

**Belgium as a Crucial Test of Consociationalism:  
The 2007-2011 Political Crisis**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis aims to challenge consociationalism as a method for reducing ethnic conflict in deeply divided states. It attempts to demonstrate that consociational institutions in fact achieve the opposite effect as to what founders of the theory suggest. Instead of providing political stability, it reduces ethnic integration and promotes conflict between the different ethnic groups. Belgium, which used to serve as an ideal case for consociationalism will be tested against the theory. This thesis argues that the consociational institutions themselves are responsible for the current and other past political conflicts in Belgium, because institutions provide the means and incentives for ethnic parties to have more extreme demands and pursue a road towards secession.

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## Introduction

Consociationalism has been recommended by some scholars as the most appropriate political system for divided societies to maintain political stability. Supporters of the consociational system in fact regard Belgium as the paradigm of a successful consociation. Arend Lijphart observed in 1981 that "Belgium is the most thorough example of a consociational democracy" and claimed that it "is the most perfect, most convincing, and most impressive example of a consociation."<sup>1</sup> While consociationalism encourages power sharing and equal representation of the different ethnic groups, it might lead to the strong fragmentation of the state and to a political deadlock. This is exactly what has recently happened in Belgium. Belgium as a federal state has not been able to form a government in the last 300 days, breaking the time record any country has ever needed to form a coalition government. This unusual event deserves investigation and the testing of the consociational system's role in the current political deadlock in Belgium. Given that Belgium meets most of the conditions that proponents believe would make it an ideal type for a consociation, if consociationalism cannot hold up in Belgium, it is not likely to hold up anywhere else. In this sense, the case of Belgium is a crucial test case for the effectiveness of consociational democracy.

The political crisis that started in 2007 is to be explained by the diverging party politics and future ambitions of the pro-independence and liberal New Flemish Alliance (Flanders) and the pro-unity Socialist Party (Wallonia), which make forming a coalition particularly problematic. However since Belgium has three autonomous regions (Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels) and three linguistic communities (French, Dutch and German) with separate governments each, some of the responsibilities of the federal government could be assigned to a temporary "caretaker" government that can ensure the running of the country in the interim. However, the long-term absence of a

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<sup>1</sup> Lijphart, Arend. "The Belgian Example of Cultural Coexistence in Comparative Perspective." in. Lijphart, Arend (ed.) *Conflict and Coexistence in Belgium*. Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, University of California, 1981. 1-13.

permanent federal government can be a major problem, even if extensive power is devolved to the different regions and communities. As the demonstration that took place on the 24th January 2011 in Brussels illustrates, people feel dissatisfied by the absence of political cooperation and solidarity. The "Shame" demonstrations have urged the politicians to come to an agreement after more than 300 days of deadlock and finally form a government. The current situation is thus undoubtedly "unhealthy."

The consociational system is usually recommended for deeply divided states, of which Belgium is a perfect example. However, according to the major opponents of consociationalism like Donald Horowitz, the system is "inapt to mitigate conflict in severely divided societies."<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Roeder claims that "Belgian power sharing was most stable as long as ethnicity was not elevated above other group rights and institutional weapons did not concentrate in ethnic foci,"<sup>3</sup> asserting that since the consociational system provided ethnic groups the means through their own institutions to be more assertive of their ethnicity, tensions have exacerbated. The regional, cultural and linguistic division between the Flemings and the Walloons could not be more pronounced, preceded by a long history of ethnic antagonism. The historical grievances from the Flemish side towards the Walloons and the growing economic cleavage between the two regions due to the continuing Flemish economic growth hand in hand with the relative impoverishment of Wallonia play a major role in the Flemings' growing claim towards separatism. However, the Flemish separatist party, the New Flemish Alliance, makes elite bargaining and cooperation very problematic due to its extreme claims; thus contributing to the political deadlock. Although Flemish nationalism has gone through several phases during the last decades, at times having less or more support, it has never threatened the complete dissolution of Belgium. The consociational democratic

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<sup>2</sup> Horowitz, Donald. *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985. p. 256. as cited in O'Leary, Brendan. "Debating Consociational Politics: Normative and Explanatory Arguments." In: S. Noel. ed. *From Power Sharing to Democracy: Post-Conflict Institutions in Ethnically Divided Societies*. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2005. p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Roeder, Philip G., "Power Dividing as an Alternative to Ethnic Power Sharing." in Roeder, Philip G. and Rothchild, Donald (eds.). *Sustainable Peace: Power and Democracy after Civil Wars*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005. p. 66.

system is meant to resolve ethnic conflicts between different ethnic communities living in one state. It is indeed puzzling why it was possible for such a political crisis to emerge in a consolidated consociational democracy situated in a peaceful region of Europe.

Arguably Belgium cannot be the ideal model for a consociation since it is currently lacking a government. Apparently the consociational system, even though it had been elaborated in Belgium to its fullest, has not been able to prevent ethnic tensions from producing total functional breakdown of the central government. It is also an interesting question why Belgium has come to face such a political deadlock now and not before. If in the past Belgium was considered to be the most ideal type for a consociation, what factors could have induced the current crisis that the consociational system could not cope with? Or has the consociational system simply run its course and instead of reduction led to exacerbation of conflict? The present research will identify the underlying causes that could have led to the political deadlock and investigate what the consociational pattern failed to do for Belgium, including some of the root causes (nationalism and/or economic upheaval) that generated unresolvable problems within the framework of the consociational system. The main features of the consociational system will thus be discussed regarding their advantages in resolving ethnic tensions within a state, as well as some of the criticisms that have been leveled against it for actually promoting conflict. The limits of consociationalism will be tested with the case of Belgium. This analysis demonstrates that the internal features of consociationalism, rather than mitigating ethnic tensions, actually exacerbated them and ultimately produced the current political deadlock in Belgium. Given Belgium's status as a crucial test case, these conclusions cast doubt on the viability of this model as a method of managing conflict in deeply divided societies.

## Chapter 1— The Debate

### 1.1 Consociationalism and its Criticism

Lijphart first developed his theory of consociationalism in the late 1960's. Its key idea is that divided territories (states or regions) that comprise linguistically, religiously or ethnically different communities can be efficiently governed through consociational principles, this way reducing the emergence of overt ethnic conflict. It was originally developed in opposition to the majortarian type of governance, since its core function is to incorporate all segments of society in a common system of governance, this way reducing tensions and antagonism between the different ethnic groups. It is strongly based on the assumption of elite cooperation, and in this way is a top-down elite-based model. The concept of consociationalism was first advocated by Lijphart in his work *The Politics of Accommodation: Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands*<sup>4</sup> which he later developed in his second book *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration*<sup>5</sup>. In it, Lijphart identified four key organizational principles that characterize consociational democracies: (1) Executive power-sharing (each of the major groups share part of the executive power); (2) Autonomy or self-government (each group enjoys a certain amount of autonomy especially in matters that are of cultural concern); (3) Proportionality (each ethnic group is proportionally represented in key public institutions and the Parliament); (4) Minority veto (minorities can prevent legislations that threaten their vital interests)<sup>6</sup>.

Lijphart also acknowledges other solutions to ethnic conflict, namely (1) *partition*, which can only work if people are neatly divided into two or more distinct regions; and (2) *assimilation* which is likely to happen if one group forms a clear majority. He argues that the solution of *consociationalism* is the best way to stabilize democracy in plural societies. Lijphart also specifies a

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<sup>4</sup> Lijphart, Arend. *The Politics of Accommodation: Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968.

<sup>5</sup> Lijphart, Arend. *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977.

<sup>6</sup> Lijphart, Arend. "Consociational Democracy." *World Politics* 21 (2). 1969. p. 207-25.

number of favorable conditions that could make consociationalism more likely to work, the most important of which include: "the absence of a majority ethnic group and the absence of large socio-economic differences among groups"<sup>7</sup>. He specifies seven additional favorable factors: (1) ethnic groups should be roughly the same size so that balance of power exists among them; (2) there should not be too many groups (3 to 5) so that negotiation is still possible among them; (3) the total population of the country shall be relatively small; (4) external dangers promote the internal unity of the state; (5) overarching loyalties should be stronger than particularistic ethnic loyalties; (6) if ethnic groups are more concentrated, federalism can promote better territorial autonomy; (7) prior traditions of compromise between the different groups<sup>8</sup>. These conditions could make consociational democracy work more efficiently, however Lijphart claims that these factors are not *decisive*, only *helpful*. Even if a state encompasses all these factors, success is not guaranteed, whereas in other cases it still might work even though conditions are unfavorable. Lijphart thus proposes consociationalism for most plural societies, even if initial conditions are unfavorable. Therefore, Lijphart would have predicted that consociationalism would ameliorate conflict in Belgium rather than exacerbate it. The question remains whether increased tensions in Belgium were driven by consociational institutions themselves, as expected by Horowitz, or by larger structural factors that these institutions ultimately failed to address. If the latter, the question remains why these institutions failed to contain growing ethnic tensions in Belgium.

Lijphart's theory has received considerable criticism from various scholars. According to the critics, consociationalism may not be a justified form of governance in all divided states since the power sharing system leads to strong polarization and reinforces the already existing cleavages (social, economic, cultural, etc.). Rinus van Schendelen argues that consociationalism will further a certain party's political interests instead of the group's they represent since elites are allowed to

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<sup>7</sup> Lijphart, Arend. "The Power-Sharing Approach," in Joseph Montville (ed.) *Conflict and Peacemaking in Multiethnic Societies*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1990. p. 491-509.

<sup>8</sup> Lijphart, Arend. "The Power-Sharing Approach," *op. cit.*, p. 498.

bargain on behalf of the group with very little constituent oversight.<sup>9</sup> Brian Barry claimed that consociationalism is not a real theory, but a mere tautology joining together segmentation, dissensus, elite accommodation, stability and the consociational 'devices'. Since consociational democracy builds on a divided society and elite cooperation it incorporates both the origins and the solution of a problem, therefore implying a paradox.<sup>10</sup> Laitin claims that Lijphart overuses the concept of consociationalism and recommends it for the most different cases where the desirable conditions are not at all present. "If conditions are favorable, Lijphart's theory leads him to propose a consociational [power-sharing] system; if conditions are unfavorable, he proposes the same. The status of the conditions is questionable if the score [of the favorable versus unfavorable conditions] does not alter the recommendation."<sup>11</sup>

Many scholars in fact claim that consociationalism instead of promoting the accommodation of different ethnic groups, *exacerbates ethnic conflict*. Nordlinger claims that segmental autonomy creates more of an incentive for secessionist demands. Therefore consociationalism, even though it intends to achieve a peaceful coexistence between different ethnic groups, might eventually lead to extreme polarization and the collapse of the federal system.<sup>12</sup> Similarly Cornell asserts that autonomy is the first step towards secession and once in place triggers an irreversible chain of events that lead to collapse, since through their own political institutions ethnic groups will have the means to press for further concessions, eventually resulting in secession.<sup>13</sup> Hale argues that if states encompass a so called "core ethnic region" that incorporates at least 20% more of the whole population than the second largest ethnic group (certainly true for the Flemish in Belgium), the

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<sup>9</sup> Schendelen, Rinus van. "Consociational Democracy: The Views of Arend Lijphart and Collected Criticisms." *Acta Politica* 19, 1984.

<sup>10</sup> Barry, Brian. "Political Accommodation and Consociational Democracy." *British Journal of Political Science*. Oct 1975, 5 (4). p. 480.

<sup>11</sup> Laitin, David. "South Africa: Violence, Myth and Democratic Reform." *World Politics* 39. 1987. p. 265. Lustick, Ian. "Stability in Deeply Divided Societies: Consociationalism Versus Control." *World Politics* 31. 1979. pp. 107; Schendelen, Rinus van. "The Views of Arend Lijphart and Collected Criticisms." *Acta Politica* 19, 1984. pp. 34.

<sup>12</sup> Nordlinger, E. A. *Conflict Regulation in Divided Societies*. Cambridge, MA: Cent. Int. Aff. Harvard University, 1972. p. 32.

<sup>13</sup> Cornell, Svante. 2002. "Autonomy as a Source of Conflict: Caucasian Conflicts in Theoretical Perspective," *World Politics*, Vol. 54, No. 2, p. 254.

majority is likely to pursue sovereignty.<sup>14</sup> Even though Lijphart lists geographical concentration in his later work as a favorable condition, it has been strongly criticized by scholars since the ethnic divide becomes more pronounced due to its institutionalization by the consociational system itself. This way instead of integrating, the consociational system only strengthens and enforces ethnic division.<sup>15</sup> According to Barry, if "the basis of division is ethnic the question may not be how the country is to be run but whether it should be a country at all,"<sup>16</sup> He claims that ethnic identities are more difficult to overcome due to their 'primordial' qualities than ideological/religious identities. Consociationalism, due to its top-down approach and by reducing interaction between the ethnic groups apart from their elites, can make these ethnic loyalties more pronounced and the creation of an overarching national identity more problematic. According to Roeder and Rothchild, power-sharing institutions empower ethnic groups to press for further demands instead of promoting a mutual concession between the different parties. The power-sharing system provides them both the motives and the means to escalate ethnic conflict.<sup>17</sup> Horowitz claims that consociations are more likely "the products of resolved struggles or of relatively moderate cleavages," and claims that they are "inapt to mitigate conflict in severely divided societies."<sup>18</sup>

Horowitz, also argues that consociationalism can in fact strengthen ethnic divides and questions the viability of grand coalitions since they can lead to stronger intra-ethnic competition, instead of a competition between rival ethnic groups. "If each group were represented by a single set of leaders, then leaders would indeed have more latitude to cooperate across group lines," but since ethnic groups themselves are not cohesive, this makes cooperation less plausible.<sup>19</sup> It can make leaders of the different subcultures more vulnerable, while consolidating the ethnic divide

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<sup>14</sup> Hale, Henry. 2004. "Divided We Stand: Institutional Sources of Ethnofederal State Survival and Collapse," *World Politics*, Vol. 56, No. 2, p. 173.

<sup>15</sup> Lijphart, Arend. *Power-sharing in South Africa. op. cit.*, p. 119-128.

<sup>16</sup> Barry, Brian. "Political Accommodation and Consociational Democracy." *op. cit.*, p. 503.

<sup>17</sup> Rothchild, Donald. Roeder, Philip G. "Power Sharing as an Impediment to Peace and Democracy." in Roeder, Philip G. and Rothchild, Donald (eds.). *Sustainable Peace: Power and Democracy after Civil Wars*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005. p. 36.

<sup>18</sup> Horowitz, Donald. *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*. p. 256. as cited in O'Leary, Brendan. "Debating Consociational Politics: Normative and Explanatory Arguments." p. 4.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 574.

instead of bridging it.<sup>20</sup> According to Sinardet it also promotes ethnic outbidding,<sup>21</sup> as elites are only accountable to the group they represent, which contributes to the creation of the illusion of majoritarianism.<sup>22</sup> According to Andeweg, "consociationalism does not address the problem of conflict regulation in a society with groups of shifting membership that are divided by temporary differences of opinion."<sup>23</sup>

Lijphart himself recognized some of the dangers that inhere to consociational systems. He noted that such systems can seriously slow down the decision-making due to the difficulty of achieving elite consensus in grand coalitions. Second, if proportionality is applied in the public services, it can interfere with merit-based appointments. Segmental autonomy could also lead to the multiplication of agencies, plus minority vetoes can impose a serious deadlock (a concern that Lijphart views as a problem of inefficiency). However, he claims that while some of these difficulties might arise in the short run, they can be resolved over the long run through processes of elite bargaining that reinforce long-term stability<sup>24</sup>

In his 1969 paper "Consociational Democracy" Lijphart emphasizes the importance of elite cooperation, defining the government as an 'elite cartel' which should be able to (1) accommodate the diverging interests of the subcultures; (2) join in a common effort with the elites of the rival subcultures in order to transcend cleavages; (3) have a strong commitment to the maintenance and the cohesion of the system; (4) realize the dangers of political fragmentation.<sup>25</sup> Elite cooperation, which is not only conducive but essential for consociationalism to work, is a critical foundation for

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p 575.

<sup>21</sup> Gagnon defines ethnic outbidding as a "competition to attract popular support [that] leads political actors to try appear the most supportive of ethnic claims, which causes an almost inevitable spiral toward conflict with other ethnic groups" in Gagnon, V.P. "Ethnic Conflict as Demobilizer: The Case of Serbia." presented at the workshop "The Balkans: Nationalism and Ethnicity," Hamilton College, Clinton, NY, April 9, 1994.

<sup>22</sup> Sinardet, Dave. "From consociational consciousness to majoritarian myth: Consociational democracy, multi-level politics and the Belgian case of Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde." *Acta Politica*, Sep 2010, 45; 3; 346-369.

<sup>23</sup> Andeweg, Rudy. "Consociational Democracy." *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2000, Vol. 3 Issue 1, p. 17.

<sup>24</sup> Lijphart, Arend. *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration. op. cit.*, p. 50-51.

<sup>25</sup> Lijphart, Arend. "Consociational Democracy." *op. cit.*, p. 216.

its functioning. Indeed, the lack of elite cooperation plays a crucial role in the crisis in Belgium, as will be explained later on. Therefore the paradox inherent in consociationalism, drawing both on ethnic divide and elite cooperation as articulated above by Barry, and the deepening of the divides due to intra-ethnic competition and strict electoral separation based on ethnicity (Horowitz) are all very pertinent in the case of Belgium. Strong differences in opinion about a particular issue (Andeweg) could create a deadlock if the elites' intent on cooperation and the maintenance of the system is not stronger than defending their interests in a particular matter.

## **1.2 The Argument**

The consociational system through its four key features (grand coalition, proportionality, group autonomy and minority veto) defined by Lijphart, is meant to decrease ethnic conflict and accommodate the different ethnic groups living in one state. Even though Belgium has been defined by Lijphart as the ideal type that closely fits his model, the fact that it has been unable to form a coalition government for the last 300 days, and has a political history that has often been marked by political deadlock, suggests a paradox. The mechanisms of the consociational system, even though they were originally designed to reduce conflict, promote it. Some of the paradoxes inherent in the consociational system have been explained above, however, in this section I intend to specify which mechanisms are primarily responsible for promoting ethnic conflict.

The power-sharing institutions provide ethnic groups the leverage, the tools and the inspiration to mobilize around demands for greater autonomy and eventually secession. According to Roeder, one of the main opponents of the power-sharing system, "power-sharing arrangements create incentives for ethnic leaders to escalate both the stakes and the means of conflict."<sup>26</sup> He also claims that "under power-sharing ethnic leaders are more likely to make more extreme demands on behalf of their ethnic groups and to inflict greater losses on the leaders of the common-state."<sup>27</sup> This

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<sup>26</sup> Roeder, Philip G, "Power Dividing as an Alternative to Ethnic Power Sharing." *op. cit.*, 56.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

way the bargaining range becomes reduced and it becomes more difficult to establish a compromise between the different parties due to the fact that minorities become a lot more empowered by the power-sharing institutions than they would in a majoritarian system. "Power-sharing may unravel through a domino effect of cascading defection. Each demand of an ethnic group for greater rights at the expense of the common-state government inspires others to make similar or greater demands because being left behind will leave them worse off."<sup>28</sup> This way an irreversible process is put into motion, which can eventually result in the secession of the ethnic group. Similarly Cornell claims that if ethnic groups are given autonomy, the political institutions will empower them to pursue secessionist claims. "The institution of autonomous regions is conducive to secessionism because institutionalizing and promoting the separate identity of a titular group increases that group's cohesion and *willingness* to act, and establishing political institutions increases the *capacity* of that group to act."<sup>29</sup>

The consociational system when applied in ethnically divided societies positions ethnicity into the foreground thereby making all issues ethnic issues. "Under power-sharing institutions in ethnically divided societies politicians have greater incentive to make all issues an ethnic issue, and so ethnicity is seldom irrelevant to any policy question....this ethnification of issues, in turn, leads to the elimination of cross-cutting cleavages; only policy divisions that are cumulative rather than cross-cutting are likely to reach the government."<sup>30</sup> Roeder emphasizes the consociational system's role in deepening the ethnic divide through the system's reification of ethnicity. "Belgian power-sharing was most stable as long as ethnicity was not elevated above other group rights and institutional weapons did not concentrate in ethnic foci."<sup>31</sup> Roeder claims that if the power-sharing system is not primarily based on religious/class differences but on ethnic divides, the system has little potential to be long-lasting. He claims that while previous class or religious cleavages tended

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<sup>28</sup> Roeder, Philip G, "Power Dividing as an Alternative to Ethnic Power Sharing." *op. cit.*, p. 57.

<sup>29</sup> Cornell, Svante. 2002. "Autonomy as a Source of Conflict: Caucasian Conflicts in Theoretical Perspective," *op. cit.*, p. 252.

<sup>30</sup> Roeder, Philip G, "Power Dividing as an Alternative to Ethnic Power Sharing." *op. cit.*, p. 56.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

to be cross-cutting therefore more integrative, the reinforced ethnic cleavage by the 1962 language laws drew a fix border which made integration impossible. "The transformation of Belgium's multiple-majority democracy of the 1970s into an ethnic power-sharing arrangement has made Belgium less stable... the rights of ethnic groups have come to trump the rights of other groups and, particularly since the adoption of the 1994 Constitution, the Regional Councils have come to concentrate more institutional weapons in their hands."<sup>32</sup> Since the emphasis on the ethnic differences through the 1962 language laws and the continuous reforms since the 1970s that devolve more and more power to each ethnic group, Belgium has embarked on a route that seems irreversible. According to Roeder the consociational model thus leads to the stronger fragmentation of the state, empowers Flemish secessionist claims and therefore increases ethnic conflict.

Rothchild and Roeder list a number of mechanisms inherent in the consociational system that empower ethnic leaders to generate instead of reduce ethnic conflict. They also claim that although ethnic leaders might be sincere in their commitments to power-sharing, once the power-sharing system is in place, commitment might abate, especially due to the so called "second-generation problem."<sup>33</sup> Incentives tend to shift as the contract becomes a reality, especially since the following generation had not been present during the conditions that made a power-sharing arrangement necessary. They also claim that power-sharing institutions lead to "governmental inefficiency" in the long run since the government and legislature intends to represent all major ethnic groups which can lead to the multiplication of political parties in both the legislature and the government.<sup>34</sup> This can slow down policy making and is more likely to produce a deadlock. The fragmentation of the party system is also more likely during ethnic power-sharing since parties become duplicated based on ethnicity besides the already existing ideological cleavages. In addition, "mutual vetoes can be used to begin a game of brinkmanship in which each side threatens to force a deadlock in governmental decision-making until the other side grants further

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66-67.

<sup>33</sup> Rothchild, Donald. Roeder, Philip G. "Power Sharing as an Impediment to Peace and Democracy." *op. cit.*, p. 38.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p.39.

concessions.”<sup>35</sup> The mutual veto instead of reducing mutual fears, can empower ethnic groups for further demands. The above mentioned mechanisms are very apparent in the case of Belgium, since due to party fragmentation government formation becomes a lot more problematic and a real challenge to reach a mutual agreement on various issues. The mutual veto empowers ethnic groups to push for further claims and less willing to compromise, resulting in a political gridlock.

I argue that the political crisis in Belgium is not due to some external factors or problems the consociational system could not tackle, but that it is the consociational system itself that led to the fragmentation of the state, triggering the resurgence of separatist claims. In this thesis, I will present the evolution of the consociational system in Belgium step-by-step and describe each political crisis in relation to the evolution of the consociational system, in this way demonstrating the interconnectedness of consociational reforms with political instability. It will thus become clear that the consociational system instead of reducing ethnic conflict served to increase the tension between the ethnic groups by providing the means for these groups to pursue a road towards separation. It will also become clear that it is not the first time that Belgium faces a severe political deadlock, in fact it has already happened three times since it embarked on the route towards consociationalism, which suggests that even if it had once been an ideal model for a consociation, it has not managed to maintain its position due to the inherent flaws of the consociational system itself. Since Belgium has been identified by Lijphart as a case where consociational institutions were most completely implemented and which has the most favorable initial conditions, one can argue that if the system did not promote ethnic compromise in Belgium, then it is even less likely to do so in other cases where conditions are far less favorable.

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

## Chapter 2— Methodology and Research Design

### 2.1 Case Selection: Consociationalism in Belgium

Consociationalism is closely associated with Belgium, which served as a role model for setting up consociational systems of democracy elsewhere (eg. Bosnia). Therefore it is indeed puzzling how such a political deadlock could have taken place. Since Belgium has been identified by Lijphart as the ideal case for consociationalism, it should serve as the best candidate to stand a crucial test of consociationalism. In 1981 Lijphart predicted a long-lasting and peaceful coexistence of the Belgian communities under a consociational democratic structure and described Belgium as "the most perfect, most convincing, and most impressive example of a consociation"<sup>36</sup> Lijphart advocates consociationalism for most divided states, but in the case of Belgium he envisioned its long-lasting and stable success above all other potential candidates. According to Lijphart, the success of the Belgian model lies in the fact that Belgium implemented not just the initial four elements, but all eight institutions that he believed were central to successful consociationalism: (1) executive power-sharing: grand coalitions; (2) balanced executive-legislative relations and semi-separation of powers; (3) balanced bicameralism and minority representation; (4) multiparty system; (5) multidimensional character of the party system; (6) proportional representation; (7) territorial and non-territorial "federalism" and decentralization; (8) minority veto.<sup>37</sup> As Belgium used to have all the eight consociational institutions, they certainly made it the perfect embodiment of the consociational system. Since its first state reform in the 1970s, Belgium had always had a grand coalition consisting of 4-6 parties (4.6 on average since 1968), comprising both Flemish and

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<sup>36</sup> Lijphart, Arend. "The Belgian Example of Cultural Coexistence in Comparative Perspective." *op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Walloon parties.<sup>38</sup> The Parliament has also consisted of approximately 6-8 parties on average since 1968, making it a strongly multi-party system.<sup>39</sup> The ministerial positions are equally divided among the Dutch and French speakers (7-7 each) in the cabinet. The territorial (regions: Wallonia, Flanders, Brussels) and non-territorial (communities: Dutch-, French-, and German-speaking) autonomy of the ethnic groups guarantees that the power is shared with the federal government. Through proportional representation in terms of both the seats in the legislature and the division of functions in the public sector, the representation of all minorities is guaranteed. The minority veto protects the rights of both the Francophone minority and the Flemish majority through the 'alarm bell procedure.' If three quarters of a language group judges that a bill "could severely damage the relations between the communities, they can 'ring' the alarm bell introducing motion."<sup>40</sup> In order to introduce an institutional reform *double majority* is needed from *both* language groups, which again strongly relies upon the consociational logic of consensus among the principal ethnic groups.

Besides the fact that Belgium implemented nearly all of the elements of consociational democracy, making it a crucial test case, it also meets some of the conditions that Lijphart identified as favorable for consociationalism (see page 4). The population is relatively small, approximately 10,7 million, which should make the decision-making process less complex according to Lijphart. There are two major ethnic groups, the Flemings and the Walloons, since the German-speaking community comprises less than 1% of the total population. Negotiation between the elites should be more efficient due to the small number of ethnic groups, according to Lijphart. The geographic concentration of the ethnic groups is also predominant in Belgium, which is supposed to facilitate group autonomy.<sup>41</sup> Belgium has had a tradition of compromise during the last 40 years in which the evolution towards an ethnofederal system was based on the leaders' consent and was not forcefully imposed by the state. Even though it had been a unitary state from 1830 onwards, it had not been

<sup>38</sup> De Winter, Lieven; Dumont, Patrick. "Do Belgian Parties Undermine the Democratic Chain of Delegation." *West European Politics*, Nov2006, Vol. 29 Issue 5, p. 958.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 958.

<sup>40</sup> Sinardet, Dave. "From consociational consciousness to majortarian myth: Consociational democracy, multi-level politics and the Belgian case of Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde." *op. cit.*, p. 354.

<sup>41</sup> Lijphart, Arend. *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration. op. cit.*, p. 497.

marked by civil wars or any ethnic violence. In addition, the state is based on the rule of law and strongly promotes human rights, making it a democratic ethnofederation.

All these factors suggest that Belgium should qualify as the perfect candidate for consociationalism to perform its promised function of reducing ethnic tensions. However it will become clear that no matter if a state qualifies most of the favorable conditions, peace among the ethnic groups is by no means guaranteed due to the consociational system's inherent flaws. To gain a better understanding about how exactly consociationalism has exacerbated ethnic conflict through its various institutions, I will use the following method.

## **2.2 Methodology**

Since Belgium has been identified as a crucial test case for consociationalism, where the system was implemented according to the book and where the initial conditions were most favorable, consociationalism must be shown to reduce conflict here; otherwise, we cannot believe that it will perform better in other cases, where consociationalism is implemented less completely and/or that have fewer favorable conditions. Because it has met all the conditions of Lijphart's theory of consociationalism, it qualifies as a "crucial case" for testing the validity of the theory. According to Eckstein, "crucial case-studies [] must closely fit a theory if one is to have confidence in the theory's validity."<sup>42</sup> Since Belgium is a 'crucial case' for the testing of consociationalism, it is plausible to argue that if consociationalism fails in Belgium it is very likely to fail in other cases where the conditions are less ideal.

I intend to shed light on the underlying problems leading to the current defect of the consociational model resulting in a political deadlock; I also show that these defects have led not just to the recent crisis, but are also implicated in previous conflicts since Belgium embarked on the route of consociationalism. The dependent variable in my research is ethnic conflict at the state level resulting in political deadlock in the central government. It is very unlikely that violent

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<sup>42</sup> Eckstein, Harry. "Case Study and Theory in Political Science", in F. Greenstein, N. Polsby (eds.). *Handbook of Political Science Vol. 7: Strategies of Inquiry*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1975. p. 119.

conflict would take place in current Belgium; therefore, the focus will be on the type of conflict that could happen in Belgium and the type of conflict that consociationalism is best equipped to handle—conflicts within the central government at the federal level. Whether the consociational system itself (since it has certain inherent flaws explained above) or other structural factors produced these crises will be examined in the following analysis. I intend to demonstrate that new consociational/federal state reforms that aimed to resolve ethnic tensions have only exacerbated them in the long run. Consociational institutions such as grand coalition and minority veto have made negotiation in Belgium very problematic. Due to the fragmentation of the party system (which was a result of the reinforcement of ethnicity and electoral divisions), reaching a concessions between several parties to form a grand coalition became very difficult. Autonomous institutions and minority veto also empowered the ethnic groups to press for further and more radical claims. The power of ethnic groups has simultaneously grown with the implementation of new consociational/federal institutions, which made cooperation among the ethnic groups all the more problematic. Reaching a concession took longer each time resulting in always longer political deadlocks.

Political conflict will serve as a starting point for determining which time periods to select. I will investigate four time periods that have shown political disturbances, therefore I intend to use *longitudinal analysis* to gain an in-depth picture of each time period that is of importance and investigate the causes that escalated the crises in relation to the consociational system. With the use of *process-tracing*, which "explores the chain of events of the decision-making process by which initial case conditions are translated into case outcomes,"<sup>43</sup> I will be able to deduce the causes that have led to the different crises and analyze their origins. This will allow me to determine whether, as hypothesized, consociationalism is directly responsible for these conflicts.

In the following chapter I will provide a detailed overview about the evolution of the

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<sup>43</sup> Van Evera, Stephen. *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*. Ithaca : Cornell University Press, 1997. p. 64.

Belgian consociational/federal system hand in hand with the emerging political deadlocks. In chapter 3.1 and 3.2 the historical roots of the Flemish and Walloon nationalist sentiments will be explained and the growing tensions after World War II that eventually led Belgium to shift from a unitary state to an ethnofederation. The most important institutional reforms from the 1960s on will be discussed in Chapter 3.3 as well as their connection with the subsequent political crises. Chapter 3.3 will primarily focus on the four major political deadlocks in recent Belgian history during its consociational period. I will show how the system actually provided the means for ethnic mobilization and separatist claims.

## Chapter 3— The Case of Belgium

### 3.1 The roots of ethnic antagonism

Belgium has been characterized as one of the most deeply divided states in Europe, comprising 58% Flemish-speakers and 41% French-speakers. The roots of the ethnic divide can be dated back to 1830, the foundation of the Belgian state, from which time French became the only official language up until 1889. The French Bourgeoise was intent on frenchification of the whole of Belgium, as exemplified through a quote by Charles Rogier, leader of the Belgian Revolution in 1830 and later Prime Minister of Belgium:

“The first principles of a good administration are based upon the exclusive use of one language, and it is evident that the only language of the Belgians should be French. In order to achieve this result, it is necessary that all civil and military functions are entrusted to Walloons and Luxemburgers; this way, the Flemish, temporarily deprived of the advantages of these offices, will be constrained to learn French, and we will hence destroy bit by bit the Germanic element in Belgium.”<sup>44</sup>

Belgium became a unitary state after its independence from the Netherlands in 1830 with French as its official language. It was beyond question that Belgium should become a unitary state since the economic, financial and political elite spoke only French. Flemish was in use only by the common people and illiteracy was predominant among the masses. After the independence from the Netherlands, the emphasis was put on the establishing of a common Belgian identity in opposition to the previous Dutch domination. The independence from the Netherlands was made possible by the unwilling but necessary cooperation between the Liberals and the Catholics, whose joint leadership was undisputed for the next two decades.<sup>45</sup> This political cooperation among the elites to fight the common enemy was to become the foundation for elite accommodation, characteristic of Belgian politics. The process of frenchification set off by the French-speaking elites gradually led to

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<sup>44</sup> Rogier, Charles. "Letter to Jean-Joseph Raikem." 1832.

<sup>45</sup> Heisler, Martin O. "Managing Ethnic Conflict in Belgium." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 433, Ethnic Conflict in the World Today. 1977 Sep. p. 36.

the emergence of a Flemish opposition movement, which was initially manifested in literature and gained political power only in the 20th century. With the emergence of a new Socialist elite towards the end of the century, the population became extremely segmented based on ideological/religious cleavages (Catholic, Liberal, Socialist). The clear separation between the societal cleavages prevented any kind of conflict between the different groups since all the segments had their own educational, social, etc. networks and they all occupied a significant position in public administration and policy making. These class and religious cleavages cut across ethnic or regional cleavages, which further enhanced the stability of the state's segmental structure.<sup>46</sup>

During the 19th century Belgium became one of the few countries in Europe that quickly embraced industrialization, contributing to the flourishing of the Walloon steel and coal industry.<sup>47</sup> However, the industrial wealth did not benefit all Belgians, as the Northern Flemish region stayed relatively poor, with a strong agricultural base. Due to the advancement of the Flemish movement, in 1898 Dutch became recognized as the other official language in Flanders besides French and in 1893 universal suffrage was introduced which further empowered the Flemish majority. However, only in 1932 did Dutch become the sole official language of Flanders, which finally ended the domination of the Francophone elites in public services and opened up space for Dutch-speakers. During the Second World War, the use of Dutch was especially promoted by the Third Reich, however after the war its popularity diminished since it became associated with collaboration involving severe punishments. After World War II the Flemish movement enjoyed a renewed upsurge. Controversial issues in the 1950's which further ethnically divided the population, and the economic, political and demographic changes of the 1960's produced a growing need for federalization. The changes that resulted in the first steps towards a federal system will be discussed in the following chapter.

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>47</sup> D'Haveloose, Erik. "Milestones in the Belgian Political History and the Foundation of the Belgian State Structure." *RoSa-factsheets* No. 5. 2000 October. p. 2.

### **3.2 Growing Ethnic Tensions and Steps towards Federalism**

After World War II, due to the Flemish collaboration during the war and the following repercussions the Flemish movement became more moderate. However, there had been other controversies that ideologically divided the population and made the linguistic and regional cleavage more apparent. One of them was the Royal Question, which concerned the return of King Leopold III to the throne. The king did not follow the government into exile during the German occupation but stayed in Belgium after surrendering his army. After the war ended he was taken as prisoner by the Germans and confined in Austria. His actions attracted much criticism and created opposition between the Socialist/Liberal opponents and the Catholic proponents. Even though the conflict broke out along party lines, since Flanders had been predominantly Catholic with a strong support for the return of the king, the socialist stronghold Wallonia voted against the king's return in a 1950 referendum.<sup>48</sup> The controversy around the 'School Question' in the 1954 and 1958 elections brought similar results. The Liberals and Socialists objected to the amount of aid the Catholics demanded for the financing of secondary schools, as it might disadvantage state-run schools.<sup>49</sup> Even though the linguistic struggle was not the main focus of these conflicts, the regional and linguistic divide between Socialist Wallonia and Catholic Flanders became a lot more prominent due to the ideological cleavage.<sup>50</sup>

The economic and demographic changes in the 1960's equipped the Flemish population to gain more influence in both politics and public services. The Flemish population enjoyed a major boom coupled with economic development. Wallonia's heavy coal and steel industries experienced a significant decline in the 1950's, while after the war most of the light industries became relocated to the North. Foreign investors preferred the Northern region and the building of new industries in

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<sup>48</sup> In the consultative referendum in March, 72% voted for the return of the king in Flanders as opposed to 42% in Wallonia and 48% in Brussels. After the return of the king, strikes broke out and even three demonstrators got killed. The king finally abdicated in favor of his son, Baudouin I.

<sup>49</sup> The Catholics and the Socialists/Liberals finally agreed on the School Pact in 1958 which increased the expenditures for both state and religious schools, thereby satisfying both parties.

<sup>50</sup> Dunn, James A. "The Revision of the Constitution in Belgium: A Study in the Institutionalization of Ethnic Conflict." *The Western Political Quarterly*. Vol. 27, No.1, 1974 March, p. 147.

the North instead of refurbishing old mines in the South. The younger population of Flanders due to the demographic boom was also a more promising workforce than the aging population of Wallonia.<sup>51</sup> In terms of social and economic conditions there was thus a sudden reversal, which the Flemish majority wanted to see reflected in the political scene as well.

"Given their larger, more dynamic population and economy, [the Flemings] would be able to achieve both economic and political goals within the framework of the Belgian system through evolutionary means. [The Walloons] became concerned with building institutional safeguards against Flemish revenge for real or imagined wrongs inflicted during the long period of francophone cultural, political and economic dominance."<sup>52</sup>

As the regional/ethnic differences became more pronounced, both side felt the necessity to restructure the political system in order to protect their interests. Another factor that urged the Flemish side to fix the language border was the movement of French-speaking Bruxellois to the Flemish countryside, thereby expanding the territory of Brussels which was mostly inhabited by French-speakers. The Flemings also resented the predominantly Francophone composition of their capital. The Walloons also promoted federalization, because they felt that Wallonia's growing economic problems could be easier dealt with by a regional government than by a "Flemish dominated" national government.<sup>53</sup> Protecting Wallonia's economic interests against the Flemish dominance in the central government had been the Walloons' main motif to promote federalization, whereas the Flemings wanted to secure their long-awaited cultural and linguistic autonomy. The drawing of the strict linguistic border in 1962 made Flanders exclusively Dutch-speaking, Wallonia stayed French-speaking and Brussels was declared bilingual. According to Dunn, "the linguistic laws of the sixties polarized the relations between the two ethnic communities and stimulated each group to increase its demands on the political system."<sup>54</sup>

The linguistic laws of the 1960's thus only led to further tensions and demands. The 1968 split of the University of Louvain/Leuven into French and Flemish sections had been another

<sup>51</sup> Heisler, Martin O. "Managing Ethnic Conflict in Belgium." *op. cit.*, p. 39.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>53</sup> Dunn, James A. "The Revision of the Constitution in Belgium: A Study in the Institutionalization of Ethnic Conflict." *op. cit.*, p. 148.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p.149.

conflictual issue that led up to the introduction of an ethnofederal state.<sup>55</sup> The "Louvain affair" resulted from the dispute over expanding the French section of the Catholic University of Louvain and transferring its French section to the French-speaking area (since the linguistic borders were redrawn in the 1962) - its "expulsion," as it was called by the French-speaking Bruxellois who opposed the transfer. The divide of the University of Louvain is to correlate with the split up of the three traditional parties along ethnic/linguistic lines.<sup>56</sup> After the division of the Social Christian party into the Flemish CVP (Christelijke Volkspartij) and the Walloon PSC (Parti Social Chrétien) in 1968, the two other dominant national parties, the Socialists and the Liberals also split up along linguistic lines in the 1970s. Therefore "many of Belgium's other political, economic, and social problems tended to be viewed through the prism of the ethnic problem."<sup>57</sup> Besides the division of the three traditional parties that formerly cut across ethnic lines, new nationalistic parties had been formed that emphasized the ethno-linguistic cleavage. The Volksunie (VU) in Flanders and the Rassemblement Wallon (RW) in Wallonia effectively mobilized voter support based on the mutually exclusive antagonism between the two ethnic groups.

### **3.3 Belgium as a Federal State**

The rest of this chapter will analyze in detail how the Belgian consociational/federal system evolved. In doing so, I will shed light on the causes of political deadlocks that unfolded simultaneously with the evolution of the multi-ethnic federation. As Roeder asserts, "the transformation of Belgium's multiple-majority democracy of the 1970s into an ethnic power-sharing arrangement has made Belgium less stable... the rights of ethnic groups have come to trump the rights of other groups and, particularly since the adoption of the 1994 Constitution, the Regional

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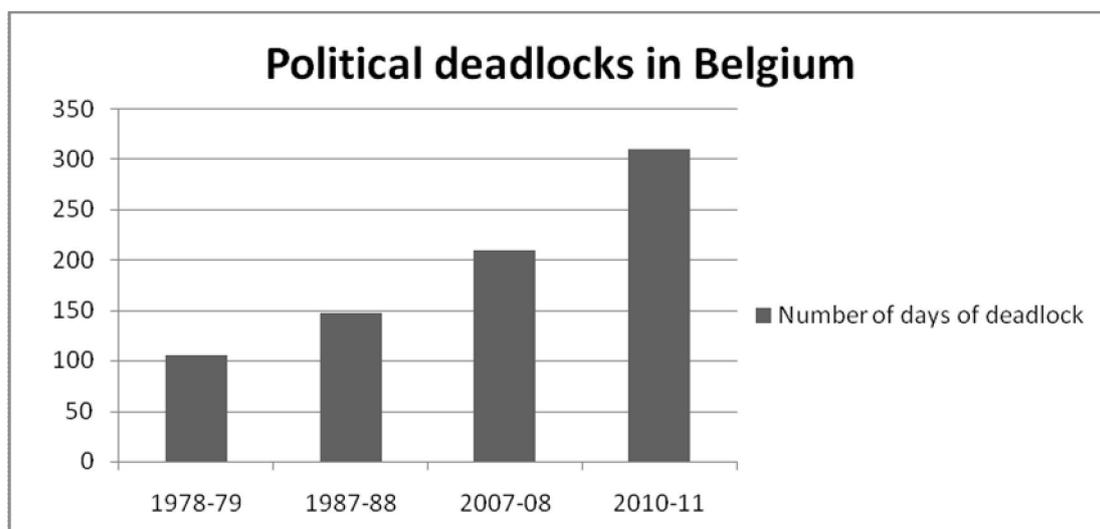
<sup>55</sup> Gérard-Libois, Jules. "Belgian Electoral Politics." in Lijphart, Arend (ed.) *Conflict and Coexistence in Belgium*. Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, University of California, 1981. p. 134.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p.135.

<sup>57</sup> Dunn, James A. "The Revision of the Constitution in Belgium: A Study in the Institutionalization of Ethnic Conflict." *op. cit.*, p. 150.

Councils have come to concentrate more institutional weapons in their hands."<sup>58</sup> To support Roeder's argument, I will show how the consociational arrangements set off an irreversible process supported by institutional means and equipped the Flemish majority to pursue their claims on separatism. I conclude that, even though the institutional reforms temporarily suppressed ethnic tensions, in the long run they had the opposite effect, namely exacerbated ethnic conflict.

The following chart depicts the four political deadlocks that took place since Belgium started to introduce consociational reforms in the 1970s. In 1977-78, the first major political crisis occurred when it took 106 days for the parties to form a coalition government. In 1987, the number of days needed for government formation rose to 148 days. During the third political deadlock in 2007, it took 210 days for the parties to form a government. Finally, in the current crisis, the parties have surpassed 300 days and still have not managed to form a coalition government.



### 3.3.1 The First Political Deadlock of 1978-79

Since the implementation of the new state reforms in 1970, Belgium came to face a serious political deadlock for the first time. After winning the elections in 1979 Wilfried Martens, leader of the Flemish Christian Democrats, was assigned the task of forming a coalition government. The political climate was filled with unresolved issues originating from the 1970 state reforms, which

<sup>58</sup> Roeder, Philip G., "Power Dividing as an Alternative to Ethnic Power Sharing." *op. cit.*, p. 66-67.

made parties reaching a concession extremely difficult. Therefore in order to understand why forming a coalition took 106 days, we need to have a closer look at the constitutional reforms of the 1970's that started off Belgium on the consociational path.

Since the 1970's Belgium has adopted more and more measures in order to turn the conflict between the communities into a peaceful coexistence. The 1970 constitutional reforms aimed to satisfy the diverging claims of the Walloons, which were primarily socio-economic due the economic crisis of the region in the 1950's, and the claims of the Flemings, which were more of cultural/linguistic concern. The reforms introduced a new state structure based on the division of the three cultural communities (German-, French- and Flemish-speaking) and the three regions (Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels).<sup>59</sup> Competencies in language and cultural issues and some parts of education were given to the communities, thereby satisfying the Flemish claim for cultural autonomy, whereas some economic competencies were given to the regions, thereby satisfying the Walloon demands.<sup>60</sup> In addition, a few other measures were introduced that aimed to guarantee the protection of minorities on both a regional and federal level. The French demanded "guarantees against minorization" in the federal government in return for granting equal representation to the Flemish minority in the Brussels executive college.<sup>61</sup> Therefore linguistic parity within the executive and proportional representation within the legislature was introduced in both Brussels and the federal government. Two linguistic groups were established in both the Senate and the Chamber of Representatives,<sup>62</sup> and for the acceptance of a new constitutional reform, a dual majority was necessary from both language groups.<sup>63</sup> Besides the special majority law in the federal parliament, the so called 'alarm bell' procedure was also introduced. The procedure of the 'alarm bell' aimed to

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<sup>59</sup> The German-speaking community, however, received equal competencies only in 1983.

<sup>60</sup> Heisler, Martin O. "Managing Ethnic Conflict in Belgium." *op. cit.*, p. 42.

<sup>61</sup> Dunn, James A. "The Revision of the Constitution in Belgium: A Study in the Institutionalization of Ethnic Conflict." *op. cit.*, p. 153.

<sup>62</sup> Members of unilingual regions (Wallonia and Flanders) become members of their language group, whereas members from the bilingual region of Brussels declare their choice of parliamentary group and take their oath in the language of the chosen group.

<sup>63</sup> Laws that make a special majority necessary include laws that aim to modify the borders of the regions based on the linguistic divide, laws that would set up new cultural councils or economic bodies for further decentralization.

protect the minorities (both in Brussels and the federal parliament) by providing them the right of vetoing any bill that could harm their interests. If three quarters of a linguistic group judges that a bill can put them at a significant disadvantage, the parliamentary procedure is suspended.<sup>64</sup>

This first set of reforms in 1970 thus introduced several consociational institutions in Belgium and indicated a first major step towards becoming a multi-ethnic federation. Some of the fears of the ethnic groups, however, were not yet completely appeased. The reforms did not provide a solution for the problematic status of Brussels and left some of the power-division between the national and regional levels unsettled. Even though the equal presence of the French-speaking minority in the cabinet was guaranteed in response to the equal representation of the Dutch-speaking minority in the Brussels executive, this arrangement only led to further demands by both ethnic groups.<sup>65</sup> The Francophone inhabitants of Brussels regarded this agreement as more of an elite deal between the Walloons and the Flemings, which disregarded the rights of the Francophone Bruxellois. They did not appreciate the equal representation of the Dutch minority in the Brussels government, regarding it was 90% inhabited by French-speakers. In addition, the language laws that fixed the borders limited the city in its natural dynamism and expansion, also limiting the voting rights of the French-speakers in Brussels' suburban area since it expands into the territory of Flanders. The Francophones thus insisted that language laws should adjust to the territory and not the other way around, however the Flemish wanted no expansion of Brussels' territory. The Flemish Bruxellois wanted a capital that would mirror an essentially Flemish-majority Belgium in its political, social and cultural arrangements. Furthermore, the Walloons demanded further economic regionalization and autonomy both for Brussels and Wallonia. Disputes over the exact power-division between the regional and national authorities and the issue of Brussels have divided ethnic

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<sup>64</sup> After the 'alarm bell' is rung, the bill is sent to the cabinet which has thirty days to make modifications, amendments to the bill. Then the Parliament has to vote again to either accept or reject the bill. The bill, however, cannot be vetoed again by the same linguistic group for the second time.

<sup>65</sup> D'Haveloose, Erik. "Milestones in the Belgian Political History and the Foundation of the Belgian State Structure." *op. cit.*, p. 3.

groups and political leaders into unitarist and regionalist camps.<sup>66</sup>

In 1977 the Egmont Pact aimed to put an end to these disputes and was signed as part of a government formation process on 24 May 1977. The Pact would have established autonomous governments for all the three communities and regions. It would have granted the inscription right for Francophones in Brussels' suburban area to be able to vote within the region of Brussels, since territorially the suburbs now expanded into the region of Flanders. Unfortunately, the Egmont Pact was never implemented due to immediate public Flemish protests and the divided attitude of the Flemish parties on these issues. The Flemish Christian Democrats (CVP) who gained most of the votes in Flanders during the 1977 elections, had been internally divided into unitarists and regionalists. On the other hand, the major Francophone party, the Socialist Party (PS) reflected a relatively unified position on the necessity of regionalization. The Flemish nationalist party, the Volksunie (VU), however, was more cooperative with the Francophones and promoted regionalization, thereby weakening the Flemish side during the bargaining process. Due to the CVP's intraparty divisions on the issue and the protests, the Egmont Pact was never implemented and eventually led to the resignation of the prime minister Leo Tindemans in 1978. The following year new elections were held and Wilfried Martens, leader of the CVP was elected as prime minister. The Francophone side asserted that it would only join the coalition if a solution was found regarding regionalization and the Brussels-issue. The Belgian constitution based on the consociational system mandates that the cabinet shall be formed from an equal number of Dutch- and French-speakers. For this reason government formation did not take place for the next three months due to the difficulties of reaching a common agreement.<sup>67</sup> Finally, the Flemings agreed to further regionalization and economic decentralization by way of new constitutional amendments that were to come into effect in 1980.

The political conflict of 1978 exemplifies very well the consociational system's flaw in

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<sup>66</sup> Covell, Maureen. "Agreeing to Disagree: Elite Bargaining and the Revision of the Belgian Constitution." *Canadian Journal of Political Science*. Vol. 15, No. 3 1982 Sep., p. 455.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 464.

terms of elite bargaining. As Horowitz pointed out, "if each group were represented by a single set of leaders, then leaders would indeed have more latitude to cooperate across group lines," but since ethnic groups themselves are not cohesive, this makes cooperation less plausible".<sup>68</sup> Besides intraparty fragmentation that made bargaining extremely difficult between the political elites, the demands of the minorities had to be satisfied if parties wanted to reach a concession. This in the long run only further empowers minorities and produces more extreme demands. The 1980 reforms and their correlation with the upcoming political deadlock in 1987 will be explained in the following chapter.

### 3.3.2 The Political Deadlock of 1987-88

From 1987 December to 1988 May it took 148 days for the victors of the elections to form a new coalition government. In order to understand what could have caused this gridlock at the central level, we again need to search its roots in the last constitutional amendments. I will show that this, too, was rooted in the consociational system and the strict regional division of the ethnic/linguistic communities.

The next constitutional reforms in 1980 intended to further clarify issues around regionalization since the Egmont Pact of the Tindemans government was never implemented. The powers of the cultural communities became extended to encompass health care, welfare and personal affairs, and the regions were assigned more specific powers this time as well, involving regional economic development, country planning, environment and employment.<sup>69</sup> The Flemish demand for cultural autonomy and the Walloon demand for further economic regionalization were thus satisfied. The regions and communities finally got their own parliaments and governments as well. In Flanders the regional and the community institutions became fused together by which one parliament and government assisted both the Dutch-speaking community and the region of Flanders. This unification of community and regional bodies strengthened Flemish autonomy as

<sup>68</sup> Horowitz, Donald. *Ethnic Groups in Conflict. op. cit.*, p. 574.

<sup>69</sup> D'Haveloose, Erik. "Milestones in the Belgian Political History and the Foundation of the Belgian State Structure." *op. cit.*, p. 3.

opposed to the different bodies of the Walloon region and the French-speaking community. Even though the different regions and communities received more autonomy, at this point Belgium was not really a federal state yet, since direct elections on the federal level were not yet possible. The financing of the regions and the communities happened still through the federal state, plus the issue around Brussels was not resolved, nor was it provided with its own autonomous institutions like the other regions.

The consociational institutions of territorial and non-territorial autonomy have further paved the way for Belgium to become an ethnofederation. The devolution of further powers to the regions and the communities provided new means for the two ethnic groups to press for new demands based on past grievances. The controversy about the town Voeren/Fouron dates back to the time when the linguistic border was fixed in 1962. The town, based on a linguistic census from 1930 according to which the population consisted of 18% French-speakers and 81% of Dutch-speakers, became part of the Flemish Limburg province. Numbers from a later census of 1947 however displayed a reversal in the number of French- and Dutch-speakers (51% and 42% respectively). The town of Voeren became a topic of linguistic controversy, since it was officially determined to be Flemish-speaking with special regulations for the French-speakers, generating resentment by the Walloons towards this arrangement. The issue of Voeren received special attention again in the year of 1987 when a French-speaker called Jose Happart was elected as mayor. According to the constitution of 1970, people in public/governmental offices had to speak the language that was territorially determined. On the other hand based on the 1970 constitution, one's native language cannot prevent one to run as a candidate for a public position, or the knowledge of a particular language cannot be a requirement for becoming elected.<sup>70</sup> The only problem was, however, that Happart the newly elected mayor of Voeren refused to sit for a Dutch-language test. Therefore he was deemed to resign from his position. The controversy around the Happart-issue increased tensions between both the ethnic groups and within the federal government. This issue shifted focus to other similar cases in

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<sup>70</sup> Craeybeckx J., Meynen A., en Witte, E. *Politieke Geschiedenis van België van 1830 tot Heden. op. cit.*, p. 442.

the Brussels area where civil servants in municipalities did not speak any Flemish, but still worked under the Flemish regional government. The controversies around Happart and the use of languages in the municipalities around Brussels eventually resulted in the fall of the government in 1987.<sup>71</sup>

The upcoming elections in 1987 December brought with it the need for the further refinement of the consociational system to appease the existing ethnic tensions between the communities. Concessions on the new amendments of the state reform were not easy to reach considering that within the consociational system a double majority is needed by each language group to have a new legislation accepted. Besides the need to find an urgent solution to cases like the Happart-controversy, other educational, economic, social issues (eg. abortion) came to the foreground that had to be settled through the new state reform. The period of government formation provided the parties the opportunity to settle some of the issues that were of pressing concern, however, to achieve the two thirds majority on both sides which was necessary to amend the constitution was less easy and therefore prolonged government formation, which eventually culminated in 148 days.

Each ethnic group put forward its demands in terms of the new state reform. This time the difficulty in bargaining was not due to the opposing views of the unitarists and the regionalists (like in 1979), as not only the nationalist parties (eg. the Volksunie or the Ressaemblament Wallon) advocated further federalization, but both the Flemish and Walloon traditional parties shifted towards favoring further decentralization. The major difference in opinion was whether Belgium should have only two autonomous regions (Wallonia and Flanders), or three (Wallonia, Flanders, and Brussels-capital region). The Francophones wanted Brussels to become a fully-fledged region, thereby gaining economic independence, whereas the Flemings did not want the French-dominated capital to become an autonomous region. Finally, after extensive bargaining the parties managed to reach a concession, which of course resulted in further regionalization.<sup>72</sup> Brussels was determined to become an autonomous region with a legislative and executive body of its own. In return the

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 442.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 445.

Flemings insisted that the linguistic border cannot be modified, but shall stay fixed based on the 1970 constitution. This arrangement aimed to resolve the Happort-type controversies, since from now on any civil servant serving under the Flemish regional government could be removed from his office if he did not speak Dutch. In addition, the representation of the Dutch minority in the Brussels government became constitutionally fixed. To avoid disputes on social and other matters, parties agreed to further decentralization and significantly extended the powers of both the regions and the communities. Competencies in areas of public work, scientific research, environment, etc. had been given to the regions, while education had been fully transferred to the language communities. In addition, the communities and regions from this time on could rely on a fixed part of the national tax for their financing, which further satisfied their economic claims.

The reforms of 1988 thus temporarily appeased again the demands of the ethnic groups, however as it has been visible so far, newly acquired institutional demands only created incentives for further demands. The ethnification of certain issues had also contributed to the amplification of minor problems (eg. the Happort-controversy) that eventually had the effect of bringing down the whole government. As Roeder states,

“under power-sharing institutions in ethnically divided societies, politicians have greater incentive to make all issues an ethnic issue, and so ethnicity is seldom irrelevant to any policy question...this ethnification of issues, in turn, leads to the elimination of cross-cutting cleavages; only policy divisions that are cumulative rather than cross-cutting are likely to reach the government.”<sup>73</sup>

The consociational institutions by assigning more and more autonomy to the regions provided them the institutions to have further demands. Even though the 1988 reforms assigned a fixed amount of financial assistance to the regions, polarization over economic issues have further dominated the 1990's. Whereas so far Walloons felt that they were losing out to that the economically better-off Flemish region and tried to protect their economy against the measures of the Flemish dominated national parliament, the Flemish now felt that the fixed proportion of the

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<sup>73</sup> Roeder, Philip G., "Power Dividing as an Alternative to Ethnic Power Sharing." *op. cit.*, p. 56.

national tax that was provided for the financing of the regions put the Walloons at an advantage. The Flemish felt that national fiscal policies put Flanders in a position of subsidising Wallonia. "The disproportionate share of national benefits that Walloons received under the social security programme has become something of a rallying point for Flemish nationalists."<sup>74</sup> Besides the fiscal problems, the ethnification of other policies became prevalent, for example, imbalances in the funding of schools or scientific research, or the routing of the high speed train, etc. In all these instances policies which would not necessarily put the North against the South became interpreted in such a way due to the consociational ethnic divide of the country.<sup>75</sup> As a consequence, public protests over various legislations became regular, and as a public opinion poll conducted by the Flemish newspaper *Standaard* indicates, 31% of the Flemish would have favored outright independence in 1992.<sup>76</sup> Ethnic tensions led Belgium in 1993 to formally become a federal state with the three territorially defined regions (Flanders, Wallonia, Brussels) and three communities based on language divides (French, Dutch and German). The reforms of 1993 further refined the discrepancies of the previous reforms and provided constitutive autonomy to the federal states to organize their institutions independently within the framework of the constitution. Direct elections of the federal states had also become possible.<sup>77</sup>

### 3.3.3 The Political Deadlock of 2007-2008

The year 2007 marked another political deadlock after 20 years of relative peacefulness in terms of political stalemates. The crisis of 2007 could be considered an important precedent to the current crisis since the causes that evoked it were left unresolved. After the 2007 federal elections the parties could not agree for the next 196 days to form a government, setting a new time record in

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<sup>74</sup> Murphy, Alexander. "Belgium's Regional Divergence: Along the Road to Federation." in: Smith. Graham. (ed.) *Federalism: The Multiethnic Challenge*. Longman Group Limited, 1995. p. 92.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>77</sup> D'Haveloose, Erik. "Milestones in the Belgian Political History and the Foundation of the Belgian State Structure." *op. cit.*, p. 4.

terms of government formation. Even though Belgium did become a fully-fledged federal state in 1993, ethnic demands did not abate. The factors that led to the 2007 political deadlock were mostly due to the Flemings' pressing concern about the further devolution of power to the regions (predominantly in terms of fiscal autonomy) as economic differences between the Flemings and the Walloons became more pronounced. The other reason that generated conflict on the political level was due to the still unresolved and controversial case of the electoral district of Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde, which came again to the foreground due to the electoral reforms of Verhofstadt. The reforms intended to counteract party fragmentation and make government formation easier on the federal level by introducing a 5% threshold. It also introduced new electoral districts that would have been congruent with the provinces, but which would have involved the split-up of the BHV. Besides the electoral changes, there had been other factors that produced significant tensions. The growing economic differences which led to the increased popularity of the extreme right-wing Vlaams Belang (Flemish Interest), the party got to occupy the second place after the Christian Democrats in the Flemish regional elections. In order to avoid forming a federal coalition with Vlaams Belang, the Christian Democrats had to ally with parties of the other two 'traditional' party families (the Socialists and the Liberals) thereby producing an unprecedented coalition and making reaching a common agreement extremely difficult.

Since the parties in Belgium are electorally split up on a linguistic basis since the 1970 reforms, there are no nationally organized parties, and electoral districts do not transgress the borders of the regions (with the exception of the Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde district). Therefore Walloon voters can only vote for Walloon parties, while Flemish voters for only Flemish parties. The electoral change was introduced by Guy Verhofstadt in 2003 in order to make the forming of government coalitions easier. Due to the high fragmentation of parties, to achieve a working majority was no longer an easy matter. Whereas in the past four parties were sufficient to form a government, this number had risen to six due to party fragmentation, which made bargaining all the more difficult. By introducing a new 5% threshold, Verhofstadt intended to reduce the number of

parties in the federal legislature. However, the time shift between the federal and the regional elections led to other unforeseen problems, namely the incongruency of parties in the federal and the regional level. This made cooperation between them somewhat more problematic, since certain parties were part of the federal coalition while being left out from a regional coalition, or the other way around.<sup>78</sup>

The controversial issue of the BHV electoral district has also gained new attention due the 2003 electoral reform which intended to adjust the electoral districts to each province. This would have implied the split-up of the BHV electoral district since it expanded over the capital-region of Brussels. The district of Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde comprises the bilingual Brussels region and a periphery that is part of Flanders. On the other hand, it has an 80% French-speaking population, since many people left the urban cityscape of Brussels willing to move to the countryside. In the BHV electoral district with bilingual Brussels as its core, people can vote for the French-speaking candidates. However, since the periphery is on the territory of Flanders, this would go against the linguistic territorial principle defended by the Flemish who consider the expansion of Brussels as a threat of frenchification. In order to extend the bilingual region of Brussels, that way reducing the size of the region Flanders, the Flemings in return demanded various social and economic competences. Due to the mismatch of the electoral district and the linguistic region, tensions have been constant on the matter since the 1970 state reforms. The Flemings would want the French-speakers to integrate and learn Dutch, while French-speaking parties consider the population of the periphery as a minority and count on their votes.<sup>79</sup>

The demand for further devolution of powers by the Flemings has been a demand for further economic independence, since most Flemings resent the fact that a lot of the taxes they pay to the federal state flow into the less well-off Wallonia. Flanders is one of the wealthier regions of Europe

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<sup>78</sup> Sinardet, Dave. "Belgium Federalism Put to the Test: The 2007 Belgian Federal Elections and their Aftermath." *West European Politics*, Sep 2008, Vol. 31 Issue 5, p. 1018.

<sup>79</sup> Sinardet, Dave. "From consociational consciousness to majoritarian myth: Consociational democracy, multi-level politics and the Belgian case of Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde." *op. cit.*, p. 356-357.

with high-value exports (eg diamond industry in Antwerp), while Wallonia's industry based on coal and iron mines have been facing constant decline since the Second World War, not to mention the 10% higher unemployment the region faces compared to Flanders.<sup>80</sup> The yearly transfer from Wallonia to Flanders is estimated (by the Belgian Federation of Employers) to be app. 2 billion euros.<sup>81</sup>

The growing economic cleavage between the two ethnic groups has significantly contributed to the increasing popularity (12%) of the nationalist/separatist party Vlaams Belang (Flemish Interest) that advocates the separation of Flanders due to the huge inequalities between the two regions. As Franck Vanhecke, the president of the party claims "We oppose Belgium and the European superstate in the making because no Belgian or European people exists. A multi-national democracy does not exist because a multi-national people does not exist."<sup>82</sup> The Vlaams Belang, before called the Vlaams Blok, was also labeled a criminal party by the other regional parties due to its xenophobia, which resulted in the party's changing to a different name. A public opinion poll, conducted by the Flemish Television Company (VTM) and published by the *Standaard* in 2007 has also produced shocking results. It indicates that 45% of the 1300 Flemish at the time questioned would have voted for independence, whereas 54% opposed the idea of Flemish separatism.<sup>83</sup> The growing popularity of the Vlaams Belang raised new challenges in the federal government formation as well. In 2007 for the first time the grand coalition (usually comprising of 50% French- and 50% Dutch-speaking members) was to be formed from parties belonging to different 'party families' in order to exclude Vlaams Belang. Before the government or the opposition always incorporated both of the regional branches of the traditional party families (Liberal, Socialist, Christian Democrat), however in 2007 for the first time parties from different party families were forced to cooperate and to try to reach concessions, which led to serious difficulties. The growing

<sup>80</sup> "Belgium." *Political Risk Yearbook: Belgium Country Report*, 2008.

<sup>81</sup> De Winter, Lieven. "Belgium Towards the Breakdown of a Nation-State in the Heart of Europe?" *Nationalism & Ethnic Politics*. Jul2009, Vol. 15 Issue 3/4. p. 15.

<sup>82</sup> Jan Vanhecke cited: *The Flemish Republic*, 2006.

<sup>83</sup> "Kleine Helft Vlamingen wil Volgens Enquete Onafhankelijk Vlaanderen." *De Standaard*, 24 August 2007. [http://www.standaard.be/Artikel/Detail.aspx?artikelId=DMF24082007\\_083](http://www.standaard.be/Artikel/Detail.aspx?artikelId=DMF24082007_083);

economic cleavage between the ethnic groups which fed Flemish secessionist motives and thereby increased the popularity of the Vlaams Belang, led VB to occupy the second place at the 2007 elections. The Christian Democrats had to incorporate parties from other party families to be able to form a coalition government and to be able to leave out the Vlaams Belang. As the coalition had to be composed of parties of very different ideologies, negotiations became extremely difficult and eventually resulted in a political deadlock.

The 2007 political crisis, similarly to previous crises, clearly indicates that the consociational system does not resolve ethnic conflicts but makes the socio-economically better off ethnic groups press for further fiscal, social, etc. autonomy, by which the process becomes irreversible. The growing popularity of the extreme nationalist parties makes the creation of 'healthy' multiparty grand coalitions extremely difficult or impossible by which elite cooperation becomes reduced to zero. In addition, the Francophone parties feel that the Flemish proposal to split the BHV district into a bilingual Brussels and a Dutch-speaking Halle-Vilvoorde constituency (where only Flemish politicians could stand for vote) would endanger their vital interests and generates ethnic fears. This way consociationalism produces completely the opposite effect. Instead of reducing ethnic tensions, it increases them. Even though Lijphart predicted these obstacles as only temporary, they rather seem to come to surface in the long run. The crisis has further polarized the two ethnic groups, bringing them closer to the possible split of the country. Therefore it is a clear indicator of the fact that the route Belgium has taken does not avoid but generates ethnic tensions.

#### **3.3.4 The Political Deadlock of 2010-2011**

Since June 13, 2010 elections the separatist New Flemish Alliance has been unwilling to back down from its demands for greater autonomy, which is necessary to form a cross-ethnic coalition with the Socialist Party of Wallonia. It has been more than 300 days (Belgium breaking the European record) that negotiations between electoral victors have brought no results. Therefore

currently the former government acts in the role of the caretaker while protests and negotiations continue.

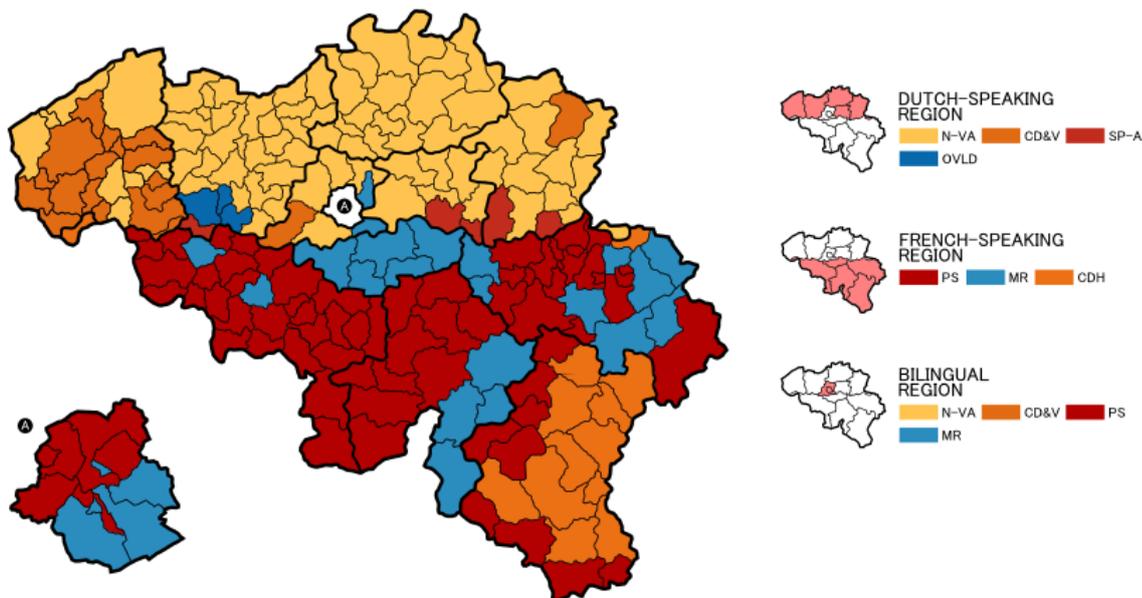
The gap between the two majority parties winning the votes of their regions has become significant, making the forming of a coalition quite problematic. While the New Flemish Alliance formed only a part of the coalition with the CD&V in the previous government, its popularity has by far surpassed that of the CD&V which could be attributed to the previous crisis itself which further reinforced nationalist sentiments. The grand coalition was supposed to consist of the New Flemish Alliance (N-VA), the Socialist Party of Wallonia (PS), the Christian Democratic and Flemish Party (CD&V), the Flemish Socialist Party (SPA), the Humanist Democratic Centre (CDH) and the Ecolo, which would mirror parties in the regional governments, this way resulting in greater efficiency. Elio Rupo, head of the Socialist Party was appointed to be the next prime minister since the Socialist party family comprises the biggest part of the Parliament and the N-VA has no Francophone equivalent. Since Rupo did not manage to further the negotiations and resigned from his post after many failed attempts, Vande Lanotte (head of the Flemish Socialist Party) was appointed by the king to further negotiations. He proposed a package (comprising the most critical issues to be settled), namely: the transfer of further competencies to the regions; settling the issue of the BHV district; a new state reform (elections every 5 years, both regional and federal); a new finance law (which would transfer taxation to the regions), etc. All in vain, his proposal was met with refusal by the Francophone parties.

As the map on the following page indicates, the overarching popularity of the New Flemish Alliance (N-VA) in the Dutch-speaking region is quite homogenous.<sup>84</sup> The current crisis is a clear continuation of the 2007 crisis as the current would-be government is struggling with the unresolved issues the previous government did not manage to cope with. What is on the other hand threatening is the growing popularity of separatist parties in Flanders, as the map shows, which will make further negotiations even less possible. "If you know this country you see that we have an

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<sup>84</sup> For the map see, Wikipedia. "Belgian Federal Election 2010." Winkipedia. 2010. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Belgian\\_federal\\_election\\_2010\\_map\\_en.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Belgian_federal_election_2010_map_en.png) (accessed April 31, 2011).

evolution that's been going on for more than 100 years of a splitting up of the Belgian nation into two fully fledged democracies"<sup>85</sup> told De Wever (head of N-VA) to the Flemish magazine Reuters. He further said that "We want to go step-by-step, not by revolution - we do not want to split up in one evening - in an evolution towards our own democracy which is Flanders and a supra-national level, which in our view isn't Belgium, but is Europe." When questioned about solidarity towards the Walloons he made a comparison with the break-up of Czechoslovakia. "Slovakia was the weaker region of Czechoslovakia. Slovakia was against independence," he said. "Who has benefited the most from independence? It is Slovakia that has had strong economic development by taking up responsibilities"<sup>86</sup>



The challenge Belgium faces in reconciling tensions is bigger than ever. According to Peters, the problem lies in the complete division of the country into two components which sharpens the differences and does not use the shared functions to reconcile them. Therefore the structural mechanisms achieve quite the opposite effect as were meant to achieve.<sup>87</sup> The ethnic, linguistic and

<sup>85</sup> "Beginning of the End for Belgium?" *Reuters in Stuff World*. June 1, 2010.

<sup>86</sup> "Beginning of the End for Belgium?" *Reuters in Stuff World*. June 1, 2010.

<http://www.stuff.co.nz/world/europe/3760352/Beginning-of-the-end-for-Belgium>

<sup>87</sup> Peters, B. Guy. "Consociationalism, Corruption and Chocolate." *West European Politics*, Nov 2006, Vol. 29, Issue 5. p. 5.

cultural tensions are aimed to be resolved through the extreme degree of institutionalization that enforces these cleavages, instead of integrating the differences. According to De Winter, due to the recent financial crisis, consociationalism might not be sufficient to solve the problems since it used to create win-win situations by granting subsidies to camps in conflict, but since financial resources left to distribute have been reduced, it will less likely be an incentive for compromise. The breakdown in communication between the two sides further reduces the potential for success, since parties are not integrated across the ethnic divide, cooperation takes place only among the elites and not the masses. In addition, since there is a considerable outbidding on the Flemish side between the Flemish parties in terms of their radical demands, this cannot lead to an agreement with the Francophones who defend the status-quo.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> De Winter, Lieven. "Belgium Towards the Breakdown of a Nation-State in the Heart of Europe?" *op. cit.*, p. 19.

## Conclusion

Consociationalism, as it has been demonstrated by the case of Belgium, instead of reducing ethnic conflict, increases it. It empowers minorities with both the means and the incentives to have more extreme demands, which further strengthens the group. In the case of Belgium, the five different state reforms since 1970 never managed to bring about stability in the country, instead they led to further reforms aimed at satisfying the minority groups. This research shows that this pattern led to further ethnic fragmentation.

Belgium has established all the consociational institutions defined by Lijphart that should have turned it into a stable ethnofederation. However, as the growing number of days stuck in a political stalemate indicates, ethnic conflict at the political level has become longer each time. During the 1978 and 1988 conflicts, ethnic groups had reciprocal demands. The Flemish tried to protect their linguistic and cultural identity, whereas the Walloons tried to protect their economy against the Flemish-dominated legislature. The fact that both parties had strong demands and yet their objectives were very different, might serve as an explanation to why ethnic bargaining lasted shorter back then than in the recent cases. The political crises of 2007 and 2010 have had strong Flemish demands for complete fiscal autonomy and the split of the BHV district to stop the process of 'frenchification' around Brussels, whereas the Francophones, by using their minority veto, have tried to avert extreme Flemish demands. Throughout the last twenty years the Francophones have benefited from various national fiscal allowances and subsidies that make them reinforce the status-quo. Apparently, since the power-sharing system cannot further satisfy parties with a win-win situation, it is inept to mitigate ethnic conflict.

Autonomy or secessionism has become undoubtedly more popular within the elites since Belgium has taken the consociational path. Whereas in the 1970's parties had been divided into unitarist and regionalist camps, by the 1980's unitarism had been eliminated as a viable alternative,

and the core of the conflict became whether Belgium should have two or three autonomous regions. By the beginning of the twentieth century the popularity of extreme separatist parties (Vlaams Belang) grew. Recently, even mainstream right-wing parties, like the New Flemish Alliance adopted a stronger separatist tone and have become the most popular party in Flanders. Thus, the increase in Flemish claims for autonomy and secessionism correlates highly with the implementation of the different consociational and federal reforms. Every time, this resulted in the devolution of more power to the regions satisfying their claims for further autonomy, thereby achieving a paradoxical effect.

Some of the inherent flaws in terms of the consociational mechanisms have become prominent by looking at the case of Belgium. Minority veto, since it has only been used in 1985 on a secondary matter, has now become used for the second time as the Francophones vetoed the split-up of the BHV district. Its usage can thus seriously halt negotiations. Even though it is meant to be a protective mechanism, it is also a blocking mechanism which instead of leading to a concession between the parties, can empower one side to threaten the other one by producing a deadlock until the other party grants further concessions. The formation of grand coalitions has similarly become problematic in Belgium due to the high fragmentation of parties. In order to achieve a working majority several parties have to be incorporated into the executive, reducing the chances of efficient cooperation and coalition formation. The consociational system itself can lead to party fragmentation as it duplicates parties along ethnic lines besides the ideological cleavages and through proportional representation various parties can gain seats in the legislature. Territorial autonomy in homogenous ethnic groups like Flanders and Wallonia have strictly divided the groups along ethnic lines reducing the integrating potentials of cross-cutting cleavages. This has led to the ethnification of certain issues and policies that generate tensions between the groups.

The purpose of this thesis has been to demonstrate how each state reform led up to the subsequent political crisis resulting in a deadlock. Consociationalism, instead of mitigating conflict between the different ethnic groups achieves the opposite effect, it promotes conflict and ethnic

fragmentation. Regarding the wider implications of the theory and the current research, it is thus arguable that if ethnic conflict cannot be resolved in Belgium, which has been identified as the most ideal case for a successful consociation, it cannot possibly hold up in any other cases where conditions are less favorable.

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