient (Benson and Baden, 1985: 401).

In Italy, the control mechanisms were for a long time ineffective. For more than forty years, the history of controlling political corruption in Italy has consisted of political cover-ups and obstruction rather than of successes.² Some of the major scandals which have erupted in Italy's recent past have been produced not by control agencies but by the diffusion of compromising information (sometimes originating from the secret services) on the part of politicians with something to gain from implicating others.³ However, the frequency and magnitude of the scandals through which political corruption has been brought to light (only to be swiftly covered up again in many cases) has noticeably increased in the past twenty-five years, culminating in the recent political upheavals caused by the "*mani pu-*

1 According to the economic theory of crime, besides the probability of being discovered, the decision to undertake a given illegal activity depends on the severity of punishment expected and other variables, such as income to be derived, expectations of gain in other illegal activities and the propensity to unlawful action (Becker, 1968: 169).

2 Corrupt politicians ensured their safety from incrimination by refusing to grant authorization to proceed against parliamentarians under investigation, or by acquitting implicated ministers in the Inquiry Commission, a body itself composed of politicians. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that up to 1987 only 19% of the requests for authorization to proceed made by the magistracy were accepted by Parliament (Cazzola, 1988: 133) and of 400 requests, only one minister was indicted. The cases of the secret funds of the IRI and the *Italcasse*, used for clandestine financing of politicians, provide illuminating examples in this respect.

3 In the scandal which erupted in 1961 over irregularities in the construction of Fiumicino airport, for example, "not even the Minister of the Interior escaped attempts at blackmail, carried out by the secret services using their dossiers and inspired by other Christian-Democrat leaders" (Galli, 1983: 90-1).

lite" ("clean hands") investigations of corruption. ⁴On February 17th 1992, the most serious political crisis in the history of the Italian Republic began in Milan, the economic capital of the country (and at one time considered its moral capital also), with the first of a long series of arrests of prominent politicians and functionaries, from virtually all the national political parties, accused of committing such serious crimes as extortion, corruption, receipt of stolen goods, criminal conspiracy and association in organized crime. The inquiries of Antonio Di Pietro, and who is now Minister of Public Work, the Milanese Assistant Prosecutor who would become a popular hero in Italy, resulted in the arrest of Mario Chiesa, an administrator belonging to the Socialist Party (PSI) and President of one of the city's public agencies, the *Pio Albergo Trivulzio*. The investigation subsequently mushroomed, laying bare the true nature of public administration in what was to become known as *tangentopoli* (bribe-city). From Milan the investigations spread also to other northern and central cities, and from 1993 reached into the south of the country as well. Initially concentrated on local politics, the investigations quickly extended to the uppermost levels of major private and public enterprises, implicating important government figures as well as the secretaries of the various political parties. In a matter of months, the magistracy had opened a breach on a scene of corruption and political illegality without precedent in the history of the Western democracies, involving the entire political class of the country and broad sectors of its business community. To cite only a few statistics, on May 18th 1993 (just one year after the election of a new parliament) 205 of a total of 630 deputies and 81 of 326 senators were under investigation, albeit not only for offenses against the public administration (*Sapere di non sapere*, 1993a, 1993b). By the end of 1994, the number of suspects involved in the investigations had already reached more than 7,000, against 338 ex-deputies, 100 ex-senators, 331 regional, 122 provincial and 1,525 communal administrators, and 1,373 public functionaries (*L'Unità*, 7 December 1994, p. 4), with about 4,000 preventive custody orders issued by the investigating magistrates (*Samarconda*, 15 November 1994).

These judicial investigations of corruption, besides sanctioning what both media and politicians have come to describe as the crisis of the "First Republic", provide an enormous amount of material for the analysis of what can be defined - paraphrasing Bachrach and Baratz (1962) - as the "other face of power". In fact, reviewing the information which has emerged from the "*mani pulite*" inquiry since 1992 together with that slowly accumulated in earlier judicial inquiries, it is possible to reconstruct certain aspects of that "invisible" level of Italian politics which has had such an important influence on the "visible" one (Pizzorno, 1993).

As we will see in what follows, an ensemble of clandestine political markets created a structure of invisible norms more powerful than the laws of the state. The latter could be violated with impunity, while anyone who challenged the conventions of the illicit market would meet with certain punishment. Those occupying the principal posts in the state administration moved around easily within this pervasive system of hidden exchange, legislating and directing the affairs of the state and of public entities. At the same time, they acted as guarantors for the functioning of the illegal markets which directed every public action of any eco-

⁴ The official statistics, which nonetheless only provide a partial picture of the phenomenon, show a gradual increase in the number of offenses against the public administration (such as corruption, extortion, embezzlement and abuse of office): 466 in 1970, 557 in 1980, 1,111 in 1985 and 1,198 in 1990 (Censis, 1992: 102).

conomic importance. The careers of politicians and public functionaries depended on their ability in creating clandestine contacts and investing politically the proceeds of corruption. On the supply side of the market, the skepticism of citizens and businessmen as to the impartiality and efficiency of public action augmented the demand for purchasing favors. In these circumstances, an equilibrium developed in which the interests of both politicians and businessmen lay in accepting the status quo, receiving or paying bribes, rather than in denouncing the situation of illegality. In this way, individual checks on corruption were weakened, despite the fact that single actors might be aware of the disastrous effects of such behavior for the collectivity.

The judicial investigations have brought into light the main phenomena that increased the rewards of political corruption, and reduced its risks. While in other work we dealt with the former (della Porta, 1992; della Porta and Vannucci, 1994), in this paper we will focus on those mechanisms which "blocked" the instances of control, permitting the development of political corruption.

In what follows, we will start by discussing the reasons why the "external" controls on corruption--by the public opinion, and the political parties--did not work in the Italian case. Attention will thereafter turn to the mechanisms that jeopardized the system of "internal" controls in the public administration, focusing then on the reasons why a single actor--the judiciary--successfully assumed all the burden of control and punishment of administrative misconduct. Finally, we will review some suggestions for the prevention and control of corruption. In our presentation, we will refer, in an illustrative way, to our research on political corruption in Italy, a research based on judicial documents concerning 40 episodes of corruption; the reports of Parliamentary Inquiry Commissions; the requests of judicial action against Members of Parliaments; and the daily and weekly press as well as about fifty interviews with business men and politicians (della Porta e Vannucci, 1994).

I. The "external" controls on political corruption: The role of political competition, the media and the public opinion

In a democratic system, a decisive factor should deter "bad behavior" by politicians in power, limiting the willingness of public agents to indulge in illegal activities: political competition. The competition between different parties and individuals aspiring to govern (in order to realize objectives defined by contending programs), in fact, should help those who are most honest or more willing to denounce the illegal actions of others. Defeated parties and politicians should have a definite interest in exposing the misappropriation of resources on the part of those in government. In this way, citizens can acquire the necessary information to inflict electoral retribution on parties indulging in illegal business at their expense.

The dynamics of the Italian political system, however, have powerfully limited this possibility. For over forty years, the absence of turn over in the national government of the country has represented the principal "anomaly" of Italian democracy (among others, Pasquino, 1985 and 1991). The limited expectation of change in the short term have made the discovery and denunciation of corruption more difficult. The strong ideological identifications of the electorate, moreover, has largely circumscribed its mobility, rendering voting behavior impervious to political scandals. The main opposition party, PCI, was strong enough to challenge the majority effectively, but not to take on direct responsibility for go-

vernment. On the government side, the absence of turn over weakened the capacity for planning, favoring instead the immediate interest in dividing up and occupying public offices for clientelist ends [*lottizzazione*]. The opposition's strength could however not be ignored in either general or distributive political decisions precisely because of the weakness of the government coalitions and the fractio-nating of the parties. Continuous negotiation was necessary to avoid the danger of paralysis through obstructionism and head-on conflict. At the same time, the opposition (with no immediate prospect of winning power) found a way of "go-vernning" from its minority position. Sharp verbal and public dissension was ac-companied, in reality, by a practice of under-the-table negotiations and deals (Piz-zorno, 1993). This related in the first place to legislative activity⁵ but, from a cer-tain moment, included also the division of minor government posts. A tenacious "consociational" equilibrium was thus created: formally opposed political forces became part of an hidden network of relationships. In most cases, the opposi-tion exchanged a silence on corruption for political influences, while the various parties of the governmental area actively shared bribes, developing therefore a connivance relating to their respective illicit activities. According to the actual re-sults of the investigations, in a few cases--such as the ENEL (*Ente nazionale per l'energia elettrica*)--also the opposition participated in the distribution of the bri-bes. The consociational agreements eliminated, even inside the elective organs, the normal controls between the majority and the opposition.

In the management of the public and semi-public agencies and in the enter-prises with public capital, members of those very parties that had nominated their protégés inside the administrative bodies were in charge of the political con-trols. As one of them explained, "In practice and beyond the bureaucratic proce-dures that were legally established, the names listed [for the nomination in the administrative body] were those chosen by the party secretaries, that is by those who are the final receivers of the bribes" (AA.VV., 1993: 36). Moreover, in the pu-blic enterprises new employment and fall-back places were created for a profes-sional political class in constant expansion, safeguarded from electoral setbacks by the power of appointment held by the political leadership.⁶

The intrusion of political influence appeared particularly dangerous in the field of the media. Investigative journalism, in fact, constitutes an essential deterrent to corruption. Besides contributing directly to the exposure of illegal practices the media also represents the *filter* through which knowledge of corruption is divulged. The public's idea of the gravity of a scandal (and therefore its possible electoral consequences) depends on the *quantity* and the *kind* of information provided by the media. Links between politicians playing institutional roles and the press and television, whether the result of secret understandings or of prop-rietary pressure, represent a serious contamination of the democratic political

5 In the first five legislatures of the post-war period, the average percentage vote in favor of laws passed in parliamentary commissions was 91%. The percentage vote in favor in the chamber itself was not unanimous, but nevertheless high at 76.5 per cent (Di Pal-ma, 1978: 85-9). The difference between commissions and chamber is to be explained by the greater publicity of voting in the latter, which would have made clear pre-arranged agreements difficult to justify before the electorate.

6 In Italy, the elected political personnel reaches 160,000 units, the second highest num-ber in Europe (after France). The number of people with an income mainly related to po-litical activities is of about 2,000,000 (Bettin and Magnier, 1991; *Panorama*, 19 July 1992, p. 44).

process (for instance, Rossi, 1993: 107). Case studies on political corruption in Italy showed that, especially at the local level, the press tycoons and the corrupted politicians were linked together by common interests in legal and illegal business (for instance, della Porta, 1992: 272-280). As for the television, for a long time in Italy the monopolistic public channels were under a strict political control, which thwarted any attempt to develop an investigative journalism (Cazzola, 1988). The development of private channels, often under political "tutelage", did not change the situation.

The control of the public opinion on the functioning of the local administration is, in general, also limited by the attribution of the power to spend money without a corresponding power to collect taxes. In general, this creates a sort of political irresponsibility, with the local administrators who had a vested interest in obtaining as much public resources as possible from the center, even if these resources were bounded on provisions of expenditure which were not needed at the local level. In Italy, "High cost and inefficiencies summed up with a strong fiscal centralization and the mechanical method of retributions. Centralized credits and decentralized expenditure decisions: the fiscal revenues of the state constitutes more than 92% of the total fiscal revenues in the public administration, while 52% of the state current expense (net from interests) is formed by the transfers to all other public agencies (state controlled bodies, regions, provinces, and communes). This brings about a fiscal deresponsabilization of the decentralized bodies, which decide on most of the public expenditure" (Cassese, 1994: 16).

II. The system of administrative and bureaucratic control

According to Sabino Cassese (1992), ex-Minister for the Public Administration, the prime responsibility for the proliferation of political illegality in Italy rests with the system of administrative controls. Controls inside public organizations have all but fallen into disuse because "they were contrary to the interests of the politicians who should have been leading the administration but who instead were using it to their own advantage". As to the other sources of control, they have been frustrated by a lack of resources and the "piling up" of overlapping controls, without any real verification of their effectiveness, as well as by the politicization of the controlling bodies.

In general, an uncorrupted bureaucracy represents an essential watchdog on, and counterweight to, the activities of politicians. Civil servants are often in a position to denounce the illegitimate actions of politicians, or they can refuse to carry out the measures desired by the latter. For their part, the politicians define the essential lines of the public administration's activity, influencing both the opportunities and risks of bureaucratic corruption. In Italy, several elements of distortion in the relationship between politicians and bureaucrats emerged. First of all, criticisms of the public bureaucracy addressed its limited capacity for an autonomous action. The behavior diffused in the public administration has been defined as "oriented to let it be, postpone to the next day, wait until the others will demand, ready to bargain. Therefore, the antithesis of a weberian model of administration. A type of administration founded not on the legal-rational power, but on the contractual-conventional one" (Cassese, 1994: 17).

To explain the tendency of the public bureaucrats to enter the corrupt market we should consider that the "political culture" of public agents or, in other words, the presence of "*esprit de corp*" and "sense of state", influence the moral costs of illicit activity. If the recognized moral criteria of the public organization to which

the individual belongs are analogous to those of the public authority, the potential *exposure* consequent on involvement in corruption will appear particularly costly. The internalization of norms depends on so-called *pride in position* and the prestige of public service: the more public roles are sought after and socially rewarded, the less desirable will appear the violation of group norms. Compared with the German, British or French public administrations, which have traditionally shown a strong *esprit de corps*, the Italian bureaucracy is characterized by a generalized lack of the sense of the state, related to the importance of political protection (or, in the best of cases, seniority). In a comparative perspective, the Italian bureaucrats emerged as "legalist, illiberal, elitist, hostile to the uses and practices of the pluralistic politics, fundamentally non democratic" (Putnam, 1973), as well as with a mainly juridical formation (Aberbach, Putnam and Rockman, 1981: 2). A limited specialization was combined with the structural exclusion of the administrative leadership from the ruling class, which produced a vicious circle: "a) the high bureaucrats, excluded from the circles of those who take the decisions, take a defensive stance, looking only at increasing their status; b) the 'political class', in the attempt to contrast the deriving situation, adopt inefficient and counterproductive remedies; c) the high bureaucrats, at their turn, seek a refuge in legalism, using it against the 'intrusion' of politicians; d) the political class multiplies the laws in the attempt to lead the administration...; e) at the end of the circle, the result is an increase in the viscosity of the procedures and administrative inefficiency" (Cassese, 1983: 64).

The limited capacity of initiative of the public bureaucracy is therefore combined with a large veto power, exercised through omissions and delays in the application of the law (Mortara, 1974). This veto power was in fact used in several occasions by corrupt bureaucrats in order to impose bribes in exchange for a "faster" response to the needs of the entrepreneurs. To accelerate a "*pratica*" (a dossier), to forget about a control, to sign a payment bill were all "favors" that could (and were) sold on the market of the petty corruption (for several examples, della Porta and Vannucci, 1994: 255-268). The trial records show that the administrators were so aware of their differential power on the different enterprises that they calculated the bribes according to how much the entrepreneurs needed a fast procedure. To provide just an illustration, the managers of the Milanese "Provveditorato alle Opere Pubbliche" demanded 1% of a contract as a bribe to an entrepreneur who had a solid financial position (and could therefore afford the "waiting") and 2,5% to another entrepreneur who instead was in a chronic deficit, and for whom each delay in the payment meant high passive interests to be paid to the bank (Public Prosecutor's Office in Milan, 1991).

Besides these autonomous spaces for collecting bribes directly from the entrepreneurs, however, the bureaucrats had often the chance to enter into complex--and economically rewarding--negotiations with the politicians. The Italian bureaucracy is, in fact, characterized by a process of *political fragmentation*: "The lack of turn over and the lengthy permanence in power of the same political personnel has led to forms of vertical alliances between politicians and bureaucrats which transcend the traditional separation between political personnel on the one hand and civil servants on the other. Here too, the cement has been provided by corruption, or at least by the use of public resources for private or partial ends" (Pizzorno, 1992: 59).

The security of a career formally based upon seniority--and therefore automatic (Ferraresi, 1980)--did not allow to reward efficacy and loyalty to the institution. At the same time, political affiliation became a precondition for enjoying a series of privileges. The intervention of the political parties on public bureau-

crazy did not take the form of a visible "spoil system" based on ideological congruence--which should help policy implementation--but of a, very pragmatic, "*lottizzazione*" (or party allocation of public positions), within clientelistic relationships: "on the one side, the bureaucracy accepted a 'low profile' and a scarce external visibility. There is a kind of 'yes, minister' bureaucrat Italian style. But, differently than in the English model, the Italian administration accepted a diminishment in its own role. Instead then administering the country, it ended up administering itself" (Cassese, 1994: 14). The relationship between bureaucratic and political elites are therefore characterized by a clientelistic exchange: the contacts between them "in most cases refers not to policy elaboration, but instead to administrative decision of a limited range, sponsored by politicians for clientelistic, or at least particularistic reasons" (Guarnieri, 1989: 227). To understand to which extent the public administration formed a privileged field for clientelistic practices, it suffices to recall that the entrance through temporary contracts, followed by the so-called "*titolarizzazione*" (that is, the assignment of tenured positions, without regular competitions), involved 60% of the public employees (Cassese, 1994: 15).

An intermediary class of bureaucrat-politicians, whose first loyalty lies with the political parties that promoted their careers, has thus developed and expanded: as Cassese noticed, "In the local structures, there was the development and consolidation of an intermediary class, a mix of political-bureaucrats, of bureaucrats loyal to a politician, of unionists-politicians-public administrators etc. that do politics, govern and administrate: that it, a class that exercises three powers that should be kept separate.... it is non clear anymore where politics ends, and where administration starts" (1992). These "political-bureaucrats" have generated a dense exchange network with leading political figures in the public administration. In order to obtain easier career advancement, greater decision-making power or to collect bribes and other private advantages, bureaucrats require the protection, or at least the abstention from supervision, of their political superiors. In return, they can offer the services of their office to particular private actors or divide the proceeds of illegal activities with their political protector. In fact, the Italian bureaucracy has traditionally demonstrated a conspicuous permeability to interest and pressure groups where these have close links with the governing political parties (La Palombara and Poggi, 1975). The politician, for his part, can devote himself to illegal activities with a high probability of immunity thanks to the complicity of the bureaucrat.

Our research indicated in fact that politicians and bureaucrats cohabited in the corrupted market. As a Milanese entrepreneur explained: "The aldermen, who are politically nominated, deal with the big business; and, on purpose, they leave to the top bureaucrats the smaller business so that all of them can work without troubles in its own field" (Fipe, 1992: 13-4). However, corrupt politicians and corrupt bureaucrats also collaborate on the market of the "big illegal business". On this market, the bureaucrat is a necessary ally for the corrupt politician: in fact, its help is necessary for the implementation of the political decision that have been paid through bribes. According to the trial records of the "Mani Pulite" investigations, the politicians acknowledged "the need to have 'reliable' administrative managers that can implement the political desires of those who have the majority in the Administrative Committee" (AA. VV., 1993: 52). If the party leaders decide upon the attribution of public contracts, they however need the administrative structures in order to implement their decisions. In particular, by reducing or abolishing altogether the internal controls, the corrupted bureaucrats allow for the formation of the political rents from which the bribes are drawn.

Besides that, thanks to the stability of his position, the bureaucrat can offer to the politicians additional favors, reducing the risks of the illegal exchange by taking care of the contacts with the entrepreneurs as well as of the "coordination" of the distribution of the bribes to the various public actors. To take just an example, an employee of the local administration in Bari efficiently worked as brokers between the entrepreneurs, other bureaucrats, and the politicians of different parties. According to the judges, he invited the entrepreneurs to take part in the competitions for public contracts, and even organized the participation of fake competitors in order to manipulate the procedures. He was also the only one who was entitled to collect the bribes, and administered them with "absolute precision". In fact, each illegal payment was distributed to the members of the local council respecting the proportional weight of each party: 50% to the Christian Democrats; 34% to the Socialist Party; and 16% to the Social-Democrats (Tribunal of Bari 1985a and 1985b; for other illustrations, della Porta and Vannucci, 1994: 268-284).

The consequence of the political influence on administrative controls were all the more pathological in the case of the Regional Control Committees (CORECO), responsible for the administrative control on the local administration. Their members, the majority of whom are nominated by political organs, have frequently revealed a greater propensity to collude with the politicians to whom they owe their nomination than to control them. As the Prefect of Milan Carmelo Mancuso noticed, "the negative experience of the CORECO, which are heavily conditioned by politics, and the extreme fragmentation of procedures and decisional centers created a thousand occasions for corruption and diluted, and even dispersed, the moment of responsibility" (*L'Espresso*, 14 October 1990, p. 10).⁷ *At the same time, there was a growth in the power of the politicians upon the private agents, who could not rely upon impartial controls in their legal conflicts with public agencies led by party-appointees.*

Internal controls are made even more difficult by two other characteristics of the Italian administration. The first one derives from the rapidity and extent of the growth of public spending. If we assume a certain rigidity in adapting to new conditions on the part of public organizations, procedures and control agencies, rapid growth in the volume of resources offers public agents greater opportunities for illegal appropriation. Given the rapid extension of the "territory" to be covered, administrative and legal controls become more difficult (Becker, 1968; Stigler, 1970). If the resources to be spent exceed the structural capacity of administration of a public body, the discretionary powers of functionaries increase considerably due to the perpetual "emergency" situation with which they are confronted. Such "administrative traffic jams", and the ensuing increase in "exceptional" discretionary power in decision making, have occurred frequently in Italy (della Porta and Vannucci, 1994). They can be explained, at least to a certain extent, by the fact that Italy is among the principal democracies which presents the highest relative increase in levels of public spending (Rose, 1988: 318).

7 The former mayor of Reggio Calabria, Agatino Licandro, condemned for corruption, provides some illustration of these mechanisms: "Somebody at the CORECO prepared and manufactured the acts for the entrepreneurs-corrupters, then passed them to this or that town councilors, so that they could be approved by the city council.... Corruption is the norm.... eventually the political bosses arranged things in order to send to the CORECO people who could play their game" (Licandro and Varano, 1993: 68).

We should add that, compared with France, the United Kingdom, Sweden and Ireland, the Italian legislation presents a lower level of *importance*, as measured by the number of persons affected, the resources distributed and the kind of redistribution involved. The legislative initiatives regarding decisions of limited significance are those more likely to acquire a notable *exchange value* in the corrupt market, since they have "to satisfy a multitude of extremely sectorial and clientelistic demands" (Di Palma, 1978: 107).⁸ Sectional and micro-sectional initiatives prevail, and so-called "mini-laws" proliferate, allocating particularistic benefits to groups of small dimensions while spreading widely the external costs.⁹

In evaluating occasions for corruption a further, decisive condition must be considered: the nature of the restraints and controls on political and administrative activity. Systems of *civil law*, such as the Italian one, are characterized by a strong suspicion of discretionary power, which is harshly limited by a series of intersecting *procedural controls*, that is to say by a rigid and extensive predisposition of norms for putting into practice and verifying each individual action. These controls are mainly formal ones, addressing the respect of procedural rules, while there is a lack of substantial controls on the costs and quality of the product. In Italy, in fact, "Preventive controls occupy too large a sphere, and ask for a drastic amputation. At the present stage, they are suffocating, formalistic, and to a good extent insufficient to insure a 'good administration'.... Successive controls are few and ill-organized" (D'Auria, 1993: 233). Moreover, "as far as the local finance is concerned, a model of preventive controls remains intact, without any possibility of controls ex-post" (Guccione, 1993: 28). To summarize, "The controls that are exercised on the administration are the so called 'conformity controls', that aim at controlling if a certain action was initiated and developed in the respect of predetermined parameters, and not that that action reached the expected aim (in other words, it is taken for granted that, if the technical norms are respected, the realization of the aim follows automatically)" (Freddi, 1992: 225).

This might seem an effective model of controlling corruption. However, it presents a weakness which has been manifested with particular evidence precisely in Italy. The existence of a complex system of prescriptions for and constraints on the behavior of public agents, and the resulting uncertainty on the norms to be applied, can end up by aggravating inefficiencies and delays, favoring the factual reintroduction of discretionary power. As the former Italian Premier Giuliano Amato observed, "The procedures that govern public behaviors remained based on the alternative between a formalist warranty and a derogatory discretio-

8 Moreover, the wider the distribution of benefits expected from a given measure--the closer, that is, it approximates to the general interest--the greater the difficulties faced by potential beneficiaries in exerting pressure on the power that decides. In other words, a correlation exists between the distribution of public resources and the individual convenience of corruption. In fact, public action allocating individual benefits is more easily translated into monetary terms. In the opposite case, those who wish to corrupt are confronted with the problems of collective action described by Olson (1983). Individually, it is more reasonable for each to wait until others, more eager to corrupt, take the initiative thus relieving them of the costs, given that the benefits of the measure "purchased" will fall indiscriminately to all.

9 For instance, 88% of the bills presented in the Italian Parliament have positive effects on direct receivers that, in 45.5% of the cases, are members of homogeneous and small groups of individuals (Di Palma, 1978: 119-123).

nality, two faces of the same coin" (Amato, 1980: 95). The existing regulations foresee a multiplicity of controls *ex ante*, with a merely formal character, that enormously increase the time of the procedures, justifying the recourse to discretionary, "emergency" mechanisms, that at their turn hamper substantial controls and facilitate corruption. This *vicious circle of guarantees* (Pizzorno, 1992: 55) has been encouraged by the traditional failings of Italian administration. Lengthy delays weighing on citizens using public services end up by legitimating *ex post* a greater discretionary power of public agents. In this area of decision making, opportunities for illegalities will be greater because *extraordinary* discretionary power, not foreseen by the regulations, is more difficult to control.

III. The changing role of the magistracy in Italy

Given that illegalities committed by public agents are often also breaches of the criminal law, the "natural" adversary of corrupted and corrupters is the magistracy. The latter performs, in fact, a decisive function in the control of corruption: any eventual punishment of corrupted politicians in political terms is tightly bound up with the existence and visibility of a criminal prosecution. The efficiency of the magistracy marks the degree to which indulging in political corruption is dangerous.

A first characteristic that influences the effectiveness of the magistracy intervention is the *quality of the legislative production*. In Italy about 150,000 laws are currently in force, compared to little more than 7,000 in France. The average number of laws passed annually in Italy is 588, compared with 93 in France, 148 in Great Britain and 452 in the United States (Rose, 1988: 20).¹⁰ The *inertial force* of laws remaining in force for an indefinite period after their emanation increases exponentially the quantity of legally binding regulations to be obeyed. This creates an escalation in the number of contacts between individual citizens and public entities as a result of the extended range of pertinence of laws and regulations. As a consequence, there is a proportional increase in friction, confrontation and contention between citizens and the public apparatus. The statistics on the demands for administrative justice confirm this trend: in 1992, more than 85,000 appeals were presented at the regional administrative courts, the TAR (*Tribunale Amministrativo Regionale*), with an increase of 169% on 1977. This overload of demands was addressed towards institutions which were not prepared to sustain it: the difference between appeals and decisions increased of three times in the last fifteen years, with an average duration of the proceedings of 3,077 days (Arabbia e Giammusso, 1994: 283-4). At the same time, the risk increases of normative overlaps, assimilation, partial abrogation, exceptions and contradictions needing to be resolved at judicial level increases. In such a context, the rules of the game predisposed and guaranteed by the state lose their role as a stable institutional framework within which transactions can take place. Instead, they become a point of departure for successive rounds of negotiation between centers of political and economic power, from which the rules themselves emerge altered (Fipe, 1992: 64-5). Uncertainty thus grows regarding the effective extent of individual property rights and, in consequence, regarding the content of mar-

¹⁰ These data refer to the seventies; according to more recent relevations, the average number of laws passed annually in Italy from 1987 to 1992 is 295 (Arabbia e Giammusso, 1994: 272).

ket relations (Sgubbi, 1990: 61). This high uncertainty makes the tasks of the judiciary more and more difficult.

As far as political crimes are concerned, the efficacy of the magistracy is also, to a large extent, determined by its degree of independence from political authority. If at the formal level the magistracy is a separate power, with a neutral attitude towards politics, in practice most democracies tried to produce mechanisms of political interference in the activities of the magistrates. This interference may be oriented in two directions: the repression of the political opposition, and the tolerance of administrative misconduct. In the Italian case, two apparently contradictory peculiarities emerge in the relationship between the judges and the political sphere: on the one hand, a very high formal degree of independence; on the other, a high level of "politicization" of the judges.

Some institutional and normative features can be quoted to explain both characteristics. The formal independence from the political system is due to the implementation of constitutional principles that had to avoid that the magistracy could again become, as during the fascist regime, a "long arm of the government". In particular, since 1959, the Consiglio Superiore della Magistratura (CSM, the Supreme Council of Judges) took over several tasks which once had been assigned to the bureaucratic élite, in particular career and disciplinary decisions. A system of promotion based mainly on years of services reduced the possibility to blackmail the most "troublesome" judges. In many occasions, the CSM worked as a corporatist actor to defend and increase the autonomy, status, and wages of the judges. We should add that, since both judges and prosecutors are part of the same profession, and may freely interchange roles, the latter enjoy the same degree of autonomy from the government of the former. Another principle that limited the political interference was the formal rule of compulsory prosecution for all reported offenses. Since the law imposes to the Italian judges to prosecute any crime, "the doctrine of compulsory prosecution prevented the government from raising consideration of public interest even when the investigations came to involve leading government figures and the Minister of Justice himself" (Nelken, 1996: 196). Differently than in common law countries, the recruitment in the magistracy-based on competitive examinations open to all those who have a university degree in Law—also increases the autonomy of the judges.

The formal independence is combined however with "a strong tendency to the development of contacts and connections between the magistracy and the political environment, between judges and the political environment, between judges and parties, between judicial fractions and party, or party fractions" (Guarnieri, 1991: 25-6). If the above mentioned characteristics explain why, in a cross-national comparison, the Italian magistracy enjoys very high levels of formal independence (Guarnieri, 1992), others help to understand the "politicization" of the Italian judges. First of all, the CSM is a body composed for two-thirds of representatives elected by the judges and for one-third from politically appointed representatives. This composition brought to the formation of semi-party lists for the election of the judges-based in the beginning on a first past the post electoral system, and since 1975 on a proportional system. Several matters, such as the nomination of the General Prosecutors in the most important cities, the distribution of scarce resources, and the punishment of politically "rebel" judges, became highly political issues on which the judges and lay representatives split on a left-right cleavage. The same kind of alliances were then maintained even for decisions referring to the careers of individual judges, that had therefore an incentive to align with one party or the other. An additional factor which made the judges more sensitive to external pressure was the availability of (rich) economic

compensations for "extra-judicial" arbitration that were used to settle conflicts among entrepreneurs or between entrepreneurs and the public administration, a mechanism that often replaced the inefficient system of the Civil courts. We should add that the principle of the "obligatory prosecution of crime" could never be really implemented.

In the history of the Italian Republic, these institutional characteristics interacted with broad social and cultural changes producing different results in different phases. In the fifties, the magistracy aligned with the government. A sort of "class collusion" (Pizzorno, 1992: 61-65) pushed the judges, who were mainly drawn from the upper class, to sympathize with conservative positions. Not only, in fact, most of the "request for the permission to proceed" presented in Parliament referred to the opposition (Cazzola, 1988: 130), but they were oriented more against "opinion crime" than against "appropriation crimes" (Cazzola and Morisi, 1995: 87). Occupying the top hierarchical positions, the senior judges, socialized during the fascist regime, had the power to punish any deviation from their standards. In fact, until the 1960s, the activity of the magistracy seems to have followed prevalently the interests of the political forces in government.

Only in the sixties, the implementation of the CSM reduced the power of the high hierarchy, paving the way for the political splits of the seventies. In the seventies, in fact, a different "type" of judge entered the magistracy. While mass education opened the way into the university also to the lower classes, and the protest cycle of the late sixties influenced the political attitudes of a generation, the magistracy lost status in comparison with the economically more rewarding private professions, losing also attractiveness for a part of the upper class. In a climate which had been polarized by a wave of social and political conflict, also the judges "split" on different ideological positions. Some of them openly supported right-wing positions, contributing--according to their critics--to the "insabbiamento" of the trials against the illegal behavior of politicians and secret service agents.¹¹ However, the left-wing component became stronger and more and more audible. In the judiciary system, the so-called "*pretori d'assalto*" often took anti-governmental stances on labor and environmental issues. At the same time, especially in the fight against terrorism and the Mafia, the magistracy exercised a proactive power, which "surrogated" for a weak political power. The abnegation of many judges, who often paid with their lives their defense of the Italian democracy, was contrasted with the collusion of a divided political class, and the magistracy won a sort of direct legitimacy by the public opinion.

In the late eighties and the nineties, there was also a weakening in the attitude of complicity of some judges with political forces which had hindered in part the activity of the magistracy. A new generation of so-called "*giudici ragazzini*" (young kids-judges), lacking any sense of deference towards the political power (and conscious instead of the levels of collusion between politicians and the organized crime) began a series of investigation into administrative and political misconduct. In the beginning, various strategies based upon intimidation were adopted

¹¹ The word *insabbiamento* (literally, covering with sand) started to indicate the several cases in which delicate investigations - among others, those on 243 billions liras illegally paid by the public enterprise IRI to political parties, politicians and newspapers - had been taken away from their natural judges, and advocated by the Tribunal of Rome (known for a long period as the "foggy harbor"), ending up with the acquittance of all defendants (Galli, 1991: 255).

to stop those magistrates who pierced the circle of political illegality: pressure by superiors more sensitive to "political needs", marginalization or transferal. Inquiries were removed as quickly as possible from the magistrates responsible for the initiative and transferred to judicial seats more inclined to suppress the matter.¹² As David Nelken observed, "Those, such as Judge Carlo Palermo, who initiated investigations which brought them too close to centrally organized plots involving networks of politicians, masons and organized criminals met fierce resistance; the case would be taken from their hands to be given to a colleague or taken over by another court. Just as in the fight against 'Organized Crime', troublesome judges could find themselves moved by disciplinary proceedings to other parts of Italy and the policemen working with them could be transferred even more easily at the will of their respective Ministries; they became targets for defamation or even assassination" (Nelken, 1996: 198). Part of the political class—in particular, the socialist party—reacted with several attempts at reducing the independence of the judges (Neppi Modona, 1993: 15). These attacks probably strengthened the internal cohesion in the magistracy. In this period in fact, we assist, at the same time, at a weakening of the politicization of the magistracy as far as deference towards the politicians is concerned, and at an increasing intervention of the judges in the political process, with the development of an autonomous strategy of communication with the citizens (Righettini, 1995).

Only with the development of the "Mani Pulite" investigations, the fight against political corruption became a primary task for many judges and, although with internal resistance, judges who had been considered as "troublesome" by the governmental parties, were appointed to lead the most important Public Procurators Offices. The investigations of these judges went as far as exposing the activities of their corrupted colleagues, which in a few cases have already received administrative and penal punishments. Especially after the election of 1994, the conflict between the magistracy and part of the political class—in particular, Forza Italia, whose leader, the media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi, is currently under investigation—escalated. The involved politicians attempted at delegitimizing the magistracy, by denouncing an alleged "ideological stance" of the investigating judges or the political exploitation of their activity as well as by claiming the "superiority" of the political power upon the judiciary power, the latter lacking the electoral legitimization of the former.

IV. Perspectives of reform in the control on political corruption

The setting in motion of this "virtuous circle" is significantly modifying the Italian political system, rendering imperative long-delayed reforms. For some time now, the debate on the legislative changes required to cut down the endemic illegality existing within the state has been intensifying. Looking, either explicitly or implicitly, to the variables influencing individual calculations of the costs and benefits of participation in corrupt exchange, many of the solutions proposed in Italy, as elsewhere, aim to transform the utility function of corruption. The probable costs of corruption can be raised by increasing the penalties and impro-

12 For instance, the judge who indicted, in 1983, the socialist "boss" Alberto Teardo was invited by other judges, in higher hierarchical positions, to abandon the case, and was emarginated when he did not (Del Gaudio, 1992). A similar destiny had another judge, Carlo Palermo, who had mentioned in his investigation about the illegal traffic of fire arms the then prime minister Bettino Craxi.

ving controls on the public administration. A series of proposals have been made in different countries in this area: the creation of commissions of inquiry independent of the parties (Pinto-Duschinski, 1977); the reduction of the discretionary powers of the public administration (Gardiner and Olsen, 1974); an increased coordination between its various branches (Banfield, 1975). In a comparative analysis the opportunity of "a change in the rules of the game between politicians and bureaucrats," has also been suggested, "[in such a way that] bureaucratic elites offset the power of politicians, the bureaucratic structures becomes more independent of political intrusion and party politics, with the consequent withdrawal of bureaucratic resources from the political context" (Etzioni-Halevi, 1989: 302; on the same theme, see Pippig, 1990). An increase in the - at present extremely low - salaries of local administrators might raise the level of "professional competence" of aspiring candidates, their social status and, at the same time, the costs of illegal activity. The risks of being implicated in judicial proceedings would then include the loss of a greater income and more prestigious social position. Containing the cost of politics, particularly through controlling the level of electoral expenses, might lower the propensity of politicians to seek (sometimes illegal) financing. The introduction of competition between different bureaucratic structures would allow curbs on the monopolistic power which public agents usually exercise (Rose Ackerman, 1986).

However, it seems necessary to go beyond the single causes of political corruption to consider the complex interconnections running between political illegality and other phenomena. The research on political corruption in Italy and elsewhere (della Porta and Mény, 1994) has indicated that, alongside measures influencing individual costs and benefits, it is necessary to act on those macro-phenomena which favor the spread of corrupt practices. The control of corruption will be all the more difficult if, at the same time, the problems connected with administrative inefficiency, an electoral system favoring the buying and selling of votes and political protection of organized crime are not also confronted. The completion of the "virtuous circle" which leads to the overcoming of a system of generalized corruption demands not only specific remedies but also profound institutional reforms.

For this motive, the public debate on controls has concentrated on the institutional reforms necessary to avoid a return to illegality. Among the changes to the "rules of the democratic game" which can favor competition within and between different centers of power and render more transparent public decision-making procedures are those relative to the division of tasks, with precise government responsibilities for those who win the elections and control responsibilities for those who go in the opposition¹³, a more rigorous separation between political functions and administrative functions, the reduction of the parasitic rents related with state intervention, the conditions for a real competition among the enterprises present in the public market. A profound reform of the public admini-

13 The main institutional changes after the "mani pulite" investigation were those brought about by the new electoral laws for the national elections, passed in 1993 (n. 276 and 177), that introduced several elements of the "first-past-the-post" model. The reform of the local electoral system went in the same direction. The instability and growing conflictuality at the national level indicated however the limits of an electoral reform which could not suffice to change deeply rooted political behaviors. As Lijphart observed, in ideologically dishomogeneous societies the majoritarian model has negative effects when the minorities feel excluded, and loose confidence in the political regime (Lijphart, 1988: 32).

nistration appears equally necessary, leading to a greater accountability of the public bureaucracy, the fixing of strict temporal limits for the fulfilling of administrative tasks, an increase in the technical and professional competence of functionaries and the introduction of serious controls on their efficiency. In a perspective of reform, the controls on the public procedures should untie the knot that link illicit activities and administrative inefficiency.

Another proposal, which has been recently formulated in the Italian case, is the creation of a special body of fiscal inspectors, that should work on two different fronts. The first one is the internal control in the public fiscal administration, with the creation of a data bank on the patrimonial situation of public officers, that could allow to monitor suspect movements of capital. The second one is that of external controls, with an increase in the investigators' power on private capital, in order to investigate the mechanisms that allow for the creation of the "black reserves" necessary to finance bribes (*La Repubblica*, 27 January 1995, p. 3).

In this context, the "*mani pulite*" inquiry, which has temporarily halted the perverse ascending spiral of corruption and inefficiency, undoubtedly had beneficial effects. Nonetheless, the prospects for the future remain uncertain. In fact, the action of the magistrates has broken only one of the two rings in the chain of reciprocal causation by increasing enormously the risks involved in corruption. Exasperating slowness, unjustified delays, normative complexity and the procedural quagmire - in other words, the components of structural inefficiency in public activity - continue to be present.

These considerations have been fully confirmed by the recent reform of the public contract system, which had revealed itself among the most vulnerable to illegalities. Approved on 11 February 1994, law 109/94 fully took on board the requirement for transparency: procedures with a greater level of discretionary power were drastically limited, while the preparation of projects, the direction of the work and the activities of supervision and control were given, in the first instance, to the internal technical divisions of local administrations, with the object of reducing recourse to modifications and amalgamations of the original projects. On the basis of the considerations developed in the present essay, a reform of this kind represents a strong bastion against corrupt practices, drastically reducing the opportunities for committing abuses and illegalities. However, the law confronted only one aspect of the problem, the need to combat corruption, without considering the inefficiency and the scarce qualitative and quantitative resources of the administrative structure. This created the undesired effect of a complete "standstill" in public contracts, caused by the inability of public agencies to handle the responsibilities foreseen by the legislation. It is significant that Berlusconi's government, rather than trying to intervene to deal with these structural variables, safeguarding the requirement for transparency, has chosen, with decree 31 of May 1994, to suspend the application of the new law, thus reinstating the earlier state of affairs. The result is that the procedures governing public works already underway, worth 84,656 billion over the next two years, will be regulated by the old norms, whose vulnerability to corruption and exponential growth in costs has been "historically" proven (*La Repubblica*, 29 May 1994, p. 7). It remains to be seen whether bureaucratic and political personnel (notwithstanding the drastic renewal of the latter) will be capable of radically reforming public procedures and behavior, relinquishing the incomes, power and privileges they have acquired.

V. A summary, and some comparative remarks

The paper dealt with the control on political corruption in Italy, in particular with the reasons why most of the control mechanisms did not work for a long time, allowing for the development of "tangentopoli".

First of all, we briefly discussed the reasons why the controls "from below"-that is, from citizens or electors--did not function in Italy: the pervasive occupation of the administration and the civil society by the political parties, as well as "secret" agreements between political parties in order to avoid political scandals were discussed.

We continued by analyzing two types of institutional control: the administrative controls and the judiciary controls. In the second part, we presented some main characteristics of the Italian public administration that hampered internal controls: a complex system of formal controls combined with the lack of substantial controls; the difficult "access" to the public administration by the citizens, that are therefore pushed to look for personal "protection"; the lack of technical skills inside the bureaucracy, with the related tendency to delegate a lot of tasks to private actors outside the bureaucracy; the presence of representatives of the political parties in the administrative control bodies, with the related overlapping between controllers and controlled; the informal control of parties over the bureaucrats through clientelism and complicity in corruption.

In the third part, we focused on the peculiar characteristics of a magistracy that enjoyed of a very high degree of formal autonomy from the political power, but was "pushed" towards politics for reasons as different as complicity in corruption and the need to "substitute" for the weak policy making capacity of political parties. The analysis addressed some institutional features of the judiciary--the presence of a common career pattern for public prosecutors and judges, the characteristics of the Consiglio Superiore della Magistratura as a self-governing body, the obligatory persecution of crimes, etc.--singling out their effects on the interactions between judges and politicians in different historical phases.

A comparison of the Italian and Belgian cases allows to single out a few similarity, but also several differences. Lack of personnel and infrastructures as well as little interest in the development of a criminal policy appears problems common to both countries. Relevant *differences* referred instead to several indicators of "politicization" of the magistracy: the patterns of recruitment (in Italy, public, open competition between young people); the pattern of career (all inside the magistracy in Italy, with no intervention by the political level); the self-government of the magistracy (with a self-governing body and a lower influence of the "higher ranks" in the Italian case); and the distinction between the public prosecutors and the "judging" magistracy (with, in Italy, the public prosecutors who have the same careers of the judges, the same organism of self-government, and therefore the same autonomy from the political system). It may be not too risky to hypothesized that these differences had an impact on the results of the investigations on political corruption. It is in fact not by chance that public perceptions on the judges seems to be different in the two countries: accused of being "near to the Left", in Italy, and instead too conservative in Belgium; too "aggressive" against the politicians in Italy, and too "shy" in Belgium.

In the fourth part, we reviewed some (implemented of planned) reform bills to deal with the control of political corruption.

Abstract

The paper dealt with the control on political corruption in Italy, in particular with the reasons why most of the control mechanisms did not work for a long time, allowing for the development of "tangentopoli". First of all, we briefly discussed the reasons why the controls "from below"--that is, from citizens or electors--did not function in Italy: the pervasive occupation of the administration and the civil society by the political parties, as well as "secret" agreements between political parties in order to avoid political scandals were discussed. The paper continued by analyzing two types of institutional control: the administrative controls and the judiciary controls. In the second part, we presented some main characteristics of the Italian public administration that hampered internal controls, the informal control of parties over the bureaucrats through clientelism and complicity in corruption being one among them. In the third part, we focused on the peculiar characteristics of a magistracy that enjoyed of a very high degree of formal autonomy from the political power, but was "pushed" towards politics for reasons as different as complicity in corruption and the need to "substitute" for the weak policy making capacity of political parties. In the fourth part, we reviewed some (implemented or planned) reform bills to deal with the control of political corruption.



The Political role of the judiciary

The Belgian case

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Only someone with a narrow view of the meaning of "politics", for instance in the sense of "partisan politics", will doubt the fact that judges and the judiciary play a political role in our societies. Naturally, this role can be interpreted in very different ways. We are going to set out by tracking the political vicissitudes of the administration of justice in the past few years and their connection with a wide range of events. After that, we shall take a critical look at partisan politicisation, to wind up with an examination of the way the government that was formed in June 1995 paid very special attention to the courts and the administration of justice. If a political role by the judiciary system is indeed inevitable, it remains to be seen whether the far-reaching proposals made actually provide the necessary guarantees for the proper administration of justice in future. This immediately raises the question as to whether it suffices to tinker with the system of the administration of justice alone... We do not believe this is the case!

I. Events and reactions

The following conclusion was reached in 1982: "measured by their election programmes (for the general elections of November 1981) the political parties have in general no (clear) ideas about a policy regarding penal law and penal justice". Considering the coalition agreement and the policy statement of the centre-right government, the author noted that they contained no special references to penal or judiciary policy: not a single section or paragraph. But apparently that had been the case for two decades already. Admittedly, the policy statement did mention some of the token issues: the fight against fiscal and social fraud, the abortion issue, the protection of privacy, the fight against crime and violence. During the discussions in parliament, however, not a word was said about such policies, not even by the socialists, who had nonetheless made some provisions for them in their election programme (Fijnaut, 1982: 93-98).

On 16 May 1987, a seminar was held in Leuven about the preliminary draft for a new penal code. The keynote speaker held forth about the so-called "unease" in the administration of penal justice. "It is being said everywhere, in many different ways, that penal law is in crisis." He then linked that crisis to that of the welfare state. But he continued by quoting F. Blankenburg and H. Treiber: "The smaller the degree of politicisation within a certain problem area, the bigger the influence of those working in this area on the formulation of problems and policy-making in this field". Lawyers or penal experts tend to monopolise the field and have closed ranks. "Applied to penal law, this means that those who belong

to the "implementing staff" are awarded a monopoly in penal policy-making within the margins they have been granted by the political institutions." (Dupont, 1987: 395-398)

"The judiciary in our country never was a glass house really. It used to shun the light that science ¹, public opinion and the media want to shine on judges and their work from time to time. In a sense that is understandable. Judges are usually concerned with the darker side of society... It is harder, however, to accept the tendency of declaring the judges themselves off bounds as well. This has resulted in an office that has become deaf and blind to the cries of society. Many magistrates did not notice that the world around them was changing. Neither were they forced to react to the excesses taking place in their own circles." (Huysse, 1993: 7)

For quite some time, courts and judges were simply neglected by politicians. Our colleague Storme was in the habit of saying that more money was spent on meting out the mail than on meting out justice. During the past few years, however, the budget for the judiciary has gradually been raised from 21 billion to 35 billion Belgian francs, a 60 percent rise. However, just as important is the fact that since the beginning of the eighties, and certainly from 1988 onwards, a politicisation process, in the sense of wide social attention, developed under the eyes of the centre-left governments. Rather than an originally governmental or parliamentary awareness, the causes for this are found in a series of events. In 1979, the Judicial Police and the Court of Brussels launched an inquiry and a lawsuit against the lawyer Michel Graindorge, who had defended a German RAF activist. This was done in a somewhat curious way, and the judicial apparatus did not fare well under the scrutiny! But the increasingly audacious behaviour of the private militias, mainly the "Front de la Jeunesse" and the "Vlaamse Militanten Orde", including racist actions, arson and violent attacks, raised questions about the willingness of the police and the judiciary to enforce the available legislation. Doubts were even cast on the effectiveness of the penal system as a whole. These events led to the creation of a parliamentary investigation commission by the Upper House (Senate) on the 19th of March 1980: the so-called Wijninckx Commission. Its mission was: "to study the maintenance of law and order in general and the implementation of and compliance with the law of 29 July 1934 outlawing private militias, complemented by the law of 3 January 1933 regarding the manufacture, trade and carrying of weapons as well as the trade in ammunition, in particular." The commission's report was approved in June 1981. Already by that time, many questions were being asked about the activities of the Public prosecutor's office regarding the enforcement of the law on private armed and uniformed militias, as well as about the supervision of the police and the courts, for example as regards to links between private and/or political militias and political organisations, the role of private security and surveillance firms, and the acquisition and processing of information on all kinds of so-called subversive organisations. Finally, the question was raised as to whether parliament should not supervise the administration of justice on a more permanent basis. (Eliaerts, 1981: 525-532) The inquiry by the House of representatives after that, of 6 June 1985, investigated the Heysel disaster (during the football match between Liverpool and Juventus Turin on 29 May 1985) and the shortcomings of the forces of law and order, whereas another investigation commission, created on 8 January 1987 by the

¹ It must be said that there was indeed very little scientific research material available to base this article on.

Vlaamse Raad, the Flemish parliament, focused on the workings of the judiciary. Granted, a judicial inquiry into fraud during the implementation of the regional plan of Halle-Vilvoorde-Asse had been set in motion in 1981....But judicial inquiries into irregularities during the implementation of other regional plans had also been running for some time by then. MPs wanted to know why the courts were not passing any sentences. And the parliamentary inquiry launched on 17 March 1988, this time again by the Lower House, "into the scope, the causes and the consequences of the possible fraud scandals and of any infringements of the non-proliferation treaty by the Study Centre for Nuclear Energy (S.C.K.) or related companies", also cast doubts upon the role played by judges. The latter two parliamentary boards of inquiry were forced to settle disputes over jurisdiction: to what extent are such boards allowed to question magistrates? Can a parliamentary inquiry coincide with a judicial inquiry? To my mind it was at that moment that a breach began to open up between the political and the judicial spheres. Whereas up until then distrustful questions had been asked and all sorts of suspicions raised, the following parliamentary inquiry "into the way in which the fight against gangsterism and terrorism is organised", again set up by the Lower House on 21 April 1988, dug deep into the bowels of the judiciary and came up with a number of concrete proposals. This commission was the so-called "Bande de Nivelles" commission. It should be pointed out that a series of raids had taken place between 1982 and 1985, killing 28 people. Some people spoke of "terrorism", others even today talk of "right-wing terrorism". The whole of Belgian society became not just worried but also increasingly impatient when no apparent progress was being made in the inquiry and all kinds of strange data regarding the activities of the police and the judiciary emerged: conflicts between police forces and between magistrates; the merging and separating of files; the disappearance of documents; the sudden removal of police officers and magistrates; the disappearance of witnesses...phenomena that perhaps sound familiar to Italians... "The investigation commission (has) apparently laid bare some new data. We are using the word "apparently" here because we believe the board brought up more secondary facts than elements related to the "hard core" of the matter. There is an impression that the board, instead of setting up careful fact-finding missions into the crux of the matter, let itself be tempted into drawing a large series of concentric circles around the heart of the case". (Ponsaers, 1990: 504) The investigation commission also called upon a number of honorary magistrates to dissect a series of judicial and administrative files. They discovered organisational, technical and tactical errors in the judiciary inquiry, as well as inadequate or blatantly non-existent guidance by the magistrates. The board itself added a whole shopping list of complaints: insufficient support of the investigators; understaffing of judicial officials; insufficient communication with the police forces; poor leadership; work overload and a lack of support from the judicial authorities. The board found in particular that any non-statutory preliminary investigation had in reality been turned into a criminal investigation, replacing the actual judicial inquiry. According to the board, such preliminary inquiries also had to be placed under the responsibility of the public prosecutor's office...although the executive power should determine the general policies to pursue. The examining judge (*le juge d'instruction*) had to be released from his double role: he should no longer be an officer of the criminal police but restrict his office to that of independent examining judge, for all inquiries. The best thing to do was to appoint "National magistrates" with jurisdiction for prosecution in the whole territory. The board also seemed to have been won over in favour of a more accusatorial as opposed to inquisitorial criminal investigation (Verstraete, 1990: 533-535; 539-540) Apart from this, several proposals were made as regards the regulation and supervision of

special investigative methods and the workings of the police forces. Not all of the proposals were related to the findings: the commission was obviously trying to bring more things out into the open! The government nevertheless took the case seriously and published its "Pentecost Plan" on 5 June 1990. However, all the matters mentioned still had more to do with the police than with the judiciary. In the introduction to the Plan, the government even noted that our penal institutions are in order; they are just misapprehended and misused... Our judiciary is described as "high-standing". Yet in 1991, the government created the so-called Franchimont Commission, consisting of university professors and magistrates; they were to revise the penal procedure, which dates from 1808. But at that time, parliament was clearly more aware of the shortcomings of the penal justice system than the government.

It would seem something else and more serious had to happen to sensitise the government to the full...and it did. In came the "scandals"! And through the media they gained growing attention from the public. "Once again it became increasingly difficult for the judiciary - which is supposed to tackle the "tangentopoli", the state of bribes - to let justice take its course serenely. On the one hand because certain investigating magistrates show little zealousness² in obtaining some results. Witness the "scandals", which are commented on again and again. (The journalist De Moor is familiar with at least six, some of which with respectable seniority). On the other hand, the judiciary has to face the retrospective indignation of some police officers and journalists. In the past months they have tightened certain regulations to such an extent that others at times find it hard to suddenly prove they have "mani puliti", or clean hands. Witness..." (And the same reporter lists another dozen cases!) All in all he arrives at a list of 20 "scandals" of financial, economic and political nature: "Scandalitis - Every day has its own scandal - an outline of the main scandals that rocked public opinion last year (i.e. 1993)." And the reporter stresses immediately "that in that climate, allegations can turn into proof, investigative activities become accusations and suspicions outright judgements." (De Moor, 1994: 12-17) And add to that the new scandals that broke out afterwards: about government procurement and army acquisitions, which likewise led to a parliamentary investigation commission. So it is not difficult to get a full waft of the scent of scandals and to appreciate the question put by many: is something actually being done about this? Apparently some action was indeed undertaken, just in time: legislation aimed at avoiding corruption in the shape of the financing of political parties and election campaigns. Which has not prevented a number of scandals dating from "in tempore non suspecto" from being surrounded by a certain suspicion of kickback corruption and by an aura of political disputes and the settling of reckonings, including the as yet unsolved murder of an important politician. Quite rightly, the financial administrator of one of the political parties, who has been under investigation by the court, recently pointed out in an interview "...because by the end of the eighties things were really starting to get out of hand. No doubt about it. Whereas in the beginning they were mainly spontaneous gifts, in the past few years there was a real "demand" for money. The parties always needed more. And that pushes you to the edge of your weakness, when caution is sometimes thrown to the winds...Especially towards the end of the eighties. That was when the race between the political parties for ever more expensive election campaigns, for all kinds of gadgets, increased enormously. It was madness really. For all parties." (Humo talked to Etienne Mangé; 1995: 12) And today, the judiciary continues to meddle

2 In Italy the judges got the reputation as "doing a lot".

with that political machinery, which used up more and more as its militant stance weakened and as the cost of media coverage and tele-democracy went up and up.

We can round off this analysis of events with the outcome of the activities of yet another parliamentary investigation commission, entrusted again by the Lower House on 23 December 1992 "with the examination of a structural policy aimed at penalising and stamping out the trade in humans." In the meantime it had, after all, been revealed that for years the trade in prostitutes had been allowed to flourish without any intervention from the police or the judiciary whatsoever. It is clear that by now more attention is being paid to actual justice policies. True, a feeling of "déjà vu", "in the light of the conclusions of the "Bande de Nivelles" commission (may) be hard to suppress". But the same commentators also point out: "To wind up this far too brief outline of a number of the commission's resolutions, we should mention that the by now classical weak points of Belgian criminal policy have been brought to light yet again as a result of this inquiry: the inadequately equipped judiciary, the lack of a criminal policy and hence of a real prosecution policy, the breach between a police force in full development and a judiciary that has to cope with a 19th century logistical and operational armamentarium, the lack of a pro-active policy, the need for an integrated approach to tackle multifarious-dimensional phenomena such as organised crime. These are all conclusions drawn on other occasions as well. We nevertheless cherish the hope that the results of this investigation commission will this time be followed up." (De Ruyver, Fijnaut, 1994: 105-106) In the meantime, another scandal has come to light: a hormone Mafia, another one that has been around for some time, but that is now suspected of the murder on a cattle inspector...And the court searches on.

We have already mentioned the creation of the Franchimont commission. 1993 also saw the launch of a long-range plan for the judiciary. Many elements from the plan were included in the June 1995 government programme and so are yet to be implemented. Still, the government has in the meantime adopted so-called "summary proceedings" in order to bring street delinquents to trial and established a "Service for Penal Policy" (Service de Politique Pénale).

II. The partisan politicisation of the magistrature

In what I have just told, you have hardly heard me mention outcomes, verdicts or arrests... It is true, barring a few exceptions, the courts did not reach any results after political assassinations, cases of terrorism with manifest right-wing overtones, corruption by important figures. Should it surprise us, then, that some people are starting to suspect that there must be a connection with a politically highly gullible magistrature? Naturally, this includes the awareness that there is an extreme lack of expertise and means, and that the labour structure of the magistrature is highly antiquated. It is also known that the rivalry between the various criminal investigation departments of the police services is not of a nature so as to encourage effective work. This negative evaluation was, of course, able to thrive in a climate of a kind of structural politicisation of the magistrature. Is it not odd that, barring some recent exceptions, the political hues of every magistrate are more or less public? ³ Hardly surprising, though. Until the law of July 1991 there

³ Indeed, in Belgium the magistrate got the reputation to be political-conservative. In Italy they believe them near to the left.

was a formal procedure that would have enabled impartial appointments. After all, article 99 of the Constitution provides for appointments by the King, and hence the Minister of Justice is responsible for the quality of the judiciary, which means he can be held accountable for it. (Vandenberghe, 1981: 52) But the lists of candidates were agreed upon beforehand by the main political parties. They applied a distribution code, while the members of the bodies elected systematically followed the agreements and the party directives. "The partisan-political influence is hence no longer the work of individuals, but of well-equipped party structures." And this was justified in a curious way: by wholesome philosophical and ideological pluralism; by the withdrawal of selection and promotion from corporatism. But the author notes quite correctly: "Moreover, it would seem likely that from the side of the party leaders, their interventions in the appointment procedures were aimed above all at increasing their parties' clients base, for every fruitful intervention brings a few more people to believe that it is worth becoming part of such and such political party." The author we have quoted here, however, also mentions the risks: long political negotiations and delays in the appointments with the resulting backlog in judicial proceedings; loss of quality and of course the politicisation of the jurisdiction itself. There has been no scientific research into this and it may be impossible to perform any... Neither is it certain that this happens in all cases, obviously... But the perception that the possibility exists suffices to arouse mistrust; vis-à-vis their clients, lawyers blame the loss of a case on partisan politicisation; politicians, on the other hand, hint at power and influence. "Judges were no longer beyond suspicion." (Huysse, 1985: 124-128) Yet from time to time there are clear indications about such partisan politicisation: services rendered to or protective relations with politicians, the obvious discontinuance of an investigation, but certainly also the taking up of a conservative stance in social matters. Thus, the left-wing terrorists of the "Cellules Communistes Combattantes" (CCC) in Belgium were dealt with suspiciously quickly... The presumed right-wingers are still around though! There are also judges who will systematically give property rights preference over the right to strike. In one jurisdiction, large chemical companies are acquitted of environmental crimes for the most diverse reasons, whereas other courts would sentence them. (Huysse, 1994: 102-104) Did a well-known journalist not write recently: "In order to understand an investigation, sentence or arrest it is sometimes not unwise to colour the organisational chart of the court and the table of lawyers with their political-ideological tendencies, without forgetting their memberships of certain service clubs. While the Christian-democrats still reign in some courts, the liberals, often within the confines of their lodges, make a grab for power... Talking of which, should magistrates, like some other professionals, not have the decency to stay away from all those clubs and associations in which the contacts with society are in any case restricted to dining and conniving?" (De Moor, 1994: 30) On whose sense of justice do judges base themselves? Protection against state power? What or who is the State? Protection of the right to life, against inhuman punishment? What do "life" and "inhuman" mean to a judge? It is clear that the parallel interests of politicians and magistrates have tipped the balance more than once and that the executive power in particular has a mistaken and unhealthy grip on the judicial power. This easily turns into: "docile au prince, terrible au justiciable".

The training of magistrates has been advised for some time now. However, in a well-known report, top magistrate Krings more or less opposed a school for magistrates, in which he was supported by the former council of Solicitors General. (Krings, 1976) It would appear that they feared a repetition of events in France: the "Ecole de la Magistrature" was the cradle of the "Syndicat de la Magistrature"! As a matter of fact, until very shortly, any attempts to organise groups wit-

hin the magistrature were nipped in the bud either by the Solicitors General or by the Presidents of the Courts of Appeal. This has changed: in the French-speaking as well as in the Flemish parts of the country magistrates (particularly young ones) are now more or less allowed to associate freely and they do so effectively.

III. Conditions for acceptable politicisation

Judges are inevitably involved in political decision-making. Is there any other way? How could they function socially "vacuum clean"?

It can be said that the French and in particular the Italian example have not been without their influence on the Belgian system and still remain important. But to my mind, the main point is to interpret the examples correctly. These two countries have for many years ensured the formal independence of magistrates, but this has apparently not always prevented the continued existence of political-party dependence and connections. I believe that the context of a so-called independent magistrature deserves as much attention as the organisation and functioning of the magistrature itself. Clean hands is one thing, a clean context quite another!

It is nonetheless clear that there are many contextual factors that do not themselves trigger off partisan politicisation but do not therefore form the foundations for the normal, acceptable process of politicisation. Thus, both *overregulation* and *underregulation* may give the wrong results. Highly complex, excessive and obscure legislation can no doubt lead to law evasion. Extensive and complicated procedures likewise leave room for all kinds of disputes, often resulting in the preclusion of criminal proceedings by reason of lapse of time. This seems to be particularly the case for financial and economic matters. The wealthy, assisted by highly qualified and sharp lawyers, make the most of this. These are the characteristics of the inadequate legislation which is said to afflict both Flanders and the whole of Belgium. (Verhoest, 1995: 7-8; 2/1) However, underregulation, which gives the judge ample room to manoeuvre, almost automatically causes the latter to make pseudo-political decisions. Thus, there may be a situation in which parliament or the government is at a loss as to what to do with a particular matter or finds it too delicate. In such cases, the judge may be promoted to acting legislator and the problem moved to some court or another: an ordinary court of law, the State Council or the "Court d'Arbitrage."⁴ (Huyse, 1994: 105-107) Quite a recent example of this are the laws of 17 July 1990 and of 11 January 1993 concerning the laundering of illegal money and the seizure and confiscation of goods: many eagerly awaited the first judgement...which has since then arrived...⁵

Another weighty contextual factor is the control over the administration of justice, which immediately calls to mind the important issue of the independence

⁴ The "Court d'Arbitrage" is supposed to settle disputes between and amongst the Federation and the Communities or Regions, but in Belgium it is gradually turning into a kind of Constitutional Court!

⁵ In general it was felt that there was a vacuum in the law regarding the seizure of goods. A judge at the Court of Appeals in Brussels believed that the law does not clearly specify who the competent judge is and he decided that not only the civil judge but also the penal judge may be competent; furthermore, that a new proviso had to be added to the law: it must be clear that the goods have been purchased with criminal funds, otherwise the seizure is rendered invalid.

of both the judiciary and the judges. From what has been said above it will be clear that there are some doubts about such independence...even about the possibilities to achieve it. What we really mean is that it is the judge who is dependent in the wrong way; the judiciary, on the other hand, is said to be too independent compared to other powers. There is a kind of internal control over the judicial decisions made by judges due to the possibilities for appeal or cassation. This, however, requires a separate analysis which cannot be performed in this space. Another kind of internal supervision can take place within the organisation of the magistrature, in the so-called *corps*, the group of magistrates belonging to a court. "La conception militaro-cléricale de la magistrature léguée par Bonaparte a laissé des traces toujours visibles dans la structure judiciaire." (Ringelheim, 1993: 4) In any case, discordant notes about the power relations within these corps are heard regularly. In practice they appear to be little professional, rather discretionary, arbitrary and authoritarian even. This seems they have little to do with real personnel policies or with workload, a division of tasks or job contents. A survey among magistrates claimed that a mistaken kind of authoritarian, hierarchical pressure is being exerted. (Dupont, Christiaensen, Claes, 1992: 222-225; 236-239) It is, for instance, no longer always clear what magistrates may and may not do. "There is a lack of clear texts. Although the adage "la plume est serve, la parole est libre", for instance, is uttered only too easily, it would seem both in practice and in theory...that the hierarchical superior can demand to be informed in advance about an intended oral claim to be announced in a particular trial, so as - in the event of a dispute - to entrust the case to another subordinate or to take over the claim himself. Some people, following the example of solicitor-general Matthijs, would nonetheless wish to stress that, if the subordinate magistrate is not replaced but requested to announce the solicitor-general's personal opinion, he maintains the right, the duty even, to expose his own opinions or convictions orally during the trial." (M en M., 1994: 12). According to the same survey, all this goes hand in hand with "a poignant lack of material means to function." (Dupont, Christiaensen, Claes, 1992: 220-222) and Belgian judges do by no means operate in optimum working conditions. Naturally, this prevents a careful assessment of the situation. All the more so since this state of affairs can so often be used to cover up other shortcomings. Under this aspect the similarity of the Italian and Belgian situation is striking.

Another problem is that of the independence of the judicial power vis-à-vis the legislative and controlling powers, as well as vis-à-vis the executive power. This is a long-standing debate, held largely with respect to the Public Prosecutor. At times, the debate becomes side-tracked when tackling the interference of the other powers in specific court cases or if a negative case to injunction of the minister of justice is involved...which is by no means the case in Belgium! It seems to me that the debate about whether the members of the Public Prosecution are civil servants or judges, also misses the point: legally they are considered to be judges, and regarding all other matters presumably the solicitor general of the "Court of Cassation" J. Velu was in the right when he said in his opening speech on the first of September 1994 that when the public prosecutor's offices perform trials or implements judicial decisions, they act as "bodies (organes) of the executive power." (P.D., 1994) But some politicians state quite frankly that the magistrates of the public prosecutor's office are really civil servants. (Verhoest, 1994) To my mind, F. Périn took up the right stance at the time when reacting to the thesis of the sovereign Public Prosecution and the premise of the so-called delegation the solicitor-general receives from the Nation. "La Nation ne peut être au procureur ce que Dieu était à Louis XIV." (Périn, 1987: 87-94) In this respect, the Flemish magistrates' association "Magistratuur en Maatschappij" (Magistrature and Society) re-

cently formulated an excellent stand. "The public prosecutors need to accept that the executive and legislative powers would control its policies (or lack thereof). In a constitutional state, the powers balance each other out by an interaction between autonomy and supervision. Refusing to accept all control risks the withdrawal of the public prosecutor's autonomy. The idea is to regard control positively: it should generate a dialogue between the state powers about penal policies, in which every power has its own responsibilities, rights and duties. Modern penal policy should answer society's current needs and problems. The world of politics has a more sensitive finger on the pulse of society than the aloof magistrature. That is why the minister of justice should be given the authority, within the rules of proper governance, to set out the priorities of penal policy, but without removing all room for a general penal policy from the Public Prosecution agencies. This competence could be allocated to the minister on the basis of his generally acknowledged positive right of injunction, which is already an incomplete policy instrument and could be extended to rise above the level of individual files and constitute a more general penal policy. On the other hand, the political powers should be given the authority to check the solicitor's annual reports and plans and/or guide it in the right direction via their legislative or executive competence, without putting the independence of the public prosecutor at stake. Not just the political powers should have access to the administrative data of the Public Prosecution agencies. Let us point out that today, the minister of justice can already look into criminal files or demand a report about pending cases. Scientific research into penal policies pursued, for example, by the Service for Criminal Policy, might constitute an additional supervisory method." (M en M., 1994: 11) Like in Italy, in Belgium also a clear criminal policy is needed.

Finally, the controlling effect exerted by publicity and the publication of judicial activities and decisions must not be underestimated. (Verhoest 1995: 2/1)

However, several other contextual conditions must be met. These will have to be much more preventive and at the same time make things clearer for the magistrature, should the settlement of a dispute or irregularity ever be called for.

- To begin with, there is a great need for strict and transparent legislation regarding the public contract system. The parliamentary investigation commission dealing with weapons deliveries has already put forward some suggestions.

- Furthermore, anti-corruption legislation, provided with a possibility to ban people from pursuing their profession and with measures concerning seizure and confiscation, is essential.

- Laws on the financing of political parties and election campaign expenses can be highly anti-corruptive.

- Given the, to my mind debatable, existence of a system of parliamentary and ministerial immunity, the criminal responsibility of the members of the legislative and executive powers should at least be brought into line.

- Belgium's administration is starting to become a little less politicised,...that is to say. At least there is regular talk about the rigour of the financial inspectors who check government spending, but the question remains as to whether their advice and remarks are taken into account... I do not think we can gain any insight into that... The Court of Auditors also publishes an annual report they call the "complaints book"... But it is said that the book has few results... The idea of an administration with looser party links is being praised, and quite rightly so. But maintaining the extended political ministerial cabinets, which also involve many civil servants in partisan politics, will do little to further the cause.

- Finally, the French sociologist A. Touraine stressed a very important point. "Si aujourd'hui nous avons l'impression d'un bras de fer entre les juges et des hommes politiques, c'est parce que notre parlement a perdu presque tous ses pouvoirs et n'est pas plus respecté par l'opinion que par les gouvernements. La seule manière de limiter le pouvoir des juges, qui peut toujours devenir excessif, c'est d'accroître celui des législateurs. Comme nous sommes au plus loin de connaître un pouvoir excessif du parlement, il n'est pas dangereux que des juges, quelles que soient leurs intentions, mordent les mollets des partis et des dirigeants politiques qui exercent un pouvoir de plus en plus absolu. Il est vrai en particulier que les partis ont acquis une puissance excessive puisqu'elle ne correspond plus à la participation active de leurs militants. Il n'est pas sain de parler de démocratie quand n'existent que des entreprises politiques dont les ressources en proviennent qu'en proportion très faible des cotisations de leurs membres. Les distorsions de la démocratie produites par la partitocratie sont beaucoup plus dangereuses que les pouvoirs, en effet presque sans limites, des juges d'instruction". (Touraine, 1992: 17)

As a matter of fact, a more attentive parliament, above all as autonomous as possible, playing both a legislative and a controlling role, truly concentrating hence on policies regarding the administration of justice, will offer much better guarantees for the politically sound functioning of the judicial powers... And the nearly complete party-political dependence of the M.P.'s is an painful point in Belgium as well!

IV. Assessment of recent government proposals

The federal coalition agreement of 20 June 1995 pays much detailed attention to the "Renewal of Democracy and the Constitutional State", with as important subtitles: "An improved administration of justice"... "Modernisation and accountability of the courts". It would seem that even the government has finally realised that the magistrature should no longer be neglected or left to its own devices... and that this is not just a money matter. Naturally, there is the influence of some of the media, of some political mandatories, of producers as well as recipients of public opinion, who will insist that the judiciary function with the necessary skills and with a certain independence... The Italian example is still there! We are taking the liberty of adding some critical comments, with the aim of finding out whether conditions are being created that might favour an acceptable political/judicial decision-making process.

By way of introduction, the government's policy statement announces *several preliminary bills* that ought to interest us.

- They set out by stating that *criminal and judicial inquiries will be improved*. But it would have been preferable if they had clarified what this means. Particularly since it is precisely the way in which judicial inquiries are carried out in Belgium that is the subject of a rather heated debate, while the Franchimont Commission mentioned before has been working on it for years. The questions raised in that respect are: should such inquiries become contradictory and which things should remain secret and which should not? What would the impact of a modification in the position of the magistrates and the judge of inquiries (le juge d'instruction) be? Although the governments statement does not mention it at all, the Franchimont Commission mooted a "new" proposal at the beginning of 1995 to modify penal procedures. This document was transferred to the State Council by the government in power at the time on 31 March last for consulta-

tion. In a first draft, the commission had suggested that criminal inquiries should be more contradictory but with a stronger position for the judge of inquiries. After hefty criticism from the magistrates in particular, the new version actually went back on some of the defendants' rights, such as the right of access to files and the right to demand inquiries into specific aspects. Now they also propose to deal with procedural matters regarding the inquiry behind the closed doors of the "Chambre d'Accusations" (a kind of Grand Jury), thus effectively removing public control over lapses and mistakes committed by the police and the courts. The government's reticence in its statement is therefore understandable, but so are the protests from court journalists: this is treating the symptoms, not the disease! (De Wit, 1995: 2) Admittedly, the judge of inquiries does get a mention further on in the policy statement, but obviously not as "the judge of inquiries only"; the one thing he can be asked to do now by the Public Prosecutor is to make inquiries, as opposed to leading the whole investigation itself: so, there we have the compromise. Pity also there is no proposal to regulate the use of special means of criminal investigation (undercover etc.) and the monitoring thereof by law, instead of the way it is being done now, through a circular of the minister of justice and hence with no legal basis. This does not give anyone legal security, not even police officers. They could have stated clearly that the penal procedures code should be provided with a better-defined description of the methods of coercion, the arrangement by law of the so-called information inquiry, and, why not, a different way of structuring the autonomy of police inquiries. (Cappelle et Kaminski, 1989: 2-7)

- Another bill calls for *a national advisory body for the magistrature*. If I am not mistaken about the Italian situation, the partisan politicisation chased out of the front door can be let back in through the back one. F. Ringelheim is perhaps a little too optimistic about the value of the Italian model. (Ringelheim, 1993: 5) So everything must be done to avoid the renewed inclusion of this kind of politicising. Criteria other than party-dosage must thus be applied: generational representation, external know-how (professors, lawyers etc.).

* *
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And then it goes on.

- The government is to encourage consultation between the legislative and the judicial powers, partly in order to *simplify legislation*. This is an excellent objective. However, in that case, the government administration and the parliaments will have to be provided with more civil servants and services working on legislation. Otherwise the necessary enhancement of quality will never be obtained. Other parts of the text also promise that the abuse of procedural rules will be dealt with. One has to admit those are excellent remedies against class legislation and class justice!

- The government announces measures to make *the relations between the powers more transparent*.

Giving the council of solicitor-generals a legal status, appointing a chairman with a temporary instead of a permanent mandate and tracing a hierarchical line to the minister of justice are all government proposals that should lead to a uniform and joint criminal policy. The recently created *Service for Penal Policy and "national magistrates"* with truly national and international jurisdiction deserve support. Moreover, the government wants to continue along the same lines by stipulating that *reports about the past and future of criminal policy must be sub-*

mitted to the parliament on an annual basis. This is nonetheless too minimalist a way of putting things. Although elsewhere it is said that the parliament has the possibility to evaluate. But then, is the House of Representatives not the ultimate competent power?

- There is also mention of *a certain relief of the workload, a new division of labor and a faster and simpler administration of justice.* The administrative tasks are to be removed from the Public Prosecution agencies; the extended application of arbitration on sentencing and of alternative punishment; more administrative courts and a simplification of procedures for the State Council will also be installed. But not a word about the famous "summary proceedings" that have now been applied for some time to street delinquents, who turn out to be mainly immigrants: a new kind of class justice with racist overtones! The government wants to *modernise the courts* and make them accountable. The public prosecutor's offices will have to adopt a new division of labor; additional and temporary personal will have to help eliminate the considerable backlog in the administration of justice; magistrates will get fewer holidays; the appointment of corps presidents; the renewed job description of administrative staff; continuous training; an external audit; the creation of a magistrates' corps specialised in organisational consultation and supervision; computerisation and better infrastructure; the appointment of building managers: so many means to reach the goal the government has set itself. Now that is all very well. Particularly the arrival of people other than jurists may help to break through the seclusion. *But more management is needed, as well as more democracy,* and the participation of the magistrates themselves in the decision-making process is another must, just as the freedom of association should be encouraged. For all too long, the magistrature has been kept away from all democratic functioning as if it were on an island. But the government does not seem to have realised this yet! The Italian self-government of the magistracy could be a good model.

- "The staff of the courts and public prosecutor's offices will be *recruited via a state examination*". We do hope that this refers to all kinds of staff, including magistrates! The implementation of the law of July 1991 provided for an entrance examination, meant as a first step to depoliticisation. Experiences from other countries teach us that this attracts graduates from all classes of society, thus breaking the upper-class connection, although it may also mean that those upper-class folk no longer feel at home there. Yet the backdoors stay open, and they are not mentioned. Thus, in the event of a lack of fitting candidates - the sitting staff can make the tests for newcomers as difficult as they want - judges functioning as substitutes can still be appointed according to the old system! The promotion system is not discussed in the policy paper of the government. "The great many advisory bodies through which promotions in the magistrature take place cannot guarantee quality either. And, indeed, neither can the corps presidents. That is precisely why there is little point in making corps heads more accountable, as has been put forward by politicians, as long as the appointments at the top are not more serious and the magistrates at the bottom are hardly or not at all involved in the workings of their jurisdictions. Open assemblies are practically unknown. Seniority - until now the only rule for promotion - is not the only element encumbering certain executive mandates, such as that of first president and president of a chamber. For how long will candidate judges of the courts of appeal, candidate first presidents, presidents and vice-presidents at the court of first instance (according to the constitution) have to go on gathering the necessary votes in the provincial council and the court in order to be appointed? Yet everyone knows that it is not necessarily the best who make it this way. On the contrary.

Many first presidents, presidents, vice-presidents and chamber presidents bears personal blame for the humiliating agony that is killing off the judiciary." (De Moor, 1994: 30-31) Indeed, we do not arrive at the stage of a public, open recruitment with competition between young people and of an organisation of career-pattern without any intervention by the political level: the Italian situation.

- Just as important for a balanced and acceptable political dimension in the jurisdiction is "*more generalised possibility of access to the administration of justice*". The policy statement of the government mentions this together with "the settlement of disputes" and "breaking down the abuse of proceedings". But this more global access remains a vague notion. The socialists' demand to set up public offices for legal aid and to fix rates for lawyers' fees did not make it. Yet class justice is also marked by the parties to a trial disposing of unequal means in court. Public legal aid, in which stipendiary lawyers systematically deal with specific types of cases, is also an excellent way of monitoring an unjust and wrongly influenced administration of justice. Besides, in that way it would be easier for organisations and associations to take others to court.

- The policy statement also specifies a number of measures, which we called *the preventive contextual aspects of the proper administration of justice* earlier on. Let us summarise them: more financial expertise in courts; more possibilities for seizure and confiscation with the onus of proof resting with the defendant; reduction of sentences for those providing useful information; reduction of the abuse of proceedings; fight against fraud, trade in humans, hormone and drug trafficking; fight against corruption with the possibility of banning people from exercising their professions or bidding for government contracts; adaptation of the purchasing procedures for government procurement. Much of this, however, will depend on the quality of the legislation and the way it is applied.

- The government also wishes to tackle *the criminal accountability of ministers*. For a start, courts will be allowed to question them. But for prosecution and inquiries, permission must first be granted by a "high commission", which can also put an end to the inquiry. After the inquiry, the parliament will pass a resolution behind closed doors. Investigators and members of parliament are enjoined to absolute silence. But we should point out here that this "high commission" consists of former members of parliament from the main political parties. So the risk of partisan politicisation and manipulation by the government raises its head yet again. So does the question as to whether the oath of secrecy can be reconciled with parliamentary prerogatives. And what is to become of the rights of the defendant? This bill looks set to unleash some heated debates! Let us hope that the principle of parliamentary and ministerial immunity itself will not be excluded from the discussions.

The government's statement makes no mention of the relations between the media and the judiciary. Yet both politics, the media and the judiciary badly need to reformulate their mutual relationships: what kind of information may and should be exchanged and made public? What kind of rules for access to courts and files should be put in place?

- Finally, the statement contains *something quite extraordinary regarding the position allocated to the House of Representatives*. Somewhere in the programme there is talk of "an efficient functioning of democratically elected mandatories". But this refers largely to their loss of power vis-à-vis all kinds of advisory and consultation bodies. There is no mention of a possible problem existing in the relations between government and parliament, of the fact that increasingly it is the government that controls parliament instead of vice versa, as it should be

in a democratic constitutional state. Thus, the government itself decides that parliament shall strive to reach consent about party funding, about the execution of the political mandate, about political leave and so on. Elsewhere it had been said that the government was going to encourage consultation between the legislative and the judicial powers regarding judicial policies. And elsewhere still it says that the co-operation between the various police forces is to become the subject of a parliamentary debate. Surely it must be difficult to get more patronising the parliament! And regarding all the rest, the "interdepartmental conferences", i.e. the government, will deal with certain important issues itself: fight against poverty; integration of immigrants; inner-city reforms; drugs policy; action plans to inform citizens and so on. This approach by the government is highly unwise since, as we stressed before, reactivating the parliament is of the greatest importance if we are to reduce the power of the magistrature to its real and proper dimensions.

So, we have reached the conclusion that clearing the judiciary from a wrong kind of politicisation is not enough. The context in which the judiciary works also needs to be overhauled.

Abstract

We set out by tracking the political vicissitudes of the administration of justice and their connections with a range of phenomena: the neglect by politicians; a series of events and scandals and the very curious reactions of the judicial apparatus; several parliamentary investigation commissions without much effect. Then we take a critical look at partisan politicisation of the magistrature: negative evaluation of their output thrives to it; but there are also partisan appointments and promotions, even absence and refusal of training. Many contextual factors hinder a normal, acceptable process of politicisation: over- and underregulation, bad legislation, misconception on control over the administration of justice and over judges, non-democratic decisionmaking within the organisation of the magistrature, the development of wrong relationship inside the trias politica; but also other more external conditions were not met neither. We wind up with an examination of the assesment of recent governmental proposals: an improvement of criminal and judicial inquiries; foundation of a national advisory body for the magistrature; simplification of the legislation; modernisation of the courts activities; a more objective recruitment and selection system; more easy access to justice etc. The question raises as to wether it suffices to tinker with the system of the administration of justice alone...Between the Belgian and the Italian situations are similarities and relevant differences.

After the breakdown of the "First Republic": a turning-point for the Italian Extreme Right?

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I. From Marginalization to Protagonism

For almost fifty years after World War II, in Italy the availability of political space for the Extreme Right has been very restricted. The most representative party of this area, the Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI), has never possessed a potential of coalition or of "blackmail" in the parliamentary arena. The interwoven reasons responsible for this isolation are the following three:

1. In the first phase of re-establishment of democracy, the conservative and nationalist circles were kept out of the political game because of their previous involvement in the fascist regime. They found it very difficult to build an autonomous organizational network and were not able to gain the full support of those interest groups, which aimed at containing the influence of the Left. The quick decline of the Fronte dell'Uomo Qualunque, a populist, antipolitical movement, which had achieved a considerable success in the immediate post-war period (see Setta, 1995), is a meaningful example of this difficulty.

2. Fear of communism and the high temperature of political conflict in the second half of the 1940s induced conspicuous "law and order" sectors of the Italian public opinion to support the Christian Democracy (DC), to the detriment of its rightist competitors, such as monarchists and the Liberal Party (PLI).

3. The success of the Christian Democrats at the 1948 general elections, where they polled 48.5% of the votes and gained a majority of parliamentary seats both in the Camera dei Deputati and in the Senato, laid the foundations of a tripolar political system, within which the Center played both a legitimated and legitimating role. In order to maintain its monopoly over the Center, the DC has used strategies based on the anti-fascist and/or anticommunist discriminants against the Right and the Left or *ad hoc* cooptations from either of these areas (Chiarini, 1991).

These reasons explain why in post-war Italy, for almost half a century - i.e., until the creation of Forza Italia by Silvio Berlusconi -, a fully legitimated Right, which in a bipolar context could have served as an interlocutor and a potential allied for the Extreme Right, with the effect of limiting its marginalization and moderating its attitudes, did not emerge.

As a consequence of this situation, rather anomalous in comparison with those of the other Western European countries, the MSI, a party which openly admitted its allegiance to the fascist ideology, assumed the almost exclusive representation of the whole Right. The task was not easy, but the shape and the logic

of the Italian party system favoured the MSI in its effort to secure itself a solid electoral "niche".

Owing to the lasting exclusion of the strong Communist Party from the coalitional arena, the DC was indeed forced to enter into an alliance with smaller parties, both in the centrist phase of its governmental strategy (1948-1960) and in the period of center-left cabinets, which started by 1961. The "blackmail" power of these minor partners, added to the centrifugal pressures by its powerful and well-organized internal factions (factionalization was an unavoidable consequence of the party's ideologically and socially heterogeneous character), induced a chronic governmental instability which many people felt as a blame for the political élites and as a proof of their indifference to public interest. The anti-establishment, and in a larger sense anti-political, orientation of the MSI matched this resentment against the "partitocratic" system and allowed the neo-fascist movement to present itself as a reliable protest party, especially in the Southern regions, where its image was not obscured by the bloody reminiscence of civil war. The clientelistic practice which grew up along with the consolidation of the DC's central role in Italian politics certainly affected the legitimacy of the system, and created a considerable potential of dissatisfaction. When, in order to reabsorb the strains revealed by the outbreak of the 1968-69 cycle of protest (Tarrow, 1990; Della Porta, 1996: 21-49), even the oppositional PCI was involved by means of consociational accommodations in the bad performance of a system which «survived without governing» (Di Palma, 1977), the ground for the success of a rightist anti-establishment party was ready.

If the MSI could exploit only to some extent these propitious preconditions, it was due to the emphasis that its leadership always put on the allegiance to the fascist legacy. Many features of the political culture of this party, as shown by its official documents and press, enable us to include it in the category of the Extreme Right (Ignazi, 1994b). Let us mention the emphasis put on the authority principle, a strong nationalist claim, the invocation of law-and-order policies, the demand for enlarged powers of the State vis-à-vis society, the mistrust for parliamentarism, parties and all mechanisms of representation, the apology of hierarchy, the call to traditionalist morals, the resort to emergency measures (capital punishment, use of military troops for social control duties, etc.) in order to ensure the public order.

In spite of this extremist image, thanks to the lack of any significant competition, the MSI could attract a national-conservative, anti-party and fiercely anti-communist electorate, and gained enough support to be represented since 1947 at all institutional levels, from the town councils to the Parliament (tab. 1), where the vote of its MPs has been in many occasions a crucial variable for the passage of bills proposed by the cabinets.

Since the mid-1950s the leadership of the MSI adopted a moderate strategy, aimed at counterbalancing from inside the system the growing influence of the Left wing on the DC. Nevertheless, in order to keep the hegemony over the area where it had been confined, and to repel the recurrent challenges of more radical antidemocratic movements, the MSI went on claiming the fascist legacy (Tarchi, 1995b). This choice reinforced the capacity of resistance and the organizational cohesion of the party, but at the same time condemned it to a permanent destiny of marginalization, thereby accentuating the polarization of the political system. (Not by chance, the paradigm of "polarized pluralism", adopted by Giovanni Sartori so as to describe the dynamics of the Italian democracy in the 1960s-

Tab. 1

MSI Parliamentary Representation, 1948-1996 Number of Seats

Year	Camera dei Deputati	Senato
1948	6	1
1953	29	9
1958	24	8
1963	27	14
1968	24	11
1972	56	26
1976	35	15
1979	30	13
1983	42	18
1987	35	16
1992	34	16
1944	109	48
1996	94	45

Source: Italian Ministry of Interior

1970s (Sartori, 1982), was based on the existence of a bilateral, symmetrical anti-system opposition: that of the PCI on the Left, and of the MSI on the Right).

In spite of some favourable electoral fluctuations during the periods of most intense social conflict - as in 1972, when the MSI got the dividend of the reaction to the protest fostered by the student movement and trade unions, gaining 8.7% of the votes at the general elections -, neofascism was pushed in a corner for 45 years. Such situation persisted despite the rise in the 1970s of a new cleavage, linked to the massive immigration from the Third World, which on the contrary stirred up the birth or the growth of a xenophobic "post-industrial Extreme Right" in other European countries (Ignazi, 1994b).

This ongoing marginalization was confirmed at the general elections of 1992, when the MSI polled only 5.4%. Awkwardly this happened despite the disappearance of one of the systemic constraints which had undermined its appeal: the threat of communism, that had provided a major incentive to the electorate to cast a "useful" vote in favour of the Center. Although hundreds of thousands of moderate voters left the DC, thereby showing their dissatisfaction with the clientelism and the inefficiency of the public administration, they did not converge on the Far Right but on another protest party, the populist and localist Lega Nord¹.

In the course of only two years (1993-1994), the above situation drastically changed, owing to the combined effect of two leading factors:

- a) the loss of legitimacy of the ruling political élite, overwhelmed by the uncovering of the widespread political corruption of the "First Republic";
- b) the introduction of the plurality principle, due to the adoption of new electoral laws, following the success of an important referendum held in April 1993.

1 Some scholars include the Lega Nord within the class of the radical right-wing populist parties (see Betz, 1994: 115-119, 121-123), but this opinion is far from being unanimously agreed by the social and political scientists (see Diamanti, 1995b).

The disintegration of the DC and of the other Center parties was the basic precondition for the rise of the Italian Extreme Right. This made it possible for neo-fascism to come out of the ghetto where it had been confined until then. The ongoing exclusion of the MSI from governmental and administrative responsibilities, which had limited its resources, thereby preventing it from establishing enduring exchange relationships with social actors and interest groups, was turned into a *felix culpa*. All of a sudden, the party was seen as different from all the others and as having nothing to do with the clientelistic network of the *partitocrazia*. Moreover, the involvement of several leaders of anti-fascist parties in corruption inquiries and trials weakened the strength of moral stigma linked to the memory of dictatorship. In the climate of diffuse anti-party if not anti-political attitudes, the populist culture embedded in the MSI ideological background underwent a major revival. As a matter of fact, many voters saw in the authoritarian and nationalistic statements contained in MSI programs a proof of sense of State.

These facilitating conditions, as well as some more general factors - the progressive de-radicalization of political conflict in the 1980s, which broke down the formula of the "constitutional arch", explicitly intended to isolate the MSI from democratic parties, and the academic reconsideration of historical judgement on the fascist experience (Ignazi, 1994c) - are certainly very important to a proper understanding of the changing role of the Extreme Right. Nevertheless they are not sufficient to explain the sudden increase of MSI votes from 5.4% to 13.5% in less than two years (see tab. 2). A crucial factor towards such understanding is namely the structural context defined by the adoption of the new plurality electoral laws.

Tab. 2

MSI Votes in the Parliamentary Elections,
Camera dei Deputati, 1948-1994

Year	Votes	%
1948	526,670	2.0
1953	1,582,567	5.8
1958	1,407,913	4.8
1963	1,571,187	5.1
1968	1,414,794	4.5
1972	2,896,762	8.7
1976	2,245,376	6.1
1979	1,930,639	5.3
1983	2,511,487	6.8
1987	2,282,256	5.9
1992	2,107,272	5.4
1994	5,202,398	13.5
1996	5,875,391	15.7

Source: Italian Ministry of Interior.

While the new configuration of the Italian party system increased considerably the political space available to the MSI, the bipolar dynamics of electoral competition partly filled the legitimacy deficit which had penalized it. On one hand, the splitting of the Christian Democracy in four splinter parties (Patto Segni, PPI, CCD,

CDU)² and the disappearance of all the other Center parties (PSI, PSDI, PLI, PRI) dismantled the widespread clientelistic network which had excluded from the electoral market large sectors of voters, mainly in the Southern regions. Thus the large support potential of many conservative voters, who in the past had chosen the DC as the less of evils, "holding their nose", was set free (Morlino and Tarchi, 1996). On the other hand, as an effect of the plurality system, many political and social actors of moderate orientation rapidly accepted the hypothesis of an alliance with the MSI in order to build a successful electoral cartel against the Left.

Hence, under the pressure of the Tangentopoli³ scandal, the Extreme Right suddenly achieved that power of coalition and blackmail which it had in vain sought in the past decades through its unconditioned anti-communism. At this point, we can ask ourselves whether this can be considered a real turning-point in its history, or yet another contingent adaptation due to the exceptionality of a phase of transition.

II. Which kind of change?

In order to answer to such a question, it is necessary to inquire whether the participation of the MSI in the "Polo del buongoverno" electoral cartel and in Silvio Berlusconi's cabinet (April 1994-January 1995) with 5 ministers and 12 undersecretaries has been associated with an ideological and organizational transformation of the party or not. And, if it has, in which degree.

A preliminary answer can be found in the change of denomination implemented by the neofascist leadership in order to favour acceptability on behalf of potential allied forces. Significantly, the label *Alleanza Nazionale* was adopted in the aftermath of the successful local electoral tests in Autumn 1993. In this instance the impressive score of some MSI candidates showed that, given the crisis of the DC, the capacity of mobilization of the party with respect to moderate public opinion was undergoing a noticeable growth. The open support acknowledged by Berlusconi to Gianfranco Fini, the national secretary of MSI, at the Rome municipal elections, is an example of the novel "respectability" achieved by the party. But, since a change of name is neither easy nor painless, especially for parties comprising a relevant amount of "faithful" activists (Panbianco, 1982) and attributing an important role to symbolic factors in the socialization of its members, the new label was presented alongside with the old one for more than one year. Even when, in January 1995, the XVII MSI National Congress ratified the dissolution of the party and its reconstitution as *Alleanza Nazionale*, the old emblem (a tricolor flame) was kept, although in a reduced scale, within the new symbol, following the example of the PCI's change into the PDS.

2 The DC suffered a first split in 1992, when Mario Segni, a liberal-catholic MP, launched his own movement *Popolari per la Riforma*, later *Patto Segni*, accusing the party of being indifferent to the need of institutional reforms. The CCD, *Centro Cristiano Democratico*, was created by some leaders of the DC's conservative wing in the summer 1993, when the party assumed, under the Secretary of Mino Martinazzoli, the new label *Partito Popolare Italiano*, PPI, and shifted to an open strategy of "dialogue" with the PDS. After the March 1994 electoral defeat - 15.7% of the vote -, the PPI was shaken by a sequence of controversies and turnovers. As a consequence, its more moderate wing, led by the deposed secretary Buttiglione, split to form the CDU (*Cristiano-Democratici Uniti*).

3 Under this label, the Italian media designate the cases of political corruption discovered in the early 1990s.

Beyond these formal elements, the transition from the MSI to the Alleanza Nazionale was characterized by a mixture of persistence and change (Ignazi, 1994a).

Concerning the organizational aspects, the new political actor has inherited the old structures entirely. The most significant adhesions to the Alleanza Nazionale took place at the upper and intermediate élite level, with the recruitment of a certain number of professional politicians from the DC and the other Center parties, and of a few independent intellectuals and technicians. At the grass-roots level the turnover appears to be slower.

Tab. 3

MSI Organizational strength, 1970-1995

Year	Number of members	N. of local units
1970	188,878	1,821
1971	205,794	2,415
1972	239,075	2,721
1973	225,030	2,843
1974	210,018	2,501
1975	212,120	2,304
1976	217,110	2,429
1977	160,339	1,926
1978	152,234	2,123
1979	174,157	2,471
1980	165,810	2,363
1981	176,417	2,561
1982	159,169	2,048
1983	165,308	2,158
1984	180,688	2,496
1985	141,623	2,014
1986	156,520	2,275
1987	165,427	2,720
1988	151,444	2,109
1989	166,162	2,338
1990	142,344	3,020
1991	150,157	4,185
1992	181,243	5,933
1993	202,715	8,337
1994	324,344	8,451
1995	467,539	10,284

Source: MSI National Direction, Organization Office. Communications to the author, 17.5.1990, 28.6.1990, 5.7.1990, 30.11.1990, 20.7.1994, 5.5.1995, 12.1.1996, 12.4.1996.

The effective consistence of the *circoli di ambiente* (basic organizational units) into which the first members of the AN have been recruited was unclear. The official figure of January 1995, 1,650 clubs, with a total of 33,000 members, was no doubt inflated. In any case, the new members were a minority if compared to the number of MSI members at the eve of congress - 324,344, distributed over 8,451

local branches, according to official figures (tab. 3)⁴ - gathered under the new label. The territorial articulation of the party was still centered around the pre-existing MSI sections. The majority of deputies and senators elected in 1994, too, had been MSI militants (Verzichelli, 1994). The AN National Assembly elected at the end of the congress, i.e. the largest executive body of the party, comprises a leadership which is of MSI origin in its majority. Even the electoral criteria of this Assembly echo the neofascist mistrust for the democratic method: 200 members were imposed by the leadership, another 200 proposed on a blocked list, 50 coopted on the basis of a direct designation by the President, only 50 were chosen through a free vote of the delegates. Moreover, only 17 out of 101 members of the National Direction were not holding a high-level position in the MSI hierarchy prior to the creation of the Alleanza Nazionale. Finally, AN was born without an autonomous statute. The Congress approved only the first four articles, and in order to know the others a period of seven months had to pass.

As in the old MSI, the organizational structure of the AN is highly centralized and with a strong charismatic connotation (Diamanti, 1995). In addition, the adoption of a presidential model accentuated such characteristics, by reducing the role of the middle-level élite (Tarchi, 1996b). With the new statute, approved by the National Assembly at the end of July 1995, the territorial units of the MSI merged with AN circles and the members of these associations were kept under the control of the neofascist local leadership. The presidential structure of the party allows the leader Gianfranco Fini the powers of a monarch: without consulting any executive body, he can dissolve a circle, remove from office leaders at any level, expel a member; and he chooses the candidates for general elections. Internal democracy has practically disappeared. From this point of view, hence, the birth of the Alleanza Nazionale has certainly not represented a radical discontinuity with respect to the past.

As far as the political culture of the "new" party is concerned, the judgement can not be as clear-cut. The theses submitted to the XVII Congress delegates, who approved them almost unanimously, show, at least on the surface, a significant distance from the historical roots of the MSI. The AN program refers to a Right which is not «born out of fascism» and which «accepts the democratic values rejected by fascism», even recognizing that «anti-fascism was the crucial historical moment to restore the democratic values which had been crushed by fascism» (Tesi, 1994: 8). All forms of both authoritarianism and totalitarianism are condemned, and even corporatism, which had always been one of the programmatic strongholds of the MSI, is left aside, and free market economy *de facto* accepted, under the only condition of recognizing the social needs (Tesi, 1994: 4). Instead, the most evident trace of a persisting linkage with the traditional radical Right-wing culture is to be found in the suspicion towards the representative principle, a mistrust expressed through the refusal of the «old mechanism of delegation» and the preference for «direct democracy». The proposal of a double vote, one to choose the government and the other to elect the members of Parliament (Tesi, 1994: 13), is clearly inspired by a plebiscitary mentality.

⁴ As most Italian parties do in order to give an image of organizational strength, the MSI has always largely over-estimated the consistency of its own membership. By analyzing the number of the delegates and the criteria adopted for their election, we can assess at about 60,000 the actual number of its members at the moment of the last Congress of the party, held in January 1995 (see Tarchi 1996b).

However, the real reach of the evolution of the Italian Extreme Right has to be measured referring not only to the official statements of its programmes, but also, and above all, on the ground of praxis. From this point of view, the Alleanza Nazionale presents some undeniable contradictions. Its leaders often exhibit allegiance to democracy, but every now and again they boast of the merits of Mussolini and his regime. The party rejects any use of violence and accepts the dialogue with the Left, but the echoes of the neofascist rhetoric are frequent in its press. Such a wavering behaviour is connected to the need to preserve the capacity of mobilization and identification of the rank and file. In order to succeed in this endeavour, the AN leadership must periodically appeal to the heritage of neofascist ideals (and nostalgia) and thereby emphasize the differences which keep the party separate from its liberal and former Christian Democrat partners of the Center-Right cartel "Polo delle Libertà" (see Tarchi, 1996a). This strategy of duplicity has already been rewarded. At the Fiuggi Congress in 1996, only a small number of delegates split to follow the MEP and former national secretary Pino Rauti in his refusal of the new course. As the change from the MSI into the AN has not been the consequence of an external "threat" but only a strategic move to enlarge the party's room to manoeuvre and legitimacy, its implementation has not induced a real conflict among the factions which supported the old leadership⁵. Within the top-level élite of the Alleanza Nazionale, many old *routiniers* of neo-fascist politics stand side by side with national-conservatives and former Christian Democrats, and the middle-level élite cadres do not seem to interpret the change as a turn. In their opinion, reference to fascism is untouchable, nationalist ideas are still predominant, anti-system attitudes are considerable, mostly among youth (Vignati, 1995: 175-180).

From this concise overview, it should be evident that the moderate turn of the Extreme Right's largest party of postwar Italy is basically a tactical and instrumental move. As several scholars have pointed out (Ignazi, 1994c; Tarchi, 1995a; Carriotti, 1995), this change has been neither preceded nor prepared, within the party, by a critical discussion of the neofascist experience. On the contrary, AN leaders frequently pay public homage to the "glorious" struggle of their forefathers. The same strategy of accommodation is not a novel one in itself: already in the 1970s, under the label *Destra Nazionale*, the MSI had made big efforts in order to gain credit as a respectable Right movement, although with only a limited success. Nevertheless, an excessive emphasis on the analogies with the past does not take into account the changing profile of Italian politics after the breakdown of the "First Republic". Once the MSI-AN was accepted as an electoral and governmental partner by the moderate cartel, the external perception of its identity inevitably entered an evolutionary path. The party leadership is now aware that a nostalgic reversing would endanger a substantial portion of the votes gathered at the March 1994 (5,202,398) and April 1996 (5,875,391) elections: those of the ex center parties voters (50%, or even more, of the overall AN electorate).

The uncertainty about the future of this evolution is therefore linked to other factors, not directly dependent on the will of the party's headquarters:

a) the effective dimension of the gap between the political culture of the AN leadership, that of the membership and that of the electorate;

5 At the XV (1987) and XVI (1990) national congresses, the fractionalization of the MSI was evident, with six factions competing to get, or to influence, the secretary. An agreement of four out of these six factions allowed Fini to regain the party leadership in July 1991.

b) the possibility of a change in the systemic conditions which favoured the rise of the MSI in 1993-1994.

Each of these two topics will be investigated very briefly in the following paragraph.

III. Some uncertainties about AN future

A. *Members and voters: a cultural gap*

Available survey data and electoral studies show that, at least from the mid-1970s, the distance between the values of MSI voters and militants has been considerable (Calvi, 1980; Ignazi, 1989). More recent inquiries seem to confirm and even to accentuate such evidence.

Two surveys carried out among the delegates of the XVI and XVII National Congress (January 1990, January 1995) points out the presence of a continuity with the past in the political culture of the MSI and AN cadres. Anti-system attitudes and a strong feeling of alienation with respect to all other parties prevail over a bargaining and coalitional propensity. The inclination towards radical, even violent, protest is still widespread. Discontinuities with the traditional neofascist culture also depart from the typical values of the Right: no relevant support is given to militarism and clericalism, while in foreign policy anti-americanism is the prevailing attitude, even if the experience of the conservative governmental alliance seems to make it decreasing (Ignazi, 1993: 86-92; Vignati, 1995: 138-174). At the same time, though, a few traces of biological and cultural racism have still been identified, although certainly far less important than in other Extreme Right european movements, especially the French Front National (see Ignazi-Ysmal, 1992).

The profile of the MSI-AN voter, as emerging from a study carried out in 1994, is characterized by different psychological and cultural features. This voter declares a higher than average satisfaction with the working of the political system, gives priority to personal economic welfare, success and pleasure, favours a strong government, "law and order" policies, capital punishment, industrial development, free initiative, and optimistically believes in the upward trend of national economy (Calvi and Vannucci, 1995: 50).

A temporal gap of four years separates the survey realized among the delegates of the XVI MSI national congress and the analysis of the MSI-AN voters. This could bias the comparison, but, as we have seen before, AN members in the year 1994 totally overlapped with those of the MSI, and three quarters of them had joined before 1991. Hence it can be assumed that their basic orientations have remained unchanged, at least until the 1994 elections (analyses of 1996 voters are still not available). Clearly, considerable differences persist between the militant's and the voter's motivations. While the first is attracted and driven into political engagement by an anti-systemic and vaguely revolutionary ideology, moderated at most by some embryonic libertarian "temptations of modernity", especially among the youngest (Ignazi, 1994c: 87), the second reveals typical features of modern conservatism. He/she adopts individualism and a kind of social darwinism, and emphasizes the problems linked to personal and collective security.

To reconcile such different expectations will not be an easy task for the party leadership.

B. "Post-fascism" strategy and systemic preconditions

The systemic context which offered to the Italian Extreme Right the chance of a previously unthinkable success, thereby stimulating its transformation, seems to be heading towards consolidation. Unless a proportional electoral law is again implemented, it is unlikely that the attempts at reviving a strong Center will be successful⁶. The enduring of a bipolar competitive dynamics strengthens the coalition and blackmail power of the *Alleanza Nazionale*, because of both the *Lega Nord*'s defection from the *Polo delle Libertà*, which caused the fall of the Berlusconi's cabinet after only eight months of government, and the organizational weakness of *Forza Italia* at the local level.

Consequently, the reasons for the "post-fascist" evolution imposed to the MSI under the leadership of Gianfranco Fini in order to exploit the crisis of the centrist parties involved in the Tangentopoli affair, are still valid. The uncertainty about the outcome of future electoral competitions increases AN's weight in the conservative alliance, thus reinforcing its hegemony within the political space of the Right. Its potential competitors are weak: the galaxy of Radical Right groups, very active in the past, is now fragmented and scarcely organized (Ferraresi, 1995); skinhead gangs are no more than lunatic fringes, lacking both political strategies and cultural references (Marchi, 1993). The threat of Rauti's *Movimento Sociale-Fiamma Tricolore* is more serious, but does not represent, at the moment, an actual challenge to AN strategy. Its score at the regional elections of April 1995 was very poor, below 1%, and the comparative success that the *Tricolor Flame's* lists enjoyed at the general elections one year later (2.3% for the Senate, with only 165 candidates out of 232 constituencies) seems to express more a reaction against the high number of former christian democrats which stood as candidates for the *Polo per le Libertà* than an adhesion to the MS-FT programme or ideology⁷. Moreover, this splinter party does not control a sufficient amount of resources as to put up a mass-party structure (in 1995, it claimed 14,236 members and 463 basic units). Hence, up to now, no factors can be identified, which could prevent AN's shift towards the Center. The party could gradually mitigate the fascist features of its ideological identity without the risk of undergoing major defections.

This does not mean that the current developments can not be reversed, or that in Italy Right-Wing populist Radicalism will not have a future. The MSI's change from an old-fashioned neofascist movement to the legitimate representative of die-hard conservative public opinion has been fostered, as we have seen, by some specific conditions: decline in social tensions, collapse of the moderate Center, generalized disaffection with corrupted professional politics, adoption of a plu-

6 Even if the April 1996 general elections show the success of at least three Centrist lists: "Per Prodi" (2,555,082 votes gathered in the p.r. system election of one quarter of the Chamber MPs) and "Lista Dini" (1,627,191), linked to the Center-Left coalition "L'Ulivo"; CCD-CDU (2,190,019), linked to the Center-Right cartel "Polo per le Libertà". The real challenge to bipolarism comes from the *Lega Nord* (3,777,786 votes, 10.1%, 59 deputies, 27 senators).

7 The score of the *Movimento Sociale-Fiamma Tricolore* was indeed not so good for the Chamber of Deputies (p.r. share), where the voters had to choose between its candidates and those of the *Alleanza Nazionale*. The lists of Rauti's party (which had been presented only in 19 out of 26 constituencies) polled in this case only 338,721 votes (0.9%). It should be also noted that the only senator of the MS-FT was elected in a constituency (Avola, in the Sicily) where the *Polo per le Libertà* had not presented its own candidate, as to favour the candidate of the allied *Lista Pannella-Sgarbi*.

rality electoral system, lack of competitors on the Right. The vanishing of whichever of these conditions could hinder the process.

In this perspective, given the experiences of other European countries, a major place should be assigned to the topic of immigration and xenophobia and to their impact on the growth of social tensions in Italy. Until today, racism has not been a relevant problem in Italian politics. Anti-immigration protest has not become a factor within the electoral market, due to the high costs it would have entailed in terms of image (Chiarini, 1993). Nevertheless, on some occasions the temptation to use xenophobia as an instrument of propaganda has been followed not only by the MSI but also by the Lega Nord and the PRI. As a matter of fact, social discontent with mass immigration from extra-European and Eastern European countries is growing in the country, and the issue has been already put back on the governments's agenda. Since the link between collective insecurity and xenophobic reactions has considerably favoured the rise of "postindustrial" Extreme Right parties in several European countries, it is likely that even in Italy such issue will become a political warhorse. If the Alleanza Nazionale will give in to this temptation, following the urging of some sectors of its rank and file, it will be re-absorbed within the limits of its past extremist *cliché*. If, on the contrary, it will abstain from that, in order not to challenge its recently acquired legitimacy, it will leave some room of manoeuvre on its Right. The recent contacts of Rauti's Movimento Sociale-Fiamma Tricolore with Le Pen's Front National, with the announcement of future common anti-immigration meetings, show that such challenge is a concrete option.

Another important topic is related to the change of the Italian political system in itself. As many recent developments have shown, the closed, consociational, cartel-type, clientelist, partitocratic system which had aroused in Italy a widespread dissatisfaction with the working of democratic institutions has not been completely dismantled by the proclaimed birth of a "second Republic". The ruling political class is still largely formed by the leaders of the old parties, now under new labels. Has the system changed enough to avoid an enduring lack of legitimacy, or at least will it be able to do it in the future? The outbursts of anger by some interest organizations (artisans, shop keepers, small entrepreneurs), the recurring menaces of a "tax strike", the success of the Lega Nord's calls to secession of the Northern part of the country, as well as the electoral growth, on the Left side of the political system, of the neo-communist party Rifondazione Comunista, reveal that the Italian society is still suffering a great deal of discontent and asks for an open anti-establishment protest. Will be the policies of Prodi's Center-Left government able to improve the performance of both the civil service and the national economy and so to reabsorb this unrest?

The future developments of the Italian Extreme Right will largely depend on the answer to this question.

Abstract

The position of the extreme right within the Italian political system has been modified since 1993. A larger political space became available to the right-wing parties when some of the pillars of the "First Republic" governmental coalitions collapsed. The most representative party of this area, the MSI, is experiencing an ideological and organizational change which started by the assumption of the new label "Alleanza Nazionale". In this article we try to explain why the shape and logic of the clientelistic and partitocratic Italian system can be held responsible for the success of the MSI and to discuss some organizational, ideological and political aspects of its change into the AN. We also analyze the chances of success for the movements of the populist Radical Right, whose strategy is mainly related to the emergence of the immigration cleavage, in a country where the dissatisfaction for the working of democracy is still widespread.

On the 'Two Faces' of right-wing extremism in Belgium

Confronting the ideology of extreme right-wing parties in Belgium with the attitudes and motives of their voters

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I. Introduction

Belgium, like most West-European countries, has in the last decades been confronted with a remarkable electoral growth of parties on the far right. The chronology of this development, however, differed in Flanders and Wallonia (Ysebaert, 1994). Electoral support for Vlaams Blok in *Flanders* was fairly negligible in the early eighties (between 1 and 2%), but increased unexpectedly in the European elections of 1989 (6.6%). In the national elections of November 1991, Vlaams Blok managed to win no less than 10.6% of the total votes in Flanders, with the party's support even rising to 12.6% in the European elections of June 1994, a score which was almost repeated in the national elections of May 1995 (12.2 to 12.4%). The electoral gains of the extreme right-wing parties is more recent in *Wallonia*. Front National's breakthrough came with the European elections of 1994, with 7.9% of the vote, compared to only 1.1% in 1991. The smaller Agir party, a party limited to the Liege region, got 1.9% of the vote in 1994. Together, both extreme right-wing parties thus obtained almost 10% of the vote (9.8%) in Wallonia in 1994. At the national elections of 1995, however, the total percentage of these parties' voters fell to 6.3% (5.5% for FN; 0.8% for Agir).

The spectacular growth of extreme right-wing parties in Belgium poses various questions, for example as to the reasons for this development, and as to the appropriate responses to it. In this article, however, we will limit ourselves to the question of the *significance* of this phenomenon. There is, after all, a great deal of confusion in public opinion and in political debate about the nature of a *party* such as Vlaams Blok. Should Vlaams Blok be seen as an extreme right-wing party, as political commentators have fairly unanimously labelled it since its electoral gains in November 1991? Or is it a respectable, populist party, characterised by a popular, and hence hardly extreme message? The same confusion dominates when we look at the *voters* for such a party. Did they vote out of racist, or even fascist-like motives, was it an apolitical protest vote, or did they fall for a deliberately populist election campaign?

These questions will be answered by comparing the ideology of such parties with the attitudes and motives of their voters. First the profile and the ideology of the parties will be laid out, then the ideological profile and the electoral motives of the voters will be examined. The contrast between the two uncovers the

strategy which such parties follow in gaining votes. This strategy will be examined in a third section. The dangers which this strategy poses to the functioning of democracy will be considered in the conclusion. In answering these questions we will largely look at Vlaams Blok in Flanders. The electoral breakthrough of the Front National (and Agir) in Wallonia is, after all, a very recent development. Research into the ideology of these parties and their voters has still largely to be done, and the reliability of existing research into FN and Agir voters is uncertain, since so far only thirty of them have been interviewed. We will, however, refer to these findings when relevant.

The analysis of *extreme right-wing ideology* held by parties and their voters implies a definition of extreme right-wing attitudes. In general, five components of extreme right-wing ideology have been distinguished in the research literature (see e.g. Falter & Schumann, 1988; Mudde, 1995; for a review, see: De Witte et al., 1994). *Biological racism* refers to the belief in differences between races based on hereditary superiority, which leads to inequalities between 'peoples' based on biological grounds. In extreme *nationalism* the central concept is one of a homogeneous ethnic or national community, in which one's own 'national characteristics' are portrayed in a positive and strongly romanticised fashion. This national community is conceived as a strong, united group to which the individual is subordinate. A belief in the necessity of strong leadership is the basis of the *leadership principle*. This authoritarian concept of mankind ties in with the *rejection of parliamentary democracy*, which is seen as a weak or inefficient system of government. Such anti-parliamentarianism is linked to anti-democratic and anti-pluralistic views. These last express themselves in a *militant opposition to political opponents* (anti-socialism, anti-communism and resistance to any form of 'progressiveness').

These five central components of extreme right-wing ideology are related, representing different facets of a single ideology with its own internal logic. Thus anti-pluralism is an aspect of the concept of a homogeneous ethnic or national community (homogeneity excluding difference), while anti-parliamentarianism and the leadership principle are two sides of one coin. Also biological racism and extreme nationalism are related, if one sees the 'bloodtie' as the element which holds together the 'ethnic community' and distinguishes it from foreign peoples. The coherence of the various facets of extreme right-wing ideology is not coincidental. After all, they all come back to a single basic concept: the belief in the *fundamental inequality of individuals, groups and peoples* (see e.g. Cochrane et al., 1979; Hagendoorn & Janssen, 1983: 74). Peoples can, in this view, be ranked from superior to inferior on a genetic basis, while society should be hierarchically ordered (leaders versus followers). This elitism, or assumption of inequality, also implies that left-wing ideologies must be combated, since the basic value of equality is central to these ideologies.

II. Can we speak of extreme right-wing parties?

Various journalistic studies concerning Vlaams Blok have appeared recently (De Moor, 1992; Gijssels, 1992 & 1994; Vander Velpen, 1992; van den Brink, 1993; Elbers & Fennema, 1993). Together with existing political research into this party and extreme right-wing groupings in Flanders (Verlinden, 1981 & 1991; Spruyt, 1994 & 1995) these studies allow us to sketch a profile of the ideology and significance of Vlaams Blok. Three important conclusions can be drawn from this analysis (De Witte, 1994).

Firstly the links of Vlaams Blok with the extreme right of before, during and immediately after the Second World War are remarkably strong. The political platform of Vlaams Blok explicitly refers to the nucleus of extreme right-wing ideology held by the pre-war extreme right-wing organisations in Flanders. The party also openly celebrates the leaders of such organisations. Thus Jef François, one of the leaders of the 'Algemene SS-Vlaanderen' during the Second World War, was a guest of honour at the Vlaams Blok election conference in 1988 (Gijssels, 1992: 246). Furthermore it is apparent that the links with the mosaic of extreme right-wing organisations active in Flanders in the 1960s and 1970s are noticeable. Almost all those elected in 1991 and 1995 were previously active in extreme right-wing organisations such as the fascistic private militia VMO, the intellectual think-tank Were Di and the activists' group Voorpost. The links between both periods are *finally* ensured by a number of key figures, the most important of whom take up leading positions in Vlaams Blok, for example Karel Dillen and Roeland Raes. Karel Dillen played a crucial part in bringing together the various fractions of the post-war Flemish far right, while Roeland Raes can be considered the ideologist and international contact of the extreme right in Flanders (Gijssels, 1992: 243-246 & 269-271; De Moor, 1992: 16-28 & 71).

We will examine here the first conclusion in particular, since it is crucial to our concern. The interested reader can obtain further information on the other two conclusions in the works cited above (see especially, De Witte, 1994). It should be mentioned that openly referring to pre-war organisations and their leaders in Flanders is - at first sight - probably less compromising than in most of the surrounding countries. After the war a romanticised historiography of 'great Flemish examples' was developed to minimise their involvement in, among other things, collaboration with the Nazi regime (Seberechts, 1992). Their selfless idealism was emphasised, while references to, for example, Nazi sympathies or involvement in the Nazi movement went unmentioned (cf. descriptions of Cyriel Verschaeve, who became active in the 'Algemene SS-Vlaanderen' during the Second World War).

From the founding of Vlaams Blok the party made references to '*solidarism*' as a system for organising the socio-economic framework of society (see the Vlaams Blok leaflet 'Grondbeginselen' [Basic Principles], 1979: 9-10). Central to solidarism is the emphasis on the organic coherence of society. In this view, all those who belong to the same people experience a strong and deeply rooted feeling of ethnic solidarity. This feeling of mutual 'belonging' excludes a competition of interests within one nation and leads to corporatism: all segments of the population should cooperate, because by definition they strive for the same goals. Given the emphasis on the organic and homogeneous coherence of the ethnic community, this socio-economic view is typical of extreme right-wing ideologies (Verbeeck, 1994: 221-227). In developing its solidarist doctrines, Vlaams Blok based itself on the writings of two pre-war extreme right-wing organisations in Flanders: the 'Verbond van Dietsche Nationaal Solidaristen' (Verdinaso) and the 'Vlaams Nationaal Verbond' (VNV). Both organisations can be considered authoritarian, anti-democratic and close to fascism. Verdinaso saw itself as 'the sole bearer of the fascist revolution' (Vanlandschoot, 1975: 1744). The historian De Wever has shown that the VNV was from its very beginning conceived as a party that appealed to fascism, with the purpose of achieving a Flemish version of German national-socialism (De Wever, 1992).

References to a fundamental inequality between individuals and peoples is - as mentioned above - at the heart of extreme right-wing ideology. Such references are met fairly frequently in the Vlaams Blok. Thus, in its *Grondbeginselen* the

party emphasises the 'fundamental natural inequality and difference of individuals and communities' and opts for the building of a 'hierarchically structured community of natural and ethnic unity' (Grondbeginselen, 1979: 17-18). At its conference on immigration in 1984 Vlaams Blok reiterated its faith in the principle of inequality: 'It is one of our first and most difficult tasks to destroy the monstrous lie of equality. Individuals, peoples and races are not equal' and 'The left (...) bases itself on an ideal of equality which we find utterly unacceptable. With Nietzsche we say that true injustice lies in the claim for equal rights for everything and everyone' (Raes, 1984; Gijssels, 1992: 181-182 & 203).

We can deduce from Spruyt's detailed analysis of the various Vlaams Blok programs that this party's ideology is characterised by all the extreme right-wing concepts set out above (Spruyt, 1994 & 1995). His research also shows the ideological consistency of Vlaams Blok ideology. Support for an ethnic-nationalist state organisation, in which the national community is conceived of as a 'genetically unified ethnic community', is integral to this. The concept of nationality is thus based on the 'biological bloodtie'. Because the structure of the state should follow the 'natural ethnic structure', there is a wish for an organic and hierarchically ordered Flanders. The emphasis on an ethnic-nationalist statehood also implies that this should be mono-cultural and mono-racial. Political or ideological pluralism cannot be reconciled with this. Only ideologies which do not hinder 'the development of a constructive ethnic unity' are accepted by Vlaams Blok. Liberalism and Marxism are therefore rejected as ideologies reflecting ideas that oppose the interests of the ethnic group. Members of the community should accept that the ethnic interest has priority over all other interests. Political and civil liberties are limited by the principle of ethnic duty, which includes such duties as socio-economic productivity, child bearing in a monogamous marriage, and loyalty to the Flemish ethnic community. The rights of the individual are thereby 'subordinated to the primacy of the organic whole' (i.e. the 'ethnic community'). At a political level this view leads to the rejection of the existing parliamentary system, because this represents various interests which oppose one another and damage the general interest of the nation and loyalty to it. There are also signs of biological racism in Vlaams Blok publications. At a conference on immigrant workers in 1984 the concept of race was central, and among other things there was a call for 'a racism of mutual respect. This is not racial hatred, but the recognition of race'. In later publications this explicitly biological racism was exchanged for a 'cultural' racist discourse (see below).

The ideology and the links of extreme right-wing parties in Wallonia have so far been less studied. There are, though, a number of scientific studies dealing with the extreme right-wing movement from before the mid-eighties (see e.g. Verhoeyen, 1974 & 1975; Balace et al., 1994). Parties such as the Front National and Agir are, however, of fairly recent origin (founded in 1985 and 1989 respectively), so that they have so far not been as thoroughly analysed. In one study the ideology and the links of both parties were sketched (Brewaeys et al., 1992). This showed that the activists in both the Front National and Agir had previously been active in a variety of extreme right-wing organisations. Walloon extreme right-wing parties, like Vlaams Blok in Flanders, thus also have clear links to the extreme right-wing activism of the sixties and seventies. The analysis of the ideologies of both parties also leads to similar conclusions. The Front National concentrates on two kinds of themes in its programme and propaganda. Firstly 'classic' extreme right-wing themes are developed, such as racism (anti-immigration), extreme nationalism, anti-communism and anti-socialism. Furthermore, a number of 'poujadist' topics are touched on, such as anti-stateism and resistance

to taxation. The Front National is strongly in favour of a unified Belgium, the greatest point of difference with the smaller grouping Agir, which supports a more independent Wallonia. Furthermore, Agir appears to be more strongly influenced by the concepts of the French 'New Right' (*la Nouvelle Droite*).

We can thus conclude that Vlaams Blok as a party (and also the central leadership of the party) can indeed be seen as an extreme right-wing formation. With some reservations this can also be said of the Walloon parties Front National and Agir, despite the relative lack of research concerning these two. But to what extent can those who vote for such parties also be considered to be extreme right-wing oriented?

III. Are those who vote for these parties an extreme right-wing electorate?

A number of studies have mapped the ideology of Vlaams Blok voters and the reasons for their voting behaviour. A first series of studies examined the aspect of 'racism', since it is one of the key concepts in extreme right-wing ideology. In a second study the whole spectrum of extreme right-wing attitudes was operationalised. We will look at the findings which emerged from each of these studies. Finally, we will analyse the attitudes and motives of the Front National voters.

A. Voters for Vlaams Blok: racists or apathetic?

a. Motivation for their voting behaviour

In the research literature concerning the significance of a vote for an extreme right-wing party, two broad schools can be discerned (Van Holsteyn, 1990; Billiet & De Witte, 1995). The first of these states that the choice for an extreme right-wing party is based on political-ideological considerations: the voter knows the views of such a party and expresses his or her *preferences* for such views. The second tendency, on the other hand, emphasises that the choice for such a party is an expression of *protest*: one does not choose for that party, but against all the others. Thus revulsion with the political system, rather than an agreement of views, is central in this view.

In order to investigate the extent to which voting for Vlaams Blok expresses a preference or a protest vote, a secondary analysis was carried out (De Witte, 1992a) on the data of a study concerning the attitudes of Belgians towards immigrants (Billiet et al., 1990), which were collected in 1989. Given the time at which data-collection was carried out, the main concern was with voting in the 1989 European elections. Which attitudes best statistically discriminated Vlaams Blok voters from voters for the other parties, was investigated by means of discriminant analysis. The selection of these attitudes was limited to those views included in the original study. Three sorts of attitudes were included in the analysis as possible expressions of a preference for Vlaams Blok: a moderate form of nationalism (typifying item: 'I am proud of my own ethnic group'), a negative view of immigrants because one perceives them as a socio-economic or cultural threat, and biological racism, which was already described as an aspect of extreme right-wing ideology. In order to investigate the extent to which voting for Vlaams Blok can be considered a 'protest vote', a measurement of 'anomia' and 'political powerlessness' were added to the analysis. 'Anomia' refers to feelings of powerlessness, meaninglessness and social isolation (Srole, 1956) and can, together with

'political powerlessness', be taken as an indication of (political and social) dissatisfaction and revulsion.

The results of the analysis revealed that a negative view of immigrants formed the *chief motive* for voting Vlaams Blok in 1989. Nationalistic or racist (extreme right-wing) considerations played no significant part in motivating such voting. Nor was a vote for Vlaams Blok a protest vote, although feelings of political powerlessness were of limited influence in deciding on this party as against the larger parties (Christian Democratic Party, Socialist Party, liberals). The choice of Vlaams Blok in 1989 thus reflected a choice in favour of an anti-foreigners position. At that moment voters for this extreme right-wing party were not voting from racist or extreme right-wing considerations, and could thus - as a whole - not be characterised as an extreme right-wing electorate.

Soon after the 1991 elections the Flemish Interuniversity Centre for Political Opinion Research (ISPO) interviewed a representative sample of about 2,700 Flemish voters with an extensive questionnaire (Carton et al., 1993). Among them were about 230 Vlaams Blok voters. Subsequently, the motivation of their voting has been investigated in two ways. In a first study the answers to the open question 'Why did you vote for this party?' were analysed (Billiet et al., 1992). The results of this analysis confirm the findings of the study of the European elections. In 1991, as in 1989, voting Vlaams Blok was inspired by a negative attitude towards immigrants with undertones of political protest. There were no explicit references to aspects of extreme right-wing ideology set out above. For 60 to 70% of Vlaams Blok voters, an anti-immigrant attitude was the motive for their vote. For about 40% political dissatisfaction and mistrust of the established parties were relevant. The researchers also found that the two motives are correlated: for a section of Vlaams Blok voters, references to immigration were coupled with expressions of disappointment with politicians and the political system. A significant number of them seems to have channelled resentment about the way politics works into a rejection of immigrants.

Asking about the reasons for voting behaviour by means of an open question does, however, have its drawbacks. In answering this question the voter can be influenced by the discussion of voting behaviour in the media, which can lead to the reproduction of 'standard answers' which have little to do with the 'real' motives for the vote. That is why voter motivation in the 1991 elections was also analysed indirectly. Discriminant analysis (De Witte & Billiet, 1993a) and logistic regression analysis (Billiet & De Witte, 1995) were used to compare the attitudes of Vlaams Blok voters to those of voters for the other parties. This time a much more extensive set of opinions could be tested, including authoritarianism, socio-economic conservatism and aspects of socio-cultural conservatism (e.g. rejection of the liberalisation of abortion and emphasis on traditional sex-roles). As previously, right-wing extremism was not explicitly mentioned. The survey only included a scale for (biological) racism. The results of these analyses again confirmed that voting for Vlaams Blok was chiefly determined by a negative attitude towards immigrants. All other opinions - including the extreme right-wing aspect of 'racism' - were of subordinate or negligible importance. The earlier findings with regard to the European elections thus seem to hold for the parliamentary elections of 1991. At the time of writing there are no research findings concerning the 1995 parliamentary elections yet available. It is thus not yet possible to check these findings against the most recent national elections in Flanders.

b. How homogeneous is the Vlaams Blok electorate with regard to their attitudes?

All the studies of the reasons for voting Vlaams Blok mentioned above have the important disadvantage of not distinguishing *within* the electorate of each of the various parties. After all, there could be some right-wing extremists among Vlaams Blok voters. By analysing this electorate as a whole, we lose sight of these internal differences. For this reason a typology has been developed concerning the attitude which can be adopted towards one's own and other peoples (De Witte & Billiet, 1990; Billiet & De Witte, 1991). Three sorts of attitudes were brought into the typology: moderate nationalism, a negative attitude towards foreigners, and (biological) racism. Again, only one aspect of extreme right-wing ideology was involved in the analysis. It appeared to be possible to order the three attitude scales cumulatively: only those in favour of their ethnic group adopted negative attitudes towards foreigners. Both attitudes were held by racists. Thus four types of respondents were distinguished. The *cosmopolitans* (17%) reject all three views. They do not feel (strongly) attached to the Flemish people, do not take a negative view of immigrants and reject racism. The *'nationalists'* (about 29%) adopt a positive attitude towards their own ethnic group, and combine this attitude with a positive view of immigrants and a rejection of racism. The next type (about 25%) goes a step further: they combine a positive attitude to their own people with a negative view of other peoples, although without adopting racist views. They can be considered *'ethnocentrists'* in the double sense given to the term by Sumner (Scheepers et al., 1989). The *'racists'* (roughly 18%) take the final step: they combine the views of *'ethnocentrists'* with racist attitudes. Their rejection of immigrants is thus supported by a belief in the genetic superiority of whites relative to non-whites. Finally there was a small group of *'indetermined'*, whose profile could not be determined because of lacking data or inconsistencies. This group will be left out of the further analysis.

Table 1

Distribution of the voters (European elections in 1989) according to the four 'ethnic types'

Ethnic type	Agalev (Green party)	SP (Socia- lists)	VU (Flemish Natio- nalists)	CVP (Christian Demo- crats)	PVV (Liberal party)	Vlaams Blok (Extreme right-wing)	Blank or invalid	All respon- dents
1. Cosmopolitans	45,3	15,9	5,8	11,1	20,2	6,3	14,7	17,0
2. Nationalists	34,7	18,3	26,9	41,8	15,5	9,4	29,4	28,8
3. Ethnocentrists	12,0	28,6	30,8	20,2	26,2	46,9	29,4	24,5
4. Racists	1,3	23,8	21,2	18,8	19,0	31,3	11,8	18,5
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

Note: The percentage of the 'indetermined' is not mentioned in this table. The sum of the (column) percentages therefore does not amount up to 100%.

This typology and voting behaviour in the 1989 European elections were cross tabulated against one another (De Witte & Billiet, 1993b). Data concerning voting behaviour in 1991 is, unfortunately, not available, because the typology was not used in the ISPO study mentioned above. A cross-table can, of course, be read in two directions, both of which will provide us with relevant information. Firstly, we will examine the extent to which the various party electorates divide themselves among the four types. This gives us an idea of the ideological composition of the various electorates in 1989. Table 1 contains this information.

Voters for the ecological party Agalev were largely cosmopolitans (45.3%) and nationalists (34.7%). The electorate of the Christian Democratic CVP were characterised by an over-representation of nationalists (41.8%). Among voters for the social democratic SP ethnocentrists (28.6%) and racists (23.8%) were marginally over-represented. The same was true for voters for the moderate Flemish-nationalist VU (30.8% and 21.2% respectively). Voters for the right-wing liberal PVV and those whose votes were blank or invalid, were fairly evenly spread among the four types. Vlaams Blok voters were the opposite of Agalev voters. Almost half of the Vlaams Blok voters (46.9%) showed to be 'ethnocentrists', while something under a third (31.3%) belonged to the 'racist' type. This implies that almost 80% of them held negative views of immigrants. Further, a very small number of cosmopolitans and nationalists were found among them. Despite a certain differentiation among Vlaams Blok voters, these findings confirm that the majority of Vlaams Blok voters cannot be considered extreme right-wing voters.

The 'racist' type can be taken as a partial indicator of an extreme right-wing electorate, given that 'racism' was used as a - limited - operator of right-wing extremism. The actual number of right-wing extremists is probably much lower, since this would need agreement with all the other aspects of extreme right-wing ideology set out above. Estimates using the Eurobarometer polls lead us to believe that only 1.6% of Europeans can be regarded as right-wing extremists (Falter & Schumann, 1988: 96-110). Nevertheless, investigating the voting behaviour of the 'racists' can give us a first indication of the degree to which right-wing extremists (here operationalised as 'racists') vote for extreme right-wing parties such as Vlaams Blok. The findings of this analysis show that the largest proportion of the 'racist' group voted for the Christian Democratic CVP and the social democratic SP in 1989: 35% and 27% respectively. A smaller proportion voted for the right-wing liberal PVV (14.4%) or the moderate Flemish-nationalist VU (9.9%). Only 9% of them voted Vlaams Blok. Of the rest, 3.6% gave blank or invalid votes, while only 0.9% voted for the ecological party 'Agalev'.

We can therefore conclude that Vlaams Blok voters, in both 1989 and 1991, did not vote because of (biological) racist motives, and that - seen the other way - only a limited number of racists appears to have voted Vlaams Blok in 1989.

B. Vlaams Blok voters: an extreme right-wing electorate?

In all the studies mentioned thus far, only (biological) racism was used as an indicator of extreme right-wing views. But to know for certain whether or not Vlaams Blok voters should be regarded as right-wing extremists, the entire range of extreme right-wing ideology should be brought into the analysis. This has only been done in one study (De Witte et al., 1994). The various parts of extreme right-wing ideology were operationalised by means of six items, given to respondents as part of a follow-up survey in early 1991. The results of this explorative study confirmed the findings of the earlier studies.

First of all it became apparent that Vlaams Blok voters in the 1989 European elections did not score highest on the scale of right-wing extremism, although they did concerning their voting intentions at the moment of the interview in late 1989. At both times, however, Vlaams Blok voters as a whole scored below the neutral midpoint of the scale, so that they cannot be viewed en masse as right-wing extremists. About 20% of them scored above the neutral midpoint, and can thus - to a certain degree - be seen as holding extreme right-wing views. This percentage was, however, just as high in most other electorates - with the exceptions of Agalev and the SP.

In a second stage the entire group of interviewees was divided according to their score on the right-wing extremism scale. Those who scored above the mean (about 20% of those interviewed) were analysed separately and asked what party they had voted for in the European elections of June 1989. This second analysis showed that the majority of them had voted CVP (38.6%) or PVV (20.5%), while fewer than 5% of them had voted Vlaams Blok. Another 13.3% voted SP, 10.8% VU, 6% Agalev en 6% blank or invalid. A more stringent selection of those with extreme right-wing views, including only those who agreed with at least 5 of the 6 statements, led to the same conclusions.

This last study allows us to conclude definitely that Vlaams Blok voters are not right-wing extremists, while extreme right-wing voters largely vote for parties other than Vlaams Blok. A certain degree of caution is, however, necessary, since the number of Vlaams Blok voters in the study just discussed is very small (only about 20), while the voting behaviour discussed is that of 1989 rather than 1991 or later. More recent data concerning extreme right-wing attitudes is not, however, available.

C. Are Front National voters an extreme right-wing electorate?

As mentioned in the introduction, little research has yet been done concerning the attitudes and motivation of voters for extreme right-wing parties in Wallonia. The research available only allows conclusions to be drawn with regard to Front National (FN) voters. In the studies carried out by PIOP, the Walloon opposite of ISPO, after the 1991 elections, thirty FN voters were interviewed. The limited number of this sample clearly allows provisional conclusions only, but the available material does seem to lead to conclusions parallel to those for Flanders.

Firstly, FN voters reject foreigners to a far greater extent than any other electorate (Aish-Van Vaerenbergh, 1994: 229-230 & 236-237). The analysis of open questions concerning voting behaviour further shows that a majority of these voters explain their vote for the FN from a negative attitude towards immigrants (Frognier, 1994: 240). A slightly smaller group does so from political protest. These motives and their proportions agree fairly closely with those presented in studies of Vlaams Blok voters. They do not, however, show that FN voters do not have extreme right-wing attitudes or motives for voting. This question can only be answered by analysing where the respondents place themselves on a 'left-right' axis (Claeys & Desmarez, 1994: 136-137). This shows that only a minority of FN voters describe themselves as 'extreme right-wing', although a small majority (55%) describe themselves as 'right-wing' (including the category 'extreme right-wing'). When all respondents who consider themselves to be 'right-wing' are taken together, it appears that only a minority of them (a mere 12.5%) voted FN. Most voted for the Christian Democratic PSC or the right-wing liberal PRL. Altogether these findings thus suggest that also FN voters should not be consi-

dered right-wing extremists, although this conclusion - given the slender basis of the findings - should provisionally be treated with the necessary caution.

IV. The strategy of the 'two faces' bridges the gap between voters and party

The contrast between the ideological views of Vlaams Blok and the views of its voters partially explains the confusion in public opinion concerning the significance of (the electoral advances of) the far right. It is, after all, an essentially ambivalent phenomenon. The huge gap between the extreme right-wing ideology of Vlaams Blok and the more moderate opinions of its voters naturally leads to the question: how can an extreme right-wing party attract voters who do not themselves hold extreme right-wing attitudes? In answering this question we will base ourselves on the insights of Van Donselaar, who has analysed the development of extreme right-wing parties in the post-war Netherlands, and the adaptive strategies which they used (Van Donselaar, 1991). His analysis has implications wider than the situation in the Netherlands and can be used to explain the ideological gap between Vlaams Blok voters and 'their' party as well. After sketching the central findings of Van Donselaar's research, we will attempt to apply his analysis to the Belgian situation, or more specifically to the case of Vlaams Blok in Flanders. Studies of the strategies used by the Front National or Agir in Wallonia have not been carried out as yet.

A. *The strategy of the 'two faces'*

Van Donselaar's analysis leads to two important conclusions. Firstly, he shows that also the post-war extreme right-wing parties in the Netherlands developed fairly directly from the extreme right-wing organisations which were active in that country before, during and immediately after the Second World War. Since the Second World War, however, extreme right-wing parties have operated in a social climate which is deeply hostile to their ideology and action. This forces them to adopt the strategy of the 'double face'. In order to continue in existence and - a fortiori - to grow, a political movement needs two groups: voters and activists. Without voters a party can gain no position of power, while without activists the party cannot carry out its ideological goals or convince voters to vote for it. Once in power a party without activists also lacks the people to put its ideology into practice. The hostile post-war social climate confronts the contemporary extreme right with an important dilemma: how to reconcile appeal to the voters with mobilising the activists? In order to attract voters these groups have to avoid any reference to their ideological background. Identification with fascism or Nazism would discredit the movement and scare off voters. Being associated with the occupation, collaboration and the persecution of the Jews would lead to pronounced revulsion and antipathy. It is thus in the interest of organisations on the far right to appear moderate to the voters and to make an impression of decency.

The reverse of this moderate profile is, however, that a too far-reaching denial of the ideological principles would disillusion the activists. These would lose interest if a movement or party became too 'respectable' and lost its radical attraction. In order to keep such supporters, and because they also want to achieve their ideological goals, extreme right-wing organisations must show their real, radical face to their members.

The way in which extreme right-wing organisations present themselves is thus dependent on the audience to whom they are speaking. In this context Van Don-

selaar speaks of the difference between 'front-stage' and 'back-stage'. A moderate, respectable face is shown to the electorate ('front-stage') in order to win votes, while the torch of pre-war fascism is passed on and kept burning within the party ('back-stage'). This 'two-face' strategy makes it clear that the meaning of an extreme right-wing party can only be understood when one also looks 'behind the scenes'. The 'public face' of party spokesmen and the party's media profile only give one side of the story. Studies of the attitudes of those who vote for the party also give no relevant information on the ideology of such a party, since the electorate has not been attracted by a consciously extreme right-wing campaign. A party such as Vlaams Blok deliberately seeks to take a more moderate, non-aggressive stance in public, and a central concern is with producing an acceptable, respectable image.

The strategy behind this 'charm-offensive' is, however, more complex than at first appears. In order to attract voters certain aspects of extreme right-wing ideology set out above are reformulated in popular terms. The ideology as a whole is, after all, hard to 'sell', especially in its extreme form. Facets of it can, however, appeal to sections of the electorate, if they can be 'translated' into concepts which are closer to opinions already current in large sections of the population. In this way extreme right-wing parties can create an image of being populist parties 'who say what you think'. The populist themes chosen are not, however, coincidental: those themes are chosen which can still be seen as watered-down symbols of extreme right-wing ideology. This can be shown with the two aspects of extreme right-wing ideology around which Vlaams Blok has successfully created a populist image: racism and anti-parliamentarianism.

B. From 'everyday' racism to 'cultural' racism

The electoral research discussed above shows that Vlaams Blok chiefly attracts voters through its negative attitude towards immigrants. This sort of 'everyday' racism should not be confused with 'biological racism', since it is much vaguer and more general in content, and sees no biological, and unchangeable, basis for the inferiority of other peoples. This 'everyday' racism was not invented by Vlaams Blok. In the West the assumption of white superiority to other races is several centuries old (see e.g. Nederveen Pieterse, 1990). It is therefore hardly surprising that opinion polls from the sixties show that the cultural difference of immigrants causes resentment in some sections of society, such as blue collar workers (De Witte, 1990: 58-61; De Baets, 1994). The economic crisis of the seventies and eighties was an additional factor that reinforced the feeling of being in competition with immigrants among the same groups in society (De Witte, 1992b).

The theme around which Vlaams Blok could build its image was thus 'there for the taking' on its entry into the political forum. The party could take advantage of already existing feelings among broad layers of the population. However, in the early period this was only done lightly. Only one paragraph of the party's statement of principles mentions immigration. Only in 1984, when Le Pen in France showed how electorally viable this theme could be, did it become the keynote in the image of Vlaams Blok (Gijssels, 1992: 202 & 266). But taking up 'everyday' racism does not imply a belief in 'biological' racism. That is why the far right in Europe created '*cultural racism*', in which an element was added to the cultural aspects of everyday racism. In this view different peoples are characterised by *distinct* and *immutable* cultures, which are mutually *exclusive*. Central to cultural racism is the idea that culture is the essence of ethnic identity, and must thus be maintained unchanged, since the ethnic community would otherwise lose its iden-

tity. Any form of cultural pluralism is thus seen as threatening, not only for one's 'own' culture, but also for the 'foreign' culture, which would similarly lose its individuality. This attempt to maintain the people's cultural identity is put in fairly absolute terms: differing cultures are seen as *irreconcilable*. This is especially claimed with respect to Islam. It is claimed that those who grow up in an 'Islamic culture' are by definition unsuited to integration in a non-Islamic culture, such as our own. Their removal is thus seen not only as necessary to maintain the Flemish identity, but also in the interests of the immigrants themselves. These 'culturally uprooted people' are seen as only able to find a home in the culture of their country of origin. In this way the far right also presents itself as the defender of the rights of the immigrants themselves: 'only we take their real needs into account'.

It is the addition of the static idea that cultures are immutable and irreconcilable that gives this form of cultural racism a more ideological character. By the addition of this aspect, cultural racism becomes a bridge between 'everyday' and 'biological' racism. The positions of biological racism can now even be put in a cultural cover, which makes this ideology seem less extreme and less 'unsellable'. The emphasis on the biological, and thus inherited nature of differences between races only needs to be shifted to 'unbridgeable' cultural differences. Such cultural racism furthermore links up with the emphasis on the homogeneity of the ethnic community, as is the case in extreme nationalism (see above). Vlaams Blok proposals and the statements of leading members of this party contain fairly explicit cultural racism. Thus proposal 6 ('rejecting integration') of the '70 proposals for the solution of the problem of foreigners' contains just about all the elements outlined above (De Winter, 1992: 7-9). Also arguments in favour of withdrawing recognition from Islamic worship ('In recent years it has become clearly apparent that there is a fundamental and unbridgeable contradiction between Islam and western values'), and in favour of setting up a separate educational system for the children of 'non-European foreigners', show aspects of such cultural racism.

The emphasis on cultural racism does not mean that biological racism has died out among Vlaams Blok activists. References to such biological racism seem to be avoided largely because of tactical considerations. In 'branch organisations' Vlaams Blok gives a much clearer view of its intention. In the eighties, Karel Dillen's son Koen wrote in the then NSV (Nationalistic Student Movement) periodical *Signaal*: 'In order to guarantee the continued existence of our culture and our people as an organic unity, we must keep the race pure (...). In a pure and self-conscious Germanic people, peace, loyalty and honour will live again, for once the influences of Eastern decadence have disappeared, the people will automatically return to their true nature (...). That is why our nationalist struggle is a struggle against foreign influences (...) in which no mercy is possible, for it is a life or death battle (...).' (Gijssels, 1992: 206 & 279). Koen Dillen still works on the Vlaams Blok party periodical and - as far as can be discovered - has never distanced himself from the views he expressed earlier. Furthermore, Vlaams Blok also took up biological-racist positions during its conference on immigration in 1984 (see above).

C. *Political dissatisfaction as a 'translation' of anti-parliamentarism*

The electoral studies, as stated above, reveal both a negative view of immigrants, and, as a secondary reason for voting Vlaams Blok, a *negative attitude towards politics*. This undertone of political protest also has a long history. For

decades there has been a popular discourse in our country which involves being dismissive of 'politics' and politicians (see e.g. Huyse, 1969). Politicians are dismissed as 'in it for the money' and nepotists 'all tarred with the same brush', while politics is portrayed as discreditable, 'a dirty business' and 'six of one and half a dozen of the other'. By taking a stand on this issue Vlaams Blok was thus able to feed on a phenomenon which again already existed among broad sections of the population. This led to the much-repeated slogan 'This can't go on' and to the powerful motto 'Punishing the political mafia' in the campaign for the 1991 elections. The traditional parties were repeatedly described by Vlaams Blok as a 'gang' and the *Wetstraat*, on which the parliament-building in Brussels is situated, was described by Vlaams Blok member Dewinter as a brothel (De Moor, 1992: 59).

Political protest does not, however, amount to anti-parliamentarianism, even though the one can be an extension of the other. In its proposals however, Vlaams Blok constantly presents itself as a limited advocate of existing democratic institutions. That this goes further than criticising abuses of the existing democracy, is apparent in the model constitution which this party presented for a future 'Flemish Republic' (Van Hauthem & Verreycken, 1990: 106-132). A central feature is the concentration of power in the hands of a small group of administrators, and the limitation of the influence of parliament, the political parties and the unions. At a party conference in 1985 Vlaams Blok, in the person of De Lobel, then head of the party's research service, made its point of view even clearer (Gijssels, 1992: 229). It was stated that: 'Our choice is for a real democracy: a democracy in which participation in power is open to all according to their capacities and competences. Participation must be (...) in proportion to competence. If this is not the case, participation is itself the greatest threat to the common good (...). Out of ignorance, voters will endanger their own safety.' And in the brochure 'Liberty and Security' the same author shows himself to be in favour of introducing a voting qualification and repealing compulsory voting, arguing that 'responsibility is being passed on to those who have as much understanding of politics as a cow has of computing' (Vander Velpen, 1992: 152). This explicitly anti-democratic and elitist view clearly refers to the extreme right-wing concept of inequality.

This elitist, anti-democratic view still does not show the extreme anti-parliamentarianism so characteristic of the fascist-like VMO in the seventies. In the past decades, Vlaams Blok does not appear to have been guilty of explicit anti-parliamentarian statements. This is probably again a tactical decision. It is, after all, remarkable that Karel Dillen himself was in 1981 described by far-right-spotter Verlinden as one of the pioneers of the increasing anti-parliamentarianism of the extreme right-wing organisation *Were Di* (Verlinden, 1981: 385). Hans Carpels, director of Vlaams Blok's Nationalist Training Institute, and Edwin Truyens, who ran the Vlaams Blok research service in the early eighties, at that time also left little room to doubt their anti-democratic and anti-parliamentarian attitudes. 'It is simply the case that people are unequal and shall remain so, so that one cannot design and prefer a form of state organisation based on equality, such as democracy', Carpels wrote in 1981 (Vander Velpen, 1992: 109). Truyens' statement is even more explicit: 'Parliamentary democracy and democracy as such are evils which we must continue to suffer for a while, but which should be replaced as soon as possible by the efficient government of specialists' (Gijssels & Vander Velpen, 1989: 94). Certain key elements of the extreme right-wing ideology set out above are present in this statement: anti-parliamentarianism, the principle of inequality and the resulting elitism referring to the 'leadership principle'. Behind Vlaams Blok's position as a 'party of protest' there is, then, a much stronger and ideologically based anti-parliamentary position.

V. Conclusion

The comparison of the ideas of Vlaams Blok as a party with those of its voters leads to a remarkable contrast. A chasm yawns between them, which far exceeds the infamous 'chasm between politicians and voters' about which so much has been written since the elections of November 1991. The studies discussed show that Vlaams Blok voters - in general - cannot be viewed as right-wing extremists. Journalistic and political research does, however, show that the party itself and its leaders are clearly extreme right-wing. The cause of this chasm is largely the strategy which typifies extreme right-wing parties in post-war Western Europe. The unpopularity of extreme right-wing ideology since the Second World War has forced Vlaams Blok to cultivate two faces: a civilised, decent face for the outside world, and a radical, extreme right-wing face for the members, for whom extreme right-wing ideology remains the basis of their political action, and is passed on to new generations of militants. When presented to the voters, aspects of this extreme right-wing ideology are translated into popular terms, so that they connect to concepts held by the population. The success of this strategy can be read from the motives given by Vlaams Blok voters for their electoral behaviour. They refer to 'watered down' aspects of the extreme right-wing ideology: a rejection of immigrants (rather than biological racism), with an undertone of political protest (rather than antiparlamentarianism).

The conclusion of this article is, therefore, that Vlaams Blok poses a threat to our democracy. This conclusion is hardly new. Others have already indicated how this party's position on immigration threatens the constitutional state (De Verontruste Juristen, 1992; Vlaamse Raad, 1992), while the occasional riots in which the party has been involved threatened to disrupt democratic processes. But the analyses presented in this article add two new elements to these findings.

Firstly, the ideology of the extreme right, due to its emphasis on the basic inequality of individuals and peoples, is in conflict with democracy, in which the principle of legal equality is fundamental. The principle of equality has an important place in the Belgian Constitution, in the European Convention on Human Rights, and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This principle of equality refers particularly to the necessity of treating individuals and groups on equal terms, and is thus foremost 'non-discrimination' (Rommens & Jossart, 1992; Vermeire et al., 1992). The extreme right-wing principle of inequality is, primarily, ideological. This ideological principle of inequality leads, however, to proposals of discriminatory measures (cf the '70-point programme', which calls, among other things, for the setting up of a separate education system and a separate social security system for immigrants), so that we may conclude that this principle of inequality is indeed contrary to the democratic principle of equality, and thus poses a threat to democracy.

Vlaams Blok (and its ideology) not only threaten democracy, they also *deceive* it. This party, from tactical considerations, does not show its true face. The way in which Vlaams Blok presents itself, the party keeps silent about an important part of its message and goals. This makes real dialogue with this party and its leaders impossible. Instead, Vlaams Blok abuses the trust of the voters and their powers, which leads to the danger that this party will use the votes it gains for other ideological goals than the voter envisaged. It could be argued that there is in every party a gulf between the ideas of the party leadership and the electorate, but the attitudes of one are, in the other parties, simply an extension of the attitudes of the other. There does appear to be a difference in intensity: the voters probably subscribe to (one of) the basic principles of the party, while party leaders inte-

grate these principles into a logically coherent ideology and subscribe to them more fully (see e.g.: Middendorp, 1991: 237-255). With an extreme right-wing party such as Vlaams Blok there is, rather, a division between the voters and the party management. While the voters find themselves, ideologically, largely at the 'democratic end' of the political spectrum, this is no longer the case with the party leadership. This is a result of a strategic choice, whereby the undemocratic ideology is fearfully kept from the common gaze. Simply stated, the motto of a party on the extreme right wing, since the Second World War, thus amounts to: 'In public we say what the voters think, while in-house we think what cannot be said anymore'.

Abstract

In this article, we analyse the ideological differences between extreme right-wing parties and their voters in the Flemish and Walloon part of Belgium. Extreme right-wing ideology consists of five core elements: (biological) racism, extreme ethnic nationalism, the leadership principle, anti-parliamentarianism and an anti-leftist attitude. All these attitudes refer to the basic value of right-wing extremism: the belief in the inequality of individuals and (ethnic) groups. An analysis of the ideology of the Vlaams Blok in Flanders shows that it adheres to these core elements of extreme right-wing ideology. An analysis of the attitudes and motives of the voters of this party, however, shows that they cannot be considered as right-wing extremists. The ideological gap between the Vlaams Blok and its electorate is due to the strategy of this party, since it cultivates 'two faces': a populist, moderate face in order to attract votes, and a radical extreme right-wing face in order to recruit and motivate militants. In Wallonia, less is known about the ideology of right-wing parties and that of their voters. Current research however, suggests that the conclusions from Flemish research may very well be generalized to Wallonia as well.



Regionalism, federalism and minority rights: The Italian case

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I. Introduction

Most domestic and foreign observers have usually emphasized Italy's cultural heterogeneity and weak national identity. When the country was at last officially unified in 1870, only the 10% most cultivated citizens could use the national language to communicate; over a century later, in the early 1990s, about 14% of the population are, according to some estimates, still restricted to local dialects; of the twenty-eight minority languages identified by the European Union within member states, thirteen are spoken by minorities located within the Italian borders. Altogether, these groups exceed one million people (Lepschy, 1990; De Mauro, 1994; Adnkronos, 1995: 856).

Whether these and other sources of cultural variation - e.g., those reflected in the North-South divide - are big enough to result in open cultural fragmentation within the country is however another question. Many claim indeed that shared mentalities and lifestyles nonetheless provide Italians with a relatively homogeneous culture and identity (Romano, 1994). This view is apparently supported by recent figures about feelings of national identification. In spite of recent successes of political organizations advocating a drastic reform of the unified state, and occasionally threatening its dissolution, Italians still overwhelmingly conceive of themselves as fellow nationals in the first place, while only tiny minorities regard regional (Venetian, Lombard, Piedmontese, etc.) origins as their major sources of collective identity¹.

Rather than from strictly cultural reasons, major problems to Italian successful integration have seemingly come from political and socio-economic dynamics, related to nation building. Obstacles have come in fact from the well-known strength and radicalism of the mounting workers' movements. Sticking to the territorial dimension we are most interested in here, elites in the new unified state had to face since the very beginning harsh opposition from local populations that were little sympathetic to the new rulers. Rather than from below, ie, as the outcome of democratic mobilizations, the Italian unification was achieved through a largely elitarian effort. Especially in Southern Italy, the lack of resources to devote to large scale education and socialization processes prevented the new elites

¹ Diamanti and Segatti (1995). Sources of homogeneity and solidarity are not, though, shared civic cultures or commitment to collective goods, rather, individual qualities such as creativity or entrepreneurial skills, or emphasis on familial values.

from filling the deficit of loyalty to the new state by democratic procedures. Rather, they found it more convenient to obtain support from the backward-looking pre-unification elites in those regions. The favourable conditions for the spread of patronage politics, familism and corruption, and later for the distorted use of welfare policies, were thus set. So were those for the consolidation of overcentralized state apparatuses, willing to concede little or no autonomy to local representative bodies. This led in turn to a drastic reduction of opportunities for economic growth and social development. Ironically, the absence of a strong civil society, particularly though not exclusively in the Southern regions, may also have contributed to the lack of regional conflicts along 'internal colonialism' lines in what could definitely be seen as the most colonized and deprived areas of the country (Zincone, 1992; Putnam, 1993; Keating, 1988; Palloni, 1979). This in spite of a few exceptions, especially in Sardinia (Petrosino, 1992).

The fascist regime further strengthened the already high centralization within the public administration (Voci, 1994). It also pushed very far the process of forced 'Italianization' of cultural minorities. In the recently annexed South Tyrol, as well as in the Aosta Valley and in other peripheral areas, use of local languages was banned, and names of both sites and people were translated into their supposed Italian equivalents (Salvi, 1975).

Therefore, discussing the center-periphery relationships and the protection of cultural minorities implies referring to processes that are well rooted in the country's recent (and not so recent) history. Here, I focus on major events of the last fifty years, and relate minority and territorial mobilizations with broader developments in territorial and devolution policies.

The center-periphery cleavage has surfaced in three different phases at least since the end of World War II and the collapse of fascism. The first phase corresponds to the secession efforts launched just at the dawn of the new republic in areas as different as Sicily, Aosta Valley, and South Tyrol. The second phase consists of the re-awakening of cultural and linguistic minorities in the contentious phase of the late 1960s-early 1970s. Finally, the third phase can largely be located in the late 1980s-early 1990s, in correspondence with the sudden rise of the Northern League. Each time, claims have been made on behalf of deprived and aggrieved populations, whose rights have been purported as denied and/or threatened by the central state. Each time, however, the specific traits of the regionalist, anti-centralist initiatives have been different. Extreme variation may indeed be found in the major goals supported by each mobilization wave, in the definition of the actors involved in the conflict as well as of its stake, in the structural and political context.

In particular, conflicts related to the regional dimension have largely exceeded the boundaries of conventional minority rights politics. Throughout the last fifty years, regional mobilizations have run parallel to reform attempts undertaken by national parties and/or by the central government. Policies meant to protect regional minorities' distinctive cultural traits have been started with some regularity since the 1960s on. Recently, efforts have been made to extend the autonomy of local governments and increase citizens' participation to local politics, eg by passing a new act on local autonomies (142/1990) (Voci, 1994). However, the most substantial effort to deal with the regional dimension in domestic politics has consisted of the devolution process, that resulted in the institution of regional councils in 1970. The oppositional PCI were obviously interested in extending the autonomy of local governments, given their strength in some important areas of the country, especially in central Italy. As for the Christian Demo-

crats, special attention to territorial issues was paid by those regional branches who were under pressure from ethnoterritorial parties, like in Sardinia or Trentino. Strong commitment to devolution processes also came from areas where the most progressive sections of the party had a say, like in Lombardy (Putnam, 1993).

II. Postwar separatism and regional reform policies

Italian minorities and territorial political organizations tried to exploit the opportunities, created by the reintroduction of democracy in the country, and the uncertainty which came along with it. They also tried to take advantage of a drastically modified international context, where the drawing of new state borders was in many cases highly controversial.

Admittedly, not all secession attempts undertaken in the aftermath of the war were equally rooted in international conflicts. These had no impact in the case of the Independentist Sicilian Movement (MIS - Movimento Independentista Siciliano), active in Sicily for a few years following the Allied Forces' occupation of the island in 1943. They obtained in the beginning some support from both large and petty landowners, as well as from the American occupants, in their claims for secession from the Italian state. Yet, this was far more an attempt by traditional land proprietors to guarantee their hold of power, rather than the expression of minority groups' attempts to gain increasing recognition and power (Ginsborg, 1990: 59). In Sardinia, the effervescence of the first postwar years also facilitated the revitalization of the Sardinian Action Party (Partito Sardo d'Azione - PSdA). An autonomist party established in 1921, they dropped their profile as a patronage, *notables* party, for a more explicit perspective of democratic federalism (Petrosino, 1992; Settembre, 1994).

The international dimension played an explicit role in Aosta Valley, where the autonomist movement had strong roots in the anti-fascist opposition². In May, 1945, demonstrations demanding regional autonomy - and also threatening secession to France - turned into riots. To be fair, support from across the border was at least officially rather cool, and the cultural affinity between France and Aosta Valley was actually quite tenuous (as a matter of fact, local dialects bear little similarities to the French language) (Salvi, 1975). Still, the proximity to France provided nonetheless local autonomists with a valuable political opportunity. It was in South Tyrol that regional grievances became a truly international question. The South Tyrol people's Party (SVP - Sudtiroler Volkspartei) was established already in 1945 as an ethnic party with a strong subcultural integration capacity, primarily oriented to the preservation of the German speaking group. They started off by asking for a referendum, which should have sanctioned their return to Austria. Indeed, the backing of Austria to South Tyrol largely contributed to assign this issue a prominence, rarely attained by other minorities' mobilizations. Already in 1946 a pact signed in London by the Prime Ministers of the time, Mr De Gasperi and Mr Gruber, committed the Italian government to provide effective protection of the German speaking group's rights. The long and often troubleso-

2 Its leaders had in fact been among the promoters of the so-called *Chivasso charter*, a joint document drafted already in 1943 by representatives of cultural minorities involved in the resistance movement, advocating autonomy for peripheral regions once freedom had been obtained. See Salvi (1975) and Canciani and De La Pierre (1993).

me implementation of this agreement has represented the underlying thread of South Tyrol politics and policies in the last fifty years³.

In this context, the first moves towards decentralization on the part of national political actors were largely reactive in nature. They were mainly meant to prevent secession threats in the peripheral regions in a risky and uncertain phase of national life, when national unity had to be reasserted after divisions originated from the 1943-1945 civil war. Already in 1945, in the aftermath of the May riots, a royal decree recognized Aosta Valley's right to autonomy; in 1948, the Autonomy Statute granted among other rights bilingualism and financial autonomy. In South Tyrol, the already mentioned 1946 De Gasperi-Gruber agreement was similarly followed by an Autonomy Statute, where the German-speaking province of Bozen was associated with Trento in a special status region. By 1949, four special status regions with high degrees of political autonomy had been established in Sicily, Sardinia, Aosta Valley and Trentino-Alto Adige (the latter being the Italian name for South Tyrol), while Friuli-Venezia Giulia had to wait for a similar status until 1964. As for the Slovenian minority in north-east Italy, its claims for rights were dealt with in the context of the long-lasting negotiations between Italian and Yugoslavian governments on the redefinition of national borders (from the signature of the pace treaty in 1947 until the final Osimo treaty in 1975).

It has to be acknowledged that early decentralization moves were in many respects disappointing from the point view of both the ethnic minorities and the advocates of decentralization within national parties. In Sardinia, decentralization plans and, later, policies were largely controlled by the locally dominant Christian Democratic party. For example, proposals that were put forward from PSDA when the regional autonomy statute was being drafted were not even discussed in the consulting committee constituted to that purpose (Settembre, 1994). In South Tyrol, the provincial council was actually granted substantial capacities only in a few areas, including culture, professional training, craftsmanship, trade. Moreover, as they were associated with the more populated, Italian speaking province of Trento, German-speaking representatives were by definition minoritarian in the regional council.

As for supporters of decentralization within national parties, they had not conceived of it only as a means to meet cultural minorities' demands. Rather, decentralization had to be a decisive step towards a more substantial form of democracy, able to overcome the undue centralization of both the fascist regime and the pre-war liberal state, and to respond to citizens' rising demands of democratic participation. The 1948 constitution indeed referred explicitly to the introduction of regional parliaments elected by citizens. With the exception of the somewhat 'troublesome' regions that were granted special status, the implementation of regional governments proved however fairly difficult. Opposition came in fact from both the state bureaucracy and the majority of the Christian Democratic party. Being firmly in hold of national power after the 1948 general elections, DC feared that regional autonomy could grant the Communist Party further opportunities for action (Putnam, 1993: chap.2).

3 Even the cuts to the regional budget, proposed by Mr Berlusconi in Fall, 1994 in the context of the widely contested Legge Finanziaria (General Budget Act), have been opposed by South Tyrol MPs by threatening a global revision of the agreement and the call for Austria support once again!

III. The protection of minority rights and regional devolution policies 1960 to 1980s

During the 1950s and early 1960s minority parties sometimes managed to play some role in the political arena, like in Sardinia. Other times, they combined tactic, occasional threats to secession with pragmatic cooperation with national parties. This applies for instance to the Aosta Valley, where the ruling parties within the autonomist movement (Popular Democrats first, Union Valdotaïne later) got involved from time to time in alliances with both right- and left-wing parties. This resulted in a patronage politics style that has marked autonomist forces in the area ever since, sometimes leaving way to political corruption. While electoral support has been preserved to date, little efforts have instead been devoted to develop an ethnonationalist approach, capable of revitalizing local culture and traditions and of denouncing the external financial groups' grip over local economy⁴.

Evidence of consociational relationships to national parties may be found in South Tyrol, too, in spite of the above the average levels of contention there. On the one hand, conflicts kept developing on the issue of the real implementation of the 1946 agreement, of the need for greater independence from Trento ('loss von Trient' was in fact a major slogan of the time); radical positions in favour of secession to Austria maintained substantial influence. At the same time, though, South Tyrol representatives in the national Parliament sided with ruling Christian Democrats virtually on all issues but those referring to regional conflicts.

The political situation changed drastically since the mid-1960s, when an unprecedented wave of political and social unrest put the polity members under severe challenge (Tarrow, 1989). In this context even regional and territorial conflicts were revitalized and reshaped. Growing overlaps and integration could actually be detected between minority mobilizations and other, often class-based, struggles. Similarly to what was happening in other Western countries, even in Italy a new generation of minority activists emerged. They had been in many cases socialized to political activism within the urban protest movements active in the core regions of the country. This allowed them to overcome the classic notion of ethnonationalism, focusing on the defence of traditional culture, in favour of a more political, anti-capitalist view⁵. The notion of peripheral regions as 'internal colonies' gained increasing popularity.

The shift was particularly impressive in Sardinia, where new political organizations like 'Su populu sardu' (The Sardinian people) were established. They identified themselves as an anti-colonialist movement ('movimentu contra su colonialismu') in the first place. Campaigns were launched against NATO bases and military training camps in the island; against the industrialization attempts, controlled by continental business and the Rome government; against luxurious tourist resorts. Traditional banditry was given new attention and appreciation as a

⁴ Autonomist parties still polled over half of the vote in both the 1993 regional and the 1994 national elections, with the dominant Union Valdotaïne totalling 37% and 38% respectively (Adnkronos, 1995: 418 and 435).

⁵ The distinction between old and new ethnonationalism is elaborated in Diani (1983). It goes without saying that new currents do not displace more traditional ones, rather, they coexist with them, in a changing context where all actors in the political arena tend to redefine to some extent their approaches.

peculiar example of people's protest action. Even long established organizations like PSDa adapted their strategies and belief systems to the new context by picking up and reframing, from a more moderate and interclassist perspective, themes which were part of the 'anti-colonialist discourse'. Unprecedented emphasis was therefore placed upon struggles against cultural and economic domination. Alliances with left-wing parties were built up, after years of poor communication. This trend was to continue in the 1980s, when separatist and ethnonationalist approaches would have increased their strength within the party, although electoral success would have come only in the 1984 European elections (13.4%)⁶. Analogous, although politically less influential, developments might be found in both Slovenian and Occitane areas in northern Italy, where internal colonialism approaches overlapped with actions meant to revitalize local traditions, consistently with contemporary trends within European ethnonational movements (Canciani and De La Pierre, 1993; Smith, 1981; Keating, 1988).

Protest waves usually come along with reform waves (Tarrow, 1989 and 1994). Cultural minorities politics in Italy are no exception to this pattern. To be fair, actions promoted in this policy area should not be automatically seen as a by-product of the context which led to massive radical protest movements in the 1960s and 1970s. Still, a number of acts were passed between the 1960 and the 1980s, although no systematic legislation has been introduced yet⁷. Between mid-1970s and mid-1980s spaces opened up within public institutions for several forms of minority cultures, to complement the use and teaching of Italian language. Slovenian culture and language have gained for example increasing - albeit still poor - protection, following a series of acts introducing the use of their language in local public media and in the education system, although independent schools were not created⁸. Altogether, however, such opportunities have apparently been seized far more often by private, or semi-public, cultural associations and research centres - sometimes, by some university departments - than by public schools (Canciani and De La Pierre, 1993: 38-39).

Ironically, although the Italian Constitution is among the few to point explicitly at minority protection as a fundamental task for the country (Pastori, 1995), and in spite of some legislative innovations, minorities within Italy largely owe their rights - if any - to extra constitutional factors. The most important one is still the legacy of international treaties following the Italian defeat in World War II. Indeed, most protection has been obtained by minorities leaving on the borders, like the Germans in South Tyrol, the 'French' in Aosta Valley, the Slovenians in the provinces of Trieste and Gorizia. The counterproof comes from the Ladins, who are split between South Tyrol, Veneto and Friuli. While the 30,000 living in South Tyrol can for example be taught in their own dialect since 1973, this is denied to the 700,000 living in Friuli. Similarly, Slovenians living in Friuli do not enjoy specific protection, while those living in the neighbouring provinces of Trieste and Gorizia do (Canciani and De La Pierre, 1993: chap.1). Policy responsiveness in this area may also be encouraged by catastrophic events. The

6 A short history of PSDa may be found in Petrosino (1992) and Settembre (1994).

7 Proposals for a global act regulating the whole issue ('Norme in materia di tutela delle minoranze linguistiche') were actually discussed in parliament both in 1987 and in 1991, but they failed in both cases to be finally approved before the end of the legislature (Canciani and De La Pierre, 1993).

8 See Acts 308/1956, 1012/1961, 933/1973. See also Settembre (1994).

first chair in Friuli's language and culture was indeed created at the University of Udine in 1977, ie, in the aftermath of the 1976 earthquake ⁹.

South Tyrol is definitely the area where minority rights have been dealt with by Italian governments in the most systematic way. In 1969, agreement was reached about a comprehensive set of measures (137 altogether), covering virtually all issues of relevance to the protection of the German group. The implementation of the so called 'pacchetto' (literally, 'package') has represented a major source of argument and contention in the last decades. In 1971, the new Autonomy Statute was passed. It assigned greater autonomy than usual to provinces, through the relocation of power and competences from Trentino-Alto Adige regional offices to Bozen province institutions. High degrees of independence were reached, in areas including, among others, education and justice; the choice of language, with full bilingualism being awarded; public budget; etc. All major policy areas came largely under the control of provincial, German-speaking bodies.

One might even argue that in many respects the label 'minority problems' in South Tyrol has more and more frequently applied to locally minoritarian groups (the Ladins to some extent, but especially the Italians) in their interaction with the German group. One major contentious issue has been the rigid system of 'ethnic proportionality', according to which access to public jobs and to social services is strictly regulated by one's affiliation to any of the three language groups in the region. This has resulted in significant shares of Italian or Ladin speakers, identifying themselves as Germans on the occasion of the National Census, in order to increase their opportunities for jobs and provisions ¹⁰. The dominance - be it real or presumed - of the German group has fuelled opposition from both the right and the left wings of the political spectrum. On the right, the neo-fascist and overly nationalistic MSI (now turned into the post-fascist Alleanza Nazionale: Ignazi, 1994) has long become the best option among Italian speakers, mostly concentrated in the bigger towns. On the left, new social movements and alternative organizations have opposed the increasing pillarization of South Tyrol society, claiming for peaceful interaction and coexistence, rather than for separation, between the different groups (Barozzi, 1994; Langer, 1983).

What about relations between minority rights and regional devolution? All in all, it seems possible to argue that the institution of regional councils has opened up more opportunities for minority protection than the state has managed to create. Among ordinary status regions, Veneto, Piedmont, Calabria, Molise, and Basilicata include among their official goals the protection of minorities. However, conflicts on this level, have regularly developed with central authorities, claiming that the Constitution reserved this role for the state (Voci, 1994). In fact, several regional laws have been ruled off on this ground. In the 1980s, however, the Constitutional court has finally ruled illegitimate the state monopoly over this policy area ¹¹.

Even the implementation of the regional reform taken as a whole has not been devoid of problems and obstacles, though. The act, regulating regional elections, was passed only in 1968, against heavy opposition from conservatives, and

⁹ Act 546/1977. See Canciani and De La Pierre (1993: 36-37).

¹⁰ The 1971 Census registered for instance, out of 414,000 residents, 260,000 Germans, 128,000 Italians, 26,000 Ladins. On the following censuses, held in 1981 and 1991, estimates have been done that about 10% of members of the non-German groups have modified their ethnic affiliation.

¹¹ Sentences 312/1983 and 289/1987. See also Canciani and De La Pierre (1993: 40).

in the favourable context created by the mounting wave of participatory politics of that time. Although elections took place in 1970, only two years later did the government actually transfer some powers to the newly established regional councils. The devolution of power, responsibilities and resources has actually been very long and complex. One important step were the 616 decrees by which over 20,000 offices came under control of regional administrations in 1977. Substantive policy areas that were submitted to territorial devolution included health and social welfare, urban planning, economic development (Voci, 1994; Putnam, 1993:28).

How substantial the budget autonomy of regional councils is represents a highly controversial issue. Here, large differences persist between special status and ordinary status regions. According to some estimates, in the 1980s only 36% of expenses in the former was regulated by state laws, while the share climbed up to 82% in the latter. Moreover, regional councils have rarely proved able to overcome the shortcomings which marred the state administration in terms of degrees of bureaucracy and inefficiency. On the other hand, yet, regional governments have displayed greater persistency and lesser internal conflicts than national governments¹². Altogether, surveys regularly conducted at different points in time have shown that while Italian citizens have been quite dissatisfied with regional councils' performances, they have been less so than with the national governments'. Discontent with regional authorities has been far stronger in Southern Italy. In northern Italy, in contrast, and in spite of recent political upsets, people still in the 1980s were globally more satisfied than dissatisfied with their regional institutions and administrators¹³.

Regional administrations have therefore managed only to a limited extent to counter-balance the attitudes of open distrust and criticism of government actors - as well as of political actors at large - that were spreading during the 1980s. Right in the same period it appears indeed that center-periphery tensions within the established political class tend to fade away. In the pioneering years of regional reform, regional politicians had often acted as a 'counterpower' to the central state, arguing that local policies offered the opportunities to develop more responsive, participatory styles of policy making. By the 1980s, though, hostility for state control over regional policies tended to reduce drastically among regional councillors; so did claims for the suppression of prefects, the local representatives of the central state (Putnam, 1993: 53). According to critics, regional politics and policy proved to be in the end largely a replication on a smaller scale of national 'big' politics, to the detriment of any real autonomy (Keating, 1988: 230-234). This contributed to create further spaces for action for those, willing to fuel again center-periphery tensions within the country. This would have taken, however, radically different forms to the recent past.

12 For example, the average length of regional coalitions has been of 700 days in 1985-1990, in front of 250 days for national governments (Putnam, 1993: 49-50).

13 Data refer however to feelings, recorded before corruption scandals emerged and the 'Italian revolution' started off (Putnam, 1993: 58-65).

IV. The Northern League's challenge to established parties and "consociational" democracy

The rise of the Northern League has introduced substantial changes on the symbolic level, with respect to the way other, previous minorities' claims and grievances were framed and turned into political messages. This does not mean that the Leagues' communication has not picked up a number of rhetoric forms which are well rooted in conventional self-representations of oppressed minorities. Indeed, the autonomist groups that will later constitute the Northern League started off in the late 1970s-early 1980s as political organizations very close to the ethnonationalist model. Northern Italians were portrayed as colonized by "Roman parties", and invited to take action against their oppressors. However, and in contrast to other wealthy regions like Catalonia, emphasis on ethnonationalist ideas has proved little rewarding in terms of mobilizing capacity. The Leagues have therefore dropped progressively their emphasis on the defence of regional cultural legacy and identities (with the partial exception of Liga Veneta). The use of dialect in public offices and the revitalization of regional traditions have actually become rather marginal in these organizations' programs by the early 1990s (Allievi, 1992). What prevails is rather a more confused combination of populism and regionalism. It allows autonomists' political organizers to better stitch together themes and grievances, like anti-state and anti-bureaucratic sentiments, anti-welfare, pro-market options, hostility towards immigrants and Southern Italians, which it would be more complex to fit coherently in a classic ethnonationalist perspective.

By focusing on the hard-working ordinary 'people', without further qualification, it is indeed easier to maximize the distance between the 'us' and the 'them', where the latter includes welfare parasites along with immigrants on the one hand, politicians, trade union organizers, intellectuals, and even big industrialists on the other (Biorcio, 1991 and 1992; Diani, 1996). The Leagues' discourse shares many traits with neo-conservative currents in other countries, critical of welfare arrangements and consociational politics. However, in spite of a recurring emphasis on the importance of democracy, the Leagues' populism has differed from Thatcherism or Reaganism in its unusually high contempt for democratic practices and procedures. A conception of democracy as a conflict-mediating activity which requires specific competences, mutual understanding between conflicting parties, and the recognition of the plurality of interests at stake in the political arena, has been largely missing - at least until the 1994 National elections. While these themes have recently gained some attention, due to the Leagues' vital need to differentiate themselves from Mr Berlusconi's managerial approach, in their basic representations of politics deep mistrust for current Italian politicians has often turned into global anti-political attitudes. The success of the Leagues has in fact occurred at a political phase when the capacity of traditional cleavages to structure political conflict are not the only feature of established politics to come under contestation; rather, public criticism addresses more and more frequently the legitimacy of political actors and of political procedures based on rational discourse as such (Diani, 1996).

What is the linkage, if any, between the Leagues' approach and minority rights issues? A point of convergence could be found in the importance given to local autonomy. Emphasis on self-government and grassroots democracy has actually been one key theme for new social movements in recent times (Dalton and Kuechler, 1990; Dalton, 1993). According to one senior League politician, "autonomy is to be the ruler of yourself at home; decentralization instead is just doing at home

what the state has decided you should do. While autonomy necessarily requires a federal state, decentralization can be implemented even in a centralized state like the Italian state"¹⁴.

This important exception notwithstanding, the Leagues' programs do not pay too much attention to minority rights issues, nor to issues of 'rights' in the broader sense of the term. This is partially dependent on the fact that in recent times new social movements have mobilized on rights which are more or less connected to the redefinition of welfare entitlements and provisions. While social movements have often been critical of welfare policies, they have never challenged their legitimacy, rather, they have devised alternative ways to provide for social needs, or to define standards of access to welfare goods. The Leagues' approach is different. They do not aim at granting full citizenship rights to culturally specific populations which were previously excluded from them. Rather, they tend to expand the rights of majority groups that are already full members of the system - for example, their rights to lighter fiscal pressure - by excluding, or at least restricting, citizenship entitlements to groups that they judge unworthy of special social support. These range from Third World immigrants to most Italian citizens currently on welfare. Arguments behind these proposals underline the unusual, clientelistic expansion of access to welfare provisions (in the form of generous early retirement schemes, fake disabledness pensions, and so forth) which has marred Italian welfare in the last decades.

One should also notice that social movements' action on rights in recent times has not been restricted to expanding access to a given set of citizenship rights. They have also emphasized the importance of cultural pluralism, ie, the importance of redefining rights in a way which took ethnic, gender, cultural differences into account. No traces of these debates may be found in the Leagues' perspective. Their reference is the 'people', that they see as a naturally homogeneous entity, which one can either assimilate to or deviate from. On several occasions, Leagues' prominent figures have shown little interest in, if not contempt for, cultural pluralism, and denied the need to support the cultural diversity of groups which for some reasons have been historically deprived¹⁵.

All in all, the Leagues get their support from social sectors that are in most cases supportive of more right-wing views than the general Italian population. Surveys conducted among electors in Lombardy and Veneto demonstrate for instance that Leagues' voters are more racist than their fellow residents in their attitudes to both Southern Italians and Third World immigrants¹⁶. Similar data emerge even from social milieus, like volunteers in nonprofit organizations, that are

¹⁴ Lombardia Autonomista, 21.10.1989, cited in Allievi (1992: 23).

¹⁵ Examples may range from some local administrators' appeals to women to stay home as a means to fight unemployment, to the macho language adopted by national leaders, to the opposition many local chapters have mounted against the construction of non catholic, mostly muslim, places of worship in their neighbourhoods.

¹⁶ About 50% of the Leagues' voters regard favourably limitations to Southern Italians' capacity to move around northern Italy (vs 26% of the total populations in those regions), while 72% see non-white immigrants as potential sources of trouble and problems (vs 58% in the general population) (Diamanti, 1993: 103).

supposed largely hostile to the Leagues¹⁷. Their proposals are therefore unlikely to link up with other political organizations' action on the expansion of rights; here, the Leagues' attention is actually restricted to the question of territorial autonomy, and more specifically of the federalist transformation of the Italian state.

V. The debate on federalism and local government reform

Loudly voiced claims of federal reform by the Northern League have attracted most media and public attention in the last years. In practice, however, similarly to what happened in previous phases, issues of devolution and local autonomy have been taken up from several perspectives. A number of actions have been undertaken by parliamentary and governmental actors, in order to counteract citizens' growing disaffection for traditional parties and public institutions. In this perspective, devolution has been mainly seen as an opportunity to improve the quality of the linkages between citizens and institutions: in local offices and agencies both communication with, and control by, citizens may in principle be expected to be easier.

A major achievement on this ground has been the 'local autonomies act', passed in 1990. Opportunities for citizens' involvement in local policy making have been enlarged, introducing city-level referenda on local issues, making it easier to access administrative documents, or designing procedures to involve public interest groups in more regular interaction with public authorities. The new act has also affected relationships between city and regional councils, introducing the principle that regional planning should be based on regular city councils' consultation¹⁸. In 1993, the national associations of cities (ANCI), provinces (UPI) and regions (CINSEDO) proposed the adoption of a Charter of Regions (Carta delle Regioni). Following the German example, it aimed at introducing in the Constitutional Charter the notion of subsidiarity (Pastori, 1995; Piraino, 1994). In 1994, the Minister for Institutional Reforms of the Berlusconi government, Francesco Speroni of the Northern League, chaired the "Study group on institutional, electoral, and constitutional reforms". As its name suggests, the committee's tasks covered a large spectrum of potential institutional innovations. A similar advisory board, the "Study group for regional and local autonomies reforms", was chaired in the second half of 1994 by another prominent figure of the League, Roberto Maroni, then in charge as Minister of Internal Affairs¹⁹. However, these bodies never managed to formulate organic and systematic plans for reform (Pizzetti, 1995: 245-249), also because of the quick dissolution of the right-wing majority in December 1994. Even earlier, the collapse of the traditional party system, following corruption scandals, had similarly vanished the work of what some regard as the most systematic attempt at institutional reform to date. The "Joint Senate and Chamber of Deputies Committee for Institutional Reforms", establis-

17 On the occasion of a project on new public interest groups in Milan city in 1990, data on 165 members showed for example that even there, relatively more authoritarian orientations were positively correlated to relative sympathy for the Northern League (they actually accounted for 25% of variance). This evidence has not been published to date. For additional information on the project, see Diani and Lanzalaco (1990). For details on the authoritarianism index, see instead Diani (1995: chap.6).

18 Act 142/1990. See Voci (1994), Piraino (1994) and Pitruzzella (1994).

19 Pizzetti (1995) provides a systematic assessment of all the major reform proposals put forward in this area in the last few years, including those elaborated by the Speroni and Maroni committees.

hed in 1992, was abruptly terminated by the conclusion of the legislature in early 1994 (Pizzetti, 1995; Pastori, 1995).

All the above mentioned projects reflected the recurrent tensions between reform plans emphasizing the role of regions, and reform plans aiming in contrast to revitalize the role of all different levels of local government, including city and provincial councils (Pizzetti, 1995: 250). However, both 'regionalist' and 'localist' approaches would have been of small scope and breadth in comparison to what the Northern League has long claimed to be its major political goal, ie, the constitutional changes meant to turn Italy into a federal state. To be honest, an articulated definition of what the Leagues meant by 'federalism' has been largely missing thus far. The idea of federalism has rather been used as a metaphor and a rhetorical device in political debates (Pizzetti, 1995; De Siervo, 1995; Diamanti, 1994). The first project the Leagues ever rendered public was a very succinct, ten-articles project for a federal constitution, presented by their ideologue of the time, Professor Gianfranco Miglio, at their national conventions of December, 1993 and February, 1994 (Frattolin, 1994). It envisaged the preservation of the five special status regions, plus the merging of the others into three Macroregions or Cantons, corresponding respectively to northern ('Padania'), central ('Etruria'), and southern Italy ('Sud'). The highly residual role of the state, the string cantonal control over budget and taxation policies, the opportunity for single regions to secede, rendered this project very close to a federation of virtually independent states. After it was presented, one major line of criticism was that differences in resources between the different areas would have inevitably led the strongest macroregions to break away from the others²⁰. To survive, the new federation would have had to rely upon the unifying powers of charismatic figures²¹.

Widespread negative reactions resulted in the quick dismissal of the project as a 'provocation' by the leaders of the Leagues themselves. However, even though Mr Miglio left the party just after the formation of the Berlusconi's cabinet in Spring, 1994²², his views still affected the more systematic proposal that the Northern League presented at a convention in Genoa in November, 1994²³. This project envisaged the creation of nine new states, whose size was more comparable than that of those in the original 'macro-regional' scheme. It was a highly complex constitutional design, in as much as it maintained the current twenty regions, albeit in a more marginal position (Pizzetti, 1995: 238-241).

From a different perspective, a systematic proposal of regional reform has come from a study, promoted by the Agnelli Foundation. In contrast to Miglio's plans, merging of current regions into bigger units is inspired by practical - in particular, economic - considerations, rather than by cultural and historical homogeneity (De Siervo, 1995: 58). Twelve regions are proposed, with smaller ones either joining neighbouring, bigger ones (this would be the case for example of Liguria and Aosta Valley joining Piedmont), or merging together to constitute a bigger unit (as in the case of Marche, Abruzzo and Molise). The rationale behind mer-

20 For an example of an historically grounded argument along these lines see Romano (1994).

21 See Pizzetti (1995: 244-245, 251); De Siervo (1995: 30).

22 The League leaders' uncertain commitment to this project was apparently among the factors which convinced Mr Miglio to resign (Miglio, 1994).

23 A modified version of this project was later presented in the Senate in January 1995 as a parliamentary proposal for constitutional change by Mr Speroni and other MPs (Pizzetti, 1995: 240-241).

gers is to create twelve units not too different in terms of economic and infra-structural resources. This should result in a system where a) each region is strong enough to sustain its own autonomous policies, but at the same time b) no region is stronger than the others to the point of being tempted by the idea of secession (Pacini, 1994; Fondazione Agnelli, 1994).

However, the real question is how many chances has any of these projects to be really implemented. With the obvious exception of the Northern League's, none of them is backed by organized political actors. And even the League would need a coalition to support their plans. Whether political opportunities are favourable to such an outcome is however uncertain. Among public opinion, interest for federalism seems to be relatively low: according to a survey conducted in 1994, the Leagues' proposal of three macroregions was the best type of state structure reform for 5% only, while federalism with existing regions was supported by 15%, versus one third who preferred the status quo and about one fourth who advocated devolution of powers to either regional or city councils. Even in northern Italy, the macroregional reform got only 6% of support, while federalism was chosen by 21% of respondents - definitely a higher share than in central or southern Italy (10% each), but still lower than those standing for no changes (25%) (Diamanti and Segatti, 1994). One year later, figures showed no substantial changes but for the further increase of supporters of the *status quo* (Diamanti, 1995: 817).

In the light of this evidence, the macroregional option seems to be hardly feasible for the Northern League. And yet, the persistence of territorial issues in the political agenda should not be automatically ruled out. While its chances for coalition building on this ground may be tiny, the League has nonetheless a clear interest in revitalizing debates on territorial reform, and in radicalizing them, at least in rhetorical terms²⁴. Federalism and decentralization could in other words represent once again *the* issue 'owned' (Gusfield, 1981; Schneider, 1985) by the League. This would allow the League to differentiate itself from both the center-right and the center-left coalition²⁵. However, that this might turn into real secessionist politics seems, in spite of speculations that secession could be an "unintentional consequence" of the interplay between the League's tactics and changing external conditions (Diamanti, 1995: 818-819), highly unpalatable.

VI. Conclusions

By combining differences in regional mobilizations and policy reform attempts we have been able to identify three analytically distinctive dynamics, albeit often overlapping in practice. In each of these dynamics, regional policies have been seen as peculiar responses to different challenges to established political actors,

²⁴ It is less clear, though, whether they are really willing to pursue this goal in a consistent way. Professor Miglio's recent conviction is for instance that the League leaders have never been interested in federalism, nor have they ever been intellectually equipped to the task; rather, they would have used it as a pure propaganda device (Miglio, 1994; see also Diamanti, 1994).

²⁵ As these notes were finally amended in November 1995 there was no chance to incorporate any discussion of the last National election and the Prodi's government proposals for regional reform in the present paper.

coming from territorial-based opposition. The first dynamic focuses on efforts to prevent secession moves in peripheral areas in the aftermath of World War II, and on their interplay with the regional reform. Here, regional policies may be mainly conceived of as moves in conflicts, largely shaped by the relevance of the international politics arena. Although this dimension has gradually lost its relevance, traces may still be found among the more radical fringes of South Tyrol nationalism.

The second dynamic relates instead demands for recognition coming from cultural and linguistic minorities to broader attempts to secure larger access to citizenship rights for lower status groups. Here we come closest to a classic "minority rights" problem, where territorial movements mobilize in close interaction with other social movements committed to participatory notions of democracy, to the expansion and redefinition of welfare entitlements, as well as to more identity-oriented issues. 'Autonomy' themes are strongly related to broader 'social justice' frames. This pattern could be most frequently found in the contentious 1960s and 1970s, when the ethnic revival spread across Europe and the 'internal colonialism' approach to territorial conflicts emerged. Themes close to this perspective may be found nowadays among some Occitane or Sardist organizations, or among the South Tyrol new left groups trying to increase communication between the different linguistic groups in the region.

The third major dynamic reverses to a large extent the previous approach to territorial issues. Autonomy is still emphasized here, yet disconnected from, and often in explicit opposition to, social equality ideas. Territorial and cultural dimensions rather legitimize claims for new mechanisms of social closure, rather than inclusion as in the previous model. Opposition to redistributive mechanisms is in fact mounted upon this basis. In this perspective, freedom and rights are still advocated. Yet, they are mainly functional to the defence of regional interests and do not have high status *per se* in the territorial political discourse.

The Northern League has actually drawn upon grievances related to economic power and status, rather than upon cultural, ethnonationalist ones. Admittedly, a number of features of the Leagues' approach is compatible with previous frames emphasising self-government; they have also picked up a few rhetoric devices from the internal colonialism approach. Still, the core of the Leagues' challenge lies in their deep criticism of the political arrangement, according to which the strength of the ideological divide between the major political factions of the country was at least partially balanced by a fairly loose access to welfare entitlements - no matter the evaluation one may give of both the quality of welfare provisions and the long-term consequences of these agreement.

By standing for free market principles and for the drastic reduction of welfare policies, the Leagues' challenge is at least as much, and possibly more, anti-systemic than those posed by the other two dynamics I have just mentioned. At the same time, though, a break can be found in this case with respect to "classic" minority rights approaches to territorial politics. In the Belgian case (Van Dyck, this issue), substantive cultural differences have long overlapped with economic and status inequalities. Thus, they have provided the basis for the development and consolidation of neat political cleavages. However, the political elites have managed to design various forms of institutional (and in particular, constitutional) innovation. These seem to have in turn - at least, thus far - facilitated pacific settlements of intergroup controversies, and prevented the potential for disruptiveness and fragmentation within Belgian society from fully developing. In Italy, in contrast, ethnic and cultural differences within the country have been tradi-

tionally rather weak. However, potential tensions, originating from regional differences within the country, and from the unsatisfactory performances of largely centralized institutions, have been successfully merged by the Northern League in an appealing and (at least apparently) coherent quest for radical federalism. That this was the case, it seems largely due to the traditional political leaders' failure to appreciate the pervasiveness and seriousness of demands for change coming from Italian society - of course, along with politicians' recent appalling record in terms of public morality. It is on the spread of broader anti-politics and anti-elites sentiments that the League's populist message has in the last analysis capitalized.

Abstract

Three distinctive dynamics may be identified in the post-war developments of territorial and minority rights politics in Italy. The first focuses on secession attempts in peripheral areas in the aftermath of the world war, and on their interplay with the regional reform. The second peaks in the late '60s-early '70s, and relates territorial minorities' demands for recognition to broader protest movements and 'internal colonialism' perspectives. The third consists of the recent success of regional Leagues in the North, and largely reverses previous approaches to territorial issues. Autonomy is still emphasized here, yet disconnected from, and often in explicit opposition to, social equality ideas. 'Minority rights' are largely replaced with a peculiar version of territorial populist politics.



'Divided we stand'¹. Regionalism, federalism and minority rights in Belgium

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I. Introduction

For a Belgian it is not an easy task to write a non-biased essay on the inter-group relations in his or her country. Flemings, Walloons and 'Bruxellois' commonly each have a different perception of the same Belgian reality. Since I perceive myself as belonging to one of these language communities my analysis might be biased by this membership. As a (political) scientist though I am of the opinion that I should make an effort to look at things through a pair of non-partial spectacles. Since I cannot literally step outside my Flemish 'skin', I must attempt to do so intellectually.

II. The Belgian 'ethnic' conflict and its political settlements

A. *Clarifying 'ethnicity'*

Today, the (Dutch-speaking) Flemings in Flanders and Brussels on the one hand and the (French-speaking) Walloons on the other hand perceive themselves and are being perceived by the others as separate 'ethnic' entities. The French-speaking 'Bruxellois', living outside Wallonia but speaking the same language as the Walloons, are less easy to categorize. In a broad anthropological perspective an ethnic entity is "any group of people who set themselves apart and are set apart from other groups with whom they interact or coexist in terms of some distinctive criterion or criteria (...)". (Seymour-Smith, 1986: 95) These criteria, on the basis of which ethnic groups therefore categorize themselves and others are largely ascriptive characteristics, i.e. identifying features of persons (and therefore of the group they are a member of) that lay outside the individual's control, such as color, language, religion, geographical origin and customs.

Individuals are not necessarily aware of their ethnicity. They can look, think and behave like many others without realizing their (relative) 'sameness'. Jackson (1984) calls this a 'dormant' form of ethnicity. A number of persons just possess (some) ascriptive characteristics that make them objectively identifiable as a separate group. But, this dormant form of ethnicity is susceptible to socio-political mobilization. This would not only mean that (some of) the members of the eth-

1 This is an 'adaptation' of the device of the Belgian nation-state 'United we stand' ('Eendracht maakt macht'/'L'union fait la force').

nic category become aware of their ethnic identity but also that they become organized. In this process of mobilization "ethnic categories are awakened and transformed into ethnic groups or ethnonations." If such an ethnic group also develops "an interest in possessing public authority in a country, but not outright sovereignty", it becomes an 'ethnonation'. (Jackson, 1984: 228) Ethnonations finally can transform into 'nations' when they "possess, have a desire to possess, or remember that they once possessed and wish to repossess political sovereignty". (Jackson, 1984: 211) In my view Jackson takes too little account of the fact that people can have an ethnic identity without being politically mobilized. People can identify with their ethnic category [i.e. being aware of their (perceived) ethnic sameness] without being organized with the purpose of defending their interests vis-à-vis an other ethnic category. This is because people can identify with an ethnic category without attaching much importance to this membership. Identifying with an ethnic category may be of no more importance to somebody than identifying with the female population of one's country, for instance. It is only when great value is attached to this ethnic membership, that the identification takes the form of 'ethnonationalism' or 'nationalism'. (Maddens, Beerten & Billiet, 1994: 11)

B. *Ethnic identification and mobilization in Belgium: a short historical overview*

For the predominantly French-speaking elites (living in Wallonia, Brussels and Flanders) of the newly created (1830) strongly centralized unitary state it went without saying that the official life in Belgium should take place in only one language and that this language should be French. Unilingualism was considered to be absolutely necessary for national integration. (Zolberg, 1974: 188) Permitting official language differentiation would endanger the unity of the new country. Moreover, among several elites anti-Dutch² feelings existed. Above that, wasn't French the language of the values promoted by the French Revolution, a universal language and the 'only language of civilization'? (Kesteloot, 1993: 14) French was the language of culture and therefore, a prestigious one. In view of the sociological background of the Belgian elites of that time, therefore, French quite 'naturally' was proclaimed the only official language (1830) despite the constitutionally guaranteed free use of languages (1831). Since the vast majority of the common people, whose life was limited to their village and its immediate rural surroundings, only spoke the distinct local (Flemish or Walloon) dialect because this was all they needed, the exclusiveness of French on the supra-local level was not contested for a long time. (Reynebeau, 1995: 111-114)

In view of this situation it is hardly surprising that the group identities of the common people of that time were of a local kind, like it had been for centuries. (Murphy, 1988: 42-43, 53) 'Flanders' and 'Wallonia' as ethnic linguistic-territorial entities did not yet exist in the minds of the common people, and certainly not in those of the French-speaking Belgian elites who first and foremost identified with the new Belgian state. Their Belgian collective identity corresponded with the French bourgeois liberal model of the nation. (Reynebeau, 1995: 94-95)

2 In this case we use the adjective 'Dutch' as referring to both (1) the language-policy of King William I (in 1823 he made Dutch the exclusive official language of administration, secondary education and the judicial apparatus in the entire territorium of what was to become Belgium in 1830) and (2) his authoritarian, anti-liberal and anti-catholic regime in general (Wils, 1993: 131-132).

In short, in 1830, neither among the elites, whose economic dominance was politically supported by an on property based electoral system, nor among the powerless common people, languages had an ethno-territorial connotation (Reynebeau, 1995: 111). Therefore, regionwide ethno-linguistic identities simply did not exist yet.

How then can we explain the progressive identification and mobilization process of the initially 'dormant' Flemish and Walloon ethnic categories? The first process of linguistic ethnic mobilization modestly took off in 'Flanders' around 1840. (Wils, 1991: 225) From the start and throughout the nineteenth century this 'Flemish movement' was an explicitly pro-Belgian (patriotic) and moderate one. Its first leaders did not demand any public authority for the Flemings nor did they claim Dutch unilingualism within Flanders. They wanted the recognition of 'Flemish'/'Dutch'³ on an equal footing with French in 'Flanders'. (Alen, 1990: 3) For them there was no contradiction between, on the one hand, their agitation in favour of the defense of what they called the 'popular' language and its people (both of which did not yet exist though, taking into account the variety of dialects in 'Flanders' and the absence of a Dutch standard language) and, on the other hand, their loyalty vis-à-vis the Belgian state. Hroch demonstrated that the most important supporters of the Flemish movement in the nineteenth century were urban middle class intellectuals. (Hroch, 1985: 111-112) Why would these 'Flemish' intelligentsia ('Flamingants'), most of whom were educated in French, support the demands of the Flemish movement? Many scholars agree that language became the ethnic marker for mobilization because of the link between the relative backward social position of these Flemish middle class literati's with their mother tongue that was held to be inferior. Even if they adopted French as a means of communication, they remained an outgroup, which put them in a relatively disadvantaged position. Hence, "national agitation (...) offered to the educated individuals among them the opportunity to create a new in-group based on a common language, all of whose members would be equal and hope for better opportunities for social advancement without having to assimilate." (Hroch, 1994: 29) As a result these 'Flamingants' created a mythical 'Flemish people' which formed the basis of legitimization for their language demands.

In the beginning of the 1870s the pressure of the - all in all still not weighty - Flemish movement augmented, which resulted in the first language laws. Although they allowed for a (secondary) place for Dutch in public life in the Flemish provinces, next to French, many of the Flamingants considered these language laws to be inadequate. Towards the end of the nineteenth century a combination of limited economic recovery in 'Flanders' and state bureaucracy expansion produced more opportunities for upward mobility. By that, more and more of these modernizing Flemings became confronted with their relative disadvantaged position. Although by then public life in Flanders had officially yet partly become bilingual, Flemings still had to pay the additional cost of learning another language. The "formal grant of linguistic parity by no means resolved problems of linguistic equity in Bel-

3 The promoters of a 'popular' language for the Flemings did not agree which idiom to advocate. Some of them made a plea in favour of a standardized vernacular language ('Flemish') that had to be different from the one that was spoken in Holland, while others advocated that the standardized language should be the same 'Dutch' as it had been developing in the Netherlands since the 17th-18th century. (Vandeputte, Vincent & Hermans, 1986: 31-32) This internal disagreement obviously played into the hands of the Franco-phone elites who kept arguing against the official use of Flemish/Dutch. (cf. Bequet, 1977: 9-20)

gium." (Zolberg, 1974: 209) A part of this new Flemish bourgeoisie continued to assimilate into the dominating culture (so called 'Frenchification'), but another and growing group became susceptible to Flamingant mobilization.

After World War I, which acted as a catalyst to this potential Flamingant rank and file, the Flemish movement reached the masses. (Wils, 1991: 233; Murphy, 1988: 111) The introduction of proportional representation (unqualified universal male suffrage) in 1919, which raised the expectation on the Flemish side that their numerical majority would throw its weight into the electoral scale, is certainly not alien to this evolution. It is only at this stage that 'Flanders' received its full linguistic-territorial connotation, as a result of which the till then claimed demands for individual language rights would be turned into demands for collective language rights, i.e. for language rights for the Flemish *people*. By means of education, a Flemish press and propaganda a civilization offensive started that, it is evident to us now, in the long run enabled the Flemish masses to "imagine" themselves as one "community" (to restate Anderson, 1991). (Reynebeau, 1995: 152-154) Flemish-national parties were created and reached their best, although modest, election result just before World War II. As Lorwin points out, their "threat to the established parties, especially to the Catholic party, and especially after 1930, was much greater than their percentage of the electorate. For they functioned, in effect, much like groups of pressure upon the national parties and the government." (Lorwin, 1974: 191)

When the Flemish movement began to aim at the bilingualization of the Belgian centre itself, towards the end of the nineteenth century, it caused the emergence and the development of a 'Walloon movement'. (Zolberg, 1974: 208) The Walloon movement remained marginal until the First World War and their influence on the political parties is even negligibly small until 1940. (Vagman, 1994: 5, 12-13) The first Walloon movement formed a language movement, that is to say, a movement in defense of the dominance of the French language ⁴ which was contested by its Flemish counterpart. (Kesteloot, 1993: 13) It is therefore no surprise that this kind of 'Wallingant' agitation originated outside of Wallonia, i.e. in Brussels and the Flemish cities of Gent and Antwerpen where Francophone functionaries felt threatened by the language laws (Wils, 1993: 188) and that the first 'leagues' of the Walloon movement were created in Brussels, likewise by French-speaking officials (Kesteloot, 1993: 19; Wils, 1993: 189) Given the social, economic and political supremacy of the Francophone elites in Belgium and their affinity with France ⁵, one should not be at all surprised that the leaders of the Walloon movement wanted the preservation of the unitary centralized Francophone Belgian state. (Vagman, 1994: 6) Fonteyn calls this line of thought, whose successors persist up till today, in defense of French (and the position of its speakers within the Belgian state) c.q. against the Dutch language (and the aspirations of the Flemings), the 'untrue' (oneigenlijke) Walloon movement. (Fonteyn, 1988: 62)

⁴ The Walloon movement never fought a language struggle in favour of the Walloon idiom, although the care for the dialects was an object of its pursuits. According to Fonteyn nobody seems to mind because (1) the development of the Walloon dialects closely followed the development of the standard French language and (2) cultural affinity between Wallonia and France has always been strong and remains to be so. (Fonteyn, 1988: 62).

⁵ For quite a long time a strong tendency within the Walloon movement persisted which wanted a re-attachment to France. A small group of these 'rattachistes' still exists today.

In course of time the Walloon feeling of threatening minorization was enhanced by two other factors. On the one hand, because of the progressive demographic decline of the Walloon provinces in combination with the above mentioned extension of franchise, the Walloon elites started asking questions on the consequences for their political representation on the national level. (Kesteloot, 1993: 27) On the other hand there was the progressive economic upheaval of Flanders which started around 1880 but which only became a major preoccupation within the Walloon movement in the beginning of the 1930's (Kesteloot, 1993: 21). Under the influence of both factors a regionalist tendency developed and slowly became dominant within the Walloon movement. (Vagman, 1994: 9-12) From 1930 onwards one can say that the Walloon movement was exclusively occupied with the Walloon territory, a fact which marks the beginning of the distinct territorial integrity of Wallonia. (Kesteloot, 1993: 29) The Walloon movement 'dropped' Brussels and the Francophone elites in Flanders and entirely focused on Wallonia. This happened because, meanwhile, the Walloon movement had come to realize that the Flemings, who were well on their way to become the inhabitants of the more prosperous region, would not cry off their demands. Therefore they judged it more wise to concentrate on a unilingual Wallonia and the defense of the Walloons within the Belgian state. Fonteyn calls the defenders of this 'pure Walloon' line of thought, the 'true' (eigenlijke) Walloon movement. (Fonteyn, 1988: 63)

Flemish and Walloon mobilization reinforced each other. The evolution in the minds of the defenders of both the Flemish and the Walloon case explains why in 1932 a language legislation was adopted that laid the basis for complete administrative unilingualism in Flanders and Wallonia. (Murphy, 1988: 115) The law introduced the 'principle of territoriality' according to which the use of the language of the area is compulsory in the public domain.

Yet, the compelling of this legislation proved to be very difficult because it did not carry measurements to sanction the numerous violations. Therefore and despite its contribution to the reinforcement of the position of Dutch in Flanders, the 1932 legislation did not bring about the change hoped for on the Flemish side, i.e. the achievement of linguistic equality in Flanders and in the Belgian state, and the termination of the Frenchification of Flemish/Dutch-speaking people, especially in Brussels and its surroundings, a 'problem' (as perceived by the Flemings) to which we shall return extensively later on. Yet, the 1932 law was important "In framing the language question in regional terms". (Murphy, 1988: 117) Kesteloot affirms that from 1932 on the conflict between Flemings and Walloons was re-defined as a conflict between two 'communities' (although this term is more used in Flanders than in Wallonia) which focused their demands on the issues that are the bearers their identity, i.e. cultural issues (Flemings) and economic issues (Walloons). (Kesteloot, 1993: 30)

The politicization of the ethnic conflict augmented in the two decades after the Second World War when two major political crises took an ethnoregional undertone. (Murphy, 1988: 125-127) Above that, Flanders continued its economic and demographic march. The old coal and steel industry located in Wallonia had become "technologically outmoded and inefficient" while investments in new technologies and industries were primarily made in Flanders. ⁶ (Mughan, 1979: 25) A growing number of Walloons lost their confidence in the Belgian state which

⁶ See for a general overview of the problem of the economic decline of the Walloon region: Quévit, 1978.

they accused of being monopolized by the Flemings to their detriment. Voices were raised that claimed some kind of parity of political representation possibly connected with decentralization of decision-making in economic affairs, but with equal distribution of resources. (Zolberg, 1977: 116) Increased Walloon consciousness made appear a regional Walloon party ('Rassemblement Wallon') that, however, disappeared relatively soon. (Buelens & Van Dyck, forthcoming).

Nevertheless, on the Flemish side old grievances persisted. An inconsistency between their enhanced social and economic status on the one hand and the still relative low cultural-linguistic status on the other hand reinforced Flemish mobilization. In 1954 the Flemish-nationalist party 'Volksunie' was created that successfully mobilized the Flemish electorate. (Mughan, 1979: 26) For the Frenchification to be stopped, the fixation of the language border between Flanders and Wallonia and the sealing off of the bilingual Brussels area were claimed, combined with a decentralization of decision-making in cultural affairs. (Zolberg, 1977: 115) The Flemish movement partly obtained what it had demanded. The 1962-1963 language legislation, coordinated in 1966, consolidated the territoriality principle. Belgium was constitutionally divided into four language areas: three monolingual (a Dutch, a French and a German language area) and one bilingual (Brussels Capital: Dutch and French). This implied, for example, that in the three monolingual areas the language of instruction in schools could only be the language of the area in question. Nevertheless, some exceptions to this rule were made (municipalities with 'language facilities') to which we shall return later on too.

Because of the 'binary' character of the Walloon movement, indicated by Fonteyn, the Walloon movement constantly showed an attitude of ambiguity vis-à-vis the French-speaking 'Bruxellois'. It has always found it very difficult to balance, on the one hand, what was perceived to be in the interest of the Walloons (i.e. their 'region') but which went contrary to the Francophones in Brussels and, on the other hand, the preservation/enlargement of the 'solidarity' among all the French-speaking Belgians, whether Walloon or 'Bruxellois'. (Vagman, 1994) As a result, the Bruxellois themselves have resolutely taken the lead with respect to the specific Francophone interests, especially since the sixties. An important form of ethnic mobilization took place as a reaction to the national language laws of 1962-1963. A distinct Brussels 'language party' was created to defend the interests of the Brussels Francophones (the 'Front Démocratique des Francophones'). These 'Bruxellois', of whom most did not speak Dutch, feared the loss of their privileged position because bilingualism became a legal requirement for certain jobs ('status panic'). Since most of the Flemings spoke both languages, bilingualism would be an advantage to them. The importance of joined Francophone forces against the Flemings was always (and still is) stressed. (Buelens & Van Dyck, forthcoming)

C. *The ethnic conflict in Belgium and its political solutions: 'regionalization' and 'communitarization'*

We pointed out that within the Belgian state two forms of regional ethnic identification and mobilization arose. The first one, embodied by the Flemish movement, demanded linguistic and cultural autonomy, i.e. autonomy that would lead to "a genuine recognition and development of their own language (...) and culture". (Alen, 1990: 9) The second one, that was mainly a reaction to the successes of the Flemish movement and the economic deterioration of the Walloon region, was embodied by the Walloon movement. The Walloons demanded re-

gional autonomy, i.e. autonomy over social and economic matters to resolve the economic crisis of their region. As a result of this dynamic, the Brussels Francophones wanted their city to become a full-fledged region in its own right too. (Alen, 1990: 10)

Because of Brussels and its location in Flanders the demands of the Flemings and those of the Walloons were intrinsically incompatible. According to the Flemings, the entirely by Flemish territory surrounded city of Brussels had to become an integral part of the Flemish community. The Francophones (including the Walloons) boggled at the idea of leaving 800.000 Brussels Francophones under the 'domination' of the Flemings. According to them, Brussels had to become a region of its own. In other words, Flemings and Walloons simply demanded two different things. Therefore compromising, i.e. both parties doing concessions so that the settlement agreed upon is 'something in between', was impossible. In fact, there were only two possibilities of which the first one, keeping the centralized, unitary state, had been "overtaken by events". (Alen, 1990: 9) Therefore, the only possible solution was *both* a 'communitarization' *and* a 'regionalization' of the state structure. That is what happened. In four successive constitutional revisions (1970, 1980, 1988, 1993) Belgium became a federal state with three communities⁷ and three regions. For Brussels, with a Francophone majority and a Flemish minority, a special settlement was agreed upon in 1988.

'Regional' matters and 'community' matters are of a different kind. The Regions are competent for a variety of economic and environmental matters, public works, public transport, area planning, housing and competencies vis-à-vis the local governments (municipalities). The Communities have competency over cultural, educational, linguistic and a number of other 'personalized' matters. Since both regions and communities have legislative power, in principle each region and each community has its own parliament, government and administration. Yet, the competencies of the Flemish Community and those of the Flemish Region have always been administered by only one legislative, one executive and one administrative body. On the Walloon/Francophone side to the contrary legally there are still two separate parliaments, governments and administrations. However, the Walloon Region has taken over the greater part of the competencies of the French Community. Moreover, since the 1995 elections the members of the parliament of the Walloon Region are also the members of the parliament of the French Community. In the latter the Walloons are joined by the Francophones of the Brussels regional parliament. In the Brussels Region, regional matters are administered by both Flemings and Francophones. But, when it comes to specific community matters, they split up in separate bodies, the so called 'community commissions'.

So, the Belgian ethnic conflict has not only given a settlement by 'agreeing to disagree' (Covell, 1982) or 'splitting the difference' (Zolberg, 1977), i.e. on the one hand giving Flemings, Walloons and Francophones the authority to legislate both on regional and on community matters and, on the other, keeping as federal competencies only those for which an agreement could be reached upon. The conflict has also been dealt with by allowing asymmetry in the structures. As far as the Flemings are concerned, more emphasis is laid on the Community whereby the Flemish community living in Brussels (only 3% of the total Flemish

⁷ The German-speaking community (70.000 people) received a (restricted) cultural autonomy of its own, but became a part of the Walloon region for social and economic matters.

community in Belgium) is an integral part of the Flemish community. This means that the Brussels Flemings have (almost) no legislative power in Brussels as far as community matters are concerned. On the Walloon side to the contrary, much more emphasis is put on the region. When the Walloon Region took over a large part of the matters of the French Community, the Francophones in the Brussels Region (17% of all the Francophones in Belgium) received their own legislative powers as far as community matters are concerned (since the Brussels Region has no competencies to regulate community matters). As a result of this Belgium has become a *de facto* 'bipolar' federalism in which the Flemish Community and the Walloon Region play first fiddle. The French Community is more and more forced to play the second one and the Brussels Region and the German Community must content themselves with a third and fourth players' status.

Next we can classify the Belgian federal construction both as a 'jurisdictional' and as a 'dual' form of federalism. A 'jurisdictional' division of competencies (in contrast to a 'functional' one) means that both the federation and the regions have both legislative and executive powers with respect to their (specific) competencies. In Belgium these competencies are exclusive competencies, which produces a 'dual federalism' (in contrast to 'cooperative'). It means that each government is supreme in its own domain of action. Since no joint decision-making is undertaken there are no problems of cooperation as a result of which there are hardly any conflicts of competence. If the latter do occur nevertheless, they are to be dealt with by the Supreme Court. On the other hand does the strict division of competencies not exclude conflicts of interest completely. If there is a conflict of interest it receives a political solution: the so called 'concertation committee', composed of ministers from both the federal government and the communities and the regions, equally balanced in linguistic respect, has to pronounce a judgment by consensus within a given period of time.

D. Concluding remarks

Compared to the Flemings the mobilization of the Walloon collective identity took another course. The Flemish ethnic identity was created along cultural-linguistic lines and turned into an ethnoregional identity after the First World War. Flemish ethnic mobilization provoked a Walloon reaction when the position of the Francophones began to be threatened. The Walloon movement initially started as a language movement, but within the 'true' Walloon movement other aspects than the cultural-linguistic would come to front. In the absence of ethnic characteristics such as a separate common past, a language that was not exclusively theirs and a different religion, it was the Walloon *territory*, i.e. that part of Belgium which belongs to the Romance language area since the Middle Ages, that became the most important unifying characteristic of their identity. (Kesteloot, 1993: 18) Although we must not forget that the concept of territory must be viewed in a broad, not exclusively material way [since "territory is not; it becomes for... it is human beliefs and actions which give the territory meaning." (Knight, 1982: 526, quoted in Murphy, 1988: 27)], it is also true that the Walloon identity of today is less ethnic in character than its Flemish counterpart. That is to say, at least in their official rhetoric, the Walloon elites maintain that Wallonia is not an ethnic nation but a political one. The exponents of the present-day Walloon movement give more evidence of a kind of 'regionalism' whereby taking cultural aspects into consideration is disregarded, even disapproved, especially when Walloon interests are legitimized vis-à-vis Flanders. The nationalist aspirations of some Flemish elites to the contrary, that meanwhile have become predominantly economic aspi-

rations too, are very often and without hesitation legitimized by referring to the ethnic character of the region/its inhabitants. Of course, the 'Flemish culture' has been an important element of Flemish ethnic mobilization from the very beginning, while this is not true for the Walloons.

In sum, according to Jackson's typology there is no doubt that the Flemish ethnic group meanwhile reached the 'ethnonation'-stage. Although Wallonia has also demanded and received political autonomy, scholars do not agree whether to define it as a 'ethnonation' given the non-ethnic emphasis of the elites' discourse. And, as far as Brussels is concerned, the 'ethnicization' of the entire region is highly improbable. The French-speaking 'Bruxellois' could be considered a distinct ethnic group though. This is much less true for the Dutch-speaking people in Brussels. But this might change because the institutionalization of both the Flemish and the Francophone subculture within Brussels reinforces the internal ethnic divisions. For a different reason the Belgian federal system also causes a centrifugal tendency between Wallonia and Flanders. On the political level these component parts of the federation tend to drift apart because it is electorally not rewarding to speak either for Belgium or for the other ethnic group since there the political parties seek their votes entirely within the own ethnic group (region). In general, the federalization of Belgium reinforces ethnoregional identities which has a profound influence on the way the ethnic groups perceive themselves and are perceived by the others. This causes new demands and problems which require new answers. (Murphy, 1988: 175-188)

To conclude this part, in contrast to the Italian case (Diani, this issue) we cannot say that there is a straightforward connection between the Belgian ethnic conflict and the present-day legitimization crisis of the state. In Italy the Lega Nord consciously used the ethnic factor as a catalyst for questioning the political system. This party deliberately grafts its ethnic discourse upon this political crisis. This is not the case in Belgium. The ethnic conflict is neither a cause nor a consequence of the present-day legitimization crisis of the state. At its utmost we could say that, because of its complexity and the long duration of the preceding negotiations, the institutional framework that has been set up to deal with the Belgian ethnic conflict causes some resentment among the citizens and creates new problems as well. As such it might enhance the common people's feeling of apathy. But none of the actors intentionally uses its resentment vis-à-vis each other to foster the existing anti-politics feelings.

III. The remaining 'stumble blocks' within the Belgian federal model: Brussels, its periphery and the language border area

A. *Flemings and Francophones: 'liberal' and 'regulated' views on democracy*

The twofold federalization of the unitary Belgian state has dealt with the biggest part of the interethnic conflict, but there are still some stumble blocks left behind that might endanger the present stability. That is to say, *de jure* all the problems have received a legal settlement. But there are two area's where (a number of) Flemings and Francophones (including the Walloons) *de facto* still 'disagree to agree' and which keep the feeling running high from time to time. The stumble blocks concern the position of the Flemings within the Brussels Region and that of the Francophones in the area just outside Brussels (the so-called 'pe-

riphery') and the language border area. These remaining stumble blocks are problems of language 'minorities'.

How is the situation of these language minorities perceived by both the Flemings and the Francophones? Our main finding is that, according to the situation of the language minority concerned, a different view on democracy is held. These contrasting views on democracy are used for legitimizing the claims regarding the policy (to be) conducted vis-à-vis the own and/or the other language community. Which opinion is held by a language community (its elites) is closely connected to the perceived interests of the own ethnic group in relation to the perceived interests of the other.

Our characterization of the respective opinions on democracy is largely inspired by J.L. Talmon. (Talmon, 1952: 1-13) He confronts two types of democracy, which he labels (in their extreme forms) as 'liberal' and 'totalitarian-messianic'.

The starting point of both opinions is the ideal of freedom. According to the 'liberal democracy', the citizens are *defined as free* and this freedom has to be protected by not touching it. The other type sees freedom as something that has to be realized. The citizens have *to be liberated* in the first place. Therefore political actions have to be undertaken, that eventually curtail the citizens' absolute freedom. There is a regulating task for the political authority. The first type of democracy emphasizes the freedom in the procedures of political decision-making, the second - which we will label here the 'regulated' view - emphasizes it in the outcomes of decision-making. To put it differently: while the 'liberal democracy' type stresses equality in *chances*, the 'regulated democracy' one demands equality in *results*.

B. *The Gordian knot in Belgian politics: Brussels and its periphery*

An often heard statement is that, if Brussels would not have been surrounded by Flanders, Belgium would not exist any more. Whether true or not, it points at a problem that has been at the very heart of the Belgian ethnic conflict for more than a century.

A long time ago Brussels was a relatively small though important Flemish town, located close to the internal language border (which coincides with the border between the Romance and Germanic language families in Europe). In 1846 already 31% of the people spoke French, of whom the majority belonged to the upper classes. (Fonteyn, 1984: 48) Because French was the vehicle for upward mobility a language shift occurred among the Flemish-speaking masses too. As a result, the majority of the Brussels people became 'Frenchified'. In 1910 the majority of the people in seven of the nineteen municipalities of what we call 'Brussels' today spoke French and their number was rising in the other municipalities too. In 1930 the Flemings did not constitute half of the total Brussels population any more. In 1947 almost 71% declared to speak French most of the time. (Fonteyn, 1984: 50) In sum, the "once quiet little Flemish city had become a French-speaking metropolis" (Lorwin, 1974: 195). We do not know exactly how many Dutch-speaking and how many French-speaking Belgians are living in Brussels at

the moment since no language census has been held any more since 1947.⁸ Estimates run from 80% to 90% French-speakers and 10% to 20% Flemings. But we also know that there is a 'grey area' of truly bilingual people who do not wish to categorize themselves exclusively as either 'Flemish' or 'Francophone'.⁹

Frenchification was (is) possible since, what was an ascriptive characteristic at birth can change during a person's lifetime because of the person's achievements or, in other words, because the "features of labeling and contrast are dynamic, subject to contextual reinterpretation, and exist variously at different levels. Boundaries established by both labeling and contrast do not prohibit individuals from moving back and forth between respective groupings or categories, nor do they prohibit people from identifying or being identified differently as they move back and forth." (Seymour-Smith, 1986: 95) Although the existence of ethnic differences itself contributes to the persistence of different ethnic categories, it does not make impossible changes in the ethnicity of individuals and the groups they belong to: "the human material that is organized in an ethnic group is not immutable, and though (...) social mechanisms (...) tend to maintain dichotomies and boundaries, they do not imply 'stasis' for the human material they organize: boundaries may persist despite what may figuratively be called the 'osmosis' of personnel through them." (Barth, 1969: 21) That is exactly what happened in Brussels.

Not only *in* Brussels. The Frenchification of Brussels has gone hand in hand with the Frenchification of its surroundings. These Flemish municipalities around Brussels increasingly became residential areas. More and more people who worked in Brussels, wanted to live just outside the city in this green periphery. Between 1950 and 1960 73% of these immigrants came from Brussels, 21% from Flanders and only 6% from Wallonia. (Fonteyn, 1984: 58) Frenchification was reinforced after the sixties when the depopulation of Brussels took a high flight (Van der Haegen, 1991: 1-6). Because more and more people fled Brussels to live in its 'green belt', the number of French-speaking people in these Flemish municipalities increased drastically, in so far that now they constitute an actual majority in a number of them.

Officially, i.e. legally, there is no 'problem' because several legal agreements have been reached for both the Flemish minority in Brussels and the Francophone population in the Brussels periphery. Despite the fact that the Francophone parties at that time agreed upon the settlement concerned, we can only observe that today most of the French-speaking political elites and the common Francophone people in Brussels and its periphery do not accept this situation

8 Because of the ongoing Frenchification process along the language border and around Brussels, the results of a language census could bring about a transfer of language heterogeneous municipalities from Flanders to Wallonia. The 1947 census indeed held possible unpleasant results for the Flemings. Therefore, they demanded the language border to be fixed for eternity as well as the perpetual sealing off of the bilingual area of Brussels. After years of reinforced ethnic tensions the language border was established in 1963. Consequently, questions with respect to linguistic affiliation have been left out of the Belgian decennial censuses.

9 For Brussels we can deduct the proportion of both populations from the percentage of votes cast by the Francophone respectively the Flemish parties in Brussels, although for two reasons these numbers can only be estimates. The first reason is the 'grey area' of bilingual speakers just mentioned. The second one is that in Brussels a Dutch-speaking person can vote for a Francophone party and vice versa (in contrast with Flanders and Wallonia that each have a separate party system).

(wholeheartedly). In the present discourse one reproach always comes to the front: the alleged non-respect for democracy.

As far as the language minorities in Brussels and its periphery are concerned the Francophones have a more 'liberal democracy' opinion while the Flemings tend to give a more 'regulated democracy' interpretation to the situation. In general, the more 'liberal democracy' view of the Francophones holds that the political authorities should not regulate the use of languages. The opportunities for participation in the political market for (their) language 'minorities' should not be controlled, i.e. restricted. Every French-speaking person living in any heterogeneous language area must always have the right to speak French in his/her relations with the municipal authorities and public institutions. The present situation whereby in some of these municipalities a Francophone can only use French in public affairs in a restricted number of cases (or not at all), is completely 'undemocratic', it is argued, certainly in those municipalities where the Francophones constitute an absolute majority of the (Belgian) inhabitants. So, many French-speaking people argue that these municipalities should become a part of the bilingual area of Brussels. In view of the present demographic situation in the periphery it is indeed very likely that in some of these municipalities a majority of the inhabitants would express themselves in favour of 'joining' Brussels if their opinion would be asked.¹⁰ Extending Brussels to its periphery has always been and still is the ultimate goal of many Francophones.

The Flemings generally reject the Francophone point of view because, they argue, in reality this free market situation has resulted in maintaining and even strengthening the existing inequality. Free language use has led to a massive Frenchification of the Flemish population in Brussels and its periphery. The Flemish dialect that was (is) spoken by the population and even the standardized Dutch later on could for a very long time simply not compete with French on an equal basis given the latter's linguistic superiority and the corresponding higher socio-economic status of its speakers. Despite their demographic majority (in origin) the Flemish-speaking people were a powerless ethnic minority in Brussels. By using Talmon's terminology therefore we can argue that the Flemings consider the competition between French and Flemish/Dutch to have been/be unfair because it was/still is guided by the right of the strongest. Therefore the result (Frenchification) could not be accepted. Henceforth the eagerness of the Flemings to stop this assimilation process.

This could only be achieved, according to their opinion, by regulating (i.e. restricting) the use of languages in the public domain. Francophone 'immigrants' who wish to live in Flanders should be legally obliged to speak Dutch. They have to 'adapt' themselves. Becoming a part of Brussels is completely out of the question. As mentioned before, to a large extent thanks to the combination of their demographic preponderance and growing economic prosperity, the Flemings ultimately received what they wanted: a *de jure* unilingual Flanders (and Wallonia). But, they had to accept a compromise: in six municipalities of the *de facto* language heterogeneous Brussels periphery Francophone inhabitants received language rights, 'language facilities' as they are called. Francophones living in one of these municipalities have the right to have their children educated in a number of

10 This explains why the abolishment of the language census practice discontents the Francophones who, with the results of an official language census in their hands, would undoubtedly be able to add force to their plea for attaching the periphery to the area of Brussels.

French-speaking kindergarten and primary schools that are entirely financed by the Flemish Community. Also, all communications from the local government to the public must be made in both Dutch and French. Francophones can also ask for a number of official documents in French or ask for a free translation. So, as far as the Brussels periphery is concerned, one could argue that Francophones and Flemings managed to find a compromise between the 'liberal' view which in theory does not allow for any restrictions and the 'regulated' view which in principal would like to regulate as much as possible on a legal basis. None of both groups has wished/been able to push its own opinion to its extreme.

By means of the 1963 language law the territory of what now coincides with the borders of the Brussels Region became officially bilingual. In view of the unequal status of French and Dutch this situation would have been to the disadvantage of the Flemings. Yet, in Brussels the Flemings received special forms of protection to overcome this disadvantage of competition. They first received extra means to develop their own education system and network of cultural organizations. Moreover, in 1988 the Flemings received equal representation in the executive body of the Brussels Region (not in its parliament though, something they had demanded too). Despite the fact that the Flemish parties in Brussels cast only one out of every six votes, since 1989 they have as many ministers as the Francophones, except for the 'prime minister' who should take a neutral position though. The Brussels settlement is the reflected image of the federal one. Since 1971 the federal government is composed of an equal number of Francophones and Flemings too, to which a prime minister is added who should act as an arbitrator. Above that, all decision-making within both the Brussels and the federal government has to take place by consensus. So, it were the Francophones who, for fear of the numerical dominance of the Flemings, demanded equal representation in the national government. In this arena it were the Francophones who pleaded for a 'regulated' type of democracy and it were the Flemings who tended to adhere more to the 'liberal' view. This shows that the use of the one or the other view on democracy is basically dictated by the perceived interests and contains an element of strategy. Indeed, according to the perceived advantages for the own group a different opinion is defended.

Despite the willingness to compromise between the political elites of both ethnic groups, which is reflected in the settlements for the Flemish minority in Brussels and the French-speaking population in the Brussels periphery in Flanders, there have always been voices that pleaded in favour of a maintenance of or a return to a more extremist view on democracy, be it in a 'liberal' or a 'regulated' direction. As we mentioned before, as far as the Brussels periphery is concerned, many Francophones continue to make a plea either for an extension of the received language facilities or for attaching the periphery to the bilingual territory of Brussels.¹¹ Especially in those municipalities where the Francophones constitute an absolute majority of the inhabitants they want to have the right to de-

11 Other Francophone propositions have been made such as giving the inhabitants of these (Flemish) municipalities the right to vote for the parliament of the French Community instead of 'obliging' them to vote for the Flemish Community that would be 'alien' to the Francophones. The most recent (February 1996) 'move' on behalf of the Francophone side is the creation, by the Brussels French Community Council (COCOF), of an 'advisory council' composed of Francophone politicians living in the periphery. The COCOF has no competency outside of Brussels though. In fact, both the voting proposition and the 'advisory council' trench upon the exclusive Flemish prerogatives in this area, a reason for which they are vigorously rejected by the Flemings.

cide to become a part of Brussels (referendum). It is argued that not possessing this right, as it is the case for the moment, is 'undemocratic'. As far as the language facilities are concerned, many of the Francophones have always seen them as a first step towards a bilingual status of the periphery. In any case they are considered as an infeasible right. However, a number of Flemish politicians recently made a plea for completely abolishing the language facilities for Francophones, which would come to a full regulation (restriction) of the use of language in the public domain. According to the official Flemish interpretation the language facilities for Francophones were meant as transitional measures. It was hoped that, in the long run, these facilities would become superfluous because the Francophone immigrants and their children eventually would learn Dutch, so the problem would be solved in a 'natural' way. Yet, this has proved to be an illusion. Since the language facilities in the Brussels periphery only serve further Frenchification, it is argued, they should disappear completely. Only legally establishing Dutch as the exclusive official language will force all non-Dutch speaking people in the periphery to learn Dutch and to use it in public, it is argued.

By 'non-Dutch-speaking people' one does nowadays not only understand the Francophone Belgians. Indeed, because of the evolution Brussels went through as the capital of the European Union, more and more citizens of other EU countries took up their residence in the green periphery around the capital. These people usually do not speak Dutch, but English or French as a second language. Henceforth a number of Flemings argue that the danger for an ongoing Frenchification is not over. To the contrary, it is in these days reinforced by the presence of the EU citizens. For the same reason the present Flemish government is opposed to the right to vote for EU citizens because, it is supposed, they would mainly vote for (local) Francophone parties.¹² Francophones to the contrary (because of the same assumption although founded on the 'liberal democracy' view), are in favour of municipal suffrage for EU citizens, in the Brussels periphery at least. A number of Flemings also fear the negative influence of English, often the 'lingua franca' among European citizens, on the use of Dutch in the periphery (and its influence on the use of French, in Brussels, as far the Francophones are concerned). One reason all the more for those who live in the periphery to make them learn and use Dutch in public. It is not clear however where the public domain ends and where the private one begins. There are (extremely 'regulated democracy' minded) Flemings who would like the use of another language but Dutch to be forbidden in a number of 'cultural' affairs that constitute a 'grey area' between the public and the private domain (masses in church, regional television, local radio, etc.).

As far as the situation of the Flemish minority in Brussels is concerned Francophone voices are raised that toughen their ('liberal') opinion. Notably the fixed parity within the Brussels regional government does not receive much support any more among parts of the Francophone majority, all the more because the relative number of Flemings in Brussels is further decreasing, at least according to the most recent regional elections at which the Flemings lost a seat.¹³ It is argued that, in view of the increasing demographic majority of the French-speaking population this parity annex decision-making by consensus rule is 'undemocratic'. The Flemings to the contrary keep defending this form of what they con-

12 A recent study (Deschouwer & Mariette, 1993) shows that the EU citizens in the periphery are hardly aware of the possible political meaning of a linguistic choice.

13 The Flemish parties won 13,7% of the votes in 1995 compared to 14,7% in 1989.

sider to be fair 'positive discrimination'. They thereby use the argument of the defenceless Frenchification to which Flemings in the past fell a prey to and will continue to do so in the future in Brussels.

The Flemings on the other hand still have some grievances on the Brussels municipal level. Despite the legal obligation of providing public services in both languages, they feel that Dutch is in practice still not treated with the same kind of self-evidence as French. Therefore Flemings demand that the existing language legislation is applied correctly. On the other hand, in contrast to the situation on the regional level, there is no guaranteed presence of Flemings in the political institutions of the Brussels municipalities. In 1994 the 'Fourth Congress of Brussels Flemings' demanded a small though guaranteed presence of Flemings on both the legislative and the executive level within each Brussels municipality. This demand has immediately been rejected by the Francophones. They do not only point at the position of the Francophones in the periphery, but also state that granting the Flemings 'more than they deserve', i.e. according to their demographical strength (rather: weakness), would be 'undemocratic' and therefore unacceptable.

C. *The language border and the municipality of 'Voeren'/'Fourons'*

Where territories of speech groups 'touch' each other municipalities tend to have a mixed population. Shortly after the language border between the unilingual Dutch area and the unilingual French area was fixed, in a number of municipalities citizens of the other language group received the same kind of language facilities as in the Brussels periphery. Generally speaking there are, at the moment, no problems worth mentioning, except in one municipality: 'Voeren' (in Dutch) or 'Fourons' (in French).

The Francophone part of the population of Voeren has always protested against the settlement that was decided (by the national government) with respect to what, at that time, still were six small municipalities. In 1962 they were transferred from the province of Liège (situated within the French language area) to the province of Limburg (situated within the Dutch language area). By that they became *de jure* unilingual Dutch municipalities with language facilities for Francophones, while they had been *de jure* unilingual French municipalities before. Language facilities were granted because Voeren has a mixed population due to both migration and its location.¹⁴ The transfer of the Fourons municipalities was part of a 'Belgian compromise': in return for a number of other municipalities being transferred from Flanders to Wallonia they moved the other way round, i.e. from Wallonia to Flanders.

As a result of this transfer the French-speaking population of Voeren became a minority within the Dutch language area (which coincides with the present Flemish Region). Yet, within their own municipality they constitute a (small) majority. Therefore, it is not surprising that this local Francophone majority did not agree with the settlement decided upon them 'in Brussels'. The Francophones received lan-

¹⁴ Before the independence of Belgium (1830) Voeren was namely a part of the 'large' province of Limburg, i.e. the present Belgian and Dutch provinces of Limburg that formed one whole at that time. After the independence this 'large' province was split and after the border between the Netherlands and Belgium was definitely fixed (1839), the area became geographically cut off of the (Belgian) province of Limburg and from then on formed one geographical whole with the province of Liège. Until 1962.

guage facilities too, yet, Dutch is compulsory for all public administrative acts. As a result they became very militant claimants of the return to Liège ('retour à Liège'), as a result of which the Flemish population would become a minority though. Of course, the Flemings refuse. The rhetoric at the moment used on both sides is, again, embedded in a discussion on what it means to respect democracy.

Former acting-mayor José Happart and figurehead of the 'retour à Liège' movement summarizes it nicely: "The Flemings say that Voeren is Flemish, but a majority of the people does not agree. If the same situation would occur elsewhere in the world, the most passionate 'Flamingants' would be the first ones to condemn it. (...) We are in Voeren living in an undemocratic situation and I do not accept that." (interview with J. Happart in 'De Standaard Magazine', 23.05.95) José Happart clearly uses the 'liberal' view on democracy: the (local) numerical majority has to have the right to decide upon its own destiny. Since the majority of the population are Francophones¹⁵ they must have the right to use their language in the public domain. But, since this is impossible, the present situation is a mockery of the democratic will of the majority of the people. According to the Flemings, to the contrary, it were José Happart and his local government who did not respect democracy because they refused to use Dutch in public administration, as they should have done according to the 1962-1963 national language legislation that was also approved by the Francophone parties. For the Flemings the situation in the small municipality of Voeren has become a symbol of what they perceive as the ongoing Francophone disdain towards the Dutch language and the corresponding unwillingness to speak it. It is because of Voeren becoming a symbol that the problem has exceeded the borders of its municipality and has become a 'national' problem.

The developments within the EU also influence the problem of Voeren. It seems that nowadays both language communities tend to make use of the opposite 'democracy' interpretation than the one they use with respect to Brussels and its periphery. If the citizens of the EU would receive the right to vote at the municipal level, the relatively high number of Dutch citizens might strengthen the Flemish votes, at least this is what is speculated on, and by doing so it might reverse the actual power balance in the municipality.¹⁶ Since there are only two lists presenting themselves at the municipal elections, one Flemish and one Francophone, the votes of both Dutch-speaking electorates might render an absolute majority to the Flemish list. Correct or not, this view is being shared, be it with fear, by the Francophones. Henceforth their unceasing zeal in the cause of the return of Fourons to the province of Liège. We are faced with a situation whereby both Flemings and Francophones stick to their original opinion ('Voeren has to remain Flemish' and 'Fourons has to become a part of Liège (again)' respectively), but whereby the legitimization that is attached to each view, is being turned the other way round. The Flemings tend to adopt the 'liberal democracy' opinion by speculating on a future demographic majority of Dutch-speaking inhabitants (Flemings and Dutch), while they firmly reject the same logic with respect to the periphery. The Francophones seem, for the same reason, a little confused. One the one hand they have always been passionate defenders of the liberal view on

15 This is to say, again, according to the number of votes for the local Francophone list since we do not have any language census data at our disposal.

16 In 1991 (census) there were 566 inhabitants of Dutch nationality in Voeren, out of 625 foreigners and out of a total population of 4.226 inhabitants. (Algemene Volks- en Woningtelling op 1 maart 1991, Part 1B, p. 94-95 and p. 186-187)

democracy, but when the own language community is likely to be harmed by changing demographic and political circumstances, they do not know what to think of it and accuse the Flemings of hanging their cloak to the wind.

IV. Conclusion

Val Lorwin once called the Belgian ethnic situation a "unique national triangle of one oppressed majority and two oppressed minorities" (Lorwin, 1974: 199). He hit the nail on the head. How is it possible that at the same time, on the same level, there is both an oppressed majority (the Flemings) and two oppressed minorities (the Walloons and the 'Bruxellois')? In this essay we tried to provide an answer: different perceptions on democracy, embedded in conflicting interests, legitimize and thus reinforce these coexisting minority feelings. Neither among scholars nor among politicians there is a consensus on what 'democracy' precisely means. They all have a different opinion on what democracy is or what it should be. Thinking about democracy essentially is a normative business. Because of this normativity it is impossible to say which view is the 'right' one. One can plead in favour of one view, furnish it with every plausible argument, but it is and remains a normative point of view. Both Flemings and Francophones defend their own interests and thereby develop a view on their interethnic relations that is either of a 'regulated democracy' or of a 'liberal democracy' kind, according to the situation. Both opinions are acceptable as such. Whether you agree or not depends on which starting point you take: freedom or regulation.

Drawing a border always creates dissatisfaction among those who, due to this border drawing, have become a minority. In Belgium this dissatisfaction will remain to exist because this situation has been stabilized partly due to the institutionalization of the ethnic groups. Presently none of both languages is able to 'overrun' the other. The Frenchification of Flemish people (outside Brussels) has stopped, thanks to the language regulation, the shift in the economic and political balance of power to the advantage of the Flemings and the rise of the status of the Dutch language attendant upon it. (Willemys, 1992: 7-8) Likewise, the linguistic and the socio-economic cleavages that coincided in former times, have become cross-cutting cleavages. The times when the common man spoke a Flemish or a Walloon dialect and only the elites spoke French are definitely over. The standardized Dutch¹⁷ and French have become the 'lingua franca' of a much broader part of the Flemish population on the one hand and the Walloons and 'Bruxellois' on the other.

The interdependence of the position of the Flemish minority in Brussels on the one side and the position of the French-speaking population in the Flemish region, i.e. the Brussels periphery, on the other is at the same time an element of stability and instability. The compromises that rule both language minorities have worked precisely because throughout the years they have become a complex whole of intertwined and evenly balanced agreements. If somebody would upset this balance, the stability of the Belgian construction is in danger. It is true that unilaterally changing this situation is impossible since such a change constitutionally requires both a majority in every language group of the federal parliament and a overall two third majority. The Francophones would never spontaneously agree with the abolishment of the language facilities in the Brussels pe-

17 See generally, for a good socio-linguistic overview of the Dutch standardization process in Belgium: van de Craen and Willemys (1988).

riphery. But, in view of the present worsening socio-economic situation of the Walloon Region, they might be forced by the Flemings in return for Flemish financial support. This might in turn have repercussions on the (still relatively weak) position of the Flemings in Brussels. In sum, if any of the constituting parts of the Belgian federation unilaterally sets the ball of conflict rolling, it is uncertain where it would come to a standstill.

Abstract

In the present Belgian situation the three major ethnic groups (Dutch-speaking Flemings, Francophone Walloons and 'Bruxellois') share the belief that they are culturally, economically and/or politically dominated by the other linguistic community. This article expounds the thesis that these minority feelings are embedded in different interest which are legitimized by a discourse on democracy. Both Flemings and Francophones defend their own perceived interests and thereby develop a view on their interethnic relations that is either of a 'regulated democracy' or of a 'liberal democracy' kind, according to the situation. This political 'war of words' is nowadays concentrated on those areas that were left 'untouched' by the recent decentralization and federalization of the country which was designed to defuse the ethnic tinder-box. These remaining stumble blocks concern the position of the Flemings within the Brussels Region and that of the Francophones in the Brussels periphery and along the language border. The article starts with a short historical overview of the Belgian intergroup conflict to provide a better understanding of the present-day democracy discourse.

The partitocracy of health

Towards a new welfare politics in Italy?

by Maurizio Ferrera

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I. Healthcare, political logic and party government

Healthcare is undoubtedly one of the most delicate areas of state intervention: what governments do or do not do directly, and almost literally, affects the chances of life of their citizens. The very complex nature of the production and distribution of health services tends to give a primary role to players with a professional and technical background (doctors, researchers, administrators), in this area of policy: here, much more so than in other areas, knowledge (specific and general, medical and managerial) greatly influences the processes by which decisions are reached and their contents. The great visibility and high impact of these decisions, as well as a strong government involvement in regulating the most important aspects of healthcare (access, funding, organisation of services, etc.) nevertheless means that the specific preferences of political players - above all political parties - retain their own importance.

Despite the recent growth of a fruitful field of comparative research on healthcare policy, the relationship between the former and political parties still remains largely unexplored.¹ True, the literature has highlighted the links between ideological and programmatic positions of the various political families and the features of the healthcare systems which they have helped to build over time. But the direct link between political competition (especially party competition) and healthcare decisions has not been analysed systematically. Yet the hypothesis that this competition has had some impact, i.e. that there has been some "political exploitation" of healthcare by parties, with tangible effects on the content and results of public policy, appears to be highly plausible and, at least for political scientists, is certainly worth serious consideration.

Italy offers more than its fair share of material for the purposes of such research. The healthcare scandals of the early 1990s (the *malasanita* - or evil health care - as these scandal are known in Italy) have revealed practices of political manipulation of incredible levels of sophistication (and cynicism). Furthermore, these practices were just the climax of decades of use of the healthcare resource by Italian political parties for the purposes of obtaining consensus. Reconstructing this history would, therefore, appear to provide interesting material to enrich the comparative theory on the determinants of healthcare policy.

1 For a critical survey of these studies, see Immergut, 1992, chap. 1.

Besides, such a reconstruction could probably also lead to equally interesting indications for the current debate regarding the crisis of the so-called 'partitocrazia' (partitocracy). The healthcare scandals not only testify to the existence of massive exploitation of this sector by the parties but also - and perhaps above all - its spectacular failure both in terms of results and as a way of gathering consensus. The metaphor of a "giant with a clay foot" has been recently proposed as promising interpretative tool for understanding the ascent and - especially - the demise of Italy's partitocratic government (Cotta and Isernia, 1996). This metaphor appears to be highly suited to interpreting the relationship between the political parties and the healthcare system in Italy from the post-war period to the present, and to assess to what extent the dynamics of the national healthcare system contributed to the fall of the partitocratic giant. In the paragraphs that follow I, therefore, propose a re-reading of the events within healthcare policy over the last forty years, emphasising the rise and decline of Italian-style party government in this sphere, and showing how the rise was intimately linked with the decline.

II. From insurance funds to a National Health Service

The political exploitation of healthcare began in the 1950s by the DC, was perfected by the governments of the centre-left during the 1960s and reached its climax in the 1970s and into the 1980s, with the involvement of the PCI and the extension of the spoils system from national level to sub-national level (regions and local health units). The healthcare system generated political resources for the parties mainly through four channels.

The first (in chronological terms, as well) was the selective extension of healthcare rights to the various social groups. At the end of the Second World War, only employees (manual workers and white collar workers) were entitled compulsory healthcare insurance. In the 1950s and 1960s the right to free treatment was gradually extended to new sections of the working population, sometimes even including quite small groups: journalists (1951), domestic workers (1952), managers, (1953), retired state employees (1953), owner-occupier farmers, sharecroppers and tenant farmers (only those in work 1954), general compulsory pensioners (i.e. former private employees 1955) working artisans (1956), home workers (1958), fishermen (1958) working shopkeepers (1960), retired artisans (1963), traders, retired owner-occupier farmers, sharecroppers and tenant farmers as well as the unemployed (1966) and social pensioners (1972). Very often, this led to new insurance funds, with their own regulations (both in terms of contributions and provisions) and their own administrative structure. In some cases (such as the extensions to various categories of pensioners, or to the unemployed), they were true financial gifts: services for the newly insured could be paid for through greater contributions from the working and employed categories. And needless to say each of these little inclusions into the citadel of the welfare system was intelligently exploited by government parties (particularly the DC and the PSI) to retain or attract into their own electoral orbit the beneficiary groups. The political and distributive use of healthcare eligibility nevertheless had a natural limit in the universalisation of cover, which was achieved *de facto* at the beginning of the 1970s and formally established in 1974 (for hospital care), and in a more complete form in 1978 with the establishment of the Servizio Sanitario Nazionale (SSN - National Health Service).

The second channel that generated political resources was the distribution of economic and legal privileges to the providers of services. The most courted ca-

tegrity was undoubtedly the doctors, especially the *medici della mutua* (health insurance doctors), whose caricature in films (a mixture of incompetence and greed) is still seen today as a sort of cultural landmark of Italian society in the 1950s and 1960s. The centre and centre-left governments bought political and administrative support from these doctors by giving them large emoluments and various social guarantees (including paid leave for marriage) (Paderni, 1981). It should be noted that especially in Southern Italy, insurance doctors also acted as electoral advisors to patients (and in some cases as mediators in clientelistic voting). These clientelistic ties between parties and doctors ensured consensus, but also helped greatly to push professional standards down.

The third channel was the intense sub-governmental exploitation of the health-care institutions. The proliferation and solidification of the insurance funds created new public (para-statal) sector jobs that the parties were able to distribute among their supporters and, most of all, to their peripheral lieutenants (with little attention to the requisites of technical expertise and, as a result, considerable negative effects on the operating efficiency of the funds) (Bonaccorsi, 1979). In the 1950s and the 1960s, the *Istituto Nazionale per l'Assicurazione contro le Malattie* (National Institute for Health Insurance or INAM) became a major stronghold of Christian Democrat sub-government (*sottogoverno*). The use of health-care institutions as political spoils continued even after the dissolution of the funds and, indeed, intensified (as we shall see) after the 1978 reform.

Finally the construction of the *selva mutualistica* (a true forest of separate health insurance funds) created new opportunities to obtain secret funds. Culminating in 1993 with the indictment of Poggiolini (the head of the Health Ministry's pharmaceutical services, arrested on charges of corruption), the story surely began at the time of the insurance funds system - although, unfortunately, this will be difficult to document.

The clientelistic practices targeted to the various occupational categories and the shareout of posts produced a long "distributive cycle" in Italian healthcare politics, based on the proliferation of measures characterized by "concentrated benefits and diffuse costs".² As I mentioned above, these measures could easily be financed in a relatively painless way, due to the existence of quite generous "contributory dividends"; i.e. operating surpluses within the funds' budgets thanks to the expansion of working contributors, especially in the private employment sector. This syndrome was not exclusive to the state healthcare system. As a matter of fact it took on an even more acute form in the sector of transfer payments: entire generations of pensioners (e.g. within the self-employed) were blanketed in the new old age insurance schemes created in the 1950s and 1960s without paying any contribution at all. What, if anything, was unusual about the health insurance system, was the fact that financial difficulties came to a head much earlier than in other sectors: debt was already rising around the mid-1960s, especially in the case of hospitals. Various factors were responsible for the early onset of a financial crisis: changes in demographic and employment trends and the consequent imbalances in the actuarial equilibria of the insurance funds, rising levels of healthcare consumption by the insured population, ever rising costs of medical technology and its relative cost, particularly inefficient Italian healthcare bodies, the irrationality of some funding methods (Ferrera, 1993). There is obviously no link between some of these factors and the parties. Nevertheless, what

2 The concept of "distributive cycle" is dealt with in more detail in Ferrera, 1996a.

is certain is that the dynamics of political exploitation of the insurance system, described above, did worsen the general situation, by generating waste and inefficiency and placing distributive interests before the requisites of good management. Typical of this was the hospital reform of 1968, which was approved shortly before the general election of that year; a vast shareout agreement between government parties, trade unions and the PCI introduced the funding of hospitals on the basis of *per diem* payments³: "The one minor drawback of this reform, noted Salvati (1978, p. 10) - was that hospital costs tripled in five years".

In short between the 1960s and the 1970s the healthcare sector witnessed an 'ante litteram' version of the "partitocratic giant with clay feet" syndrome. The distributive obsessions of politicians, on the one hand, and their planning and management incapacities on the other, provoked a policy crisis of considerable proportions, especially with regard to funding. At the time of their dissolution (in 1977) the insurance funds had accumulated total debts of 6,151 billion lira (ca. 3.2% of that year's GDP): a shortfall which has rightly been considered as the main component of Italy's "original" public debt (Mapelli, 1984 and Panella, 1984). Italian-style party government was able, however, to come out of this crisis unscathed through a double operation: the extraordinary write-off of the insurance debt (which was transformed into public debt) and the approval of the health reform of 1978.

Although the first strategy ridded the party-system of the "small nuisance" of previous financial difficulties, the reform of 1978 in many ways crowned and gave new life to a long cycle of political exploitation of the healthcare system. It would be unfair to look at the establishment of the SSN as just another of the usual large shareout deals. Many players who helped to see the reform through (even from the parties) were really inspired by concerns of efficiency, justice and (to a lesser extent) of effectiveness. These goals were, however, unable to take precedence in the decision-making process and ended up being practically suffocated by the stranglehold of ideological pressures, on the one hand, and self-interest, on the other. At a political level, the reform was the result of a double compromise. A compromise of high politics, above all, preceded by an intense ideological competition, centred on general principles and normative references: State vs. Market, Public vs. Private, Democratic vs. Professional Control, Planning, Universalism, etc. (the political and cultural climate of the second half of the 1970s should be borne in mind). The emphasis on principles prevented serious debate on the methods and ways - in law no. 833/1978 - of rationally organising the infrastructure. The second compromise was purely based on a shareout deal. The parties (including the PCI) agreed to broaden the health care *party governmentness*, by creating additional important instruments of distributive government in the newly formed *Servizio Sanitario Nazionale* (National Health Service or SSN).⁴ The main way was through the Management Committees, the controlling organs of the *Unita' sanitarie locali* (local health units or USL), which were politically appointed and in which the reform had concentrated all powers. It is a well-known fact that such organs were allotted immediately: and their *lottizzazione* was of-

³ The daily bill for a hospital stay invoiced by hospitals was calculated by dividing the annual operational costs by the number of stay days - a mechanism which provides no incentive to curb costs.

⁴ For a political and comparative analysis of the Italian healthcare reform see Freddi, 1984 and the articles by Freddi and Ferrera in Freddi, 1989.

ten based on regional legislation which specified the percentages of members government and opposition could appoint in each single Management Committee. Research carried out on the composition of these committees gives a rather desolate picture regarding the technical expertise of the staff recruited during the first legislature (1980-1985); the majority did not even possess a higher education degree (Ferrera, 1986). It should be noted that the parties themselves had difficulties in filling all the positions allocated to them. These totalled about 11,000 posts ranging from Presidents, Vice-Presidents and ordinary members. In many cases not only did the committees contain members without any technical competence, but also persons who had poor political credentials such as candidates who had lost in administrative elections (Berlinguer, 1994). Also the trade unions supplied their own "manpower" to fill the new posts: it is important in this regard to note that throughout the 1980s the trade unions have been prominent participants of the distributive games played within the health care arena.

There has been a barrage of word written about the damage done by the spoils system for the USLs in terms of results in the last fifteen years. That experienced at the beginning of the 1980s was the last "feast" of the healthcare partitocracy - at least in terms of visible politics at national level. A few years after the write-off of the insurance debt, the issue of debts was, once again, on the agenda with growing urgency and the clay began to crumble more quickly under the heavy weight of the spoils system.

III. The 1980s and the new financial government of the healthcare sector

In the 1980s endogenous and exogenous problems surrounding the healthcare service led to a renewed worsening of the problem of (rising) costs and (falling) yields. Healthcare gradually changed from an easy spending resource into a "hot potato" for the parties, especially those in the centre. As it became impossible to pass an effective reform of the reform (which had actually been mooted in the middle of the decade), the sector came under the "axe of the three Cs" (copayments, ceilings and cuts) (Vicarelli, 1995), wielded by the Treasury with the parties forced to go along. The reform of the reform was only passed in the autumn of 1992 by the Amato government, in the wake of an alarming currency crisis. Making costs explicit through the "three Cs" and through the new reform of 1992, nevertheless, slowly eroded the old consensus based on distributive deals and induced a polarisation of interests (social and political) which manifested itself for the first time clearly during the elections of 1994.

Let us consider the various stages of the sequence sketched out, starting with the financial problems. After the reform, Italian style party government found itself having to run a sector of vast and complex proportions, and one which was growing in economic terms, but whose ramifications as well as technical and management implications were still widely unknown. The law enacting the SSN had a system of administration based on a multi-step programming, (national economic programme, national health plan, regional plans etc.) based on "need" considerations rather than available resources. This system never got off the ground (Granaglia, 1990). The first five-party governments shifted the emphasis from needs to resources and appointed a liberal politician with a business background as head of the Health Ministry (Mr. Altissimo), in the illusion that it would be easy to curb expansionist tendencies in the sector - at least in macro-financial terms. Let us remember that at the same time inflation, debt and the deficit were spir-

alling up, while the external constriction of Italy's membership to the European Monetary System began to have an effect. In the first two years of the SSN (which entered in full operation in 1980) there were nevertheless some worrying turbulence. In 1980 on top of a planned expenditure of 15,594 billion lira (4.6% of GDP) the government was forced to allocate another 2,000 billion in October and another 400 at year end (public health expenditure thus amounting in 1980 to 5.3% of GDP). In 1981, the gap between budgeted and actual was once again nearly 2,500 billion. The heated discussions on the *lottizzazione* of the USLs and on the confused organisation generated by the reform at the peripheral level in turn created pressures to return the management of the SSN under some form of control from the centre. The government (especially the Treasury Ministry) took cover and launched a new phase of financial administration of the sector, aimed, on the one hand, at curbing the demand for services by making users pay in part for services and secondly by making the regions and USLs accountable through the imposition of a number of aggregated ceilings of expenditure.

Copayments have been without doubt the most visible (and most unpopular) instrument of government action in the healthcare sector in the last fifteen years. Significantly, the year of change was 1983. Alarmed at the worrying excessive growth in healthcare costs (especially for medicines) in the previous two years, that year the government decided to change the copayment from a (modest) fixed fee to a percentage, making consumers pay 15% of the cost of drugs. This percentage was then raised on several occasions in later years (1986, 1988, 1989 and 1992) reaching 50% in 1995 (limited to the so-called class B set of drugs) - one of the highest copayment rates in Europe (Ferrera, 1995). The policy of copayments was not, however, limited just to the introduction of tougher measures, but also accompanied by action on three other fronts.

The first was the modulation of the taxable pharmaceutical basis, through ever more restrictive revisions of the Therapeutical Catalogue aimed at reducing the number of drugs that could be prescribed at the expense of the state. This process culminated in the reclassification of drugs into three groups: a very limited class A of "life-saving" drugs (available with just a fixed prescription copayment); a class B of drugs obtainable with a percentage charge and a residual class C (payment of full price by the consumer).

The second line of action was the extension of the use of the copayment system first to diagnostic tests (1982) and later to specialist consultations (1986). Finally, the third line of action was the introduction of more detailed legislation on exemptions, based on therapeutic criteria (exemptions due to illness), income, family situation, and age. The copayment policy was heavily criticised for a long time as an ineffective way of bringing down prescription consumption, as having unfair distribution effects, etc. (Censis, 1988). From the point of view of governments which have pursued this policy, however, it generally achieved its aims, which were mostly financial. Pharmaceutical spending has, in fact, stabilised, copayments now represent 30% of this expenditure (compared to 10% in 1980) and the use of prescribed drugs has actually fallen (Ferrera, 1995).

The second major line of government action regarding the SSN, as mentioned before, was the introduction of ceilings on expenditure. Once the intended multi-step planning fell through, from 1983 onward the five-party governments (once again) tried to keep expansionist pressures in the sector under control by placing budgetary limits. The budget bill becomes the instrument par excellence to run the healthcare system from the centre: it is this bill that sets the global allocation for the National Health Fund (NHF) on the basis of available public funds,

to be shared out among the regions; and it is again the budget bill that determines both the copayments and the cuts (the third C: reduction of facilities, staff, investments etc.) deemed necessary to remain in line with the ceilings. Generally under the sway of the Treasury Ministry at the centre, the policy of ceilings (and cuts) was mainly implemented by the regions. As these had little say in the fixing of ceilings, and were not bound by any fiscal accountability, they had little interest in keeping spending down, and objectively did not possess powers of control over the USLs or, above all, over the main "demand-inducers", i.e. general practitioners. The regions in turn engaged in a tug of war with central government (Pistelli, 1995 and Veronesi, 1994). Throughout the decade 1984-1993 the typical sequence of events in each financial year with regard to the health service was the following: fixing of expenditure ceilings, of copayments and cuts in the autumn/winter budget; spring adjustment of the previous year's deficit; alarm in the summer due to the insufficiency of the funds allocated to the regions, consequent delays in USL payments to suppliers (such as pharmacies) and threats of insolvency, lockins etc.; agreement in September between central government and regions on further allocations; new ceilings and more severe copayments and cuts in the next budget. There has been a gradual escalation over time in this sequence of events. On the one hand, the government, under increasing pressure of budgetary restrictions (internal and external), has begun to set ceilings that are quite unrealistic; on the other hand, local health units have made very little effort to curb spending. To give but just one example, very few regions (and USLs) have introduced the systems of effective monitoring of medical prescriptions recommended by the government and clearly set out in the national agreements with doctors. This escalation of the financial stakes between centre and periphery is borne out by the growing gap between the funds budgeted ex ante for the regions and actual ex post expenditure. In percentage terms, this gap rose from 4.5% of ex ante expenditure in 1983 to 20.3% in 1990 (Veronesi, 1994).

In the second half of the 1980s, the issue of fiscal unaccountability of the regions and of the USLs became a *leitmotiv* of the debate on the reform of the reform (Balassone and Franco, 1995). The budget for 1992 attempted to modify this situation for the first time, by officially mooted the transfer of direct responsibility for the financing of health services to the regions. The actual transfer from the centre to the regions of the responsibility for balanced budgets in the SSN was decided by the Amato government only in the autumn of 1992 (even though, as we shall see, it is still to be actually implemented).

Although less visible to the eyes of the general public, the policy of ceilings (and cuts) has also come in for a good deal of criticism for both technical and political reasons: it is said to have had generally negative effects on the technical efficiency of the sector as well as the non-clinical quality of services (France, 1995). Once again, from the point of view of the successive governments applying the policy, however, it has resulted in some quite remarkable changes. It is true that budget allocations to the SSN have constantly risen (social contributions now cover just 50% of the expenditure), and that the gap between budgeted and actual costs has grown. Nevertheless, in percentage terms of GDP, public expenditure on healthcare did not rise much between 1980 and 1992 (from 5.3 to 6.5%) and remains at values that are fully in line with (if not lower than) those of other European countries (OECD 1994).

It should, however, be noted that there is a big mortgage to be paid for this apparent success: the huge hidden accumulated debt of the USLs towards their creditors over time, as a result of operations "off the books" (Veronesi, 1994). Tolerated (and sometimes even directly encouraged) by the regions and already

partly written off by lenient governments, this debt has been the hidden cost of the policy of ceilings and cuts. Estimated at twenty billion lire in 1995 (ca. 1.2% of GDP), this debt is a real Sword of Damocles hanging over the still precarious conditions of Italy's public finance system - a new "hot potato" which the First Republic is sadly about to bequeath to the Second Republic.

IV. The reactions of parties at national, sub-national, visible and invisible levels

The institutional re-organisation brought about by the reform and cost containment pressures at the macro level re-structured party interests in the health-care sector during the 1980s. This re-structuring has been somewhat complex. To fully understand its various forms it is useful to distinguish between national and sub-national levels, on the one hand, and between visible and invisible politics, on the other.

At the national level, the opportunities to exploit the SSN directly became increasingly scarce. The only measures that made sense were the "3 Cs", i.e. those which placed sacrifices on users, producers/suppliers, on regional and local politicians and local administrators. The initiative to work out and introduce such measures was willingly left to "technical" Ministers and to the Cabinet which acted in union with senior levels of the civil service (Court of Accounts, Bank of Italy, Central Service for Health Planning etc.). The parties have kept their distance from cabinet actions: events in the health care system confirm that the functional needs of policy management (in a restrictive sense), which came to the fore in the 1980s, contributed to the institutionalisation of the executive and its independence from the party system. This withdrawal of the parties from the executive sphere has nevertheless been accompanied by the their mobilisation - at national level - in two directions. Firstly, in blame avoidance so as to prevent erosion of support from the categories that were hit by government measures. Secondly, in cross-vetoing all proposals aimed at structural change.

Avoiding blame (and consequently punishment from the electorate) is a primary objective of all political players in general. However, it becomes the primary objective when politics turns into a negative sum game, where only losses are being distributed. The comparative literature has identified many possible strategies of blame avoidance (Weaver, 1986; Pierson and Weaver, 1993). Italian parties in the 1980s adopted, above all, two strategies: "passing the buck" and "finding a scapegoat". As noted above, the introduction of unpopular measures was left to the cabinet, while the parties played off the political responsibility for them against each other, often assigning the "blame" to the regions or the European Community and its pressures for austerity. In some cases, this gave rise to a sort of "jumping on the bandwagon", but in reverse - with parties outbidding each other in proposing attenuations of the "3 Cs".

The strategy of avoidance was particularly cautious when it came to co-payments, the most visible and unpopular measure in the eyes of the mass electorate. Here the syndrome of blame avoidance worked more or less as follows. The government proposed the introduction, extension, and/or higher levels of co-payment (and perhaps passed a decree to this effect). The opposition parties and trade unions protested strongly and, in some cases, took their protests to the streets. The five parties of the majority thus began a sort of 'reverse auction', proposing concessions, new exemptions etc. in parliament. In 1986, for example, charges on medicines were raised from 15% to 25% and then brought back down

to 15%. In some cases, the 'reverse auction' (sparked off also by Communist intransigence and social protest) even led to the abrogation of the measure. Once again, in 1986, the attempt to increase the copayment on diagnostic tests to 25% raised such protests that in the end the five-party government decided to eliminate it completely. The same thing happened to the attempt to introduce a copayment of ten thousand lire a day (ca. five ECUs) on hospital stays, proposed by the government in 1989 (and practised in many other countries). The left-wing opposition organised a general strike, the government parties initially proposed a series of ceilings and exemptions and then gave up the idea. In the case of the "doctor tax" introduced in 1992 (eighty-five thousand lire a year - ca. 42 ECUs - to retain free access to general practitioner consultations), the parties agreed to the introduction of the measure, but later withdrew support from government and from administrative attempts to verify payment, following an almost mass evasion.

The second direction that mobilisation took was the issue of the reform of the reform. Discredited by the furore at the unfettered division of the USLs spoils at the beginning of the 1980s, the parties realised that they had to loosen their control over health (at least at the visible level): as noted previously, the debate on the de-politicisation of the USLs and the professionalization of medical staff and managerial competence had already begun in the mid-1980s. In actual fact, however, the parties vetoed the reform of the reform (especially on the revised USLs) and it appeared that approval would be postponed sine die. It was only the financial crisis of 1992 (and the beginning of 'Tangentopoli') which finally opened a window of political opportunity so that the Amato government was able to finally get the bills through parliament (law no. 421, and later, delegated decree no. 502).

In short, the political exploitation of the healthcare system was scaled down considerably in the 1980s at national and visible level. For government parties, at least, the balance in terms of support and resources was negative; the only electoral strategy possible was the transfer of blame onto other parties; within the spoils system, competition was only defensive, taking the form of a veto on those proposals that directly threatened single shares of power.

At the national, invisible level, however, the party system continued to make full use of the health sector as a source of illegal and secret funding. A fourth C (corruption), through a very refined clientelistic network, was piloted by the Ministry of Health with large bribes flowing through the *Commissione Unica del Farmaco* (CUF or Single Drug Committee, approving new drugs and their classification within the Therapeutic Catalogue) and the *Comitato Interministeriale Prezzi* (CIP or Inter-ministerial Committee on prices): the *malasanità*. The Court of Accounts has estimated that the kickbacks alone which were paid to politicians by pharmaceutical companies between 1983 and 1993 amounted to a total of 15,000 milliard lira (0.9% of the 1995 GDP) and added, on average, 3,000 milliard a year (ca. 0.3 percentage points) to the public finance bill (due to artificially higher prices) (Il Sole-24 Ore, 19/7/1994).

The sub-national level allowed even more opportunities for political exploitation of healthcare than from the centre, even at a visible level, throughout the 1980s. The political administrators of the region and the USLs are, as I mentioned before, not institutionally bound to financial accountability. At this level, therefore, there are no political incentives to distinguish between administrative government and party interests. The local, political and administrative decision makers (especially in the USLs) are, in addition, imbued with a 'debt culture',

that has developed with many years of practice and learning, perhaps in the administration of public hospitals or insurance funds.⁵ To a large extent, the local partitocracy can continue its own distributive games unhindered, claiming credit for the appropriation of resources from the centre and in sharing them out locally or for its own accounting creativity. Being by far the most important sector of decentralised government, healthcare has allowed and promoted the development of a peripheral party government, distinct from (and perhaps in some ways rivalling) the national one, undoubtedly with its own dynamics which are still widely unknown. This local partitocracy suffered a serious blow with the appointment of external administrators to run the USLs (1990) firstly, and with the managerialisation later, introduced by the reform of the reform. The "giant" seems, nevertheless, to be more resistant at this level, at least with regard to the regions. And in the sphere of invisible behaviour its appetite appears to be just as voracious as at ministerial level. As research is beginning to show (Della Porta and Vannucci, 1994), individual USLs were the scene of large-scale corruption, especially with regard to external contracts and commissions.

V. A new political demand in healthcare: prospects for the future

From 1993 onwards the healthcare partitocracy was caught up in the whirlwind of "Tangentopoli" (Bribesville). The wrongdoings of various health Ministers, bureaucratic chiefs of Ministry, members of the CUF and the drugs CIP have perhaps dealt the final blow against Italian-style party government. Speculation "on people's lives" has, in fact, had a particularly marked impact on public opinion. The reform of the reform - finally passed in 1992, as already mentioned - has erected institutional barriers to the presence of parties in the management of the sector and in the continuation of the distributive games at the sub-national level. Following the disbanding of the management committees, the USLs are now run by General Managers who, at least on paper, must possess verifiable technical expertise. The USLs (and large hospitals) are, in addition, becoming public companies, with increased powers of independent management and a duty to balance budgets. The regions, for their part, must make good any financial debts through their own resources. The new institutional model is slowly taking off while old habits die hard: in the spring of 1995 the Italian press reported on continuing attempts by regional councils (i.e. parties) to shareout posts. The regions, for their part, have engaged in a battle against central government through legal appeals, in order to reduce their fiscal accountability: they argue (and they are not totally unjustified) that they do not have effective powers to monitor local spending. The institutional system of healthcare is nevertheless restructuring and its level of party governmentness is gradually diminishing, albeit with great difficulty.

⁵ It has been noted that one of the main causes of regional irresponsibility was "the operational culture of the USLs, heirs of other institutional bodies (hospitals and funds) that were generally run with a shortage of resources to meet objectives (necessary or unnecessary). As a result, incurring debts without the means to pay them off became an accepted state of affairs, and skill was used to obtain more credit from suppliers of goods and services" (Veronesi, 1994, p. 180). These observations provide the basis for developing an interesting theory as to how the healthcare debt grew (and perhaps the public debt, in general), based on a cognitive - cultural and policy learning perspective (Gualmini, 1995).

The account I have just given suggests that this restructuring is to a large extent the result of the failure of party governmentness: its shareout excesses, its corrupt practices, and its ineffectiveness at the planning and management levels. The "financial" government of the SSN by technical Ministers has prevented the declining standards from developing into a complete breakdown of the system. But it has not been able to protect the old parties from the long term political consequences of their behaviour and the progressive erosion of those resources that have traditionally been obtained through these behaviours. Indeed, the financial government of the healthcare system has, in itself, ended up accelerating the break-up of the partitocratic system, generating an ever greater political demand for change. This is a very important point and requires greater development.

During the 1980s, not only did the parties run the SSN at the macro level badly, halting the dynamics of organisational and institutional innovation at the meso and micro levels: they also failed to make choices of a purely political nature regarding the distribution of costs of healthcare services among social groups. It has been said that the reform of 1978 was, on the one hand, a compromise of high politics on principles and, on the other, a compromise on the sharing out of power. Besides ignoring the "middle ground" of managerial and organizational considerations, the reform also failed to be accompanied by clear redistributive decisions (who receives what and, above all, who pays what) - the very healthcare choices which in other developed countries are normally made by the parties themselves (at least in the sense of parties-in-government). These choices, in fact, constitute the "wherefore" of party action in the various policy domains (the *partyiness of government*, if you wish). The "financial government" of the SSN could not do much on this aspect: it has imposed sacrifices where it has been able to do so (technically as well as socially), while the parties have tried to manipulate the social distribution of these sacrifices so as to protect their own share of the electorate from copayments and cuts. To illustrate this point, we could mention the failure to shift from contributory to tax financing of the SSN, the retention of contribution differences between categories, the selective concession of exemptions (for example various types of disabled) as well as the tolerance of widespread fraud in this sector, and inaction against large pockets of evasion (contributions from self-employed workers, health tax and, finally, the above mentioned doctor tax). Applied against such a background, the copayment policy has only generated further inequalities (honest tax payers versus evaders). The policy of ceilings has for its part indirectly contributed, as has been said, to a fall in standards, at least at a non-clinical level.

In the long term, all these dynamics have generated widespread ill-feeling among the consumers of the SSN and have created a constellation of potentially favourable interests for change. This constellation, it should be noted, is tendentially anti-universalist and anti-state, exasperated by the excessive taxes (although ready to avoid them where possible), by operational inefficiencies, by the wrongdoings of politicians, etc. The comparative literature has shown that it is difficult to create and mobilise anti-universalist coalitions in the health sector due to the typical model of service utilization in this sector: everyone needs health services sooner or later and, therefore, everyone is interested in retaining the right of access (Moran, 1991). The case of Italy shows that - under certain conditions - such a coalition can be formed even in a mature welfare state, lending itself to be mobilised at a political level.

As a result of the inability of the old parties (given the well-known macro-political and institutional constraints of the First Republic) to break of the distri-

butive cycle and make bold redistributive choices, the process just described has contributed - and I wish to emphasise this - to the break up of the partitocratic system as a whole. The anti-universalist and anti-state interests in some major social groups have, in fact, been mobilised by the new parties: initially the Lega Nord and later Forza Italia. It is worth remembering that the Lega supported a referendum (rejected by the Constitutional Court) on the abrogation of compulsory membership of the SSN. Forza Italia's electoral manifesto in the elections of 1994 included plans for the dismantlement of the public service and its replacement with a system of vouchers reserved for the most needy (the most radical proposal ever officially put forward by any European party). In other words (and to conclude): the healthcare system shows how the inadequacy of the partitocratic system to produce a policy of redistribution has created fertile ground for the emergence of a new political demand and new political entrepreneurs. The elections of 1994 signalled a re-orientation of the political system in this direction: at least in their manifestos the parties formulated quite detailed proposals. In the coming years, the pendulum of healthcare reforms might well swing (for the first time in Italy) towards greater partyness in the running of healthcare, together with the dismantling of the spoils system. The margins of choice will not be great. Comparative experience shows that the "extremist" options (all public or all private, all state or all market) are technically and politically very dangerous in this sector. The adoption of a mixture of various instruments appears to be the most promising strategy to achieve good results in terms of efficiency, effectiveness and fairness (France, 1994). A serious debate between left and right on the kind of state healthcare towards which to aim (a debate which is pragmatic but also based on value options), open to "non-partisan" voices, but promoted by parties, and subjected to the electoral test, would nevertheless be an important sign that the *malasanità* is truly a thing of the past.

VI. Towards a new model of welfare

A development in a similar direction would be extremely positive not only for the health care sector, but also for other social policies as well. As mentioned in passing throughout this article, the whole welfare state has been the object in Italy of a systematic and pervasive exploitation by the First Republic's partitocracy. In certain sectors (e.g. invalidity pensions or unemployment subsidies) parties (and trade unions) have been able to set up extremely elaborated patronage machines for the individualized delivery of benefits to their voters. The Italian academic debate of the 1980s has coined the label of a "particularistic-clientelistic welfare model" to characterize the Italian case vis-à-vis the other Continental welfare states belonging to the same "Bismarckian" family.⁶ Whether the emerging Second Republic will be able to effectively reform this model and break with the legacy of partisan patronage, without however dispensing with the idea of a national welfare state is a crucial, but still uncertain question.

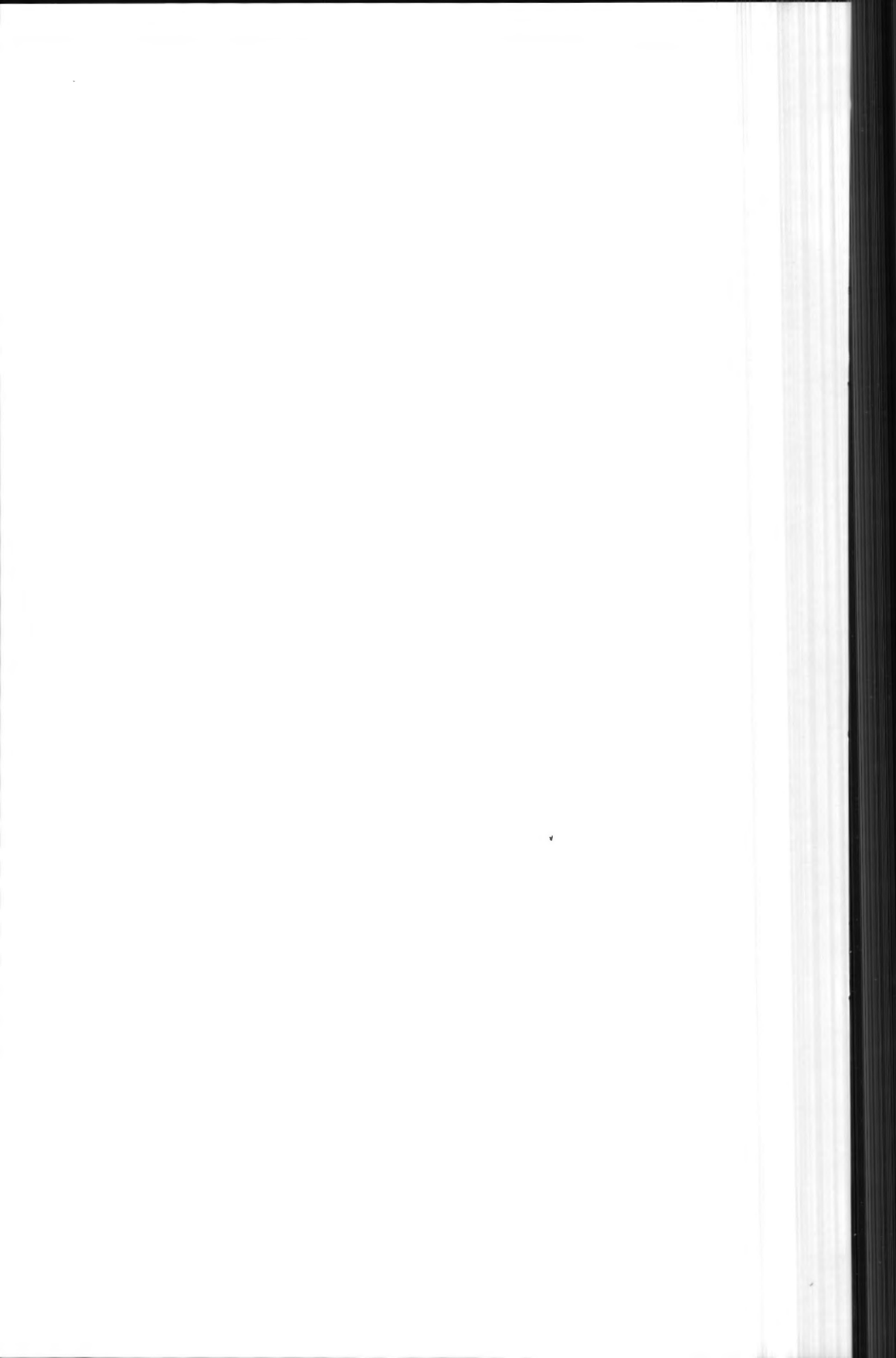
The debates and proposals made during the 1996 electoral competition have sent some promising signs - but they have also switched on an alarm bell. The positive signs are the programs of welfare reform presented by the two opposing

⁶ See for instance Ascoli, 1984 and Ferrera, 1984. For an update on the particularistic-clientelistic model (with references also to the other Southern European countries) see Ferrera, 1996b.

coalitions. These programs are clearly differentiated on the basis of typical left-right principles: but the relevant thing is that they are both serious, pragmatic and realistic documents, devoid of the ideological clichés and simplifications of the past. The PDS has for instance abandoned its traditional, intransigent "etatisme", while Forza Italia no longer questions in its turn the maintenance of a public and compulsory social insurance. The alarm bell is represented by the Lega Nord. This party advocates a dismemberment of the national welfare state and its radical regionalization: regional health services and even regional pension systems, with only a moderate amount of inter-regional redistribution. It will not be easy either to accomodate the demands of the Lega: but it could be very risky to ignore them. Amongst the many challenges confronting the new "Olive tree" government (and, more broadly, the new Parliament), welfare reform is certainly a very compelling one - and possibly even the most important of all.

Abstract

This article illustrates the relationships between political parties and the healthcare sector in Italy since the 1950s. The several ways though which parties have "exploited" health policies are explored, ranging from the selective extension of care entitlements to the various occupational categories to the clientelistic ties with doctors, from the placement of party personnell in the various administrative posts to illegal financing. The author argues that the partitocratic exploitation of the health care sector has greatly contributed to the failure of the 1978 reform establishing a National Health Service. This failure has in its turn backlashed against the partitocratic government, accellerating its demise in the early 1990s. The article concludes with some considerations on the future of Italy's health policy and, more generally, welfare state policy.



Italy: The Interaction between European Integration and Domestic Politics

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I. Outline

A major change is about to take place as far as the relations between domestic politics and European integration are concerned.

The history of the so-called first Italian Republic can be summarized as a process of growing domestic consensus on the European integration, beyond the traditional left-right, catholic-non catholic cleavages. Around 1978-79, such a general agreement between all constitutional parties reached a top level, after both the important statement of the Parliament on foreign and European policy (voted by Christian Democrats, Socialists and Communists as well as by the small center parties) and the common federalist engagements at the first European direct election.

On the contrary the so-called second Italian Republic is characterized by a high degree of uncertainty on the attitude of Italian parties in European policy matters. Since the very background of the past consensus is about to decline, the expected change is supposed to be a conjunctural but not a structural one: once again Europe may be faced with a domestic cleavage of Italian politics, even if this new situation is completely differently shaped than during the former period of 1947-1977.

II. The background of the European consensus between democratic Italian parties during the first Italian Republic

Why did the Socialist Party and the Communist Party join the two fundamental foreign policy choices which, during the very first decades, only had been adopted by Alcide De Gasperi, Carlo Sforza, Altiero Spinelli and by the cultural and political streams they represented?

Such a question has to be answered in the light of several international and domestic factors.

As far as the international implications are concerned, I would like to emphasize two main points that happen to be also the two main differences between Italy and Belgium in the matter of foreign policy in general:

a) in spite of the antinazi engagements of 1943-45, the Allies treated Italy as a defeated nation -as clearly appears from the peace treaty of 1947.

b) during the long era of the Cold War and the dramatic East-West confrontation, Italy was, and was considered as such by the USA, a "border country". It is impossible to really understand the European choice made by the new Italian de-

mocratic regime without taking into account the role of this general historical framework which gave Italy both constraints and positive chances.

These two main domestic factors are linked to the characteristics of the major Italian parties.

a) The Christian Democrat leader, Alcide De Gasperi clearly understood since 1945 the absolute priority for international and European policy to deepen and stabilize the new Italian democracy. The political "miracle" accomplished by De Gasperi was that he succeeded in convincing the very traditionalist and provincial catholic electorate of the need not only to join the NATO and the CECA but also to accept to be part of the Western and European block, including its economic and social values. Anticommunism of course played an important role, but economic interest and democratic values were also part of the strategy, in particular the option of free economy and free international trade (in association with Einaudi) on the one hand, the christian awareness of the need of a supranational democracy beyond the nation-state (see its contribution to the political dimension of the European Defence Community "CED") on the other hand.

De Gasperi didn't want Italy to come back to the pre-fascist democracy and emphasized the international constraints in order to stabilize the political modernisation (as did Adenauer in Germany and, later on, F. Gonzales and M. Soares in their own countries).

b) In spite of the harsh political confrontation with that block led by the Christian-democrats, the parties of P. Nenni (PSI) and P. Togliatti (PCI) remarkably contributed to the new Italian Republican Constitution in 1947, that even allowed some transfers of national sovereignty to supranational and international bodies, likely to reinforce peace and cooperation.

The Left's "step by step" maturation of an option for Europe, needed the communists to burst their bonds with the international communist movement and both the communists and the socialists to follow the europeanization process, common to all the European Left parties (but the Belgian and the French socialists), to succeed in going over from opposition to support of the EC. The evolution of the PCI was partly influenced by the SPD way to Europe, from K. Schumacher to W. Brandt. The constitutional characteristics of their opposition prepared the europeanization of the Italian Left parties.

For the Left parties, accepting European involvement was first of all part of their legitimation process aiming at conferring them an image of accountable government parties. However, it also gave them an opportunity to search for allies in the European Parliament. It finally was a means of improving the cohesion of the European Left. European institutions were the best framework for the social-democratic transformation of the PCI, the biggest communist party in Western Europe. Of course, the "détente"-era, the Ostpolitik and the need to react to the oil crisis (that originated a first confrontation between Europe and the USA) gave a concrete impulse to the europeanization of E. Berlinguer's PCI. The achievement of such a process includes the integration of the PCI (since 1991 Left Democratic Party, PDS) into the socialist group of the European Parliament and into the Socialist International.

Such backgrounds illustrate that, in Italy, Europe was not only a matter of foreign policy but also of domestic politics. On the one hand, the reference to Europe forced the Italian political system to modernize and to become more consistent with the European one. On the other hand, the political parties used Europe to grapple with some traditional as well as new handicaps of Italian demo-

cracy. It would be wrong to consider it only as a party rhetoric. Europe more and more tends to be a part of the parties' identity, more particularly a part of the balance between national and international dimensions of their strategies, since the nationalistic option is no longer to be put forward after the fascist adventure.

One of the major issues of such an evolution was the involvement of Italians in favour of a federal Europe: the very high participation rate in European polls, the strong support given by all Italian democratic parties to the pattern of a federal Europe, including the vote at the European Parliament for the so-called "Spinelli Treaty" (voted by the EP in 1984), the critical attitude against the weakness of the Single European Act and the referendum of 1989 giving the EP constitutional powers.

III. The dark side of the European consensus in the '80s

It is extremely important to realize that the "bon élève" in the matter of European federalism became a very bad one as for the implementation of European standards.

First of all, this clearly appears if we analyse the delayed transposition of European law into the domestic legislation.

Secondly, Italy's domestic compromises of the '80s increased the gap between national economic performance and European standards in matters like inflation rate, public deficit and debt, interest rates. The consequences on currency policy appeared in 1972 for the first time, then in 1978 with the hard debate on the European Monetary System (EMS).

The debate that took place in 1978 was strongly conditioned by domestic factors, such as:

- the crisis of the national solidarity government;
- the break between the PCI and the other parties.

It was the last one. During the 80s, the European rhetoric did not succeed in improving the public opinion's interest in European affairs. In spite of the remaining high participation rate in the European elections, often used as a kind of protest vote by the citizens, the public debate on European options was poorer in Italy than in France or in the United Kingdom. The Italian chairmanship in 1985 of course gave an impulse to the approval of the Single European Act (Milan summit) but, in general, the low profile of the Italian participation to the Council and the Commission confirms the gap arising between European rhetoric and disappointing political action at the European level.

IV. The time of uncertainty

The Maastricht Treaty can be considered as a tremendously accelerating factor of the Italian Republic's crisis: to go on with the domestic "pact for inflation and currency devaluation", in order to finance social consensus and political clientelism, clearly became impossible, in front of the new compulsory convergence criteria to fit in with the European Monetary Union (EMU). Since such means were essential to maintain the internal stability, achieved by the "pentapartito" government but often backed by the opposition parties, the political crisis soon turned into an institutional crisis. The Italian kind of "Consensus Democracy" was about to separate Italy from Europe. The main worth of the new Treaty of 1992 lies in the fact that it openly showed that "the king is naked".

The raising European constraint (simultaneously with the end of the Cold War and with the so-called "tangentopoli scandal") had very important domestic consequences both for the "pars destruens" and the "pars construens": first of all the breakdown of the two major government coalition parties, the DC and the PSI, and secondly the self-assertion of new political parties (Forza Italia, Lega Nord, Alleanza Nazionale) and more political cleavages, opening a new era for the European policy.

The fluctuations of foreign and European policy between 1989-90 and 1995 witness objective difficulties. See, for example:

- the hyperactivist foreign policy of De Michelis ("pentagonal" or Center-European initiative, Mediterranean security policy, conjunctural alliance with UK...);
- the anti-Maastricht parenthesis of the Berlusconi government in 1994 and his Foreign Minister Martino (openly criticizing the EMU);
- the return to European orthodoxy with the Dini-Agnelli foreign policy.

It is a matter of fact that Italy loses, in the new geopolitical environment of the post-Cold War Europe, its past bargaining power as a "border country" in the framework of the bipolar system and that it meets raising problems to keep its status (see the exclusion from the "contact group" concerning Bosnia). Furthermore, the domestic instability of 1992-95 deepens the Italian political inclination towards introversion, which weakens both the European and the international policy of the country.

If pure continuity with the past is impossible, there are still no new European policy patterns in view for Italy. However the country is faced with an absolutely new phenomenon: European integration is about to cause negative reactions.

On the one hand, the need to fit in with the Maastricht convergence criteria resulted in an important and positive tripartite agreement on social and economic policy between employers, unions and government (Ciampi government, 1993), in fact a kind of "import" of the German model of social concertation. On the other hand, nationalistic reactions are about to rise: for instance, the right wing parties (Alleanza Nazionale and often, Forza Italia) represent opposition streams against the European Union.

Of course, the bad habit taken by many former governments to focus on the EU as responsible for economic and social sacrifices doesn't help to promote the popularity of the European ideals. There is a real danger of seeing a dramatic decrease of people's support to new steps forwards due to develop European integration. But it would be impossible to import the Thatcher or Chirac pattern of a "Nations Europe" into Italy.

The worst scenario is the fragmentation of the country. European reference could paradoxically be instrumentalized to deepen the crisis of the Italian nation's unity and more particularly the secession tendencies of Northern Italy emphasized by the Lega Nord.

Some similarity exists between the crisis the Italian and the Belgian states are presently facing: both countries are confronted with the rising of fundamental regionalist movements which sometimes even stress the opposition between European unification and national solidarity. The difficulties of the Maastricht project are of course particularly favourable to a reinforcement of such disintegration bias in weak European countries.

The best scenario is the achievement of the transformation of Italy into a "démocratique de décision" (Duverger) using both the chances of the domestic politi-

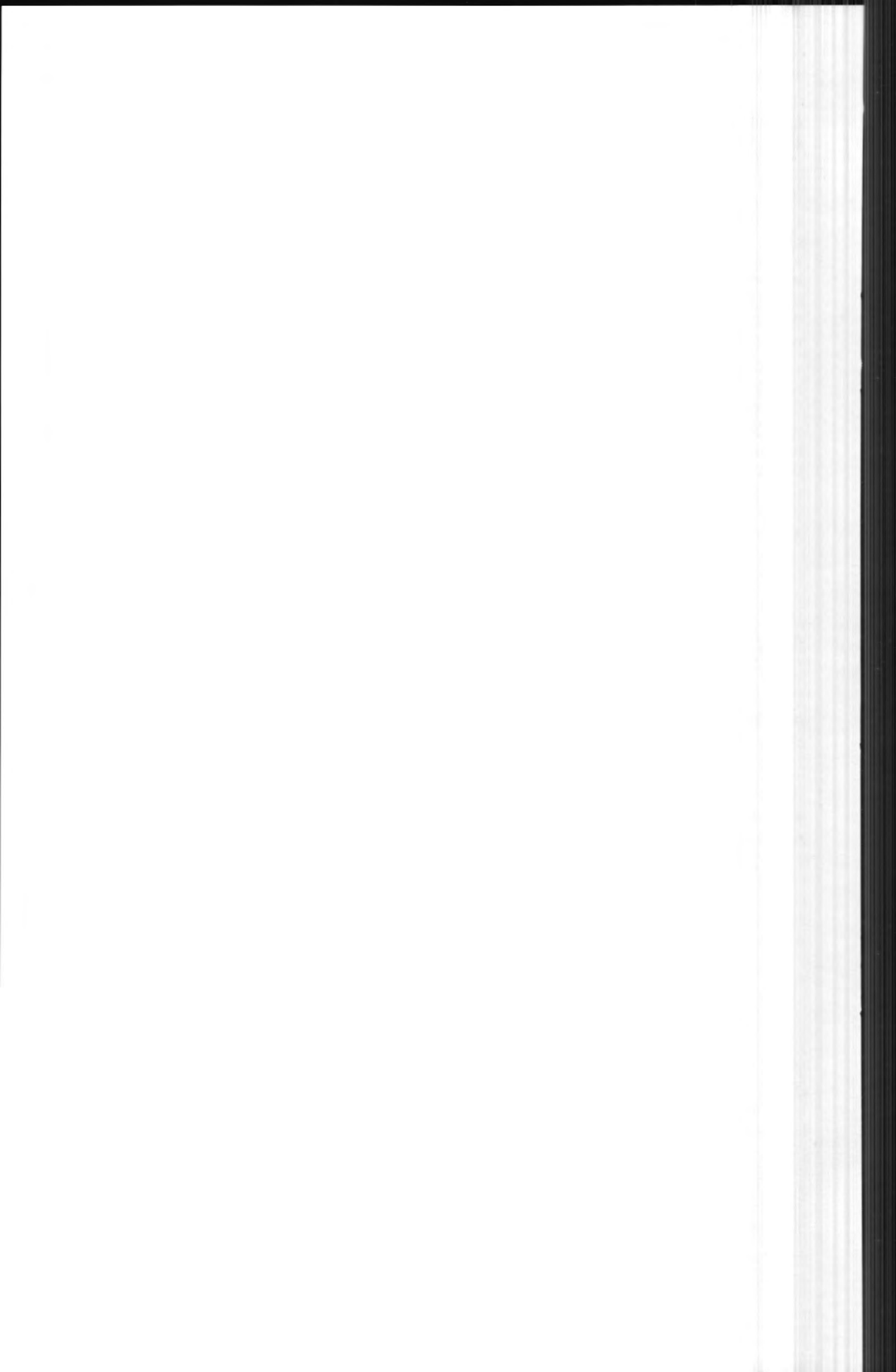
cal revolution and of the Maastricht constraints to stabilize a modern and accountable democratic pattern. The logic of a bipartisan political system could lead to a new and deeper debate on European unification in the public opinion and so improve people participation as well as democratic control of the European process. However European integration is not to become a fundamental cleavage of domestic politics. Europe needs a certain degree of bipartisan consensus between major parties.

The open question is: how can such a virtuous evolution towards a kind of neo-republicanism take place in spite of the limited sovereignty that characterizes many European countries in the '90s? A crucial variable is the new balance between on one hand the extent the unavoidable limitation of the national sovereignty will reach, and, on the other hand, the reinforcement of common European institutions.

Abstract

The European policy of the Italian Republic can be split into three periods:

- *the first one is characterized, on the one hand, by the historical decision of the young democracy to integrate both the EC and the NATO, but on the other hand, by the harsh domestic political confrontation;*
- *during the second period the domestic consensus for Europe increased to become almost unanimous, but there was a dark side: the growing gap of economic performances, and more particularly as far as the public deficit was concerned;*
- *the third period can be qualified as the time of uncertainty concerning both the ability of Italy to belong to the hard core of the European Monetary Union and the negative interaction between the paneuropean fragmentation and the tensions concerning the unity of the Italian nation.*



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